

The Blowback Effect:

A comparative examination of the foreign fighter phenomenon following the Soviet and Coalition interventions in Afghanistan.

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Clarification of Terms

Blowback Effect:

- The impact, both direct and indirect, that Foreign Fighters have on terrorism in their home countries.

Foreign Fighter:

- An individual who travels abroad to train or engage in combat.

Terrorism:

1. The act must be aimed at attaining a political, economic, religious, or social goal.
2. There must be evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate, or convey some other message to a larger audience than the immediate victims.
3. The action must be outside the context of legitimate warfare activities, i.e. the act must be outside the parameters permitted by international humanitarian law, particularly the targeting of civilians.

Situation

Soviet Afghan War 1979-1989

- An estimated 15,000 Foreign Fighters travelled to Afghanistan
- Largest contingents were Saudis, Algerians and Egyptians
- Foreign Fighters from this conflict were often referred to as “Afghan Arabs”

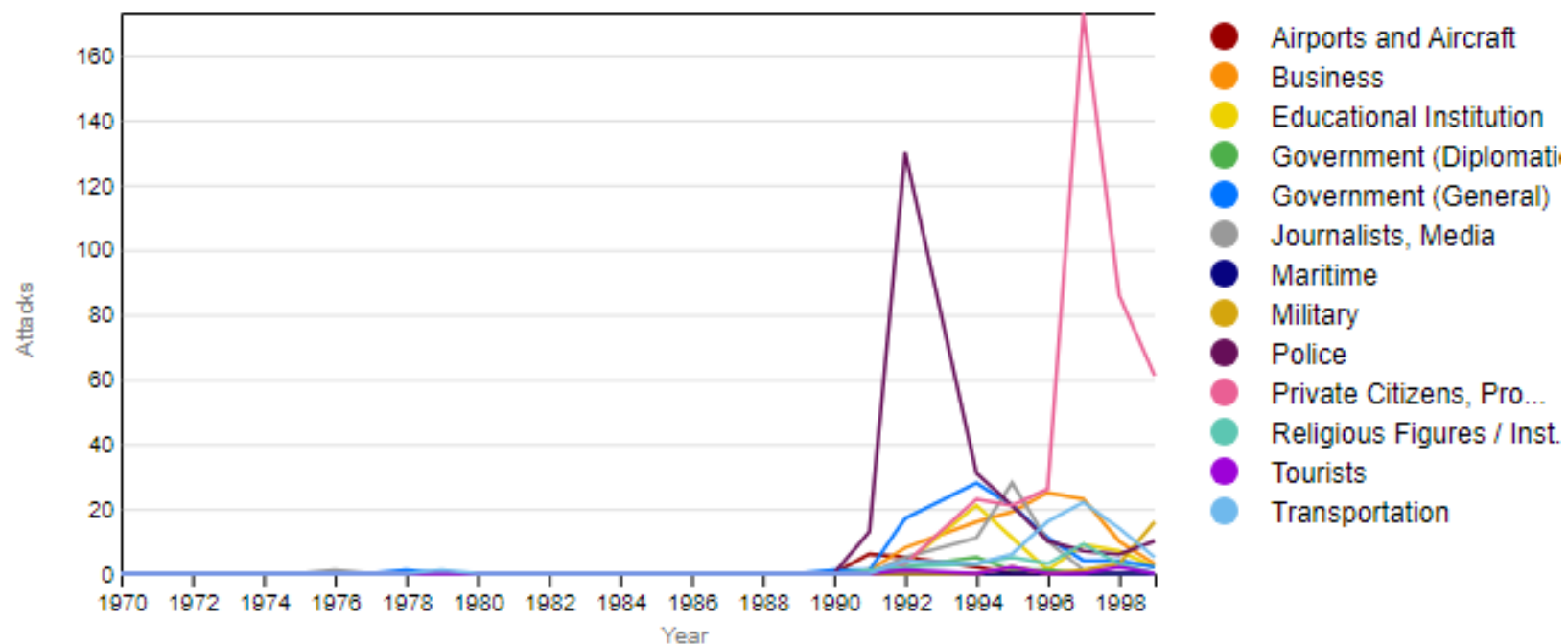
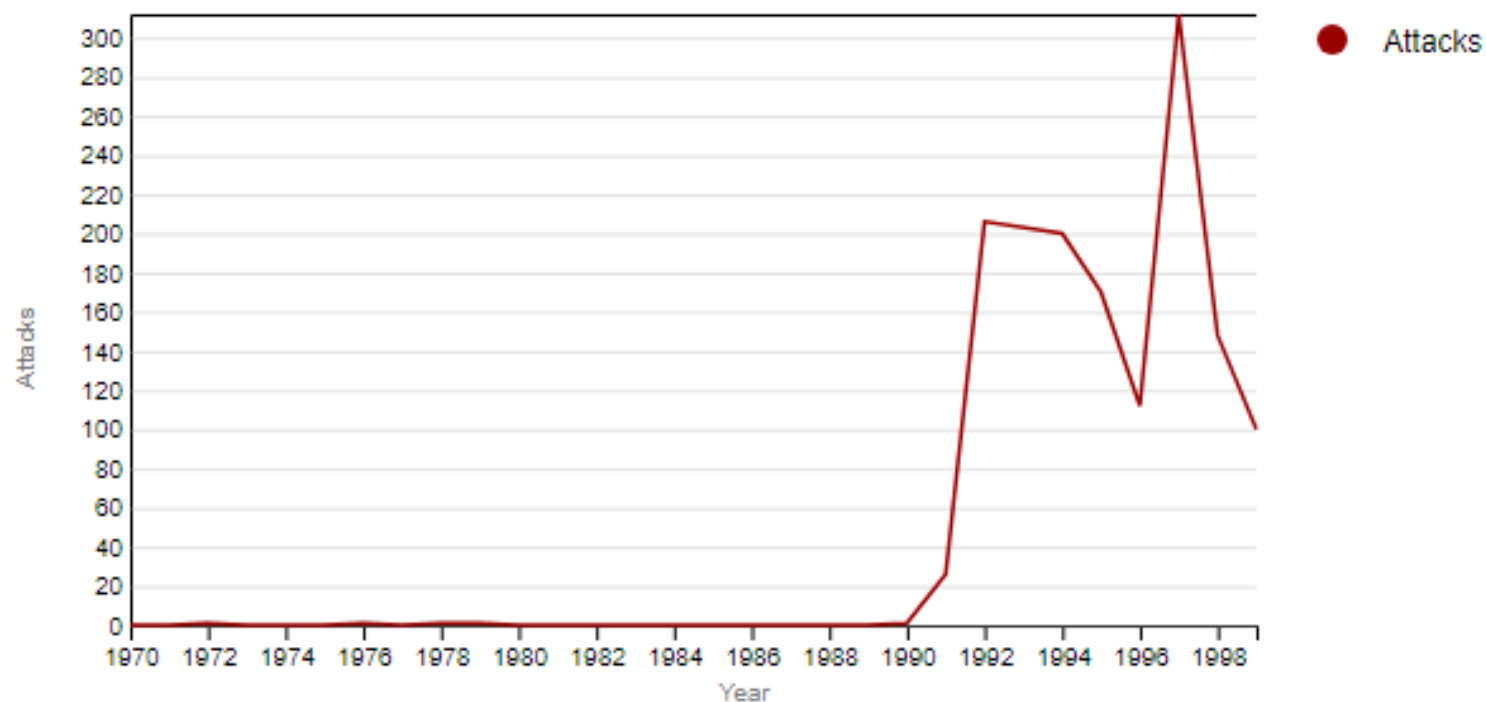
Coalition War in Afghanistan 2001-2021

- Since 2001 an estimated 50,000 Foreign Fighters travelled abroad
- Split between Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria
- Egerton (2011) “*Precise quantification is impossible*”

Algeria

- A Coup in 1992 overthrew the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) party
- Initial resistance led by the Islamic Armed Movement (MIA) later renamed Islamic Salvation Army (AIS)
- Soon however Afghan veterans broke away and formed the Armed Islamic Group (GIA)
- 1994 GIA began to dominate
- 1997 GIA communique “*all others are apostates and deserve to die*”
- 1998 many non “Afghan Arab” members split to form the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC)
- 1999 coupled with Government amnesty this resulted in an estimated 85% drop in membership.

Algeria



- 65% of all attacks were targeted at Civilians
- 19% at Police
- 10% at Government and Military

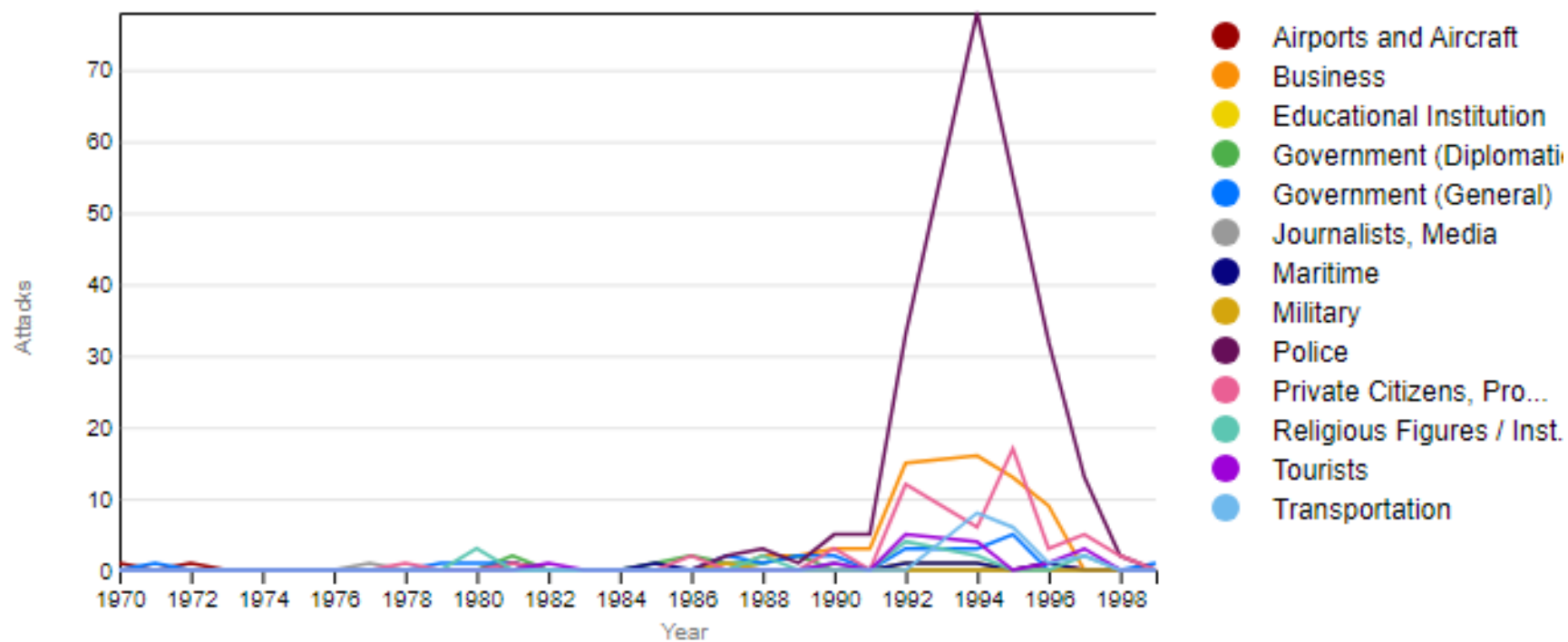
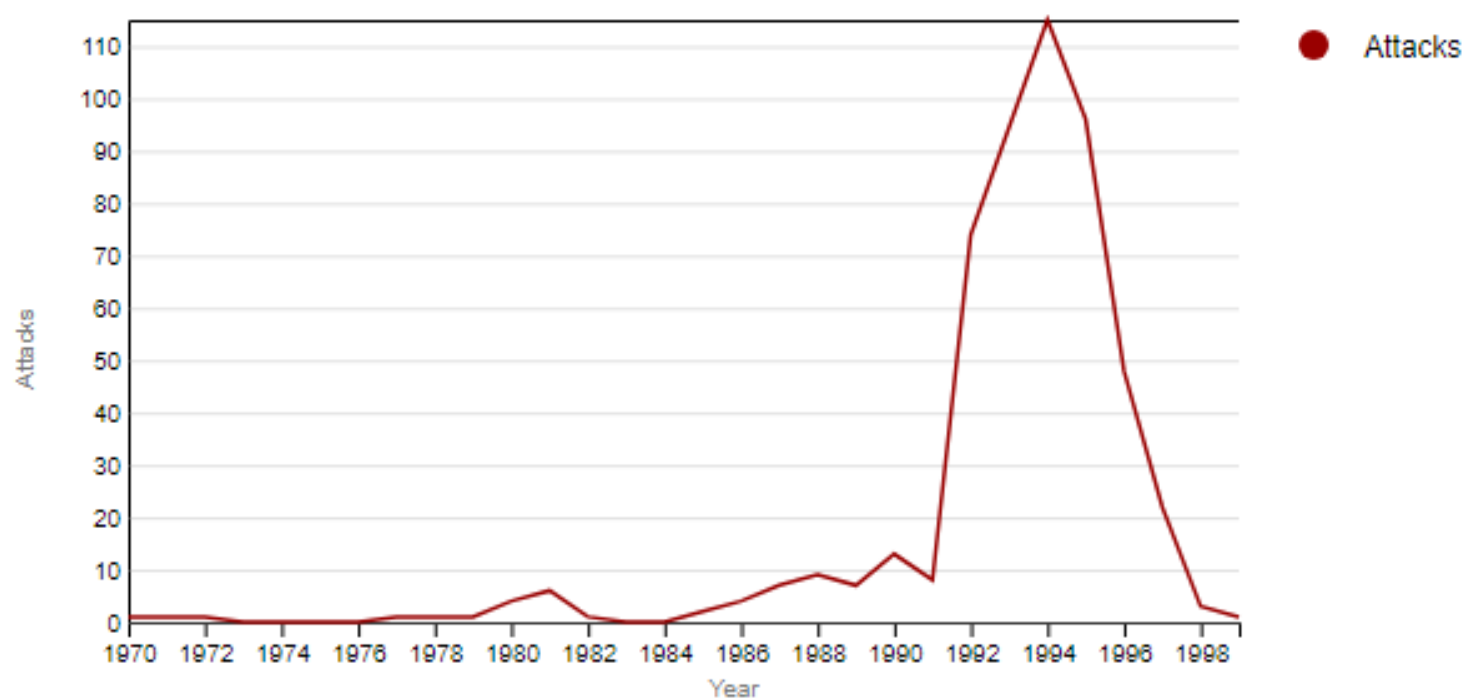
- In just 7 years at least 160,000 civilians were killed

- Laqueur W. (2007) *“Algerians often complained that the Afghan Arabs had been the ones who brought along such practices”*

Egypt

- Suffered low levels of terrorism in the 70s and 80s including the assassination of President Sadat in 1981.
- Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) was responsible for many attacks
- Al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyah (Assembly of Islam) focussed on riots until it officially arming in 1992
- Sageman M. (2004) *“Most members... fled to Afghanistan to help the mujahideen there and escape persecution at home.”*

Egypt



Pre 1990

- 39% targeted the Government and Military
- 16% targeted Police
- 7% targeted Civilians
- 76 people were killed

Post 1990

- 58% targeted Police
- 37% targeted Civilians
- 3% targeted the Government and Military
- An estimated 634 deaths

Europe

- Vital to also acknowledge the superior security services.
- Failed, foiled and completed attacks along with arrests must therefore also be taken into consideration.
- Drawbacks include the pronounced history of terrorism in Europe.

Pre 2001

- 36% targeted Businesses
- 22% targeted Government and Military
- 20% targeted Civilians
- 12% targeted Police

Post 2001

- 46% targeted Civilians
- 19% targeted Government and Military
- 18% targeted Businesses
- 13% targeted Police

Indirect Impact

- Cruickshank P. (2011) notes of completed attacks in the West 59% involved Foreign Fighters in some capacity.
- 2008 report by the British government that found that 75% of plots in the UK after 9/11 were in some way connected to a Foreign Fighter.
- TE-SAT records increasing number of younger individuals arrested for command roles.
- By 2012 average age was just 25 with 70% under 30.

Direct Impact

- Six of the top ten worst terror attacks in EU history are connected to radical Islam, four of which involved a Foreign Fighter.
- Grossman L. (2009) found that 40 per cent of domestic terrorists sampled in 2009 had trained abroad.
- Hegghammer T. (2013) “*One-in-nine-radicalisation rate which would make foreign fighter experience one of the strongest predictors of individual involvement in domestic operations.*”
- Hegghammer T. (2013) “*Increase, by a factor of around 1.5, the probability that a plot will come to execution, while it doubles the likelihood that the plot will kill people.*”

Conclusions

- Clear trend in number and frequency of attacks upon return.
- Pronounced presence of Foreign Fighters in major terror groups.
- Heavy focus on civilian targets.
- Strategy noticeably differed from groups formed of primarily domestic fighters.
- Continuation of Foreign Fighters undertaking command roles
- Foreign Fighting serves as the strongest predictor for terrorism