

Field Analysis Report

(U//FOUO) Assessing ISIL's Influence and Perceived Legitimacy in the Homeland: A State and Local Perspective

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FIELD ANALYSIS REPORT



Regional Analysis with National Perspective.

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(U//FOUO) Prepared by the Delaware Information and Analysis Center with contributions from the Colorado Information Analysis Center, the Delaware Valley Intelligence Center, Houston Regional Intelligence Service Center (HRISC), Maryland Coordination and Analysis Center, Northern California Regional Intelligence Center (NCRIC), North Carolina Information Sharing and Analysis Center, New Hampshire Information and Analysis Center, Northern Virginia Regional Intelligence Center, South Carolina Information and Intelligence Center, the Washington Regional Threat Analysis Center, and the Virginia Fusion Center. Coordinated with the Department of Homeland Security, Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A).

(U//FOUO) **Scope:** This Field Analysis Report (FAR) is designed to support awareness and inform enforcement and collection operations of federal, state, and local partners involved in homeland security and counterterrorism efforts. Some of the activities described in the FAR may be constitutionally protected activities and should be supported by additional facts to justify increased suspicion. The totality of relevant circumstances should be evaluated when considering any law enforcement response or action. Our assessment of the level of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's (ISIL) name recognition since its declaration of a caliphate in June 2014 is based on a review of suspicious activity reporting (SAR) across the United States between 1 January and 30 December 2014, criminal complaints of US persons charged with supporting or seeking to support ISIL, Bureau of Prisons (BOP) intelligence reporting, and DHS I&A open source reporting to assess the influence of ISIL's messaging campaign within the United States and ISIL's perceived legitimacy among homegrown violent extremists (HVEs).[†]

(U) Key Findings

- (U//LES) We assess an increased volume of ISIL-related SARs between June 2014 and January 2015 signifies the penetration and recognition of its brand because much of this reporting centered on ISIL symbols, imagery, and support for the group voiced on social media.
- (U//FOUO) We judge—based on the body of SAR, criminal complaints, BOP reports, and open source reporting consulted throughout this FAR (see Scope and Source Summary Statements)—that ISIL's messaging is resonating with US-based violent extremists due to its championing of a multifaceted vision of a caliphate that prioritizes a wide array of justifications and obligations for support, especially compared to other terrorist groups with whom it

^{*} (U) I&A's perspective on this topic is included in the textbox on page 7.

[†] (U//FOUO) DHS defines a HVE as a person of any citizenship who has lived and/or operated primarily in the United States or its territories who advocates, is engaged in, or is preparing to engage in ideologically-motivated terrorist activities (including providing support to terrorism) in furtherance of political or social objectives promoted by a foreign terrorist organization, but is acting independently 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 from or influence from a foreign actor.

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competes for support, like al-Qa'ida (AQ) and its affiliates. ISIL's messaging is amplified through a sophisticated use of social media tailored to a global audience.

- (U//LES) A high volume of SAR reporting—of varying degrees of potential threats—associated with ISIL will likely persist as long as ISIL sustains its messaging campaign and perceived military and governance successes, specifically so long as it is perceived to successfully defend its self-declared caliphate.

(U//FOUO) **ISIL's Narratives Promote Caliphate and Lone Offender Attacks**

(U//FOUO) We assess ISIL's name recognition is built in large measure on its military successes and rapid territorial gains in Syria and Iraq in 2014. The allure for potential HVEs also rests with ISIL's carefully constructed image, based on the perceived legitimacy of its self-proclaimed re-establishment of the caliphate, governance efforts according to their interpretation of Islamic law, and ability to project power through continued expansion—all conveyed via a highly organized messaging effort.^{*} The prevalence of media coverage surrounding ISIL's exploits challenges our ability to isolate and assess how central a role ISIL-directed messaging, amplified by individuals who share that messaging online through their individual social media platforms, plays in influencing demonstrations of ISIL support in the United States.

(U//FOUO) ISIL espouses a violent extremist counterculture and vision focused on the expansion of its self-proclaimed caliphate. This approach is at odds with the model traditionally espoused by AQ, which focuses on driving perceived Western aggressors from Muslim-majority countries through terrorist attacks in the West, before conquest of a state or establishment of a caliphate. The ISIL narrative includes a positive vision—in the eyes of its members—of an alternative political system that is to be established now, as opposed to at some point in the distant future.

(U//FOUO) As a consequence, a broader and more diverse pool of individuals in the United States, including females, may identify strongly with aspects of ISIL's narrative—including governance under a particular vision of Islamic law, the re-establishment of the caliphate, the purported obligation upon Muslims to emigrate once it is formed, and the defense of Sunni Muslims against the Syrian regime's persecution. These elements of ISIL's narrative do not resemble goals long prioritized by AQ via its English-language messaging. We judge ISIL's self-purported success as a functioning and viable state responding to US-led coalition attacks helps legitimize—to some individuals—its use of terrorist tactics to defend itself against perceived Western aggression.

- (U) In October 2014, three formerly US-based female youths were stopped in Germany while attempting to travel from the United States to allegedly join ISIL in Syria. Separately, authorities arrested an identified Virginia-based female in November 2014 for making a false statement to a federal official after reportedly supporting ISIL through her social media posts.
- (U) ISIL's English-language magazine, *Dabiq*, focuses on topics such as state building and governance in ISIL held territory—highlighting extensive government services including banking, health care, and education—in addition to encouraging lone offender attacks in the West.^{*} In contrast, al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula's *Inspire* magazine frequently glorifies

^{*} (U//FOUO) For additional information about the resonance of ISIL's messaging in the West, see the *Joint Intelligence Bulletin*, "(U//FOUO) ISIL Social Media Messaging Resonating with Western Youth," 27 February 2015.

^{*} (U) DHS defines lone offender as an individual motivated by one or more violent extremist ideologies who, operating alone, supports or engages in acts of unlawful violence in furtherance of that ideology or ideologies that may involve influence from a larger terrorist organization or a foreign actor.

terrorist operations, educates prospective HVEs on weapon fabrication and tactics, and urges lone offender attacks in the West.

- (U) A July 2014 English-language video released by ISIL's Al Hayat Media Center showed a now-deceased Canadian fighter detailing ISIL's need for engineers, doctors, and other professionals; the fighter also exhorted these individuals to migrate to ISIL-controlled territory because "there is a role for everybody," not just fighters.
- (U//FOUO) ISIL on 21 September 2014 released an audio message (with an official English translation) from ISIL spokesman Abu-Muhammad al-Adnani—for the first time—urging lone offender attacks in the West "in retaliation for US-led airstrikes." In the message, Al-Adnani emphasizes that ISIL did not initiate the war but is reacting to Western aggression.

(U//FOUO) Uptick in ISIL-Related Suspicious Incidents since June 2014 May Signify Group's Increased Influence

(U//LES) The volume of ISIL-related SARs increased sharply in the second half of 2014, according to queries of state, local, and federal holdings nationally.* Chronologically, this uptick corresponds with ISIL's military successes, self-declared re-establishment of a caliphate, and increased English-language messaging—along with increased media coverage of these exploits. Any single incident of suspicious activity, in isolation, may constitute constitutionally protected activity and does not necessarily indicate an intent to mobilize to violence or provide material support to ISIL. Nevertheless, as a body of reporting showing a trend, we judge the increase in SARs signifies a penetration of ISIL's messaging into the Homeland.

(U//LES) Several incidents related to ISIL graffiti, symbols, or ISIL-related paraphernalia—including clothing, patches, and flags—were reported to law enforcement agencies.† Additional examples of graffiti, in Arabic and English, stickers with ISIL emblems, and similar imagery have been reported in the United States. A group was arrested in France in November 2014 for selling ISIL paraphernalia to US-based individuals and other customers, according to open source reporting.‡

- (U//LES) In late October 2014, personnel at Marine Corps Base Quantico discovered seven leaflets depicting an ISIL banner with the translation "We came from Mexico on a train."
- (U//LES) In September 2014, several three-inch by five-inch flags resembling those portrayed in ISIL messaging were found on the front windshield of vehicles in a residential neighborhood in Falls Church, Virginia, according to law enforcement reporting. The flags were printed on white paper in black and white ink.
- (U//FOUO) ISIL stickers have been identified on memorials, highway signs, and other public venues in Arizona, Nevada, and Texas, according to open source analysis.

* (U) The reports were determined to have a potential terrorism nexus and placed in the Information Sharing Environment Suspicious Activity Reporting (ISE-SAR), and the Data Repository (SDR). Functional Standard 1.5.5 defines an ISE-SAR as official documentation of observed behavior reasonably indicative of pre-operational planning related to terrorism or other criminal activity that has been determined, pursuant to a two-part process, to have a potential terrorism nexus (i.e., to be reasonably indicative of criminal activity associated with terrorism).

† (U//FOUO) Even though this flag is promoted by ISIL and many of its supporters, and similar versions are used by other terrorist organizations, the genealogy of this flag traces to the early periods of Islam. Therefore, it should not be viewed specifically as an indicator that someone is declaring allegiance to or intending to make an association with ISIL without further evidence.

‡ (U) The individuals were arrested based on recent anti-terror legislation passed in France to combat "apology for and incitement to terrorism." The selling of such paraphernalia in the United States is not illegal.

(U//LES) We reviewed multiple SAR incidents to identify the resonance of ISIL messaging—although not necessarily to characterize actual plotting activity. Roughly half of the reports were based on anonymous tips—that were likely non-credible—describing aspirational threats of violence against family or friends, where ISIL-affiliation appeared to be used only as a means to intimidate the victim(s); or were reports from individuals describing mentally ill or suicidal family members making violent threats in the name of ISIL. The other threat incidents—most of which we assess were also likely not credible—centered upon political targets, called for general attacks against the Homeland, or indicated awareness of ISIL’s tactics. While these threats did not result in specific acts of violence, they may reasonably be assessed to indicate a growing awareness within the Homeland of the group’s message and activities.

- (U//LES) Two threats were directed against the President of the United States and several others were anti-Semitic and anti-Israel threats disseminated over social media. In October 2014, an individual threatened to behead a law enforcement officer, according to law enforcement reporting.
- (U) In early September 2014, the Twitter account of an individual called for the assassination of Twitter employees in San Francisco as retribution for the suspension of several accounts associated with ISIL.

(U//FOUO) ISIL leverages social media to propagate its message and benefits from thousands of organized supporters globally online, primarily on Twitter, who seek to legitimize its actions while burnishing an image of strength and power. This influence is underscored by the large number of incidents that were derived from social media postings.

- (U//LES) Just over one-third of the suspicious incidents examined were based on social media postings—including videos and pictures—which, in combination with DHS open source reporting, portrayed individuals’ communicating support for ISIL’s recent terrorist acts, promoting the establishment of an allegedly functioning state, or making pro-ISIL threats.
- (U//FOUO) Since August 2014, a number of presumed US persons conveyed support for ISIL’s methods via peer-to-peer social media platforms by disseminating official ISIL messaging, according to a body of DHS open source reporting.
- (U//FOUO) In separate incidents in August 2014, individuals using the hashtag “#AmessagefromISISToUS,” re-tweeted statements and photographs—such as of an illuminated cell phone screen image of the flag employed by ISIL with the White House in the background—and of an Arabic-language note taken outside an identified building in Chicago, implying an ISIL presence in the United States.

(U//FOUO) ISIL’s Legitimacy Based Largely on Support of the Caliphate, Tactics Justified as Defense against Western Attacks

(U//LES) We assess ISIL’s legitimacy, among those who have expressed support for its goals, is based largely on the appeal of the caliphate, and enhanced by the military gains ISIL achieved in 2014. From that basis, a wide range of justifications for ISIL’s violent tactics—including the beheadings of Western journalists and encouragement of attacks in the United States—were cited as necessary to defend Muslims against enemy attacks and to defend ISIL’s self-proclaimed re-establishment of the caliphate. Sectarianism is a key tenet of ISIL’s ideology and we identified anti-Shia statements, in the context of support for ISIL, in a few reported incidents.

- (U//LES) Several US persons incarcerated on terrorism-related charges, whose statements indicated their support for ISIL, argued the caliphate is legitimate and justified the beheading of American journalists as a necessary response to US involvement in Syria and Iraq according to BOP reporting.
- (U//LES) An inmate incarcerated on terrorism charges, in separate conversations in April and July 2014 with family members, offered his support for ISIL's activities and stated his belief that there is a need to "finish Shiites and other disbelievers," according to BOP reporting. Separately, an individual in the Fort Worth, Texas area in early September 2014 spoke out against the Shia community and praised ISIL's tactics, according to DHS reporting from a source with secondhand knowledge of the information. We are only aware of limited instances of anti-Shia violence or threats of violence in the United States, and we assess these instance have often been inspired by developments in a foreign conflict zone.
- (U//FOUO) Our review of DHS open source reporting between August and October 2014—after US-led air strikes began and during which time ISIL released multiple messages advocating lone offender attacks in the West—reveals presumed US persons defended ISIL's beheadings of American journalists, advocated for retaliatory attacks in the United States, and provided religious justification for prospective HVEs to travel to Syria to fight on behalf of ISIL.
- (U//FOUO) Our review of a body of criminal indictments of several US persons—who were arrested for attempting to travel overseas to provide material support to ISIL—indicates they appear to have been motivated by the general desire to fight overseas, defend Muslims against aggressors, and join like-minded violent extremists. These narratives are reinforced in ISIL messaging.
- (U//FOUO) An Ohio-based US person arrested in early January 2015 voiced support for ISIL and for violent attacks previously committed in North America. According to a criminal

(U//FOUO) Divide Between AQ and ISIL Leadership Not Resonating Amongst US-based ISIL HVEs

(U//FOUO) The formal split between AQ and ISIL—announced by AQ leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in February 2014—raised tensions between the terrorist groups, but we assess has not caused HVEs to take sides. Although the catalysts of radicalization and mobilization to violence vary from case-to-case, a resemblance between AQ and ISIL calls for potential HVEs to engage in lone offender attacks in the West and defend Muslims against Western aggression—especially in English-language messaging—may lead some potential HVEs to embrace the groups' similarities more than their distinctions.

- (U//LES) During a BOP search in October 2014, an incarcerated known or suspected terrorist was found in possession of images of Usama bin Ladin, Ayman al-Zawahiri, ISIL leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, several deceased US persons linked to ISIL and al-Shabaab, as well as images from the video recordings of ISIL's beheadings of US and UK citizens.
- (U//LES) In June 2014, a separate US person incarcerated on terrorism charges praised the May 2014 suicide bombing by a deceased US person in Syria on behalf of Jabhat al-Nusra, an AQ affiliate. In July 2014, the incarcerated individual praised ISIL and called for pledges of allegiance to Baghdadi according to BOP reporting.
- (U//FOUO) A Colorado-based US person arrested for attempting to join ISIL researched both ISIL and DVDs of deceased AQAP operational leader Anwar al-Aulaqi, according to a criminal complaint.
- (U) A US person from Minnesota, allegedly in Syria supporting ISIL, posted quotes from Aulaqi on social media and at one point was unsure of whether to join ISIL or the AQ-affiliated Jabhat al-Nusra, according to press reporting.

* (U//FOUO) DHS defines radicalization as the process through which an individual changes from a non-violent belief system to a belief system that includes the willingness to actively advocate, facilitate, or use unlawful violence as a method to effect societal or political change.

complaint, the individual was planning an attack against government employees, including members of Congress, whom he considered legitimate targets.

(U) Outlook

(U//FOUO) We assess that we will likely continue to observe US-based individuals using social media platforms to call for participation in violent action in the West, to post or seek guidance about travel to Syria or Iraq, and to participate in or solicit US-based material support to terrorists overseas. We are concerned that if this activity is sustained over time, US-based individuals who support ISIL's goals and methods could become aware of one another and network their ISIL-related activity, especially if they do not perceive the risk of detection by law enforcement as high. Alternatively, if social media activity is disrupted—for example, through targeted and sustained account suspensions by the hosting companies—lone offender attacks may become more likely as law enforcement pressure could cause some US-based individuals to mobilize on their own, in an attempt to avoid disruption.*

(U) Intelligence Gaps

- (U//FOUO) Does the increased number of SARs primarily reflect US-based support for ISIL's goals or simply promotion of the ISIL brand as a counterculture symbol?
- (U//FOUO) To what extent is increased awareness in the field of ISIL driving the drafting and release of SARs on individuals potentially linked to or motivated by the group?
- (U//FOUO) How many of the SARs mentioning ISIL resolve to individuals affiliated with the group or intending to provide material support or take violent action on its behalf?
- (U//FOUO) Are the justifications for ISIL's violent acts that are made on social media platforms the same justification made by individuals arrested and charged for supporting ISIL?
- (U//FOUO) To what extent are US-based ISIL members networked with one another?
- (U//FOUO) How many US-based potential HVEs are receiving direction from ISIL members overseas versus acting entirely independently?
- (U//FOUO) What are the primary factors causing US-based HVEs to mobilize to commit attacks at home or travel to fight in Syria or Iraq?

(U) Indicators

(U) Potential indications of an individual preparing to travel to join foreign terrorist organizations or other violent extremist groups in Syria or Iraq, as well as taking steps to mobilize for violence in the Homeland, are included below. Some of these activities may be constitutionally protected, and any determination of possible illicit intent must be supported by additional facts that justify reasonable suspicion. Any one of these activities may be insignificant on its own, but when witnessed in combination with other observed suspicious behaviors—particularly advocacy of violence—they may constitute a basis for reporting.

* (U//FOUO) This forward-looking assessment of possible future developments related to ISIL messaging is based on an analytic exercise conducted by State and Local Fusion Center intelligence and law enforcement personnel, and moderated by Intelligence Community tradecraft experts provided by DHS I&A.

(U//FOUO) Potential Indicators of Travel to Engage in Overseas Violence

- (U//FOUO) Communicating online with Syria or Iraq-based violent extremists for advice on travel routes to Syria;
- (U//FOUO) New participation in weapons training or paramilitary exercises in preparation for engaging in violence abroad;
- (U//FOUO) Destroying computers and taking down social media profiles prior to travel to areas with known violent extremist activity;
- (U//FOUO) Giving away or selling worldly possessions, to include cars and electronics, in conjunction with an expressed desire to die fighting overseas;
- (U//FOUO) Concealing travel history, possibly to avoid detection of activities related to violent extremism; and
- (U//FOUO) Making travel arrangements—including application for documents and identification necessary for travel or procurement of fraudulent travel documents—in conjunction with advocacy of travel to join violent extremist causes.

(U//FOUO) Possible Behaviors Associated with Individual Radicalization and Mobilization to Violence

- (U//FOUO) New or increased advocacy of violence including providing material support or recruiting others to commit criminal acts;
- (U//FOUO) Showing violent extremist messaging produced by al-Qa'ida, its affiliates, ISIL, or other inspired groups to prospective recruits to encourage them to engage in violence;
- (U//FOUO) Consumption and sharing of media glorifying violent extremist acts;
- (U//FOUO) Reports to law enforcement that a community member has initiated unexplained isolation, including broken contact with friends and family, unexplained self-initiated exit from school or work, combined with advocacy of violence;
- (U//FOUO) Adoption of new lifestyles, changes in appearance, and segregation from normal peer and family groups in association with advocating criminal or terrorist activity; or
- (U//FOUO) Communicating with known or suspected homegrown or foreign-based violent extremists using email or social media platforms.

(U) DHS I&A Perspective

(U//FOUO) This FAR's highlighting of unclassified and state and local law enforcement reporting, indicating a heightened level of support for ISIL among US-based individuals, is consistent with I&A's review of all-source reporting on the topic. We concur with the FAR's judgments that ISIL's 2014 successes on the ground in Iraq and Syria—especially its declaration reestablishing the caliphate—and sophisticated English-language messaging campaign, and use of social media are key drivers contributing to the group's support among a small subset of US-based individuals.

(U//FOUO) We assess that—as long as ISIL maintains at least its current level of perceived legitimacy and relevancy—most US-based individuals interested in fighting overseas in a Muslim-majority country will be more likely to seek to join ISIL than other violent extremist groups. Similarly, we judge that US-based individuals who prioritize engaging in homeland plotting over travel to a conflict zone will be more likely to derive inspiration from ISIL than AQ or any of its affiliates, especially given ISIL's now regular call for lone offender attacks in the Homeland.

(U//FOUO) This FAR particularly highlights the potential use of SARs in revealing indications of a pattern of homeland activity, and we share the FAR's **moderate confidence** in its analytic judgments, which we deem consistent with all source assessments benefiting from additional sources of information. However, we caveat that increased reporting alleging ISIL activity, including SAR, likely reflect some reporting bias, based on a heightened awareness of the ISIL threat, and thus a willingness to ascribe some otherwise ambiguous activities as being linked to ISIL. Consistent with prior DHS guidance, we encourage reporting entities to follow up on SAR with FBI, and the National Network of Fusion Centers, as appropriate, to gather additional relevant information and ensure that reports being consulted have not been resolved via further investigation.

(U//FOUO) Comments, requests, or shareable intelligence may be directed to the Mid-Atlantic Region SL_MidAtlanticRegion@hq.dhs.gov.

(U) Source Summary Statement

(U//FOUO) We have **medium confidence** in our judgment that some US-based individuals are increasingly receptive to ISIL messaging when compared against other terrorist groups, based on our review of SAR, social media information, BOP reporting, and criminal complaints of individuals associated with ISIL. We acknowledge that this body of reporting is not comprehensive, and may not definitively describe the threat environment as depicted by all source—including investigative and classified—reporting.

(U//LES) We used four datasets to inform this *Assessment*, each offering a different layer of insight regarding the impact or resonance of ISIL's message and the perceived legitimacy of its actions by a subset of US persons. A larger pool of information is needed to assess how the resonance of ISIL's action and messaging may increase the threat to the Homeland.

- (U//FOUO) Tips and leads, also referred to as SARs, from the public or partner law enforcement agencies to fusion centers provided incident-specific information on ISIL-related reporting. As the SAR vetting process evolves, the quality and analytic value of the reports may be inconsistent. It is important to consider the facts, source reliability, and circumstances of the reported incident. Follow up occurs through the passing of information to investigative units, like the FBI-led joint terrorism task forces for further vetting. Aggregated, these SARs are useful for detecting increases in the penetration of ISIL's brand, but not for determining whether this corresponds to an increase in threat to the Homeland, as many anonymous tips threatening violence were determined to likely be not credible.
- (U//FOUO) Open source research highlighted English-speaking reactions of support, likely of some US persons, to ISIL-related social media and messaging efforts. These reports provided anecdotes on the types of justifications made for ISIL and the platforms used to further disseminate pro-ISIL messaging, but the sample size was too small to yield insight that can be used to reveal the motivations of ISIL's English-speaker supporters' writ large.
- (U) Criminal complaints and affidavits on US persons charged with supporting ISIL detailed specific information on likely motivations among ISIL supporters in the United States.

(U) Reporting on incarcerated US persons previously charged with terrorism-related crimes unrelated to ISIL provided insight into these individuals' perception of ISIL's tactics.

(U) Report Suspicious Activity

(U) To report suspicious activity, law enforcement, Fire-EMS, private security personnel, and emergency managers should follow established protocols; all other personnel should call 911 or contact local law enforcement.

Suspicious activity reports (SARs) will be forwarded to the appropriate fusion center and FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force for further action. For more information on the Nationwide SAR Initiative, visit <http://nsi.ncirc.gov/resources.aspx>.

(U) Tracked by: HSEC-8.1, HSEC-8.2, HSEC-8.3, HSEC-8.6, HSEC-8.8, HSEC-8.10