



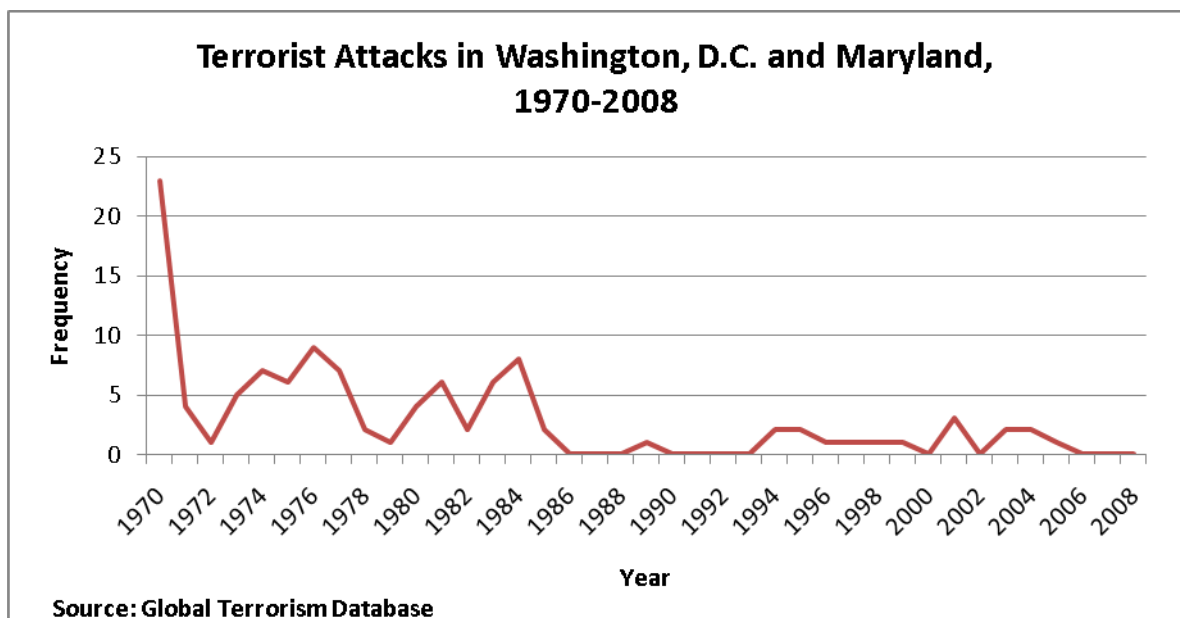
Background Report: Discovery Communications Building Hostage-Taking September 1, 2010

Following the September 1, 2010, hostage situation at the Discovery Communications building in Silver Spring, Maryland, START has compiled background information on terrorist activity in the District of Columbia and Maryland, media targets, and hostage situations in the United States.

The gunman in this event, James Lee, was known to be a vocal advocate of extreme views related to protecting the environment, including extreme perspectives on population control, and his actions on September 1, 2010, appear to be an extension of his ongoing efforts to support this agenda. Given the nature of Lee's political and social goals and his use of illegal force, this incident would qualify as a terrorist incident, according to the definition of START's Global Terrorism Database (GTD).

- **WHAT ARE THE TRENDS OF TERRORISM OVER TIME IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA AND MARYLAND?**

There have been over 100 terrorist attacks in the District of Columbia and Maryland since 1970. Almost 60% of all attacks in this region occurred during the 1970s. Recent incidents in Maryland include arson attacks by suspected environmentalists on homes in 2004 and 2005. In Washington, D.C., recent attacks include anthrax-laced letters sent to the offices of Senator Patrick Leahy, Senator Tom Daschle, and the United States Supreme Court in 2001 and letters containing ricin addressed to the White House in 2003 and Senator Bill Frist in 2004. The most deadly terrorist attack in the D.C.-area occurred on September 11, 2001, when an American Airlines jet flew into the Pentagon, located in Arlington, Virginia—about 2 miles from Washington, D.C.

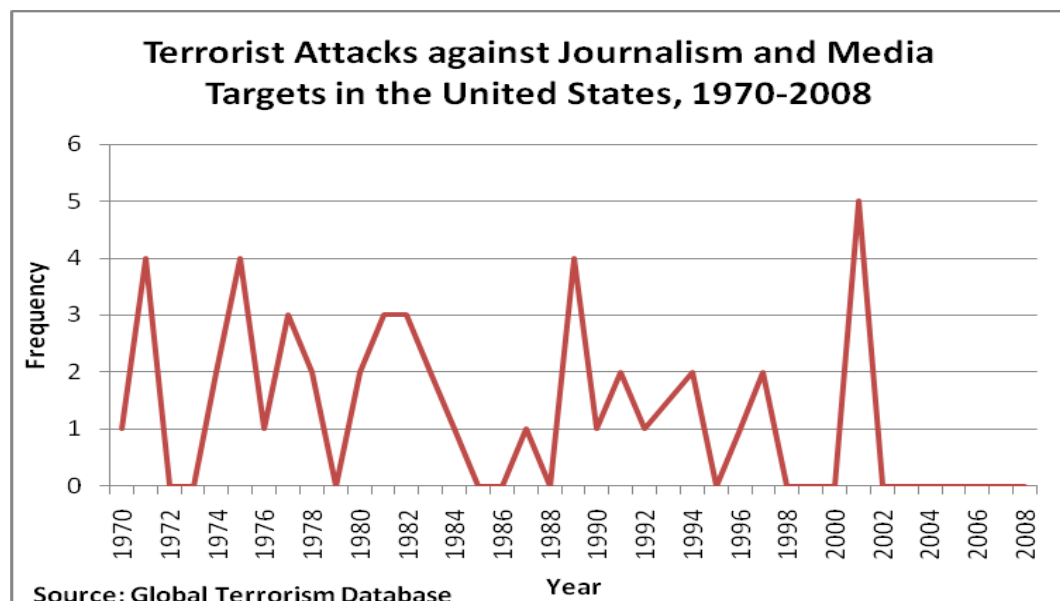


Also in 2003, a farmer protesting the United States government's tobacco policies drove a tractor through Constitution Gardens in Washington, D.C., and claimed to have an "organophosphate bomb." After a two-day standoff with law enforcement the man, who did not have a bomb, surrendered to authorities. Most recently, in 2009 a white supremacist opened fire at the National Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., killing one security guard and injuring several civilians.

- **TERRORISM AGAINST MEDIA TARGETS**

Journalists and media targets make up only 2% of all attacks in the United States. This is consistent with rates of terrorist attacks on media globally (2% of the 87,710 terrorist incidents worldwide since 1970 have targeted media). In the United States, these attacks typically target offices and employees of broadcasting companies, radio stations, newspapers, and magazines. The most common types of attacks against U.S. journalism and media targets are Bombings/Explosions (43%), Assassinations (23%), and Facility/Infrastructure Attacks (19%).

Prior to the events at the Discovery building, the most recent terrorist attacks on media targets in the United States were the 2001 anthrax attacks, which included targets such as *The New York Post*, CBS, ABC, and NBC, in New York, and American Media Inc. in Boca Raton, Florida.

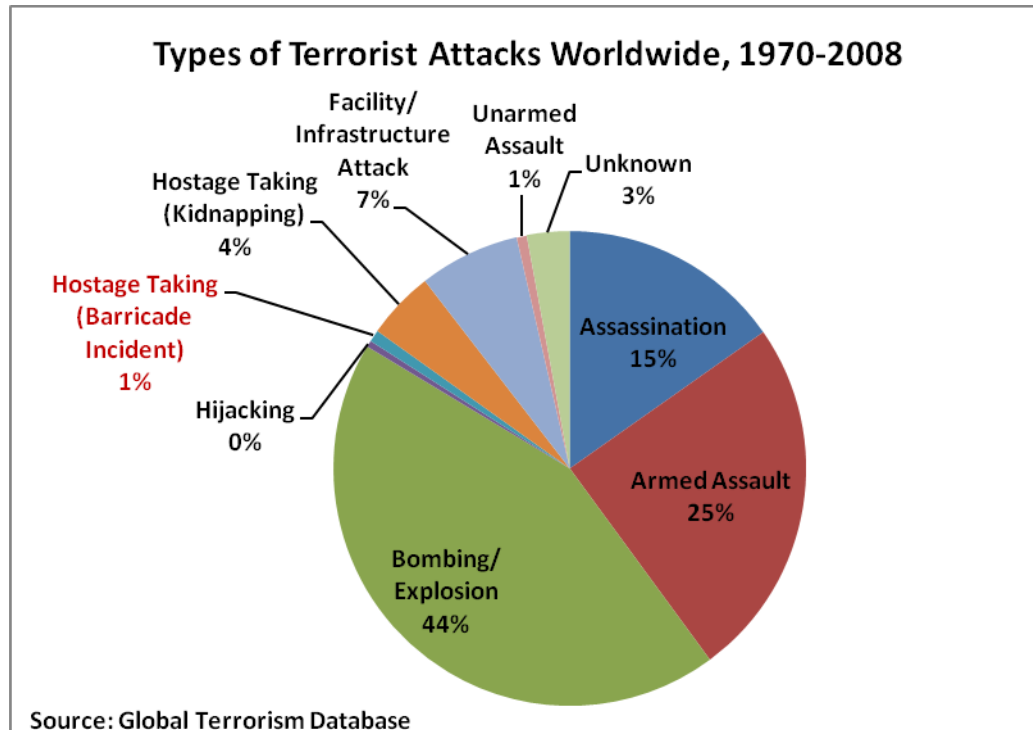


- **ECO-TERRORISM IN THE UNITED STATES**

Environmentally motivated perpetrators, like the gunman in this event, have been active in the United States since the 1970s. The Animal Liberation Front (ALF) and the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) have carried out over 60 attacks in the United States. In the 1990s, these two groups were responsible for approximately 3% of all terrorist attacks in the United States. Since 2000, over 37% of all attacks in the United States were perpetrated by environmentally motivated groups. These events are typically facility/infrastructure attacks. Over 80% are arson attacks involving the use of incendiary weapons. In less than 10% of eco-terrorism cases, bombs or explosives were used. There are no recorded cases of firearms or hostage-taking tactics being used in attacks by these groups in the United States. Environmentally motivated attacks almost always have no casualties but have caused tens of millions of dollars in property damage.

- **HOW COMMON ARE TERRORIST HOSTAGE-TAKING EVENTS?**

Although terrorist hostage-takings like the one in Silver Spring are extremely rare globally, representing less than 1% of all terrorist attacks worldwide since 1970, three have occurred in the District of Columbia, accounting for 2.7% of all attacks in the area. These include a two-day siege in March 1977 when a group of Hanafi Muslims took approximately 150 hostages at the District Building (city hall), the B'nai B'rith International Center, and the Islamic Center. During this attack one person was killed and several others were wounded, including then-D.C. Council member Marion Barry.



- **SUICIDE TERRORISM IN THE UNITED STATES**

Early media reports on the Discovery Communications attack indicated that the perpetrator had explosives strapped to his chest and back, suggesting that Lee might be willing to die in this attack. Suicide attacks are extremely rare in the United States. Less than 0.5% of terrorist activity in the United States is classified as suicide terrorism, in which the perpetrator does not intend to survive the attack. The most notable suicide events in the United States are the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in which all 19 terrorists died in the attacks. Also, in February of this year an individual who was radically opposed to the U.S. government and tax policies flew his private plane into an IRS building in Austin, TX killing himself and one IRS employee and destroying the building. In the event that the Discovery Communications attacker indeed wore explosives that he intended to detonate, this would be the first recorded incident of environmentally motivated suicide terrorism in the United States, and likely the first worldwide.

Global Terrorism Database

These data were collected and compiled from the **Global Terrorism Database (GTD)**, www.start.umd.edu/gtd. The GTD contains information on more than 87,000 terrorist incidents that

have occurred around the world since 1970. An updated version of the database, with information on incidents through 2008, was released in May 2010.

GTD is a project of the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), a U.S. Department of Homeland Security Center of Excellence. START, based at the University of Maryland, College Park, aims to provide timely guidance on how to disrupt terrorist networks, reduce the incidence of terrorism, and enhance the resilience of U.S. society in the face of the terrorist threat. The material presented here is the product of START and does not express the official opinion of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

For additional information, please contact START at 301 405 6600 or gtd@start.umd.edu.