

U.S. MILITARY SERVICE IS THE STRONGEST PREDICTOR OF CARRYING OUT EXTREMIST VIOLENCE

The mass murder in New Orleans and Cybertruck explosion in Las Vegas fit a troubling pattern among U.S. vets, research says.

Nick Turse

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Fire vehicles surround the valet area of the Trump International Hotel in Las Vegas where active-duty Green Beret Matthew Livelsberger detonated a Cybertruck on Jan. 1, 2025.

Photo: David Becker/The Washington Post/Getty Images

THE TWO MEN who carried out apparent terror attacks on New Year's Day – killing 15 people by [plowing a pickup truck into a crowd](#) of New Year's revelers in New Orleans, and detonating a Tesla Cybertruck outside a Trump hotel in Las Vegas – both had U.S. military backgrounds, according to the Pentagon.

From 1990 to 2010, about seven persons per year with U.S. military backgrounds committed extremist crimes. Since 2011, that number has jumped to almost 45 per year, according to data from a new, unreleased report shared with The Intercept by Michael Jensen, the research director at the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, or START, at the University of Maryland.

Military service is also the single strongest individual predictor of becoming a “mass casualty offender,” far outpacing mental health issues, according to a [separate study](#) of extremist mass casualty violence by the researchers.

From 1990 through 2023, 730 individuals with U.S. military backgrounds committed criminal acts that were motivated by their political, economic, social, or religious goals, according to data from the new START report. From 1990 to 2022, successful violent plots that included perpetrators with a connection to the U.S. military resulted in 314 deaths and 1,978 injuries – a significant number of which came from the 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City.

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In the latest attacks, the FBI identified 42-year-old Shamsud-Din Jabbar as the man who rammed a pickup into New Year's revelers on Bourbon Street in New Orleans, early on Wednesday morning. At least 15 people were killed and 35 more were injured.

The U.S. Army said Jabbar served as a human resource specialist and an information technology specialist between 2007 and 2020. His service included a deployment to Afghanistan from February 2009 to January 2010. A staff sergeant at the end of his service, Jabbar was “inspired by” the Islamic State terrorist organization, according to a short address by President Joe Biden on Wednesday night, who added that, in videos posted to social media shortly before the attack, Jabbar indicated that he had a “desire to kill.” The FBI said it did not believe he was solely responsible for the attack and said the investigation was “live.”

Authorities are also investigating whether the terrorist attack in New Orleans is linked to the Cybertruck explosion in Las Vegas which killed the attacker, Matthew Livelsberger, and wounded seven bystanders. The U.S. Army told The Intercept that Master Sgt. Matthew Alan Livelsberger served in the active-duty Army from January 2006 to March 2011, then served in the National Guard from March 2011 to July 2012, followed by a stint in the Army Reserve from July 2012 to December 2012. That same month, he rejoined the Army, serving as a U.S. Army Special Operations Soldier.

Livelsberger was assigned to U.S. Army Special Operations Command and still serving in the military, though on approved leave, at the time of his death.

IN THE YEARS 1990 to 2022, 170 individuals with U.S. military backgrounds plotted 144 individual mass casualty terrorist attacks in the United States, according to START research using the Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States, or PIRUS, database, which includes information on more than 3,000 subjects who committed extremist crimes in America. These troops and veterans represent approximately one-quarter of all individuals who plotted mass casualty extremist attacks during this span, outstripping their representation in the U.S. population.

Jensen and his colleagues found that while military personnel and veterans are not more likely to radicalize to the point of violence than members of the general public, when service members and veterans do become radicalized, “they may be more likely to plan for, or commit, mass casualty crimes, thus having an outsized impact on public safety.”

The researchers also determined that subjects “in PIRUS with U.S. military backgrounds are 2.41 times more likely to be classified as mass casualty offenders than individuals who did not serve in the armed forces.” This means that U.S. military service is a more reliable predictor for becoming a mass casualty offender than mental health issues, being a lone offender, or having a pre-radicalization criminal history.

Most mass casualty offenders with U.S. military backgrounds in PIRUS (73.5 percent) were associated with far-right domestic extremist groups and movements. Approximately 15 percent (24 offenders) were inspired by or connected to foreign Islamist extremist groups, such as Al Qaeda and its affiliates (9 subjects) or the Islamic State or ISIS (13 subjects).

LAW ENFORCEMENT SOURCES confirmed to local news outlets that Livelsberger's weaponized Tesla Cybertruck was rented from Turo, the vehicle-sharing service that was also used in the New Orleans attack. Jabbar reportedly used the Turo app as well to rent the electric Ford pickup truck used in that attack.

Both Livelsberger and Jabbar spent time at the military base formerly known as Fort Bragg and [now called Fort Liberty](#), a massive Army garrison in North Carolina that is home to multiple Army Special Operations units. It does not, however, appear that their assignments to the base overlapped.

Fort Liberty is, however, an exceptionally troubled Army base. [Investigations](#) found, for example, that [109 soldiers](#) assigned there died in 2020 and 2021. Ninety-six percent of those deaths took place stateside. Fewer than 20 were from natural causes. The remaining soldier fatalities, including [macabre or unexplained deaths](#), homicides, and [dozens of drug overdoses](#), were preventable.

Seventy-six of the 170 mass casualty offenders (44.7 percent) in PIRUS with military backgrounds served in the Army. These soldiers and veterans represent more than half (52.4 percent) of all Army-affiliated individuals represented in the data, which is the highest ratio of mass casualty to non-mass casualty offenders for any one military service branch. By comparison, 32 percent of the individuals represented in the data who served in the Marine Corps were mass casualty offenders.

“The Army is a vast organization with all kinds of different people and all kinds of different training and experiences,” said Joel A. Dvoskin, a clinical and forensic psychologist and an expert on violence, who cautioned against drawing any early conclusions about the relationship between the attacks and the attackers' military service records. He said data on the relationship between military service and mass casualty

attacks should only be used for beneficial purposes, like smoothing the transition from military to civilian life.

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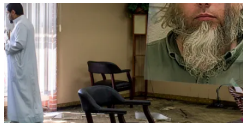
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