TRUCKS, KNIVES, BOMBS, WHATEVER

EXPLORING PRO-ISLAMIC STATE INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIAL ON TELEGRAM

Bennett Clifford

10/19/2018

Key Questions

- **How do English-speaking online supporters of the Islamic State share instructional material on Telegram, and what types of material are frequently disseminated?**

- **What can dissemination of instructional material explain about the broader use of Telegram by IS supporters?**

- **What is the impact of online instructional material on terrorist learning and attack planning?**

The Data

- **98 channels, collected as part of Program on Extremism's "Telegram Tracker" project**

- **December—June 2017**
  - **98.7 members/channel**
  - **7,560 photos, 536 videos, 300 audio messages, 8,243 files, and 689 URL links**

- **Three major categories**
  - **Explosives construction**
  - **"Low-tech" attacks**
 - **Operational and cyber security**
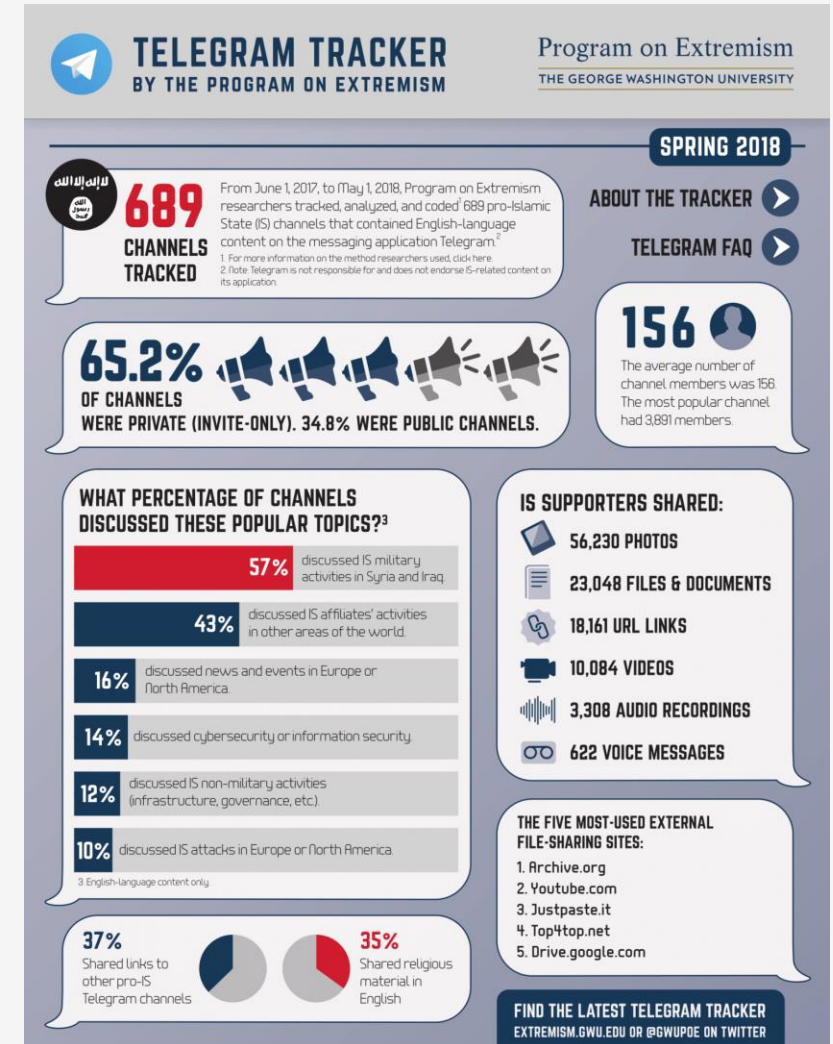
Category 1: Explosives
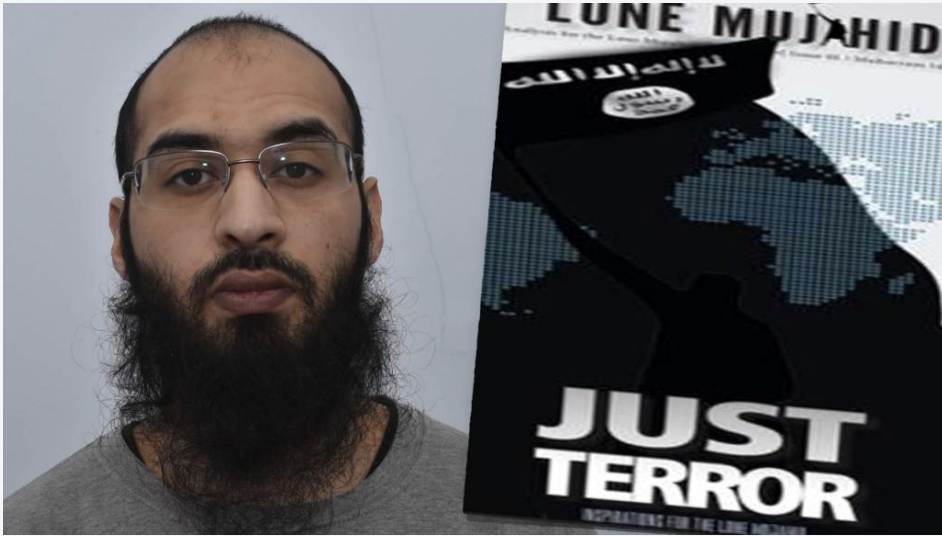
- **information and step-by-step instructions to synthesize explosive material, improvised explosive devices, and instructions for carrying out an attack using explosive devices**

- Approximately half (46%) of surveyed channels contained some form of explosives-making instruction

- "Lone Mujahid"

- Reposting of non-IS explosives manuals

  – Jihadi sources

  – Other sources

Category 2: Low Tech Attacks
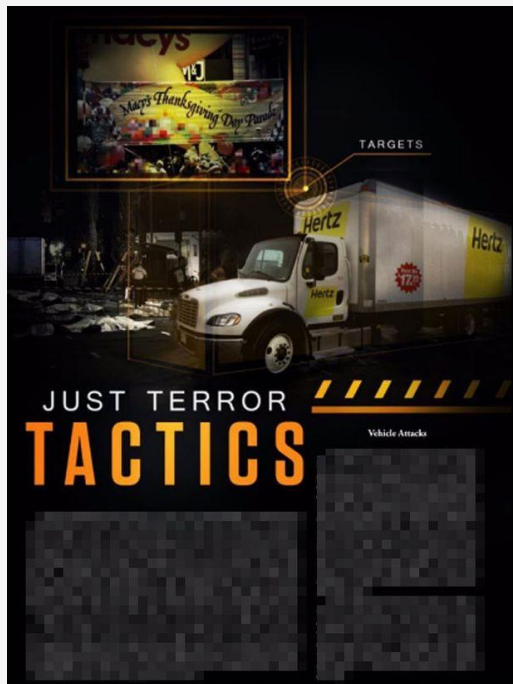
- **information and guidance about conducting attacks that do not require explosive devices (knife attacks, vehicular assaults and rammings, arsons, train derailments, etc.)**

- "Just Terror Tactics"+ crowdsourced instructions

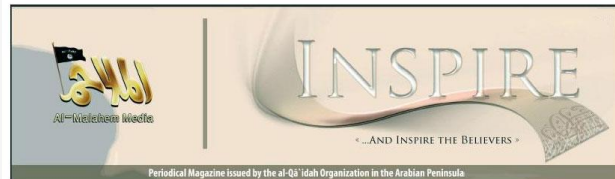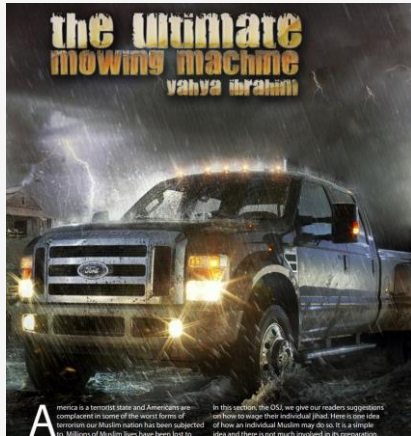   – Operational playbooks

- Recent months: poisons

Category 3: Operational and Cyber Security

- **information about avoiding detection while implementing a plot and reducing the risk of apprehension; instructions to avoid monitoring of online activity, including the installation of privacy-maximizing applications and services (virtual private networks, anonymous browsers, 'self-destruct' features, encrypted messaging and e-mail services, etc.)**

- 70% of channels posted information on OPSEC or cybersecurity

- Cybersecurity

  – application download links for avoiding detection online (VPNs, anonymous browsers, etc.)

  – Instructions for creating multiple accounts on mainstream social media

Observation 1: Everything Goes

- **English-language, pro-Islamic State Telegram channel administrators post a wide array of instructional material from inside and outside the jihadi movement.**

  – Dearth of officially-released IS instructional material in English

  – Surplus of material released by other groups (AQAP)

  – English-speaking jihadist attack planners: *a la carte* approaches to the broader movement

#2: Filesharing, Filesharing, Filesharing

- **Telegram has changed the landscape of jihadist instructional material distribution by developing a platform that combines extensive file-sharing capabilities in multiple file formats with lax regulation.**
  - Critical factor in jihadist use of the platform more broadly
  - Expansion in size/type of media
  - Laissez-faire regulation and the "clearinghouse" factor
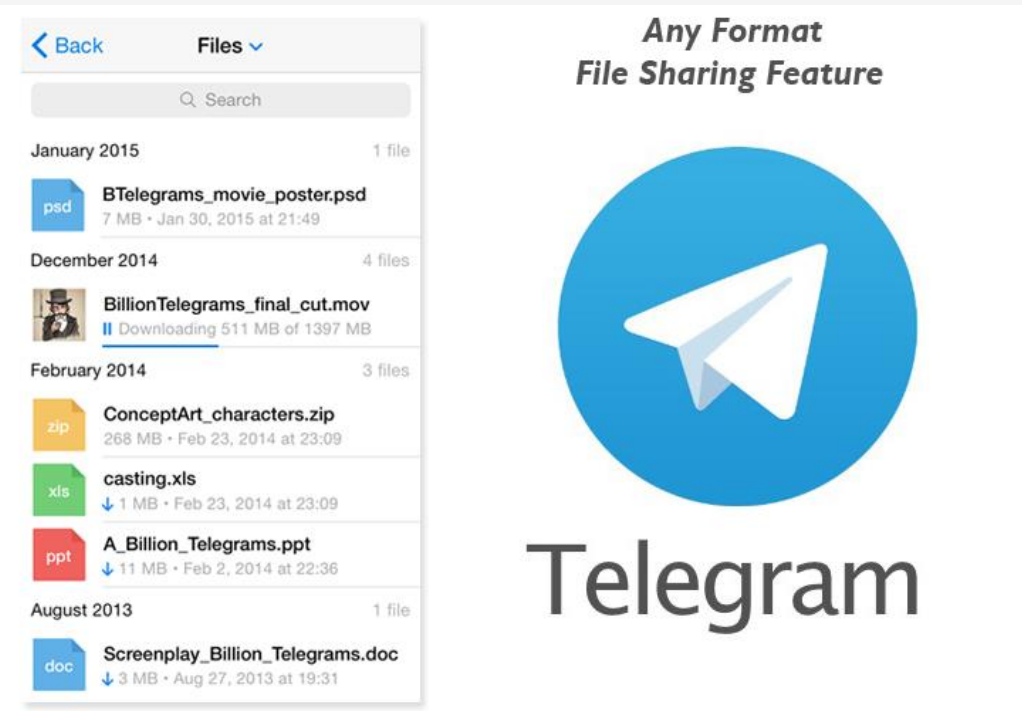
#3: Impact, Techne, and Metis
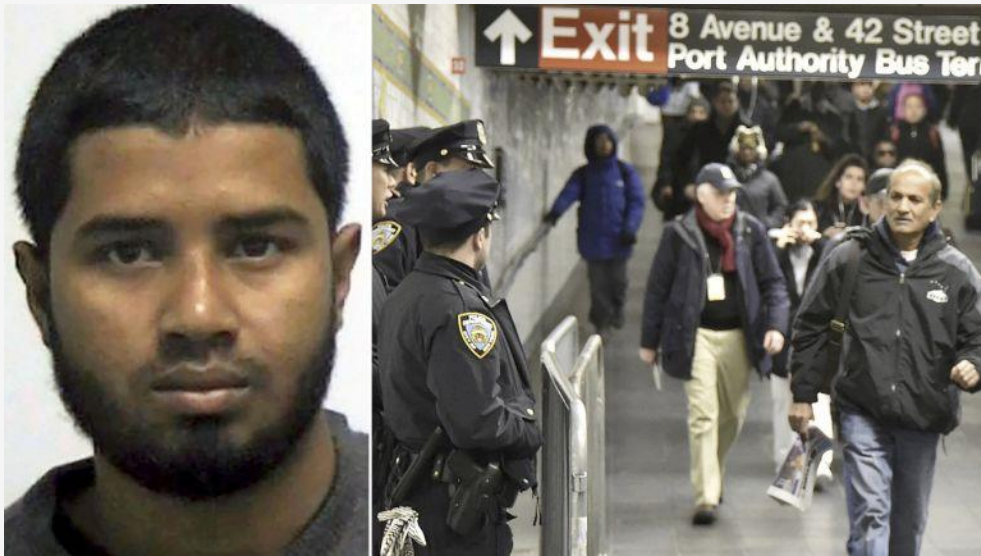
- **Should we be worried about attack-planning instructional material on Telegram?**
  - Yes, with caveats
  - Access to instructions ≠ successful plot
  - Techne/metis
  - TATP/Akayed Ullah
- **OPSEC/cybersecurity manuals- important concern**
  - Easily accessible and implementable
  - Impede law enforcement/intelligence collection
  - Make efforts against ISIS elsewhere online difficult

Thank you!

- bennettclifford@gwu.edu