



NATIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM CENTER



(U//FOUO) WORLDWIDE: IED TARGETING OF FIRST RESPONSE PERSONNEL— TACTICS AND INDICATORS

*NCTC SPECIAL ANALYSIS REPORT 2012-34a
7 August 2012*





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(U) Key Findings

(U//FOUO) Although most terrorist IED attacks outside war zones target civilians or symbols of authority and usually involve a single device, some are designed specifically to target emergency response personnel. The most common tactics involve using secondary or tertiary devices in tiered or sequential attacks intended to kill or maim response personnel after they arrive on the scene of an initial IED incident.

- The extent of government control in the intended target zone is a critical variable in operational planning for attacks against first responders. Whether attackers have sufficient access to the target area to gain familiarity with the landscape, the presence of police or other security forces, and even possibly their emergency response procedures are significant factors in attack preparation.
- Terrorists who are well-versed in the render-safe procedures used by explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) teams are the most likely to construct secondary devices capable of defeating techniques to defuse or destroy them.

(U//FOUO) There is widespread concern about the availability of information in online manuals, videos, and extremist discussion forums on IED design and tactics that can be used by plotters in Western countries—including the US.

- Only one Homeland attack plot by homegrown violent extremists (HVEs)^a in recent years was intended to specifically target first responders, but a successful Homeland attack may be imitated once it is publicized in the media.
- Growing awareness of the tactics and techniques used by terrorists elsewhere in the world—particularly in East Africa, South Asia, and Yemen—could motivate HVEs and other Homeland adversaries to deliberately plot attacks that target first responders.
- The targeting of EOD personnel during execution of render-safe and exploitation procedures represents a higher level of adversary tactical sophistication that could provide an early indication of the need to reassess the Homeland IED threat environment.

^a (U//FOUO) According to DHS, an HVE is a person of any citizenship who has lived and/or operated primarily in the United States or its territories and who advocates, is engaged in, or is preparing to engage in ideologically motivated terrorist activities (including providing support to terrorism) to further political or social objectives promoted by a foreign terrorist organization, but who is acting independent of direction by a foreign terrorist organization. HVEs are distinct from traditional domestic terrorists who engage in unlawful acts of violence to intimidate civilian populations or attempt to influence domestic policy without direction or influence from a foreign actor.

(U) This report was prepared by the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), Department of Homeland Security, and Office of Naval Intelligence.

(U) Scope Note

(U//FOUO) This NSAR focuses primarily on the factors at play in successful attacks against first response personnel including explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) operators and bomb technicians, as these personnel are specifically trained and equipped to render safe IEDs. It examines common enabling and mitigating factors involved in the targeting of first responders and EOD forces by examining IED events conducted by extremists, terrorists, and criminal elements (referred to throughout the NSAR as “adversaries”).

(U//FOUO) Key assumptions in the assessment are that IED knowledge is transferable between threat groups and that the primary mitigating factors are dependent on target and local control rather than on the operating environment.

(U//FOUO) For the purposes of the assessment, the following terms are used:

- **First responder** refers to individuals and assets who, in the early stages of an incident, are responsible for protecting and preserving life, property, evidence, and the environment, including emergency response providers and other skilled support personnel who provide immediate support services during protection, response, and recovery operations.
- **Explosive ordnance disposal** refers to responder personnel who assess access, reconnoiter, identify, render safe, exploit, and dispose of known or suspected IEDs.
- **Render safe** is the capability to disrupt the firing train and eliminate personnel hazards to moving a known or suspected IED through the application of specialized tools, training, and operational experience. Render safe is executed by both EOD and certified public safety bomb squads in the Homeland operating environment.

(U//FOUO) Worldwide: IED Targeting of First Response Personnel—Tactics and Indicators

(U//FOUO) Targeting Responders Depends on Context

(U//FOUO) All incidents involving IEDs, including those that fail or are a hoax, draw emergency responders to handle any casualties, secure the area, deactivate or dispose of other potential explosive devices, and begin the process of investigative forensics. Although most terrorist IED attacks target civilians or symbols of authority and usually involve a single device, some devices encountered outside war zones are designed specifically to target emergency response personnel. Motivations for targeting first responders are highly dependent on context.

- In countries coping with insurgencies or political unrest that result in a sustained level of violence, responders may be deliberately targeted to counter their capabilities to deal with attacks by the armed opposition. Insurgents in the Iraq and Afghanistan war zones primarily target first responders—military police and explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) personnel—to degrade their ability to counter the insurgent’s primary weapon of choice, the IED. Insurgents in countries like Thailand—where the primary focus is to counter government rule or occupation—most likely attack first responders because they represent the ruling government.
- Criminal organizations under law enforcement or military pressure—such as drug-trafficking organizations (DTOs) in countries like Mexico and Colombia—may attack first responders to deter or inhibit disruption operations against them.
- Terrorist groups or individual extremists with ideological agendas may target responders deliberately to enhance the magnitude of their terror attack, creating increased fear and media

attention by demonstrating that even would-be rescuers are vulnerable to attack.

(U//FOUO) The extent of government control in the intended target zone is a critical variable in operational planning for attacks against first responders. Whether attackers have sufficient access to the target area to gain familiarity with the landscape, the presence of police or other security forces, and even possibly their emergency response procedures are significant factors in attack preparation. Freedom of access also allows time to set up the attack, which is particularly important if multiple devices are to be employed. Attacks against responders have been particularly successful where an adaptive adversary is able to control the response environment and rely on support from local populations, either through cooperation or coercion. A pervasive security presence or particular vigilance by local citizens or police forces may not prevent conducting a single attack targeting civilians but could make it much more difficult to specifically target response personnel.

- Adversaries in Afghanistan and Iraq have used their ability to observe and control IED incident zones to achieve an advantage in attacks against response personnel. Emplacing real and hoax devices to test the response of EOD teams provides them insight into how to best target response personnel, according to lessons learned from US military forces deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Urban areas in Western countries, including the US, are a much more difficult environment in which to achieve an IED attack that specifically targets response personnel. Adversaries may rely on hasty emplacement of victim-operated devices to cause casualties because of the constraints of the domestic operational environment, including the vigilance of alert/concerned local citizens,

which would limit the amount of time an adversary has to set up a multiple IED ambush. Moreover, in most Western countries the on-site commander has authority to control the response area for as long as necessary to neutralize the threat.

- State and local first responders have seldom been targeted within the US, most likely because of a combination of lack of intent to target first responders and adversary difficulty in controlling the attack site before the bombing.

(U//FOUO) Types of Devices and Tactics Aim for Effect

(U//FOUO) The most common tactics to target emergency responders include using secondary or tertiary devices intended to kill or maim response personnel after they arrive on the scene of an initial IED incident. Tiered or sequential IED attacks—in which an initial attack is followed by additional explosions as emergency personnel arrive or deploy on the scene—involve a greater degree of complexity and sophistication to execute, but the potential for higher casualties is significant. Such attacks have the potential to inflict casualties against highly trained response professionals, which could slow or even deter responses to subsequent attacks and result in increased fear in the local population, undermining their faith in authorities' ability to keep them safe.

- Al-Qa'ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb in mid-July 2011 conducted sequential VBIED attacks targeting an Algerian police headquarters in Boumerdes with one device and then detonated a secondary device once emergency responders reached the scene.
- Extremists in Chechnya and Dagestan have used hoax devices, tiered-detonation events, and victim-operated devices in a campaign targeting emergency responders during the past 10 years.

(U//FOUO) When responders are the priority target, the initial IED attack may be small, appear to have failed, or even be an obvious hoax device intended to lure EOD personnel into an explosive ambush. Response personnel can also be drawn into an IED ambush through tactics such as staging an accident or another kind of incident, often posing a threat to

security personnel. Mexican drug cartels have had particular success using this tactic in recent years, probably a result of extreme levels of violence between the cartels and the government, the cartels' expanding territorial control of previously government-controlled areas, and cartel operatives imitating tactics seen elsewhere.

(U//FOUO) The most effective devices for specifically targeting responders force them to work in proximity to the device and often mitigate IED countermeasures. Successful production and use of such devices can indicate and may require a familiarity with EOD procedures and/or technical acumen.

- Victim-operated devices and anti-tamper switches require outside stimuli—mechanical pressure, movement, or removal of components—for the device to function effectively. In early April 2011, a Northern Ireland police officer was killed by a victim-operated IED that detonated outside the officer's home. Investigating detectives explained this was an example of Real Irish Republican Army dissidents actively targeting police personnel.
- Command-detonated devices—usually triggered by command wire or radiofrequency requiring the attacker to have either a physical tether or be in proximity to the IED—have been effective against EOD when placed near a primary IED or hoax device or in an established safe area. Use of such devices can be indicative of terrorists feeling comfortable in the operating environment or their being willing to sacrifice low-level operatives.

(U//FOUO) Unconstrained Diffusion of Tactics and Techniques Proliferates Knowledge

(U//FOUO) Information on IED design and tactics has become available to plotters in Western countries—including the US—who might then employ options, such as tiered attacks targeting emergency responders, they otherwise might not have considered. Explosives training manuals, extremist literature such as *Inspire* magazine, and Internet videos and chat rooms are widely disseminated. Violent extremists making available knowledge of EOD procedures and countermeasures could facilitate and significantly enhance the capability of terrorists to lure

responders into IED ambushes and construct devices that would detonate as authorities tried to contain or deactivate them. A successful attack against responders may be imitated once publicized in the media.

- The diffusion of IED design information and tactics is not bound by geographic or motivational constraints. A review of bombmaking publications available on the Internet or in printed form dating back to the 1960s illustrates that an extremist can readily access a wide variety of manuals detailing EOD procedures and information on how to build victim-operated IEDs.
- Manuals, videos, and forum discussions are not complete substitutes for practical experience in IED emplacement, however; evidence of hands-on training and IED testing by terrorists in Western countries could give security services and law enforcement indicators of possible attack plotting.

(U//FOUO) Terrorists interested in conducting complex IED attacks, including deliberately targeting emergency personnel responding to an initial IED attack, can also learn from the examples of groups that have such experience in high-threat Western environments, some of whom are willing to provide expert training or instruction. Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) bombmakers in the UK in the early 1990s created and employed a wide array of IED switches intended to reduce the effectiveness of security forces by targeting British and Irish EOD and response personnel, according to military reporting.

- Palestinian terrorist organizations historically have used tiered detonation of multiple devices to cause maximum casualties and target response personnel. PIRA in its 1992 London bombing campaign used tiered-detonation events, exploding a small device inside a department store and then detonating a secondary device once the evacuation of the building was underway.
- The arrest in 2001 and conviction of three senior PIRA members in Colombia for training members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia indicate the group most likely shared its expertise with at least one other terrorist group.

- (U//FOUO) In 2011, two Iraqi refugees and former members of al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI) were convicted in US Federal Court of providing material support to a terrorist organization. One of the subjects—who had provided accurate IED diagrams to an FBI source—was charged with distributing explosives-related information.

(U//FOUO) Implications for Homeland Plotting

(U//FOUO) Because of the difficult operating environment, attacks such as the May 2010 attempted Times Square bombing—intended primarily to cause casualties and sow fear—are the most likely terrorist threat in the Homeland. Homeland adversaries have shown little inclination to specifically target first responders with IEDs attacks, however, and we have no reporting to indicate that HVEs or other Homeland adversaries have tried to systematically collect information on emergency responder tactics, techniques, and procedures. The most complex Homeland attack plotting by HVEs in recent years called for simultaneous IEDs on New York City subways, none of which was intended to specifically target first responders.

- The first publicized incident using a secondary device to target emergency responders occurred in 1997 when Eric Rudolph^{USPER}—later convicted of the 1996 Olympic Park bombing—detonated a small device in an office building and then a second larger device once response personnel were on the scene. A second attempt by Rudolph to target first responders in a nightclub bombing in February 1997 failed when responding personnel, having learned lessons from the first attempt, discovered and rendered safe the secondary IED

(U) According to open-source reporting, police responding to the scene of a bombing in San Diego, California—attributed to animal rights extremists—in August 2003 discovered a second IED, which the FBI claimed was timed to detonate as first responders arrived.

- Members of a Midwest militia group were charged in early 2010 with plotting to kill Ohio first responders—specifically police officers—with IEDs and then to follow up with attacks at

the funerals of the slain officers, according to US court documents.

- An identified individual wearing a device incorporating a “dead man” switch in September 2010 entered an office building in Maryland and took hostages. This is the first occurrence in the US of a hostage taker using a tactic capable of injuring responding officers upon his death or incapacitation.
- An accused HVE in late 2011 in Florida conspired to purchase a VBIED, suicide vest, and small arms from an FBI undercover employee with the stated intent to target responding law enforcement officers and FBI agents with the suicide vest after setting off the VBIED.

(U//FOUO) Growing awareness of the tactics and techniques used by terrorists elsewhere in the world—particularly in East Africa, South Asia, and Yemen—could motivate HVEs and other Homeland adversaries to deliberately plot attacks that target first responders. An increase in the domestic threat of IED targeting of first responders would probably be preceded by subtle indicators designed to glean information on response procedures without alerting responders that they are being probed.

- Multiple hoax-device emplacements in the same geographic area, hoax emplacements combined with noticeable observation cues—such as range-marking indicators or attempts to circumvent countermeasures or hide sites in proximity to hoax devices—and bystanders filming or taking notes on render-safe operations could all be indicative of possible intent to ultimately target responders.
- Targeting EOD personnel during the execution of render-safe and exploitation procedures represents a level of adversary tactical sophistication that could provide early indication of the need to reassess the Homeland IED environment.

(U//FOUO) Homeland IED Incidents, 2004-10

(U//FOUO) From 2004 to 2010, first responders were called on to deal with an average of 800 attempted or actual explosive and incendiary bombings every year, according to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) and US Bomb Data Center (USBDC) statistics. Very few incidents were terrorist related; most involved other criminal activity such as murder, revenge, extortion, hate crimes, or pranks. Many of the incidents lack full documentation because of the voluntary nature of data submission for many US law enforcement agencies.

(U//FOUO) 2004-10 Homeland Explosive/Incendiary Bombings

Year	Explosive/Incendiary Bombings	Attempted Explosive/Incendiary Bombings
2004	828	200
2005	595	114
2006	597	109
2007	445	98
2008	732	34
2009	729	107
2010	939	102
Total	4,865	764

(U//FOUO) Information provided by the ATF, Office of Strategic Intelligence and Information, USBDC.

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(U//FOUO) The majority of the 1,041 explosives incidents reported in 2010 involved pipe bombs with simple nonelectric initiation systems. Electric blasting caps, electric matches, fireworks devices, and at least one incident involving an initiation system using a modified Christmas tree bulb—a technique commonly encountered by Coalition forces in Afghanistan and Iraq—accounted for the remaining incidents.

(U//FOUO) First Responder Considerations^b

(U//FOUO) Information about tactics for targeting first responders can help develop effective countermeasures—especially when the measures eliminate predictable patterns of behavior that terrorists look for during preoperational surveillance. Interagency training and planning to enhance coordination and ensure availability of adequate resources in the event of an incident is critical. Responders must be vigilant in recognizing and reporting signs of preattack surveillance as well as indicators that terrorists may be acquiring material to support an operation and possibly rehearsing attack scenarios. Responders should at a minimum:

- Avoid announcing key command and control locations on unsecure communications networks and maintain situational awareness during operations.
- Secure the perimeter around an incident site and limit access to essential personnel. Examine all command posts, triage, and emergency vehicle parking areas. Be on the lookout for individuals or objects that appear out of place and be alert for secondary devices.

^b (U) For additional information, see Fire Line (U//FOUO) *Terrorist Use of Secondary Improvised Explosive Devices to Target First Responders*, dated 9 September 2012; and RCR (U) *Terrorist Use of Secondary Explosive Devices to Target First Responders and Onlookers*, dated 4 May 2010.