American Foreign Policy Council

Denmark

QUICK FACTS

Population: 5,515,575

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): $311.9 billion

Map and Quick Facts courtesy of the CIA World Factbook (Last Updated July 2010)

Since the September 2005 publication in the Danish daily Jyllands-Posten of 12 cartoons that were widely perceived as depictions of the Prophet Mohammad, Denmark has become a prime target of al-Qaeda and like-minded groups. From 2009 through 2010, three separate plots against the Jyllands-Posten, and another against one of its cartoonists, were successfully thwarted. In June 2008, the Danish embassy in Islamabad was attacked with a car bomb.

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 there. Today, violent Islamism in Denmark remains far from a well-organized domestic phenomenon,

although there have been notable instances of homegrown 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 which themselves are increasingly disconnected from international organizations.

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 had gone 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, who visited Denmark twice in 1990 and 1991 respectively.[4] Investigations of the WTC 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. As an ardent supporter of the Algerian terrorist group GIA, and involved in the distribution of their newsletter *Al Ansar*, Mansour was also 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 was 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 "internal" in nature, and often includes first-generation Danes. For some years now, the Taiba mosque in the northwestern part of Copenhagen has been the center of a subculture of young men supportive of militant Islamism. Some of these individuals were acquainted with Said Mansour, who used to attend the mosque. Young men from this group have been involved in two cases leading to convictions under the Danish anti-terrorism legislation: the Glostrup case, with linkages to al-Muhajiroun in London, and the Glasvej case, tied to al-Qaeda in Pakistan.

The Glostrup case—also known as the Sarajevo case—started in October 2005 when a Bosnian-Swede and a Danish-Turk, both part of the Taiba mosque group, were arrested in Bosnia in possession of explosives. They were later convicted, along with two others, 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. Notably, the group was well connected internationally. 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.: Ehsamul Islam Sadequee and Said Harris Ahmed.[10]

The Glasvej case, on the other hand, had direct links to al-Qaeda in Pakistan.[11] In 2007, a Danish-Pakistani 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 (along with some of their friends) 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.

Another locus of Islamist militancy is Aarhus, the second largest city in Denmark.[13] The only Danish detainee at Guantánamo Bay—Danish-Algerian Slimane Abderrahmane—lived there. In the wake of the so-called "cartoon crisis," Aarhus has been the site of several plots against the *Jyllands-Posten* newspaper, which is published there. Moreover, the most controversial of the cartoonists involved in the scandal resided there at one time. In February 2008, in an incident soon to be known as the "Tunisian case," two Tunisians were arrested and detained under suspicion of preparing an attack against the cartoonist in question, Kurt Vestergaard. 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 forced his way into the residence of cartoonist Kurt Vestergaard 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.

A final locus of internal Islamist militancy is the city of Odense. 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 connections to any Islamist organization.

Ever since the outbreak of the cartoon crisis in 2005, and the subsequent republication of the cartoons by several Danish newspapers in 2008, Denmark has become a prime 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.

- 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 decent 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 September 2010, a Chechen-born Belgian citizen traveled to Denmark, carrying a bomb that inadvertently went off in his hotel. The Belgian was arrested and later charged for terrorism because, the prosecution has charged, the bomb was intended for the *Jyllands-Posten*. No connection to an organized militant group has so far been revealed; the trial was slated to begin in May 2011.
- 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 citizen of Tunisian decent was subsequently arrested in Sweden. According to Danish authorities, the suspects plotted 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 suspects previously had been arrested in Pakistan; another had been arrested in Pakistan and Kenya on prior occasions.[16] Danish security officials will not rule out the possibility that the group had contact with David Headley, who himself had visited Sweden in 2008.[17]

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* (HuT). *Hizb ut-Tahrir* put down roots in Denmark in the mid-1980s,[18] although the Danish branch of the organization was not formally estab-

lished until the mid-1990s.[19] British HuT members were instrumental in the establishment of the group's Danish contingent,[20] 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."[21] The organization has an estimated 150 active members, but attracts around 1,000-1,200 people at public meetings.[22]

Ideologically, it aims to reestablish a Caliphate in the Muslim world and therefore, unlike the classical Muslim Brotherhood, are against the modern notion of the "state." HuT 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.[23] Former HuT spokesperson Fadi Abdullatif 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.[24] Various political parties have argued that HuT should be banned, however, in 2004, the Danish Attorney General ruled that there were no legal foundations for such a ban.[25]

Aside from Hizb ut-Tahrir, The Islamic Society (*Wakfl Islamisk Trossamfund*) is one of the most visible and vocal Islamic organizations in Denmark. In contrast to HuT, 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. The Islamic Society has no formal ties to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, but its worldview is some-

what infused by the group's ideology, albeit not in the classical form as it was articulated by Hassan al-Banna or Sayyid Qutb.[26] 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 the second generation of Muslims in Denmark and can—as the Muslim Council—be considered as a Muslim lobby-group. Hence, they intervene in public debates whenever sensitive issues related to Islam reach the top of the public agenda or 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[27]), as a result of a growing number of refugees from Iraq and Somalia, as well as family reunifications among Turkish and Pakistani immigrants.[28] 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).[29]

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 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."[30] In public debates, Islamism has increasingly come to be framed as a security issue.[31] Successive ministers of foreign affairs have repeatedly maintained that Islamism constitutes "the most important totalitarian threat today."[32] 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. Most recently, no less than the newly-appointed Minister for Integration declared that he had always been lukewarm towards the idea, since what was needed was, in fact, "assimilation."[33]

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 for the Prevention of Extremist Attitudes 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.

ENDNOTES

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