

# NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT



## TACTICAL ASSESSMENT

### Tactics Used by Anti-Government Extremists and Malicious Actors against Law Enforcement Officers amid Ongoing Civil Unrest

Information Cutoff Date: July 31, 2020 | 1700 Hours

(OLEA) – Contains information shared by other law enforcement agencies

Over the last two months, the NYPD Intelligence Bureau (IB) and nationwide NYPD Operation SENTRY partners have observed numerous tactics—reflecting varying degrees of complexity—employed by anti-government extremists and violent actors targeting law enforcement amid ongoing civil unrest. These tactics include physical targeting of officers, patrol vehicles, personal residences, and property, as well as virtual targeting through posting personal information online and cyber threats. Recent incidents and threats targeting police officers both in New York City and across the U.S. underscore the need for all law enforcement personnel to exercise increased vigilance both on and off-duty.

#### ANTI-GOVERNMENT EXTREMISTS EMPLOY COMPLEX DIRECT ACTION TACTICS

(U//LES) In recent weeks, anti-government extremists across the country have engaged in a series of often violent direct action tactics targeting law enforcement officers and government infrastructure, exploiting otherwise peaceful demonstrations and mass gatherings with the aim of increasing violent clashes and exacerbating tensions. Operation SENTRY partners have observed and reported similar tactics across multiple jurisdictions, reflecting a degree of influence and cross-pollination—likely via videos and images shared on social media and communications on mobile messaging platforms—despite the opportunistic nature of the violence. Notable among these tactics are the use of improvised incendiary devices like caustic acids, thermite, fireworks, or improvised smoke screens; nontraditional weapons like lasers or airsoft guns; and the prevalence of “de-arresting” techniques to thwart officers making arrests.

- (OLEA) In New York City, fireworks have been deployed offensively against patrol vehicles and lines of police officers in New York City both as a diversionary tactic and as a way to target law enforcement personnel at protests. In some cases, fireworks have been modified with shrapnel, demonstrating intent to cause injury—in Atlanta, Georgia, bomb technicians discovered commercial grade fireworks with nails embedded in the mortar shell following a vandalism incident at a federal building.<sup>i</sup>

#### Autonomous Zones

Some anti-government extremists and criminal actors have periodically set up barricades to isolate autonomous zones and established security teams at major sites of unlawful protest activity. Shootings and other incidents of violence within the autonomous zones underscore the need for increased vigilance in the vicinity of these sites.

- In New York City, *Occupy City Hall* protesters established checkpoints at ingress and egress areas into the zone, with individuals manning the entrances.
- Protesters in Seattle erected makeshift barricades after the city removed several barriers at the Capitol Hill Organized Protest (CHOP), also known as the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone (CHAZ). On June 9, a Twitter user likely based in Seattle encouraged followers to bring weapons to ongoing protests in the city, stating, “We need more people with guns at the CHAZ.”
- In Portland, protesters set up walls and barriers outside a federal courthouse in an attempt to establish the Chinook Land Autonomous Territory (CLAT). On July 26, police discovered a bag of rifle ammunition and Molotov cocktails while responding to reports of gunfire at the site.

**UNCLASSIFIED // LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE**

- **(OLEA)** Anti-government extremists have employed or discussed using various improvised incendiary devices (IIDs) to cause structural damage to buildings or statues. Violent actors in Portland targeted a federal courthouse using Molotov cocktails that contained fire paste—likely to extend burn time—and spray paint cans attached to fireworks.<sup>ii,iii</sup> Additional violent actors breached a courthouse window and placed a pyrotechnic device through the opening, while securing a piece of chain link fence against it to inhibit first responders.<sup>iv</sup> Open source instructions and guidance for destroying statues using a chemicals and incendiary substances, including thermite, have circulated online.<sup>v</sup>

- **(OLEA)** At least 16 NYPD vehicles sustained some degree of fire damage from several incidents of targeted arson over the course of civil unrest in New York City. In two separate incidents on May 29, Molotov cocktails were thrown into NYPD vehicles. As alleged in two federal complaints, Brooklyn residents Colinford Mattis and Urooj Rahman threw a Molotov cocktail through the window of an unoccupied NYPD patrol vehicle, and Samantha Shader, a resident of Catskill, NY, threw a Molotov cocktail at an NYPD vehicle occupied by four police officers. On July 15, unknown perpetrators broke the windows of a marked NYPD van in the 6<sup>th</sup> Precinct and poured an unknown liquid accelerant, setting the van on fire.<sup>vi</sup> On July 29, a marked, unoccupied NYPD patrol vehicle in the 20<sup>th</sup> Precinct was set on fire in a similar manner.<sup>vii</sup> The investigation into both incidents is currently ongoing. According to Operation SENTRY partner reporting, the day before a local protest in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, a social media posting offered individuals \$1,000 for each patrol vehicle they lit on fire, as well as other incentives for assaulting police officers.<sup>viii</sup>



Burning NYPD patrol vehicle

- **(OLEA)** Violent anti-government extremists have used laser pointers against police officers at large gatherings in multiple cities throughout the U.S. New York City-based individuals have been observed using and possessing lasers, in some cases pointed at officers and/or equipment.<sup>ix</sup> During recent demonstrations in Portland, anti-government extremists used laser pointers against federal and local law enforcement officers, in some cases causing momentary blindness and headaches. On July 5, an individual was arrested in Portland after pointing a green laser at a law enforcement officer. The suspect also possessed several knives, eight M-80 fireworks, and a pipe bomb-style improvised explosive device (IED).<sup>x</sup>



Use of laser pointer in Portland. Source: Daily Mail

- There has been a notable increase in the use of “de-arresting” techniques across the country, with specialized trainings and information graphics circulating online. Observed de-arresting techniques include “swarming,” a tactic by which violent protesters attack police officers from multiple sides at once; rushing a patrol vehicle and surrounding it so other units cannot respond; diverting officers’ attention so the patrol car door can be opened to free the arrestee; pulling a person who is being arrested so the officer becomes unstable and falls; rushing to pull an arrestee



Example of De-Arrest Tactics Guide (Source: Instagram)

**UNCLASSIFIED // LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE**

## UNCLASSIFIED // LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE

who is on the ground away before additional police officers respond; pushing an officer's baton away or grabbing onto it; and grabbing onto officers' vests to forcibly remove them from arrestees.<sup>xi</sup>

### VIRTUAL TARGETING WITH REAL WORLD IMPLICATIONS

(U//LES) In addition to violent tactics directed at officers and government infrastructure, anti-government extremists and other malicious actors nationwide have engaged in online targeting/harassment or intimidation tactics ranging from online threats and doxing to virtual reconnaissance/physical surveillance of officers and their families.

- **(OLEA)** Operation SENTRY partners reported targeted doxing incidents against police officers and their spouses related to ongoing civil unrest in multiple localities, to include: Buffalo, New York; Chicago, Illinois; Hennepin County, Minnesota; Kentucky; Las Vegas, Nevada; Los Angeles, California; New York City, New York; Portland, Oregon; and Seattle, Washington.<sup>xii</sup>
- **(OLEA)** Law enforcement officers in Portland have been actively surveilled, with specific details of their movements posted on social media, including ingress and egress from government buildings and hotels.<sup>xiii</sup> On July 13, an unidentified individual took photographs of a federal officer leaving a hotel in Portland.<sup>xiv</sup> Individuals have also filmed and followed Portland police officers leaving work in their personally owned vehicles.<sup>xv</sup>
- **(OLEA)** Individuals have periodically identified police officers and broadcasted their personal information in public forums in an effort to intimidate them and possibly incite violence. In Portland, individuals photographed and yelled out the names of specific police officers after they witnessed alleged instances of injustice.<sup>xvi</sup> Individuals also broadcasted the home addresses of multiple Portland police officers over a loud speaker at public demonstrations.<sup>xvii</sup>
- Anti-government extremists and malicious actors routinely monitor and interfere with law enforcement radio frequencies in addition to reviewing online police forums to track movements of police officers. NYPD reporting and a review of social media posts indicate that malicious actors are actively monitoring NYPD frequencies. This tactic was also observed during violent protests on May 31 and June 1. Malicious actors have used numerous tagging symbols painted on sidewalks near government buildings as quick reference points in radio communications to plan and direct violent activities against government buildings and personnel.<sup>xviii</sup>
- **(OLEA)** Individuals in Portland threw paint-filled balloons at specific Portland police officers while at mass gatherings, possibly to mark them visibly as priority targets for harassment or violence. Officers marked with paint were reportedly targeted because individuals believed they were involved in police brutality or infringed on protestors' civil liberties. The officers were subjected to projectiles, such as glass bottles, ball bearings, and bricks, and received verbal threats.<sup>xix</sup>

### SIMPLE TACTICS WITH DANGEROUS REPERCUSSIONS

(U//LES) Localities across the country have witnessed simple tactics employed by anti-government extremists and criminal actors to damage or destroy government property, create diversions during demonstrations or confrontations with police officers, or incite violence against law enforcement personnel. While some simple tactics are more benign, others have dangerous consequences and potentially devastating results. These tactics have included tampering with officers' personal and departmental vehicles; spray-painting anti-police messages on public buildings and patrol vehicles; and posting threats or general derogatory language possibly intended to incite violence against law enforcement. Anti-government extremists and criminal actors have also employed traditional and easily obtainable weapons in confrontations with law enforcement, including spring-loaded knives, blunt objects, bricks/stones, makeshift shields/umbrellas, marbles, and frozen paint- or chemical-filled objects.

## UNCLASSIFIED // LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE

**UNCLASSIFIED // LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE**

- **(OLEA)** As of July 29, over 300 NYPD vehicles have been damaged amid ongoing civil unrest, resulting in nearly \$1 million in damages to department property; 14 of the 303 vehicles were so heavily damaged they were deemed unsalvageable. Since May 27, the NYPD has investigated at least 25 incidents targeting police officers' personal vehicles. Incidents targeting both personal and official vehicles involved vandalism, removal of lug nuts, nails placed under tires, and punctured tires. On July 17, a suspect in New York City was arrested for reckless endangerment, criminal mischief, criminal tampering, auto stripping, and obstructing governmental administration after he crawled under a marked NYPD van and sliced wires, intending on cutting the vehicle's brake lines.<sup>xx</sup>



Nails found under tire

- **(OLEA)** Operation SENTRY partners in Arizona; Buffalo, New York; Colorado; Hennepin County, Minnesota; Memphis, Tennessee; Florida; Michigan; North Carolina; San Diego & Los Angeles, California; Portland, Oregon; Seattle, Washington; and Virginia have reported incidents targeting off-duty law enforcement officers, civilian employees, and police union officials at residences, including vandalism of officers' departmental and personal vehicles.<sup>xxi xxii</sup>



Vandalism of NYPD patrol vehicle

- NYPD observed multiple incidents of criminal actors in New York City utilizing spray-paint on security cameras to block off visual access to law enforcement, a disruptive but simple tactic requiring minimal prior surveillance to identify and locate security cameras in the vicinity.
- Social media reporting in recent weeks indicates that multiple users continue to broadly encourage violence against police officers. These have included potential derogatory and incitement-oriented phrases such as "kill cops," "kill pigs," "Lynch cops," etc. Malicious actors on social media have also expressed intent to identify the locations of law enforcement and sabotage their vehicles.

**Situational Awareness**

The NYPD advises police officers to be mindful of overt displays of law enforcement affiliation while off-duty, at residences, on vehicles, and on personal social media platforms and refrain from discussing law enforcement plans, tactics, and techniques in online forums.

- Remain vigilant when wearing items that identify you as law enforcement, whether during your commute, meal, shift changes, or on your days off.
- Be mindful when gathering at muster areas, such as roll call and other pre-deployment staging points, to maximize your field of peripheral view, with officers providing over watch for their peers (front, back, side to side, above and below).
- Be alert to suspicious activity indicating preparation for an attack against law enforcement personnel (probing security-related questions, surveillance, loitering near police locations, stalking, vehicle tailing, etc.).
- Do not be distracted by auditory or visual electronic devices.
- Monitor your surroundings and remain in close contact and communication with your partner to avoid being caught alone or off guard.
- Stagger personal and patrol routines and avoid repetitive or predictable patterns of behavior.

## UNCLASSIFIED // LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE

*\*This NYPD analytic assessment is the result of extensive open-source threat reporting and a review of law enforcement sensitive intelligence products from partner agencies. The data-points covered in this piece represent some of the most high-profile incidents and should be treated as a conservative estimate not fully reflective of the totality of all recent attacks, suspicious activity, and threats. All NYPD Intelligence Bureau investigations are conducted in accordance with the Handschu Guidelines ensuring that law enforcement actions do not unconstitutionally intrude upon rights of expression or association.*

### SOURCES

- 
- <sup>i</sup> (U/LES) FBI SIR. July 2020. Use of Modified Commercial Grade Fireworks During Demonstrations, as of late July 2020.
- <sup>ii</sup> (U/LES) DHS FIR. 25 June 2020. Violent Opportunists Using Fire Paste in Molotov Cocktails to Target Federal Courthouse in Portland Oregon.
- <sup>iii</sup> (U/FOUO) 23 July 2020. Violent Opportunists Attempt to Use a Spray Paint Can with Attached Firework to Target Federal Courthouse in Portland, Oregon.
- <sup>iv</sup> (U/LES) DHS FIR. 22 July 2020. Individuals Utilizing Commercially Available Pyrotechnic Devices to Target the Interior of the Federal Courthouse Building in Portland, Oregon.
- <sup>v</sup> [How to Topple a Statue Using Science](#). *Popular Mechanics*. 15 June 2020.
- <sup>vi</sup> LIU-2020-0310-C
- <sup>vii</sup> LIU-2020-TBD-C
- <sup>viii</sup> (LES) IB Operation Sentry Reporting. Perth Amboy, NJ. NYPD. 23 July 2020.
- <sup>ix</sup> [See It. Protesters Pay Early A.M. Visit to NYPD Commissioner's Building](#). *Daily News*. 29 July 2020. [FBI Seeks Assistance in Identifying Laser Threat to NYPD Helicopter During Protest](#). FBI New York. 24 June 2020. [At Least 40 People Arrested Friday Night During Mostly Peaceful George Floyd Protests](#). *Daily News*. 6 June 2020.
- <sup>x</sup> (U/FOUO) DHS FIR. 12 July 2020. Violent Opportunists Tactics Used against Law Enforcement and Critical Infrastructure in Portland, Oregon.
- <sup>xi</sup> (LES) IB Operation Sentry Reporting. NYPD. 23 July 2020.
- <sup>xii</sup> (LES) IB Operation Sentry Reporting. NYPD. 23 July 2020.
- <sup>xiii</sup> (U/FOUO) DHS OSIR. 11 July 2020. Social Media User Surveils Law Enforcement Movements in Downtown Portland.
- <sup>xiv</sup> (U//LES) Officer Safety: Suspicious Photography of a Federal Law Enforcement Officer in Portland, Oregon
- <sup>xv</sup> (U/FOUO) DHS FIR. 18 July 2020. Intimidation Tactics against Law Enforcement in Portland, Oregon.
- <sup>xvi</sup> (U/FOUO) DHS FIR. 19 July 2020. Violent Opportunists Targeting Portland Police Officers with Paint Filled Balloons to Identify Specific Officers for Further Retaliation
- <sup>xvii</sup> (U/FOUO) DHS FIR. 18 July 2020. Intimidation Tactics against Law Enforcement in Portland, Oregon.
- <sup>xviii</sup> (U/LES) Violent Demonstration Tactics and Trends-Reference Guide. NJ Regional Operations and Intelligence Center. 5 June 2020.
- <sup>xix</sup> (U/FOUO) DHS FIR. 19 July 2020. Violent Opportunists Targeting Portland Police Officers with Paint Filled Balloons to Identify Specific Officers for Further Retaliation
- <sup>xx</sup> NYPD Arrest Report. K20622645.
- <sup>xxi</sup> (U/FOUO) DHS FIR. 18 July 2020. Intimidation Tactics against Law Enforcement in Portland, Oregon.
- <sup>xxii</sup> (LES) IB Operation Sentry Reporting. NYPD. 23 July 2020.