Lone Wolf Terrorist Attacks

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Relevance for UPSC exam

While terrorism has always remaind a global threat to humanity and integration, it has decentralized in recent years with lesser direct involvement of organized groups. ICT and online propaganda has enabled isolated events (lone wolf attacks) which makes tracing and tackling of such events difficult. Knife attack at a park in London is the most recent example.

Meaning of lone wolf

- A lone actor, lone-actor terrorist, or lone wolf is someone who prepares and commits violent acts alone, outside of any command structure and without material assistance from any group.
- They may be influenced or motivated by the ideology and beliefs of an external group and may act in support of such a group.
- Compared to group terrorism or network-sponsored terrorists, lone operators have a critical advantage in avoiding identification and detection before and after their attacks, since most of them do not communicate with others with regard to their intentions. Although lone wolves might have the disadvantage of lacking the means, skills, and professional support of terrorist groups, some of them nonetheless have proven to be very lethal.
- U.K., especially London, continues to see low-tech lone attacks, where the attacker either uses vehicles to run over people or launch knife attacks. Terrorist organisations have also embraced this tactic to spread violence in countries where coordinated big attacks are impossible. When the territories it controlled in Iraq and Syria started shrinking in the wake of counter-

attacks, in 2015 and 2016 the Islamic State urged its supporters first to launch attacks in western cities and then declare allegiance to the Caliph.

- Technology is also an increasingly important element in today's lone actor terrorism. Whether using the internet as a source of inspiration, how-to advice, or to forge connections to like-minded extremists, today's lone wolves are increasingly reliant on the internet, and increasingly able to use new technologies to mask their identities online to avoid detection.

- However, even with the prevalence of online forums where hate-speech and pro-terrorist sentiment flourishes, distinguishing between the thousands of individuals accessing and posting content on these websites and the handful who may at some point act on their feelings is nearly impossible.

**Source:** **Telegraph, The Hindu**