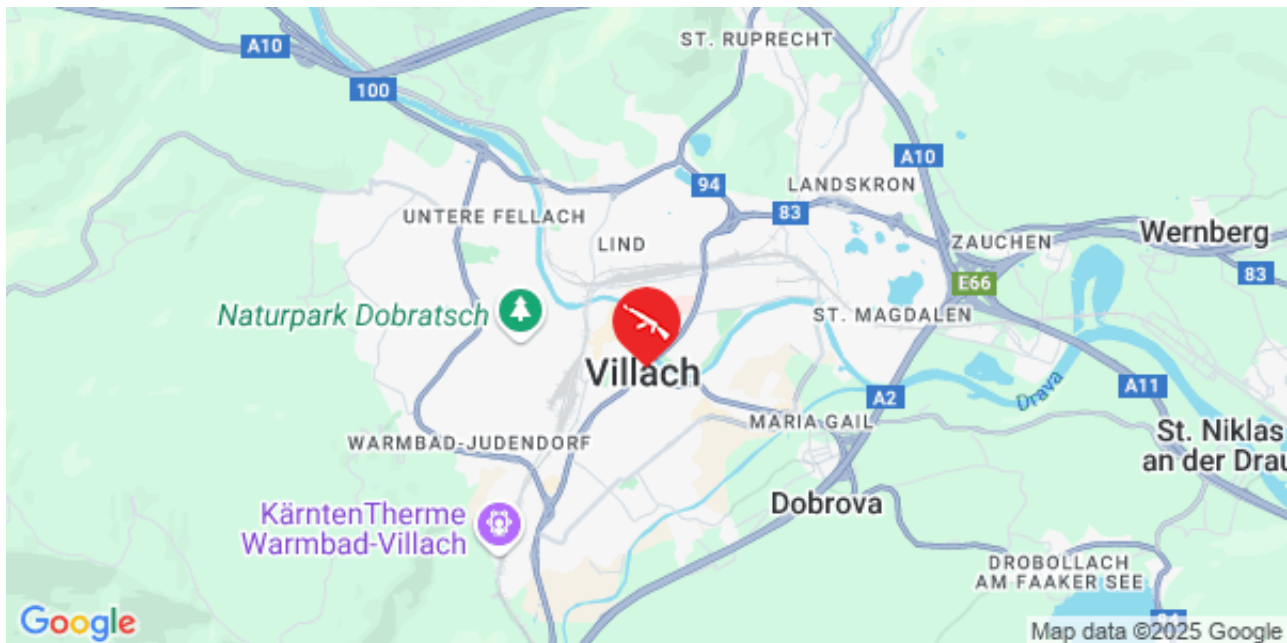


Militancy/Terrorism

**16**

FEB

15:17 UTC

Austria Alert: One killed, five injured in Islamist stabbing attack in Villach, Carinthia on February 15; to further heighten anti-migrant sentiment

Current Situation

- On February 15, a 23-year-old Syrian asylum-seeker stabbed six passersby with a 10-centimetre knife blade in Villach, Carinthia around 16:00 (local time). A 14-year-old was killed in the attack, while two 15-year-olds and three adults were injured.
- Interior Minister Gerhard Karner stated the assailant is thought to have acted with an “Islamist motive” linked to the Islamic State (IS). Images of the suspect, grinning while being restrained by police with his index finger raised, have already circulated on social media. The raised index finger, a gesture closely associated with the Tawhid salute, is associated with IS.
- He is reported to have shouted “Allahu Akbar” during the attack. Authorities say he was radicalized online over a short period of time.
- Police found IS flags on the wall of the suspect’s apartment, but no other weapons were discovered.
- Herbert Kickl, leader of the far-right Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) political party, condemned the attack and the politicians who “have allowed stabbings, rapes, gang wars, and other serious crimes to become the norm in Austria.”

Source: [Kurier](#)

Assessments & Forecast

1. This incident underscores the ongoing Islamist threat in Austria, following several recorded plots, including the arrest of three individuals in August 2024 for planning an Islamist attack at a music concert in Vienna and the detention of a 14-year-old girl in May 2024 for plotting an attack in Graz.
2. With reports indicating the assailant was radicalized online over a short period of time, the development is in line with regionwide concerns over radicalization efforts by transnational Islamist groups. This is especially true for IS and its offshoot Islamic State – Khorasan Province (ISKP), with both groups increasing propaganda aimed at inciting lone actor attacks in Europe. Most recently, in January, ISKP published posters calling for attacks on events in Europe on various platforms.
3. The attacker's profile is in line with several recent attacks regionwide carried out by Muslim-background males in their mid-20s, often with asylum or immigration backgrounds. This includes the perpetrator of the February 13 Islamist vehicle ramming by an Afghan migrant that left 36 injured in Munich, Germany, and the February 3 suspected Islamist stabbing of police by a Sudanese migrant in Paris, France. This is due to such individuals being more susceptible to Islamist propaganda, which often centers on grievances among local Muslim communities in Europe.
4. **FORECAST:** In the near-to-medium term, the Islamist threat will remain elevated in Austria and regionwide. In fact, given that Ramadan is scheduled to begin on February 28, the threat of Islamist attacks is likely to increase in the coming weeks. This is due to groups like IS and Al Qaeda calling for attacks during Ramadan, as well as using the period as a rallying point for radicalization. Any future attack is most likely to be carried out by lone actors in the form of stabbings or vehicular ramming, as these methods are easy to carry out and harder for authorities to detect. However, attacks involving multiple individuals cannot be ruled out – although these are more likely to be thwarted.
5. Separately, amid heightened anti-immigrant sentiments in Austria, far-right groups are expected to capitalize on the attack, intensifying their anti-migrant rhetoric and framing the incident as symptomatic of broader immigration-related issues. This is already evidenced by Kickl's statement. Moreover, considering the recent failed coalition talks between FPO and the center-right Osterreichische Volkspartei (OVP), FPO is liable to use the attack in rallying support ahead of new elections, which are likely should government formations fail. With that, anti-immigration protests, including by far-right groups especially FPO members, are likely to manifest in the near term.
6. **FORECAST:** Moving forward, potential attacks targeting asylum seekers and immigrants by far-right extremists are likely, as seen in the aftermath of the vehicle ramming attack in Magdeburg, Saxony-Anhalt in December 2024 in Germany. This is especially so amid an overall uptick in anti-refugee and anti-immigrant sentiments among far-right groups across Austria, following the involvement of asylum seekers and immigrants in several extremist attacks over the past few months.

Recommendations

1. Travel to Austria may continue while maintaining heightened vigilance for potential Islamist terrorist threats nationwide.
2. Travelers are advised to remain cognizant of their surroundings, including any suspicious behavior of individuals, which may include a person wearing winter clothing during warm weather and/or seemingly wandering around, as well as items that look out of place, such as bags or containers.
3. Alert authorities immediately upon witnessing suspicious items or behavior.
4. If a potential stabbing, shooting, explosion, or vehicle ramming manifests, leave the area immediately if possible, or take shelter at a secure location.
5. Move away from large groups to mitigate the risks of a stampede and of presenting a bigger target

for a possible secondary attack.

6. Remain cognizant of authorities' updates regarding evolving security protocols at public events.
7. Maintain heightened vigilance in the vicinity of any far-right, anti-immigration, or far-left protests in cities in Austria due to the heightened risk of unrest.
8. For further questions, please contact intel@max-security.com