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MONITORING TERROR

by Brian J. Kelly - Supervisory Cyber Analyst

On September 11, 2001, I was sitting in the offices of the U.S. Probation Office for the Eastern District of New York in downtown Brooklyn, when reports of a plane hitting one of the towers at the World Trade Center sped through office staff. Less than a mile from Ground Zero, we didn't need a television to watch the horror unfold as we had a front row seat from our office windows. Curiosity and concern became shock and terror when the

second plane hit, changing our world that day. Born and raised in New York City (specifically, the borough of Queens), I, like so many others, had lost friends, family, co-workers, etc. Everyone was affected. As the dust cloud spewing from Ground Zero eventually dissipated, the “War on Terror” was just getting started.

On October 7, 2023, Hamas, officially known as the Islamic Resistance Movement, launched a massive attack on Israel that included the targeting of unarmed civilians attending a local music festival. The Israeli response and ongoing armed conflict has resulted in the deaths of over 6,500 individuals on both sides. Hamas still holds approximately 220 civilian hostages from the October 7th attack, which includes children, women, and at least 13 American citizens (2 American hostages were recently released). Notably, the October 7th attack occurred one day short of exactly 26 years since Hamas had been designated a foreign terrorist organization (FTO). The designation of FTOs is a responsibility of the Bureau of Counterterrorism (CT) within the United States Department of State. The process and procedures for designating an organization as a FTO, as well as the current listing of designated FTOs (along with delisted organizations) can be found at <https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations/>. While the post-9/11 war on terror and the current armed conflict in Israel and Palestinian territories has involved Islamic extremists, this ideology is not unique amongst designated FTOs. Other current FTOs include Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC-EP), Communist Party of the Philippines/New People’s Army (CPP/NPA), and

the New Irish Republican Army (formerly Real IRA).

Terrorism is not limited to outside the borders of the United States. Throughout the history of the country, individuals and organizations have chosen violence and terror to advance a cause or promote an ideology. Investigating domestic terrorism is mainly handled by two federal law enforcement agencies; Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS). In June 2023, the Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism report, which be found here: <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/fbi-dhs-domestic-terrorism-strategic-report-2023.pdf/view>, was published and states the following: "Pursuant to Section 5602(a) and (b) of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year (FY) 20201 (hereafter "the Act"), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), in consultation with the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), including the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), and the Department of Justice (DOJ), jointly produce a report containing a strategic intelligence assessment and data on domestic terrorism (DT). The Act requires the report to contain a strategic intelligence assessment, a discussion of specified activities, certain data on DT matters, and recommendations." The report lists the following five threat categories to understand domestic terrorism threats, which have been used since 2019:

1. Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism
2. Anti-Government or Anti-Authority Violent Extremism
3. Animal Rights or Environmental Violent Extremism
4. Abortion-Related Violent Extremism
5. All Other Domestic Terrorism Threats

While the referenced assessment report from the FBI and DHS does not name/designate specific entities as “domestic terrorist organizations”, there are numerous reference materials that identify historical and current groups that would fit this description. Some examples are Animal Liberation Front, Army of God, Symbionese Liberation Army, The Weathermen, and the Klu Klux Klan. Further resources and information can be found here: <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/terrorism>

The war on terror in response to 9/11 included the arrest and prosecution of individuals charged with providing material support to a FTO. The following publication by Nora Leslie Stephens for the Fordham Urban Law Journal provides an excellent overview of the history of these types of prosecutions: Nora Leslie Stephens, Doing More Good Than Harm: Alternatives to Incarceration for Young People Charged With Crimes of Terrorism, 48 Fordham Urb. L.J. 197 (2021). Available at: <https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/ulj/vol48/iss1/6>

Whether domestic or international, the use of technology has been a large part of the propaganda and recruitment techniques used by terrorist organizations and to spread extremist ideologies. This includes the use of **social media**:

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/science/terrorist-groups-recruiting-through-social-media-1.1131053>;

<https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/domestic-extremists-and-social-media-study-finds-similarities-differences-web>; **bot networks**:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09546553.2023.2169141> ; and **emojis**:

<https://www.politico.eu/article/islamic-state-disinformation-social-media/>. When individuals convicted of terrorism-related offenses are placed on community supervision, it is common for computer/Internet monitoring and restriction conditions to be ordered by the Court or parole boards. Some of the issues and concerns officers face with these cases are:

- **Mobilization Indicators:** observable behaviors that could signal whether individuals or groups are pursuing ideologically-motivated violent extremist activities (see resources from the National Counterterrorism Center for detailed information on these indicators: <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/nctc-newsroom/nctc-resources>)
- **Treatment Concerns:** exposure to news and other online material that can result in re-radicalization; PTSD; other triggers
- **Financial:** use of cryptocurrency and/or payments apps (e.g. Cash App) to mask financial activity
- **Associations:** connections to religious or community entities that may promote extremist ideologies
- **Technical:** communication in other languages; family/friends outside the United States

Understanding the terrorist/extremist organization and the underlying ideology, how the person under supervision became associated and involved, what's changed in their life and current mindset are all crucial pieces of information needed to adequately monitor and supervise these cases. There are also technology solutions that can assist with some of the challenges identified above. For example, Copyfish is a free extension for most web browsers that incorporates optical character recognition (OCR) and translation tools to extract text from images and translate: <https://ocr.space/copyfish>

IPPC Technologies' Spotlight service will validate events and provide notifications to agencies if suspected terrorism/extremist activities are identified. This includes if the person under supervision is viewing news reports or related content on terrorist/extremist organizations that could result in radicalization or trigger other issues. Canned language used by Spotlight in validated events includes:

- FTO/Extremist Group-News: (potential concerns: radicalization)
- Racially/Ethnically Motivated Extremism
- Anti-Government/Anti-Authority Extremism
- Animal Rights/Environmental Extremism
- Abortion-Related Extremism

IPPC Technologies continues to strive towards predictive and proactive solutions so officers can intervene early, address areas of concern and change behavior. Spotlight is a data analysis service provided by IPPC Technologies that uses a combination of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies and human verification to validate content captured and flagged by IPPC's

monitoring solutions. Spotlight's mission is to provide agencies and officers with streamlined and verified leads, for possible intervention opportunities related to concerning behaviors. For more information on Spotlight, please call IPPC at (888)-WEB-IPPC or contact me directly at bkelly@ippctech.net or by calling (516)341-4201.



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