COVID-19 Outbreak: Investigating a Threat Actor

March 2020
Introduction

- In March 2020, New York City-based Muslim Brotherhood activist Bahgat Saber publicly urged his friends and followers to take any opportunities they may have to infect Egyptian government officials and supporters with COVID-19/coronavirus.

NY-Based Muslim Brotherhood Activist Bahgat Saber To Egyptian Nationals: Give Coronavirus To Officials, Staff At Egyptian Consulates And Embassies; If I'm Infected, 'I Will Go To The Egyptian Consulate' In New York

Whoever has flu-like symptoms - cold, fever, sneezing -

If you want the state to care about coronavirus

should pay a visit to his "friends" who work for Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi's government.

whomever among you suffers from influenza, fever, or cold,

should just casually walk into a police station.

or go to an office of the public prosecution, or to a courthouse.

People who are outside of Egypt should go to any consulate or embassy.
Introduction

- Saber posted this video on his Facebook page – [redacted].
- Analysts quickly identified two other social media profiles belonging to Saber – a Twitter account and a personal Facebook profile.
Saber Profile Query: Direct Connections

- VoyagerAnalytics’ collection and analysis of Saber’s personal Facebook profile collected information about 3,959 of Saber’s publicly-available friends.

- **Blue nodes:** Each node represents one of Saber’s friends.

- **Pink nodes:** The system highlights Saber’s 10 top connections – those who interact with him the most and share the most mutual connections, among other determining factors.

- **Yellow nodes:** The activist’s mediators – accounts that are not only strongly connected to him, but also to other connections within his network.

- **Green nodes:** The system highlights the Saber’s ghosts – accounts that have similar networks and behaviors on social media. In this case, the one ghost account in this network appears to be a second profile of Saber’s.
Profile Query: Searching a Network

VoyagerAnalytics’ collection methodology means that users do not only have access to Saber’s publicly-reported biographical data – but also to his friends’ publicly-reported biographical data. This information is all keyword searchable and filterable, allowing us to:

- Identify 58 of Saber’s nearly 4,000 friends who list a location in or affiliation with New York City (see attached “Bahgat Saber NYC Friends” spreadsheet)
- Clicking on a highlighted node shows where in the public profile the owner of the account said they were NYC-based.
Profile Query: Searching a Network

The same search tools were used to identify two individuals connected to [redacted] who work for State and Federal Government agencies and therefore may have easier access to U.S. officials who have a similar profile to the Egyptian officials and government supporters who [redacted] was urging his followers to target.
Profile Query: Indirect Connections

In addition to analyzing Saber’s direct connections, VoyagerAnalytics’ Target-Nontarget-Target (TNT) function allowed users to see Saber’s indirect connections to dozens of previously identified both in the Middle East, Europe, and within the United States – including individuals connected to persons and pages of interest in the Pensacola attack in December 2019.

The Blue Nodes are Saber’s friends who have connections to previously-identified individuals, who are all labeled and highlighted in Orange, whom Saber is not directly connected to.

- Although Saber himself is not directly connected to anyone who had been previously flagged as an extremist threat, many of his followers are.

Please see attached “Bahgat Saber Top Indirect connections” spreadsheet for the URLs of Saber’s closest indirect connections.
Profile Query: Post Analysis

- Along with public network data, Saber’s 3,663 public posts were collected. This collection includes likes and comments, and all content is fully searchable and translatable with the click of a button.
Profile Query: Post Analysis

- Posts can also be viewed by media only and by public geotags, which are then displayed on a Google Maps interface, as shown below.

The media view only shows users posts that included pictures and/or videos.

The map view shows all of a user’s publicly geotagged posts in a Google maps interface. Clicking on an individual pin will highlight the post in question.
Summary

- VoyagerAnalytics identified information about nearly 4,000 of Bahgat Saber’s friends, including 58 who publicly claim a connection with or location in New York City, and two who claim to work for government agencies.

- Indirect connections to dozens of known extremist accounts were identified, confirming the affinity of at least some of Saber’s network for violent, radical ideologies.

- Over 3,600 of Saber’s posts were collected and analyzed, including 2,211 pictures and videos and 260 geotagged posts – the vast majority of which were in or around New York City.

- Similar collections and analysis can be conducted on people who – unwittingly or deliberately – are placing themselves and others at risk with reckless behavior related to the spread of COVID-19.