

Anti-Muslim speakers still popular in law enforcement training

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(RNS) Law enforcement officers in Virginia will no longer receive credit for a counterterrorism course taught by a former FBI agent and anti-Muslim activist after the academy where the course was taught canceled its accreditation the day it was scheduled to begin.

Nevertheless, the three-day course with John Guandolo, which Culpeper County Sheriff Scott Jenkins vigorously defended, proceeded at nearby Germanna Community College late last month.

Some 50 people, many from out of state, reportedly enrolled in the seminar, "Understanding and Investigating Jihadi Networks in America," advertised as \$225 per trainee.

The Culpeper controversy is the latest law-enforcement training course to draw harsh criticism from Muslim groups who say agencies hire purported experts in Islam or counterterrorism who in fact have other agendas.

While Muslim-American activists and media reports have raised awareness about anti-Muslim trainers, occasionally resulting in curriculum reviews and canceled classes, many say the problem persists because there are too few police administrators to properly vet courses and instructors.

The consequences, critics add, go beyond political incorrectness and include undermining public safety and obscuring real dangers as police officers chase bad leads based on profiling.

After 9/11, several anti-Muslim activists emerged, speaking about Islam to audiences at churches, synagogues, political organizations and universities. With the nation focused on homeland security, many anti-Muslim speakers began offering their courses to local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies, which paid for them with taxpayer-funded government grants.

Nearly 13 years later, these speakers continue to win lucrative fees to train law enforcement officers despite a history of rhetoric that seems to undermine their credibility.

For example, Guandolo, who taught the Culpeper class, is seen saying in a YouTube video with anti-Muslim blogger Robert Spencer that CIA Director John Brennan converted to Islam. In another recording, he claims that Brennan is “unfit for duty,” because he has brought in leaders of Hamas to advise the government.

In addition, federal court papers claim that as an undercover FBI agent, Guandolo had a sexual affair with a witness that could have interfered with an investigation into corruption by former U.S. Rep. William Jefferson, a Democrat from New Orleans.

“His views on Islam are the equivalent of historical anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic falsehoods,” said Corey Saylor, national legislative director for the Council on American-Islamic Relations, wrote in a letter to Jenkins. “Guandolo offers only his own prejudiced and inaccurate conspiratorial views, not solid counterterrorism training.”

The Southern Poverty Law Center calls Guandolo “a notorious Muslim-basher and conspiracy theorist.”

Guandolo did not agree to be interviewed but instead provided a reporter with a list of associations between founding members of CAIR and people alleged to be connected with Hamas.

Other anti-Muslim activists who regularly teach police officers include Sam Kharoba, a Jordanian-born Christian who preaches that Islam is inherently violent and that a Muslim wearing a headband signifies he wants to be a martyr, and Walid Shoebat, a Christian convert who claims to be a former PLO terrorist. Shoebat believes terrorism and Islam are inseparable.

“All Islamic organizations in America should be the No. 1 enemy. All of them,” he said.

Spencer, founder of the JihadWatch.com blog and whose anti-Muslim writings were cited by Norwegian mass murderer Anders Breivik, has given seminars on Islam and jihad to the U.S. Central Command, Army Command, the Army’s Asymmetric Warfare Group, the FBI, the Joint Terrorism Task Force, and the U.S. intelligence community, according to CAIR.

In July 2011, Gawker reported two of Spencer’s most criticized books, “The Truth about Muhammad” and “The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam,” are recommended in FBI training materials.

Critics of these speakers have in some cases succeeded in getting their courses canceled. In Illinois, three sessions of a course taught by Kharoba were canceled last year; the Florida Department of Law Enforcement said it would no longer use Kharoba. In 2011, the FBI did a review of its materials and trainers after news reports that their materials contained anti-Islamic instruction.

“I think the issues with them are reasonably well-known federally, but many state and local agencies do not know or do not care,” said Saylor.

Jenkins declined an interview request.

According to an editorial in his local paper, The Free-Lance Star, Jenkins became acquainted with Guandolo during a “two- or three-minute conversation,” and didn’t research him until Muslims and others protested. “What he learned did not dissuade the sheriff from moving ahead with the program,” the paper added.

Prior to Guandolo’s course, Jenkins agreed to let local Muslims and Saylor deliver a presentation to officers where they described the history and beliefs of Islam, and warned about stereotypes and misperceptions about Muslims.

“I think they looked at his resume, former FBI and former Marine, and did not look much further,” said Saylor. “A quick Internet search reveals his professional and bias issues.”

Steve Emmons, executive director of Oklahoma’s Council on Law Enforcement Education and Training, said his agency doesn’t have enough personnel to vet the 3,000 course requests the council gets annually.

“It’s not that we didn’t want to but it was because of the sheer number,” he said. Of his staff of 40, only one person is tasked with curriculum reviews, and only does that part time.

Emmons was criticized after retired Army Lt. Gen. Jerry Boykin and Frank Gaffney, both revered in hard-line anti-Muslim circles, gave a presentation in November at the state Capitol about Iran, Hezbollah and drug cartels.

He also acknowledged that his staff didn’t have the expertise to judge such courses. To them, “it was just another anti-terrorism course.”

It wouldn’t take much to avoid future controversies like this, Emmons said.

“If we even had two or three people who did nothing else but look at the paperwork that comes in with the course materials and lesson plans and that kind of thing, yeah, we’d be able to review those things.”