



ISSUE BRIEF

The knife attack at Amsterdam Central Station in perspective

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Introduction

On 31 August 2018, Afghan asylum seeker Jawed S. committed a knife attack on Amsterdam Central Station, wounding two. This Issue Brief will show that *this attack is in several respects typical of jihadist terrorist attacks with impact weapons*.¹ The respects in which Jawed S.' attack fits into a larger pattern are the following:

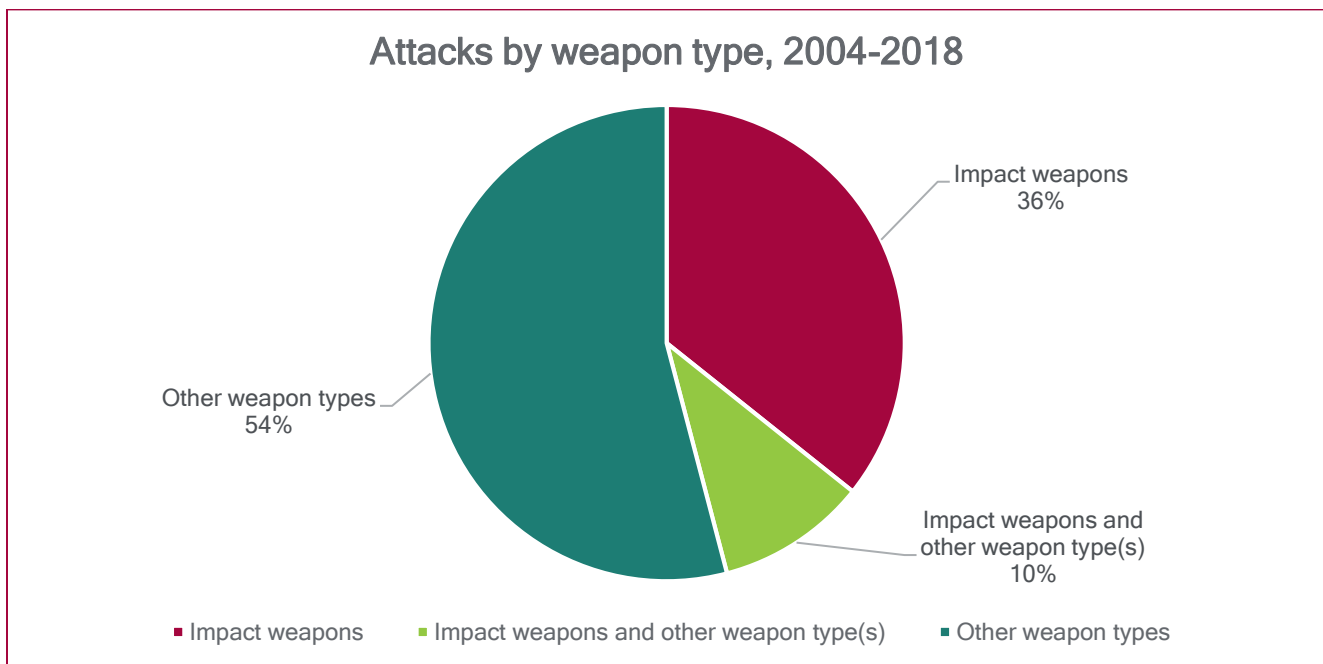
- **Frequency:** attacks with impact weapons have become an established part of the jihadist modus operandi since the emergence of the Islamic State.
- **Lethality:** like many perpetrators who commit attacks with impact weapons, Jawed S. caused relatively few victims.
- **Location:** the impact weapon is one of the weapons of choice for jihadist attacks at train and metro stations.
- **Suicidal intent:** like many perpetrators who commit attacks with impact weapons, Jawed S. expected to get himself killed during the attack.

All data in this Issue Brief have been drawn from Teun van Dongen's personal database of jihadist terrorist attacks in Europe, Canada and the US from 2004 to the present. This database can contribute to terrorist threat assessments by identifying trends and patterns in the way jihadist terrorists commit attacks. More specifically, it can provide fact-based analyses that can help police and emergency services decide how to prepare for terrorist incidents.

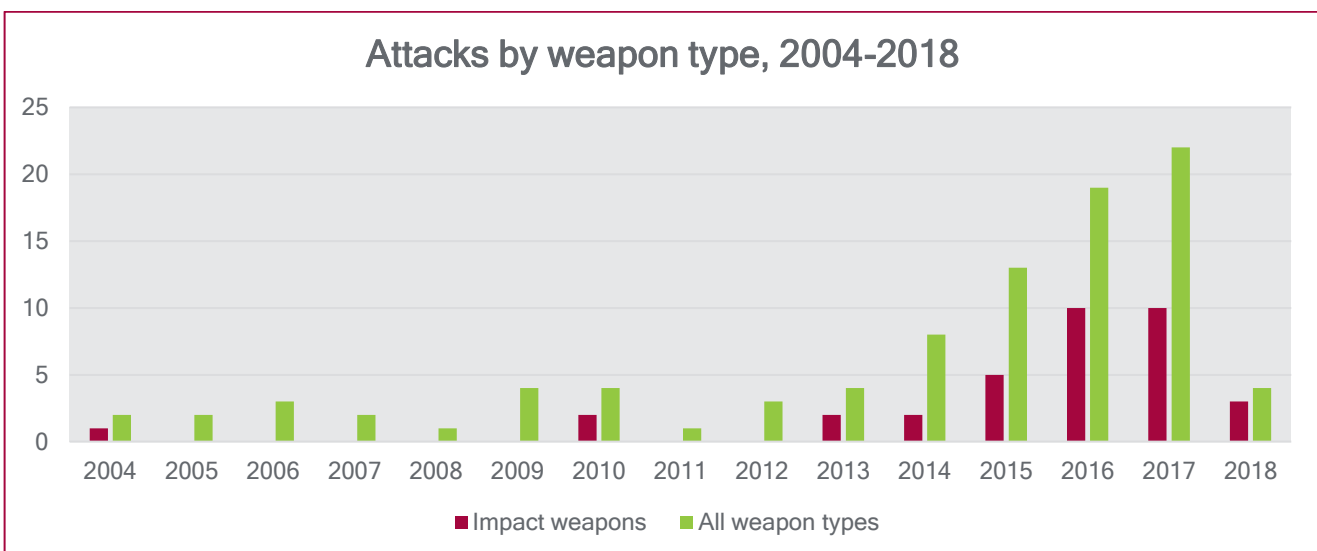
¹ Impact weapons are weapons that a perpetrator strikes an opponent with and that require physical force on the part of the perpetrator. Examples of impact weapons include knives, swords, bats, clubs and hammers.

FREQUENCY

Jawed S. is by no means the only jihadist to use impact weapons in an attack. Attacks with impact weapons account for 38% of all jihadist terrorist attacks (35 out of 92). Attacks carried out *exclusively* with impact weapons account for 27% of all attacks (25 out of 92). There have been ten attacks in which the perpetrators used impact weapons in combination with one or more other weapon types.

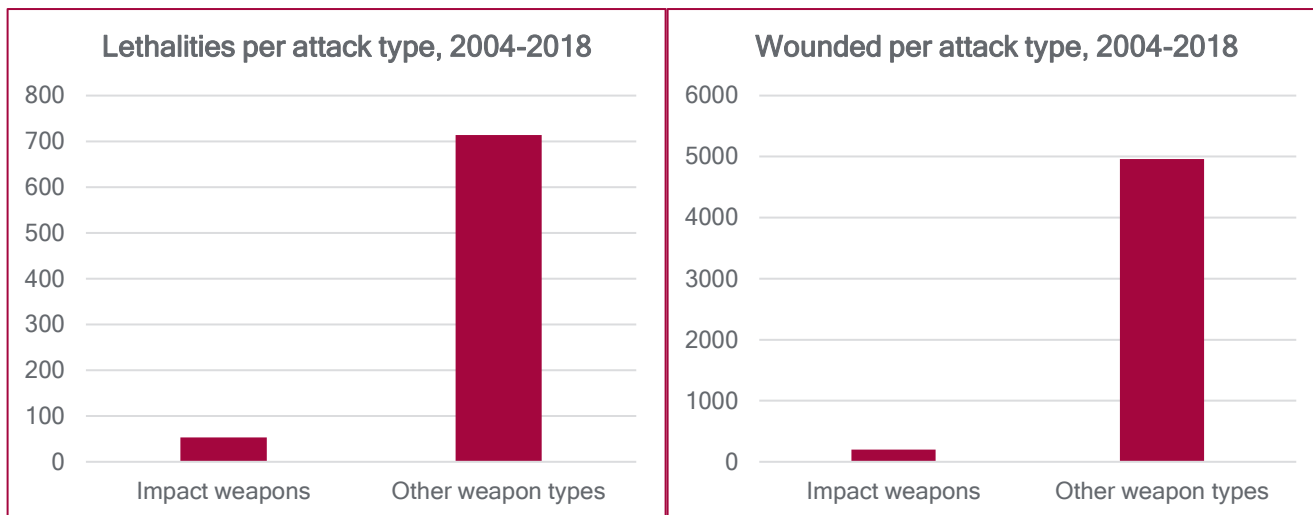


The years 2016 and 2017 saw the highest numbers of attacks with impact weapons (see below). In these years, attacks with impact weapons accounted for respectively 38% and 53% of all attacks. The increase of the number of such attacks roughly coincides with the emergence of the Islamic State.

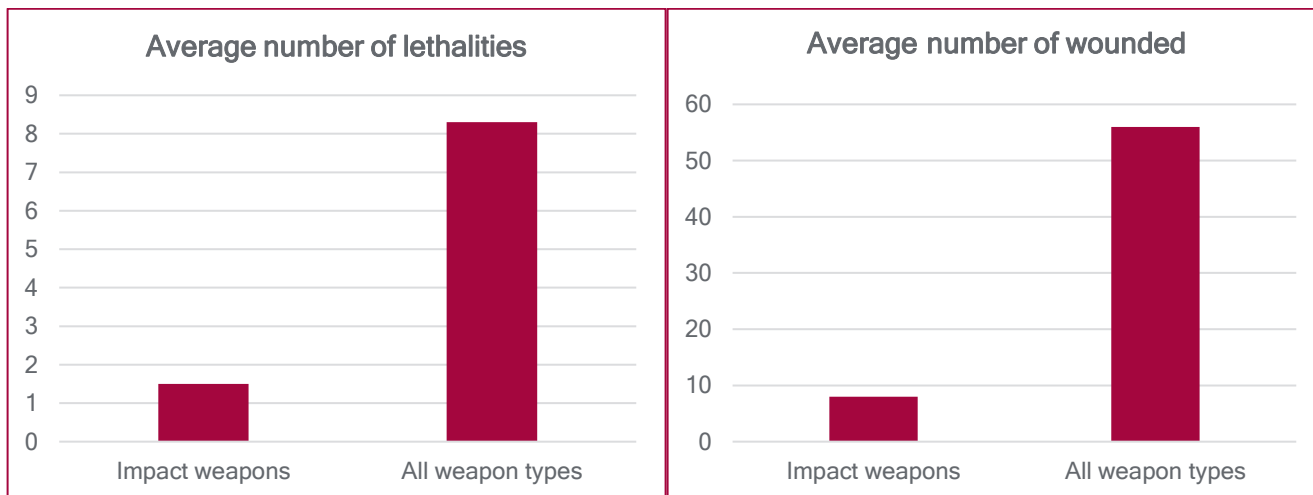


LETHALITY

Unsurprisingly, impact weapons are relatively inefficient weapons in the sense that their use results in fewer victims than the use of other weapon types. Attacks with impact weapons account for 38% of all attacks, but for only 7% of all lethalties (53 out of 767) and 4% (199 out of 5158) of all wounded.



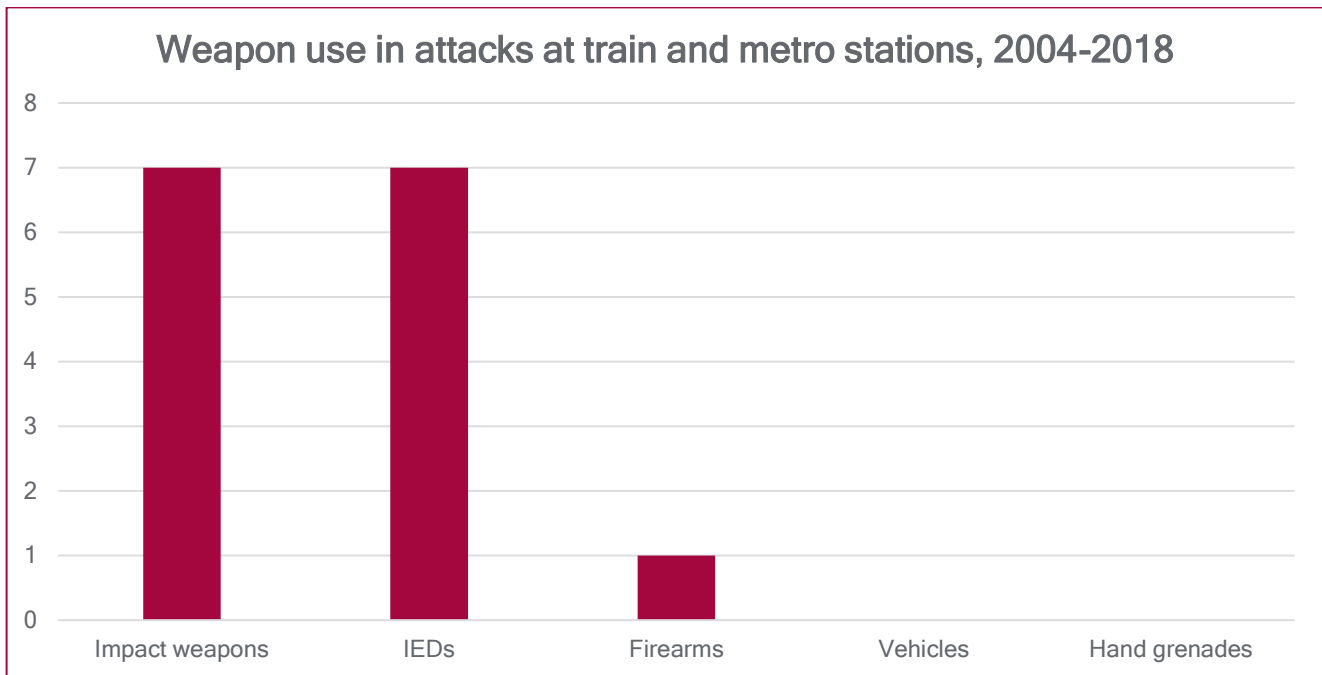
The average number of lethalties in attacks with impact weapons is 1.5; the average number of wounded is 5.7. The overall averages, i.e. the averages for all attacks in the database, are respectively 8.3 and 56.² With no lethalties and three wounded, including himself, Jawed S. fell far below even the average casualty rates of attacks with impact weapons.



² As the calculation of the overall average includes the attacks with impact weapons, it stands to reason that the difference between of the averages of attacks with impact weapons and attacks without impact weapons will be even bigger.

LOCATION

Jawed S.' attack follows a pattern in the sense that the impact weapon is one of the two weapons of choice in attacks at train and metro stations; the other is the IED. Of all fourteen attacks at train and metro stations, seven involved impact weapons, and seven involved IEDs; only one involved a firearm and no attack involved a vehicle or a hand grenade.



This does not mean, however, that knife attacks predominantly take place at train and metro stations. There have been 35 attacks with impact weapons, and seven of those (20%) were committed at train and metro stations.

SUICIDAL INTENT

According to his lawyer, Jawed S. expected to be killed during his attack.³ In this respect, too, his attack is rather typical of the attack with impact weapons. Of the 22 attacks in which the perpetrator intended or expected to get himself killed by the police⁴, fifteen (68%) were attacks with impact weapons.

³ "Terreurverdachte Jawed S. dacht aanslag niet te overleven, zegt advocaat", *NOS*, 4 September 2018.

⁴ This type of attack, which can be viewed as the jihadi version of 'suicide by police', is different from the suicide attack, in which the perpetrators kill themselves, and the so-called self-preserving attacks, in which the perpetrator tries to escape. For a more thorough analysis, see my ICCT-report "The fate of the perpetrator in the jihadist modus operandi: suicide attacks and non-suicide attacks in the West, 2004-2017", available [here](#).