



## **Active Assailant Targeting of Federal Facilities**

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This article discusses the nature of the threat posed by targeting of United States federal facilities for attack by ideological extremists, as well as by individuals who are motivated by a strong sense of personal grievance. The article defines the term “federal facility,” presents a selective listing of attacks, and provides an assessment of the motivations, types of tactics and weapons employed in such incidents. In addition, this assessment identifies some future targeting trends, new tactics and weaponry likely to be employed in attacking federal facilities.

### **Defining Federal Facility**

As defined under Section 13 of the Public Buildings Act of 1959 (40 U.S.C. 612)[1] [40 USCS § 3301], the term Federal facility means “any public building (and shall include any Federal building or construction project” on lands in the public domain, on military installations (including the Department of Veteran Affairs), and federal prisons.

### **Significant Attacks Against Federal Buildings**

The following list provides examples of significant attacks against federal facilities and the spectrum of motivations, tactics and weapons used in these incidents. Note that these incidents primarily involve targeting civilian government facilities, as opposed to military facilities. The most lethal attack against a military facility was Major Nidal Hasan’s shooting rampage against military personnel at his base in Fort Hood, near Killeen, Texas, on November 5, 2009, in which he killed 13 persons and wounded more than 30 others. These issues are assessed in the article’s conclusion, below.

- April 19, 1995: Timothy McVeigh, 33, a far-right wing extremist, detonated a 7,000-pound truck bomb against the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, killing 168 people, with another 500 wounded. McVeigh was later convicted of the attack and was executed.
- May 3, 1997: Far-right wing anti-government extremists set fire to the IRA office in Colorado Springs, Colorado. It caused \$2.5 million in damage and injured a responding firefighter. James Cleaver and Jack Dowell were arrested and convicted for their role in the bombing.
- January 4, 2010: Johnny Lee Wicks, 66, opened fire in the lobby of the Lloyd D. George Federal District Courthouse in Las Vegas, Nevada, killing a court security officer and wounding a U.S. Marshal deputy. The gunman was killed in a shootout with responding federal marshals.
- February 18, 2010: Joseph Stack, a far-right wing extremist, crashed his single-engine plane into the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) offices in Austin, Texas. Stack and an IRA manager were killed, with 13 others injured.

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- March 4, 2010: John Patrick Bedell, 36, shot and wounded two Pentagon police officers at a security checkpoint at the Pentagon's metro station, in Arlington, Virginia. With the officers returning fire, the shooter was critically wounded and died a few hours later. The shooter, who had been diagnosed with a bipolar disorder, had expressed strong anti-government views.
- November 1, 2011: Four members of a North Georgia far-right wing militia were arrested, and later convicted, for plotting to bomb federal buildings in Atlanta and other cities with ricin, including murdering law enforcement officials.
- November 28, 2014: Larry Steve McQuilliams, 49, a far-right wing extremist, was arrested for firing more than 100 rounds at a police station, a Mexican consulate, a federal courthouse and a bank in downtown Austin, Texas. He was shot dead in a shootout with the responding police.
- August 21, 2015: Kevin Downing, 68, walked into the lobby of a federal building in the SoHo district of Manhattan, New York, and shot an armed private security guard in the head, killing him. He then shot himself. The shooter was a former federal employee at the Bureau of Labor Statistics, who had been fired by the Department of Labor several years earlier.

## **Assessment**

As illustrated by these incidents, extremist anti-government ideologies, whether far-right or far-left, or a self-perceived strong sense of injustice about their supposed treatment by government agencies, drive the perpetrators who conduct attacks against federal facilities. Some of these attacks are conducted by domestic terrorists, such as Timothy McVeigh (and Nidal Hasan), some are perpetrated by individuals with psychiatric disorders, such as John Patrick Bedell, while others are carried out by ex-employees (i.e., workplace violence: type 3: worker-on-worker, which includes attacks by former employees against their workplaces), such as Kevin Downing. Similarly, a variety tactics and weaponry have been employed by such perpetrators in their attacks, such as shootings, bombings with improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and even flying a small airplane into a federal building.

In conclusion, in terms of future targeting trends, new tactics and weaponry are likely to be employed in attacking federal facilities. These include deploying weaponized unmanned aerial systems (also known as drones), as well as a combination of cyber-attacks against government information technology (IT) systems and physical attacks, in order to cause major disruption and casualties. Fortunately, with many U.S. Government facilities hardened with rings of security personnel and physical security systems, their security departments are likely aware of such new attack trends and implementing appropriate protective measures against them.

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