

ONE BEHEADED CHILD HERE AND THERE...

On the same day that the FBI culminated a six year investigation into DC Metro Police Officer Nicholas Young by busting him for sending \$245 in gift card serial numbers to an undercover FBI officer posing as someone Young believed to be a friend who joined ISIS (but who was in reality had been just someone else – an informant – playing a role scripted by the FBI), Deputy Spokesperson for the State Department Mark Toner engaged in this conversation about the US-funded Syrian rebel group Harakat Nour al-Zenki using chemical weapons and beheading a 10-year old Palestinian boy.

QUESTION: So what does a rebel group in Syria have to do to not receive U.S. funds any longer? What is the line that they must cross? What kind of controversial incident must take place for a group to stop receiving U.S. funds?

MR TONER: Well, first of all, there's a lot of vetting of the Syrian moderate opposition that has already taken place, and it's not just by the U.S., but it's by all the members of the ISSG and, frankly, the UN. And it was established that al-Nusrah as well as Daesh or ISIL were considered to be by all members and by the UN to be terrorist organizations. I think, again, these are not easy processes, and one incident here and there would not necessarily make you a terrorist group.

One incident here and there – up to and including beheading a child – will not make you a terrorist group, but buying \$245 of gift cards for an FBI actor will make you a terrorist.

That's not to say Young isn't a dangerous man or that he should work as a policeman in any

organization. But even there, it's not clear what *kind* of dangerous person he is. He likes military weapons, Nazis, Islamic terrorists, and may beat his spouse. The FBI, of course, chose to focus on the Islamic terrorism rather than the domestic abuse or Nazism. Even then, by far the most frequent "incriminating" details cited in the affidavit against Young describe his unhappiness about FBI surveillance (including that they spoke to his family in 2010 before they interviewed him when the FBI first had concerns about his associations) and his efforts to thwart it. The FBI presented this operational security as incriminating even though they deemed him not to have violated the law in several earlier reviews, the presumption being that every person who has been investigated should therefore be willing to undergo persistent surveillance for the foreseeable future.

The closest Young actually came to joining a terrorist group was in 2011 when he "had been" with rebels working to overthrow Muammar Qaddafi (the FBI improbably creates the impression that they somehow didn't monitor his two trips to Libya after investigating him for months leading up to these trips, not even after he was stopped by Egyptian authorities). A description later in the affidavit explains he must have been hanging out with the Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade, a group that arose out of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which the US has variously considered a terrorist group or not as its global interests dictated, though which they treated like rebel partners in 2011. Just as the US now considers Harakat Nour al-Zenki worthy of its financial support, in sums delivered in far greater increments than \$245 gift cards.

But for the most part, the entirety of any extremism Young engaged in – at least as portrayed in the affidavit – was FBI theater, an expensively crafted multi-player elaborate fiction. No 10-year old boys were beheaded.

Again, by all means make sure that Young can't

make the world a more dangerous place.

But while you're doing that, consider the implications of the far more significant material support for terrorism the US engages in.

Update: Murtaza Hussein wrote a piece in similar vein on Young and Max Abrahms was the first person I saw tweet on Toner's comment.