Economist Walter Enders recently used time-series analysis to study global terrorism. He wanted to know how 9/11 fit into the series of international terrorism. He said the findings are, perhaps, surprising, because they indicated that the attacks in the United States and the resulting War on Terror actually did not change international political terrorism all that much.

The direct effects of September 11 were obvious, said Enders: thousands of deaths, an increase in spending on homeland security, and proof that it is possible to achieve massive devastation without weapons of mass destruction. Despite its significant economic and psychological effect, however, that day was one part of ongoing terrorism and it did not fundamentally change the course of terrorist attacks. While it was highly-publicized, sophisticated and deadly, the course of overall terrorism was not changed dramatically.

Enders devised a method to study all terrorist attacks in relation to one another. He said transnational terrorism happens almost every day in some part of the world, although there is typically one “spectacular” incident each year. He and his colleagues input a long series of events, coding for variables such as time and location, number of deaths, and the type of event. They were typically unable to include information about who was responsible for attacks because frequently no one takes responsibility.

Although in time-series analysis, 9/11 indicates only an anomalous spike in deaths and sophistication in a longer series of similar and smaller events, when it is prejudged as a break date, Enders found that complicated attacks like hijackings or kidnappings have actually fallen as a proportion of attacks and that logistically simple, but deadly, incidences of bombings have increased.

Enders said that most terrorist attacks involved “old technology.” Around 50% involve bombs, and the other are more complicated attacks that use older techniques like hijacking airplanes, kidnappings, taking hostages, letter bombs, etc. Changes in terrorist technique often result from improvements in technology. He explained that after the implementation of airport metal detectors, terrorists were less likely to hijack planes and more likely to kidnap people. In this case, better technology caused a shift from one logistically complicated technique to another, which is not the case after 9/11. Despite the complexity of that attack, most terrorism since has been logistically simple.