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(U//FOUO) Difficulties in Determining Homeland Attacker Motivations

(U//FOUO) We assess that criminal attacks in the US can be mischaracterized as terrorist attacks because some attackers probably are motivated by ISIS's glorification of violence instead of by its ideology; and because ISIS sometimes claims responsibility for unaffiliated attacks, which gives greater credence to ISIS assertions of success in mainstream media and challenges post-attack investigation efforts. It is difficult for US officials and law enforcement to refute ISIS claims of responsibility, particularly if the attacker dies, allowing press speculation on the role of ISIS ideology to continue. ISIS's recent encouragement for its followers to steal from nonbelievers in the West probably will further obscure the underlying motivations of some incidents.

(U//FOUO) The ultimate motivation of an ideologically inspired attack may still be obscured if the attacker has a history of violence, chooses a target based on a personal grievance, or adheres to multiple ideologies such as anarchist extremism, black separatist extremism, or violent neo-Nazism. For example, an individual who attacked New York City police officers in 2014 with a hatchet appears to have been motivated by violent extremist ideology based on an interpretation of Sunni Islam, black separatist extremist ideologies, and personal setbacks such as unemployment, according to press reporting.¹²

- (U//FOUO) We have no information that the January 2017 Ft. Lauderdale airport shooter ascribed to ISIS's ideology.³⁴⁵ While he claimed that he watched ISIS's violent videos and participated in online ISIS chatrooms about plotting attacks, in November 2016 he entered the FBI Anchorage office and stated that the US Government was forcing him to view ISIS videos and subsequently was referred to a psychiatric hospital, according to press reporting.⁶⁷
- (U//FOUO) ISIS's A'maq news agency claimed that the September 2016 St. Cloud, Minnesota, mall attacker was a "soldier" of the Islamic State, and witnesses reported that he yelled "allahu akbar" during the attack, elements that prompted media speculation about possible links to ISIS.⁸ We have no indication, however, that any violent extremist ideology motivated his attack,⁹¹⁰¹¹ and personal issues, such as dropping out of school, could have also played a role, according to press reporting.¹²
- (U//FOUO) The eighth issue of ISIS's online multilanguage magazine *Rumiyah*, released in April 2017, encouraged the group's followers to take wealth from nonbelievers, such as property from commercial businesses and vehicles.¹³ Absent additional indicators, such as the perpetrator's attribution of the attack to ISIS, such acts will probably appear more criminal than terrorism related.

(U) This report is provided by the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC). Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to Managing Editor, NCTC Current, (571) 280-5201 or 93-14541 secure.

(U//FOUO) We assess that identifying indicators of ideologically inspired attacks can help law enforcement and government officials overcome some of the complications of post-attack analysis, which will improve efforts to differentiate between terrorism and crime (see graphic). Understanding these distinctions will help government communicators emphasize when attacks are of a criminal nature, which probably will limit ISIS's ability to exaggerate the spread of its influence and can assist law-enforcement elements in their initial post-attack investigations while also preparing them to address questions from the media on motivations. In addition, countering violent extremism (CVE) outreach could help community members dispel ISIS's violent narratives.

- (U//FOUO) During ongoing outreach efforts to communities, local law-enforcement elements could provide pre-attack indicators of radicalization and mobilization to violence such as praising or reposting violent extremist media, or attempting to communicate with foreign terrorist organizations or like-minded individuals, before engaging in violence. This could generate reporting on suspicious activities from family and community members and may assist future investigative efforts.
- (U//FOUO) CVE practitioners engaging in preventative outreach efforts—such as hosting community dialogues—could incorporate material that facilitates a discussion of and helps dispel ISIS's narratives that violence and criminal actions are necessary and justified and instead frame these actions as selfish and harmful to a would-be attacker's community and family.

(U//FOUO) Indicators of an Ideologically Inspired Attack

(U//FOUO) NCTC and DHS assess that there are a variety of indicators that an attack was likely ideologically inspired. Such post-attack indicators can help law enforcement and IC partners differentiate between terrorist and criminal incidents. This list of indicators was developed based on a review of the common pre-attack activities of homeland attackers and plotters since 2014 and are ranked in approximate order of how indicative they are in indicating an attacker's ideological motivation.¹ These indicators are focused on determining the presence of ideological motivations for an attack after it has occurred. Some of the indicators, for instance research into an FTO, are constitutionally protected activity and should not be reported, absent any other information showing ties to terrorist activity.

<p>HIGH</p> <p>LOW</p>	(U//FOUO) Attacker stated that their actions were motivated by a foreign terrorist organization (FTO) or violent extremist ideology
	(U//FOUO) Attacker pledged allegiance to an FTO
	(U//FOUO) Attacker attempted or had direct communications with an FTO
	(U//FOUO) Attacker tried to recruit others to participate in attack by emphasizing a perceived religious obligation to conduct violence
	(U//FOUO) Attacker sought approval from other ideologically like-minded individuals in person or online
	(U//FOUO) Attacker praised or reposted FTO's non-violent, ideologically based messaging
	(U//FOUO) Attacker posted online about general support for an FTO
	(U//FOUO) Attacker consumed FTO's non-violent, ideologically based messaging
	(U//FOUO) Other people were aware of the attacker's grievances concerning mistreatment or discrimination of Muslims
	(U//FOUO) Attacker frequently interacted in-person or virtually with members of a wider network of ideologically like-minded individuals who advocate the use of violence to advance their cause.
	(U//FOUO) Attacker has family or peers who were aware of concerning behavior before the attack, such as a surge in religious beliefs that resulted in becoming confrontational or conspiratorial at work or home
	(U//FOUO) Attacker researched FTO's call for violence
	(U//FOUO) Attacker consumed FTO's violent propaganda in conjunction with violent content from other non-FTO sources
	(U//FOUO) Attacker posted and praised mainstream media news articles discussing attacks on behalf of an FTO
	(U//FOUO) Attacker conducted general research about an FTO
	(U//FOUO) Attacker chose target or tactic encouraged by FTOs
	(U//FOUO) Attacker praised or reposted FTO's violent messaging in conjunction with violent content from other non-FTO sources
	(U//FOUO) Attacker consumed FTO's violent messaging in conjunction with violent content from other non-FTO sources
	(U//FOUO) Attacker posted and praised mainstream media news articles discussing attacks on behalf of an FTO
	(U//FOUO) Attacker conducted general research about an FTO
(U//FOUO) Attacker chose target or tactic encouraged by FTOs	

¹ Some observed activities that may be suspicious include constitutionally protected activity. These activities 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, such as indications of material support to terrorists groups.



(U) Sources

¹ [Open Source | THE NEW YORK TIMES | 20141024 | (U) Attacker With Hatchet Is Said to Have Grown radical on His Own | (U)]

² [Open Source |The Telegraph| | 24 October 2014 | (U)]

³ (U) CBS News; Esteban Santiago-Ruiz: What we know so far about the suspected Fort Lauderdale shooter; 06 January 2017

⁴ (U) Miami Herald, "Airport shooter: I was under mind control and chatted with jihadi. Feds: No evidence, 17 January 2017

⁵ (U) Local 10 News ABC; Fort Lauderdale airport shooting suspect ordered held without bond; 17 January 2017;

<https://www.local10.com/news/crime/fort-lauderdale-airport-shooting-suspect-back-in-federal-court>

⁶ (U) CBS News; Esteban Santiago-Ruiz: What we know so far about the suspected Fort Lauderdale shooter; 06 January 2017

⁷ (U) Miami Herald, "Airport shooter: I was under mind control and chatted with jihadi. Feds: No evidence, 17 January 2017

⁸ [USA TODAY | USATDY2016 | GUIDE ID: 1002/bf9b7ec6-1d69-48ba-a141-111de47984ec | 19 September 2016 | (U)]

⁹ [THE INDEPENDENT (UNITED KINGDOM) | INPDWB2016 | GUIDE ID: 1002/85cb244b-a5c4-4a72-bc43-

d0c24070c237 | 20 September 2016 | (U)]

¹⁰ [ASHARQ ALAWSAT (ENGLISH) | ASHARQ2016 | GUIDE ID: 1002/5d17bd5c-319f-4113-b174-16b772a815f0 | 19 September 2016 | (U)]

¹¹ [ASSOCIATED PRESS | urn:publicid:ap.org:9ef067e1e3e2455fa498894aa92f2696 | GUIDE ID: 1002/89e892f5-5168-4b5f-a477-f2368f7f91c6 | 7 October 2016 | (U)]

¹² (U) Minnesota Star Tribune, "Police show video of St. Cloud mall attacker's fatal encounter with off-duty officer," 07 October 2016

¹³ (U) ISIL; *Rumiyah* Magazine; Issue 8; DOI 5 April 2017; "Among the Believers are Men"; al-Hayat Media; pp. 12-15; Extracted information is Unclassified; Overall document classification is Unclassified.