

22 February 2019

(U//~~FOUO~~) **Continued Interest in Targeting Faith-Based Communities in the Homeland**

(U) Scope

(U//~~FOUO~~) This *Joint Intelligence Bulletin (JIB)* is intended to provide an overview of violent threats against faith-based communities in the Homeland in the aftermath of recent attacks and disrupted plots.^a The FBI, DHS, and NCTC advise federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial government counterterrorism and law enforcement officials and private sector security partners responsible for securing faith-based communities to remain vigilant in light of the enduring threat to faith-based communities posed by domestic extremists (DEs); perpetrators of hate crimes, some of whom adhere to or are inspired by DE ideology^b; homegrown violent extremists (HVEs)^c; Iran; and Hizballah. This *JIB* is provided to assist federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial counterterrorism and law enforcement officials and private sector security partners in effectively deterring, preventing, preempting, or responding to hate crime incidents and terrorist attacks in the United States.

^a (U//~~FOUO~~) For the purpose of this *JIB*, the FBI, DHS, and NCTC define faith-based communities as houses of worship (e.g., synagogues, churches, and mosques), cultural community centers, and other establishments or individuals associated with various faiths.

^b (U//~~FOUO~~) The FBI, DHS, and NCTC define a domestic extremist as an individual based and operating entirely 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. The FBI defines a hate crime as a criminal offense against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender's bias against a race, religion, ethnicity/national origin, disability, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation. For purposes of this *JIB*, DEs and US persons who perpetrate hate crimes are referred to as domestic actors.

^c (U//~~FOUO~~) The FBI, DHS, and NCTC define an HVE as a person of any citizenship who has lived or operated primarily in the United States or its territories who 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 whose actions are independent 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.

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(U//~~FOUO~~) Domestic Actors Pose Persistent Threat to Faith-Based Communities**(U//~~FOUO~~)** At least five incidents since January 2017 [REDACTED] b7E -4 per FBI

[REDACTED] In these separate incidents, which resulted in 14 deaths and 12 injuries, the perpetrators targeted Jewish, Christian, and Muslim faith-based communities.

- » (U//~~FOUO~~) On 27 October 2018, a Pennsylvania-based individual—who has been indicted for multiple federal charges, including violations of civil rights—allegedly shot and killed 11 worshippers at the Tree of Life Synagogue^{USPER} in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and wounded two other congregants and four responding law enforcement officers, according to an indictment and DOJ press release. While inside the synagogue, the individual allegedly made statements indicating his desire to “kill Jews.” He is currently awaiting trial on hate crimes and other federal charges.
- » (U//~~FOUO~~) On 24 October 2018, an individual allegedly shot and killed two African-American patrons at a Jeffersontown, Kentucky, grocery store, according to a DOJ press release. An investigation by law enforcement officials revealed the individual reportedly first attempted to enter a predominantly African-American church prior to going to the store. Federal authorities charged the individual with hate crimes and firearms offenses for the shooting. In a court appearance on 7 January 2019, the defendant pleaded not guilty.
- » (U//~~FOUO~~) On 24 September 2017, a Tennessee-based individual allegedly shot white churchgoers in Antioch, Tennessee, killing one and injuring six others, according to an official press release citing law enforcement. The individual reportedly left a note in his vehicle referencing the 2015 racially motivated attack on African-American worshippers at an African Methodist Episcopal church in Charleston, South Carolina, according to open sources citing law enforcement. The individual pleaded not guilty to 43 charges, including first-degree murder, in March 2018 and is currently awaiting trial.
- » (U//~~FOUO~~) On 5 August 2017, an Illinois-based individual and two indicted co-conspirators who were part of his group allegedly detonated an explosive device at an occupied mosque in Bloomington, Minnesota, which resulted in extensive damage but no known injuries, according to the criminal complaint and indictment. A member of the group said they did not intend to kill anyone but wanted to scare Muslims out of the country. The three were indicted in June 2018 for hate crimes and other offenses related to the attack. The two co-conspirators pleaded guilty to federal charges on 24 January 2019. The militia leader is currently awaiting trial.
- » (U//~~FOUO~~) On 28 January 2017, a Texas-based individual, who had supposedly become involved with an online militia group, carried out a burglary and arson at a mosque in Victoria, Texas, in order to send a message to the local Muslim community, according to a DOJ press release. A federal jury convicted the individual of a hate crime for the burning of the mosque, among other charges, and he was sentenced to over 24 years in prison in October 2018.

(U//FOUO) Faith-Based Communities Are Attractive Targets for HVEs

(U//FOUO) The FBI, DHS, and NCTC assess HVEs continue to aspire to attack a diverse set of targets, including faith-based communities. HVEs may choose to plot against faith-based communities because [REDACTED]

b7E -4 per FBI

» (U//FOUO) On [REDACTED] was arrested on charges of attempted destruction of a US Government-owned facility with explosives after he planned to attack the White House, according to the criminal complaint. [REDACTED] initially wanted to attack various other targets in the Washington, DC, area, including an identified synagogue.

b6 -4 per FBI
b7C -4 per FBI

» (U//FOUO) On 10 December 2018, Damon M. Joseph^{USPER} was arrested for attempting to provide material support to ISIS for allegedly planning a mass-casualty attack on a synagogue in Toledo, Ohio, according to a DOJ press release. When researching a location, time, and weapons for the attack, Joseph allegedly expressed a desire to attack the greatest number of people and inflict mass casualties.

» (U//FOUO) On 13 June 2018, Wisconsin-based Waheba Issa Dais^{USPER} was arrested for attempting to provide material support to ISIS, according to a DOJ press release. Dais used a pro-ISIS social media account to suggest potential targets for bombing attacks, including churches, according to the criminal complaint.

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(U//FOUO) Potential Threat to Jewish and Israeli Interests from Hizballah and Iranian Agents

(U//FOUO) The FBI, DHS, and NCTC assess [REDACTED]

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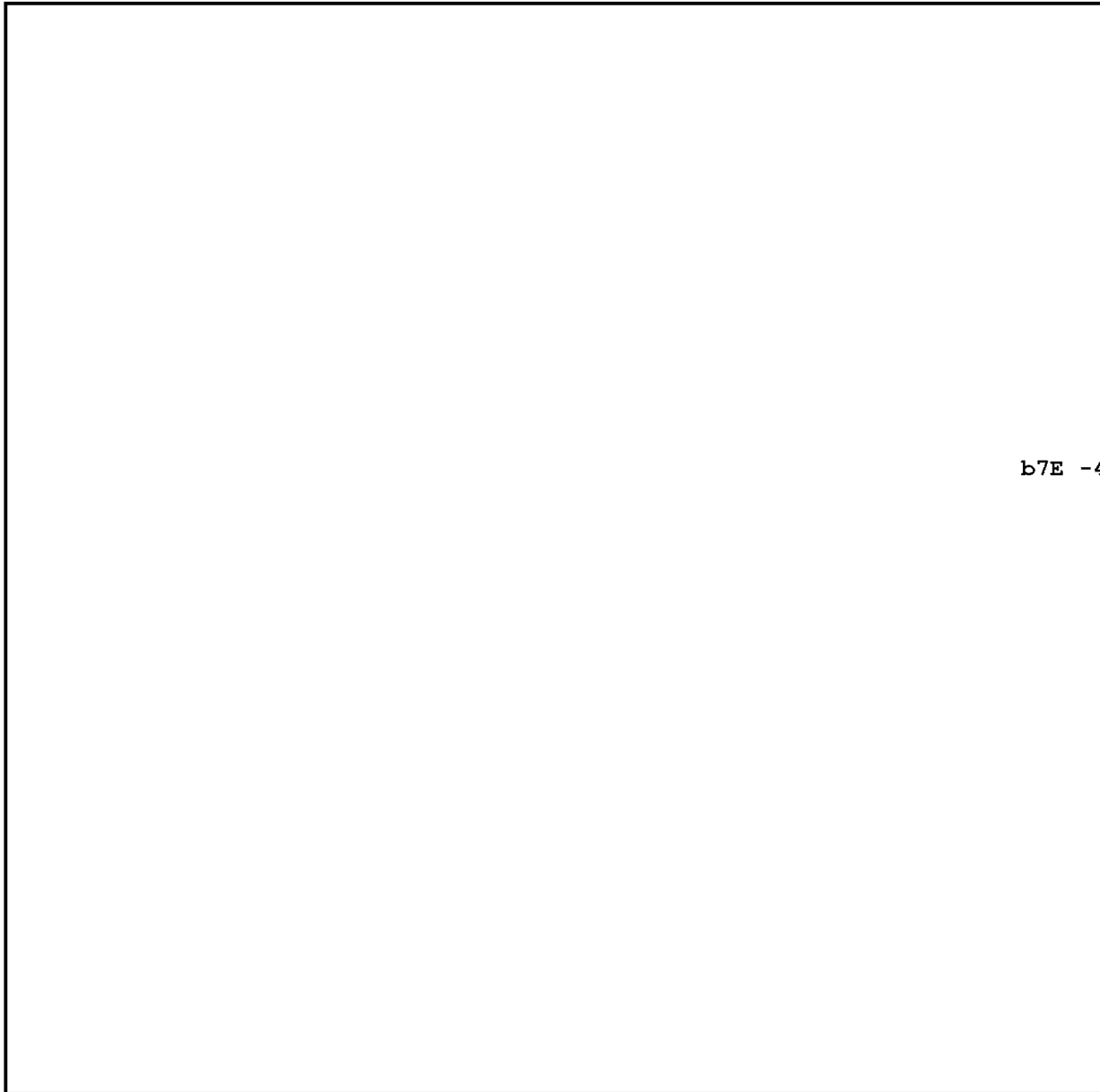
» (U//FOUO) On 20 August 2018, federal authorities charged two individuals suspected of acting on behalf of the Government of Iran for conducting illicit activities inside the United States, one of whom allegedly photographed security at a Chabad House in Chicago, Illinois, according to a DOJ press release.

(U) Outlook

(U//FOUO) In the past year, the FBI has investigated more than 100 threats to religious institutions. The FBI, DHS, and NCTC assess domestic actors will continue to pose a lethal threat to faith-based communities in the Homeland and remain concerned about the difficulty of

detecting US-based threat actors and HVEs, especially lone offenders, and the individualized nature of radicalization to violence.^{d,e} The FBI, DHS, and NCTC urge state and local authorities and private sector security partners to promptly report suspicious activities.

(U) Indicators



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^d (U//~~FOUO~~) The FBI, DHS, and NCTC define radicalization as the process through which an individual changes from a nonviolent belief system to a belief system that includes the willingness to actively advocate, facilitate, or use unlawful violence as a method to affect societal or political change.

^e (U//~~FOUO~~) The FBI, DHS, and NCTC define a lone offender as an individual acting alone or without the willing support of others to further social or political goals, wholly or in part, through activities that involve unlawful acts of force or violence. Lone offenders may act within the context of recognized domestic extremist ideologies, their own interpretation of those ideologies, or personal beliefs. The mere advocacy of political or social positions, political activism, use of strong rhetoric, or generalized philosophic embrace of violent tactic may not constitute extremism, and may be constitutionally protected.

(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) Administrative Note: Law Enforcement Response

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(U) Tracked by: HSEC-8.1, HSEC-8.2, HSEC-8.3, HSEC-8.5, HSEC-8.8