Criminal Justice & Military Deaths at the Hands of Extremists

As there have been a number of high profile incidents where extremists have targeted criminal justice personnel generally, and law enforcement officers specifically, it is important to provide some context with data on attacks over time. START researchers examined the United States Extremist Crime Database (ECDB) to provide analysis on attacks on agents of the criminal justice system and military personnel in the United States between 1990 and 2015. The ECDB identifies 66 criminal justice/military homicides perpetrated by an offender associated with either al-Qaida and its associated movement (AQAM) or far-right extremism (FRE) in this time period. This background report presents information on these incidents, the offenders and victims of these attacks.

INCLUSION CRITERIA

For inclusion, homicides must involve at least one fatality of a sworn officer who was working for a public criminal justice agency, a private criminal justice agency, or as a member of the U.S. military. Also, victims must have been killed while on duty or targeted specifically for their status as an official of the criminal justice system or the military. Only incidents that occurred within one of the 50 states or the District of Columbia between 1990 and 2015 are included. Though it was not required that a homicide be ideologically motivated, at least one of the offenders connected to the incident must have been connected to either al-Qaida and its associated movement (AQAM), broadly defined, or far-right extremism (FRE).

INCIDENT-LEVEL ANALYSIS

In more than 80 percent of these 66 incidents, agents of the public criminal justice system were the primary targets. These victims were primarily local law enforcement, but also included federal agents, corrections officials, and in one case a judge. Private criminal justice personnel were the primary targets of 10.6 percent of incidents and mostly included security guards. In several of these cases, off-duty law enforcement officers working security were targeted. Finally, in 6.1 percent of the incidents military personnel were the primary victims.

IDEOLOGICAL INFLUENCE

Of the 66 criminal justice/military homicides perpetrated by AQAM and FRE offenders, 54 (81.8%) were committed by FRE offenders and 12 (18.2%) were committed by AQAM offenders.

Nearly two-thirds of homicides were ideologically motivated (62.1%), meaning that there was evidence that offenders' ideologies, at least in part, motivated them to commit the murders. An example of this would be an anti-government extremist who hunts down a police officer because his ideological beliefs demand that he fight back against the government, particularly law enforcement.

Table 1. Incident Level Characteristics of Criminal Justice & Military Homicide Victims (N=66)

		%	N
Ideology	AQAM	18.2%	12
	FRE	81.8%	54
Victim Type	CJS Public	83.3%	55
	CJS Private	10.6%	7
	Military	6.1%	4
Motivation	Ideological	62.1%	41
	Non-Ideological / Unclear	37.9%	25
Region	Midwest	10.6%	7
	Northeast	12.1%	8
	South	42.4%	28
	West	34.8%	23
Urbanicity	Urban	68.2%	45
	Suburban	31.8%	21
	Rural	0.0%	0
Season	Spring	30.3%	20
	Summer	31.8%	21
	Fall	25.8%	17
	Winter	12.1%	8
Years	1990-1995	10.6%	7
	1996-2000	21.2%	14
	2001-2005	22.7%	15
	2006-2010	22.7%	15
	2011-2015	22.7%	15
Weapon	Firearm	84.8%	56
	Other	15.2%	10
Offenders	Single	62.1%	41
	Multiple	37.9%	25
Traffic Stop	Yes	16.7%	11
	No	83.3%	55
Siege Situation	Yes	18.2%	12
	No	81.8%	54

More than one-third of homicide events (37.9%) were not motivated by an offenders' ideology or there were unclear motivational circumstances for the incident. Such cases might entail a scenario where an anti-government extremist is pulled over by a law enforcement officer for not having the appropriate registration or tags for their vehicle and the traffic stop escalates into the killing of the officer. In these types of situations, there is no clear ideological motivation and the offender did not directly initiate the interaction, thus it remains unclear as to whether the offender's beliefs played a role in the escalation of the event from a simple traffic stop to murder.

REGIONAL AND TEMPORAL VARIATIONS

When considering all 66 criminal justice/military homicide events, the South had the highest percentage (42.4%), followed by the West (34.8%), Northeast (12.1%), and Midwest (10.6%). The majority of incidents occurred within urban counties (68.2%), followed by suburban counties (31.8%). No extremist incidents against criminal justice and military victims occurred in rural counties.

For temporal variation, each five-year time period between 1996 and 2015 incurred approximately 22 percent of the homicide events, while the six-year period between 1990 and 1995 only had slightly more than 10 percent of the events. In respect to seasonal variation, the plurality of events occurred in the summer (31.8%), followed by the spring (30.3%), fall (25.8%), and winter (12.1%).

WEAPONS, PARTICIPANTS AND SURROUNDING EVENTS

The vast majority of these homicides -- nearly 85 percent -- included a firearm. The remaining incidents included explosives or improvised explosive devices and knives or other sharp weapons.

Nearly 85 percent of homicides of criminal justice and military personnel included a firearm

In 62.1 percent of the homicide incidents there were multiple offenders who either participated directly in the act of violence or assisted in preparation for it and were later charged in connection to the homicide(s). Almost 40 percent of incidents had an offender who acted alone, with no help in planning or implementing the fatal act of violence.

Just more than 16 percent of the incidents were situations where victims were killed by extremists during a traffic stop situation and about 18 percent of the events included a siege situation.

COMPARISONS ACROSS IDEOLOGIES

All incidents where military personnel were the primary victim type were committed by AQAM offenders. Although four military personnel were killed while on duty during the Oklahoma City bombing by an FRE offender, public criminal justice personnel suffered the most casualties, making that the primary victim type for the attack.

All 12 AQAM events against criminal justice and military personnel were ideologically motivated. The 54 FRE incidents, on the other hand, were ideologically motivated approximately 54 percent of the time and non-ideological, or with unclear motives, approximately 46 percent of the time.

AQAM events occurred exclusively in urban environments and none occurred in the Midwest. FRE incidents occurred more than half (61.1%) of the time in urban areas and almost 80 percent of the 54 incidents were located in the South and West census regions.

All homicides perpetrated by AQAM offenders against criminal justice and military personnel were ideologically motivated. Just more than half of FRE incidents were.

More than 90 percent of FRE incidents included firearms, compared to 58.2 percent of AQAM events.

No siege situation was part of an AQAM event where criminal justice or military personnel were murdered, while more than 20 percent of FRE events involved a siege situation.

Table 2. Incident Level Characteristics Across Ideology (N=66)

		AQAM (N = 12)		FRE (N = 54)	
		%	N	%	N
Primary Victim Type	CJS Public	66.7%	8	87.0%	47
	CJS Private	0.0%	0	13.0%	7
	Military	33.3%	4	0.0%	0
Motivation	Ideological	100.0%	12	53.7%	29
	Mixed / Non-Ideological	0.0%	0	46.3%	25
Region	Midwest	0.0%	0	13.0%	7
	Northeast	33.3%	4	7.4%	4
	South	50.0%	6	40.7%	22
	West	16.7%	2	38.9%	21
Urbanicity	Urban	100.0%	12	61.1%	33
	Suburban	0.0%	0	38.9%	21
	Rural	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
Season	Spring	33.3%	4	29.6%	16
	Summer	25.0%	3	33.3%	18
	Fall	33.3%	4	24.1%	13
	Winter	8.3%	1	13.0%	7
Years	1990-1995	8.3%	1	11.1%	6
	1996-2000	16.7%	2	22.2%	12
	2001-2005	33.3%	4	20.4%	11
	2006-2010	16.7%	2	24.1%	13
	2011-2015	25.0%	3	22.2%	12
Weapon	Firearm	58.3%	7	90.7%	49
	Other	41.7%	5	9.3%	5
Offenders	Single	66.7%	8	61.1%	33
	Multiple	33.3%	4	38.9%	21
Traffic Stop	Yes	16.7%	2	16.7%	9
	No	83.3%	10	83.3%	45
Siege Situation	Yes	0.0%	0	22.2%	12
	No	100.0%	12	77.8%	42

OFFENDER-LEVEL ANALYSIS

The ECDB identifies 113 unique offenders responsible for the murder of law enforcement officers from 1990-2015.

The majority of offenders (67.3%) who murdered law enforcement officers during this time frame were affiliated with an extreme far-right ideology, 21.2 percent of the offenders were AQAM supporters, and 11.5 percent of the offenders were not affiliated with an ideology (in these circumstances, offenders who were not directly tied to an extremist ideology co-offended with ideological extremists). The percentage of FRE offenders increased when the September 11 attackers were aggregated into one offender for each of the four attacks.

The majority of the offenders who killed law enforcement officers are male. Of the 113 offenders identified, 102 (90.3%) are male and 11 (9.7%) are female. Most of the offenders were White (77%), while nearly 17 percent are Arab, 3.5 percent are Black, 1.8 percent are Native American, and 0.9 percent are Hispanic. The Arab category decreases and the other categories increase when the September 11 offenders are aggregated into one offender.

Most of the offenders were between 20 and 40 years old. Only 4.4 percent of the offenders were under 20 years old, 45 percent were between 20 and 29 years old, 25.7 percent were between 30 and 39, 12.2 percent were between 40 and 49, 7.1 percent were between 50 and 59, and 4.4 percent were over 60 years old.

In terms of their geographic proximity to where they offended, nearly 57 percent of the offenders lived in a county that was different from where the incident occurred, and 43 percent committed the murder in the same county as where they lived.

For almost 20 percent of offenders, there is evidence that they knew their actions would result in their deaths and were on a suicide mission. This number, however, drops dramatically when the September 11 offenders are aggregated into one offender for each of the four attacks.

Table 3. Offender Level Characteristics (N=113; 99)

		All		9/11 Offenders Aggregated	
		%	N	%	N
Sex	Male	90.3%	102	88.9%	88
	Female	9.7%	11	11.1%	11
Race/Ethnicity	Arab	16.8%	19	5.1%	5
	Black Non-Hispanic	3.5%	4	4.0%	4
	Hispanic	0.9%	1	1.0%	1
	Native American	1.8%	2	2.0%	2
	White Non-Hispanic	77.0%	87	87.9%	87
Age	<20	4.4%	5	5.1%	5
	20-29	45.1%	51	38.4%	38
	30-39	25.7%	29	28.3%	28
	40-49	13.3%	15	15.2%	15
	50-59	7.1%	8	8.1%	8
	60+	4.4%	5	5.1%	5
Ideology	AQAM	21.2%	24	10.1%	10
	FRE	67.3%	76	76.8%	76
	None	11.5%	13	13.1%	13
County of Residence	Same as Incident	43.4%	49	49.5%	49
	Different from Incident	56.6%	64	50.5%	50
Suicide Mission	Yes	19.5%	22	8.1%	8
	No	80.5%	91	91.9%	91

VICTIM-LEVEL ANALYSIS

For an analysis of victims, it is important to consider the impact of the Oklahoma City bombing and the September 11 attacks. Presented in Table 4, the number of criminal justice or military victims killed by AQAM or FRE offenders between 1990 and 2015 is 89, not counting those killed in the Oklahoma City bombing or during the September 11 attacks (addressed in Table 5). These victims were predominantly male (95.5%) and White Non-Hispanic (78.7%), with Black Non-Hispanic (11.2%) being the second highest race/ethnicity category.

More than 55 percent were under the age of 40, with only a small percentage being younger than 20 (1.1%) or 60 or older (6.7%). Across victim type, the majority of victims killed were part of the public criminal justice system (71.9%), followed by military (20.2%), and finally the private criminal justice system (7.9%). In 55 percent of cases the victim was, in fact, the only criminal justice or military victim.

Table 5 presents the number of homicide victims disaggregated across the Oklahoma City bombing, the September 11 attacks, and all other homicide events perpetrated by ideological extremists who killed criminal justice or military personnel. For the Oklahoma City bombing, 13 victims were employed by public agencies and working in an investigatory criminal justice capacity, while four worked for the military. All 17 victims worked in offices located at the Alfred P. Murrah building. For the September 11 victims, there were a total of 142 criminal justice or military victims identified who were killed while on duty. Eighty-seven of these individuals were killed in the World Trade Center towers, 72 of which came from the public criminal justice system and 15 from private. The 55 military personnel were active duty armed forces members killed at the Pentagon.

Table 4. Victim Level Characteristics without Oklahoma City & September 11 Deaths (N=89)

		%	N
Sex	Male	95.5%	85
	Female	4.5%	4
Race/Ethnicity	Asian	1.1%	1
	Black Non-Hispanic	11.2%	10
	Hispanic	5.6%	5
	Native American	1.1%	1
	White Non-Hispanic	78.7%	70
	Unknown	2.2%	2
Age	<20	1.1%	1
	20-29	23.6%	21
	30-39	31.5%	28
	40-49	22.5%	20
	50-59	14.6%	13
	60+	6.7%	6
Victim Type	CJS Public	71.9%	64
	CJS Private	7.9%	7
	Military	20.2%	18
Only CJS or Military Homicide Victim	Yes	55.1%	49
	No	44.9%	40

Table 5. Comparing Oklahoma City Bombing and September 11, 2001 Criminal Justice & Military Victims to Incident Level Characteristics for All Other Victims

		OKC	9/11	OTHER	TOTAL
Ideology	AQAM	0	142	25	167
	FRE	17	0	64	81
Victim Type	CJS Public	13	72	64	149
	CJS Private	0	15	7	22
	Military	4	55	18	77
Motivation	Ideological	17	142	61	220
	Mixed / Non-Ideological	0	0	28	28
Region	Midwest	17	0	7	24
	Northeast	0	87	9	96
	South	0	55	47	102
	West	0	0	26	26
Urbanicity	Urban	17	142	63	222
	Suburban	0	0	26	26
	Rural	0	0	0	0
Season	Spring	17	0	23	40
	Summer	0	0	30	30
	Fall	0	142	25	167
	Winter	0	0	11	11
Years	1990-1995	17	0	7	24
	1996-2000	0	0	15	15
	2001-2005	0	142	14	156
	2006-2010	0	0	32	32

	2011-2015	0	0	21	21
Weapon	Firearm	0	0	82	82
	Other	17	142	7	166
Offenders	Single	0	0	62	62
	Multiple	17	142	27	186
Traffic Stop	Yes	0	0	12	12
	No	17	142	77	236
Siege Situation	Yes	0	0	14	14
	No	17	142	75	234

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Although they are uncommon when compared to the attacks against public criminal justice targets, **the attacks against military targets were more deadly.** When the Oklahoma City and September 11 attacks are removed from the analysis, on average, there were 1.3 public criminal justice personnel victims per incidents of this type, 1 for private criminal justice system personnel, and 6 military personnel victims. When these two mass casualty events are included in the analysis, there were 2.7 public criminal justice victims per incidents of this type, 3.1 private criminal justice victims, and 19.3 per incident for military incidents.

It is also important to note that when the primary target of an attack, **military personnel have exclusively been victimized by AQAM offenders.** Public criminal justice personnel on the other hand, a group primarily comprised of **local law enforcement officers, have been disproportionately targeted by FRE.**

The profile of law enforcement and military personnel make a homogenous set of victims, predominately white males between 20 and 50. This is driven by the demographics of local law enforcement agencies in the communities where these types of homicides are most likely to occur.

Both FRE and AQAM homicides are primarily urban events. These victimizations are most likely to occur in non-rural areas in the South and West census regions. It is interesting that **no FRE or AQAM homicide occurred in a county designated a rural area** as prior research on FRE offenders has argued far-right terrorists are more active in rural areas.

It is also worth noting that the temporal distribution of homicide events was relatively stable for both ideologies from 1996 to the present, increasing from a low in 1990-1995. Although this could be a true difference, it could also be a mechanism of open-source data (publicly available information), which the ECDB relies on to identify these homicide incidents. Specifically, the further back in time the data extends, the more difficult it is to ascertain the validity and reliability of the data because of the decrease in the number of news and other sources that are digitized in that time period.

For the most part, these homicides, especially the FRE ones, are not high profile terrorist cases. But the majority are incidents with only one offender and one victim that are either ideologically motivated or the extremist appears to have escalated a routine criminal justice interaction into a murder. This percentage of White Non-Hispanic victims is much higher than the race/ethnicity distribution of all ideological homicide victims of FRE and AQAM offenders (excluding September 11 attacks and Oklahoma City bombing victims). According to ECDB data, victims of fatal attacks by these extremist movements are of a minority race or ethnicity more than 50 percent of the time.

It is also important to note that **firearms were the most common weapon for both FRE and AQAM homicides (85%).** While AQAM terrorism is often associated with explosives, we found that 58 percent of the AQAM homicides were committed with guns. In addition, the percent of incidents with firearms would increase if September 11 attack was aggregated into one incident or removed, as it counts as four separate non-firearm incidents in the ECDB (1 World Trade Center, 2 World Trade Center, and the Pentagon). The distribution in the types of weapons used highlights the capabilities of extremists in the United States and their access to weapons.

Finally, it is also worth noting that when including all September 11 offenders, almost 20 percent of all offenders who targeted criminal justice and military personnel had an expectation that they would either die in the attack or knew that the success of the attack hinged on their own death. Even when aggregating the September 11 offenders into one observation, 8.9 percent of offenders were engaged in a suicide mission at the time that they committed their murders. Restated, **20 out of every 100 extremist offenders were willing to end their own lives to kill criminal justice or military personnel.**

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The data presented here are drawn from the Extremist Crime Database, which is funded in part by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism. The ECDB is led by researchers at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Michigan State University, Seattle University and Indiana University – Purdue University, Indianapolis. The ECDB is a relational database that includes information on all publicly known violent and financial crimes committed in the United States by extremists associated with al-Qaida and its associated movement (AQAM) - which for the purpose of this dataset also include crimes committed by extremists associated with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the violent Far Right (FR), and the Animal and Earth Liberation Fronts (ELF and ALF). The ECDB includes information on the incidents themselves, as well as their perpetrators, related organizations, and victims. It currently covers the period between 1990 and 2015. Those interested in learning more about the creation of the ECDB and its reliability could see:

Chermak, S.M., J.D. Freilich, W. Parkin & J.P. Lynch. 2012. American terrorism and extremist crime data sources and selectivity bias: An investigation focusing on homicide events committed by far-right extremists. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 28(1): 191-218.

Freilich, J.D., S.M. Chermak, R. Belli, J. Gruenewald & W.S. Parkin. 2014. Introducing the United States Extremist Crime Database (ECDB). *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26(2): 372-384.

For the purpose of this report, the authors adopt the definition of FRE and AQAM found on page 380 of Freilich, Chermak, Belli, Gruenewald, and Parkin's 2014 publication, "Introducing the Extremist Crime Database (ECDB)." In it, FRE offenders are defined as individuals who "subscribe to aspects of the following beliefs: They are fiercely nationalistic, anti-global, suspicious of federal authority, and reverent of individual liberties, especially their right to own guns and be free of taxes. They believe in conspiracy theories involving imminent threats to national sovereignty or personal liberty and beliefs that their personal or national 'way of life' is under attack. Sometimes such beliefs are vague, but for some the threat originates from specific racial or religious groups. They believe that they must be prepared to defend against this attack by participating in paramilitary training or survivalism" and AQAM offenders "adhere to aspects of the following beliefs: They believe that only acceptance of Islam promotes human dignity. Islamic extremists reject the traditional Muslim respect for ''People of the Book'' (i.e., Christians and Jews). They believe that ''Jihad'' (i.e., to struggle in God's path like the Prophet Muhammad) is a defining belief in Islam and includes the ''lesser Jihad'' that endorses violence against ''corrupt'' others. Islamic extremists believe that their faith is oppressed in nominally Muslim Middle-Eastern=Asian corrupt governments and in nations (e.g., Russia=Chechnya) that occupy Islamic populations. The U.S. is seen as supporting the humiliation of Islam, and exploiting the region's resources. They believe that America's hedonistic culture (e.g., gay rights, feminism, etc.) negatively affects Muslim values. Islamic extremists believe that the American people are responsible for their government's actions and that there is a religious obligation to combat this assault. They believe that Islamic law—Sharia—provides the blueprint for a modern Muslim society and should be forcibly implemented."

Report Authors:

William S. Parkin, Ph.D.
National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism & Responses to Terrorism (START) &
Department of Criminal Justice
Seattle University

Joshua D. Freilich, J.D; Ph.D.
National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism & Responses to Terrorism (START) &
Doctoral Program in Criminal Justice
The Graduate Center & John Jay College, CUNY

Steven M. Chermak, Ph.D.
National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism & Responses to Terrorism (START) &
School of Criminal Justice
Michigan State University

Jeff Gruenewald, Ph.D.
National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism & Responses to Terrorism (START) &
School of Public and Environmental Affairs
Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis

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