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BEHAVIORAL INDICATORS AND INSIGHTS FOR COUNTERING A POSSIBLE TERRORIST ATTACK

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Introduction

Identifying behavioral indicators before a terrorist attack involves recognizing a progression of activities, from ideological radicalization to operational planning and final preparation. Here is a list and description of the key warning signs:

Key Pre-Incident Indicators and Behaviors

- **Surveillance:** Unusual, prolonged interest in facilities, taking photos of security equipment, or monitoring security personnel.
- **Probing/Testing Security:** Attempting to breach secure areas, observing security reactions to minor breaches, or asking excessive questions.
- **“Dry Runs” (Trial Runs):** Executing practice sessions to perfect the plan, such as timing police response or mapping routes to the target.
- **Acquiring Materials:** Purchasing or stealing uniforms, badges, weapons, explosives, or illegal chemicals.
- **Financing:** Unusual financial transactions, such as credit card fraud or large cash purchases, used to fund activities.
- **Suspicious Person/Behavior:** People in restricted areas who do not belong, individuals asking sensitive questions, or someone trying to blend in but acting nervous.
- **Dry-Running/Dry-Run Behavior:** Examples include people acting as a “stiff” or a “dummy” to see how security reacts.
- **Unattended Packages:** Leaving behind luggage, bags, or other items.
- **Unusual Attire:** Wearing oversized, heavy, or bulky clothing inappropriate for the weather.



Psychological and Social Indicators

- **Radicalization Shift:** Drastic changes in behavior, including adopting violent ideologies or expressing extremist views.
- **Sudden Isolation:** Withdrawal from friends, family, and normal social activities.
- **Targeting Behaviors:** Directing interest toward specific locations and planning actions to maximize impact.

Closing Statement

The prevention of terrorism relies heavily on recognizing that violent acts are rarely spontaneous, but rather the culmination of observable, escalating behaviors. By identifying these warning signs—specifically the combination of fixation, planning, and rapid changes in behavior—individuals and authorities can intervene, transforming “see something, say something” from a slogan into a critical life-saving action.

Resources

[Recognizing Suspicious Activity: See Something Say Something](#)

[Identifying Warning Behaviors of the Individual Terrorist](#)

[IIFC: 8 Signs of Terrorism](#)

[The Homegrown Threat](#)

