NCITE Project Summary

Research on Emerging Activity of Criminal and Terrorist Groups (REACT)

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REACT addresses the threat posed by newly designated foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) and transnational organized crime (TOC) entities operating in or impacting the U.S. homeland. The project will build a rigorous, publicly sourced dataset and produce analytic and operational tools to help DHS understand behaviors, tactics, targets, and impacts of these actors, and how they differ from traditional terrorist groups. Work proceeds through requirements gathering with DHS stakeholders, a literature review, sourcing and data collection strategies, creation of a codebook and routine dataset, and iterative qualitative/quantitative analyses including crime mapping. Expected takeaways include clear behavioral signatures, indicators preceding violence, geographic hot spots, and gaps in current reporting. The resulting tools and reports will support DHS investigations, interdiction, and policy planning by translating research into actionable insights for law enforcement and intelligence partners.

Impact Statement

By mapping behaviors, indicators, and hot spots of newly designated FTO/TOC activity and packaging them into toolkits and concise analyses, this project directly strengthens DHS (e.g., Homeland Security Investigations, Office of Intelligence and Analysis, Science and Technology Directorate) operators' ability to detect, disrupt, and prioritize threats within the homeland.

Policy Impact

- Executive Order 14157, "Designating Cartels and Other Organizations as Foreign Terrorist Organizations" (Jan. 20, 2025): REACT provides the data architecture and analytic products needed to operationalize designations by informing prioritization, interdiction, and prosecution support aligned with EO 14157's intent.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND DISCLAIMER

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End User Offices with Direct Operational Impact

DHS Science and Technology Directorate	DHS Homeland Security Investigations
DHS Office of Intelligence & Analysis	DHS Joint Terrorism Task Force

Expected Findings and Outputs

- A comparative profile showing how newly designated FTO/TOC entities' tactics, targets, geographic dispersion, and organizational behaviors align with—and diverge from—legacy terrorist organizations.
- Actionable pre-incident indicators and patterns (e.g., communications, coordination, weapons/access methods) that can cue interdiction and investigative leads.
- Identification of U.S. hot spots and crime typologies (violent and key non-violent) linked to designated FTO/TOC actors, including differences across regions and actor types.
- Documentation of critical data and reporting gaps that hinder timely threat detection and response, with recommendations to improve collection and standardization.
- Practitioner-facing toolkits that translate behavioral signatures and indicators into investigative checklists and analytic workflows for DHS partners.

NCITE Strategic Priority

Actors — The project systematically characterizes who is threatening the U.S. by profiling leadership, networks, behaviors, and motivations of newly designated FTO/TCO entities.

NCITE Operational Area of Excellence

Law Enforcement Partnerships — REACT co-develops requirements, datasets, and toolkits with DHS stakeholders to accelerate translation of research into investigative and interdiction outcomes.

Methodology

Mixed-method, multi-phase design: conduct literature review; convene requirements-gathering meetings with DHS stakeholders; define sourcing and data collection strategies; develop a detailed codebook; recruit 2–3 research assistants; pilot test sources; build a routinely updated, exportable dataset from publicly available official records, court documents, news, and academic/non-governmental data; produce quarterly descriptive statistics, a crime-mapping analysis, and four topical reports using qualitative and quantitative methods.

Please visit the NCITE website for more information on the project at ncite.unomaha.edu

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