

## RECOGNIZING ARSON WITH A NEXUS TO TERRORISM

We assess with moderate confidence that terrorists are very likely to continue emphasizing arson as an attack tactic in order to further their cause. This tactic is of concern due to the ease in which it can be conducted and the potential for casualties and material damage. The precursors required for an arson attack are easily obtainable, training is minimal, and the planning cycle can be accelerated. While all fires present challenges, a fire with a terrorism nexus may present even more difficulties to responding personnel, including the potential for ambushes (luring), intentional depletion of resources (diversion), and follow-on or secondary attacks.

We make this assessment based on evidence found in terrorist publications, which espouse arson as a mechanism of attack, and have provided instructions for attacking specific targets. Terrorists continue to convey messages that emphasize arson. For example, a Bangladesh-based terrorist group plotted to set fires in shopping malls in an effort to create numerous casualties; however, structures, vehicles, and wild land areas have also been mentioned.

- In January 2017, ISIS in its English-language *Rumiyah* magazine instructed violent extremists in the US on how to make improvised incendiary devices (IIDs) and target buildings and wild land areas.
- In March 2013, AQAP's tenth issue of its English-language *Inspire* magazine offered instructions targeting parked vehicles.
- In June 2012, AQAP's ninth issue of *Inspire* magazine offered instructions on constructing a "timed incendiary device," otherwise known as a firebomb, including a list of suggested materials. The magazine recommended targeting urban areas adjacent to wild land areas, to destroy natural resources as well as structures and vehicles.

**SCOPE:** This product brings awareness of continued terrorist interest in using arson as an attack tactic to further their cause.



### Just Terror Tactics; Arson Attacks – English Language Media Publication:

- Instructions include information on acquiring flammable materials, target selection, and determining the best time for an attack.
- The article also recommended claiming the attack with graffiti near target or a message taped to a brick, thrown through window.



**NOTICE:** This product was developed by the Joint Counterterrorism Assessment Team, which is a collaboration by NCTC, DHS, the FBI, and state, local, tribal, and territorial government personnel to improve information sharing and enhance public safety. The product is intended to promote coordination among intergovernmental authorities and the private sector in identifying, preventing, and responding to terrorist activities. The product is not in response to a specific threat to the Homeland and the information contained should be considered within the context of existing laws, authorities, agreements, policies or procedures within responding agencies' jurisdiction. For additional information contact us at [JCAT@NCTC.GOV](mailto:JCAT@NCTC.GOV).

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**CONSIDERATIONS:** Investigations into seemingly routine acts of arson may result in the identification of terrorism. Terrorist arson is hard to discern from criminal arson at both the response and investigation stages. Terrorist arson can be used in combination with other weapons and tactics to increase the severity of an attack, and it is almost certain that the tactic will continue to evolve. It is critically important that first responders remain apprised of the latest tactics, techniques and procedures, and train for scenarios beyond the normal routine, as described below.

- Fires set in a manner which would purposefully block ingress and/or egress routes for first responders and the evacuating public;
- A free-burning fire that represents an Immediate Danger to Life and Health (IDLH), to include smoke, limited visibility, and extreme atmospheric temperatures that limit the time and safety of the first responders;
- Multiple fires that may intentionally deplete first responders and their resources;
- Fire may be a byproduct of an explosion, and could be the result of an IED attack;
- Some of the elements of the attack planning cycle may be reduced or accelerated, placing an increased emphasis on detecting violent radicalization and mobilization to violence;
- Arson may be used as a diversion, to slow or overwhelm emergency responders as a predicate to a larger attack;
- A fire-related call for service may appear to be small, have failed, or be an obvious hoax, used in an attempt to lure responders;
- Witness statements, established tip lines, and neighborhood canvass will assist investigations and may include: CCTV video from surrounding areas, 911 calls, security and fire/safety alarm logs, as well as financial, insurance, and property records; and
- The insider threat must also be taken into account during fire prevention planning and investigations. In 2007, a UK-based al-Qa'ida terrorist was found guilty of using hotel employment to study disabling security and fire/life safety systems;



**Indicators of “Torching Parked Vehicles” could include:**

- Cars parked in unattended or unusual areas;
- Presence of excessive amounts of flammable fuels;
- Other combustible materials in unapproved containers;
- Fire which seems to originate from the exterior of vehicle; and
- Fires involving multiple vehicles.



## FIRST RESPONDER'S TOOLBOX

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- Evidence of manipulation or disabling of fire or life safety systems in a facility, to include alarms, sprinkler systems, risers, and fail open/closed doors; and
- Fire prevention planning should include vulnerability assessments of a structure's fire or life safety systems to reduce the damage and impact of terrorist arson attacks.

**MITIGATION:** Increased coordination among all potential first responders is paramount, as combined fire, EMS, and law enforcement efforts are key to saving lives through early extinguishment or containment.

- **Fire Service** – Enhanced awareness of arson attacks; determination of investigation initiator (company level officer, incident commander, fire investigator); how an investigation is started (request from companies on the scene, automatic dispatch to working incident, ATF Task Force response); and importance of an early investigation prior to overhaul operations to preserve evidence. First arriving firefighters may be faced with out of the ordinary or abnormal factors or situations.
- **Law Enforcement** – Increased training on basics of fire suppression and survival in an IDLH environment, to include equipment familiarization and use. First arriving police officers may assist in reporting out of the ordinary or abnormal details, factors or situations.
- **Private Sector Partnerships** – Importance of public safety and private sector information sharing and outreach, as recognition and reporting of suspicious activities may disrupt a plot or enhance mitigation of an attack. This interaction will ensure facets of emergency planning are current, implemented, disseminated, and practiced; fire or life safety systems and alarms are tested on a regular, recurring basis; and recurring fire extinguisher training is conducted. Established partnerships with hospitals, insurance companies, and neighboring state and local fire investigators can be invaluable during investigations.
- **Interagency** – Policies, plans and procedures that clearly define roles across jurisdictions, and exercises and training across all first responder disciplines to accomplish unified objectives in the event of an emergency. This coordination will help ensure scene preservation, chain of custody for potential evidence, early notification to prosecutor's office, and notification to FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force or Field Offices in the event of possible terrorism nexus.

**RESOURCE:** The Bomb Arson Tracking System (BATS) is a web-based case management system for state and local arson & explosives investigators to access up-to-date national arson and explosives investigative data from across the nation at no charge. Users are able to capture details of explosives and fire cases, including IED components; incendiary devices; origin-and-cause or device placement; suspect information; casualties; dollar losses; fire descriptors; collateral crimes; witness interviews; juvenile fire setters; and descriptions of how a device was delivered. For additional information visit <https://www.atf.gov/explosives/bomb-arson-tracking-system-bats>





## PRODUCT FEEDBACK FORM

(U) JCAT MISSION: To improve information sharing and enhance public safety. In coordination with the FBI and DHS, collaborate with other members of the IC to research, produce, and disseminate counterterrorism (CT) intelligence products for federal, state, local, tribal and territorial government agencies and the private sector. Advocate for the CT intelligence requirements and needs of these partners throughout the IC.

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ADDITIONAL COMMENTS, SUGGESTIONS, OR QUESTIONS. HOW DOES JCAT MAKE PRODUCTS BETTER?

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WHAT TOPICS DO YOU RECOMMEND?

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