

Los Angeles Police, Muslim Group on Same Page With Mapping Plan

By Daniel Fowler, CQ Staff

To better understand its Muslim communities and head off radicalization, the Los Angeles Police Department recently initiated a project to identify who the city's Muslims are and where they are located.

"I think we don't know enough about American-Muslim communities in the United States," said Michael P. Downing, deputy chief commanding officer of the LAPD's Counter-Terrorism and Criminal Intelligence Bureau. "I certainly don't know enough about them in Los Angeles."

A leading Muslim civil rights organization headquartered in Los Angeles does not necessarily object to the community mapping project, but wants it to be accompanied by increased dialogue between police and Muslim citizens.

"While we think mapping is a good idea to understand the demographics of a community, law enforcement should not be looking at the problem of extremism only from an intelligence standpoint," said Safiya Ghori, director of government relations at the Muslim Public Affairs Council.

Downing mentioned the initiative during a Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs hearing this week on local law enforcement's role in fighting Islamic extremism.

"In the past, we have relied on interventions based on 'experts,' logic or previous programs that are either generic or insensitive to the constellation of issues," Downing said in his written testimony to the committee. "This has consistently produced unremarkable results. Public safety pays a high cost for this business practice."

The LAPD is working with the University of Southern California's National Center for Risk and Economic Analysis of Terrorism Events on the project and also hopes to enlist a Muslim group to assist as well, Downing said in an interview.

"Just in Los Angeles, we have probably 700,000 American-Muslim members spread throughout the region," he said. "Many of them are diaspora communities from second and third generation that identify with Pakistan or Somalia or Chechnya or Jordan, all throughout Europe and the Middle East."

Downing said the LAPD is trying to identify who the Muslims are and where they are located.

Then the LAPD would "apply risk factors: whether they are exposed to Wahhabi-Salafi preachings, the age gender demographic, socioeconomic conditions, unemployment and then try to see which communities are isolated," Downing said, "and on one side infuse

social services and governmental resources to get them integrated into . . . the greater society and then maybe on the other side make sure we know about what's going on in that community.”

In his written testimony, Downing said the LAPD plans to “take a deeper look at their history, demographics, language, culture, ethnic background, socio-economic status, and social interactions.”

“It is our hope to identify communities, within the larger Muslim community, which may be susceptible to violent ideologically-based extremism and then use a full-spectrum approach guided by an intelligence-led strategy,” he continued.

Mapping and Dialogue

In addition to mapping, Ghori said, there should be community dialogue because “establishing trust is not just about identifying risks. It's about working to develop more dialogue and understanding between law enforcement and the Muslim-American community.”

Ghori said reading Downing's written testimony about the mapping project made her a “little nervous.”

“This sort of study should look at characteristics and behaviors rather than ethnic and religious groups as a whole,” she said.

Downing agrees that the two efforts go hand in hand.

“We can't have mapping without dialogue,” Downing said. “We can have dialogue, but if we are not reaching the right people, then it's really not very fruitful. Hopefully, the mapping will help us identify the right people . . . in terms of who we need to dialogue with and integrate into the greater society of Los Angeles.”

Downing said nothing about the project is covert. For the past 18 months, the LAPD has been making a grass-roots effort to reach out to Muslim communities.

The “outreach and grass-roots dialogue with Muslim communities has helped the entire command staff to observe, learn, engage, and most importantly listen,” he wrote. “This has helped to build more robust trust networks at the divisional level of the police service area.”

In his written testimony, Downing said, “One of our goals is to be viewed as trusted friends by Muslim communities in our city.”

“They have done a great job in the past few years to work with the community to build bridges,” Ghori said. “And I think it's one of the best examples of local law enforcement in this country.”

Downing said in an interview he got the idea for the community mapping project while visiting West Yorkshire during a stint with Scotland Yard in England from November 2006 through January 2007. “[It’s] where I first saw the kind of work and the benefit it had,” he said.

By spring, Downing said, he hopes to complete the community mapping initiative. If it’s successful, he believes it could be transmittable, at least in part, to other major U.S. cities.

“The ultimate goal of this thing is to try to integrate . . . so they keep their Muslim identity, but integrate into the greater society,” he said.

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