

Video Script: “A Message from the Inspector General: Review of the FBI’s Efforts to Identify Homegrown Violent Extremists through Counterterrorism Assessments,” March 2020

Hello, I’m Michael Horowitz, Inspector General for the U.S. Department of Justice.

Today, my office released a report on the FBI’s efforts to identify homegrown violent extremists, or HVEs, through counterterrorism assessments. Since September 11, 2001, HVEs have carried out over 20 attacks in the United States, some of which occurred after the FBI closed a counterterrorism assessment or investigation on the individual, such as the 2016 attack at the Orlando Pulse Nightclub. Moreover, from 2015 to 2018, the FBI reports that it arrested 65 individuals who allegedly planned to conduct terrorist attacks in the United States. This is a particularly challenging area for the FBI because of the need to preserve constitutional protections while maintaining national security.

To its credit, following several recent HVE attacks, the FBI conducted reviews of its processes for assessing HVE threats and it identified necessary improvements to the assessment process. However, we found that the FBI has not fully implemented these recommendations and therefore some field offices continued to conduct assessments that did not meet these new requirements or standards. We also found that due to legal, policy, and civil liberties issues, there were divergent practices among field offices on the scope of database checks that were being conducted in reviewing closed assessments. As a result, the FBI must determine if some field offices may have missed opportunities to identify HVEs, or if actions taken by other offices may have had implications for the civil liberties of subjects of previously closed assessments.

Another challenge facing the FBI arises from the increased the number of tips and leads being sent to FBI offices. We found that the FBI has decided to integrate criminal threat matters into its system for assessing counterterrorism threats; and is in the process of updating its protocols related to this change. Among the challenges faced by the FBI is developing an effective approach in determining whether threats by individuals with mental health issues pose an actual threat to national security or public safety, and therefore warrant additional action by the FBI.

Our report makes 7 recommendations to help the FBI address these issues, and the FBI agreed with all of them. To read the report and all of our findings, visit our website, oig.justice.gov, or go to oversight.gov.

Thank you for joining me today.

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