



31 August 2016

## (U//FOUO) **US Homegrown Violent Extremists Focusing More on Civilian Targets**

### (U) **Scope**

(U//FOUO) This *Joint Intelligence Bulletin (JIB)* is intended to provide new insight into the targeting preferences of some homegrown violent extremists (HVEs) and to examine detection challenges and opportunities.\* This *JIB* is provided by FBI, DHS, and NCTC to support their respective activities and to assist federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial government counterterrorism and law enforcement officials and private sector security partners in deterring, preventing, or disrupting terrorist attacks within the United States.

(U//FOUO) Coordinated with NPPD.

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\* (U//FOUO) FBI, DHS and NCTC define an 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 or influence from a foreign actor.

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**(U//FOUO) HVEs Increasingly Prioritizing Civilian Targets**

(U//FOUO) We assess that HVEs are increasingly favoring civilian targets, judging from our review of HVE targeting activity since January 2015, when the first ISIL-inspired HVE plot occurred after ISIL began publicly calling for attacks in the West. This alters our previous assessment that most HVEs probably would prioritize law enforcement personnel, military members, and US Government-associated targets. While HVE activity over the past twelve months particularly has demonstrated a shift towards civilian targets, we note that HVE radicalization and attack planning are unique to each individual, and assess that some probably will continue targeting military and law enforcement personnel.\*

- » (U//FOUO) Seventy-seven percent of the thirteen HVE attacks and disruptions during the past twelve months focused on civilian targets, in contrast to eleven percent of the eighteen HVE attacks and disruptions in the first seven months of 2015, according to our review.
- » (U//FOUO) Three HVE plots in 2016 targeted houses of worship, the first such cases since a 2009 plot against a New York-based synagogue, according to our review. In addition, since the beginning of 2015, HVEs have plotted against or attacked restaurants, a nightclub, a concert, a public ceremony, a place of employment, and a college classroom, demonstrating the variety of targeting choices.

**(U//FOUO) Convergence of Factors Likely Motivating HVEs to Select Civilian Targets**

(U//FOUO) HVEs likely focus on civilian targets because of a combination of factors, to include perceived lower levels of security at civilian targets, a desire to select familiar targets of personal significance to simplify plotting, direct encouragement from overseas violent extremists, and violent extremist messaging glorifying recent attacks on civilians.

- » (U) In December 2015, a Michigan-based HVE told an FBI undercover employee that he was planning to attack a local church on behalf of ISIL because it would be crowded and would be an easy target, as worshipers are not allowed to carry guns, and he believed that the attack would receive extensive media attention, according to court documents.
- » (U) In November 2015, a now-deceased HVE in California—who had viewed pro-ISIL messaging in the weeks prior—stabbed a classmate and three other individuals at his college, according to press reports. After the attack, local authorities found a note on the HVE citing his anger at being kicked out of a study group, according to US media reports.
- » (U) In December 2015, a New York-based HVE plotted to attack a local restaurant and bar and take hostages because an overseas ISIL member told him to attack nonbelievers at a crowded location on New Year's Eve, according to court documents.

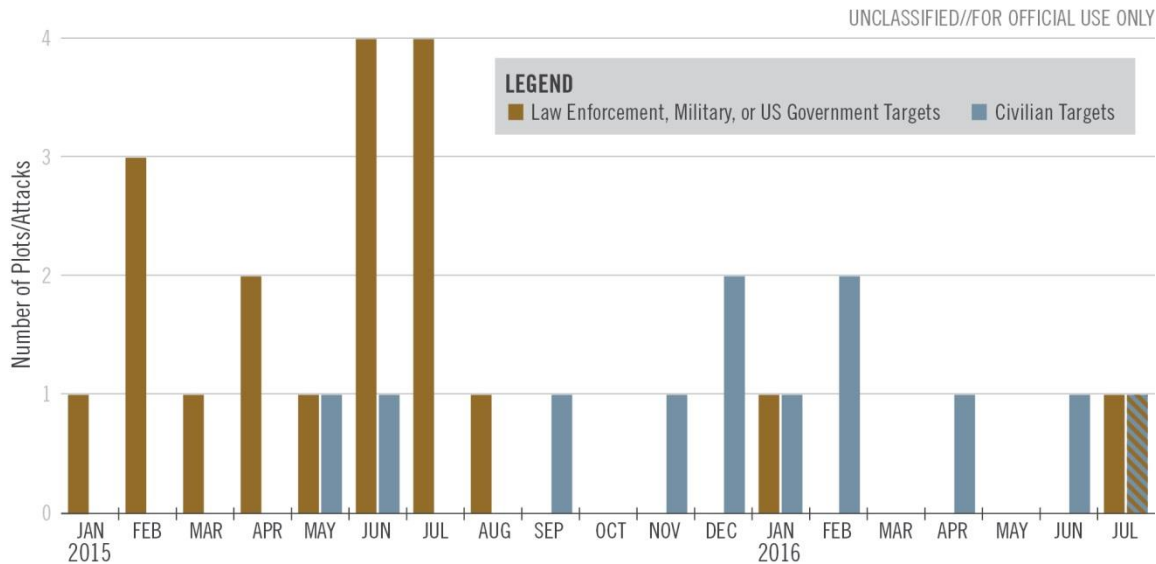
(U//FOUO) In May 2016, ISIL spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani publicly stated that ISIL supporters should target civilians in the West because of difficulties attacking military targets

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\* (U//FOUO) FBI and DHS define 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.

and retaliate for the anti-ISIL bombing. ISIL media offices also released numerous videos praising the Paris, Brussels, and Orlando attacks and encouraging similar operations in the West.

(U) **Target Selection of HVEs Attack and Plots, JAN 2015 – JUL 2016**



(U) **Outlook**

(U//FOUO) HVEs probably will continue to focus on civilian targets because of the combination of factors that make such targets attractive. We urge state and local authorities, as well as private sector security partners, to report suspicious activities related to potential mobilization to violence in the Homeland by US-based individuals inspired by foreign terrorist organizations. Many smaller public safety agencies still may not belong to a formal suspicious activity reporting mechanism within their state intelligence systems, however, this reporting gap may be mitigated.

(U) **Indicators**

(U//FOUO) Some observed behaviors that may be suspicious include constitutionally protected activity. These behaviors should not be reported absent articulable facts and circumstances that support the source agency's suspicion that the observed behavior is not innocent, but rather reasonably indicative of criminal activity associated with terrorism. These include indicators of material support to terrorist groups, indicators of violent extremist radicalization, and signs of travel overseas with the intent of engaging in violence.

(U) **Past Behaviors Associated with Pre-Operational Surveillance and Testing of Security**

- » (U//FOUO) Suspicious observation of or unusual questions to building maintenance or security personnel about security procedures;
- » (U//FOUO) Engaging in overtly suspicious actions to provoke and observe responses by security or law enforcement officers;

- » (U//FOUO) Suspicious interest in entry points, peak days and hours of operation, security personnel, surveillance assets (including cameras), and access controls such as alarms, barriers, doors, gates, or locks;
- » (U//FOUO) Suspicious observation of security reaction drills or procedures; multiple false alarms or fictitious emergency calls to same locations or similar venues;
- » (U//FOUO) Loitering, parking, or standing in the same area over multiple days with no reasonable explanation;
- » (U//FOUO) Unusual attention to or avoidance of surveillance cameras;
- » (U//FOUO) Attempts to disguise appearance from visit to visit (change in hair color, style of dress);
- » (U//FOUO) Interest without justification in obtaining site plans, ingress and egress routes, and information on employees or the public;
- » (U//FOUO) Garments not appropriate for weather/seasons or location;
- » (U//FOUO) Unusual behavior, such as staring at or quickly looking away from personnel or vehicles entering or leaving facilities or parking areas;
- » (U//FOUO) Discreet use of still cameras and video recorders or note taking or use of sketching materials, consistent with pre-operational surveillance, that would raise suspicion in a reasonable person;
- » (U//FOUO) Attempted or unauthorized access to rooftops or other potentially sensitive areas; and
- » (U//FOUO) Suspicious observations of or questions about facility air conditioning, heating, and ventilation systems.

#### **(U) Potential Indicators of Violent Extremist Radicalization or Mobilization**

(U) Recognition of common indicators, combined with a fundamental understanding of recruitment and radicalization tactics, may allow for the early detection of those at risk and assist in intervention efforts.

- » (U//FOUO) Communicating with known or suspected foreign-based or US-based violent extremists using e-mail, social media platforms, or messaging applications;
- » (U//FOUO) New or increased advocacy of violence, including providing material support or recruiting others to commit criminal acts;
- » (U//FOUO) Consumption and sharing of media glorifying violent extremist acts in attempting to mobilize others to violence;

- » (U//FOUO) Active participation in, or encouraging visits to, violent extremist websites highlighting perceived Western atrocities against Muslims to encourage others to engage in violence;
- » (U//FOUO) Advocating that their religious, cultural, or national group requires violent defense from an external threat, combined with advocacy of violence;
- » (U//FOUO) Reports 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) Participation in paramilitary exercises and reconnaissance and surveillance activities in a manner that is reasonably indicative of pre-operational planning related to terrorism, particularly in conjunction with advocacy of violence;
- » (U//FOUO) Training behavior that would arouse suspicion in a reasonable person, such as the targeting of effigies, mimicking specific operational conditions at gun ranges or gun shows, or practicing assault tactics at paintball facilities;
- » (U//FOUO) Use of cover terms to mask the true meaning of events or nefarious activities combined with active advocacy of violence;
- » (U//FOUO) Attempting to or successfully acquiring firearms or ammunition prohibited under federal, state, or local law;
- » (U//FOUO) Suspicious weapons purchases, such as attempted purchases by individuals providing inconsistent or suspect identification, refusal to fill out the appropriate documentation, or issuance of vague or cryptic warnings that are violent in nature during purchase;
- » (U//FOUO) Acquisition of suspicious quantities of weapons and ammunition, or materials that could be used to produce explosives such as hydrogen peroxide, acetone, gasoline, propane, or fertilizer;
- » (U//FOUO) Attempting to enlist in the US military or state and local law enforcement, or seeking employment in a correctional institution by individuals confirmed to be known or suspected terrorist matches in government counterterrorism screening databases;
- » (U//FOUO) Testing of operation response systems associated with commercial facilities may be indicated by a pattern of false alarms, equipment failures, or power outages; and
- » (U//FOUO) Inquiring about operations or security measures in publically accessible areas; using video/camera/observation equipment; or possessing maps, photos, or diagrams that are not related to their jobs.

#### (U) **DHS Hometown Security: Tools to Help Your Community Prepare**

(U) DHS provides free tools and resources to communities because the Department recognizes that communities are the first line of defense in keeping the public safe and secure.

The Department encourages businesses to **Connect, Plan, Train, and Report**. Applying these four steps in advance of an incident or attack can help better prepare businesses and their employees to proactively think about the role they play in the safety and security of their businesses and communities.

» (U) Find more at <https://www.dhs.gov/hometown-security>

### (U) Responding to Active Shooters and Improvised Explosive Devices

(U) To assist law enforcement in better understanding and responding to violent situations, active shooter resources are available on [www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov). Additional resources are available below.

- » (U) FBI Active Shooter Study: <https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/fbi-releases-study-on-active-shooter-incidents>
- » (U) DHS Active Shooter Resources: [www.dhs.gov/active-shooter-preparedness](http://www.dhs.gov/active-shooter-preparedness)
- » (U) Counter-IED information: <https://TRIPwire.dhs.gov>

#### (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) Administrative Note: Law Enforcement Response

(U//FOUO) Information contained in this intelligence bulletin is for official use only. No portion of this bulletin should be released to the media, the general public, or over nonsecure Internet servers. Release of this material could adversely affect or jeopardize investigative activities.

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(U) Tracked by: HSEC-8.1 HSEC-8.2, HSEC-8.3, HSEC-8.5