



**Homeland  
Security**  
Office of Intelligence and Analysis

INTELLIGENCE NOTE

21 December 2016

## (U//FOUO) Germany: Vehicular Assault at Christmas Market Underscores Threat to Mass Gatherings and Open-Access Venues

(U//FOUO) Prepared by the Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A). Coordinated with NCTC's Joint Counter-Terrorism Assessment Team (JCAT) and NPPD's Office of Cyber and Infrastructure Analysis (OCIA).

(U//FOUO) **Scope:** I&A prepared this Intelligence Note to provide situational awareness and analysis of the 19 December vehicle ramming attack in Berlin, Germany. This product is intended to assist federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial government counterterrorism and law enforcement officials, first responders, and private sector partners in deterring, preventing, preempting, and disrupting terrorist attacks against the United States. Details are subject to change, as the investigation is still under way to identify the motive, possible links to foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs), and any possible co-conspirators. Information is current as of 20 December 2016 at 1600 EST.

### (U) Overview

(U) A 25-ton commercial truck transporting steel beams from Poland to Germany plowed into crowds at a Christmas market in Berlin at about 2000 local time on 19 December, killing at least 12 people and injuring 48 others, several critically, according to media reporting citing public security officials involved in the investigation. The truck was reportedly traveling at approximately 40 miles per hour when it rammed the Christmas market stands. Police estimate the vehicle traveled 80 yards into the Christmas market before coming to a halt.<sup>2,3</sup>



(U) Path of truck during attack on Christmas market<sup>1</sup>

(U) German authorities are calling the attack a terrorist incident, with the attacker still at large. German authorities are warning that it is unclear if the attacker was a lone offender, acted as part of a cell, or if he received any sort of direction by a FTO, and expressed concern that additional attacks are possible.<sup>4,\*</sup> An individual who was initially detained on 19 December was released on 20 December, and is no longer considered a suspect, according to German police.<sup>5,6</sup> The truck may have been stolen or hijacked with the original driver overpowered or murdered. The original driver, found dead in the truck cab, appears to have died from stabbing and shooting wounds, according to media reporting citing law enforcement officials.<sup>7</sup> The truck tracking location system indicated repeated engine stalls in the time leading up to the attack, leading the owner of the vehicle to speculate this was unlikely if a veteran driver was operating the truck, unless there was some sort of mechanical trouble.<sup>8</sup> In response to the incident, German authorities, as part of their heightened security posture, will place concrete barriers around access points at Christmas markets across Germany.<sup>9</sup>

\* (U//FOUO) DHS defines a **lone offender** as an individual motivated by one or more violent extremist ideologies who may be operating alone, and supports or engages in acts of unlawful violence in furtherance of that ideology or ideologies that may involve influence from a larger terrorist organization or a foreign actor.

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## (U//FOUO) Vehicle Ramming Featured in Recent Terrorist Messaging

(U//FOUO) I&A assesses that the 19 December likely terrorist attack at one of the largest Christmas markets in Berlin highlights terrorists' continued use of simple tactics and is consistent with recent calls by the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) for attacks in the West using "all available means." In an early December audio statement, ISIL spokesman Abu Hassan al-Muhajir called for attacks in "their homes, markets, street gatherings and anywhere they do not think of."<sup>10</sup> Vehicle ramming has been featured in recent violent extremist publications and messaging—including in ISIL's *al Rumiyah* magazine and al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula's (AQAP) *Inspire* magazine—especially since the mid-July vehicle ramming attack in Nice, France. The early-November third issue of *Rumiyah* highlighted applicable targets for vehicle ramming attacks such as "large outdoor conventions and celebrations, pedestrian-congested streets, outdoor markets, festivals, parades, and political rallies."<sup>11</sup> The most recent Homeland attack featuring this tactic occurred at Ohio State University in Columbus on 28 November, where Abdul Razak Ali Artan ran over pedestrians and then continued the attack with an edged weapon after the vehicle came to a stop.<sup>12</sup>

(U//FOUO) On 20 December, ISIL's A'maq News Agency called the attacker "an Islamic State soldier" consistent with previous instances of quickly posting claims of credit for operations.<sup>13</sup> While the attack bears the hallmarks of ISIL's tactics and targets, we have not been able to determine a definitive link to the group at this time.

## (U//FOUO) Additional Resources

(U//FOUO) In the United States, we face an increased challenge in detecting in-progress plots by individuals or small groups acting quickly and independently or with only tenuous ties to foreign handlers. Preoperational indicators are likely to be difficult to detect; therefore, state, local, tribal, territorial, and private sector partners play a critical role in identifying and reporting suspicious activities and raising the awareness of federal counterterrorism officials.

(U//FOUO) I&A has no information indicating a specific or credible threat against individuals, locations or events in the Homeland, but several recent plots and attacks in the United States and overseas involving shopping malls, mass transit, and mass gatherings, including sporting events, have shown that homegrown violent extremists (HVEs) and terrorist groups are interested in attacking these types of targets.\* I&A assesses that commercial facilities—such as festivals, concerts, outdoor events, and other mass gatherings—remain a potential target for terrorists or HVEs, as they often pursue simple, achievable attacks with an emphasis on economic impact and mass casualties. The most likely tactics in a hypothetical terrorist attack against such events likely would involve edged weapons, small arms, vehicular assaults, and possibly improvised explosive devices. The 19 December events underscore the difficulties the private sector and law enforcement face in securing venues that are pedestrian-friendly, particularly in light of the large number of such areas. With thousands of events anticipated across the United States over the next several weeks, we encourage our state and local partners to remain vigilant and to take the following actions during periods of heightened alert, including the upcoming holidays:

- » (U) Maintain ongoing and open dialogue with the fusion center and Joint Terrorism Task Force in your area;

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\* (U//FOUO) DHS defines a **homegrown violent extremist** as a person of any citizenship who has lived and/or operated primarily in the United States or its territories who advocates, is engaged in, or is preparing to engage in ideologically-motivated terrorist activities (including providing support to terrorism) in furtherance of political or social objectives promoted by a foreign terrorist organization, but is acting independently of direction by a foreign terrorist organization. HVEs are distinct from traditional domestic terrorists who engage in unlawful acts of violence to intimidate civilian populations or attempt to influence domestic policy without direction from or influence from a foreign actor.

- » (U) Ensure you are coordinating with your deployed DHS I&A Intelligence Officers to access and receive updates on current threat reporting;
- » (U) Review pertinent products and information shared via HSIN and the SitRoom; and
- » (U) Maintain outreach and engagement with the stakeholders in your AOR to keep them apprised of the situation and what we know, and to emphasize the importance of identifying and reporting suspicious activities by leveraging the “If You See Something, Say Something™” Campaign and the Nationwide SAR Initiative.

### **(U) DHS Hometown Security: Tools to Help Your Community Prepare**

(U) DHS provides free tools and resources to communities because the Department recognizes that communities are the first line of defense in keeping the public safe and secure. The Department encourages businesses to Connect, Plan, Train, and Report. Applying these four steps in advance of an incident or attack can help better prepare businesses and their employees to think proactively about the role they play in the safety and security of their businesses and communities.

- » (U) Find more at [dhs.gov/hometown-security](https://dhs.gov/hometown-security)

### **(U//FOUO) I&A would like to highlight the following products that are relevant given the current situation available:**

- » (U//FOUO) New ISIL English-Language Magazine Adapting Narrative to Appeal for Western Attacks (*Homeland Intelligence Today*, published 21 December 2016)
- » (U//FOUO) “Terrorists Likely To Expand Use of Vehicle-Ramming Tactics” (NCTC Graphic, published 13 September 2016)
- » (U//FOUO) “Vehicle Ramming: Simple, Effective Tactic” (*Roll Call Release*, published 12 September 2016)
- » (U) “Inspire Magazine Sector Threat Focus Update” (NPPD Graphic, published August 2016)
- » (U//FOUO) “US Homegrown Violent Extremists Focusing More on Civilian Targets” (*Joint Intelligence Bulletin*, published 31 August 2016)
- » (U//FOUO) “Issue 15 of AQAP’s Inspire Magazine Provides Preoperational Planning and Bomb-making Guidance for Attacking Targets in the West,” (*Joint Intelligence Bulletin*, published 20 May 2016)

#### **(U) Source Summary Statement**

*(U//FOUO) This Intelligence Note is based on open source media reporting and public statements by German national security officials. I&A has **medium confidence** in our assessment, as we have some concerns about the quality of the information in the media reporting used, as information about actors’ motivations and background continues to develop in the incident cited. Additional media reporting or information pertaining to the investigations that addressed such developments would strengthen our assessment.*

**(U) Report Suspicious Activity**

**(U) To report suspicious activity, law enforcement, Fire-EMS, private security personnel, and emergency managers should follow established protocols; all other personnel should call 911 or contact local law enforcement.** Suspicious activity reports (SARs) will be forwarded to the appropriate fusion center and FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force for further action. For more information on the Nationwide SAR Initiative, visit <http://nsi.ncirc.gov/resources.aspx>.

**(U) Tracked by:** HSEC-8.2, HSEC-8.3, HSEC-8.4, HSEC-8.5.3.

- <sup>1</sup> (U); *New York Times*; “The Truck’s Path Through a Crowded Christmas Market in Berlin”; 19 DEC 2016; <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/12/19/world/europe/berlin-truck-christmas-market.html>; Accessed 20 DEC 2016; (U); News website.
- <sup>2</sup> (U); *Washington Post*; “After Berlin attack, Europe ponders new security protections for holiday markets”; 20 DEC 2016; [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/after-berlin-attack-europe-ponders-new-security-protections-for-holiday-markets/2016/12/20/6c291cf7-7fd9-4961-9cd8-813d88ca6fde\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/after-berlin-attack-europe-ponders-new-security-protections-for-holiday-markets/2016/12/20/6c291cf7-7fd9-4961-9cd8-813d88ca6fde_story.html); Accessed 20 DEC 2016; (U); News Website.
- <sup>3</sup> (U); *The Daily Mail*; “Polish lorry driver who fought for his life as fanatic shot him dead then hijacked truck in Berlin massacre was returning to his wife to prepare Christmas presents”; 20 DEC 2016; <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4049822/Was-truck-HIJACKED-Cousin-driver-registered-Polish-lorry-claims-making-drop-Berlin-s-revealed-haulage-firm-lost-contact-moments-crash.html>; Accessed 20 DEC 2016; (U); News Website.
- <sup>4</sup> (U); *The Daily Mail*; “Germany is at War;” 20 DEC 2016; <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4049442/Terror-attack-fears-lorry-ploughs-Christmas-market-Berlin-leaving-two-people-dead.html>; Accessed 20 DEC 2016; (U); News website.
- <sup>5</sup> (U); *Spiegel Online*; Case Against Berlin Suspect Crumbles; 20 DEC 2016; <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/case-against-berlin-attack-suspect-crumbling-a-1126849.html>; Accessed 20 DEC 2016; (U); News Website.
- <sup>6</sup> (U); *Spiegel Online*; Provisionally Released Detainee; 20 DEC 2016; <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/berlin-vorlaufig-festgenommener-wieder-freigelassen-a-1126860.html>; Accessed 20 DEC 2016; (U); News website.
- <sup>7</sup> (U); *The Daily Mail*; “PICTURE EXCLUSIVE: Polish lorry driver who fought for his life as fanatic shot him dead then hijacked truck and careered through market killing 12 ”; <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4049822/Was-truck-HIJACKED-Cousin-driver-registered-Polish-lorry-claims-making-drop-Berlin-s-revealed-haulage-firm-lost-contact-moments-crash.html>; Accessed on 20 DEC 2016; (U); News website.
- <sup>8</sup> (U); Reuters; Polish truck driver dropped out of contact four hours before Berlin attack; 20 DEC 2016; <http://in.reuters.com/article/germany-truck-poland-idINKBN1491SJ>; Accessed 20 DEC 2016; (U); News website.
- <sup>9</sup> (U); *The Local De*; “The day after the Berlin truck attack: As it happened”; <http://www.thelocal.de/20161220/live-police-search-berlin-biggest-asylum-centre-christmas-market-attack>; Accessed 20 DEC 2016; (U); News website.
- <sup>10</sup> (U//FOUO); OSC; TRO2016121254449240; 12 DEC 2016; DOI 07 DEC 2016; (U//FOUO); Terrorism: ISIL's Multilingual Rumiyah Magazine Largely Recycles Content; Extracted information is U; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
- <sup>11</sup> (U//FOUO); OSC; TRR2016111165702104; 11 NOV 2016; DOI 11 NOV 2016; (U); Alert: Third Issue of ISIL English-Language 'Rumiyah' Magazine; Extracted information is U; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.
- <sup>12</sup> (U); *New York Times*; “Suspect Is Killed in Attack at Ohio State University That Injured 11”; 28 NOV 2016; <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/28/us/active-shooter-ohio-state-university.html>; Accessed 20 DEC 2016; (U); News Website.
- <sup>13</sup> (U//FOUO); OSE; TRR2016122071426630; 20 DEC 2016; DOI 20 DEC 2016; (U//FOUO); “Alert: ISIL's A'maq News Agency Claims ISIL 'Soldier' Carried Out Berlin Attack; Extracted information is U; Overall document classification is U//FOUO.