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US female shooter ‘had allegiance’ to ISIL

Taimur Khan

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The woman in a husband and wife duo that killed 14 people in California earlier this week posted a pledge of allegiance to the leader of ISIL on Facebook as the attack took place, US law enforcement officials said on Friday.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation said the attack was being investigated as an act of terrorism.

Officials familiar with the investigation told US national media that Tashfeen Malik, 27, made the pledge during the shootings at her husband’s workplace, with one of the officials telling CNN it was made on an account with a different name than her own.

The posting appeared to have been deleted from Facebook, and it was unclear when authorities discovered the message. On Thursday, FBI officials said

that the couple had deleted material from their electronic devices in the days before the attack, suggesting it was premeditated.

So far there has been no evidence that ISIL directed Malik and her husband, Syed Rizwan Farook, 28, to carry out the attack at a Christmas party for the San Bernardino County health department, law enforcement officials said.

“At this point we believe they were more self-radicalised and inspired by the group than actually told to do the shooting,” an official told the New York Times.

Despite some earlier signs that Malik and Farook had been radicalised, US law enforcement officials had previously refused to describe the shooting rampage as a terrorist attack or assign a motive.

The couple had amassed thousands of rounds of ammunition for their four legally-purchased pistols and assault rifles, and investigators found large amounts of explosives at their home and at the Inland Regional Center in San Bernardino where the killings took place.

Farook, a health department employee, had attended the party and left agitated after an altercation, witnesses reported. He returned soon after with his wife in body armour and tactical gear to mow down his co-workers. Police officials said this level of preparation made it unlikely that the rampage was triggered by sudden anger and had been premeditated.

Farook, a Pakistani-American, reportedly met Malik on an online Muslim dating site. A Pakistani citizen, she was living in Saudi Arabia at the time and Farook met her there in July 2014 for marriage. Malik moved to Saudi Arabia from rural southern Punjab in Pakistan 25 years ago, Pakistani officials told Reuters. She moved back to study to become a pharmacist around five years ago. Pakistani intelligence have contacted the family as part of the investigation into the attacks.

Malik’s brother, Farhan Khan, told NBC News that Farook was a “bad person” but that he was not radical. Mr Khan said he is beginning the legal process to adopt the couple’s six-month-old daughter, who they dropped off with relatives hours before their attack.

People who attended the same mosque as Farook said he was devout and prayed there daily, and had recently memorised the Quran. Three weeks ago he stopped attending, two worshippers at the mosque who knew Farook told the AP.

Before the revelations about Malik’s Facebook pledge of loyalty to Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi, FBI officials said Farook had contact a few years ago with five people who had been investigated for possible terrorist activities, including ties to Al Qaeda groups Al Shabab in Somalia and the Jabhat Al Nusra in Syria. But the cases against those suspects had been closed with no charges.

The shootings in San Bernardino came as hate crimes against Muslims have spiked following the ISIL attack in Paris and demagogic campaign rhetoric by Republican presidential candidates trying to burnish their national security credentials to their right-wing base. The front-runner, Donald Trump, said he supports the idea of forcing Muslims to register in a special database.

New York City officials and police have increased their outreach to the city’s Muslim communities after the Paris attacks in an attempt to reassure frightened residents concerned about being targeted by hate crimes. The police department has increased security at mosques

across the city, and the mayor's office has sent staff members to visit mosques to build relationships with imams and community members.

On Thursday, the Obama administration's senior legal official spoke at the annual gala dinner of Muslim Advocates, a national legal rights organisation, and sent a message of reassurance.

"My message to the Muslim community is we stand with you in this," attorney general Loretta Lynch said. Ms Lynch added that she is increasingly worried about the "incredibly disturbing rise of anti-Muslim rhetoric", and that the federal government would pursue legal action against those who incite violence.

She added that her message to all Americans, including Muslims, was that "we cannot give in to the fear that these backlashes are really based on."