

7.2 Attacks

- Attacks can be perpetrated by many different actors with different motivations, such as terrorists, violent extremists, and targeted violent offenders. All use violent tactics to harm people and/or property.
- The consequences of the attack depend on the tactics employed by the threat actor, such as active shooter(s) events, bombings, arson, murder, kidnapping and hostage-taking, maritime attack, and hijacking or skyjacking. Other chapters cover cyber-attacks, biological hazards, infrastructure failure, and hazardous materials incidents (including bombs).
- The 9/11 World Trade Center attacks in New York City critically changed the national perception of our vulnerability and response to terrorism in the United States. However, the use of large-scale tactics remains rare, and has not been successful in the United States since 9/11. Threat actors are more likely to use small-scale tactics in today's security-conscious environment to avoid disruption of their plan.
- The threat of terrorism and violent extremism has grown with the interconnectedness afforded by the internet. Terrorist organizations can reach anyone around the world to support or participate in attacks. The openness of the internet allows for the disconnected/autonomous sharing of ideas, tactics, and successes that motivate others to act.
- The number of active shooter incidents has increased over the last decade. Intense media coverage of active shooter events has created a heightened sense of risk despite these events being relatively rare.
- It remains nearly impossible to predict violent attacks, but security and intervention measures are continuing to evolve with the use of new tactics employed by threat actors.
- Seattle has experienced attacks perpetrated by domestic terrorists and other targeted violent offenders. However, Seattle has most commonly endured attacks targeted at property, active shooter events, and activity related to terrorism.
- Seattle has many public spaces and locations vulnerable to attacks, with the densely-populated downtown area being most vulnerable.

7.2.1 Context

Violent attacks can be perpetrated using a wide variety of means, such as bombs, chemicals, firearms, biological agents, and vehicles; all intend to do harm to people and/or property. Some of these means are covered in accompanying chapters. Cyber-attack is covered under cyber-attack and disruption, bombs are covered under hazardous materials, bioterrorism is covered under disease/pandemic influenza, and aircraft under transportation incidents. This chapter focuses on other intentional, violent attacks including terrorism, violent extremism, and targeted violence.

Terrorism

Despite nearly two decades of robust counterterrorism and homeland security efforts, forecasting potential terrorist targets and events continues to be a difficult, if not impossible, task at the national and local level. In comparison to other countries, the United States historically has had few terrorist acts committed within its borders. This was completely changed by the attacks by Al-Qaeda terrorists on New York City's World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. In October-November of 2001, several incidents involving anthrax spores placed in the U.S. mail generated new and real fears about the use of chemical and biological agents. The creation of the federal Department of Homeland

Security and the city’s participation in the Top Officials (TopOff) anti-terrorism exercises in May 2003 underlined Seattle’s need to confront the threat of terrorism.

The U.S. Code of Federal Regulations defines terrorism as “the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objective.”³⁵³

Terrorism can be differentiated as international or domestic. International terrorism is “committed by a group or individual, who has some connection to a foreign power or whose activities transcend national boundaries.”³⁵⁴ An example is the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Domestic terrorism is “acts of terrorism perpetrated by individuals and/or groups inspired by or associated with primarily designated U.S.-based movements or organizations that espouse extremist ideologies of a political, religious, social, racial, or environmental nature.”³⁵⁵ An example is the 2001 UW Center for Urban Horticulture firebombing.

The other definition associated with terrorism is Homegrown Violent Extremism (HVE). HVE is “a person of any citizenship who has lived and/or operated primarily in the U.S. who advocates, is engaged in, or is preparing to engage in ideologically-motivated terrorist activities (including support to terrorism) in the furtherance of political or social objectives promoted by a foreign terrorist organization but is acting independently of direction by the foreign terrorist organization.”³⁵⁶ An example is the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing.

Some of the groups that have employed terror tactics in the United States include racist groups like the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and the Aryan Nations, radical environmental groups, and groups with ties to foreign terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda or Hamas. The Congressional Research Service identifies domestic terrorism ideologies as supporting animal rights, environmental rights, anarchism, white supremacy, anti-government ideals, black separatism, and beliefs about abortion.³⁵⁷

The FBI lists three priority factors contributing to the current threat of terrorism.³⁵⁸ First, the internet allows domestic and international actors to have an accessible platform to radicalize and recruit individuals who are receptive to their extreme messaging. Second, social media sites have allowed terrorists to more easily access and communicate with people living in the U.S. Lastly, identifying HVEs, or sympathizers, who have radicalized and aspire to carry out an attack.

Terrorist organizations are now espousing the “leaderless resistance” model for fighting people that they view as their enemies. By advocating independent actions by individuals or small leaderless cells, this strategy seeks to prevent authorities from connecting illegal activities to the organization’s command and control structure. Individuals acting on their own perpetrate acts of “resistance” that support the espoused philosophy of the larger group.

Domestic Violent Extremism (DVE)

There are other acts of violence that are like terrorism events, but that do not have a connection to a foreign or domestic terrorist organization. Domestic Violent Extremism (DVE) is “encouraging, supporting, or committing a violent act to achieve political, ideological, religious, social, or economic goals.”³⁵⁹ An example is the 2015 Planned Parenthood arson in Eastern Washington.

Targeted violence differs from DVE in that it is not motivated by social or political ideologies, but rather uses a terror tactic as a means to satisfy personal grievances. The definition of targeted violence is “an intentional act committed by an individual or group for the purpose of (or resulting in) psychologically and/or physically affecting an organization or person associated with an organization, whereby the attacker selects a particular target prior to their violent attack.”³⁶⁰ This includes hate crimes, workplace violence, rampage shootings, non-terrorism suicide attacks, or cases of violence caused by mental instability. An example is the 2017 Las Vegas mass shooting.

Active Shooter Incidents

Active shooter incidents are a violent tactic that can be used by terrorism actors, as well as violent extremists or those inciting targeted violence. The number of active shooter incidents have increased and have received greater media attention since the landmark Columbine High School Shooting on April 20, 1999 in Colorado. The definition of an active shooter incident is “an individual (or individuals) actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area.”³⁶¹ The active aspect implies that both law enforcement and citizens have the potential to affect the outcome of the event based on their response. The deadliest active shooter incident in recent U.S. history occurred on October 1, 2017, when a gunman killed 58 people at a concert in Las Vegas.

There can be varying motives for an active shooter attack. Media accounts may claim psychopathology as the motive defining an active shooter, as in the student, fired employee or jilted lover who “snaps.” However, active shooters have demonstrated extensive planning, deliberation and cognitive functioning in the commission of the attacks. Not all active shooters impulsively and randomly open fire in a public place. Like context and environment, an active shooter incident is defined by the action, not by the attacker’s motive.

The FBI published a report on active shooter incidents in the U.S. between 2000 – 2013 indicating:³⁶²

- There were 160 incidents.
- The incidents resulted in 486 fatalities and 557 injuries.
- The trend appears to be that active shooter incidents are becoming more frequent, with an average of 6.4 incidents per year in the first 7 years and 16.4 incidents per year in the last 7 years.
- The incidents took place at commerce/business locations (46%), educational institutions (24%) government institutions (10%), open spaces (9%), residences (4%), places of worship (4%), and healthcare facilities (3%).
- Over half of the incidents ended before police arrived.

The FBI has published two subsequent reports since 2013, detailing active shooter incidents from 2014-2015³⁶³ and from 2016-2017.³⁶⁴ Since 2014:

- There were 90 incidents.
- The incidents resulted in 313 fatalities and 861 injuries.
- About 14% took place at educational institutions (13 out of 90).

Concern around school shootings in particular has grown in the U.S. due to heightened media coverage and the fact that these incidents violate the widely-held ideal that schools should be a safe place for children. However, while active shooter incidents may be trending upward generally, there is mixed evidence that school shootings are on the rise. One report that looked at school shootings between 1940 and 2018 revealed that the number of school shootings in the last 18 years has already surpassed the total number of school shootings that occurred in the 20th century.³⁶⁵ Another report found that the number of students killed in school shootings has actually decreased since the 1990s.³⁶⁶ Nevertheless, school districts, including Seattle Public Schools, are actively working on developing stricter security policies. Seattle Public Schools will continue to engage in lockdown drills and promote the “run, fight, hide” training (escape if you can, hide if you can’t, and fight if you must) for situations with a direct encounter with a shooter. All Seattle public schools have the ability to lock all doors and they plan to install cameras at front doors to view visitors before granting access.³⁶⁷ Any school security measure must be balanced with the fact that schools are public institutions and it is impossible to completely secure such facilities.

7.2.2 History

Seattle has experienced activity related to terrorism, but never a large-scale terrorist incident. There have been many small-scale incidents that fit into the terrorist mold and could represent the first step in a pattern of escalation. They relate to both domestic and international terrorist groups. Foreign terrorist groups also use the U.S. for fundraising and recruiting. News stories that feature Americans going to Somalia and Pakistan make it seem as if this is a new phenomenon, but it dates back at least to the early 20th century with heavy IRA fundraising in the U.S.

Seattle has also experienced DVE and active shooter incidents. Seattle events are listed as well as events with ties to Seattle.

1984. Seattle / Whidbey Island. Members of The Order, a racist Aryan Nations offshoot, robbed an armored car at Northgate mall. They fled to Whidbey Island and were subsequently killed in a confrontation with police.

1993. Tacoma / Seattle. Two bombs exploded in Tacoma in July, causing some property damage. A group calling itself the American Front Skinheads was responsible. They are also suspected of bombing a gay bar on Capitol Hill.

1996. Seattle. Jason Sprinkle started a bomb scare when he parked his truck in the middle of Westlake Park, slashed the tires and walked away. His truck had a huge metal heart in its bed and the word “bomb” printed on its bumper. He intended the action as a protest to the reopening of Pine Street to traffic, but instead he caused a massive bomb scare. Nine blocks were evacuated during a busy weekday afternoon while the police investigated.

1999. Port Angeles / Seattle. Ahmed Ressam (AKA the “Millennium Bomber”) was caught smuggling bomb-making materials into the U.S. at Port Angeles. He was an Algerian man with links to Osama bin Laden. He had hotel reservations in Seattle close to the Seattle Center. The New Year’s celebration at the Center was cancelled as a precaution. It was later determined that the actual terrorist target was Los Angeles.

2001. Seattle. The Earth Liberation Front, a domestic terrorist group, claimed responsibility for firebombing attack against a University of Washington building. The fire caused \$6 million in damage and destroyed rare plants, books, and years of research.

2002. Seattle. James Ujama pleads guilty to aiding the Taliban government in Afghanistan.

2006. Seattle. Naveed Afzal Haq shot six people, one fatally, at the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle. Haq was not connected with terrorist groups, but his motives were deemed political.

2006. Seattle. Kyle Huff killed seven in a mass shooting at a house party in Capitol Hill.

2009. Seattle. Christopher Monfort set fire to police vehicles and shot into a police car, killing an officer. His motivations were deemed political.

2011. Seattle. Khalid Abdul-Latif and Walli Mujahidh were arrested and charged with conspiracy after planning to attack the Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) in Seattle with machine guns and grenades. They had initially planned the attack for Joint Base Lewis-McChord.

2012. Seattle. Ian Stawicki shot and killed four people at Café Racer and killed a fifth person near downtown Seattle while attempting to escape.

2014. Seattle. Musab Masmari attempted to set fire to a gay nightclub in Capitol Hill while 750 people were attending a New Year’s Eve event.

2014. Seattle. Aaron Ybarra open fired at Seattle Pacific University, killing one student and injuring two students.

2014. Seattle. Ali Muhammad Brown killed four people, including a gay couple, as part of a personal vengeance against the U.S. government for its actions in the Middle East. In 2004, he was arrested and prosecuted for his role in a bank fraud scheme to finance fighters traveling abroad and had known links to a disrupted terror cell in Seattle in 1999.

2017. Seattle. Melvin Neifert was arrested and charged with receiving incendiary explosive device materials to make a bomb that was to be used in connection with 2016 May Day events.

Until early 2001, the Aryan Nations maintained a compound in Northern Idaho not far from Washington and stated that it would like to create a white homeland in the Pacific Northwest. The Southern Poverty Law Center recorded 26 active hate groups in Washington State in 2018, up from 15 in 2010.³⁶⁸

A review of the Seattle Police Department bomb disposal unit's incident log since 1995 shows two to six bomb hoaxes per year and a similar number of serious threats. Seven of them appear to be politically motivated. Victims included federal, county and city government facilities, women's clinics, and Jewish organizations.

7.2.3 Likelihood of Future Occurrences

It is impossible to predict the probability of future attacks. Given the number of potential weapons that can be used in violent attacks, it is also difficult to predict what tactic is most likely. Terrorist groups are always seeking new means of attack. In the past, tactics have included bombs, aircraft as missiles, vehicles, stabbing, chemicals, and firearms. Most troubling is the potential for using weapons of mass destruction: nuclear, radiological, chemical, and biological weapons.

The Washington State Fusion Center has statistically analyzed over 1,000 events that have occurred in Washington and in the U.S. over the last decade to identify any trends. Their analysis reveals:³⁶⁹

- The Most Likely Tactics include: active shooter(s), vehicle attacks, stabbing/cutting, bombings, and cyberattacks.
- The Least Likely Tactics include: chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear bombing, hijacking/skyjacking, and maritime attacks.
- The Most Likely Targets include: human targets (particularly military, government, and law enforcement personnel), government facilities, commercial facilities (including public assembly, retail, and entertainment and sports venues), and transportation.
- The Least Likely Targets include: amusement parks, bridges, museums, national monuments or icons, and vessels.

The pattern of terrorism, DVE's, and targeted violence in the Seattle area has been a series of smaller scale attacks punctuated by the large arson attack against the University of Washington. Washington state has encountered more than 40 attempted and successful attacks in the past decade, an average of four per year. Recent national trends (2010 – 2016) reveal that right-wing extremist along with religious-extremist attacks are on the rise.³⁷⁰ The typical trend has become attacks that are carried out by individual perpetrators who are loosely linked to a larger organization or ideological movement.

The growth of internet forums and social media activity increases the likelihood of people becoming radicalized. Threat actors are now using encrypted communication applications to attempt to circumvent authorities from detecting and preventing a threat.³⁷¹ Between 2015 and 2017, Twitter removed almost one million accounts for promoting terrorism.³⁷²

It is probable that future attacks will be small-scale actions carried out by individuals or small independent groups. Most previous attacks, especially those carried out by radical environmentalists and animal rights groups, have targeted property, but the Jewish Federation and Café Racer Shootings

show that people can also be targeted. Based on the past events in Washington, DVE and targeted violence are the most common types of attacks in our region.³⁷³ A large-scale terrorist attack, based on historic events, is assessed to be a low probability event, but cannot be ruled out. Both domestic and international attackers have proven they can deliver devastating attacks. Tall buildings in Seattle were among those on a potential target list leading up to the 9/11 attack. As long as the capability and motives exist, the risk of an attack is real. However, the threat of terrorism appears to be trending towards terrorist organizations promoting individuals to use simple tactics such as stabbing or vehicles to incite violence.³⁷⁴ It is very difficult to detect individual actors; the expectation that all attacks can be prevented is unrealistic.

Active shooter incidents and other targeted violence are also impossible to predict but have occurred at common locations throughout the U.S. that also exist in Seattle, such as education institutions, places of worship, offices, shopping centers, event venues, parties, bars and restaurants, and family gatherings. Perpetrators of mass shootings are sometimes known to be a threat prior to the event but not all can be detected in order to take preventative actions.

7.2.4 Vulnerability

Being a large, diverse, densely populated, and open city, Seattle has many potential targets for attack. Terrorists and HVEs have demonstrated their desire to attack highly populated or popular areas to gain the greatest media attention and incite the greatest amount of public fear.³⁷⁵ Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods have the greatest population density, which becomes even denser with the influx of daily commuters. Seattle also has a dense network of critical infrastructure. Many of our transport linkages connect through downtown and would be impacted by a large attack. With limited reserve capacity in surface transportation, this presents a vulnerability. The I-5 corridor is vulnerable to a major attack as it is critical to the local and state economy and transporting both people and goods.

Preparation can reduce vulnerability. After 9/11, all levels of government began efforts to better mitigate the effects of and prepare for terrorist attacks. Citizens have become more aware as well. An attempted 2009 Christmas Day bombing of a Northwest Airlines flight was stopped by alert citizens.

It is very difficult to construct a vulnerability profile for terrorism, DVE, or active-shooter incidents because they can happen in any community and in many different locations. Specific targets of active shooter events have commonly been enclosed facilities where the shooter has an easy choice of victims; where people are crowded together, and escape is difficult. However, recent incidents such as the Las Vegas concert shooting or the vehicle ramming attack in Nice, France show that violent attacks also have occurred at outdoor venues where people are gathered. Seattle's public spaces, institutions, and buildings will never be fully secure, and communities must balance their vulnerability to attacks with their desired quality of life.

7.2.5 Consequences

While Seattle has never experienced a major terrorist attack with massive loss of life, the fact remains that there are groups in existence seeking to do harm to people and property. These groups exist in the Seattle community and can have the means to cause enormous harm. On the other hand, such groups face a number of obstacles that limit their capabilities. Post-9/11 reforms have been put in place to make it harder to act. Citizens are more alert and more likely to report something suspicious. Institutions have tightened security.

The impact of a violent attack depends on the attacker's motivation or desired outcome, the tactic used, the location, weapon type, emergency response, and success of the attack.³⁷⁶ A successful attack could result in bodily harm and/or loss of human life.

Violent attacks can have a lasting psychological component. The community at-large can become traumatized both because they identify with the victims and because attackers often target well-known, public places. The sense of public trauma is further heightened by the overwhelming media coverage at terrorist, DVE, and active shooter incidents. Through the media, people watching the event on television feel personally attacked. If the place attacked is an important landmark, a community may feel its own identity is under attack.

The physical damage done in an attack, along with the psychological impacts on the community, can have significant negative economic impacts. The 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris cost an estimated \$2 billion in damage to the city. Schools that have experienced an active shooter event often have to remodel or rebuild the school or specific site of the event to mitigate the psychological impact on students. An attack could deter people from going to public places, even if it occurred in a different city or country, which can hurt local businesses and institutions.

Most terrorist, violent extremist, and targeted violence incidents occur at a single site, but multi-site incidents (also known as Complex Coordinated Attacks (CCAs)) are possible and have been deployed by terrorists. While single/paired shooter scenarios can cause a significant amount of damage and casualties, the prospect of a CCA event is even worse and cannot be ruled out, as illustrated by the attack in Mumbai in 2008 or the Paris attacks in 2015. In Mumbai, heavily armed terrorists launched ten coordinated attacks. The attacks lasted almost 72 hours, resulted in 173 deaths and locked down much of downtown Mumbai. In Paris, terrorists used guns and suicide bombs at six different locations across the city, including a concert hall, restaurants, and outside of a sports stadium. The attacks lasted 3 hours and resulted in 130 deaths with hundreds more wounded. The U.S. has had number attacks by individuals or pairs. It is possible that Seattle could experience a CCA with similar or more severe casualties than past incidents.

7.2.6 *Conclusions*

It is nearly impossible to predict terrorism, DVE, and active shooter events. The pace and severity of attacks appears to be increasing and tactics are continuing to evolve. Seattle has become a major economic and cultural center, increasing its symbolic value and therefore, its likelihood of being targeted. The downtown area is densely populated and thick with attractive targets. Much of Seattle's economic and social life is concentrated in this area and is vulnerable to disruption.