

## VIOLENCE PERPETRATED BY SUPPORTERS OF AL-QA'IDA AND AFFILIATED MOVEMENTS (AQAM): FATAL ATTACKS AND VIOLENT PLOTS IN THE UNITED STATES

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### BACKGROUND

This research highlight provides an overview of violent incidents and plots committed or attempted by supporters of al-Qa'ida and affiliated movements (AQAM) who targeted the United States between 1990 and 2013. Data are drawn from the United States Extremist Crime Database (ECDB), which includes information on the **35 homicide events\*** and **196 violent plots** perpetrated by AQAM-related supporters during this time period.

\*The "Beltway Snipers" were responsible for 15 homicide events, and throughout this highlight, findings that do not include these 15 attacks will be indicated in parentheses.

### KEY DEFINITIONS

- ◇ **Violent plot** - a violent incident that is set into motion and stopped before it reaches completion. An offender or group of offenders who plans to attack several different targets would be responsible for several unique plots.
- ◇ **Homicide event** - an attack by one or more offenders that results in the death of at least one victim. Each event involves a spatially unique target; for example, the 9/11 attacks consisted of four homicide events.

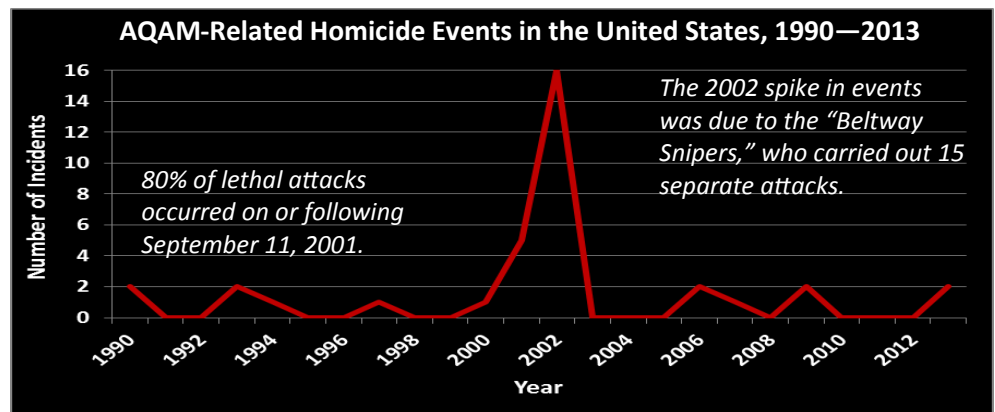
### PURPOSE

**COLLECT** data on AQAM-related attacks and plots against the United States

**DEVELOP** a comprehensive understanding of the patterns of violence of AQAM-related perpetrators

**INFORM** the U.S. homeland security community in its efforts to thwart future AQAM-related attacks

### AQAM-RELATED HOMICIDE EVENTS



#### PERPETRATORS

- 34% (60%) of fatal incidents were committed by lone actors who were often fueled by ideology, personal grievances and mental illness.
- 44 (42) unique offenders were responsible for all AQAM-related homicide events.
- 71% (50%) of homicide events targeted the general public, 14% (25%) law enforcement, 9% (15%) the military, and 6% (10%) social minorities.
- Mass casualty events were rare—69% (45%) of fatal AQAM-related attacks targeted and killed one victim.



#### TARGETS



#### WEAPONS

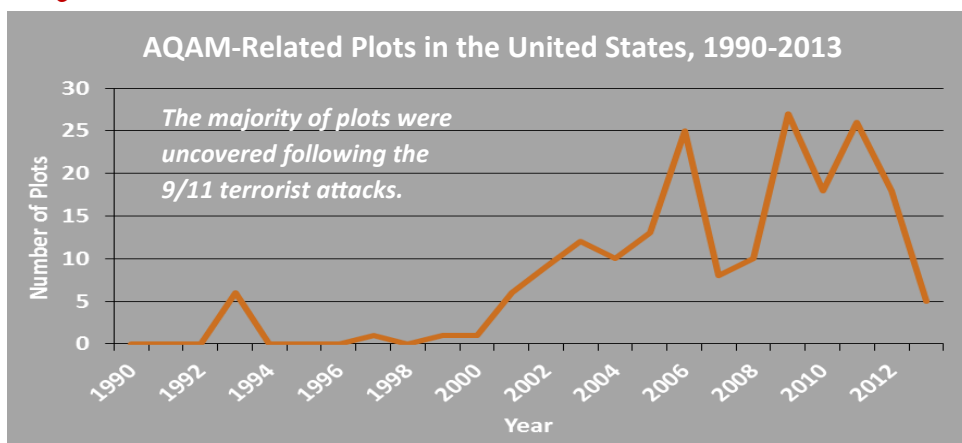
- 75% (45%) of homicide events were perpetrated with firearms.
- The 1993 World Trade Center bombing and the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings were the only fatal attacks committed using explosives.



#### REGIONS

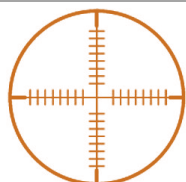
- AQAM-related homicides were scattered from coast to coast.
- Due in large part to 9 attacks conducted by the "Beltway Snipers," the D.C. metro area experienced 11 homicide events. New York, 5, and California, 4, also experienced relatively high numbers of events.

## AQAM-RELATED VIOLENT PLOTS:



### PERPETRATORS

- 53% of the identified plots were planned by lone actors, while the remainder were planned by multiple offenders.



### TARGETS

- The most common intended target types were:
  - Military-related (18%)
  - Political and government figures or structures (15%)
  - Business-related (13%)
  - Transportation-related (12%)



### WEAPONS

- The most common types of intended weapons were bombs/explosives. This suggests that most violent plots were intended to be mass casualty events.
- Firearms were the second most common intended weapon type.



### REGIONS

- AQAM supporters often planned to strike targets in the Northeast (65 plots) and South (62 plots) of the United States, with fewer plots targeting the Midwest (32) and West (20).
- The most commonly targeted cities were New York City and Washington, D.C.

## FUTURE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

AQAM-related lone actors remain a significant threat to homeland security. As a consequence, more comparative research needs to be done on:

- Potential precipitating factors associated with attacks by lone actors, small cells, and group-based actors, including the role of mental illness in the process of radicalization to violence
- The different ways that violent plots by AQAM-related lone actors, small cells, and group-based actors have been prevented

## TERRORISM & EXTREMIST VIOLENCE IN THE U.S. DATABASE

This research is part of a larger effort to develop a comprehensive database on Terrorism and Extremist Violence in the U.S. (TEVUS) that integrates data from the Global Terrorism Database, the American Terrorism Study, Profiles of Perpetrators of Terrorism in the U.S., and the U.S. Extremist Crime Database. Led by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), the research team is creating a resource that will allow operational and academic end-users to conduct unprecedented analyses that incorporate incident, perpetrator, and geospatial information.



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