SPECIAL ADVISORY
Church Security in Light of Jihadi Threats

30 March 2018

Background

On December 26, 2017 the news media reported on the first video statement released by the Islamic State (ISIS) in Somalia. "#ISIS called on lone wolves to attack during #Christmas and #NewYearsEve, and to hit nightclubs, churches, and markets, regardless of the presence of children," the SITE Intelligence Group said in a description of the video.[1]

This was the second consecutive Christmas season during which jihadi groups issued threats and calls for attacks on Christian targets. In response to a number of inquiries, CCI has issued this Special Advisory regarding church security in light of such threats.

History

The recent Islamic State Somalia statement is significant, because it is very current. However, it is by no means the first time modern jihadis have threatened the church. Here are just a few examples:

- Recovered from a student notebook used in a terrorism camp conducted by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in the Fergana Valley in the mid-1990's (pre-dating Osama bin Laden's influence in the region): "From among religious peoples we will kill those who try to gain converts to Christianity on Muslim soil, spies who works as Christian clerics, (those) Christians and Jews who speak against the mujahideen and those who propagate against Islam, and those Christians who collect money for the struggle against Muslims, and those who speak against Muslims."[2] Foreign Policy magazine wrote that "The Christian missionaries targeted here were fairly recent arrivals in Central Asia. Many belonged to U.S. evangelical groups that saw the fall of communism as a signal to expand proselytizing efforts throughout the former Soviet Union."

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[1] https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2017/12/26/islamic-state-affiliated-fighters-somalia-release-first-official-video/981105001/

[2] http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/11/04/the-terrorist-notebooks/

- Osama bin Laden: "To kill the Americans and allies – civilians and military – is an individual duty incumbent upon every Muslim in all countries…" (February 23, 1993)[3]
- Abu Bakr al-Baghadi (leader of ISIS prime): "If you can kill a disbelieving American or European – especially the spiteful and filthy French – or an Australian, or a Canadian, or any other disbeliever from the disbelievers waging war … then rely upon Allah, and kill him in any manner or way however it may be. Do not ask for anyone's advice and do not seek anyone's verdict. Kill the disbeliever, whether he is civilian or military, for they have the same ruling. Both of them are disbelievers." He went on to say, referencing the attempted attack on a conference in Garland, Texas: "We say to the defenders of the cross, the U.S., that future attacks are going to be harsher and worse. The Islamic State soldiers will inflict harm on you with the grace of God. The future is just around the corner." [4] (September 22, 2014)
- On December 24, 2016 the US Department of Homeland Security issued a warning to churches in the US:

CNN Feds warn of ISIS threats to churches, holiday events

By **Evan Perez** and **Shimon Prokupecz**, CNN
Updated 2:11 PM ET, Sat December 24, 2016

Story highlights

There are no known specific, credible threats

The bulletin was issued out of an abundance

(CNN) — Federal authorities warned Friday that ISIS sympathizers "continue aspirational calls for attacks on holiday gatherings, including targeting churches."

The bulletin was issued by the FBI and Department of Homeland Security and issued to law enforcement agencies and private security companies around the US.

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[3] *Messages to the World*, Bruce Lawrence (ed.)
[4] (CNN, May 5, 2015)

- The 5th issue of the ISIS online magazine Rumiyah, issued in January 2016, included the following threat and photograph of First Baptist Church in Dallas, listing its address and stating "A popular Crusader gathering place waiting to be burned down."

1707 San Jacinto in Dallas, Texas — A popular Crusader gathering place waiting to be burned down

The Threat to Churches in the U.S.

Terrorist attacks within the US generally fall into one of two categories: planned, targeted events initiated and sanctioned by one of the major jihadi groups against strategic and/or symbolic targets, and actions initiated by self-radicalized local persons (sometimes referred to as "lone wolves") attacking targets of opportunity. The primary jihadi threat to the vast majority of U.S. churches falls into the second category. By definition, this category involves random targets and the ability to quantify the threat to any one place is impossible. We know that the threat to a single target is very low, but we also know that it is indeed a real and foreseeable threat. Fortunately, this type of attack is usually carried out by an individual (or perhaps a pair) who are generally unprepared, untrained and can be thwarted by a prepared security presence.

An added benefit to having a prepared security presence for a jihadi threat is that such a presence will provide the same benefits in countering a more likely (but still rare) threat: the

"active shooter" who either targets someone at the church or who just picks the church as a place to vent whatever rage drives him or her to this kind of attack. That same security presence will also serve extraordinarily well in dealing with the more routine safety and security issues that every church faces.

One of the greatest challenges any church security team faces is the fact that although an attack could occur at any time on any Sunday in any church, statistically the chances of something happening at "your" church on any given Sunday are very low. That environment challenges the need to maintain vigilance every Sunday – it can be hard to continually prepare for something that is unlikely to happen.

CCI offers two thoughts about this: The first from the 9/11 Commission Report, and the second from the Bible:

- "The most important failure was one of imagination. <u>We do not believe leaders understood the gravity of the threat</u>."[5]
- **"**Once again a message came to me from the Lord: "Son of man, give your people this message: 'When I bring an army against a country, the people of that land choose one of their own to be a watchman. When the watchman sees the enemy coming, he sounds the alarm to warn the people. Then if those who hear the alarm refuse to take action, it is their own fault if they die. They heard the alarm but ignored it, so the responsibility is theirs. If they had listened to the warning, they could have saved their lives. But if the watchman sees the enemy coming and doesn't sound the alarm to warn the people, he is responsible for their captivity. They will die in their sins, but I will hold the watchman responsible for their deaths.'" (Ezekiel 33: 1-6)

<u>Objectives of a Church Security Presence</u>

1. To provide a visible deterrent to any professional adversary (criminal or jihadi).

2. To identify and intercept any violent threat as far outside (prior to entry into any building) as possible.

3. To prevent an adversary(ies) from gaining access to the sanctuary or any crowded location.

4. To neutralize any violent attack at the earliest possible moment.

5. To accomplish these objectives without disrupting services and without creating anxiety or stress to worshippers, guests and staff.

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[5] http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report_Exec.htm

<u>Overview of a Proposed Church Security Presence</u>

Developing a robust but discreet church security presence requires dedication and commitment. It is relatively easy to create a robust "no holds barred" security capability, and it is also relatively easy to create a laid-back and very quiet security presence. The hard part is achieving both simultaneously. Doing so requires the right people, appropriate policies, the right procedures and the right training. Developing this is beyond the scope of this document, but the overview of what's needed to create such a capability is fairly straightforward:

1. First, **the right people**. There is nothing more important than care in selecting a security team.

2. **Policy**. The most important decision facing a church security team is whether or not the members should be armed. This issue is too complex to be fully addressed here; but the following are certainly key factors to be considered:

   a. The theology of the church regarding the issues of self-defense and the use of deadly force.
   b. Local laws.
   c. Insurance and liability considerations.
   d. Selecting persons who are authorized to be armed. It is very important to understand that in many jurisdictions, the qualifications necessary to obtain a concealed carry permit are *pro forma* and in no way would indicate that the individual has the knowledge, judgment and skill to use a firearm in a crowded environment such as a worship service without needlessly endangering innocent bystanders.

3. **Procedures**. The types of threats and events most likely faced in a church setting are foreseeable. Developing procedures that are appropriate for the ethos and environment of each church should be a high priority.

4. **Training**. Training is necessary – it is what merges the right people with the desired procedures. At a minimum, the team needs to have a plan for a "black" situation (an ongoing active shooter inside). Our recommendation is that the team prepare and plan to engage such a threat by moving towards it as rapidly as possible and engaging the perpetrator as soon as possible.

5. **Communications**. The key actors in a church security program (pastors, ushers/greeters and security personnel) should have real-time communications, preferably radios.

<u>Outline of a Recommended Security Presence</u>

Since every church is unique, there is no "one size fits all" plan for a security presence. However, here are two foundational principles that can be used to develop specific plans:

1. The security plan needs to involve more than just the security team. It should include pastors, ushers, greeters, deacons – everyone serving the church during worship services. The security staff will never be large enough to see everything; but the rest of the team serve as force multipliers by being alert and practicing "if you see something, say something".

2. Church security teams should be trained and positioned to detect threats as far away from the majority of worshippers as possible, so intervention can occur before large numbers of innocent people are nearby.

Conclusion

This memorandum is intended to be an overview only – all of the points herein require further discussion and development. The National Organization of Church Security and Safety Management (NOCSSM) is a non-profit, faith-based organization that provides training and support to church security teams. Carl Chinn of NOCSSM maintains a database of incidents of church violence.

Contact us:

Crisis Consulting International
9452 Telephone Rd., No. 223
Ventura, CA 93004 U.S.A.
Tel (+) 1-805-642-2549
Email: info@cricon.org
Web: www.cricon.org