



Scenario – Columbus, OH

Note: This is a hypothetical scenario derived from a series of actual cases involving known homegrown violent extremists' actions prior to arrest. By combining facts from a variety of cases the scenario permits more dynamic interactions between workshop participants while still ensuring that scenario is representative of real world events.

Setting: Columbus, OH

STAGE ONE

Scene 1: Community Perspective

Hassan just turned 18 and is a senior at local high school in Upper Arlington. He lives at home with his parents and his older brother, Abdi. Hassan is a good student and has always been a pretty well-behaved kid with lots of friends. Hassan looks up to and trusts Mr. Edwards, one of his teachers who he has several classes with. Mr. Edwards sees a great deal of potential in Hassan and has spent additional time tutoring him so he can get into THE Ohio State University (OSU) to study engineering, just like his brother—the first generation to go to college. Mr. Edwards was a good teacher and mentor for Abdi when he was in high school, which led to him getting a scholarship for engineering at OSU. Mr. Edwards has seen much less of Hassan lately, and last week, Hassan told him he was thinking of focusing less on engineering. When Mr. Edwards tried to further discuss, Hassan would not give a clear reason.

Hassan did mention to Mr. Edwards that his grades have been slipping in all of his classes. Mr. Edwards has noticed that Hassan has pulled away from his friends at school. Hassan recently complained to Mr. Edwards that Muslims are treated unfairly in America—for instance, his younger cousin has been harassed in school and called a “terrorist” and other hurtful names, and his Somali friends in town have felt unfairly profiled by the police. Hassan said he does not think anyone cares enough about this maltreatment and these injustices are inspiring him to make some changes in his life. When Mr. Edwards encouraged Hassan to become active in school and in his community on these issues, Hassan said that his brother, Abdi, is part of the OSU Somali Student Association, but he is rethinking the value of college for himself and that he might take a “greater path,” but would not tell the teacher what that meant.

Abdi and Hassan’s mother is out of town visiting relatives, and Abdi is concerned because Hassan did not come home after school last night and is not answering his phone. Hassan had told Abdi that he would stay after school with Mr. Edwards and study with friends afterward. However, Abdi connected with those friends last night to check on his brother, and no one had seen or heard from Hassan. Abdi says that Hassan has increasingly been staying out late, but has never failed to come home before and never ignores his phone calls. Abdi does not want to tell his mother or call the local police because he does not want to get Hassan in trouble. Abdi sends an email to Mr. Edwards to see if he knows where he might be.

Scene 2: Law Enforcement Perspective

Around 11:30 pm at the Greater Columbus Convention Center, a Columbus Police Department officer notices and reports a “young black male walking around the exterior of the and peeking through the glass windows.” The individual appeared to be furiously typing something into his phone and taking pictures of the center. When the officer stops to question the individual, he answers that he had been waiting for a friend to drive him home. He refuses to give the friend’s name, address, or any further information, and accuses the officer of deliberately targeting him because he is Somali. The officer perceives the individual is acting belligerent and hostile in response to his questioning and senses that something just “does not seem right.” The officer asks Hassan to see the pictures that Hassan had been taking on his phone. Hassan reluctantly hands his phone to the officer, which is open to

Hassan's Facebook page. The officer sees a link to a video about Syria and Assad posted on Hassan's Facebook wall by a friend named "Ahmed Mohammed". The officer asks Hassan to navigate to the pictures, where he sees images of the entrances and exits of the Columbus Convention Center. While the officer is closing out the pictures to hand the phone back to Hassan, he notices that Hassan's screensaver is a graphic with Arabic writing on it. When he asks Hassan about the significance of the screensaver, Hassan says that he doesn't remember where he got it from and that he doesn't know what it represents, since he doesn't know any Arabic, but he has it because he liked the image.

The officer asks Hassan for his ID and tells Hassan to wait outside the vehicle while he runs Hassan's name to see if Hassan has a criminal record. All that comes back is a summons from the previous year for trespassing with an individual named Ahmed Mohammed, DOB 7/24/89. Wondering whether this was the same "Ahmed Mohammed" who posted the Syrian video, the officer runs his name as well. Meanwhile, Hassan stands outside waiting patiently and feeling uncomfortable. That name does not come up, but a "Ahmed Muhamad" appears as a hit on a US Government watch list.

Eventually the officer tells Hassan that he can leave. Hassan does not have enough money to take a taxi, and does not want to ask the police for a ride, so he waits for the bus, and doesn't arrive home until early the next morning. When he finally arrives home, his brother is upset that he didn't know where Hassan was the entire night.

STAGE TWO

Scene 3: Community Perspective

Abdi visits Mr. Edwards after school that afternoon. He has been shaken by what happened to Hassan. He says he wants to tell Mr. Edwards something but he has to promise not to tell anyone. After Mr. Edwards gives his assurance, Abdi tells Mr. Edwards that Hassan has been looking at “weird websites” with “violent images and videos,” as well as websites supporting both ISIS and Al Shabaab. He also tells him that Hassan recently applied for a passport and speaks about traveling to Syria to fight the brutality there, though Abdi always just assumed it was all talk.

Later in the day Hassan also comes to see Mr. Edwards. He says he is in trouble with his brother, but even more, he is seriously upset by what has happened to him. He insists he hasn’t done anything wrong; he was just with a friend. He won’t answer questions about the friend (including if it was a boy or girl), saying he is 18 now and an adult, and he has a right to lead his own life and not be treated like a child and answer all these questions.

He says the police inspected his phone, but gave it back. He tells Mr. Edwards he is worried the police might have tampered with his phone and bugged it. He also tells the teacher he’s worried about the internet history on the phone and is worried that they read the Arabic writing on his screensaver.

When Hassan is gone, Mr. Edwards realizes that Hassan has left his phone behind, with the screensaver visible. He shows the screensaver to a colleague who reads and speaks Arabic and translates it: “Our fellow Muslims must follow a righteous path. We are all going to be held accountable for what we do in this life. We need to be strong. Islam is not passive. It’s not just about words or beliefs. It’s about action. *‘Those who believe fight in the way of God; and those who do not, only fight for the powers of evil; so you should fight the allies of Satan. Allah loves those who fight for his cause.’*”

Hassan calls Mr. Edwards from his brother’s phone to say he left behind his own phone by mistake and wants to come and get it. When Mr. Edwards picks up Hassan’s phone he sees a Facebook message from someone named Ahmed: “Same airport hassle. Coming home 4 big event tomorrow and lighting of cake, landing @ 3:20 2day, can u pick me up?” When Hassan arrives, Mr. Edwards asks about Ahmed, whom he’s never heard of, and this big event. Hassan replies that Ahmed is a new friend and the big event is his cousin’s birthday. When Mr. Edwards asks about the screensaver Hassan again insists he doesn’t understand the meaning of the Arabic writing.

Mr. Edwards decides to call Abdi and tells him about Ahmed. Abdi then becomes nervous and further checks Hassan’s internet history on the computer and clicks on them, discovering more extremist websites. He isn’t sure who to call who he can trust about this. He calls the imam at his masjid, but the imam has not handled a situation like this before, and doesn’t know who the best person is to call about this either. He is nervous to call the police or FBI.

Abdi checks Hassan’s mobile phone and sees a response to Ahmed: “u can count on me, i’ll b there. i’m serious...i’m not scared...i thought it out...i’m ready.” He then confronts Hassan regarding the events of the past few days and asks if he has become involved in something he shouldn’t be. Hassan admits that some new friends have persuaded him to become involved in a protest demonstration at

the convention center, to protest drone bombings and to defend Syria. Abdi presses for details, but Hassan says he doesn't know any more. Abdi warns him about the dangers of getting involved with the wrong people, and probes him about the violent imagery on websites discovered on the computer, questioning if Hassan had become involved with one of those organizations. Hassan says he is against violence and would not join such an organization, but he is upset about issues like Syria, and believes Muslims have to protest and stand up for justice.

Scene 4: Law Enforcement Perspective

Information comes through to the Columbus Police Department from the FBI. Credible intelligence has been received about a serious threat to the Columbus Convention Center from both overseas and homegrown violent extremists. The reporting raises concerns about a potential explosive device in a car.

There is also information about an incoming person of concern, 'Ahmed Mohammed, who is on a Columbus-bound flight manifest. There is also a 'Ahmed Muhamad' on a no-fly list. The passenger Ahmed Mohamed was thoroughly investigated two weeks ago when he checked in to fly overseas, but it was concluded that he was not the same person as the individual on the no-fly list and he was allowed to board. The same happened when he checked in on the return flight; again, it was concluded he was not the same individual and was allowed to board. Now, however, because of the intelligence received, concerns have been raised again. He is due to land at 3:20 this afternoon.

The FBI again contacts the CPD, this time about a telephone intercept, which mentions a 'Ahmed Mohammed arriving soon for 'the big day in Columbus. The same voice also stated, 'we have the car, and Ahmed has the boy.' The FBI then ask the police about the recent interview that led to an inquiry about Ahmed Mohammed.