

## Potential for Terrorists to Exploit Challenges Associated with COVID-19

Pandemics and other national crises create unprecedented challenges that terrorists could exploit to conduct attacks against an already stressed society, and strained government and public safety systems. Violent extremists —irrespective of affiliation, grievance or ideology—may try to capitalize on the current global health crisis by exploiting conspiracy theories and online discussions about how to take advantage of the spread of COVID-19 to carry out attacks. While most citizens isolate in their homes, public safety personnel, hospitals and establishments, such as supermarkets and pharmacies, serve the largest number of co-located individuals, making them potentially attractive attack targets.

**SCOPE:** This product highlights the potential for terrorists to take advantage of the challenges associated with a National crisis such as COVID-19, and provides general considerations and resources for public safety personnel.

On 24 March, law enforcement authorities attempted to make a probable cause arrest on a suspect in the Kansas City area. The suspect planned to use a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device to cause severe harm and mass casualties during the COVID-19 pandemic at a local hospital. During the attempted arrest, the suspect was killed.

### CONSIDERATIONS:

- Ensure communications mechanisms to disseminate emergency public safety information.
- Prevent tunnel vision and aid in robust and rapid response in the event of a terrorist incident during a crisis through well-synchronized and ongoing information sharing efforts among federal, state, local, tribal and territorial government personnel.
- Continuously evaluate response staffing and plans to ensure adequate resources are available in the event of an attack coincidental to other crises.
- Ensure Unified Incident Command Systems are flexible enough to expand and contract based on the crisis and the current terrorist threat environment.
- Maintain awareness of evolving public safety responsibilities which may place officers in non-traditional roles such as corpse retrieval, providing medical aid, or hospital transport, and that could potentially further stress the public safety system.

### RESOURCES:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) - What Law Enforcement Personnel Need to Know About Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-law-enforcement.html>
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) - Information for First Responders on Maintaining Operational Capabilities During a Pandemic – Revised March 2020 [https://www.usfa.fema.gov/downloads/pdf/publications/first\\_responder\\_pandemic\\_operational\\_capabilities.pdf](https://www.usfa.fema.gov/downloads/pdf/publications/first_responder_pandemic_operational_capabilities.pdf)



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AUTHORED BY NCTC, DHS, FBI

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## 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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