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## US Officials Ask How ISIS Got So Many Toyota Trucks

By MATTHEW MOSK, BRIAN ROSS and ALEX HOSENBALL  
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U.S. counter-terror officials have asked Toyota, the world's second largest auto maker, to help them determine how ISIS has managed to acquire the large number of Toyota pick-up trucks and SUVs seen prominently in the terror group's propaganda videos in Iraq, Syria and Libya, ABC News has learned.

Toyota says it does not know how ISIS obtained the vehicles and is "supporting" the inquiry led by the Terror Financing unit of the Treasury Department -- part of a broad U.S. effort to prevent Western-made goods from ending up in the hands of the terror group.

"We briefed Treasury on Toyota's supply chains in the Middle East and the procedures that Toyota has in place to protect supply chain integrity," said Ed Lewis, Toyota's Washington-based director of public policy and communications.

Toyota has a "strict policy to not sell vehicles to potential purchasers who may use or modify them for paramilitary or terrorist activities," Lewis said. He said it is impossible for the company to track vehicles that have been stolen, or have been bought and re-sold by middlemen.

Toyota Hilux pickups, an overseas model similar to the Toyota Tacoma, and Toyota Land Cruisers have become fixtures in videos of the ISIS campaign in Iraq, Syria and Libya, with their

truck beds loaded with heavy weapons and cabs jammed with terrorists. The Iraqi Ambassador to the United States, Lukman Faily, told ABC News that in addition to re-purposing older trucks, his government believes ISIS has acquired “hundreds” of “brand new” Toyotas in recent years.

“This is a question we’ve been asking our neighbors,” Faily said. “How could these brand new trucks... these four wheel drives, hundreds of them -- where are they coming from?”

ISIS propaganda videos show gunmen patrolling Syrian streets in what appear to be older and newer model white Hilux pick-ups bearing the black caliphate seal and crossing Libya in long caravans of gleaming tan Toyota Land Cruisers. When ISIS soldiers paraded through the center of Raqqa, more than two-thirds of the vehicles were the familiar white Toyotas with the black emblems. There were small numbers of other brands including Mitsubishi, Hyundai and Isuzu.

“Regrettably, the Toyota Land Cruiser and Hilux have effectively become almost part of the ISIS brand,” said Mark Wallace, a former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, who is CEO of the Counter Extremism Project, a non-profit working to expose the financial support networks of terror groups.



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“ISIS has used these vehicles in order to engage in military-type activities, terror activities, and the like,” Wallace told ABC News. “But in nearly every ISIS video, they show a fleet -- a convoy of Toyota vehicles and that’s very concerning to us.”

Toyota says many of the vehicles seen in ISIS videos are not recent models. “We have procedures in place to help ensure our products are not diverted for unauthorized military use,” said Lewis, the Toyota executive.

But, Lewis added, “It is impossible for Toyota to completely control indirect or illegal channels through which our vehicles could be misappropriated.”

Questions about the ISIS use of Toyota vehicles have circulated for years. In 2014, a report by the radio broadcaster Public Radio International noted that the U.S. State Department delivered 43 Toyota trucks to Syrian rebels. A more recent report in an Australian newspaper said that

more than 800 of the trucks had been reported missing in Sydney between 2014 and 2015, and quoted terror experts speculating that they may have been exported to ISIS territory.

Attempts to track the path of the trucks into ISIS hands has proven complicated for U.S. and Iraqi officials.

Toyota's own figures show sales of Hilux and Land Cruisers tripling from 6,000 sold in Iraq in 2011 to 18,000 sold in 2013, before sales dropped back to 13,000 in 2014.

Brigadier General Saad Maan, an Iraqi military spokesman, told ABC News he suspects that middlemen from outside Iraq have been smuggling the trucks into his country.



**In this photo released on May 4, 2015, by a militant website, which has been verified and is consist ...**

“We are spending our time to fight those terrorists so we cannot say we are controlling the border between Iraq and Syria,” he conceded. “We are deeply in need for answers.”

In a statement to ABC News, Toyota said it is not aware of any dealership selling to the terror group but “would immediately” take action if it did, including termination of the distribution agreement.

Toyota distributors in the region contacted by ABC News said they did not know how the trucks reached ISIS.

Sumitomo, a Japanese conglomerate that ships vehicles to the region, wrote to ABC News, “In terms of how anyone operating outside of the law obtain vehicles for misappropriation, we have no way to know and therefore cannot comment.”

A spokesman for former owners of the Toyota dealership in Syria said its sales operation was halted in 2012.

The former owners, a Saudi company called Abdul Latif Jameel, said it “made the decision to cease all trading activities in the country and fully divested the business in October, 2012,” according to a spokesperson.

Wallace, of the Counter Extremism Project, said his organization wrote directly to Toyota earlier this year to urge the company to do more to track the flow of trucks to ISIS, and noted that the trucks are stamped with traceable identification numbers.

“I don’t think Toyota’s trying to intentionally profit from it, but they are on notice now and they should do more,” Wallace said. “They should be able to figure it out... how are these trucks getting there. I think they should disclose that, put a stop to that, and put policies and procedures in places that are real and effective to make sure that we don’t see videos of ISIS using Toyota trucks in the future.”

Earlier this year, Toyota responded to Wallace’s organization with similar language the company has used to answer questions from ABC News, writing that Toyota stopped entirely its sales of vehicles in Syria several years ago.

Toyota told ABC News that after company officials briefed the U.S. Treasury team and that Treasury indicated the meeting was “helpful.”

“We cannot provide further details of our interaction with Treasury as we do not want to compromise its efforts to understand and prevent diversion, or make it easier for illicit groups to penetrate our supply chains or those of any other company,” Lewis said.

Treasury officials told ABC News they could not comment publicly about the agency’s engagement with specific private companies. But in response to questions about Toyota, the officials said investigators are “working closely with foreign counterparts and stakeholders” on the issue.