



# NYPD INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENT

Counterterrorism Bureau/Intelligence Bureau



## Preliminary Investigation Findings From “Lone Wolf” Terror Attack On NYPD Officers As Police Officer Attacked With Ax in Washington, DC

### Key Points

- On Thursday, October 23, a hatchet-wielding man charged at and attacked four uniformed New York City Police Department officers in the 103<sup>rd</sup> Precinct in Jamaica, Queens, critically injuring one of the officers and wounding another in the arm. Two other officers then fired on the man, killing him and stopping the attack.
- The assault occurred on the sidewalk in front of a local department store where the four officers were standing on a regularly assigned foot patrol.
- Law enforcement officials identified the assailant as 32-year-old Zale Thompson.
- A bystander, who was struck in the responding gunfire during the incident, sustained non-life-threatening injuries.
- Law enforcement agencies nationwide have been asked to take a posture of increased vigilance following two fatal terrorism-related attacks on uniformed soldiers in Canada earlier last week and amid recent threats from foreign terrorist organizations calling for similar “low-tech” attacks.
- A preliminary analysis by the NYPD of approximately 277 online search terms by Zale Thompson in the weeks leading up to the attack revealed multiple references to “jihadist” materials, interest in foreign terrorist organizations, and violent tactics. Thompson used internet search engines to query specific terms including but not limited to “lone wolf”, “jihad”, and “jihad against the police”.
- On Friday, October 31, a man wielding an ax attacked a Metropolitan Police Department officer in Washington D.C. The officer sustained non-life-threatening injuries and the suspect remains at large. There is no known connection to the previous hatchet assault in New York City.



*Footage of the attacker, Zale Thompson*

### Background On Ax Attack In Queens, NYC



*Hatchet used at scene*

On Thursday, October 23, a man, armed with a hatchet, charged at and attacked four uniformed NYPD officers in the 103rd precinct of Jamaica, Queens. The 2:00 p.m. attack was unprovoked and occurred as four police officers were posing for a passing photographer. The suspect charged the group, swinging a hatchet with a 4.5-inch blade. The man was loitering behind a bus shelter with the hatchet concealed in a bag, indicating he may have been observing the target officers before the attack. The suspect charged, striking one officer in the right arm and another in the head, fracturing his skull. The two officers that were not hit then shot at and killed the attacker, who has been identified as Zale H. Thompson. A female civilian was struck in the responding gunfire and was later treated for serious but non-life-threatening injuries. Thompson reportedly held the hatchet in two hands like a baseball bat and swung three times. The first

swing broke an officer's arm, while the second missed his intended target. The third struck an officer in the back of the head. The 25-year-old officer who was struck in the head underwent surgery at Jamaica Hospital and was released on Wednesday, October 29. He will require extended rehabilitation. The other officer struck in the arm was also released from the hospital. Thompson had been arrested on several occasions in California, including multiple times for assault and domestic violence, and had been discharged from the Navy for misconduct.

### NYPD Investigation

Immediately following the October 23 attack, the NYPD, working with the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) launched an investigation into the deceased assailant Zale Thompson to determine potential motives for the attack on the officers. During the execution of a search warrant at Thompson's residence, investigators located a second ax and a large hunting knife.



*Second ax and knife found at assailants home*

Although the investigation is ongoing, and there is no indication that Thompson conspired with other individuals to carry out the attack, a number of electronic devices were recovered for forensic analysis, which is continuing. A preliminary review of internet activity from a laptop controlled by Thompson reveals 277 Google searches over 6 weeks prior to the attack including terms such as "jihad against the police," "lone wolf," "terror," "mujahideen" and "radical Islamic." Additionally, based on a preliminary forensic review of Thompson's recent internet activity, it appears that he regularly consumed varied material promoting violent action against perceived oppression with a number of sources ranging from black separatist movements to anti-police ideologies.

In recent months, internet activity from Thompson’s laptop is dominated by viewing material focused on the message of groups such as al-Qa’ida, al-Shabaab and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Thompson may have held a long standing interest in violent jihad, viewing two issues of al-Qa’ida’s English language *Inspire* magazine as early as April-May 2013. Thompson’s searches specifically included the following terms:

- “jihad reconnaissance”
- “jihad in America”
- “jihadist weaponry”
- “jihadist arsenal”
- “islamic warfare”
- “islamic terror jihadist”
- “islamic terror against Americans”
- “jihad against the police”
- “announcement of jihad against the Americans”
- “jihad against the Americans”
- “jihad against the infidels”
- “jihad against the police”
- “al aqsa martyrs brigades logos”
- “al quds brigade logo”
- “mujahideen frontline warriors”
- “gospel of Thomas”
- “fatwa against americans”
- “al Shabaab jihad”
- “al qaeda logo”
- “islamic jihad flags”
- “islamic jihad symbols”
- “islamic terrorist emblems”
- “militant Islamic jihad”
- “is Saudi Arabia a member of the United Nations”
- “jihad against democracy”
- “Saudi Arabia 69<sup>th</sup> general assembly un”
- “lone wolf terror jihad”
- “lone wolf Islamic jihad”
- “lone wolf Islamic terrorism”
- “lone wolf Islam”
- “islamic nuclear jihad”
- “Islamic terror cells”
- “Islamic fundamentalism”
- “jihad warriors”
- “mujahideen against America”
- “lions of jihad”
- “jihad emblems”
- “Islamic militant shia”
- “Islamic martyrdom fighters”
- “Islamic martyrdom emblem”
- “martyrdom brigade”
- “death to America in Arabic”
- “suicide bombing mujahideen”
- “mujahideen sniper”
- “Islamic snipers”
- “jihad in America”
- “Islamic terrorist groups”
- “radical Islamic terrorism”
- “radical Islamic jihad”
- “jihad against the infidels”
- “jihad against the beast”
- “jihad is the only solution”
- “jihad is the solution”
- “jihad against the west”
- “jihad against America”
- “Surah Muhammad smite at the necks”
- “jihad against Jews and crusaders”
- Islamic jihad flag

#### **Police Officer Attacked With Ax In Washington, DC**

On Friday, October 31, at approximately 3:00 a.m., a Metropolitan Police Department officer sitting in his patrol car located on the 1200 block of Quincy Street NE, in Washington, DC, was attacked by an unidentified male who swung at the officer with an ax. The ax struck and shattered the driver’s side window. The attack was unprovoked. Following the initial assault, the police officer exited the patrol vehicle and struggled with the attacker who fled on foot without the weapon. The officer sustained non-life-threatening injuries, reportedly dislocating a shoulder. The officer received medical attention, and is expected to make a full recovery. The suspect has been

described by local authorities as a black male, approximately 6 feet tall, with a “stocky build,” wearing dark-colored or black coveralls. While several leads have been reported, the investigation and search for the suspect is ongoing. According to reports, the targeted officer apparently observed the suspect prior to the attack and believed at the time that he was carrying a baseball bat. The officer noted the suspicious person and pursued the man into an alley to investigate. He lost contact with him until the moment his window was struck with the ax. No motive for this attack has been determined at this time as the suspect has not yet been apprehended. A local Metropolitan Police Department representative stated that there is no apparent connection to the recent hatchet assault in New York City. However, following the assault,



*Scene of recent ax attack in Washington, DC*

Metropolitan Police Department Chief Cathy Lanier publicly stated that "Recent incidents targeting uniformed law enforcement officers in Quebec, New York City, and now to one of our own here in Washington, D.C., are reminders that we must always be ready for any eventuality. I encourage all members to maintain a high awareness of your environment, and to always notify the dispatcher of the location when investigating or entering suspicious situations."

### Response

On the evening of Thursday, October 23, the NYPD issued a patrol bulletin alerting officers to be in a state of heightened awareness after the murder last week of a Canadian soldier and a subsequent shootout at the Parliament complex in Ottawa. The bulletin warned of potential attacks on uniformed officers. On Tuesday, October 31, citing increased threats of terrorism, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) revealed that it was increasing security at numerous federal buildings across the nation. DHS added that additional security will be provided to sites in New York City, Washington D.C. and elsewhere.

### Implications for New York City

- On September 21, 2014, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, the spokesman of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, issued a 42 minute Arabic audio statement calling for attacks on U.S., French, Canadian, and Australian nationals in retaliation for recent military actions in Iraq and Syria. The threat specifically mentioned "low-tech" tactics against police, security, and intelligence personnel. Similar threats have been repeated in jihadist forums and published in ISIS's English language publication *DABIQ*, as recently as October 12, 2014.
- Extremist groups and anti-government extremists with varied ideological motives have targeted law enforcement officers and military personnel as symbols of authority.
- Homegrown violent extremists (HVEs), sympathetic to the ideology of ISIS and other terrorist organizations, may be motivated to conduct retaliatory attacks in solidarity with the group against crowded areas, symbolic locations, high-profile events, and other potential targets using a wide range of terrorist tactics including "low-tech" methods such as edged weapons (knives, axes, etc.) and small arms, necessitating increased vigilance.
- Recent attacks against uniformed personnel highlight the continued threat that civilians as well as military and police officers face from violent extremists who may be willing to use low-cost, low-tech, and low-training tactics with high lethality.
- The public plays an important role in the identification of suspicious activity and the reporting of unusual behavior which could indicate hostile pre-operational surveillance and attack planning. Prompt reporting of suspicious actions to law enforcement can lead the prevention of violent acts and the interdiction of extremists.

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