(U//FOUO) Syria-Based US and UK Persons’ Public Social Media Activity Effective but Provides Terrorism Prevention Opportunities

20 May 2015

Office of Intelligence and Analysis

IA-0196-15
(U//FOUO) Syria-Based US and UK Persons' Public Social Media Activity Effective but Provides Terrorism Prevention Opportunities

(U//FOUO) Prepared by the DHS Office of Intelligence and Analysis (OIA) [D](3), [D](7)(E), [D](7)(D)

(U) Scope

(U//FOUO) This Assessment examines public, English-language, social media activity by US and UK persons participating in the conflict in Syria or Iraq. [D](3), [D](7)(E), [D](7)(D)

DHS and FBI reviewed social media postings released between September 2013 and November 2014 that documented 255 messages posted by 20 confirmed or self-proclaimed US persons who attempted to or engaged in violence or material support in Syria or Iraq. [D](3), [D](7)(E), [D](7)(D)

Many of the examined US and UK persons possibly engaged in social media activity that was [D](3), [D](7)(E)

This Assessment is intended to assist federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial counterterrorism and law enforcement officials and cleared private sector security partners in better understanding the threat posed by Syria-based foreign fighters and US-based violent extremists.

(U) Key Judgments

(U//FOUO) DHS and FBI assess that the examined social media postings of 20 US and 20 UK persons in Syria were [D](3), [D](7)(D), [D](7)(E)

These individuals [D](3), [D](7)(D), [D](7)(E)

weakened. Counter-narratives will likely be most effective [D](3), [D](7)(E)

* (U//FOUO) DHS defines a lone offender as an individual motivated by one or more violent extremist ideologies who, operating alone, supports or engages in violence in furtherance of that ideology or ideologies that may involve influence from a larger terrorist organization or a foreign actor.
(U//FOUO) DHS assesses that nearly 20 percent of messages included themes identified. DHS judges that US and UK Persons Promoted Similar Themes

(U//FOUO) A study of the identified, social media postings of 20 US and 20 UK persons participating in or supporting violence in Syria revealed that although the UK subjects' messages frequently included themes similar to the US individuals, their messages frequently focused on prominent themes, such as the destruction of the Islamic State (ISIL) and the repatriation of Syrian refugees.

(U//FOUO) The individuals studied likely emphasized these themes, and their messages included statements suggesting that persons were motivated by a desire to travel to support violence, such as: We assess that persons likely attempted to travel to support violence, and that the examined individuals elected to travel to support violence.

(U//FOUO) Roughly 30 percent of the examined messages posted by these persons comprised statements suggesting that persons were motivated by a desire to travel to support violence, and that the examined individuals elected to travel to support violence.

(U//FOUO) Calls for external attacks in the West by lone offenders, criticism of the US-led Coalition bombing campaign against ISIL, and commentary on ISIL’s execution of US and UK hostages. Such messaging also likely attempted to promote the repatriation of Syrian refugees. Given that the examined individuals elected to travel to support violence, these messages were likely intended to promote the repatriation of Syrian refugees.

(U//FOUO) For more information on the examined persons’ social media activity see attached Reference Aid. *(U//FOUO) Research Findings: Use of Social Media by UK and US Foreign Persons in Syria.*
(U//FOUO) According to ..., None of the examined US persons publicly called for attacks in the United States on their social media accounts during the timeframe we examined.

(U//FOUO) US and UK persons also rarely posted about ..., US persons provided general ... The frequency of commentary by US persons about life inside Syria was ...

(U//FOUO) By contrast, following ISIL’s declaration of a Caliphate, US persons ... (E)

(U//FOUO) After the declaration of the Caliphate, we saw ... On 23 Jun 2014, prominent ISIL supporters began to promote the message to encourage the group’s followers ... is likely one factor contributing to the ...

(U//FOUO) When confronted by other social media users about the execution of US and UK hostages, UK persons frequently ... Although US and UK persons posted about many themes at a consistent rate throughout the time period we examined, UK persons posted ... Following the start of Coalition airstrikes targeting ISIL in August 2014, both sets of persons ...
Several of the examined US persons most prominent on social media [b] (3), (b) (7)(E) and [b] (3), (b) (7)(E)

DHS assesses that some of these persons may have [b] (3), (b) (7)(E)

Male and female UK users generally [b] (3), (b) (7)(E) except for [b] (3), (b) (7)(E)

Messages by Syria-based females in the study [b] (3), (b) (7)(E) and we assess they were [b] (3), (b) (7)(E)

The one US woman included in this study also emphasized [b] (3), (b) (7)(E)

US and UK Persons May Show Differences in Platforms, Similarities in

13 of the 20 US persons had publicly viewable [b] (3), (b) (7)(D), (b) (7)(E) accounts in which they posted content relevant to this study, [b] (3), (b) (7)(D), (b) (7)(E)

However, [b] (3), (b) (7)(D), (b) (7)(E)

We assess that they [b] (3), (b) (7)(E)

The one US woman included in this study also emphasized [b] (3), (b) (7)(E)
(U//FOUO) Messaging Reaches Small Numbers,
(b) (3), (b) (7)(E)

(U//FOUO) As expected, the size of the examined US and
UK persons’ identified online social networks was
(b) (3), (b) (7)(E)

The examined US and
UK persons—many of whom also maintain public
social media presences—(b) (3), (b) (7)(E)

—have communicated
in a variety of media,
(b) (3), (b) (7)(E)

with one another.

(U//FOUO) DHS analysts
judge that the best direct
measure of the resonance of the examined messages is
(b) (3), (b) (7)(E)

Although the
English-speaking audiences mostly had
(b) (3), (b) (7)(E)

in the examined messages,
the examined individuals also often received
questions about
(b) (3), (b) (7)(E)

These persons are
(b) (3), (b) (7)(E)

(U//FOUO) In May 2014, (b) (3), (b) (7)(E)
(b) (3), (b) (7)(E)

about (b) (3), (b) (7)(E), a prominent
UK social media user who traveled to Syria in
August 2013. (b) (3), (b) (7)(E)

radicalization to violence, examples of his online
messaging, and provided his Twitter handle.”
Highlighting his story and
(b) (3), (b) (7)(E)

(U//FOUO) DHS defines radicalization as the process
through which an individual changes from a non-violent belief
system to a belief system that includes the willingness to
actively advocate, facilitate, or use unlawful violence as a
method to effect societal or political change.
(U//FOUO) We often saw violent extremists in the West use to seek (b) (3), (b) (7)(E)

(U//FOUO) Opportunities to (b) (3), (b) (7)(E)

(U//FOUO) DHS assesses that (b) (3), (b) (7)(E)

(U//FOUO) In July 2014, (b) (3), (b) (7)(D), (b) (7)(E)

(U//FOUO) In contrast (b) (3), (b) (7)(E)

Religious leaders, NGOs, community leaders, and family and friends are typically (b) (3), (b) (7)(E)

(U//FOUO) We assess that (b) (3), (b) (7)(E)

(U//FOUO) We assess that (b) (3), (b) (7)(E)

(U//FOUO) We judge, based on our analysis of numerous recent cases of radicalization to violence in the West, (b) (3), (b) (7)(E)

As a result, we assess that counter-narratives that (b) (3), (b) (7)(E)

(U//FOUO) We assess that personal associates, (b) (3), (b) (7)(D), (b) (7)(E)

(U//FOUO) DHS assesses that (b) (3), (b) (7)(E)

Instead, DHS judges that (b) (3), (b) (7)(E)
(U/FOUO) In October 2014, [5] [6] [7][8] [9]

(U/FOUO) Online users, especially ISIL supporters, employ a range of tactics to circumvent the effects of account shutdowns, such as [10] [11] [12]

(U/FOUO) In the summer of 2014 repeatedly suspended ISIL’s official group accounts, which forced the group to migrate to significantly less popular sites—[13] [14] [15]—until these second tier sites also suspended the group’s official accounts.

(U/FOUO) DHS notes that [16] [17] [18] may provide [19] [20] [21] to [22] [23] [24] Many individuals in the early process of potentially radicalizing to violence may be engaging in protected speech and have not committed or expressed an intent to commit any illegal activities.

(U) The US-based Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) in 2014 released a toolkit called the “Safe Spaces Initiative,” which was designed to provide Muslim American communities with practical advice on countering radicalization to violence among their members using the MPAC-designed Prevention, Intervention, Ejection (PIE) model. The prevention element of PIE recommends that, when a respected authority figure—such as a religious leader, teacher, or parent—learns that an impressionable community member has been exposed to violent extremist content online, the authority should view the material with the vulnerable individual and debunk its misleading narratives.
Research Findings: Use of Social Media by UK and US Persons in Syria

Key Findings:
- UK and US persons in Syria typically promoted themes with terrorist messages and most of the remainder were designed to target UK and US persons. Men and women, and the social media platforms they used.
- Fighters from both countries regularly examined travelers increasingly providing.
- Calls for External Attacks
- Differences and Similarities of UK and US Persons

Promoting a Foreign Terrorist Organization
- Life in Syria
- Application Preferences

(b) (3), (b) (7)(D), (b) (7)(E)
(U) Source Summary Statement

(U//FOUO) DHS and [redacted] reviewed [b](3), [b](7)(E) released between September 2013 and November 2014 that documented [b](3), [b](7)(D), [b](7)(E) 20 confirmed or self-proclaimed US persons who attempted to or engaged in violence or material support in Syria or Iraq, as [b](3), [b](7)(D), [b](7)(E) by 20 UK persons. [black]

We have [b](3) confidence in [b](3), [b](7)(E)

We also have [b] confidence in [b](3), [b](7)(E)

(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.

Customer Feedback Form

Product Title: (U//FOUO) Syria-Based US and UK Persons’ Public Social Media Activity Effective but Provides Terrorism

1. Please select partner type: Select One and function: Select One

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

3. Please complete the following sentence: “I focus most of my time on:” Select One

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Satisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat Satisfied</th>
<th>Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Very Dissatisfied</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Product’s overall usefulness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Product’s relevance to your mission</td>
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<td>Product’s timeliness</td>
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<td>Product’s responsiveness to your intelligence needs</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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

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

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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This product will enable me to make better decisions regarding this topic.</td>
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<td>This product provided me with intelligence information I did not find elsewhere.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

9. How did you obtain this product? Select One

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

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

Name:
Organization:
Contact Number:
Position:
State:
Email:

Privacy Act Statement

CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

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REV: 29 October 2014