



## **Suicide Attacks and Hard Targets: An Empirical Examination**

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### **Summary**

The idea of suicide attacks being used by militant groups to overcome hard targets is not new, however there is little empirical research in this area. The author attempts to understand the relationship between suicide attacks and hard targets by conducting a comprehensive analysis, comparing the use of suicide attacks versus conventional attacks against hard targets. Suicide attacks are more damaging/lethal than conventional terrorist attacks and they do not require an escape route. Because of this, suicide attacks are thought to be particularly effective against hard targets (e.g., military targets). Hard targets are usually more difficult to successfully attack due to being hardened or well defended, whereas soft targets are more exposed/accessible. Piazza (2018) investigates the statistical relationship between suicide attacks and hard targets. The study centers on these two research questions: 1) are suicide attacks more frequently deployed against hard (rather than soft) targets? and 2) are suicide attacks more likely to result in successfully executed attacks against hard targets?

### **Methods**

To test their hypotheses, the authors pulled data from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD). The authors used a series of logistic regression estimations for both 26,000 domestic terrorist incidents worldwide and 170,000 transnational terrorist incidents between the years 1970 to 2016. Suicide attacks made up about 3.4 percent of all attacks in the GTD at the time of publication.

### **Results**

- 1) Suicide attacks are both more frequently deployed against hard targets and are more often successfully executed against hard targets.
- 2) Suicide attacks are more likely to be successfully launched against both domestic and foreign military targets.

### **Implications**

The research empirically supports previous findings that underscore the importance of qualities of the target itself, when explaining the strategic decision to use suicide attacks by militant groups. In addition, the author claims that increasing the physical defenses of targets is a reasonable response to terrorism threats, but it may also increase the likelihood that militants will adapt with more extreme, and deadly, attack modes.

Piazza, J. A. (2018). Suicide attacks and hard targets: An empirical examination. *Defence and Peace Economics*, 31(2), 142–159. doi: 10.1080/10242694.2018.1509257