

[redacted] (OPE) (FBI)

From: [redacted] (DO) (FBI)
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To: [redacted] (CG) (FBI); [redacted] (OPE) (FBI); [redacted]
Cc: [redacted] (DO) (FBI); [redacted] (DO) (FBI); [redacted] (DO) (FBI); [redacted]
Subject: WaPost posted, but still looking for FBI engagement for follow up story

Muslims and Arab groups concerned about FBI counter-extremism program aimed at schools

By Michelle Boorstein November 2 at 9:16 AM

The exterior of the J. Edgar Hoover Building, which is the headquarters of the FBI in Washington D.C. (Photo by Matt McClain/The Washington Post)

The FBI has designed a game-style Web site about extremism meant to be used by teachers and students to spot and prevent radicalization of youth, say Muslim and Arab advocacy groups who were briefed by the agency on the program and fear it will foment discrimination against Muslims.

Some members of the handful of groups said the program, which they believe to be the first aimed at the nation's schools, frames violent extremism heavily through the lens of Islam and that they had complained strongly. The groups include those who work and communicate regularly with law enforcement and the government on the topic of radicalization, including the Muslim Public Affairs Council and the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee.

The Web site, called "Don't Be A Puppet," was scheduled to be live Monday but was put temporarily on hold in the last few days.

The FBI declined to confirm details of the program or why it was put on hold or when it is expected to go live. After initially declining comment altogether, the agency Sunday night issued a statement.

“The FBI is developing a Web site designed to provide awareness about the dangers of violent extremist predators on the Internet, with input from students, educators and community leaders,” the statement read.

The federal government and local law enforcement have struggled to find ways to reach young Americans who may be attracted to violent Islamic extremism before they break the law. The Justice Department has recently set up pilot programs in Los Angeles, Minneapolis and Boston. However, as the community groups noted, experts disagree on what might be clear triggers for young people, similarly to the cases of dozens of non-Muslims who have perpetrated the U.S. epidemic of mass shootings.

“We were all on the same page in terms of being concerned,” said Hoda Hawa, director of policy and advocacy for the council, called MPAC. “It seems like they’re asking teachers to be extensions of law enforcement and to police thought, and students as well. That was very concerning to us all.”

Seamus Hughes, the deputy director of George Washington University’s program on extremism, said he hadn’t seen the FBI program. However, he said work in schools could be complicated.

“Unfortunately, the age of violent extremists is trending younger and younger. Therefore, schools can be an important space in spotting and combating radicalization, as teachers are often best positioned to see concerning signs. Of course this needs to be done right, with proper training, respect of civil liberties and without stigmatizing,” Hughes said. “Doing otherwise would make the effort counterproductive. There are finite resources for countering violent extremism programming. It may be best to focus efforts elsewhere.”

Details about the Web site were vague. However, some participants described what the FBI showed them at the October meeting. It included exercises like a quiz. The quiz asked students: What would be activities that would concern the FBI? One option asked about a youth posting on Facebook that she intended to attend a political protest. What about a young person posting about feeling emotional about something, was a second. The third,

participants described, cited a youth with a stereotypically Muslim-sounding name who "posted that he's going overseas on a mission [and] does anyone want to chat?" said Hawa.

"All our hands went up, like: What's with this?" she said of the meeting.

Among those at the meeting were representatives of MPAC, the ADC, the Universal Muslim Association of America (UMAA), Karamah (a group of Muslim women lawyers focusing on global human rights) and groups representing Yemeni-American and Sikh-Americans, said Abed Ayoub, legal and policy director of the Arab-American committee.

Ayoub, who attended the meeting, said participants asked how schools would come to learn of the site. The FBI said it would reach out to schools to see if they were interested, and was aiming for it to be used in civics, social studies and government classes, he said. They had already showed the site to some "teachers and students in Northern Virginia to get feedback," Ayoub said.

It wasn't clear which Northern Virginia schools, if any, might have been involved in trying out the site and the FBI did not respond to a request to clarify that point.

"The one that should be involved is the Department of Education. The FBI is overreaching its mission," Ayoub said. "This kind of thing should come from professionals who create educational curriculum. You don't just have a law enforcement agency get it out to students without thinking about the ramifications on students in schools."

While group participants and experts on such efforts said they believed this would be the first such program in schools, law enforcement agencies have for a decade been debating and creating efforts called counter-radicalization or countering violent extremism, or CVE. Some involved improving communication and partnerships between Muslim organizations and law enforcement. Some are run by local police or sheriffs' departments, others by the Department of Homeland Security or the FBI or the Justice Department. Some Muslim leaders are skeptical of the efforts they see as disproportionately focused on Muslims and akin to leaning on the population to become informants even on people who criticize U.S. foreign policy.

"The most controversial part of CVE is that there is no consensus as to what is a pre-terrorism indicator," said Faiza Patel, co-director of the Liberty and National Security Program at the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University's law school.

Efforts a decade ago were "crude," Patel said, and focused on things like whether someone was becoming more religious, or growing a beard, or changing their pattern in mosque attendance.

"It's evolved a bit, but if you say signs of radicalization are alienation and disaffection – that can apply to many, many people. You can project onto CVE whatever you think causes terrorism," said Patel, who had not seen the FBI Web site. "I have teenagers, they are alienated and disaffected a good amount of the time."

Post reporter Adam Goldman contributed to this report.

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From: [REDACTED] (DO) (FBI)
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Subject: NY Times article posted

F.B.I. Tool to Identify Extremists Is Criticized

By LAURIE GOODSTEIN
NOVEMBER 1, 2015

The F.B.I. is about to introduce an interactive program it developed for teachers and students, aimed at training them to prevent young people from being drawn into violent extremism. But Muslim, Arab and other religious and civil rights leaders who were invited to preview the program have raised strong objections, saying it focuses almost entirely on Islamic extremism, which they say has not been a factor in the epidemic of school shootings and attacks in the United States.

The program, according to those who saw it at F.B.I. headquarters, called "Don't Be a Puppet," leads the viewer through a series of games and tips intended to teach how to identify someone who may be falling prey to radical extremists. With each successful answer, scissors cut a puppet's string, until the puppet is free.

In the campaign against terrorists such as the Islamic State, law enforcement agencies have been stepping up efforts to identify those susceptible to recruitment. The agencies have enlisted the cooperation and advice of religious and community leaders. But the controversy over the Federal Bureau of Investigation's new online tool is one more indication that there is no consensus on who should be involved in detecting and reporting suspects, and where to draw the line between prevention and racial or religious profiling.

"The F.B.I. is developing a website designed to provide awareness about the dangers of violent extremist predators on the Internet," a spokeswoman for the agency said late Sunday, "with input from students, educators and community leaders."

The F.B.I. had told the community organizations that the program would be available online as soon as Monday. The organizations' leaders spoke to a reporter only after learning that the F.B.I. was likely to proceed despite their concern that the program would stigmatize Arab and Muslim students, who are already susceptible to bullying.

"Teachers in classrooms should not become an extension of law enforcement," said Arjun S. Sethi, an adjunct professor of law at the Georgetown University Law Center. Mr. Sethi, who specializes in counterterrorism and law enforcement, was invited by the F.B.I. to give feedback on the program.

"The program is based on flawed theories of radicalization, namely that individuals radicalize in the exact same way and it's entirely discernible," he said. "But it's not, and the F.B.I. is basically asking teachers and students to suss these things out."

He said the F.B.I.'s program amounted to "misplaced priorities."

"The greatest threat facing American schoolchildren today is gun violence," he said. "It's not Muslim

extremism.”

Teachers do not always have the training or judgment to identify extremists, said several religious leaders who mentioned the Muslim student in Texas who was detained and handcuffed after taking a clock he built to school.

The F.B.I. held several meetings last summer to present the online program, along with a larger strategy for involving community leaders in preventing radicalization. The Arab and Muslim groups received an email inviting them to a meeting to give feedback on Oct. 16.

About six organizations representing American Muslims, Arabs, Yemenis and Sikhs were at the meeting, where they were given a quick run-through of portions of the online program. It covered different types of violent groups and ideologies, and enumerated some personality changes that might indicate radicalization, according to those who attended. It showed a map of places terrorists have targeted, and included interviews with victims of terrorist attacks.

Abed A. Ayoub, the legal and policy director for the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, recalled: “They were getting blowback from everybody. It was a very tense meeting.”

“They wanted teachers in social studies, civics and government classes to show this to their students,” said Hoda Hawa, the director of policy and advocacy for the Muslim Public Affairs Council. “But the website will be accessible by anyone.”

She and others interviewed were particularly troubled by a question that she said asked the user to identify which of four or five posts on social media should raise alarm. Among the choices were a person posting about a plan to attend a political event, or someone with an Arabic name posting about going on “a mission” overseas. The correct answer was the posting with the Arabic name.

“What kind of mission? It could have been humanitarian. It could have been religious,” Ms. Hawa said.

Mr. Ayoub said, “If this is shown to middle and high school students, it’s going to result in the bullying of these children.”

A report issued by the 9/11 review commission in May suggested that the F.B.I. , as a law enforcement and intelligence agency, was not “an appropriate vehicle” for producing prevention programs to counter violent extremism.

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