

## **Background Report: Incendiary Devices in Packages at Maryland Government Buildings**

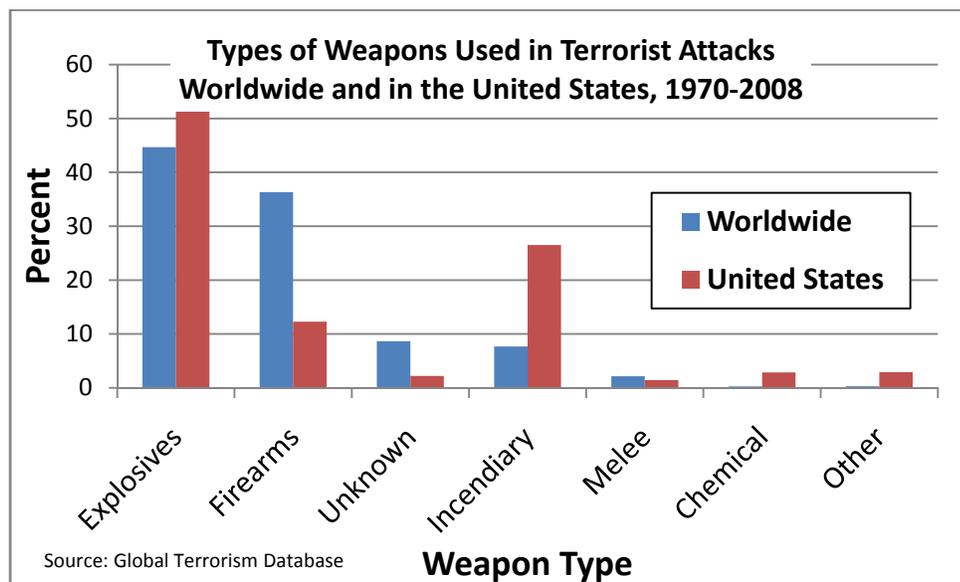
**January 7, 2011**

Following the ignition of two incendiary devices in packages at the Maryland Department of Transportation in Hanover, Maryland, and the Jeffrey Building in Annapolis, Maryland, START has compiled background information from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) on terrorist activity involving incendiaries, the use of package and letter devices, attacks against government targets in the United States, and attack patterns in Maryland.

- **TERRORISTS' USE OF INCENDIARY DEVICES**

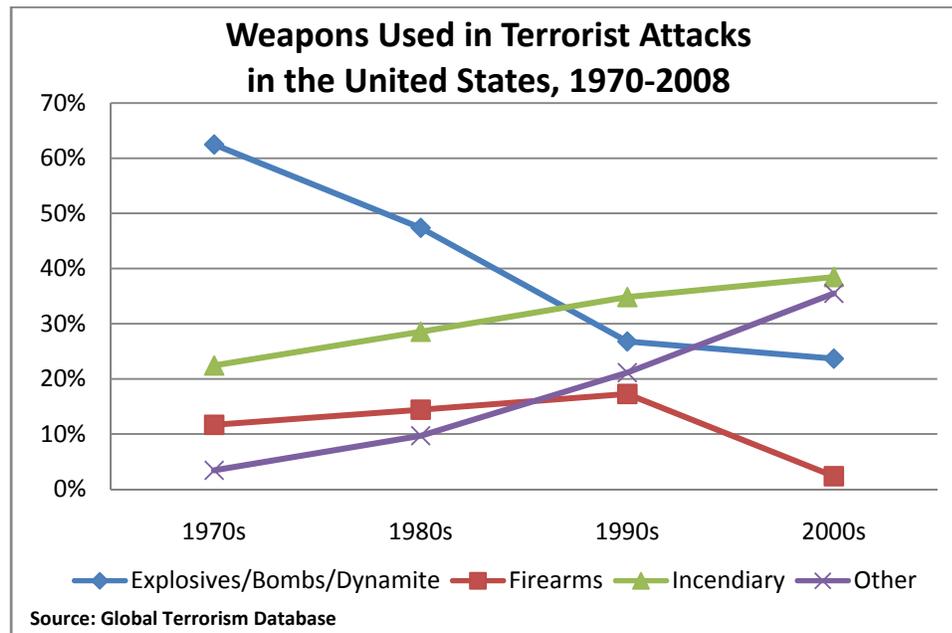
Although initial indications suggested that the weapons in question were explosives, authorities report that the packages contained incendiary devices. In the United States and around the world, explosives—in which decomposition occurs much more rapidly than in an incendiary device—are the most common terrorist weapon. In fact, some type of explosive device was used in 45% of all terrorist attacks worldwide between 1970 and 2008.

Incendiaries like those in the Maryland attacks are a more common weapon in the United States than elsewhere in the world and are the second most common type of weapon in U.S. terrorism. Incendiaries have been used in over one-quarter of all U.S. attacks since 1970, compared to less than 10% worldwide.



Furthermore, the prevalence of explosives in terrorist attacks in the United States has dropped dramatically in recent years, from over 60% in the 1970s to just under 25% in the 2000s. During the same time period the prevalence of incendiary

weapons, including arson, in terrorist attacks in the United States has increased more than 60%.



- ### TERRORISTS' USE OF LETTER/PACKAGE DEVICES IN THE UNITED STATES

Typically, attacks using incendiaries are arsons or firebomb incidents involving the use of gasoline or alcohol devices. Incendiary devices sent in letters or packages are very rare, although not unprecedented in the United States.

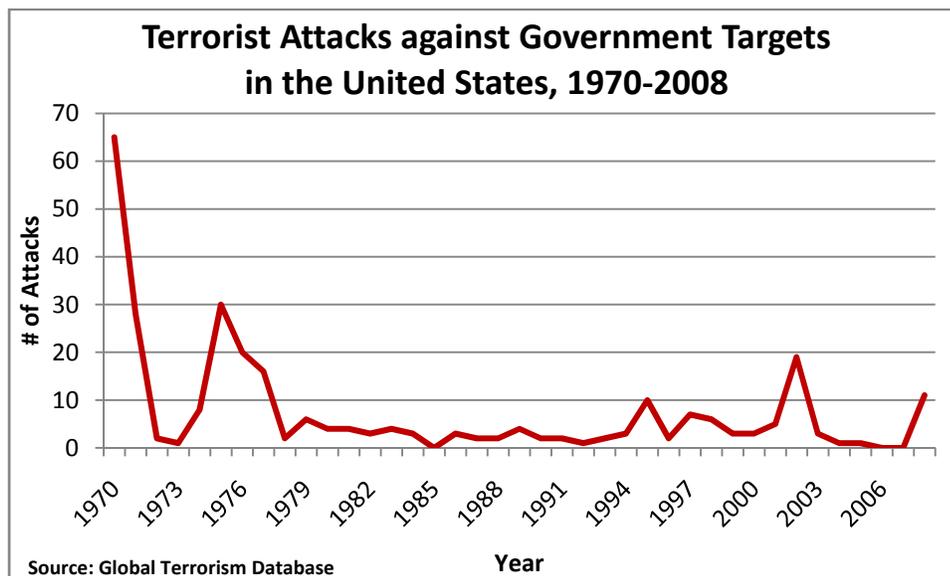
In December 1976 a series of four coordinated incidents claimed by both the Independent Armed Revolutionary Commandos (CRIA) and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) involved incendiary devices powered by batteries in manila envelopes addressed to the United States Department of Justice, President-elect Jimmy Carter, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The devices were discovered in mailboxes and postal facilities in New York City. Much like those discovered in the recent Maryland incident, the devices emitted a brief flare and caused only minor burn injuries to the hands of a postal employee who opened one of the packages. Also, in January 1977 CRIA was responsible for five letters containing incendiary devices addressed to President Ford, President-elect Carter, and the governor of Puerto Rico. These were discovered in New York City and Puerto Rico and contained batteries and emitted smoke, but caused no injuries or property damage.

Attacks via packages or letters are more likely to be explosive devices than incendiaries. In the weeks prior to the Maryland attacks, a series of such letter bombs were used in attacks against government leaders and embassies in European capitals. However even terrorist usage of package/letter bombs is rare, especially in the United States. Out of more than 1100 attacks using explosives in the United States since 1970, only forty-three involved letter or package bombs.

Letters and packages containing biological agents have also been used by terrorists in the United States, notably in anthrax attacks against U.S. congressional offices and the U.S. Supreme Court and ricin attacks against the White House. Related to the recent Maryland case targeting state-level offices, on December 10, 2008 letters containing white powder were received at the Governor's Office of eight states (Missouri, Montana, Minnesota, Alabama, Mississippi, Michigan, Alaska, and Rhode Island). The powder was found to be harmless, and no perpetrator claimed responsibility for the letters, which were mailed from Texas.

- **ATTACKS AGAINST GOVERNMENT TARGETS IN THE UNITED STATES**

The incendiary devices in the recent Maryland attack were delivered to the Maryland Department of Transportation Headquarters in Hanover and the Jeffrey Building, a state government office building in Annapolis in which the Governor's mail is processed and which also houses the Governor's Office of Homeland Security. Reports indicate that the former was addressed to the Maryland Secretary of Transportation and the latter to Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley. More than 11% of all terrorist attacks in the United States between 1970 and 2008 have been directed against government entities (excluding embassies), like those targeted in the January 6<sup>th</sup> attacks. Businesses are the most common targets, comprising over 25% of all attacks. Abortion-related targets and private citizens and property are also relatively prevalent, each making up over 11% of targets on United States soil.



Of the 286 attacks against government targets in the United States, only 16 were lethal. Most caused fewer than five deaths, with two exceptions—the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, which killed 168 and wounded over 650, and the September 11, 2001, attacks on the Pentagon in Arlington, VA which killed 189.

While the vast majority of attacks on government targets in the United States were against Federal offices, 25 have targeted state-level officials or offices—8% of the government attacks in the United States for which GTD includes target details. These

events have occurred in 17 different states, with California experiencing six attacks since 1970. Specific targets have included state-level Departments of Corrections (in California in 1971, New York in 1972, and Washington in 1974), state-level criminal justice offices and officials (in California in 1974, Massachusetts in 1976, Alabama in 1989, and Maryland in 1989), the Louisiana State Capital building in 1970, and several Governors' Offices.

- **TERRORIST ACTIVITY IN MARYLAND**

Between 1970 and 2008, Maryland has been the location for 31 terrorist attacks, ranking 17<sup>th</sup> most frequently attacked among U.S. states. In a pattern similar to that of the United States in general, the vast majority of terrorist attacks in Maryland (over 90%) occurred during the 1970s and 1980s. There are no recorded attacks in Maryland during the 1990s, and only two in 2004 and 2005.

Recent terrorist activity in Maryland includes the September 2010 hostage-taking at the Discovery Communications Building in Silver Spring, MD, in which the only casualty was the lone perpetrator who was ultimately shot by law enforcement officials. Also, in December 2010 authorities intervened in a plot to bomb the Armed Forces Recruiting Center in Catonsville, MD, by providing the perpetrator with a fake explosive device that he attempted to detonate.

Only six of the terrorist attacks between 1970 and 2008 in Maryland were fatal, all of which occurred between 1970 and 1981 and targeted both United States and international entities. Perpetrators of terrorism in Maryland represent a variety of ideological influences and include anti-abortion activists, black extremists, the Earth Liberation Front, the Jewish Committee of Concern, the Jewish Defense League, left-wing militants, neo-Nazis, the Popular Front for the liberation of Palestine, and white extremists.



These data were collected and compiled from the **Global Terrorism Database (GTD, [www.start.umd.edu/gtd](http://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. Additional information on START is available at: [www.start.umd.edu](http://www.start.umd.edu).

***For additional information on this release or the GTD, please contact START at 301.405.6600 or [gtd@start.umd.edu](mailto:gtd@start.umd.edu). For more urgent media requests please use [www.start.umd.edu/start/media/contact/](http://www.start.umd.edu/start/media/contact/).***

~~~~~

© National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START),  
College Park MD, 2011.