



# Crime & Punishment

James Alan Fox on criminal behavior and the justice system

## Security clearance for terror

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In the aftermath of Monday's mass shooting at the Washington D.C. Naval Yard, many weighty questions abound surrounding the circumstances of the crime and the man believed to be responsible for the carnage. Perhaps the most disconcerting pertains to how Aaron Alexis, given his troubled past and troubled mind, could have security clearance that allowed him access to the military facility.

For us here in Boston, we might then wonder if another Aaron Alexis armed with security credentials and a cache of weapons would have access to one of our sensitive facilities. Sure, the Charlestown Naval Base was long ago closed and transformed into luxury condominiums. But across town on Albany Street stands a biological research laboratory that invites trouble and troubled people.

Are you now convinced that permitting Level 4 research involving such deadly agents at Ebola and SARS is just not a wise move in a densely populated area? The City of Cambridge, even with its deep commitment to scientific research, has banned work with Level 4 pathogens. And [three-quarters of the candidates](#) for Mayor of Boston indicated a similar disinclination toward this type of research activity within in the city limits.

The likelihood of a security breach at the BU Biolab resulting in the release of deadly viruses into the atmosphere is undoubtedly quite low. But should the unlikely occur, the death and devastation that would result from such a incident would be far, far more expansive than anything that some deranged gunman could accomplish. *Risk = Loss X Probability* is a formula for disaster when it comes to Level 4 biological research at the BU Biolab.