

LOW-TECH attack is 'new norm'

8 held in UK on suspicion

London
The eight people arrested following the attack outside the British parliament are being investigated "on suspicion of preparation of terrorist acts," police said Thursday.

They also said that five people remained in critical condition and two more had life-threatening injuries after the attacker ploughed into pedestrians on Wednesday before stabbing a policeman and being shot dead.

Police named the attacker as 52-year-old Khalid Masood, who

had a string of convictions but none of them terror-related.

The eight arrested included two women and five men arrested at three addresses in the central city of Birmingham and a woman arrested in London.

The police statement said that there had also been a raid in Wales in which no arrests were made.

"Detectives are continuing to search" the sites that were raided, the police said.

It said the seven arrested in Birmingham were being held under the Terrorism Act.

Khalid Masood: 'A nice guy' turned extremist

London

The man who mowed down pedestrians and stabbed a policeman in Wednesday's deadly assault outside Britain's parliament has been identified by police as 52-year-old former convict Khalid Masood.

Known by "a number of aliases", London's Metropolitan Police said he had been convicted for a string of offences but none of them terror-related.

Born on Christmas Day 1964 in Kent in southeast England, Masood had been living in the West Midlands where

armed police have staged several raids since the attack, storming properties in the city of Birmingham.

Over the course of two decades, Masood chalked up a range of convictions for assault, grievous bodily harm, possession of offensive weapons and public order offences, police said, with the offences taking place between 1983 and 2003.

But Masood

had never been convicted of terrorism offences and "was not the subject of any investigations," the police said, noting there was "no prior intelligence about his intent to mount a terrorist attack".

At 52, his age has been highlighted by commentators as unusual, with most Islamist extremists behind similar attacks far younger.

Prime Minister Theresa May said he was once investigated by the intelligence service MI5 "in relation to concerns about violent extremism".

Although the police believe Masood acted alone, the Islamic State group claimed he was one of its "soldiers" acting on a call to target countries fighting the jihadists in Iraq and Syria.

'A nice guy'

Masood rented the car used in the attack from the Solihull branch of Enterprise, on the outskirts of Birmingham, the company confirmed in a statement.

According to the BBC, he told the car rental company that he was a teacher.

"He was a nice guy. I used to see him outside doing his garden," Iwona Romek, a former neighbour of his told the Birmingham Mail.

"He had a wife, a young Asian woman and a small child who went to school," she added, pointing out that the family had abruptly moved out of their house in Winson Green, a neighbourhood in western Birmingham, around Christmas.

Other media have reported that he was a married father-of-three.



A screengrab taken on March 22, 2017 from footage from an ITN helicopter shows members of the emergency services working on Westminister bridge after a car ran into several pedestrians

Paris

A man with a car, a knife and murderous intent -- the London attack shows the "new norm" of low-tech terror, experts say.

Analysts who have studied similar attacks say their crude nature makes them almost impossible to prevent and easy to copy, posing a major headache for security services.

The Islamic State group on Thursday claimed the attack on the British parliament that left three dead, saying it was "carried out in response to calls to target coalition countries".

In 2014, IS's then propaganda chief Mohammed al-Adnani urged sympathisers in the West to attack "unbelievers" wherever they were and with whatever came to hand, with police and soldiers a particular target.

In Thursday's attack, a man mowed down pedestrians on Westminister Bridge before jumping out of the vehicle and stabbing to death a policeman before he was shot dead.

Berlin and Nice

The attack was reminiscent of three other attacks in the West in the past eight months.

In December, a 24-year-old Tunisian drove a stolen truck into a Christmas market in Berlin, killing 12 people.

Last July, another radicalised Tunisian, who like the London attacker was described by Islamic State as one of its "soldiers", ploughed a truck into crowds watching fireworks in the southern resort of Nice, killing 86.

The United States has also been targeted by low-tech attackers apparently acting alone.

In November, a student used a vehicle and knives to injure 13 on a university campus in Ohio.

Over the past decade, Israel has seen a growing number of vehicle ramming attacks, particularly in Jerusalem, with Palestinians using cars, trucks or even tractors to randomly mow down pedestrians, soldiers or police.

In the latest deadly incident in January, a Palestinian drove a truck

at a group of Israeli cadets, killing four and wounding another 15.

Back in Europe, less than a day after the carnage in London, a man was arrested on Thursday after he tried to drive at high speed into a crowd of people in the Belgian port of Antwerp.

Emily Winterbotham, a research fellow at the London-based Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) specialising in extremism and radicalisation, said it was inevitable there would be more such attacks.

"Attacks of this nature, the willingness of someone to use everyday objects, cars, knives, are incredibly difficult to prevent," she said

They "seem to be the new norm and we can do everything as far as possible to prevent them but they do happen and we need to prepare for that in order to respond in an appropriate manner". (AFP)



Emirates offers laptop 'handlers' to cope with ban

Dubai

Dubai's Emirates airline yesterday announced it will provide a free packing-and-handling service for passengers on flights hit by a US ban on electronic devices larger than a standard smartphone.

Emirates will allow

passengers to hold on to their laptops and tablets after checking in until boarding time, when security staff at the gates will themselves pack the devices into boxes and load them onto the flight.

"Our new complimentary service enables passengers,

particularly those flying for business, to have the flexibility to use their devices until the last possible moment," said Tim Clark, president of Emirates.

The devices will be returned to their owners upon arrival in the United States free of charge.

The service from Emirates, which prides itself as an airline of choice for business travellers, is also available for passengers transiting through Dubai International Airport.

The US ban on laptops and tablets applies to flights from 10 airports in the region,

including direct flights to the United States from Dubai International Airport and Ataturk Airport in Istanbul.

US airlines do not operate direct flights out of the airports included in the ban.

A similar British ban covers all airports in Turkey, Jordan

and four other countries, but not the United Arab Emirates.

Both countries have cited credible threats to civil aviation from Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group as the reason for the ban, which has come under criticism for targeting majority-Muslim countries.