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ID theft could help bankroll terrorism

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Could your identity help terrorists raise money to pay for their attacks? (Photo: Getty Images/iStockphoto)

Could your identity help terrorists raise money to pay for their attacks?

Terrorists are yet another criminal element exploiting lax data security, weak passwords, social engineering and the power of technology to commit ID theft — in their case, to raise money to help fund their nefarious activities.

For years, identity theft has been linked to terrorism as stolen Social Security numbers, birth certificates and fake or fraudulently obtained driver's licenses have been used to open bank accounts or obtain access to cash and credit.

"While those who commit identity theft many not necessarily be terrorists themselves, proceeds from their criminal activities have been known to directly or indirectly be used to fund terrorist activity and terrorist groups," said John Iannarelli, a recognized expert on cybercrime and a former FBI special agent who now operates JGI Consulting Group.

"Terrorists have long utilized identity theft of Social Security numbers to enable them to obtain such things as cover employment and access to secure locations. These and similar means can be utilized by terrorists to obtain driver's licenses, and bank and credit card accounts through which terrorism financing is facilitated," Iannarelli said.

As terrorists around the globe are looking for easier ways to enter the United States, blend in to our communities and hide in plain sight until they act, every organization and individual consumer needs to be vigilant in protecting their personally identifiable information.

And it's not just our SSNs, as document fraud including birth certificates, driver's licenses, passports, and other travel documents are helping terrorists travel through airports and borders for a much more sinister purpose.

Today's advanced printing technology has helped terrorists produce high-quality counterfeit documents to the point that nearly anyone can create fraudulent documents. Criminals and terrorists are now using the same software used by professional graphic artists.

One example of how a terrorist cell works is to use fraudulent identities and stolen credit cards to create fictitious sales scams and make numerous credit card purchases to raise money for the cell. The terrorist cell will keep purchases below certain amounts as to not raise red flags. They will also use stolen cellphones and credit cards for communications back to their terrorist cells around the world.

Terrorists also create online educational material, including instructions on how to commit fraud or steal identities and how to live off of these stolen identities when in hiding.

It's not just fundraising and travel, it's also gaining access to critical infrastructure such as airports, utilities, nuclear facilities and mass transportation through the use of stolen identities.

Mark's most important: It's a terrifying reality that a stolen identity may help a terrorist seeking funds to attack. Use this current and growing threat as added motivation to improve your cybersecurity methods and ID-theft prevention.

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