

Murders linked to race war - Did white supremacists kill judge's family

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CHICAGO: Authorities were yesterday investigating whether the shooting deaths of a federal judge's husband and her 89-year-old mother were the work of white supremacists seeking revenge.

The killings came a month before white supremacist Matt Hale was to be sentenced for trying to have Judge Joan Humphrey Lefkow killed over her handling of a dispute involving his hate group.

Police said they were looking at the possibility the crime was committed by hate groups but cautioned it was "but one facet of our investigation".

The judge and other members of her family were put under federal protection after she came home on Monday to discover the bodies of her husband, Michael Lefkow, 64, a lawyer, and her mother, Donna Humphrey, in the basement.

A federal source said the victims had been shot in the head. Another source said police found two .22-calibre casings and a window at the house had been broken.

Family friend Thomas Robb described the victims as "very vulnerable people" explaining that Mrs Humphrey, who was visiting from Denver, needed two canes to walk.

Mr Lefkow had surgery last week to repair a ruptured achilles tendon and was on crutches, he said.

Illinois northern district chief

federal judge Charles Kocoras said: "All of us are horrified by the murder of Judge Lefkow's husband and mother. Nothing can prepare us for such a stunning, tragic event."

Hale's father, retired police officer Russell Hale, dismissed the notion his son may have been involved in the slayings, saying he was under constant surveillance.

"There would be no way he could order anything," Mr Hale said.

"It's ridiculous."

Hale is being held at a detention centre in downtown Chicago, where he is isolated from other prisoners.

By yesterday morning, news of the killings had been posted on white supremacist websites, along with RAHOWA ! -- meaning "racial holy war".

In a discussion on a white nationalist website in 2003, members had posted the Lefkows' home address.

Anti-Defamation League official Mark Pitcavage said another white supremacist's short-wave radio show last April had discussed killing the judge.

During Hale's murder-plot trial, prosecutors contended that he was furious when Judge Lefkow ordered him to stop using the name World Church of the Creator because it was trademarked by an Oregon religious group with no ties to Hale.

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