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CTC: Topic #2 - Countering Terrorist Threats against Vulnerable Targets

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Since the emergence of terrorism, terrorist organizations often exhibit an interest for the destructive potential of the most vulnerable areas of society: areas consisting of critical infrastructure and public spaces (otherwise known as “soft targets”). That is why we often see terrorist attacks occur in highly populated places with large infrastructure.¹ This phenomenon is strategically crafted in order to maximize casualties and destruction. Strikes on urban centers are on the rise, and as a result, it is imperative to focus governmental efforts on protecting vulnerable targets and people from terrorist attacks.

Throughout history, and especially in recent years, terrorists target vulnerable spaces to instill as much fear as possible. They choose targets with open accessibility and a high concentration of victims: urban centers, tourist venues, public aviation, religious sites, houses of worship, and critical infrastructure such as transportation and energy plants.² Terrorists abuse the open, accessible, and densely populated nature of these places to ensure the maximum amount of damage attainable.

Furthermore, attacks on soft targets provide terrorists with maximized impact and publicity. Not only does this strategy ensure the largest number of casualties possible, but it also generates widespread fear and incites terror in the public. Since almost all large-scale acts of terror generate significant media attention, they can spread fear to even greater numbers of people. In many cases, the former provides an even larger platform for the spread of radical terrorist ideology and catalyses even more violence, resulting in greater loss of human life. Similarly, terrorists also benefit from the domino effect in which the attack on a main piece of infrastructure has consequences that extend beyond the immediate site. This often affects supply chains, damages public health, causes significant economic loss in addition to casualties and physical destruction.

¹<https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/vulnerable-targets#:~:text=Protecting%20Vulnerable%20Targets%20Programming&text=The%20Programme%20aims%20at%20identifying,Sports%20and%20Security%2C%20and%20TAM>.

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The terrorist threat against vulnerable targets is not only an ongoing issue, but it is, in fact, more prevalent now than ever. Terrorist attacks against soft targets occur all over the world; they most frequently take place in regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. One of the most recent tragedies that exemplifies our topic is the deadly terror attack that targeted the Manchester synagogue on October 2, 2025. This attack left two worshippers dead on the holiest day of the Jewish calendar, and three others were in serious condition following the car ramming and stabbing assault at the Heaton Park synagogue.³ Another recent case is that of the terror attack in Jerusalem, which took place on September 8, 2025, when two Palestinian gunmen opened fire at a bus stop in Jerusalem, murdering six people and leaving many others wounded.⁴ A third example occurred at a Damascus church on June 23, 2025, where a suicide bomber killed 25 worshippers during mass, and wounded 60 others.⁵

Both governments and private owners are responsible for making sure the correct measures are in place in order to protect soft targets against terrorist attacks. However, the current systems are not invincible, as evidenced by the fact that there is presently an increase in these forms of attacks. Therefore, it is increasingly important to take on a society-wide approach that involves international cooperation and public-private collaborations to handle threats, prevent attacks, and overall enhance security.

As part of the Counter-Terrorism Committee, you are required to find ways to further develop the current methods in place to combat terrorist threats against vulnerable targets, and to help decrease the rising number of ongoing terrorist attacks.

Some questions to help guide your research are:

- What is your country's position regarding terrorist attacks? Does your country condemn or facilitate these crimes? If they do facilitate them, do they do so directly or indirectly?
- Does your country struggle with terrorist groups? Has it struggled with terrorism in the past? If so, what are some of the measures your country employed to help combat the terrorist threat?
- Are there any countries or organizations that enacted policies which successfully aided in the battle against terrorism and terrorist attacks? If so, what can we learn from these

³ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/10/1166018>

⁴ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/09/1165799>

⁵ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/06/1164786>

effective measures? Is there anything worthwhile we can implement into our solutions today?

As always, please remember you are representing your assigned delegation and not your personal views. All information must be properly cited, and there is a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism and the use of AI. All papers will be submitted through Turnitin, and the use of AI may affect your chance of receiving an award.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions or concerns by contacting me at mgutier1@mail.yu.edu. I look forward to reading your work, and hearing your ideas and proposals at the conference. Remember to have fun researching, and good luck!

All the best,

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Chair, Counter-Terrorism Committee

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