

Responses to Overseas Conflicts May Impact Public Safety Agencies in the Homeland

Public safety agencies in the Homeland may encounter threats of violence or attacks from terrorists in response to overseas conflicts. Lone offenders typically pose the greatest terrorist threat of violence in the Homeland and may take inspiration from conflicts overseas to justify or incite violent extremist attacks against targets, such as perceived ideological opponents, houses of worship, religious and educational institutions, private industry, elected officials, and US Government facilities. A potential attacker's statements or actions may provide first responders insights into potential motivations and possible tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) used by the attacker. Law enforcement investigations into what may initially appear to be criminal in nature, such as hate crimes, arson, or financial crimes, may potentially uncover terrorist activities.

SCOPE: This product provides awareness to public safety stakeholders on possible terrorist reactions, including attempts to inspire violence in the Homeland, in response to overseas conflicts. This product also provides a range of considerations to first responders, private sector, and other officials who may encounter complex threat scenarios across their communities.

Foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) often release messaging that is meant to incite violence in response to overseas conflicts that align with their broader narratives regarding mistreatment of Muslims and the FTOs' criticisms of US foreign policy. This messaging is typically not an indicator of imminent attacks, but it is designed to attract attention, instill fear, and spur lone offender plotting—although persons in the Homeland are rarely mobilized to violence solely through engagement with online violent extremist content.

- In response to HAMAS's 7 October 2023 attacks on Israel and the subsequent conflict, FTOs that have been critical of or an ideological opponent to HAMAS, such as al-Qa'ida, called on supporters to attack Jewish targets, thereby appealing to targets in North America and Europe. Furthermore, since the attacks, some racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists (RMVE) have increased calls for violence on social media platforms, celebrating attacks on Jews and stating that attacks by HAMAS might serve as an inspiration for RMVEs driven by superiority of the white race in the West.
- In April 2019, a New Jersey-based US person stated in an online livestream that he would shoot or run over demonstrators at a pro-Israel march and expressed his support for HAMAS. The subject had a history of consuming foreign violent extremist content on social media sites, including videos glorifying terrorist conflicts abroad, and in November and December 2018, allegedly expressed interest in joining HAMAS.



RESOURCES

The US Violent Extremist Mobilization Indicators Booklet (2021 Edition) is an NCTC, DHS, and FBI triseal product that provides a list of observable behaviors that could help determine whether individuals are preparing to engage in violent extremist activities. https://www.dni.gov/files/NCTC/documents/news_documents/Mobilization_Indicators_Booklet_2021.pdf

FBI

- Report Terrorism Tips: 1-800-Call-FBI or <https://tips.fbi.gov/>

DHS

- Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships <https://www.dhs.gov/CP3>
- CISA Protecting Houses of Worship <https://www.cisa.gov/topics/physical-security/protecting-houses-worship>
- National Threat Evaluation and Reporting Program Office – Nationwide Suspicious Activity <https://www.dhs.gov/nationwide-sar-initiative-nsi>

NCTC

- Radicalization Dynamics of Violent Extremists Pamphlet
- FTO Logos and Profiles <https://www.dni.gov/nctc/ftos.html>
- Understanding Bystander Interventions to Prevent Terrorism https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/understanding-bystander-interventions-to-prevent-terrorism_nctc.pdf/view



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CONSIDERATIONS

Public safety officials, private sector, and other homeland security partners may wish to consider the following to help identify, protect, mitigate, and respond to threats in the Homeland described above with links to overseas conflicts. For more specifics about each main theme, refer to the related First Responder's Toolbox highlighted in the below textboxes.



Lawful Public Assemblies

Lawful public assemblies,^a such as protests, rallies and demonstrations,^b related to overseas conflicts may present an increased risk for extremist violence, partly because of inflammatory content on social media between participants and their ideological opponents or counter-protesters. Effects of violent extremism may cascade across the immediate area and impact transportation, emergency services, and other critical infrastructure. Interagency coordination before such events may assist with planning and response efforts during a crisis, including with campus security for events taking place at universities and educational institutions.

"Violent Extremists and Terrorists Exploit Civil Unrest and Public Assemblies in the United States" (28 July 2020)
 "Complex Operating Environment—Educational Facilities: Post-Secondary Institutions" (20 September 2016)



Terrorist Disinformation

Terrorists may use emotive social media content, some of which may be manipulated or entirely fabricated, that is related to overseas conflicts to incite extremist violence. Disinformation^c tied to and symbolic of the conflict may contribute to such persons radicalizing or mobilizing to violent extremism in an effort to foment civil unrest and create greater divisiveness, sow chaos and confusion, and distract or influence global events. As a result, terrorist content has the potential to impact misallocation of public safety resources. When vetting online images, videos, or infographics, carefully consider the reliability, intent, and capability of the threat, including: 1) **WHAT** is being said; 2) **WHO** is saying it; and 3) **WHAT** are the potential effects when terrorist information is encountered, reviewed, and even shared online.

"Violent Extremists Likely Will Continue to Use Disinformation on Social Media Outlets to Instill Fear and Radicalize Others" (9 August 2018)



Radicalization to Violence

Graphic images of civilian deaths and injuries—particularly of women and children—proliferate online and are often shared widely. These images may contribute to the radicalization of lone offenders or small group-based offenders. They may also trigger those who have already radicalized to mobilize to violence with limited warning. Overseas conflicts may increase the sense of urgency for violence in individuals consuming inflammatory or graphic media online or other content, such as terrorist messaging. Enhancing public awareness of reporting mechanisms and decreasing barriers that may limit bystander resistance to report behaviors indicative of terrorism, such as concerns that their loved ones could be arrested, fear of being perceived as alarmist, potentially slandering an innocent person, or negative perceptions of law enforcement, can provide opportunities for safe, secure, and accessible options to report and intervene if a person is radicalizing to violence.

"Reporting Suspicious Activity—Critical For Terrorism Prevention" (12 October 2022)
 "Intervention Options for Minors Vulnerable to Violent Extremism Activity" (13 September 2021)
 "Bystanders Are Key To Countering Terrorism" (9 November 2020)



Government Personnel and Facilities

The high visibility; use of identifiable features, such as uniforms and logos; and public accessibility of government officials and many public and private sector facilities create a challenging security environment. Violent extremists may conduct attacks against targets that represent or are linked to an overseas conflict. It is critical to maintain awareness of current TTPs that may be used by lone offenders or small group attackers and enhance digital literacy to better protect online activity, patterns of life, and personal security.

"Personal Security of First Responders in the Digital Age" (31 March 2021)
 "Persistent Threat of Terrorist Ambush Attacks on First Responders" (14 January 2020)
 "Awareness of Violent Extremist Tactics to Defeat Physical Security Can Improve Response" (17 September 2021)
 "Protection Considerations for Violent Extremist Threats to Public Officials" (17 February 2022)



Terrorist Financing

Terrorist groups use various methods to raise funds to support operations, including support received from state sponsors, private donations, and fundraising campaigns involving cryptocurrency and fictitious charities. Incorporating financial literacy education into reporting and investigative requirements may help public safety officials identify potential financial crimes, particularly as FTOs seize on emergent conflicts to fund their operations.

"Identifying and Preventing Terrorist and Other Illicit Financing" (5 December 2022)
 "Awareness of Illicit Cryptomining-Related Activities May Improve Detection" (27 September 2021)
 "Identifying and Preventing Illicit Use of Cryptocurrency by Terrorists" (25 September 2021)



Malicious Cyber Incidents

State and nonstate sponsored terrorist cyber actors may opportunistically use misinformation and disinformation surrounding overseas conflicts in an effort to amplify false narratives online, conduct cyber attacks, and undertake measures that impact resiliency and increase polarization in social discourse. Remaining up-to-date on cyber incidents and malicious cyber actor TTPs may help identify opportunities for hardening networks and fostering greater resiliency.

"US Drinking Water and Wastewater Systems" (6 July 2023)



Outreach and Partnerships

Given the complex nature of how overseas conflicts may contribute to violent extremism in the Homeland, collaborating with law enforcement partners and building relationships with nontraditional organizations, leaders, or other community-based partners may enhance awareness of concerning behaviors, improve recognition of radicalization and mobilization indicators, increase use of reporting mechanisms, and increase safety and security measures, thereby enhancing stakeholder identification and response efforts.

"Threats Against Houses of Worship Highlight the Importance of Religious Community Outreach" (22 July 2022)
 "Threat of Terrorism and Hate Crimes Against Jewish Communities in the United States" (4 August 2020)
 "Threats Against Religious Facilities and Adherents Highlight Importance of Religious Community Outreach" (28 June 2019)
 "Recognizing Arson With a Nexus to Terrorism" (14 April 2017)

^a The Constitution guarantees the right to peaceable public assembly and free speech.

^b Although most violence during lawful public assemblies has been historically criminal in nature, and not associated with terrorism, some violent extremists perceive these events as opportunities to engage in violence.

^c Disinformation is the deliberate creation of false reports to mislead, harm, or manipulate a person, social group, organization, or country.





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