



# MCAC | MARYLAND COORDINATION AND ANALYSIS CENTER

## SITUATIONAL AWARENESS BULLETIN

28 July 2020

MCAC202007-00540

### (U) ISLAMIC STATE PROPAGANDA VIDEO ENCOURAGES SUPPORTERS TO CONDUCT INCENDIARY ATTACKS IN THE HOMELAND

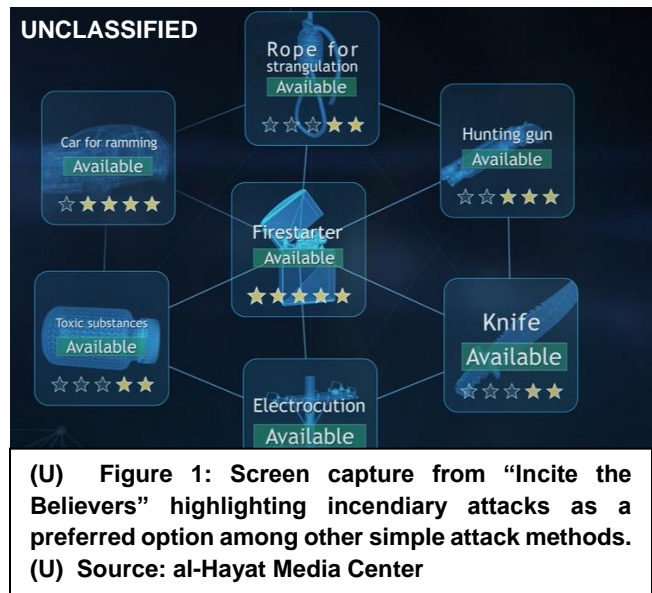
#### (U) SUMMARY

(U) On 26 July 2020, al-Hayat Media Center, a news outlet of the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (ISIS)<sup>a</sup>, released an English-language propaganda video entitled “*Incite the Believers*,” which encourages ISIS supporters to conduct incendiary attacks<sup>b</sup> in the United States<sup>1</sup>. The narrator acknowledges that ISIS supporters may have difficulty traveling to ISIS-controlled territory overseas and instead encourages them to conduct attacks where they live. The video also encourages ISIS supporters who are unable to obtain firearms or explosives to consider using incendiary attacks as an alternative.

#### (U//FOUO) INCENDIARY ATTACKS LIKELY ENCOURAGED DUE TO THEIR PERCEIVED SIMPLICITY AND OPERATIONAL SECURITY

(U) “*Incite the Believers*” encourages the use of incendiary attacks as an accessible alternative for those who are unable to obtain firearms, explosives, or other weapons. The narrator describes fire as a simple and historically recognized way to attack enemies, claiming that “even children are proficient in using it. And people have used it since ancient times to harm their enemies.”

(U//FOUO) While the video includes images of “Molotov cocktails,” it does not provide instructions on the manufacture of improvised incendiary devices (IIDs) or recipes for improvised accelerants



<sup>a</sup> (U) On 21 March 2019, the Department of State amended its’ terrorism designation of the Islamic State to include al-Hayat Media Center as part of a Foreign Terrorism Organization.

<sup>b</sup> (U) The term “incendiary attacks” refers to attacks in which an intentionally-set fire is used to damage property or cause casualties. This term is used in place of “arson attacks”, as arson is a specific criminal charge that may or may not apply to an incendiary attack depending on the circumstances of the incident and applicable criminal statutes.

(such as improvised napalm); but instead focuses on readily available ignition sources such as matches and/or lighters.

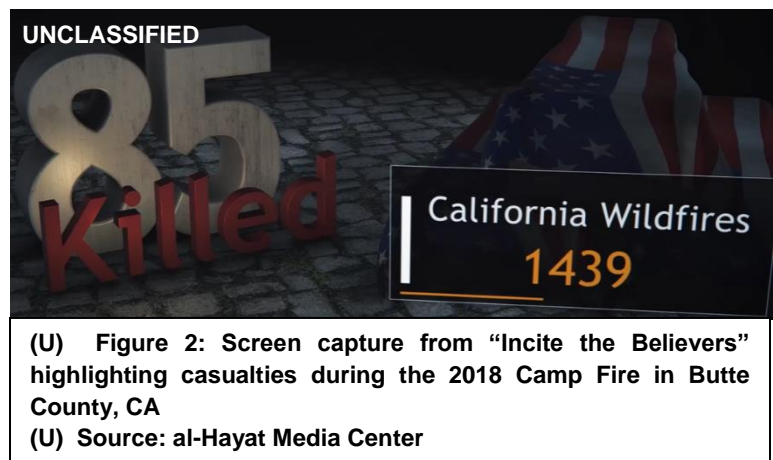
- (U//FOUO) While these simple ignition sources are likely to be less effective than IIDs or improvised accelerants, these methods require fewer precursor materials and no chemistry experience, and are likely perceived as a safer option to avoid law enforcement detection. MCAC assesses that it is very unlikely that the purchase of matches or lighters will result in suspicious activity reporting, decreasing the likelihood that a plot could be disrupted by law enforcement prior to execution.
- (U//FOUO) Unlike plots involving IIDs or improvised accelerants, incendiary attacks using simple ignition methods require no pre-operational manufacturing. This likely decreases the chances that the attacker is injured prior to the attack and increases the likelihood of successful execution.

(U//FOUO) The narrator also instructs potential attackers to dispose of ignition sources and other evidence following an attack in order to avoid law enforcement detection. This may increase the attractiveness of incendiary attack tactics for those ISIS supporters who are less willing to risk death or arrest/capture.

## **(U) VIDEO PRIMARILY FOCUSES ON TARGETING THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR, BUT OTHER TARGET LOCATIONS ARE REFERENCED**

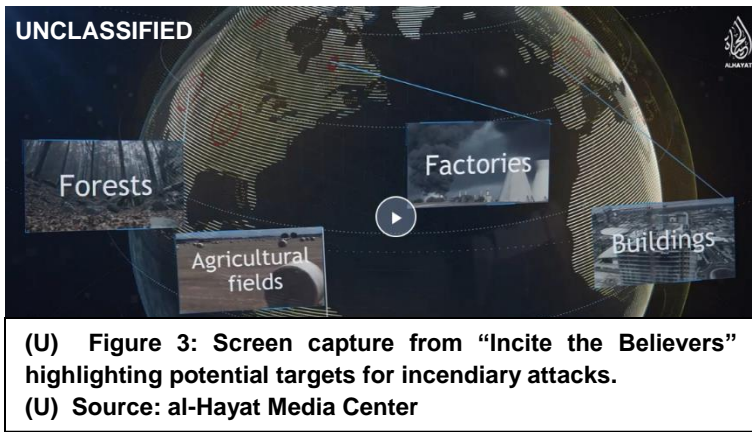
(U) The most prevalent tactics highlighted in the video are arson attacks targeting wildlands or agriculture. The video depicts several significant wildfires in recent history as evidence of the effectiveness of incendiary attacks, including:

- (U) 2019-2020 wildfires in Australia, which resulted in over 72,000 square miles burned, 3,500 structures destroyed, and 34 deaths<sup>2</sup>
- (U) 2018 Camp Fire in Butte County, CA, which resulted in 239 square miles burned, over 14,000 homes destroyed, and 85 fatalities<sup>3</sup>
- (U) 2018 wildfires in Greece, which resulted in over 12 square miles burned, 3,200 structures destroyed, and 102 fatalities<sup>4</sup>



(U) The only specific location in the US referenced in the video is the State of California, which is marked with an “X” on a map.





(U) Shortly before the end of the video, a graphic depicts four specific target types; including forests, agricultural fields, factories, and buildings.

(U) The video does not encourage the targeting of fire department personnel or equipment, including water supply infrastructure.

## (U) FTOs' HISTORICAL INTEREST IN INCENDIARY ATTACKS

(U) Incendiary attacks have been a popular theme in FTO propaganda and have been utilized with some success overseas. Despite the frequency with which incendiary attacks are referenced in FTO publications and videos, FTO-inspired or directed incendiary attacks in the Homeland remain uncommon.

- (U) In May 2019, a series of large fires destroyed numerous agricultural fields and damaged power plants, oil fields, and refineries in Syria and northern Iraq. ISIS claimed responsibility for these attacks through their Amaq news outlet, some of which have been verified to have been ignited by ISIS through independent reporting.<sup>5</sup>
- (U) Between May 2018 and July 2018, FTOs, including Hamas, have utilized improvised incendiary devices (IIDs) attached to balloons and kites to ignite wildfires in Israeli-controlled regions of the Gaza Strip. During that time, over 1,500 acres of agricultural and open lands were burned.<sup>6</sup>
- (U) In January 2017, ISIS released the fifth issue of *Rumiyah* magazine. The featured article "Just Terror Tactics" included instructions for the manufacture of improvised napalm and highlighted potential target locations for incendiary attacks.<sup>7</sup>
- (U) In March 2013, al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) released the tenth issue of *Inspire* magazine, which provided instructions on conducting incendiary attacks targeting vehicles<sup>8</sup>. The ninth issue of *Inspire*, which was released in 2012, encouraged followers to ignite wildfires<sup>9</sup>.

## (U) OUTLOOK

**(U//FOUO) MCAC assesses that FTOs will very likely continue to release propaganda encouraging incendiary attacks in the Homeland; but that these propaganda releases are unlikely to impact the tactics and targets chosen by FTO-inspired attackers.**

- (U) According to the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), between September 2001 and January 2019, there has been only one successful FTO inspired, enabled, or directed incendiary attack in the United States.<sup>10</sup>
  - (U) In February 2018, a Minnesota woman was arrested on charges of attempting to provide material support to terrorism, making false statements, and arson following a



series of small fires on the campus of St. Catherine University in Minneapolis, MN. Prosecutors allege that the suspect ignited several small fires on the campus. Investigators also believe the suspect wrote at least one letter in which she attempted to recruit fellow students to “join al-Qa’ida, Taliban, or al Shabaab”.<sup>11</sup>

(U//FOUO) MCAC remains concerned that a successful incendiary attack in the Homeland resulting in significant loss of life or property damage (conducted by either foreign or domestic violent extremists) may serve as a “proof of concept” for the effectiveness of this attack method. Such an attack could inspire violent extremists to adopt this tactic on a more widespread basis.

(U//FOUO) MCAC has no information to indicate that ISIS supporters or supporters of other FTOs are actively planning to conduct incendiary attacks in the State of Maryland.

(U//FOUO) MCAC encourages Fire/EMS personnel, including fire investigators, to report incendiary fires that may have a potential terrorism nexus to the MCAC Watch for further analysis.

(U) Please report **any** suspicious behaviors or incidents to your local law enforcement agency and contact the MCAC Watch via telephone 800-492-8477 or via email at [mdwatch@mcac.maryland.gov](mailto:mdwatch@mcac.maryland.gov)

### MCAC Feedback Survey

Please take a moment to complete this on-line survey to help evaluate the quality and value of this MCAC product. Your response will help us serve you more effectively in the future. The survey can be found [here](#).

#### (U) SUPPORTED STANDING INTELLIGENCE NEEDS (SINS):

(U//FOUO) DHS: HSEC-8, HSEC-10

(U//FOUO) MCAC: MCAC-AT-1

(U//FOUO) National Capital Region Fire Service Priority Intelligence/Information Needs



**(U) APPENDIX A –EXPRESSIONS OF LIKELIHOOD OR PROBABILITY**

(U) Phrases such as “MCAC judges” and “MCAC assesses,” and terms such as “likely” and “probably” convey analytical judgements and assessments. The chart below approximates how expressions of likelihood and probability correlate with percentages of chance. MCAC products only use terms of likelihood; the chart includes terms of probability strictly for comparison as these terms sometimes appear in reporting of other agencies. Furthermore, MCAC does not arrive at judgements through statistical analysis and will not use terms of probability to convey uncertainty in MCAC intelligence products.

**UNCLASSIFIED**

<i>Terms of Likelihood</i>	<b>Almost No Chance</b>	<b>Very Unlikely</b>	<b>Unlikely</b>	<b>Roughly Even Chance</b>	<b>Likely</b>	<b>Very Likely</b>	<b>Almost Certain(ly)</b>
<i>Terms of Probability</i>	<b>Remote</b>	<b>Highly Improbable</b>	<b>Improbable (Improbably)</b>	<b>Roughly Even Odds</b>	<b>Probable (Probably)</b>	<b>Highly Probable</b>	<b>Nearly Certain</b>
	<b>1-5%</b>	<b>5-20%</b>	<b>20-45%</b>	<b>45-55%</b>	<b>55-80%</b>	<b>80-95%</b>	<b>95-99%</b>



## (U) REFERENCES

---

- <sup>1</sup> (U) Video. Al-Hayat Media Center. "Incite the Believers". Published 26 July 2020. (Accessed 27 July 2020).
- <sup>2</sup> (U) Internet site. Center for Disaster Philanthropy. "2019-2020 Australian Bushfires". Originally published 9 September 2019. <https://disasterphilanthropy.org/disaster/2019-australian-wildfires/> (Accessed 28 July 2020).
- <sup>3</sup> (U) Online Publication. Claire Lombardo. National Public Radio. "Northern California Camp Fire Contained". Published 25 November 2018. <https://www.npr.org/2018/11/25/670652466/northern-california-camp-fire-contained>. (Accessed 28 July 2020).
- <sup>4</sup> (U) Online Publication. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. "Emergency Plan of Action Final Report Greece: Wildfires". Published 26 March 2019. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/MDRGR003efr.pdf> (Accessed 28 July 2020).
- <sup>5</sup> (U) Online Publication. Wim Zqijnenburg. Bellingcat "Torching and Extortion: OSINT Analysis of Burning Agriculture in Iraq". 3 June 2019. <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/mena/2019/06/03/torching-and-extortion-osint-analysis-of-burning-agriculture-in-iraq/>. (Accessed 28 July 2020).
- <sup>6</sup> (U) Online Publication. Matan Tzuri. YNet News. "Kite, Balloon Terrorism Continues Torching Israel's Land". 10 July 2018. <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-5307517,00.html>. (Accessed 28 July 2020).
- <sup>7</sup> (U) Magazine Article. Al-Hayat Media Center. *Rumiyah* Issue 5. "Just Terror Tactics – Arson Attacks". Pages 8-10. (Accessed 28 July 2020).
- <sup>8</sup> (U) Magazine Article. Al-Malahem Media. *Inspire* Issue 10. "Open Source Jihad – Torching Parked Vehicle". Page 51. (Accessed 28 July 2020).
- <sup>9</sup> (U) Magazine Article. Al-Malahem Media. *Inspire* Issue 9. "Open Source Jihad – It is of Your Freedom to Ignite a Firebomb". Pages 30-36. (Accessed 28 July 2020).
- <sup>10</sup> (U) National Counterterrorism Center. NCTC product 036460 ID 10-19. Publication date 10 October 2019. "(U) Foreign Terrorist Inspired, Enabled, and Directed Attacks in the United States since 9/11, as of October 2019."
- <sup>11</sup> (U) Press Release. Department of Justice – US Attorney's Office – District of Minnesota. "Minneapolis Woman Charged With Terrorism Offenses, Arson, And Making False Statements". 7 February 2018. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-mn/pr/minneapolis-woman-charged-terrorism-offenses-arson-and-making-false-statements>. (Accessed 28 July 2020).

