



Homeland
Security

INTELLIGENCE NOTE

23 March 2020

(U) Counterterrorism Mission Center

(U//FOUO) Terrorists Exploiting COVID-19 Pandemic in an Attempt to Incite Violence

(U//FOUO) Scope. This *Intelligence Note (IN)* assesses the potential for domestic terrorist actors and homegrown violent extremists to exploit the current COVID-19 pandemic to incite and engage in violence in the Homeland.^{a,b} Online disinformation campaigns and related uncertainty may also contribute to violent extremists' mobilization; however, assessments regarding the specific impacts of disinformation campaigns related to COVID-19 are beyond the scope of this *IN*. This information is current as of 19 March 2020.

(U//FOUO) Prepared by the DHS Intelligence Enterprise (DHS IE) Counterterrorism Mission Center (CTMC) and the DHS Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Office (CWMD).

(U//FOUO) Violent extremists probably are seeking to exploit public fears associated with the spread of COVID-19 to incite violence, intimidate targets, and promote their ideologies, and we assess these efforts will intensify in the coming months. Since early March, violent extremists have used online platforms to spread misinformation related to federal, state, and local government mitigation efforts and, in some cases, infected individuals with COVID-19. Increased travel restrictions and social distancing possibly will complicate violent extremist efforts to operationalize attacks against more traditional terrorist targets in the Homeland, and we have no information indicating any active plotting is underway.

- » (U//FOUO) On 19 March, ISIS issued its weekly *al-Naba* newsletter, which contained calls for attacks in Western countries against healthcare systems that are strained by the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ The newsletter also included directions for ISIS supporters to “kill [non-Muslims] wherever you find them.”
- » (U//FOUO) White supremacist extremists (WSEs) and other social media users have advocated for violence against a range of targets, including critical infrastructure and faith-based and minority communities—including Asian-Americans—in response to the COVID outbreak, according to open-source reporting.^{2,3,4,c} WSEs also have called for infected individuals to intentionally spread COVID-19 in diverse neighborhoods and in religious institutions such as mosques and synagogues.^{5,6}
- » (U//FOUO) Other social media users are sharing and discussing perceived threats associated with the US Government response to the outbreak, specifically tied to social media rumors and fears of martial law and gun confiscation.^{7,8} Some domestic terrorism-related activity in the United States historically has been driven by similar conspiracy theories, increasing our concern that a violent extremist could seek to conduct an attack based on this misinformation.^{9,10,11,12}

^a (U//FOUO) DHS defines domestic terrorism as any act of violence that is dangerous to human life or potentially destructive of critical infrastructure or key resources committed by a group or individual based and operating entirely within the United States or its territories without direction or inspiration from a foreign terrorist group. The act is a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any state or other subdivision of the United States and appears to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion, or to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping. A domestic terrorist differs from a homegrown violent extremist in that the former is not inspired by and does not take direction from a foreign terrorist group or other foreign power.

^b (U//FOUO) DHS defines a Homegrown Violent Extremist (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 material 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.

^c (U//FOUO) DHS defines White Supremacist Extremists (WSEs) as groups or individuals who facilitate or engage in acts of violence directed at the federal government, ethnic minorities, or Jewish persons in support of their belief that Caucasians are intellectually and morally superior to other races and their perception that the government is controlled by Jewish persons.

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(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-8.6, HSEC-8.8.

(U) Source Summary Statement

*(U//FOUO) We have **medium confidence** in our assessment regarding the threat of terrorist actors inciting violence in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated government responses. Our assessment is based primarily on DHS open source reporting, non-profit reporting on social media activity of unknown reliability and credibility that is consistent with recent and historical terrorism trends, and reliable open source reporting and news articles. We also base our assessment on reliable open source government and press reporting on previous domestic terrorist reactions to similar perceived government actions. We also base our assessment on our assumption that terrorist actors are unlikely to conduct attacks during the COVID-19 pandemic given the lack of access to traditional targets, as seen in past attacks, and a lack of reporting to indicate that terrorists are shifting their attack targets and tactics. Credible reporting regarding active attack plotting would likely change our assessment of the current threat.*

- ¹ (U//FOUO); OSC; TRW2020031975126393; 19 MAR 2020; 19 MAR 2020; (U//FOUO) ISIS Article Says 'New Strikes' During COVID-19 Among 'Worst Nightmare' of West; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
- ² (U//FOUO); DHS; OSIR-04001-0518-20; 18 MAR 2020; (U//FOUO); Extremist posts suggested target locations for electrical grid sabotage and TTPs for taking down a radio tower in response to COVID-19 quarantines; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
- ³ (U); *Anti-Defamation League*; "Coronavirus Crisis Elevates Antisemitic, Racist Tropes"; 17 MAR 2020; <https://www.adl.org/blog/coronavirus-crisis-elevates-antisemitic-racist-tropes?fbclid=IwAR3MXZ7g7sfxeR2bs8tP54T5Uj3m9DgKBXUuUTDxahxx7VA-dFrjrsuAr2U>; accessed on 20 MAR 2020; (U); Non-profit organization.
- ⁴ (U); *Anti-Defamation League*; "Coronavirus Crisis Elevates Antisemitic, Racist Tropes"; 17 MAR 2020; <https://www.adl.org/blog/coronavirus-crisis-elevates-antisemitic-racist-tropes?fbclid=IwAR3MXZ7g7sfxeR2bs8tP54T5Uj3m9DgKBXUuUTDxahxx7VA-dFrjrsuAr2U>; accessed on 20 MAR 2020; (U); Non-profit organization.
- ⁵ (U//FOUO); DHS; OSIR-04001-0505-20; 11 MAR 2020; (U//FOUO); White supremacist extremist used an encrypted messaging service to state they were targeting minorities with COVID-19; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
- ⁶ (U//FOUO); DHS; OSIR-04001-0506-20; 10 MAR 2020; (U//FOUO); White supremacist extremist Telegram channel administrator posts false flyer inciting coronavirus infected persons to visit religious centers, diverse neighborhoods, and utilize public transit; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
- ⁷ (U); *Anti-Defamation League*; "Coronavirus Crisis Elevates Antisemitic, Racist Tropes"; 17 MAR 2020; <https://www.adl.org/blog/coronavirus-crisis-elevates-antisemitic-racist-tropes?fbclid=IwAR3MXZ7g7sfxeR2bs8tP54T5Uj3m9DgKBXUuUTDxahxx7VA-dFrjrsuAr2U>; accessed on 20 MAR 2020; (U); Non-profit organization.
- ⁸ (U); *Anti-Defamation League*; "Coronavirus Crisis Elevates Antisemitic, Racist Tropes"; 17 MAR 2020; <https://www.adl.org/blog/coronavirus-crisis-elevates-antisemitic-racist-tropes?fbclid=IwAR3MXZ7g7sfxeR2bs8tP54T5Uj3m9DgKBXUuUTDxahxx7VA-dFrjrsuAr2U>; accessed on 20 MAR 2020; (U); Non-profit organization.
- ⁹ (U); *DOJ*; "Three Gaston County Men Arrested For Conspiracy To Violate Laws Governing Firearms, Explosive Devices And Related Charges"; 3 AUG 2015; <https://www.justice.gov/usao-wdnc/pr/three-gaston-county-men-arrested-conspiracy-violate-laws-governing-firearms-explosive>; accessed on 20 MAR 2020; (U); Government Press Release.
- ¹⁰ (U//FOUO); DHS; OSIR-04001-0360-20, 19 JAN 2020; (U//FOUO); Instant messaging user provides graphic with TTPs to attack or disable a Virginia State Police armored vehicle; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
- ¹¹ (U//FOUO); DHS; OSIR-04001-1129-19, 30 APR 2019; (U//FOUO); Antigovernment extremist incites May Day violence against antifascists; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
- ¹² (U//FOUO); DHS; OSIR-04001-0640-19, 12 JAN 2019; (U//FOUO); White supremacist extremist incites violence towards Muslims, African Americans, a journalist, an athlete, and a gun control activist; Extracted information is U//FOUO; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.



Product Title:

All survey responses are completely anonymous. No personally identifiable information is captured unless you voluntarily offer personal or contact information in any of the comment fields. Additionally, your responses are combined with those of many others and summarized in a report to further protect your anonymity.

1. Please select partner type: and function:

2. What is the highest level of intelligence information that you receive?

3. Please complete the following sentence: "I focus most of my time on:"

4. Please rate your satisfaction with each of the following:

	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	N/A
Product's overall usefulness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Product's relevance to your mission	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Product's timeliness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Product's responsiveness to your intelligence needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. How do you plan to use this product in support of your mission? (Check all that apply.)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drive planning and preparedness efforts, training, and/or emergency response operations | <input type="checkbox"/> Initiate a law enforcement investigation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Observe, identify, and/or disrupt threats | <input type="checkbox"/> Intiate your own regional-specific analysis |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Share with partners | <input type="checkbox"/> Intiate your own topic-specific analysis |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Allocate resources (e.g. equipment and personnel) | <input type="checkbox"/> Develop long-term homeland security strategies |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reprioritize organizational focus | <input type="checkbox"/> Do not plan to use |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Author or adjust policies and guidelines | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: <input type="text"/> |

6. To further understand your response to question #5, please provide specific details about situations in which you might use this product.

7. What did this product not address that you anticipated it would?

8. To what extent do you agree with the following two statements?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
This product will enable me to make better decisions regarding this topic.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This product provided me with intelligence information I did not find elsewhere.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. How did you obtain this product?

10. Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up conversation about your feedback?

To help us understand more about your organization so we can better tailor future products, please provide:

Name: <input type="text"/>	Position: <input type="text"/>
Organization: <input type="text"/>	State: <input type="text"/>
Contact Number: <input type="text"/>	Email: <input type="text"/>



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