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**NJOHSP****OFFICE OF HOMELAND SECURITY AND PREPAREDNESS**

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**NJOHSP Podcast *Intelligence. Unclassified.***  
**Episode 18: The Inspired Terrorist –**  
**A New Era of 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:** Hi, this is Rosemary Martorana, Director of Intelligence here at the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness. Today, I am speaking with Dean Baratta, our Analysis Bureau Chief, on homegrown violent extremists or HVEs. So Dean, to kick us off, what is an HVE?

**Dean Baratta, Analysis Bureau Chief, New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness:** We define homegrown violent extremists as those persons who operate primarily in the United States and are inspired by a foreign terrorist organization as opposed to being directed by one. That inspiration to act can include attacks, but can also include things like material support to terrorist groups, as well.

**Martorana:** That being said, do homegrown violent extremists, or HVEs, always act alone, or can they also act in groups?

**Baratta:** Traditionally, homegrown violent extremists do act individually, but we have certainly seen cases, like the San Bernardino attacks or the Boston bombings, where there will be two or a small group of people involved. Both are possible, but it is generally individuals acting alone. An important thing to note about homegrown violent extremists is the foreign terrorist organization that they derive inspiration for need not be an al-Qa'ida or an ISIS-like group. It can, in fact, be any foreign terrorist organization. It just so happens that, as we have seen the phenomenon manifest over the past several years, it has been exclusively these sort of Salafi jihadist groups.

**Martorana:** And why do you think that is?

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**Baratta:** Well, right now, those are the primary international terrorist groups active, globally. There certainly are other terrorist groups, but they tend to be more local or regional in focus, and so, it is a little harder to derive inspiration to act in the United States for a conflict that may occur in South America, or in Africa, or Asia, or even Europe.

**Martorana:** Oftentimes, when we are speaking to the public, they ask why such cases like Dylann Roof, who targeted a church in Charleston, South Carolina, is not considered a homegrown violent extremist. Can you explain why that might be?

**Baratta:** Yes, there are a couple of answers there. The first is that homegrown violent extremist is a specific term and it involves being inspired by a foreign terrorist organization. Dylann Roof was inspired by white supremacist ideology. That is a domestic ideology, so we would refer to him as a domestic terrorist. Part of the confusion is the term homegrown terrorist gets used a lot imprecisely in media, among government, among academics and that is used a little more broadly to identify anyone who is radicalized by sort of any ideology in the United States. The terms are close, unfortunately they get mixed and used in imprecise ways. But when we say homegrown violent extremists, it has to be someone who is inspired by a foreign terrorist organization, but operating here in the United States.

**Martorana:** What type of tactics do homegrown violent extremists prefer or use?

**Baratta:** The preferred method of attack for a homegrown violent extremist has really changed over the years. If you look at when we saw homegrown violent extremists really come on to the stage around 2009-2010, the preference was really for explosives. They wanted to emulate the attacks of 9/11, the Madrid bombings in 2003, and the London bombings of 2005. That was the attack that was seen to most likely get you global attention, get recognition among the foreign terrorist organization you are trying to impress, and sort of gain that sort of immortality that these folks were looking for. And when we look at the attack types, it was an 8 to 1 ratio of explosives to handguns or handheld weapons in terms of a preference. Just off the maps, almost everybody was looking to try to acquire some sort of explosives. And that was something that brought them to the attention of law enforcement, almost all the time. Al-Qa'ida recognized very quickly that that was not a particularly winning strategy for them and thus had been requesting over and over of their sympathizers, to abandon explosives and use more easily acquirable material. Whether that is a vehicle, a handgun, whatever was available at hand. That message never really resonated with homegrown violent extremists. In 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria put out a call to homegrown violent extremists where they encouraged people to use any means at their disposal. And that message really did resonate with HVEs in a way that al-Qa'ida's did not. Looking at that same sort of explosives to firearm ratio preference, it flipped very dramatically to a 1 to 3 ratio. For every 1 plot that involved explosives, there were now 3 that involved firearms or handheld weapons, so almost a 180 in terms of preference.

**Martorana:** Why do you think those tactics shifted from individuals wanting to conduct sophisticated attacks using improvised explosive devices to using readily available weapons, such as knives, and guns in that sense?

**Baratta:** Most of that is due to the increased influence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or ISIS. Going way back to 2010, certainly al-Qa'ida had realized that homegrown violent extremists were not having the success rate that they had hoped. And so they had begun

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advocating using sort of anything that was at hand to conduct attacks, whether that was vehicles, small arms, knives, things like that, but really that message just did not seem to resonate very well with the HVE community. In 2014, after the coalition bombing campaigns lead by the United States started against ISIS, ISIS put out a very similar message saying use whatever means are at your disposal. That really seemed to resonate with the community and we saw people very quickly after that adopt these measures.

**Martorana:** What kind of targets are these individuals focused on, or are they not focused on any particular target at all?

**Baratta:** That is really interesting as well because again, there we have seen a shift. In the early years of HVEs, 2009 to 2012, 2013, we saw a real focus on sort of the symbols of American power: government, law enforcement. And we would occasionally see some targeting of civilians, but that was just less common. There were some hypotheses out there that HVEs saw themselves as soldiers or warriors and wanted to engage with targets who they saw as equals. Post-2014, let us say in this new era of homegrown violent extremists, not so much. There were some initial calls to target government and military and law enforcement, and we have seen that happen, in some cases. But if you look at more recent HVE attacks, like the San Bernardino attacks, the Boston bombing attacks, those are clearly not targeting symbols that you could equate with national policy, government policy. Much more of an intent to sort of target the citizenry more broadly. I think the goal of that is to spread fear more broadly, make sure that nobody feels like they are safe.

**Martorana:** That being said, how does law enforcement kind of detect and deter this type of activity?

**Baratta:** Homegrown violent extremists present a number of challenges for law enforcement that more traditional terrorist groups do not. More traditional terrorist groups generally are more methodical and they are organized. And that, by its very nature, may make their chances of success greater, but it also makes their chances of being detected greater. Homegrown violent extremists, particularly ones who operate either individually or in very tight social networks, they can keep their activity secret. They do not need to report back to a home base. They do not need to go through extensive pre-planning, in many cases, so it makes it very difficult. In terms of their targeting, a lot of times as well, homegrown violent extremists mix up their own personal priorities with their ideologies and we see their targeting can be very local or involve personal grievances. Again, makes it a little difficult they are not always going for the big symbolic targets. In terms of disrupting homegrown violent extremists in the United States, we have been very fortunate in having a very high disruption rate and a lot of that comes from both good police work, but also people who know these individuals, who are reporting their suspicious activity. Overwhelmingly, when we talk about homegrown violent extremists, in the majority of those cases, there are close people, friends, family, coworkers, who recognize a radicalization of behavior, a change in behavior, with some indication that something bad is going to happen. Those are really leveraging those people to make the call is sort of the best way to identify them early.

**Martorana:** Have we seen any HVE activity in New Jersey, or any HVE arrests in New Jersey?

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**Baratta:** In 2015, there were 75 arrests of homegrown violent extremists. Of those 75, 5 arrests occurred in New Jersey. Of those 4, 4 were involved with material support of a terrorist organization and 1 was plotting an attack. Now, of the 75 arrests we had in the country last year, the overwhelming majority, about 86%, were in support of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. In New Jersey, all five of ours were.

**Martorana:** All 5 of ours were related to ISIS?

**Baratta:** Correct, yes.

**Martorana:** Looking at the arrests we saw in New Jersey, were any of these individuals associated with each other, or were they all one-off cases?

**Baratta:** Yes, actually. We had a little bit of both. We had 2 that were individuals, and then we had a group of 3, who were a pair of brothers and a close friend. So, we saw a little bit of both.

**Martorana:** Let us expand on that a little more. You said 2 of those individuals were brothers. Are we seeing familial ties between HVEs that act in coordination with each other?

**Baratta:** Certainly. I think even beyond HVEs I think either intentionally or not, terrorists have sort of stumbled on the fact that tight family groups really suit themselves well if you are trying to do some kind of clandestine activity. We have seen the San Bernardino attacks, a husband and wife; the Boston bombing, two brothers; the arrest in New Jersey of a pair of brothers. Even if you look at sort of directed terrorist attacks, like Paris and Brussels, they involved brothers, as well. And it is pretty clear if you review individual homegrown violent extremist cases, you can see why that would be a good move for them. One of the things is as you review criminal complaints of homegrown violent extremists, you will see over and over again this sort of overwhelming desire to connect with that foreign terrorist organization that they are inspired by, to get some sort of validation from them. More often than not, that is what trips them up and gives them away and gets them to the attention of law enforcement. When you have groups like the Boston bombers or you have the San Bernardino attackers, those are already groups that can give themselves validation, can encourage each other when they have low morale and keep their plotting going. We have not done any quantitative numbers on this, but it appears these tight family groups or tight social networks gives them an extra advantage in terms of carrying out a successful attack.

**Martorana:** In the 2016 NJOHSP Annual Threat Assessment, we evaluated homegrown violent extremists as being the highest threat to the state of New Jersey. Looking down the road, a year from now, 18 months, two years from now, do you anticipate that homegrown violent extremists will remain our highest threat to the state?

**Baratta:** I think so, as far as we can peer into the future. Their high rating is not necessarily due to their capabilities. Overwhelmingly, we have seen HVEs have had fairly low capabilities, but it is because of their presence and their unpredictability. That is really what makes them more dangerous and puts them at the top of our threat ranking. While some homegrown violent extremists have done some incredibly tragic and devastating attacks, like the Boston bombing and San Bernardino, if you compare them to what a fully-functioning, fully-resourced terrorist group can do, we are still talking about an order of magnitude beyond in terms of damage, death

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tolls, things like that. It is really because they are so hard to identify that gets them on top of our list.

**Martorana:** Great, thanks Dean. To learn more about homegrown violent extremists or to access our 2016 NJOHSP Annual Threat Assessment, please visit our website at [www.njohsp.gov](http://www.njohsp.gov). Thank you!

**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 do not forget to subscribe to *Intelligence. Unclassified*.