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Federal Bureau of Investigation
Intelligence
ASSESSMENT

Prepared by

FBI

Counterterrorism
Division

(U//FOUO) Sniper Tactics and Effects on the US Homeland

16 February 2007

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(U) Sniper Tactics and Effects on the Homeland

(U) Scope Note:

(U//FOUO) This intelligence assessment addresses the terrorism (TERR) topic of the NIPF and responds to FBI intelligence requirements IT-II.B.1, III.C.1, III.C.2, and III.F.1.

(U//FOUO) This assessment addresses sniper tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) and how this method of attack can affect the Homeland in future terrorist aggressions. This assessment does not differentiate between terrorist (domestic or international) and criminal intent; rather, it discusses the sniper TTPs and their potential physical, psychological, and economic impacts against the affected communities.

(U//FOUO) This assessment does not address every possible sniper scenario. Its purpose is to analyze previous attacks and provide law enforcement personnel with an understanding of known sniper TTPs. It provides some historical references to illustrate points and examines potential investigative tools to counter the threat. The information contained in this assessment was derived from FBI and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) case files, Department of Defense assessments, and open source information and is current as of 31 December 2006.

(U//FOUO) This assessment's definition of sniper or "sniper-style" shootings encompasses long-range, highly accurate, and disciplined shooting with specialized weapons by professionally trained individuals, as well as short and medium range shots with standard off-the-shelf rifles and handguns by untrained personnel.

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(U) Key Judgments:

- (U//FOUO) The FBI and ATF currently have no credible intelligence that terrorist organizations are using or plan to use sniper tactics against targets within the Homeland.
- (U//FOUO) Observations of sniper TTPs in the Homeland, the current Iraqi insurgency, and prior overseas conflicts illustrate the effectiveness of sniper activities and the effects and impact such actions have upon the general population.
- (U//FOUO) A sniper team of two or more personnel allows the individuals to concentrate on their respective responsibilities and not all aspects of an attack, thus increasing the probability of success and the ability to depart the area undetected.
- (U//FOUO) Observed sniper weapons are not exclusively military or specialized for sniper use. A variety of off-the-shelf rifles, handguns, and optics are sufficient to conduct effective sniper operations.
- (U//FOUO) Use of vehicles in support of sniper operations both within the Homeland and abroad illustrates the ingenuity of the terrorists and provides a firing platform that can rapidly depart the area of operations.
- (U//FOUO) Employment of sniper tactics can have debilitating effects on the population if sustained operations occur over a period of time. Continued actions will have negative psychological and economic effects on the surrounding communities. This tactic can provide an individual or terrorist group unprecedented media coverage.
- (U//FOUO) Showing a keen interest in marksmanship, obtaining sniper-related books and other training materials, spending time at shooting ranges, modifying vehicles in a nontraditional manner, and purchasing rifles and associated optics may be indicators of potential terrorist planning efforts; however, most of these indicators can be associated with legitimate purposes.

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(U) Introduction

(U//FOUO) The FBI and ATF currently has no credible intelligence that terrorist organizations are using or plan to conduct sniper operations against targets within the Homeland. Case reviews show that lone individuals or two-person teams have conducted the majority of sniper related incidents rather than organizational efforts. Sniping attacks have spread fear and apprehension across communities and required only minimal personnel, training, and expense. This attack method can be attractive because the weapons are easy to procure, published training materials are readily available, and past domestic sniper attacks and insurgent sniper activities in Iraq have been successful.

(U) Sniper Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures

(U//FOUO) Tactic Use: Military snipers receive specialized training to deliver highly accurate, long-range fire against enemy targets in an effort to inhibit enemy movement and harass opposing forces. Law enforcement snipers halt the life-threatening actions of the perpetrator. Terrorist or criminal use of effective sniper TTPs enables them to attack unsuspecting individuals in an effort to accomplish their objectives. These actions can have severe negative psychological and economic impacts on affected communities.

(U//FOUO) The effects of sniper tactics on domestic populations include creating widespread fear, initiating extensive media coverage, and straining law enforcement's limited resources. A number of sniper attacks have occurred within the Homeland the last few years.

- (U) One person was killed, another wounded and up to four vehicles were damaged in separate southern Indiana sniper shootings in July 2006. A 17-year-old suspect has been charged with firing a .270 caliber hunting rifle into moving vehicles from highway overpasses.¹
- (U) Three deadly sniper-style shootings terrorized the Charleston area of West Virginia in August 2003. Each victim was killed late at night by a single shot.² The investigation into these shootings continues.
- (U) In the summer and fall of 2003, two dozen sniper shootings occurred around several highways outside Columbus, Ohio, killing one individual, piercing homes and a school, flattening tires, and shattering windshields.³ Charles McCoy used a 9mm pistol, which is not normally associated with sniper activities; in spite of this, his activities were characterized as sniping by the media. He was convicted and is serving a 27-year prison term.
- (U) John Muhammad and Lee Boyd Malvo conducted 13 sniper shootings (10 fatal) in the Washington, DC, area for three weeks in October 2002. Both have been convicted for their actions.⁴

(U//FOUO) Marksmanship training is an essential component to military and law enforcement-trained snipers. In addition to these trained professionals are many law-abiding groups and clubs that conduct marksmanship training for recreation and thousands of hunters whose firearms may be highly accurate up to a few hundred yards or more. A tactically proficient sniper can engage a target over long distances while remaining unseen by the target or the surrounding population, but shooting in an urban area does not necessarily require long distance with good concealment; the shots fired in the Washington, DC, sniper cases averaged only 60-70 yards.⁵ Interest in shooting fundamentals and marksmanship training are not necessarily pretexts for terrorist sniper operations, but with additional indicators, law enforcement personnel may be able to exploit training evolutions.

(U//FOUO) Target Selection: Target selection and ensuing patterns may help investigators potentially develop a profile of the sniper/team, identify motive, and possibly make rough estimations of future targets. However, multiple attacks must occur to discern a pattern. A sniper operation designed to inflict terror across a community may on the surface appear to pick targets at random, but this may be by design. The snipers could possibly target many components of the civilian infrastructure, such as schools, churches, post offices, retail stores, gas stations, movie theaters, and so forth. Although appearing random, the engagement of a range of these types of targets over time may give the public the impression that nowhere is safe from a potential attack.

- (U//FOUO) The Washington, DC, sniper targets, although randomly selected by the snipers, gave the impression that nowhere was safe from possible attacks. A tertiary effect is that significant law enforcement resources are expended when determining whether the victims are connected. A concerted effort to purposely strike those types of targets, coupled with maintaining strict operational security, can have debilitating effects on the surrounding population.

(U//FOUO) Sniper TTP Proficiency: Sniper-related actions within the Homeland have involved a wide variety of perpetrators with varying levels of shooting/sniping proficiency and associated methods employed. The level of attention to detail, training, and employed TTPs will greatly influence attack success and drive the subsequent investigations.

(U//FOUO) A skilled sniper or sniper team is not defined only by the ability to shoot accurately over extended ranges. Additional attributes include conducting prestrike surveillance of the target area to determine the feasibility of an attack; identification of entry, exit, and emergency routes through the operating area; properly estimating target range; and ensuring adequate cover and concealment availability to minimize detection. When conducting the attack, they may shoot only once, use silencers and flash suppressors if available, account for environmental conditions on the shot, and utilize proper shot placement for the desired effect. Some of these individuals may have military or law enforcement backgrounds and training and understand the discipline and ingenuity required for the effective and efficient use of the tactic without detection over multiple strikes.

- (U//FOUO) Analysis of Iraqi insurgent Internet-posted videos reveals the insurgent snipers' various levels of expertise. Experienced snipers use the terrain to their advantage, have egress plans, stay concealed after the shot unless their position is detected, and their shot placement avoids areas protected by coalition troops' body armor. The less experienced snipers shoot multiple times at the target, shoot at areas protected by body armor, break and run immediately after the attack, and have minimal situational awareness of their surroundings.⁶

(U//FOUO) A less skilled or novice sniper or team may not conduct such comprehensive planning and surveillance efforts. Varying levels of consideration for entry and exit routes, closer target range, multiple shots against the same target, and no adjustment for environmental conditions are examples that would indicate the perpetrators lack discipline, training, and experience with sniper-like operations and methods. Although this does not necessarily prevent successful attacks, these shortcomings can potentially be exploited to interdict subsequent sniper operations.

(U//FOUO) Individual Versus Team: The TTPs for an individual conducting a sniper attack are different than those utilized by a team. A team is traditionally composed of two people—a spotter and a shooter—but can involve more personnel (such as a driver). A spotter informs the shooter when the target is approaching the defined firing area (a skilled sniper may have a narrow firing window due to cover and concealment efforts), provides security for the team, may video-record the strike (as observed in Iraq), and may abort the attack due to potential compromise. This allows the shooter to concentrate on the site picture and firing position.

- (U) During testimony in the trial of John Allen Muhammad, a British Armed Forces expert in sniper methodology testified at length about the distinct responsibilities of each member of a two-man sniper unit. He stated one member of the team is the long-range shooter occupying an obscured position with the opportunity to shoot a particular victim. Because of the intensity and discipline required to take advantage of the narrow window of opportunity to take the shot, the other team member informs the long-range shooter that the victim is coming within the zone of potential fire and that other circumstances are ripe for the shot. The spotter may ultimately give the order to shoot.⁷

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(U) John Muhammad

(U//FOUO) Teams not professionally trained may distribute responsibilities differently and any additional team members would likely be involved in surveillance and security operations.

- (U) During the Irish Republican Army (IRA) campaign in Northern Ireland in the 1990s, most successful sniper attacks involved two or more people. The other team members provided security, aided in target identification, and determined the best exit strategy as events unfolded. These teams were highly efficient, coordinated their actions, and carried out their sniper operations successfully.⁸ The British military eventually disrupted these teams and their operations.

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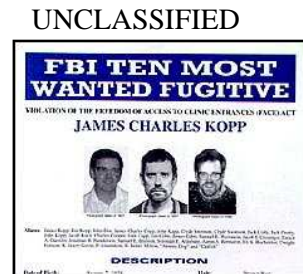
(U//FOUO) An individual sniper must account for all these aspects while attempting to successfully execute an attack and depart the area unnoticed. This can contribute to easier identification by law enforcement personnel and the general populace.

(U//FOUO) Surveillance: A direct correlation exists between the proficiency of the sniper or team and the methods employed when conducting the respective operations. Planning may include preoperational surveillance of a potential target area. During this phase, the terrorists may observe the area for potential target locations, ideal shooting positions relative to the target, ingress and egress possibilities to minimize mission compromise, story development for plausible deniability, and cover and concealment for the shooter. Online mapping tools and commercial GPS receivers can be used in support of the surveillance and planning phases. Indicators during this phase may be quite subtle, such as simply driving slowly or walking through a potential target area, or can be more overt in the form of perpetrators taking pictures or video of odd locations (shopping malls, schools, and so forth). Should a strike simply be against an emergent target of opportunity, this preoperational planning will not take place to this depth.

- (U//FOUO) John Muhammad and Lee Boyd Malvo made extensive use of the Microsoft Streets and Trips mapping package to plan their entry and exit routes through the target area. They also possessed a GPS that had the capability to be connected to the laptop, although investigators do not believe it was used.⁹

(U//FOUO) A clear line of sight is required between the shooter and target. Depending on the bullet's caliber, associated weapon, and target range, tree branches or other minor obstructions can potentially deflect a bullet enough to miss the target. When determining the shot line, those other planning considerations are factored into the feasibility assessment by the perpetrators. A position with a clear view most likely will not be utilized should there be insufficient cover and concealment and inadequate entry/exit routes through the target area due to potential compromise.

- (U) Dr. Barnett Slepian, an abortion provider, was shot to death by a sniper in his western New York home on 23 October 1998.¹⁰ The sniper was later identified as James Kopp, who was apprehended in France on 29 March 2001 and later convicted in the United States. Kopp stated he targeted Slepian largely because his home was "vulnerable" because it had a rear window facing some woods. Kopp said he scouted Slepian's neighborhood approximately six times over the course of a year before the attack. He also stated that on two occasions he had his gun and was ready to shoot if he saw Slepian at the rear window.¹¹



(U//FOUO) Based on their surveillance efforts, terrorists may also use dry runs during the final stages of operational planning to identify flaws and unanticipated problems in their attack plans.¹² These surveillance and dry run operations provide law enforcement and homeland security personnel an opportunity to detect operational planning.

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(U//FOUO) Weapons: Weapons used in past sniper attacks were not exclusively military-derived or specialized for sniper use. A variety of off-the-shelf rifles and associated ammunition are sufficient to conduct effective sniper operations. Many relatively inexpensive rifles used for target shooting or hunting are accurate up to a few hundred yards and can be incorporated into sniper operations. The inclusion of new optical sighting technology can help an unskilled shooter quickly become a proficient marksman. The use of rare weapon systems or odd caliber ammunition may aid the investigative efforts. The following pictures are just a small sampling of rifles that could or have been used in sniper attacks.



(U) Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives firearms expert Walter A. Dandridge Jr. holds the Bushmaster rifle used in the sniper shootings during his testimony in the trial of John Muhammad.¹³



(U) The .30-06 hunting rifle that James Earl Ray bought in Alabama and which was found near the boarding house on the night of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination.¹⁴



(U) Barrett M99 .50 cal rifle¹⁵



(U) Kimber of America .22 cal¹⁶

(U//FOUO) Static Sniper Positions: The static position and firing via a vehicular platform each have advantages and limitations. Use of a static position does not limit the sniper to areas where a vehicle cannot be placed. As highlighted in the Slepian attack, it allows the perpetrator to account for the surroundings and maximize the natural cover and concealment. The sniper can shoot from within structures, on rooftops, in and around natural vegetation, and so forth. The method of “stalking” into and away from the target area depends on the surrounding environment.

- (U) Although James Kopp was not seen the night of his sniper attack, his vehicle was spotted in Dr. Slepian’s neighborhood in the weeks before the attack.¹⁷
- (U//FOUO) Analysis of static Iraqi insurgent snipers’ Internet-posted videos reveals many of these snipers are tactically proficient. They are using the urban terrain to their advantage, including choosing firing positions that provide cover and protection from return fire and ensuring obstacles are between their position and the targets. If their position is detected, pursuit is difficult and provides time for insurgent escape and

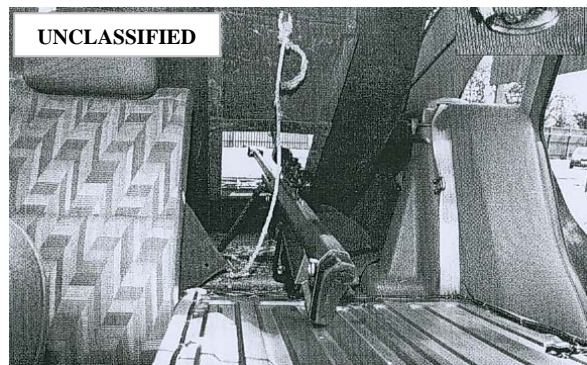
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evasion maneuvers using preplanned routes and associated surveillance teams. Some methods and techniques are posted on insurgent Web sites but exploitation of the videos reveal additional insurgent TTPs.¹⁸

(U//FOUO) Sniper Vehicular Platforms: Use of a vehicle as a sniper platform adds a new dimension to sniper activities and TTPs. The vehicle itself can provide some measure of cover and concealment, depending on how snipers use the vehicle attributes to their advantage. A vehicle also allows them to enter or canvas an area carrying their weapon(s) and associated gear, possibly within hidden compartments, without the raising suspicion from the general public.

- (U) The IRA modified the interior of a car to support their sniper operations in the 1990s. Sixteen of the twenty-four sniper attacks that occurred in the South Armagh area of Northern Ireland involved the use of a vehicle as a mobile firing platform.¹⁹
- (U) John Allen Muhammad and Lee Boyd Malvo shot from the trunk, inside their vehicle, during their sniper attacks in and around the Washington, DC, area in October 2002.
- (U) Sniper-related killings in the Charleston area of West Virginia are suspected to have originated from the cab of a pickup truck “due to the fact that, immediately after the shot, the truck sped away, with tires spinning.”²⁰
- (U) Iraqi insurgents involved in sniper operations routinely modify their vehicles to allow shooting from inside and employ other techniques to conceal their attacks.

(U) Figure 1 is a reconstruction of how an IRA sniper fired from the rear of a Mazda 626 through the aperture in the armor-plated shield fitted in the rear.²¹



(U) Figure 1

(U//FOUO) Figure 2 displays the Chevrolet Caprice used in the Washington, DC, sniper attacks in October 2002. The photo in the upper right depicts the portal created to fire the weapon from within the vehicle. The photo in the lower right shows how the shooter would have positioned himself to fire the weapon. (The trunk door is open for illustration purposes.) The rifle barrel's exposure would be minimized to reduce detection. The photo in the lower left shows where the

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rifle was hidden when not conducting the actual attacks.



(U//FOUO) Figure 2: Washington, DC, sniper vehicle

(U) Figures 3 and 4 depict Iraqi insurgents' vehicles modified for their respective anti-coalition sniper operations.



(U//FOUO) Figure 3: Iraqi sniper vehicle²²



(U//FOUO) Figure 4: Iraqi sniper vehicle²³

(U//FOUO) Although some of the vehicular modifications referenced in this section were crude, if terrorists have machine-shop or auto-body experience, modifications to a vehicle can be so subtle and well-disguised as to escape initial notice from investigative personnel. Discovering a moveable taillight, license plate, door handle, or even a bumper that may be operated from inside the vehicle would require extensive examination. Coupled with well-designed hidden compartments for the weapon and associated gear, a vehicle of this nature will be extremely difficult to differentiate from others that may travel through law enforcement check points. The ability to search such a vehicle to the extent required to discover these modifications without probable cause is severely limited. Terrorists using such a configuration who employ sound preoperational surveillance, planning, operational security, execution procedures, and ingress/egress tactics may be extremely difficult to identify and apprehend.

(U) Effects of Sniper-Related Activities

(U) Psychological and Economic Impact: As past sustained sniper operations have shown, fear begins affecting the population's daily activities. During the siege of Sarajevo of the Balkans war, "sniper alley" became internationally known due to the effects on the general population: the indiscriminate civilian killings, people running in fear when going from one place to another, and residents altering their movements and activities due to the constant threat of sniper fire. Similar reactions were prevalent during the Washington, DC, area sniper attacks in 2002 and studies reveal the negative consequences on the affected communities:

- (U) The Washington, DC, attacks caused widespread fear among people for their own safety and for the safety of their families. Forty-five percent of residents reported going to public spaces such as parks and shopping centers less than usual and 5.5 percent reported missing at least one day of work due to the sniper attacks.²⁴

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- (U) The same study's results suggest the substantial social and economic burden that events such as these sniper shootings can have on communities. In particular, the results support the notion that members of these communities were experiencing symptoms consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) above the prevalence levels.²⁵
- (U) A study examining hospital staff reactions concluded the "sniper shootings were associated with substantial changes in perceived safety and threat assessment as well as decreased activities outside the home among highly educated hospital employees. Levels of acute stress disorder were similar to levels of PTSD in New York City after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks."²⁶

(U//FOUO) Although the relative risk of being shot by the sniper were less than being killed in a car accident or by an accidental fall,²⁷ the perceived risk became much greater than the actual risk. Many people altered their daily activities to mitigate that perceived risk, thus the sniper attacks created a psychological and economic impact in and around the affected communities. Even if members of the affected communities understand the actual risk, it is assessed that many in these communities will modify their daily activities to limit their respective exposure to the threat, as observed during the DC sniper case.

(U) Media Coverage: The media coverage during the Washington, DC, sniper attacks was broadcast around-the-clock nationally and even reported internationally. This intense coverage contributed to the public's increased perceived risk from the sniper attacks. Media coverage of future attacks could possibly increase the perception of not being safe beyond the geographic area directly affected. A terrorist or group can use this media coverage to voice their respective beliefs and make their demands known to policy makers and law enforcement personnel. This may also encourage other individuals or groups to conduct similar sniper-like attacks. The media can become a tool for both the attackers and investigators. With an eagerness to continue the coverage, the attackers may become less disciplined in their activities and more susceptible to law enforcement interdiction efforts.

(U) Outlook

(U//FOUO) The FBI is unaware of terrorists currently planning sniper operations within the Homeland. The continued postings of successful Iraqi insurgent sniper activity and a recognition of past sniper attack effects within the Homeland may embolden motivated individuals and organizations to conduct similar operations in the United States using some of the tactics described in this assessment. Should a group conduct near simultaneous attacks in various communities across the country; the effects can become magnified and spread to areas not directly attacked. In conjunction with the attacks, use of the subsequent media coverage to propagate their message may encourage others of parallel ideology to conduct similar attacks in support of their cause, further spreading the fear and apprehension that these types of attacks can generate. The sniping tactic can also be used in conjunction with other operations. The tactic could be used as a diversion or in direct support of direct assault attacks.

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(U//FOUO) Showing a keen interest in marksmanship, obtaining sniper-related books and other training materials, spending time at shooting ranges, modifying vehicles in a nontraditional manner, and purchasing rifles and associated optics may be indicators of potential terrorist planning efforts; however, most of these indicators can be associated with legitimate purposes. The difficulty lies in determining when individuals or groups are engaged in these types of activities in support of terrorist attack planning.

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(U) Intelligence Gaps

(U//FOUO) Are any domestic or international terrorist organizations actively planning sniper operations against targets in the Homeland?

(U//FOUO) Are terrorist groups using Iraqi insurgent snipers' Internet postings for motivation and reference material in support of their planning efforts?

(U//FOUO) Are any terrorist groups considering the use of snipers in future terrorist attacks against the Homeland?

(U//FOUO) What terrorist groups embrace sniper tactics as an effective means to achieving their respective goals?

(U//FOUO) This assessment was prepared by the Counterterrorism Division of the FBI. Comments and queries may be addressed to the Unit Chief, Threat Analysis Unit, (202) 324-2292

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(U) Endnotes

- ¹ (U) Yvonne Lee, "Indiana Teen Confesses to Series of Sniper Shooting," *All Headline News*, available at <http://www.allheadlinenews.com/articles/7004330532> (UNCLASSIFIED).
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- ⁵ (U) E-mail from FBI Supervisory Special Agent, 19 December 2006. (UNCLASSIFIED).
- ⁶ (U) Victor Basher, *Insurgent Sniper Techniques* presentation, 03 November 2006 (UNCLASSIFIED).
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- ¹⁸ (U) Victor Basher, *Insurgent Sniper Techniques* presentation, 03 November 2006 (UNCLASSIFIED).
- ¹⁹ (U) Toby Harnden, *Bandit Country* (Great Britain: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999), p. 403. (UNCLASSIFIED).
- ²⁰ (U) CNN, *Quote from Kanawha County Sheriff Department Chief Phil Morris, D.C.-area sniper investigators aid West Virginia Police*, available at <http://www.cnn.com/2003/US/South/08/19/w.va.shootings/index.html> (UNCLASSIFIED).
- ²¹ (U) Toby Harnden, *Bandit Country* (Great Britain: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999), picture and associated text between pages 372-373. (UNCLASSIFIED).
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- ²⁷ (U) FEMA, *Case Study 6.1: Risk Communication During the Washington D.C. Sniper Crisis*, available at <http://www.training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/edu/Chapter%206%20Communications.doc> (UNCLASSIFIED).

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1	2	3	4	5	N/A	This product was delivered within established deadlines.
1	2	3	4	5	N/A	The product was timely and relevant to your mission, programs, priorities or initiatives.
1	2	3	4	5	N/A	The product was clear and logical in the presentation of information with supported judgments and conclusions.
1	2	3	4	5	N/A	The product is reliable i.e., sources well documented and reputable.

Value						
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1	2	3	4	5	N/A	The product contributed to satisfying intelligence gaps or predicating cases or intelligence operations, especially in previously unknown areas.
1	2	3	4	5	N/A	The product resulted in change in investigative or intelligence priorities and/or a shift from unaddressed to addressed work, or vice versa.
1	2	3	4	5	N/A	The product resulted in more informed decisions concerning investigative or intelligence initiatives and/or resource allocation.
1	2	3	4	5	N/A	The product identified new information associated with pending matters or offered insights into information that could change the working premise in a program or initiative.

Comments
