

Homeland  
Security

INTELLIGENCE NOTE

1 June 2020

## (U) Counterterrorism

### (U//FOUO) Violent Opportunist Tactics Observed During Civil Disturbances 26-31 May

(U//FOUO) **Scope.** This *Intelligence Note (IN)* provides a summary of tactics used by violent opportunists observed in conjunction with lawful protests since 26 May 2020. While this *IN* focuses on the current period of opportunistic violence during lawful nationwide protests, many of the tactics discussed here have previously been encountered by security officials and are likely to be encountered during future disruption of lawful protest activity by violent opportunists. This information is being provided to federal, state, and local partners to aid in awareness of violent opportunists' and domestic violent extremists' (DVEs) tactics and to aid in mitigation planning for future events where these tactics may be encountered. This *IN* is current as of 31 May 2020.

(U//FOUO) Prepared by the DHS Intelligence Enterprise (DHS IE) Counterterrorism Mission Center (CTMC). Coordinated with CBP, CISA, CWMD, DHS IE Field Operations Division, ICE, JCAT, NCTC, TSA, and USCG.

(U//FOUO) We assess that violent opportunists will continue to exploit ongoing nationwide lawful protests as a pretext to attempt to disrupt law enforcement operations; target law enforcement personnel, assets, and facilities; and damage public and private property. We have identified multiple tactics currently at play, including the use of weapons, counter-mobility, physical barriers, screening and concealment, intercepted communications, and pre-operational activities.

#### (U//FOUO) Weapons Tactics

(U//FOUO) **Improvised Incendiary Devices (IIDs):** We have received numerous reports of violent opportunists using Molotov Cocktails targeting law enforcement assets. A Molotov Cocktail is a generic term for any handheld, flammable liquid-based, improvised incendiary device contained in a bottle. On 29 May, two separate events in New York City resulted in four arrests and damage to one New York Police Department vehicle.<sup>1</sup> In a similar incident, suspected anarchist extremists used a Molotov Cocktail against law enforcement performing crowd control activities in Louisville, Kentucky, on 29 May.<sup>2</sup>

(U//FOUO) **Improvised Fireworks:** A violent opportunist ignited and threw an improvised device at law enforcement personnel protecting the lobby of a major media outlet in Atlanta during the evening of 30 May. The device, which was slightly more powerful than small fireworks, caused a loud detonation, but did not appear to cause any injuries.<sup>3</sup>

(U//FOUO) **Laser Pointers:** On 28 May in Minneapolis, Minnesota, laser pointers were directed against law enforcement personnel by an unknown individual.<sup>4</sup> In a separate incident, on the evening of 31 May a laser pointer was directed at a Milwaukee, Wisconsin, law enforcement unmanned aircraft system (UAS).<sup>5</sup> While not illegal to possess or use, laser pointers have been used for many years at otherwise lawful protests as an attempt to visually impair law enforcement personnel, and more recently to obscure video monitoring/face recognition systems. Popular colors are red, green, and blue and the green and blue lasers can project further, with greater intensity than red lasers.<sup>6</sup>

(U//FOUO) **Projectiles (Bricks, Concrete, Debris):** A long-used tactic of violent opportunists is to utilize either pre-staged bricks/rocks; use hand tools to destroy sidewalks to create debris; or steal material from construction sites, to use

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these materials against law enforcement or for breaching windows, typically of retail outlets and banks. On 31 May, traditional media reported that Minnesota law enforcement discovered hidden caches of flammable materials, rocks, and other projectiles.<sup>7</sup> In addition to the potential for injury, use of these items by violent opportunists may be a means to provoke law enforcement to take aggressive action against the preparator(s), which would likely be captured on video and shared on social media.

**(U//FOUO) Concealed Weapons/Hand tools:** Violent opportunists may bring small hand tools—such as hammers, picks, or tire irons—concealed in backpacks to lawful protests to engage in violence or conduct other criminal activity. These objects can be multi-functional including use as: handheld weapons, breaching tools to break windows or pry open doors of vehicles and structures; or, as mentioned above, tools to acquire sources of projected items. On 31 May, protesters in Washington, DC, stopped a violent opportunist who was damaging a sidewalk using hand tools, and handed the individual over to nearby Washington Metro Police Department officers.<sup>8</sup> The production of debris in such a manner has been highlighted in anarchist extremists texts as a means to produce objects which could be thrown at law enforcement and used to damage various targets of opportunity such as emergency service vehicles, retail and banking facilities, or government facilities.

### **(U//FOUO) Counter-mobility, Physical Barriers, Screening, and Concealment Tactics**

**(U//FOUO) Improvised Obstacles:** Violent opportunists may use items found in urban areas—such as trash cans, wheeled dumpsters, road signs, newspaper stands, and looted debris—to form a defensive perimeter or to block or attempt to delay access by law enforcement to a specific area. Generally, we have not seen widespread use of this tactic during the current period of violence during lawful protests. New York City noted that violent opportunists used barricades for crowd control, as well as burning wheeled dumpsters to create barriers between them and police.<sup>9</sup> Violent opportunists have been observed using burning wheeled dumpsters as an attempt to breach law enforcement lines in Washington, DC, on the evening of 30 May.<sup>10</sup>

**(U//FOUO) Screening:** Violent opportunists in Los Angeles on 30 May were observed using screened fences which had been stolen from a nearby construction site to form a screening barrier against an approaching line of law enforcement.<sup>11</sup> On 29 May violent opportunists in Louisville, Kentucky, used a large banner to screen their movements from law enforcement.<sup>12</sup> These screens serve two functions: 1) To conceal movement of specific personnel from law enforcement on the ground, and 2) to act as a barrier against rubber bullets; paint rounds; and other less-than-lethal riot control weapons. Variations of this tactic could include using plywood, banners, or umbrellas. An individual with an umbrella was observed on the front line of a group of violent opportunists during activity at a major news outlet in Atlanta on 30 May, likely intended to restrict visibility of law enforcement personnel and to deflect low velocity riot control devices.<sup>13</sup>

### **(U//FOUO) Pre-Operational Surveillance and Reconnaissance**

**(U//FOUO) Compromising Emergency Service Communications<sup>a</sup>:** As of 30 May, law enforcement officials in Portland, Oregon reported that they assessed that well-coordinated groups had potentially compromised law enforcement radio communications, according to DHS operational information.<sup>14</sup> Police officers in Minneapolis earlier this week were forced to switch to cell phones for tactical communications after learning their communications were being monitored by individuals using publicly available police scanner apps to disrupt law enforcement operations, according to unverified press reporting.<sup>15</sup>

**(U//FOUO) Pre-Operational Activities:** In the days before a planned protest, violent opportunists may conduct reconnaissance of the planned route and assembly area. This is mainly to identify sources for weapons or improvised barriers, such as construction sites, retail outlets, pre-staged crowd barriers, or road construction barriers; stockpile improvised weapons caches; and establish rally points or escape routes. On 29 May, suspected anarchist extremists in Louisville, Kentucky, cached weapons and supplies throughout the city prior to engaging in

<sup>a</sup> (U//FOUO) Reference *Intelligence Note* “(U//FOUO) Potential for Illicit Actors Monitoring and Disrupting Law Enforcement Communications During Ongoing Violence”, dated 31 May 2020, for additional information.

violent acts. Items included baseball bats, water, milk (likely as a means to counteract the effects of tear gas), and other medical supplies.<sup>16,b</sup>

#### (U) DHS Definitions

(U//FOUO) **Anarchist Extremists:** DHS defines anarchist extremists as groups or individuals who facilitate or engage in acts of unlawful violence as a means of changing the government and society in support of the belief that all forms of capitalism and corporate globalization should be opposed and that governing institutions are unnecessary and harmful to society.

(U//FOUO) **Domestic Violent Extremists (DVEs):** The FBI and DHS define a domestic violent extremist (DVE) as an individual based and operating primarily within the United States or its territories without direction or inspiration from a foreign terrorist group or other foreign power who seeks to further political or social goals wholly or in part through unlawful acts of force or violence. The mere advocacy of political or social positions, political activism, use of strong rhetoric, or generalized philosophic embrace of violent tactics may not constitute extremism, and may be constitutionally protected.

(U//FOUO) **Violent Opportunists:** DHS I&A defines violent opportunists as Illicit actors who may or may not hold violent extremist ideological beliefs, but seek to exploit opportunities in non-violent protests to engage in unlawful violence against federal, state, or local government and law enforcement personnel or facilities, as well as other critical infrastructure, that either poses a danger to human life, threat of potential destruction of the critical infrastructure, or would be so disruptive as to endanger the minimal operations of state and local governments to respond. These actors may capitalize on violent extremist narratives often espoused by organized DVE movements, such as anarchist extremists or racially motivated violent extremists, to justify violent activities that may potentially destroy government critical infrastructure at the state, local and federal levels, and may attempt to incite others to violence to provide cover for their own illicit activities. Their primary motivations may be influenced by a variety of criminal objectives and goals.

#### (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-8.2, HSEC 8.3, HSEC-8.8, HSEC-8.9

<sup>b</sup> (U//FOUO) According to some online instructions, washing eyes with milk is promoted as a countermeasure to exposure to riot control agents/tear gas. Other homemade countermeasures include soaking a mask or bandana in vinegar, apple cider, or soft drinks, or using a baking soda and water mixture to flush the eyes. There are no studies that conclude these methods are effective in minimizing the effects of exposure to riot control agents/tear gas.

**(U) Source Summary Statement**

(U//FOUO) We have **high confidence** in our assessment that violent opportunists will continue to conduct activities directed at law enforcement and damage public and private property. We base this on observed tactics since 26 May derived from law enforcement, traditional media, and social media reporting.

- <sup>1</sup> [New York Times | 31 May 2020 | “Two Lawyers Arrested in Molotov Cocktail Attack on Police in Brooklyn” | <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/nyregion/nyc-protests-lawyer-molotov-cocktail.html> | (U) | (U) ]
- <sup>2</sup> (U//FOUO) [DHS | 30 MAY 2020 | FIR 0081-20 | “Tactics Used by Suspected Anarchist Extremists to Attack Law Enforcement and Incite Violence” | (U//FOUO) | (U//FOUO) ]
- <sup>3</sup> [CNN | 30 MAY 2020 | “Object explodes during protest at CNN Center” | (U) | (U) ]
- <sup>4</sup> [CNN | 28 MAY 2020 | ‘screen capture of CNN broadcast <https://www.cnn.com> | (U) | (U) ]
- <sup>5</sup> [DHS | 31 MAY 2020 | “(U//FOUO) Wisconsin Update – 8” | (U//FOUO) | (U//FOUO) ]
- <sup>6</sup> [Online retailer | 28 May 2020 | Search: Handheld Laser Pointer; Handheld Blue Laser; Handheld Green | (U) | (U) ]
- <sup>7</sup> [CNN | 31 MAY 2020 | “Minnesota law enforcement find incendiaries, weapons and stolen vehicles while responding to protests” | [https://www.cnn.com/us/live-news/george-floyd-protests-05-31-20/h\\_472523811c79567c48487ce20fa13d75](https://www.cnn.com/us/live-news/george-floyd-protests-05-31-20/h_472523811c79567c48487ce20fa13d75) | (U) | (U) ]
- <sup>8</sup> (U) WFMZ | 31 MAY 2020 | “DC: Protesters Hand Over Agitator to Police” | [https://www.wfmz.com/news/cnn/us-national/dc-protesters-hand-over-agitator-to-police/video\\_fa928325-2eaf-5f07-a34e-f820f2ce3a57.html](https://www.wfmz.com/news/cnn/us-national/dc-protesters-hand-over-agitator-to-police/video_fa928325-2eaf-5f07-a34e-f820f2ce3a57.html) | (U) | (U) ]
- <sup>9</sup> (U//FOUO) DHS | 1 JUN 2020 | Email Response from DHS NYC Intelligence Officer on Protest Activity | (U//FOUO) | (U//FOUO) | ]
- <sup>10</sup> (U) DHS B&A
- <sup>11</sup> (U) [KTLA | Live footage of protests in Los Angeles Area | 30 MAY 2020 | (U) | (U) ]
- <sup>12</sup> (U//FOUO) [DHS | 30 MAY 2020 | FIR 0081-20 | “Tactics Used by Suspected Anarchist Extremists to Attack Law Enforcement and Incite Violence” | (U//FOUO) | (U//FOUO) ]
- <sup>13</sup> [CNN | 30 MAY 2020 | “Object explodes during protest at CNN Center” | (U) | (U) ]
- <sup>14</sup> (U) [DHS | Operational Reporting from DHS Field Intelligence Officers | 30 MAY 2020 | (U//FOUO) | (U//FOUO) ]
- <sup>15</sup> (U); [Coffeordie.com | 31 MAY 2020 | “George Floyd Death Sparks Violent Protests in Minneapolis – Here’s What You Need to Know” | <https://coffeordie.com/violent-protests-minneapolis/> | (U) | (U) ]
- <sup>16</sup> (U//FOUO) [DHS | 30 MAY 2020 | FIR 0081-20 | “Tactics Used by Suspected Anarchist Extremists to Attack Law Enforcement and Incite Violence” | (U//FOUO) | (U//FOUO) ]