

ISIS Now Threatens Specific US Churches

Vocativ, a media group dedicated to monitoring and reporting on activities on the so-called “Deep Web”—the seedy, back alley-like parts of the Internet frequented by criminals and terrorist organizations—has a warning for Christian churches preparing for Christmas services this weekend.

In a report Thursday morning, it stated:

The Islamic State published the names and addresses of thousands of churches in the United States and called on its adherents to attack them during the holiday season, according to a message posted late-night Wednesday in the group’s “Secrets of Jihadis” social media group.

A user going by the name of “Abu Marya al-Iraqi” posted an Arabic-language message calling “for bloody celebrations in the Christian New Year” and announced the group’s plans to utilize its network of lone-wolf attackers to “turn the Christian New Year into a bloody horror movie.”

ISIS has, more frequently, turned to Telegram, a social media platform virtually untraceable by government intelligence services. The Vocativ report states the threats against U.S. churches was made through “multiple posts” to the platform, and included a “public directory of churches across all 50 states.”

Vocativ doesn’t publish details of such threats so as to prevent their spread to potential lone-wolf attackers who do not have Deep Web access. However, it also reported additional threats:

In another group post, a member summoned “the sons of Islam” to target “churches, well-known hotels, crowded coffee

shops, streets, markets and public places,” and shared a list of addresses in the United States as well as in Canada, France and the Netherlands.

ISIS claimed responsibility for this week’s Christmas market attack in Berlin that killed 12 and injured 48. The group said the assailant was a “soldier of the Islamic State,” who followed organizational orders “to target coalition countries.” The suspect was identified as Anis Amri, a Tunisian man in his 20s who reportedly had Salafi and jihadi connections in Tunisia and Germany. He is still the object of a massive manhunt in Germany.

Vocativ has previously reported on similar lists published by ISIS. It reminds its readers that a previously posted list of targeted law enforcement officials in the U.S. resulted in “no known attacks.”

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security had issued a warning to churches in mid-November but has not renewed or updated it since. {eo}