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**NJOHSP**

**OFFICE OF HOMELAND SECURITY AND PREPAREDNESS**

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## NJOHSP Podcast *Intelligence. Unclassified.* Threat Assessment (Part Three) – Blended Extremism

**Rosemary Martorana, Director of Intelligence, New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness:**

Hello. I am Rosemary Martorana, Director of Intelligence here at the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness (NJOHSP) and you are listening to *Intelligence.*

*Unclassified.* This podcast is exactly what the title states: unclassified information about current trends in homeland security for the state of New Jersey, as well as educational information and resources for your awareness. Although it is produced every month, we aim to stay on top of current events and will often offer additional content. If this is your first time listening, then thanks for coming! Please feel free to add this podcast to your RSS feed or iTunes. You can also follow NJOHSP on Twitter @NJOHSP and Facebook. All links can be found in the show notes and on our website [www.njohsp.gov](http://www.njohsp.gov).

**Rosemary Martorana, Director of Intelligence, New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness:** The events of 2015 highlight that New Jersey—and the United States—face a terrorist landscape more dangerous than any since the attacks of September 11, 2001. From the brutal and tragic attacks in San Bernardino and Paris, the year saw a dramatic rise in multi-operative, small-scale attacks on civilian soft targets—all with little to no warning—as well as the decentralization and diffusion of the global terrorism movement.

This new dynamic makes it extremely difficult for law enforcement and homeland security professionals, at all levels of government, to detect and deter attacks like San Bernardino, Paris, Philadelphia, or Boston.

Now more than ever, state and local coordination is critical to combating the evolving and diffuse terrorist threat we face. Homeland security has become hometown security. And NJOHSP is working diligently with our partners to stay abreast of terrorist capabilities.

This three-part series was adopted from a webinar our office hosted in January and is intended to expand on some of the major themes presented in NJOHSP's 2016 Threat Assessment, which is available on our website at [www.njohsp.gov](http://www.njohsp.gov). Episode one discusses the increase in competition between the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, and al-Qa'ida that we expect to see in 2016. Episode two takes a hard look at domestic extremism throughout the United States, while the third episode explores the concept of "Blended Extremism," or individuals that draw their inspiration from multiple radical ideologies and tailor these beliefs to ultimately form a unique worldview to advance their violent goals.

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You may recognize the voices of our Analysis Bureau Chief, Dean Baratta, and our Deputy Bureau Chief, Kim Brown, in this podcast, who were featured in our HVE Speakers series. But before I turn the microphone over to them, thank you for your continued support to the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness.

**Dean Baratta, Analysis Bureau Chief, New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness:** That takes us to the third trend that we find really interesting. We noticed it, I think, about a year and a half ago and that is something we are coining as "blended extremist." What we have noticed is that, particularly when we are talking about homegrown violent extremist, those individual attackers, they are not ideologically pure. The terrorist that we may remember from the days of old, the 70s, the 80s, even a little bit into the 90s, when you would join a terrorist group or swear affiliation to a terrorist group, Hezbollah, Hamas, something like that, the Red Army Faction, you would buy into their entire political program, sort of like joining them involved, well it was like joining an organization or joining an army, you had to adopt that entire platform. What we are seeing now, is people taking a much more cafeteria approach to ideology. "I like a little bit of this, I like a little bit of that." That makes things difficult for us for a couple of reasons. One, everybody likes to see people put in a box, a clear box. This is an ISIS-inspired terrorist, this is an al Shabaab-inspired terrorist. But when you have this sort of mix of ideologies, it becomes much messier. It becomes a lot harder to do. That is the first problem, just in terms of cataloging them. But the second is it makes trying to anticipate their actions much more difficult. We know, for example, what ISIS's intent is, their targeting intent. They are very clear of who they think are their top ten most wanted list. But when you throw into the mix some other ideology, like New Black Panther Party, well now it gets a lot more muddled. And maybe their targeting is going to be different. We have three examples here that we will quickly talk about.

**Kim Brown, Deputy Bureau Chief, New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness:** Just to take it back for a little bit. How this blended extremism came about was the Alton Nolen case. After the incident where this individual in Oklahoma beheaded one of his coworkers and after looking at his Facebook, we saw a blending of some Black Hebrew Israelite, as well as some Islamic propaganda. When we briefed it on our webinar shortly after the incident, we described it as a hodge-podge, but we could not continue with the word hodge-podge, even though we like it. We came up with blended extremism, but I think it actually does give you a good idea of what we are describing. Individuals that are taking bits and pieces and fitting it into their own belief system. The first incident or example we have is that of Zale Thompson, the New York hatchet attack back in October 2014. Zale attended several New Black Panther Party meetings in response to, what he perceived as, violence from law enforcement. He self-radicalized himself by looking at a number of ISIS beheading videos. Taking those two ideologies and blending them together - the October 23rd incident happened.

**Baratta:** The next one is the Garland Texas shooting attacks. You may remember there was a "Draw Muhammad" contest there and two guys showed up armed and they were killed before they could do any serious harm. But they were inspired by a mix of ISIS and al Shabaab operatives and sympathizers online. It does not appear they were directed. Nobody said, "Go to this event and take these guns and at six o'clock do this." But rather they were getting that inspiring motivating talk. "Hey, you got to do something. Your brothers overseas are getting killed every day. It is time to take a stand for the religion." So there was that blending going on. And again here, it is very interesting at the local level where you do not see that organizational

competition really having an impact because al Shabaab is an al-Qa'ida affiliate. Yet again, two groups that in other parts of the world are in open combat, on the ground here in the US, "I'll take a little bit of this, I'll take a little bit of that. It is all good." And they do not really make those distinctions.

And then in Oregon, we have seen some interesting things. It is probably unsurprising to see the same militia and sovereigns mixing because they are sort of from the same family tree. They are kind of like first cousins, if you will. It would not be unusual to see similarities there. We did see some interesting things though. There is some white nationalism, white supremacy in there, although that is not the driving force of it. We did see there was one gentleman in the compound who was a little bit militia, he was a little bit white supremacist, and we knew he was white supremacist because he was supporting ISIS because he was convinced that ISIS was going to destroy Israel and the Jews. You have that on the individual level. You have some blending. But I think what you are going to see there is that you have so many ideologies in a tight space, I am calling this the petri dish of blending extremism. You are going to have militia members, sovereigns, other anti-government extremists, white supremacists. They are going to be in a tight place, in a tight period of time, they are going to exchange views and when they all go back to their homes, they are going to take a little bit of this, a little bit of that and we will probably see some sort of evolution in these groups and these ideologies moving forward. I think that is something we can expect.

**Brown:** It might become common to see a, maybe a white supremacist sending out sovereign citizen literature or using the terminology to get out of court. Again, it will be very hard to look at the indicators and put these people in a box because, again, they are pulling from different ideologies making it very hard for the analysts and for law enforcement to identify.

**Baratta:** And a great example of how this makes it difficult is the San Bernardino attack that just happened in December. Their reports are that at least the husband was radicalized and considering an attack several years prior, motivated, I believe, by al-Qa'ida ideology. But did any of that have anything to do with their targeting of that county office building, or was that a mix of personal grievance and some other events? We are still figuring that out now, but that is what makes this muddied sort of mess. No longer can some, I should not say no longer, it is getting increasingly rare where some sort of corporate HQ is issuing targeting guidelines and everyone else just follows that order and goes, "Oh, we are all going to building X to conduct an attack, or hijack airline B." Instead, we are seeing a lot of encouragement, people taking their own initiative and you are just seeing that mixture of personal grievance and ideology together and they can concoct their own target list. That makes things very, very difficult for us.

**Brown:** I think when someone is upset or angered by a certain situation, whether it be a personal grievance or events that are taking place, and they are looking for an outlet or someone to vent to, they find ISIS propaganda or they are find some al-Qa'ida propaganda, something online. It is those different venues that they are looking at to find inspiration to do something. Again, it will be multiple groups or ideologies that they will pull their inspiration from, making it a lot harder for us to identify these individuals.

**Baratta:** With blended extremism, honestly we are still working with this definition and trying to define it. I think we are going to have a lot of trouble doing that because it is a very nebulous concept. But what sparked us to think about this was very much individual cases. I do not know

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if we have seen it institutionalized, yet. I guess I have to leave it there. I do not know if I have seen these institutionalized yet, but I do not think it is impossible to see that. We have a lot more thinking and talking and writing to do on this subject before it is solidified and we can say a ton about it.

**Martorana:** So, Dean, following our last episode for the Threat assessment series, you briefly touched on the concept of blended extremism. Let us go into that in a little more detail. Do we anticipate seeing more blended extremists in the future?

**Baratta:** I think so. And I think that one of the best ways to think about blended extremism is if you look at the terrorism model of, let us say, the 1960s, 70s, 80s, you had some formal structures. And you kind of needed to have those if you wanted to coordinate with people. You did not have access to the technical means we have today, where you can have an instant message Skype conversation with somebody across the world instantaneously. It was not easy to do. So you needed formal structures. You needed organizations. We have seen that change and increasingly, we are seeing people approach extremism in a buffet or a cafeteria style, where they can take a little bit of this ideology and a little bit of that one. And they wrap that up with their own personal grievances or goals. You just do not need to have that tight connection to an organization with a formal manifesto, like you did thirty, forty, sixty, years ago. I think we will increasingly see that as it becomes easier and easier to make your individual ideology known, and access other ideologies, you are going to see more and more people incorporating what they like and leaving aside what they do not.

**Martorana:** As homeland security professionals, we often try to lump people into buckets or categories. Obviously, this concept of blended extremism is going to make that hard for us to do that. How do we account or adjust for that then?

**Baratta:** This is something that drives us crazy, and it really is just a problem, I think, for researchers and analysts who look at this. I do not think anybody else really cares too much. But there are important implications for that. If you take someone, for example, who is inspired a little bit by ISIS, a little bit by al-Qa'ida, a little bit by domestic terrorist extremists, and you just lump them into the ISIS column, that is not accurate and it is a problem for a couple of reasons. First, it makes, for example, ISIS look bigger than they are. It then also deemphasizes the impact of these other ideologies that they draw on. And so you are not really getting an accurate threat picture out there. At some point, using the old bin system, where everybody can only fall into one ideology bin, is problematic. And if this trend increases, assessments of threat are going to be less and less tied to reality. Our first step in trying to figure out how to deal with this is recognizing that it exists, recognizing that people are going to create new ideologies. We are working through that right now. We do not have all of the answers. But, we think this is a good first step.

**Martorana:** Great. Thanks, Dean. And remember, stay safe and Jersey strong.

**Outro:**

Again, all links can be found in the show notes and on our website at [www.njohsp.gov](http://www.njohsp.gov). Thanks for listening and don't forget to subscribe to *Intelligence. Unclassified*.