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A 15 million dollar clock: How much is too much?

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In September 2015, Ahmed Mohamed, a freshman at MacArthur High School in Irving, Texas, brought a homemade digital clock (<http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/09/16/440820557/high-school-student-shows-off-homemade-clock-gets-handcuffed>) to school. Ahmed showed his creation to his engineering teacher, who cautioned him not to show it to others.

Ignoring (<http://gazettereview.com/2016/01/ahmed-mohamed-clock-kid-update-news>) this advice, Ahmed set the time, which caused an alarm to ring during class. Understandably, his English teacher confiscated the gadget. Even though Ahmed insisted it was only a clock, his teacher notified the school principal because she believed the device “looked like a bomb.”

Ahmed was pulled out of class and questioned (https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/lawyer-reveals-new-details-of-arrest-of-clock-kid-ahmed-now-seeking-15-million-damages/2015/11/23/7589f682-91f5-11e5-a2d6-f57908580b1f_story.html) by five police officers, the principal, and the assistant principal. They regarded him as both “non-responsive” and “passive aggressive” when questioned. Deemed uncooperative, he was handcuffed, fingerprinted, and interviewed again at police headquarters. Finding no malicious intent, Ahmed was soon released to his parents. While no criminal charges were filed, he was suspended for three days.

The Irving Police Department conducted its investigation of the suspicious-looking item because they believed it to be a “[hoax bomb \(http://gazettereview.com/2016/01/ahmed-mohamed-clock-kid-update-news\)](http://gazettereview.com/2016/01/ahmed-mohamed-clock-kid-update-news).” They claimed their [inquiry \(http://www.dailydot.com/layer8/ahmed-mohamed-hoax-bomb-clock-suspended-charges-dropped\)](http://www.dailydot.com/layer8/ahmed-mohamed-hoax-bomb-clock-suspended-charges-dropped) was meant to determine Ahmed’s intent for bringing in the device, not whether or not the device was a bomb, as made evident by the fact that the school was not evacuated. Under [Texas law \(http://codes.lp.findlaw.com/txstatutes/PE/10/46/46.08\)](http://codes.lp.findlaw.com/txstatutes/PE/10/46/46.08), it is a misdemeanor if a “person knowingly manufactures, sells, purchases, transports, or possesses a hoax bomb with intent to . . . (1) make another believe that [it] is an explosive or incendiary device; or (2) cause alarm or reaction of any type by an official of a public safety agency or volunteer agency organized to deal with emergencies.”



Since the incident, independent [bloggers \(http://blogs.artvoice.com/techvoice/2015/09/17/reverse-engineering-ahmed-mohameds-clock-and-ourselves/\)](http://blogs.artvoice.com/techvoice/2015/09/17/reverse-engineering-ahmed-mohameds-clock-and-ourselves/) have [reverse-engineered \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEmSwJTqpgY&feature=youtu.be\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEmSwJTqpgY&feature=youtu.be) the homemade clock, and concluded that the device was a commercially available alarm clock, from which Ahmed simply removed the plastic casing and placed the open wires into a pencil box.

When Ahmed’s [arrest \(http://www.cnn.com/2015/09/16/us/texas-student-ahmed-muslim-clock-bomb/\)](http://www.cnn.com/2015/09/16/us/texas-student-ahmed-muslim-clock-bomb/) was first reported, it received immense attention on social media. According to the [Los Angeles Times \(http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-ahmed-mohamed-clock-arrest-20150917-story.html\)](http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-ahmed-mohamed-clock-arrest-20150917-story.html), Topsy, a social analytics site, reported close to a million people (including President Obama, Hillary Clinton, Sergey Brin, Mark Zuckerberg, and various NASA scientists) outpoured support through the hashtag: [#IstandwithAhmed \(https://twitter.com/search?q=%23standwithahmed\)](https://twitter.com/search?q=%23standwithahmed). The news focused its narrative on how this inventive, hard-working, and industrious young man was unjustly harassed simply for being a Muslim of Sudanese decent. Supporters claimed the situation typified racism and Islamophobia in America, and many vilified the teachers, the school officials, the school district, and the police for anti-Islamic sentiments and racial profiling.

The school district charged media outlets as presenting a completely one-sided report of the incident. It seemed to officials that Ahmed spoke more with reporters than to the officers investigating the issue.

Both Beth Van Duyne, Irving Mayor, and Jim Hanson, a former member of the United States Special Forces and now Executive Vice President of the Center for Security Policy, said the situation was handled properly because the teacher was reacting to the device, not the child who brought in the device. [Larry Boyd \(http://www.dallasnews.com/news/community-news/northwest-dallas-county/headlines/20150915-irving-ninth-grader-arrested-after-taking-homemade-clock-to-school.ece\)](http://www.dallasnews.com/news/community-news/northwest-dallas-county/headlines/20150915-irving-ninth-grader-arrested-after-taking-homemade-clock-to-school.ece), Chief of Police for Irving, said the situation would have been handled in the same exact manner, regardless of the religion and nationality of the student. Thanks to the U.S. Department of Education's Safe Schools – Healthy Students Initiative (<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/dvpsafeschools/index.html>), every student is held to the same stringent zero tolerance (<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/10/05/how-zero-tolerance-policies-hurt-kids.html>) policies found in most school districts.

To emphasize this point, the school sent a letter (<http://www.scribd.com/doc/281348805/parentletter-suspiciouslookingitematmacarthur>) to all parents, reminding them to tell their children to report any suspicious items or behaviors. The school stressed that such precautions were necessary to protect the students from potential or threatened harm. The school's statement read that if something is out of the ordinary, "it is [important] to immediately report any suspicious items and/or suspicious behavior . . . to any school employee so [it] can [be] addressed . . . right away. [The school] will always take necessary precautions to protect our students [and keep our school community as safe as possible]."

Now, the Mohamed family seeks to file a civil suit against the city and school officials of Irving. Ahmed's attorneys allege civil rights (<http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2015/11/26/texas-juvenile-law-expert-agrees-little-merit-clock-boy-ahmeds-demand-15-million/>) violations, which caused severe psychological trauma after Ahmed's "reputation (<http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/23/us/ahmed-mohamed-clock-letters-demand-apologies/>) in the global community [was] permanently scarred." They are demanding relief in the amount of an astounding \$15,000,000 (and, of course, an apology).

Inconsistent with his claim of a scarred global reputation, after his story went viral, invitations (<http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-ahmed-mohamed-clock-arrest-20150917-story.html>) poured in for Ahmed to visit Facebook, attend a Google science fair, accept an internship with Twitter, meet with Sudanese (<http://www.frontpagemag.com/fpm/260611/farewell-ahmed-clock-boy-robert-spencer>) President Omar al Bashir, pose with the Jordanian queen at a United Nations Summit, appear on various television programs, and go to Astronomy Night (https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/lawyer-reveals-new-details-of-arrest-of-clock-kid-ahmed-now-seeking-15-million-damages/2015/11/23/7589f682-91f5-11e5-a2d6-f57908580b1f_story.html) at the White House, where the president hosted astronauts and students to promote science and technological careers. In addition, Ahmed and his family have since moved to Qatar (https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/clock-kid-ahmed-mohamed-and-his-family-will-move-to-qatar/2015/10/20/a95ed296-7762-11e5-b9c1-f03c48c96ac2_story.html), where Ahmed accepted a generous scholarship to join the Young Innovators Program (<http://www.qf.org.qa/content/20th/developing-young-innovators-2015>) under the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development.

It is unknown whether Ahmed will continue to pursue this civil rights lawsuit. If he does, hopefully the city and school officials of Irving will not reach a settlement with him *just* to avoid another social media outcry. He may have been upset about being placed in handcuffs, but under the circumstances, the school district acted reasonably and within the guidelines of Texas law, the Safe School – Healthy Students Initiative, and MacArthur High's Code of Conduct.

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