

Islamic Radicalism: Threat to Business Leaders – 20 May 2016

The last two issues of an online magazine affiliated with a radical Islamic terrorist organisation have called on its readership to undertake 'professional assassinations'. This call to arms builds on a previous issue from September 2015 which ordered the targeting of 'economic personalities' and wealthy entrepreneurs'. Whilst the idea of an online magazine inspiring acts of terror may seem fanciful, previous attacks have allegedly utilised bomb-making techniques outlined in the magazine. Furthermore, one Charlie Hebdo cartoonist, assassinated in the January 2014 Paris attacks, was previously marked out as 'Wanted: Dead or Alive'.

Therefore, the threat outlined in 'Inspire', the al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) affiliated magazine, should not be taken lightly, and could mark a serious development in the trend of 'lone wolf attacks'.

Inspire Magazine & Open Source Jihad

The call for targeted assassinations which, 'bring about the maximum economic impact' was outlined in 'Inspire's', 'Open Source Jihad' section. Open Source Jihad is described as, 'a resource manual for those who loathe the tyrants; includes bomb making techniques, security measures, guerrilla tactics, weapons training and all other jihad related activities'.

The article asks potential assassins to consider whether, 'the assassination consequently and strategically realise(s) the main goals to economically exhaust America'. Similarly, in the September 2015 issue of 'Inspire' magazine, AQAP focusses on assassinations, primarily conducted by lone militants. The publication also goes as far as to name personalities whose demise would, 'bring great loss to America in order to restrain the might of those who disbelieve.' As in previous issues, potential targets are split into two categories; economic personalities and wealthy entrepreneurs or company owners. Named amongst suggested economic personalities to target is Ben Shalom Bernanek, an American economist at the Brookings Institution who served as chairman of the Federal Reserve, whilst Microsoft chairman Bill Gates is named as a wealthy entrepreneur and company owner.

History of Previous Threats

In June 2011 it was reported that a postings on closed internet forum, linked to al-Qaeda affiliates, called for jihadist sympathisers to target individuals such as corporate executives, business leaders, think tank executives, and defence contractors using 'lone wolf' style attacks. According to the threat, the 40 individuals named on the forum were, 'individual actors in the Zionist-Crusader war on our Ummah [nation], from the directors of companies, supporters of the war, and media organisations that support the false propaganda, and the instigating members of Congress'.

Islamic State group (ISG) are also reported to have made threats against prominent figures from the social media industry, including Twitter CEOs Dick Costello and Jack Dorsey and Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, due to efforts to shut down accounts linked to terrorism hosted on their respective platforms.

Following up on Threats

The tenth issue of 'Inspire' released in February 2013 included a poster of potential targets, which included Charlie Hebdo caricaturist, Stephane Charbonnier. He was subsequently murdered in the January 2014 Charlie Hebdo attacks by militants affiliated with AQAP. In later issues of 'Inspire' it was claimed that the targeting of Stephane Charbonnier by the magazine was instrumental in bringing about his assassination. The magazine has upheld the murder as the sort of 'professional assassination' that they wish their followers to perform.

Furthermore several terrorist incidents in the past have allegedly used improvised explosive devices (IEDs) which were constructed according to bomb-making techniques outlined in the magazine. Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, one of the two



brothers who carried out the 2013 Boston bombings, allegedly learnt how to create pressure cooker bombs from 'Inspire' and its practical guides on bomb-making. The first issue, released in 2010, gained notoriety for a section titled, 'make a bomb in the kitchen of your mom'.

Lone Wolf Attacks – 'A Security Official's Worst Nightmare'

In the long-term, the greatest risk that online extremist publications present is the possibility of encouraging lone wolf terrorist attacks. Unlike organised terrorist cells with active leaders, lone-wolf terrorist can slip under intelligence radars, due to the spontaneous nature of their acts. Indeed, this may be the primary objective of such publications, as it avoids the risk that individuals place themselves under when travelling to places such as Syria or Iraq. Security officials from many countries are increasingly concerned by the threat of such terror attacks due to the difficulties they face in challenging them. The German terror expert, Rolf Tophoven, speaking to Deutsche Welle, described them as, 'a security official's worst nightmare'.

The danger is that it is the disenfranchised, disillusioned, and frustrated who are most likely to be susceptible to the type of content in magazines such as 'Inspire'. Areas such as Molenbeek in Brussels, or deprived suburbs of Paris provide the environment where such individuals may come from due to feelings of having been abandoned by the state. This, Tophoven, argues, is what makes people, 'so susceptible to the messages from Islamist terror cells'.

Outlook

Whilst it is impossible to predict what future Islamist extremist attacks may look like, these recent publications demonstrate that there is intent to target prominent individuals. Furthermore, it is possible that terror attacks will increasingly take the shape of loosely organised, or lone-wolf terror attacks, rather than organised cell activity which is more susceptible to being uncovered by intelligence organisations.



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