

Background Report: Terrorist Attacks in New York City

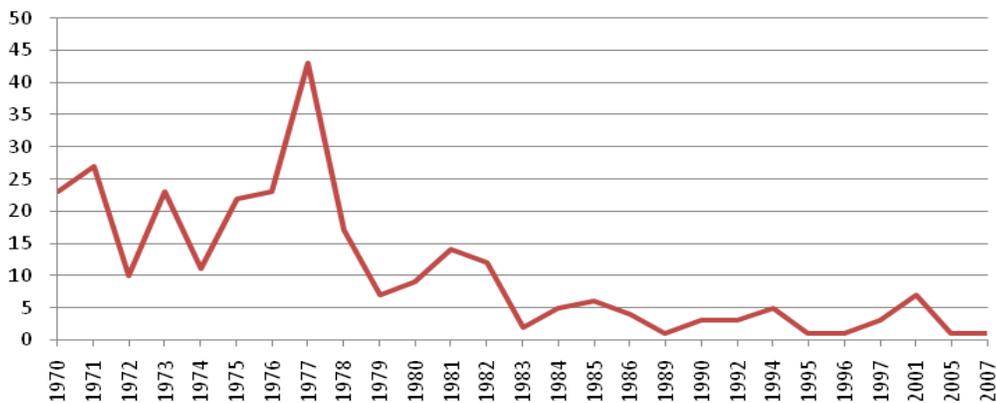
On the evening of Saturday, May 1, 2010, police in New York City’s Times Square neighborhood discovered a private vehicle on West 45th Street, between Seventh Avenue and Broadway, filled with explosive materials. At the time police discovered the vehicle—with the assistance of an astute street vendor working in the neighborhood—the device had apparently begun to detonate but did not explode.

This event is being treated as a potential terrorist attack, with a full investigation underway. The report below provides background information on the history of terrorist attacks in New York City since 1970, using data drawn from START’s Global Terrorism Database (www.start.umd.edu/gtd).

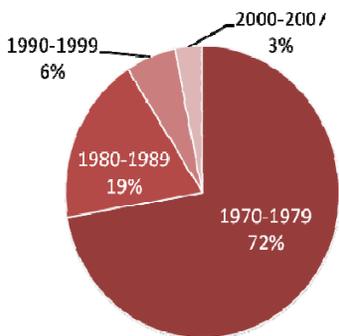
➤ Frequency of Terrorist Activity in New York City

284 terrorist attacks occurred in the five boroughs of New York City between 1970 and 2007. Terrorist activity is not new to New York City, with almost three-fourths of these attacks occurring in the 1970s.

Terrorist Incidents in New York City
(total number of attacks=284)



New York City Terrorist Attacks by Decade



➤ Casualties from Terrorist Activity in New York City

2813 individuals were killed by terrorist activity between 1970 and 2007 in New York City, with 98% of those fatalities occurring as a result of the dual attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 (see GTD ID#s 200109110004 and 200109110005 for more details on these incidents). Prior to September 11th, the deadliest attack in New York City involved a bombing at LaGuardia Airport in

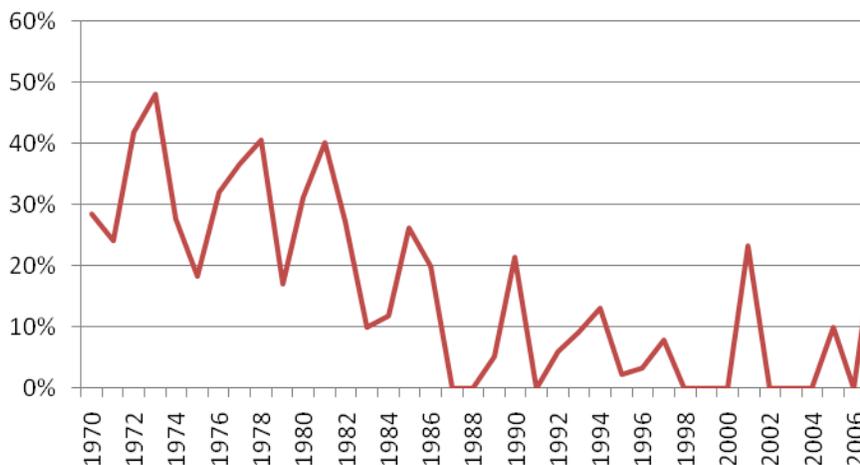
1975, resulting in 11 deaths (see GTD ID# 197512290003). These attacks on the Twin Towers are not only the deadliest U.S. terrorist attacks of all time but are the deadliest terrorist attacks to have occurred anywhere in the world.

The total number of terrorism casualties in New York City between 1970 and 2007, including both those killed or wounded in attacks, exceeds 4000 people, with an average of 6 people wounded in each attack.

➤ **Concentration of U.S. Terrorism in New York City**

New York City has been, by far, the most common target location of terrorists in the United States.

Percent of U.S. Attacks in New York City



Of the 1347 total attacks in the United States from 1970-2007, more occurred in New York City during this period than in the next 4 most frequently targeted U.S. cities *combined* (Miami, 70 attacks; San Francisco, 66 attacks; Washington, DC, 59 attacks; and Los Angeles, 54 attacks). 21% of all U.S. incidents during this period occurred in New York City, with a peak of 48% of all U.S. terrorist attacks occurring in New York City in 1973.

(For more on U.S. terrorism trends, see <http://www.start.umd.edu/start/announcements/announcement.asp?id=185>.)

➤ **Perpetrators of Terrorism in New York City**

While al-Qaeda has launched the deadliest attacks on New York City targets, almost 40 other identified groups engaged in terrorism in this city from 1970 to 2007, representing a range of different ideologies, backgrounds, and goals, with changing actors over time.

In the 1970s, the most active perpetrators of terrorism in New York City were **Fuerzas Armadas de Liberacion Nacional (FALN)**, a Puerto Rican separatist group, responsible for 40 NYC attacks in this decade. The **Jewish Defense League (JDL)**, which engaged in attacks against targets it perceived to be anti-Semitic, launched 27 attacks during this period. And, both the **Independent Armed**

Revolutionary Commandos (CRIA), another Puerto Rican separatist group, and **Omega-7**, an anti-Castro Cuban organization, each were responsible for 16 attacks during this period.

Both FALN and the JDL continued their activity and attacks in New York into the 1980s, launching another 8 and 14 attacks, respectively, during this decade.

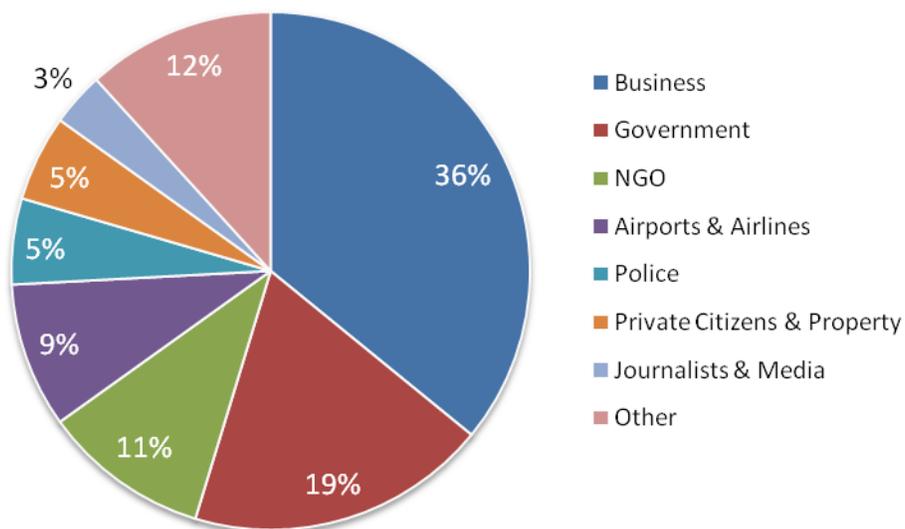
Groups that had been active in New York in the 1970s and '80s faded away in the 1990s. During this decade, more than 80% of the attacks in New York were attributed to unknown perpetrators. Of the remaining incidents in the 1990s, no single group was known to be responsible for more than one attack in New York City.

Al-Qaeda was responsible for two coordinated attacks on the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001. To date, al-Qaeda has not been identified to be responsible for any additional attacks in New York in this decade. In addition, five incidents of the delivery of anthrax via mail occurred in New York in the first decade of the twenty-first century. If one perpetrator was in fact responsible for all 5 of these incidents, this perpetrator would have committed the greatest number of NYC attacks in the 2000s.

➤ **Terrorist Target Types in New York City**

Just as different perpetrators have been active in New York City, a range of different targets have been singled out for attack by terrorists. The most common type of target in New York has been **businesses**, targeted in 36% of 1970-2007 attacks. 19% of attacks have targeted **government offices** located in the city. **Non-governmental organizations** have been targeted in 11% of attacks.

NYC Terrorist Attacks by Target Type



Business and government offices/facilities are also the most common targets of terrorist activity in the United States, writ large—not only in New York City—with 25% of U.S. terrorist attacks targeting businesses and 18% targeting non-military government facilities.

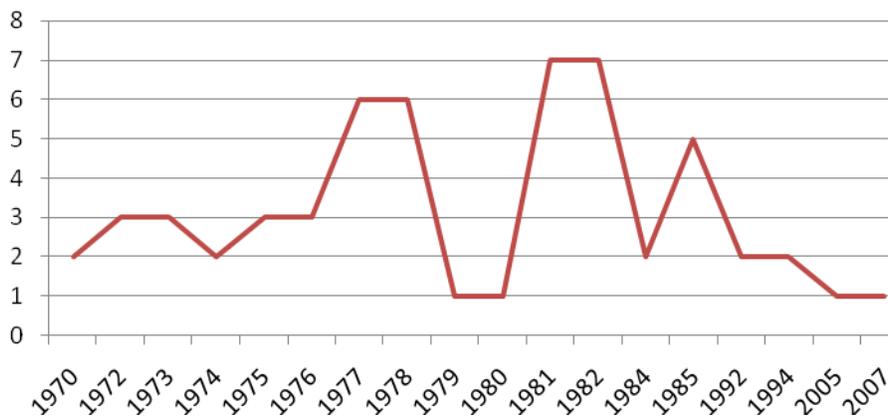
Target types that have been less frequently attacked in New York (included in the figure above as “other”) include non-aviation transportation facilities (5 attacks), religious institutions (4 attacks), food and water supply (1 attack), and telecommunication facilities (1 attack). In the country as a whole, 18% of terrorist attacks have targeted abortion-related targets (including abortion clinics). No such attacks are known to have occurred in New York City.

➤ **Terrorist Weapon Types in New York City**

The primary weapon used in 70% of terrorist attacks in New York City has been **bombs/explosives**. (Among U.S. terrorist attacks during this same period, terrorists relied on bombs/explosives as the primary weapon in 55% of attacks.) An additional 18% of NYC terrorist attacks involved **incendiaries** (arson/fire) as the primary weapon, and 10% relied upon **firearms** as the primary weapon.

Among the 195 bomb/explosive attacks in New York City, 58 incidents have been identified as cases in which terrorists used an **improvised explosive device (IED)**. This accounts for 34% of all terrorist IED attacks in the United States during this period. While IEDs have become a major concern in recent years due to their prominence in conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, a review of events in New York reveals that terrorists have been using this type of weaponry—and using it in New York City—for decades.

Terrorist Usage of IEDs in New York City
(total attacks = 58)



Of all terrorist IED cases in the United States, 10 are known to have been **vehicle-borne IEDs (VBIEDs)**, or car bombs. More than half of these VBIED attacks—6 of 10—occurred in New York. Among these attacks is the 1993 attack by Ramzi Yousef on the World Trade Center. Yousef drove a Ryder rental truck packed with more than 1500 pounds of fertilizer-based explosives into an underground parking garage beneath the World Trade Center. The attack left 6 people dead and resulted in more than 1000 injuries.

Prior to this attack, the last known terrorist usage of VBIEDs in New York occurred in the 1970s. In the course of one week in March 1973, the Palestinian terrorist organization Black September (best known for its attack on the 1972 Munich Olympic games) launched 3 attacks using VBIEDs in New York City, targeting Israeli-owned businesses in the city as well as the El Al terminal at John

F. Kennedy Airport (see GTD ID#s 197303030002, 197303040002, and 197303060001 for more information on these attacks). In 1978, the New Jewish Defense League attacked an Egyptian governmental office in New York using a car bomb, and in 1979, Omega-7 employed a VBIED against TWA offices at Kennedy Airport (see GTD ID#s 197812180007 and 197903250002, respectively, for additional details).

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**Notes on this Report:**

The **Global Terrorism Database (GTD)**, [www.start.umd.edu/gtd](http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd) contains information on more than 80,000 terrorist incidents that have occurred around the world since 1970. An updated version of this open-source database, with information on incidents through 2008, will be released in late May 2010.

GTD is a project of the **National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terror (START)**, a U.S. Department of Homeland Security Center of Excellence. START, based at the University of Maryland, College Park, aims to provide timely guidance on how to disrupt terrorist networks, reduce the incidence of terrorism, and enhance the resilience of U.S. society in the face of the terrorist threat.

The material presented here is the product of START and does not express the official opinion of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

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