# DHS Seeks to Create Cyberspace "See Something, Say Something" PSA Campaign
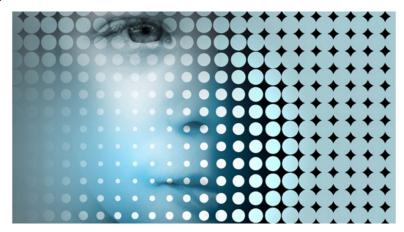
The federal government is looking to spend an extra $1 million of taxpayers' money to implement a new initiative encouraging Internet users to vigilantly observe and report potential online threats. The campaign will be modeled after the "If You See Something, Say Something" campaign that was initiated after the September 11 attacks. But while the campaign may seem like a positive step toward combating terrorism, it provides yet another opportunity for the government to target its critics.

According to fiscal 2017 budget documents released last week, the Department of Homeland Security is requesting funds to develop a public service awareness (PSA) campaign similar to the one that was first debuted in New York City in 2002 and went national in 2010, which would be placed under the Office of Partnership and Engagement. Of the $1 million requested, $94,000 would be the full-time salary for whoever is hired to run the program, while the remaining money would be used to accomplish the goals of the program.

Nextgov.com reports that the proposal is part of the Obama administration's efforts to "beef up public awareness campaigns around cybersecurity" after a report last summer from market research firm IDC recommended that the U.S. government do so. "The United States lacks a cybersecurity-focused culture," the IDC report concluded, after drawing comparisons between U.S. readiness and that of Israel, which the IDC wrote has a "cultural mindset that is suspicious of unsolicited emails" and "is consistently mindful of security."

The 2017 budget documents state that the cyber PSA "will look to raise public and private sector awareness of cybersecurity and to emphasize the importance of cyber awareness and information safekeeping."

The documents go on to explain that the Department of Homeland Security will be working with state and local governments, as well as law-enforcement agencies and private-sector companies, to execute the campaign.

The DHS provides the following justification for the creation of this program:

Cyber Security has become a growing concern throughout the United States. It is imperative that DHS address this concern in a number of ways including Public Awareness. Through these collaborations, employees, volunteers and the public are provided with information needed to recognize and prevent Cyber threats. This includes information on what types of indicators to be aware of. By tailoring the material, those viewing or receiving it feel a connection/tie to the area or entity and are more likely to feel a responsibility to help keep it safe and secure.

But exactly what "indicators" will be outlined by the Department of Homeland Security are cause for concern.

In 2009, a 10-page DHS report entitled "Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment" claimed that "lone wolves and small terrorist cells embracing violent rightwing extremist ideology are the most dangerous domestic terrorism threat in the United States."

The DHS description of right-wing extremism virtually underscored fears that the intent of the report was ultimately to target critics of the government:

Rightwing extremism in the United States can be broadly divided into those groups, movements, and adherents that are primarily hate-oriented (based on hatred of particular religious, racial or ethnic groups), and those that are mainly antigovernment, rejecting federal authority in favor of state or local authority, or rejecting government authority entirely. It may include groups and individuals that are dedicated to a single issue, such as opposition to abortion or immigration.

That report was heavily criticized for its focus on returning military veterans as particularly problematic, as they "possess combat skills and experience that are attractive to rightwing extremists." But its claim that those who favor small government (not no government) are likely terrorists should have come under equally harsh condemnation.

Last February, an intelligence assessement circulated by the Department of Homeland Security sparked outcry as it focused on domestic terror threats from so-called right-wing sovereign citizen extremists. The report indicated that in some cases, threats from that particular group are greater than those from Islamic terror groups like ISIS.

The Homeland Security intelligence assessment warned, "(Sovereign citizen) violence during 2015 will occur most frequently during routine law enforcement encounters at a suspect's home, during enforcement stops and at government offices."

By the end of 2015, the Justice Department created a new czar position to focus on "domestic terrorism," particularly from Christians and those who harbor "anti-government" views.

"Homegrown violent extremists can be motivated by any viewpoint on the full spectrum of hate — anti-government views, racism, bigotry, anarchy and other despicable beliefs," said Assistant Attorney General for National Security John Carlin during the announcement for the czar position. "When it comes to hate and intolerance, no single ideology governs."

Meanwhile, as this administration has reportedly addressed domestic terrorism as a threat to national security, it has adopted a policy of refusing to utter the words "radical Islamic terrorism."

The San Bernandino terrorist attack was the most recent example of that policy, as the White House rejected calls to define the mass shooting as "radical Islamic terrorism."

White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest defended the administration's policy by stating, "It has been instrumental to our efforts against groups like Al Qaeda and ISIL and other terrorist organizations to make clear that the United States is at war with those organizations, but we're not at war with Islam. We're not at war with Muslims around the world."

Yet the DHS did not hesitate to call out returning veterans as potential terrorists.

According to counterterrorism officials, groups such as ISIS have turned to cyberspace to conduct their

recruitment efforts. Michael Steinbach, assistant director of the FBI's counterterrorism division, told the House Homeland Security Committee last year that the "foreign terrorist now has direct access into the United States like never before" because of social media and the use of encrypted online communications.

"There are thousands of messages being put out into the ethersphere and they're just hoping that they land on an individual who's susceptible to that type of terrorist propaganda," said assistant Attorney General Carlin.

But despite ISIS' reliance on cyberspace to recruit Western allies, the Obama administration's reluctance to even address "radical Islamic terrorism" as a threat to American security leaves questions as to who will be targeted through the new PSA program.

Moreover, since the U.S. government spends in excess of $75 billion per year on intelligence agencies — of which an estimated $10 billion is spent on the NSA for electronic surveillance — the government's perceived need for such ads indicates that the government doesn't trust itself to get the job done.

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