

American Foreign Policy Council

DENMARK

QUICK FACTS

Population: 5,556,452

Area: 43,094 sq km

Ethnic Groups: Scandinavian, Inuit, Faroese, German, Turkish, Iranian, Somali

Religions: Evangelical Lutheran 95%, other Christian (includes Protestant and Roman Catholic) 3%, Muslim 2%

Government Type: Constitutional Monarchy

GDP (official exchange rate): \$213.6 billion



Map and Quick Facts courtesy of the CIA World Factbook (Last Updated July 2013)

After the September 2005 publication in the Danish daily Jyllands-Posten of 12 cartoons that were widely perceived as depictions of the Prophet Mohammad, Denmark became a target of al-Qaeda and like-minded groups. In June 2008, the Danish embassy in Islamabad was attacked with a car bomb, and from 2008 through 2010, six separate plots against the Jyllands-Posten and one of its cartoonists were successfully thwarted.

After a surge in arrests in 2010, the threat of militant Islamism in Denmark, however, appears to be in decline. There were no arrests in 2011, and only one single Islamist plot was thwarted in 2012. As the Danish intelligence service, PET, has effectively cracked down on radical Islamist milieus in Denmark, some people from those milieus have left Denmark to join jihadist groups abroad (Pakistan, Somalia or Syria) or have turned to non-violent ways of expressing their discontent with Danish society.

The history of militant Islamism in Denmark, however, dates back to the 1990s, when veterans of the Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union found safe haven in the country. Today, violent Islamism in Denmark remains far from a well-organized domestic phenomenon, although there have been notable instances of home-grown extremism among Danish Muslims, with individuals connecting to—and even joining—foreign militant movements such as al-Qaeda. In the main, however, violent Islamists are few in number, and vastly outnumbered by non-violent Islamist groups.

ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

Militant Islamism in Denmark dates back to the 1990s, when several former *mujahideen* from the Soviet-Afghan war (1980-89) found safe haven there. One of the most prominent personalities in this group was an Egyptian, Talaat Fouad Qassem aka Abu Talal (1957-1995), who was a high ranking member of the militant Egyptian group *al-Gamaat al-Islamiyya*.¹ In 1982, Abu Talal was sentenced to seven years imprisonment in Egypt for his alleged role in the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. He escaped during a prison transfer in 1989, and in 1992 an Egyptian court sentenced him to death in *absentia*.² In 1989, he went to Afghanistan, where he joined the anti-Soviet *mujahideen* and his personal acquaintance, Ayman al-Zawahiri. In 1992, he migrated to Denmark, where he was granted political asylum in three years later.³

Abu Talal was extremely well-connected to international *jihadists*. He had close ties to Egyptian cleric Omar Abdel Rahman, the “blind sheikh” who was an unindicted co-conspirator in the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, and who visited Denmark twice in 1990 and 1991 respectively.⁴ Investigations of the World Trade Center attack revealed that three other Egyptians residing in Denmark—and part of the same group as Abu Talal—were directly related to the perpetrators of this attack.⁵ Abu Talal was also well-connected to Anwar Shabaan,⁶ head of Milan’s controversial Islamic Cultural Institute, which has been the subject of terrorist investigations since the 1990s. Abu Talal is believed to have been the victim of an early form of “rendition” when he was intercepted in 1995 in Croatia by U.S. intelligence while on his way to Bosnia. He was apparently sent back to Egypt, where he subsequently disappeared.⁷

Another prominent member of this first generation of *jihadists* was Danish-Moroccan Said Mansour (b. 1960). Mansour hosted Omar Abdel Rahman during one of his visits to Denmark. An ardent supporter of the Alge-

rian terrorist group GIA, Mansour was involved in the distribution of their newsletter *Al Ansar*, and was affiliated with the notorious London-based terrorist Abu Qatada. Mansour ran a publishing house, Al Nur Islamic Information, through which he disseminated material inciting Muslims to violence. (Materials from Al Nur were subsequently found worldwide at locations related to terrorist investigations in Germany, Italy, Spain, Belgium and the U.S.).⁸ In 2007, Mansour was convicted by a Danish court of “incitement to violence,” and imprisoned for two years. He was released in 2009.

After 9/11, a new iteration of militant Islamism appeared in Denmark. In contrast to the first generation embodied by Abu Talal and Mansour, this second generation is primarily homegrown in nature, and often includes first-generation Danes. The first cases of Islamist terrorism in Denmark after 9/11 were strictly homegrown plots, planned by Danish citizens or residents with no linkage to terrorist groups abroad. But since 2007, terrorist plots have been increasingly planned by “returnees” who have come back to Denmark after joining militant groups abroad, or even by foreigners with no prior connection to Denmark.

The first Danish terrorist case after 9/11 was the Glostrup case, also known as the Sarajevo case. It started in October 2005 when a Bosnian-Swede and a Danish-Turk were arrested in Bosnia in possession of explosives and were later convicted of planning a terrorist attack at an undisclosed location. Some of their associates in Copenhagen were arrested a week later. Three Danish citizens of Arabic backgrounds and a Bosnian who had grown up in Denmark were subsequently put on trial; one was convicted, while the others were acquitted. The group was well connected internationally, but mostly through the internet. In 2005, some of the young men had visited Omar Bakri Muhammed, the leader of *al-Muhajiroun* in London. In the UK, the young Danes also had online contacts to Younis Tsoulis AKA “Irhabi007” (al-Qaeda’s “web-master” in London), Tariq al-Daour (Abu Dudjana), and Wasim Ahmad Mughal, all of whom were later convicted for terrorism.⁹ Furthermore, members of the Glostrup group had online contacts to two individuals subsequently convicted of terrorism in the U.S.: Ehsanul Sadequee and Syed Harris Ahmed.¹⁰

Two years later, in 2007, three men—a Danish-Syrian, an Iraqi Kurd and a Danish-born convert to Islam—were convicted in the Vollsmose case for conspiring to commit an act of terrorism at an unspecified location. A bottle of explosives as well as metal splinters and ammonium nitrate had been discovered at various locations. There was no clear evidence, however, that the group had acquired militant experience abroad or had established connec-

tions to any Islamist organization.

The Glasvej case, which is also known as “Operation Dagger,” was the first Danish case with direct links to al-Qaeda in Pakistan.¹¹ In 2007, Danish-Pakistani Hammad Khürsid traveled to Pakistan where he linked up with people from the Red Mosque (*Lal Masjid*) in Islamabad. There, he reportedly met up with a high-ranking “al-Qaeda facilitator” who helped him gain access to a terrorist training camp in North Waziristan.¹² Upon his return to Denmark, he and an Afghan friend began to produce explosives. In September 2007, the two men were arrested by Danish authorities, and in October 2008 were convicted for producing explosives and conspiring to commit an act of terrorism at an undisclosed location.

Ever since the outbreak of the cartoon controversy in 2005, and in particular after the republication of the cartoons by several Danish newspapers in 2008, Denmark has become a target of foreign militant organizations, including of al-Qaeda and like-minded groups (*Lashkar-e Taiba*, AQIM, AQAP, and *al-Shabaab*), as well as of autonomous cells operating in Europe. From 2008 through 2010, six plots targeting either the daily *Jyllands-Posten* or one of the cartoonists, have been thwarted. The people behind the first two plots were Danish residents, but in 2009 and 2010, four plots were attempted by foreigners with no prior relation to Denmark.¹³

In February 2008, two Tunisians residing in Denmark were arrested and detained under suspicion of preparing an attack against the cartoonist Kurt Westergaard. The Tunisians were administratively expelled from the country on “secret evidence” presented to the court by the Danish intelligence service. However, due to human rights concerns, they were not repatriated back to Tunisia; one left Denmark for an undisclosed Middle Eastern country, while the other was acquitted in 2010 following a closed trial. Since the case was not carried out in open court, little is known of their links to Islamists abroad.

Subsequently, on January 1, 2010, a Danish-Somali, Mohamed Geele, forced his way into the residence of cartoonist Kurt Westergaard with an axe. The man was arrested on location, and in February 2011 was convicted for the attack under Danish terrorism legislation. Beforehand, the plaintiff had been to Somalia where, according to the Danish security and intelligence service, he had close connections to Somalia’s *al-Shabaab* and al-Qaeda elements in East Africa.¹⁴ He had subsequently returned to Denmark in 2008, where he recruited and raised money for *al-Shabaab* in both Denmark and Sweden.¹⁵

In 2009, he was preventatively detained in Kenya prior to a visit there of U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Nothing, however, indicates that he was directly related to a specific plot against Mrs. Clinton.

David Coleman Headley, a U.S. citizen of Pakistani origin involved in planning the 2008 Mumbai attack, pleaded guilty in March 2010 to planning an attack against employees at the *Jyllands-Posten*. Headley had been befriended by both Hafiz Muhammad Saeed—the titular head of the Pakistani terrorist group *Lashkar-e Taiba*—and Ilyas Kashmiri, a member of the al-Qaeda-linked Pakistani group *Harkat al-Jihad ul-Islami*. In the U.S., Headley cooperated with Tahawwur Hussain Rana, a Canadian citizen of Pakistani descent who financed Headley and provided him with false identification. Headley traveled twice to Copenhagen, where he took photographs of his intended target, the *Jyllands-Posten*. His plot included the beheading of employees at the paper. Headley was arrested in October 2009 in Chicago before he was able to carry out his plan.

In July 2010, three men of Uighur, Uzbek and Iraqi Kurdish descent were arrested in Norway on terrorism charges. In January 2012, two of the men were convicted for plotting an attack against the *Jyllands-Posten*. According to U.S. officials, the group had direct contact to the commander of the Turkistan Islamic Party as well as top-al-Qaeda personnel, such as Salah al-Somali who was involved in the New York subway plot in 2009. A few months later, in September 2010, a Chechen-born Belgian citizen, Lors Dukaiev, traveled to Denmark, carrying a bomb that inadvertently went off in his hotel. The Belgian was arrested and later convicted for terrorism as it turned out that the bomb was intended for the *Jyllands-Posten*. No connection to an organized militant group has so far been revealed.

In December 2010, a Tunisian living in Sweden and two Swedish citizens of Arabic extraction were arrested on the outskirts of Copenhagen. Yet another Swedish-Tunisian was subsequently arrested in Sweden. All four men were convicted for planning to access *Jyllands-Posten's* office in Copenhagen and subsequently kill as many employees as possible. The Swedish group was well-connected internationally. One of the convicted—a former drug dealer—previously had spent several years in a training camp in North Waziristan; another had been arrested in Pakistan and Kenya on prior occasions.¹⁶

The first Danish case with international ramifications—Operation Dagger—was connected to al-Qaeda in Pakistan. More recently, however, Somalia

and Syria have become important jihad-venues for Danish Muslims on the look-out for a violent jihad experience. Two Somalis who grew up in Denmark committed suicide attacks in Mogadishu in 2009 and 2010, and in 2012, two Somali brothers were arrested in Denmark on charges of terrorism. One of the brothers apparently had been to an *al-Shabaab* training camp in Somalia. Through 2012, Danish residents began joining the uprising in Syria. However, many people aspiring to become foreign fighters in Syria are not exclusively Islamists, but apparently also people with a background in gang-related crime.¹⁷

The most spectacular story in 2012, providing a glimpse into the closed world of radical Islamist activity, was the revelation that a Danish convert to Islam, Morten Storm, had assisted the CIA in chasing down radical American cleric Anwar al-Awlaki.¹⁸ Anwar al-Awlaki was a high-profile member of al-Qaeda in Yemen and in 2011 the first American citizen to be the object of a targeted killing. Storm had converted to Islam in 1997 and, after having joined radical Islamist milieus in the UK, he went to Yemen where he met with Anwar al-Awlaki. In 2006, he contacted the Danish intelligence service to become an informer. According to Storm, information about Awlaki's whereabouts was forwarded to the CIA. Awlaki had asked Storm to provide him with a European wife, and once Storm had located a Croatian woman, she travelled to Yemen with her luggage stuffed with GPS equipment. The mission failed, as the luggage was removed at her arrival. It is unclear whether the information from the Danish agent in any way contributed to the eventual killing of Awlaki in a drone strike in September 2011, but Storm has provided evidence that a meeting between him and CIA personnel took place in Denmark in October 2011 shortly after Awlaki's death.

Nevertheless, the number of Muslims in Denmark who actively support violent Islamism is limited. As of this writing, nine Danes or Danish residents have been convicted for terrorism related to Islamism since September 11, 2001. Militant Islamists are far outnumbered by Muslims involved in non-violent political groups. Some of these organizations, organized around a common Muslim identity, are very vocal and visible in public sphere.

Among the most controversial is *Hizb ut-Tahrir* (HT). *Hizb ut-Tahrir* put down roots in Denmark in the mid-1980s,¹⁹ although the Danish branch of the organization was not formally established until the mid-1990s.²⁰ British HT members were instrumental in the establishment of the group's Danish contingent,²¹ and the movement's Copenhagen leadership committee was subsequently elevated to head the group's regional affairs, as reflected in its current title "*Hizb ut-Tahrir* Scandinavia."²² The organization has an estimat-

ed 150 active members, but attracts around 1,000-1,200 people at public meetings.²³

Ideologically, it aims to reestablish a Caliphate in the Muslim world and therefore, unlike the classical Muslim Brotherhood, is against the modern notion of the “nation-state.” HT considers democracy an un-Islamic invention, and urges Danish Muslims not to engage in politics or take part in elections. It does, however, seek to engage in debates with select intellectuals. The organization as a whole does not engage in violent activities, but supports “defensive *jihad*” in places such as Iraq or Afghanistan. The group’s public meeting in January 2011 caused considerable controversy, as it endorsed continued resistance in Afghanistan, which was interpreted by many as encouragement to kill Danish soldiers serving there.²⁴ Former HT spokesperson Fadi Abdulatif has been convicted twice for “threats, flagrant insults and incitement to murder” against Jews and former Danish prime minister (and current NATO Secretary General) Anders Fogh Rasmussen.²⁵ Various political parties have argued that HT should be banned; however, in 2004, the Danish Attorney General ruled that there were no legal foundations for such a ban.²⁶

As the Danish Intelligence Service, PET, has effectively cracked down on violent Islamist milieus, some Islamist groups supportive of violent *jihad* have now given up on violence and have turned to non-violent ways of expressing their radical opinions in public. One of the most visible of those radical groups is the fairly recent The Call to Islam (*Kaldet til Islam*) that regularly attracts media attention. The group, which inter alia includes a person acquitted in the Glostrup case, has close ties to former London-based cleric, Omar Bakri Mohammed, and his successor in the UK, Anjem Choudary. Choudary was the leader of the now-banned group Islam4UK. The Call to Islam organizes demonstrations in front of foreign embassies, where Bakri and Choudary intervene directly via phone or internet. Similarly, they have demonstrated against a parade honoring Danish veterans from the war in Afghanistan; they have publicly announced the establishment of *sharia*-zones in certain areas of Copenhagen; and during the 2011 elections for parliament, they urged Muslims not to participate in elections and even tore down election-posters of Muslim candidates.

Aside from HT and The Call to Islam, The Islamic Society (*Wakf/Islamisk Trossamfund*) is one of the most visible and vocal Islamic organizations in Denmark with roots back to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. In contrast to HT, it was established by first-generation immigrants as one of the various ethnic-religious organizations that manage and administer Muslim places of worship in Denmark. It has a broad constituency all over Denmark, and

is active in the public sphere as well as on the political scene. Unlike *Hizb ut-Tahrir*, it has adopted a strategy of dialogue and participation in Danish society, formally cooperating with the Danish intelligence service on de-radicalization efforts. Although The Islamic Society has no formal ties to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, its worldview is somewhat infused by the group's ideology.²⁷ In April 2011, the youth organization of The Islamic Society—*Munida*—caused a great stir by inviting the controversial Canadian Muslim preacher, Bilal Philips, to give a public speech in Copenhagen.

Yet another cluster of “domestic” Islamic groups is represented by The Muslim Council (*Muslimernes Fællesråd*), an umbrella organization that unites 13 separate Muslim organizations. A group very active in the public debate is the Muslims in Dialogue (MID) that was established in 2003. Another organization that actively takes part in debates about identity politics, *sharia*, etc. is Critical Muslims. Like MID, Critical Muslims was established by second-generation Muslims in Denmark and can—like the Muslim Council—be considered as a Muslim lobbying group. Hence, they intervene in public debates whenever sensitive issues related to Islam reach the top of the public agenda, and proactively try to set the agenda on issues concerning the establishment of mosques, graveyards, Muslim eldercare, etc.

ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

Muslim immigration to Denmark began in the 1960s, and proceeded in essentially two waves. During the 1960s and 1970s, immigrants from Turkey, Pakistan, North Africa and the former Yugoslavia came to Denmark to work. After the mid-1970s, a second wave of newcomers to the country was made up primarily of refugees, as well as the families of earlier immigrants who had stayed in Denmark. Conflicts in the Arab and Muslim world (including the Iran-Iraq war, as well as the civil wars in Lebanon, the former Yugoslavia, and Somalia) also prompted Muslim immigration to Denmark, as have the more recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

While no official census of Muslims in Denmark exists, some preliminary data is available. Between 1999 and 2006, the proportion of Muslims in the total population grew from 2.9 percent to 3.8 percent (207,000),²⁸ as a result of a growing number of refugees from Iraq and Somalia, as well as family reunifications among Turkish and Pakistani immigrants.²⁹ Denmark's Muslim community is ethnically very diverse. The largest group are Turks (24.7 percent), followed by Iraqis, Lebanese and Pakistanis (11.7 percent, 10.7 percent and 8.3 percent, respectively).³⁰

A precise estimate of the level of support for violent Islamist groups among Danish Muslims is difficult to obtain since—in contrast to the Swedish security service *Säpo*—the Danish intelligence service does not make such estimations public. Similarly, it is difficult to identify the reasons some Danish Muslims are attracted to violent Islamism; a general climate of Islamophobia in Denmark is often cited as one such cause, yet concrete evidence of such a surge in anti-Muslim sentiment is lacking.

It is, however, beyond doubt that since September 11, 2001, public debates on Islamism have become increasingly incendiary, culminating with the publication of the infamous 12 cartoons in the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in 2005. The year 2001 also coincided with the rise to power of a conservative government that—for the first time in Danish history—depended on parliamentary support from the country’s anti-immigration and Islam-critical nationalist party, the Danish Peoples Party (DPP). The DPP has been instrumental in articulating a “struggle of values” against Islam, which it considers necessary in order to defend Christianity and “Danishness.”³¹ In public debates, Islamism has increasingly come to be framed as a security issue.³² Successive ministers of foreign affairs have repeatedly maintained that Islamism constitutes “the most important totalitarian threat today.”³³ Similarly, Muslim politicians who have tried to run for parliament were, notwithstanding their protestations, accused of supporting *sharia* law, if not constituting a threat to Danish democracy outright. Ever since a new center-left government took office in 2011, the political agenda of a “struggle of values” against Islam has become less prominent in public debates.

ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

Since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the Danish parliament has passed two Anti-Terrorism Acts (I and II), in 2002 and 2006 respectively.³⁴ The first Act *de facto* amended the Danish penal code by introducing a separate terrorism provision (Chapter 13, §114) that increased the punishment for a variety of previously-proscribed acts if carried out with the intention of “frightening a population,” “unduly forc[ing] Danish or foreign authorities to act or abstain from acting,” or destabilizing “the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organization.”³⁵ The maximum sentence for committing an offense under the new terrorism provision was raised to life in prison.

The Anti-Terrorism Act also penalizes the act of providing financial services to terrorist groups. The fact that a group is included on the UN or the EU list of terrorist groups is not, in principle, enough to have it considered as such in a Danish trial, however; specific evidence must be produced in court.

To date, there has been one conviction related to the financing of terrorism, albeit not in relation to an Islamist group (rather, support to Colombia's FARC). While a trial concerning financing for Hamas did take place, it did not lead to a conviction.³⁶ The Anti-Terrorism Act similarly equipped authorities with new tools to fight terrorism, including secret searches; the logging of telephone and Internet communications; easier access to computer surveillance; expanded ability to refuse or withdraw residence permits, and so forth.

Following the July 7, 2005 subway bombings in London, Danish perceptions of the threat from militant Islamism changed, and the greatest danger is now seen as "homegrown." State antiterrorism policies soon focused on preventing the "radicalization" of Danish Muslims, leading to the establishment of a government "office for democratic community and the prevention of radicalization" under the country's Ministry of Integration. A working group, which included the aforementioned office, subsequently prepared a report—entitled *A Common and Safe Future: an Action-Plan to Prevent Extremist Views and Radicalization*³⁷—which was published in June 2008. It suggested a whole range of softer initiatives to deal *preventively* with the phenomenon of radicalization, including: courses on democracy and citizenship; role-model and mentor initiatives; focus on radicalization in the cooperation between schools, social authorities and police (SSP-cooperation); preventive talks with selected individuals; dialogue forums between the Danish Intelligence Service and selected *imams*; and formalized accreditation procedures for imams in Danish prisons. All of these initiatives are currently being implemented. The Danish intelligence service regularly carries out "preventive talks" with people who are in a process of violent radicalization. Similarly, they have established mentoring programs in prison, primarily targeting convicts over terrorism, as well as exit-programs for persons who want an exit from extremist environments.³⁸

ENDNOTES

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[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Tribunale de Milano, "Ruling of Judge Presiding Over Preliminary Investigations," n.d., 44, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/world/documents/milan_warrants.pdf.

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[5] See Manni Crone and Mona Sheikh, "Muslims as Danish Security Issues," in Jørgen S. Nielsen, ed., *Islam in Denmark* (London: Ashgate, forthcoming).

[6] Taarnby, "Jihad in Denmark," 17.

[7] Human Rights Watch, "Black Hole: The Fate of Islamists Rendered to Egypt," May 9, 2005, <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11757/section/6>; Claus Blok Thomsen, "CIA's første bortførte fange kom fra Danmark" [CIA's First Abducted Catch Came from Denmark], *Dagbladet Politiken* (Copenhagen), October 20, 2007, <http://politiken.dk/indland/article399819.ece>.

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[10] Author's personal notes from the 2008 trial of EIH at the Eastern High Court.

[11] At a press conference following the arrests, Danish security and intelligence service head Jakob Scharff maintained that the plot had "direct links to al Qaeda." See "BAGGRUND: Hvad handler Glasvejsagen om?" [Background: What's the Glasvej Case About?], *Dagbladet Politiken* (Copenhagen), August 11, 2008, http://politiken.dk/indland/fakta_indland/ECE550307/baggrund-hvad-handler-glasvejsagen-om.

[12] Author's personal notes from the Glostrup trial.

[13] Lene Kühle and Lasse Lindekilde, "Radicalization among Young Muslims in Aarhus," Aarhus University Centre for Studies on Islamism and Radicalization, January 2010, http://ps.au.dk/fileadmin/site_files/filer_statskundskab/subsites/cir/radicalization_aarhus_

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