



Homeland
Security

INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENT



(U//FOUO) Potential Tactics and Targets in ISIL-Linked Western Attacks

17 October 2014

Office of Intelligence and Analysis

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(U//FOUO) Potential Tactics and Targets in ISIL-Linked Western Attacks

(U//FOUO) Prepared by the Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A).
Coordinated with the FBI and NCTC.

(U) Scope

(U//FOUO) This Assessment highlights the tactics, targets, and tradecraft that potentially could be used in the Homeland by individuals associated with or inspired by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL); we do not address the likelihood of an attack against the United States by the group. This Assessment is intended to support the activities of DHS to assist federal, state, and local government counterterrorism and law enforcement officials, first responders, and private sector security partners in effectively deterring, preventing, preempting, or responding to terrorist attacks against the United States.

(U) Key Judgments

(U//FOUO) **I&A assesses terrorists directed or inspired by ISIL who are interested in conducting a Homeland attack would most likely employ tactics involving edged weapons, small arms, or improvised explosive devices (IEDs), based on our review of recent plots in Europe and Australia since early this year and statements by the group encouraging Homeland attacks. Such attacks could inflict significant casualties and may not require complex pre-operational planning.**

(U//FOUO) **The most likely perpetrators of a potential ISIL-directed or inspired Homeland attack include individuals acting under the direction of foreign-based terrorists, returning foreign fighters, and those who are inspired by the ongoing conflict in Syria and Iraq but who cannot or will not travel overseas.**

(U//FOUO) **Targets in recent ISIL-linked terrorist plots against Europe and Australia—which included public gatherings, government entities, and Jewish facilities—were likely selected because they presented an opportunity to successfully execute an attack that would garner media attention and the perpetrators had the expertise or ability to acquire weapons. Although these plots had varying levels of**

association with ISIL, the degree of the group's knowledge or direction of them remains unclear.

(U//FOUO) Australian Arrests Highlight Potential for ISIL-Directed Attacks

(U//FOUO) A decapitation plot disrupted by Australian authorities highlights the potential threat posed by individuals who have not traveled to Syria or Iraq, but who maintain contact and take some level of direction from overseas-based ISIL leaders. Individuals located in Iraq and Syria could provide encouragement and guidance to potential operatives in the form of tactical guidance, target selection, or bomb-making instructions. Government authorities may be able to gain insight into potential plotting involving operatives who are known to law enforcement and intelligence services, if they become aware of a change in behavior that indicates pre-operational activity.

- » (U) Australian authorities in mid-September arrested several individuals in connection with a plot to kidnap and behead individuals in Australia on behalf of ISIL. Authorities acted after intercepting a communication between a Syria-based Australian senior ISIL member and a Sydney-based group member discussing a plot reportedly centered on filming the murders of randomly selected individuals in Sydney, which would then be sent to ISIL's media wing to disseminate via social media, according to press reporting and court documents. According to police, the suspects also discussed the potential of conducting an attack, possibly involving a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) against an unidentified target.

(U//FOUO) Some Returning Foreign Fighters Prepared to Conduct Attacks

(U//FOUO) Several returning European foreign fighters connected to ISIL have planned or executed attacks soon after their return to their home countries. These incidents to date have included small arms or IEDs that do not require extensive resources or planning and present fewer observable indicators for law enforcement to detect their activities. Violent, self-initiated plots like those earlier this

year in Europe may give other foreign fighters—or homegrown violent extremists (HVEs)—a model to follow for their own attack plotting if they return to their home countries.* Although we lack information indicating US persons currently fighting in Syria and Iraq intend to participate in attacks in the United States, we remain concerned that US persons who connect with ISIL in Syria and Iraq could self-initiate or be persuaded to conduct organized or lone-offender style attacks, potentially targeting the United States.† Efforts to identify foreign fighters help mitigate this threat, but attempts by travelers to disguise their travel could prevent or delay detection of pre-operational efforts.

- » (U) In May, a French citizen believed to have fought with ISIL allegedly shot and killed four people at a Jewish museum in Brussels, Belgium. Authorities discovered an ISIL flag and a video recorder as well as an automatic rifle and handgun—the type of weapons used in the attack—among his belongings when he was taken into custody weeks later by French authorities. It is unknown if ISIL was aware of this attack prior to execution; Syria-based foreign fighters, however, praised his attack on social media.
- » (U) During a February arrest, French authorities recovered a handgun and three IEDs from a French citizen who had recently returned from Syria. Authorities believe he, along with a colleague who was detained en route from Syria, may have been intending to conduct a terrorist attack in France, according to press reports. The individual reportedly discussed targeting France on social media while in Syria and, when stopped in Greece during his return to Europe in January, had bomb-making instructions in his possession, suggesting his plotting may have been planned prior to his departure from Syria.

* (U//FOUO) DHS defines 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 from or influence from a foreign actor.

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

(U//FOUO) HVEs Inspired by ISIL Could Attempt Attacks

(U//FOUO) The use of ISIL’s media wing to publicize and encourage domestic attacks, and extensive media coverage of the ongoing combat overseas could boost the group’s ability to recruit individuals to travel overseas or conduct attacks in their home countries. A late September attack by an alleged Australian violent extremist against two law enforcement officers highlights the potential threat from individuals who are inspired by the conflict in Syria and Iraq, but who for a variety of reasons chose to conduct independent attacks. These types of attacks—likely targeting law enforcement, military, or critical infrastructure—could proliferate as more governments work aggressively to halt travel overseas to conflict zones and if recent statements by ISIL encouraging domestic attacks gains traction. We assess that most HVEs likely will continue in the near term to prefer to travel to Syria and Iraq to fight with terrorist groups rather than attempt to carry out Homeland attacks, but some HVEs—acting alone or in small groups—could attempt attacks against targets of opportunity with little or no warning.

- » (U//FOUO) A late September audio message by ISIL spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani called, for the first time, for lone offender attacks against the United States and coalition partners in retaliation for military operations in Iraq and Syria. The message suggested followers target law enforcement, military, and intelligence interests as well as civilians in the United States, Australia, Canada, France, and other coalition nations. In addition to recommending attacks involving small arms, IEDs, edged weapons, and poisons, Adnani urges listeners to use whatever means are at their disposal, to include striking “the enemy” with rocks or running them down with vehicles.
- » (U) In late September, an 18-year-old Australian male who had publicly supported ISIL was fatally wounded after reportedly stabbing two law enforcement officers outside a police station. The alleged perpetrator volunteered to meet with counterterrorism task force members as part of an ongoing investigation and had recently had his passport revoked. The incident preceded Adnani’s statement calling for attacks against coalition members, but is consistent with ISIL’s more recent messaging encouraging attacks in the West.

(U//FOUO) Tactics, Targets, and Procedures Observed in ISIL-Linked Western Plotting

(U//FOUO) Below is a graphic that highlights some of the tactics, targets and operational security measures observed in ISIL linked plots. Many of these tactics and targets are consistent with ISIL's recent guidance to conduct attacks against coalition members.

(U) Location	(U) Tactics	(U) Targets	(U) Operational Security Measures
(U) Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » (U) Probable intended use of small arms and edged weapons to kidnap and murder victims. » (U) Pre-operational planning, to include acquisition of weapons, despite awareness of law enforcement scrutiny. » (U) Beheading would be disseminated on social media by ISIL's media wing. » (U) Police reportedly seized a gun, a scimitar, machetes, balaclavas, military fatigues, and electronic media. » (U) Considered using a VBIED against an unidentified target. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » (U) Random individual(s) in public locations. » (U) Group may have considered government targets. » (U) Reportedly threatened law enforcement officers surveilling the group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » (U) Reportedly met on sports fields and in homes to engage in pre-operational planning. » (U) Use of public telephone and avoidance of talking in cars to avoid detection by law enforcement.
(U) Belgium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » (U) Alleged use of small arms to conduct attack against civilians. » (U) Attempted filming of attack using camera to publicize attack. » (U) Arrested with handgun, automatic rifle, ammunition, and an ISIL banner. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » (U) Civilians frequenting the Jewish museum in Belgium. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » (U) After fighting in Syria, spent time traveling to several countries in southeast Asia before returning to France. » (U) After conducting attack, reportedly traveled from Brussels on bus that rarely conducts security checks.
(U) France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » (U) Probable intended use of small arms and IEDs against an unidentified target. » (U) Authorities recovered a handgun, soda cans filled with explosives material; screws and nails were attached to one of the cans. » (U) Use of social media while in Syria to encourage attacks in France. » (U) Traveled from Syria to France with USB drive containing bomb making instructions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » (U) No publicly available information regarding specific targets, but attacks likely would have taken place in France. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » (U) Probable co-conspirator traveled separately from Syria.

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(U//FOUO) Importance of Suspicious Activity Reporting

(U//FOUO) Given the range of targets and simple tactics of ISIL-associated plots since the beginning of this year, we encourage reporting of suspicious activity to appropriate government authorities and encourage our security, military, and law enforcement partners to remain vigilant. We face an increased challenge in detecting terrorist plots underway by individuals or small groups acting quickly and independently or with only tenuous ties to foreign-based terrorists. Pre-operational indicators are likely to be difficult to detect; as such, state, local, tribal, territorial, and private sector partners play a critical role in identifying and reporting suspicious activities and raising the awareness of federal counterterrorism officials.

(U) Indicators and Protective Measures

(U//FOUO) DHS encourages federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial counterterrorism officials, as well as first responders and private sector security partners, to remain alert and immediately report suspicious activity and potential behavioral indicators of pre-operational terrorism planning activities, to include suspicious acquisition of materials and construction of explosive devices. Some of these behavioral indicators may be constitutionally protected activities and should be supported by additional facts to justify increased suspicion. No single behavioral indicator should be the sole basis for law enforcement action. The totality of behavioral indicators and other relevant circumstances should be evaluated when considering any law enforcement response or action.

- » (U//FOUO) New or increased advocacy of violence, including providing material support or recruiting others to commit criminal acts;
- » (U//FOUO) Interpreting and using religious texts to convince prospective recruits that violence is religiously sanctioned;
- » (U//FOUO) Encouraging visits to violent extremist websites highlighting perceived Western atrocities against Muslims to encourage prospective recruits to engage in violence;
- » (U//FOUO) Consumption and sharing of media glorifying violent extremist acts, or unusual interest in statements from terrorist leaders encouraging violence;
- » (U//FOUO) Internet research for target selection, acquisition of technical capabilities, planning, or logistics;
- » (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;
- » (U//FOUO) Reports to law enforcement that a community member has adopted a new name, style of dress or speech, and/or other significant changes in presentation to others in association with advocacy of violence;
- » (U//FOUO) Communicating with known or suspected homegrown or foreign-based violent extremists using e-mail or social media platforms;
- » (U//FOUO) Participation in weapons training, 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) Use of cover terms to mask the true meaning of events or nefarious activities combined with active advocacy of violence;
- » (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; and

- » (U//FOUO) Activities that a reasonable person would deem as suspicious, indicating a storage facility or other area is being used to construct an explosive device.

(U) Source Summary Statement

(U//FOUO) This Assessment is based on information drawn from a body of unclassified reporting, including open source press reports, public statements of senior foreign government officials, and public accounts of foreign law enforcement investigations from various law enforcement agencies. We have **medium confidence** in the press reports used in this product, some of which have been corroborated by public statements made by senior foreign law enforcement officials.

(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-8.5, HSEC-8.8



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Customer Feedback Form

Product Title: (U//FOUO) Potential Tactics and Targets in ISIL-Linked Western Attacks

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- Other:

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- Strongly Agree
 Agree
 Neither Agree nor Disagree
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree
 N/A

(U//FOUO) I would like to continue receiving products on topics like this from I&A.

- Strongly Agree
 Agree
 Neither Agree nor Disagree
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree
 N/A

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