



Scenario – Houston, Texas

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: Houston, TX area

STAGE ONE

Scene 1: Community Perspective

Majid just turned 18 and is a senior at Hastings High School in Alief. He lives at home with his parents and his older brother, Ahmed. Majid is a good student and has always been a pretty well-behaved kid with lots of friends. Majid 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 Majid and has spent additional time tutoring him so he can get into Rice University to study biomedical engineering, just like his brother. Mr. Edwards was a good teacher and mentor for Ahmed when he was in high school, which led to him getting a scholarship for biomedical engineering at Rice University. Mr. Edwards has seen much less of Majid lately, and last week, Majid told him he was thinking of focusing less on engineering. When Mr. Edwards tried to further discuss, Majid would not give a clear reason.

Majid did mention to Mr. Edwards that his grades have been slipping in all of his classes. Mr. Edwards has noticed that Majid has pulled away from his friends at school. Majid recently complained to Mr. Edwards that Muslims are treated unfairly in America—for instance, his cousin has been harassed in school and called “terrorist” and other hurtful names, and his Muslim friends in town have been profiled by the police. Majid said he does not think anyone cares enough about this maltreatment and these injustices are inspiring him to make some changes in life. When Mr. Edwards encouraged Majid to be active in school and in his community on these issues, Majid said that his brother, Ahmed, is part of the Muslim Student Association (MSA), 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.

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

Scene 2: Law Enforcement Perspective

Around 11:30 pm, a Houston police officer notices and reports a “young, dark-skinned male walking around the exterior of the George R. Brown Convention Center in downtown Houston and peeking through the glass doors.” The male individual appeared to be furiously typing something into his phone and taking pictures of the convention center. When the officer stops to question the individual, he answers that he had been waiting for a friend to drive him home. He refused to give the friend’s name, address, or any further information, and accused the officer of deliberately targeting him because he was Muslim. The officer thought the individual was acting belligerent and hostile in response to his questioning and something just “did not seem right.” The officer asked the individual to come to the police station with the intent of asking him more questions. The individual again complained about police harassment but agreed to come to the police station.

At the station he is voluntarily searched and a leaflet in Arabic is found in his pocket. When questioned, the individual said someone handed it to him that day on the street, but he doesn't know who the person was. He said he doesn't know what the leaflet is about; he doesn't know any Arabic. When asked why he didn't just throw it away, he responded that it looks like it has an ayat (verse) of the Qur'an on it, and it is forbidden therefore to put it in a trash can, so he was taking it home to give to his father who would know how to deal with it properly without disrespecting the Qur'an.

The officer asked the individual if he can look at the suspect's cell phone. The individual again complains about police targeting him because he was Muslim but ultimately allows the officer to review his phone. The officer sees a contact listed with the name "Tariq Khan." The officer decides to run a name check. That name does not come up but a "Tarek Khan" appears as a hit on a US Government watch list.

Eventually the police let him go as they don't have grounds to hold him. He is given his phone and the leaflet and leaves the station. He does not have enough money to take a taxi so he waits for the bus, and doesn't arrive home until the next morning. His brother is upset that he didn't know where he was.

STAGE TWO

Scene 3: Community Perspective

Ahmed visits Mr. Edwards after school that afternoon. He has been shaken by what happened to Majid. He says he wants to tell Mr. Edwards something but he has to promise not to tell anyone. After Mr. Edwards gave his assurance, Ahmed tells him that Majid has been looking at “weird websites” with “violent images and videos” as well as websites supporting Jabhat al-Nusra who is fighting to overthrow the government of Syria. He also tells him that Majid recently applied for a passport and speaks about traveling to Syria to fight the brutality there, though Ahmed always just assumed it was all talk.

Later in the day Majid 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 and leaflet, but gave them back when he was released. 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 a leaflet in Arabic. He leaves the leaflet with him.

When Majid is gone, Mr. Edwards takes the leaflet to a colleague who reads and speaks Arabic and translates it: “Washington’s imperialism is intolerable. What they have done to the Muslim lands is unacceptable. 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.’*”

Majid 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 Majid’s phone he sees a Facebook message from someone named Tariq: “Same hassle, I hate how America treats Muslims. Coming home 4 big event tomorrow and lighting of cake, landing @ 3:20 2day, can u pick me up?” When Majid arrives, Mr. Edwards asks about Tariq, whom he’s never heard of, and this big event. Majid replies that Tariq is a new friend and the big event is his cousin’s birthday. When Mr. Edwards asks about the leaflet Majid again insists he doesn’t know anything about the contents and refuses to take it back.

Mr. Edwards phones Ahmed and asks about Tariq; Ahmed does not know him either. Ahmed becomes nervous and further checks Majid’s internet history on the computer and clicks on them, discovering that they are 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.

Ahmed checks Majid’s mobile phone and sees a response to Tariq Khan: “u can count on me, i’ll b there. i’m serious...i’m not scared...i thought it out...i’m ready.” He confronts Majid regarding the events of the past few days and asks if he has become involved in something he shouldn’t. Majid

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. Ahmed presses for details, but Majid says he doesn't know any more, his new friend Tariq was going to tell him more when he got back from Pakistan. Ahmed 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 Majid had joined a related organization. Majid says he is against violence and would not join such an organization, but he is upset about issues like drones and Syria, believing Muslims have to protest and stand up for justice.

Scene 4: Law Enforcement Perspective

Information comes through to the Houston Police Department from the FBI. The Department of Defense will be having a convention the next day at the George R. Brown Convention Center with high level officials coming from around the world. Credible intelligence has been received of a serious threat to the conference 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. 'Tariq Khan' is on a Houston-bound flight manifest. 'Tarek Khan' is on a no-fly list. Passenger Tariq Khan was thoroughly investigated two weeks ago when he checked in to fly to Pakistan. It was concluded that he was not the same person 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 Houston Police Department referring to a telephone intercept. It mentions a 'Tariq/Tarek' arriving soon for 'the big day in Houston'. The same voice said 'we have the car, and Tariq has the boy.' They ask the police about the recent interview that led to an inquiry about Tariq Khan.