



UNITED STATES

Quick Facts

Population: 326,625,791 (July 2017 est.)

Area: 9,833,517 sq km

Ethnic Groups: white 72.4%, black 12.6%, Asian 4.8%, Amerindian and Alaska native 0.9%, native Hawaiian and other Pacific islander 0.2%, other 6.2%, two or more races 2.9% (2010 est.)

GDP (official exchange rate): \$19.36 trillion (2017 est.)

Source: CIA World FactBook (Last Updated June 2018)

INTRODUCTION

Despite significant advances in the U.S.-led fight against the Islamic State terrorist group in Iraq and Syria throughout 2017, the broader threat posed by militant Islamists and terrorist networks remains a challenge to U.S. national security. In November 2017, National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) Director Nicholas Rasmussen told the House Committee on Homeland Security that “ISIS and al-Qa’ida have proven to be extremely resilient organizations” and terrorist groups “continue to exploit safe havens created by ungoverned spaces and threaten the United States and our allies.”¹ The threat from the Islamic State’s “virtual caliphate” likewise continues to grow and expand, as the terrorist group makes savvy use of social media to continue to recruit terrorists and motivate individuals to perpetrate attacks in the United States and other Western nations.² Although the Trump administration has yet to release a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy, it has taken significant steps to bolster counterterrorism operations in conflict zones. These have included easing the rules of engagement for U.S. troops battling enemy forces in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria³ and loosening restrictions on drone strikes and commando raids.⁴ The United States has also deployed combat-equipped forces to conduct counterterrorism operations and assist counterterrorism capabilities of partner countries in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Libya, and elsewhere.⁵

ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

Contemporary Islamist activity in the United States can be understood in the context of five loose conceptual groupings:

The Ikhwan-Jama’at duopoly⁶

The Ikhwan-Jama’at duopoly is the largest and most influential grouping of organized Islamist activism in the United States. In the 1950s and 1960s, Muslim Brotherhood activists fled repression in Egypt and sought refuge in Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia. Wahhabi authorities took advantage

of their organizational experience, placing them in key positions at major Islamic NGOs. With Saudi backing, these Brotherhood activists, joined by Jama'at-e-Islami⁷ cadres, propagated Islamist thought and institutions all over the world, including the United States and the wider Western world.⁸

The structure of the U.S.-based Ikhwan-Jama'at duopoly can be understood on three levels: 1) a covert vanguard, 2) professional activist organizations with formalized membership schemes, and 3) the related grassroots they seek to mobilize. The vanguard consists of Brotherhood and Jama'at leaders in North America who hold key leadership positions in a network of overlapping activist organizations. These activist organizations are the most prominent Islamic groups in American civil society. They are influential in local, state, and national politics and have established relationships with editorial boards and news producers at media outlets throughout the country.

Internal U.S. Brotherhood records released as evidence in the terrorism financing trial of the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development (HLF) reveal that a covert vanguard of Muslim Brotherhood activists founded and directed the most influential Muslim-American civil society groups in the United States, including the Muslim Students' Association (MSA) the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), the North American Islamic Trust (NAIT), the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and the Muslim American Society (MAS).⁹ The Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) similarly has been identified as a "front" for Jama'at-e-Islami.¹⁰ The public faces of these groups are professionally-led activist organizations that are purportedly concerned with civil rights, religious education, political awareness, grass-roots organization, and other seemingly benign activities.¹¹ However, internal Brotherhood documents reveal another use for these organizations: promoting "the main goal of Islamic activism," which is "establishing the nation of Islam, the rule of God in the lives of humans, making people worship their Creator and cleansing the earth from the tyrants who assault God's sovereignty, the abominators in His earth and the suppressors of His creation."¹² Brotherhood officials have done so by promoting the creation of civic organizations with a covert—and occasionally an overt—political agenda, an activity described by one Brotherhood official in the 1980s as "energizing political work fronts."¹³ Such groups include:

The Muslim Student Association ("MSA")

Founded in 1963 by Brotherhood activists at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the MSA, or MSA National, served as a coordinating committee for Brotherhood activities during the organization's formative years in the United States. During this early era, all Brotherhood activists in the U.S. had to be active in the MSA.¹⁴ Now a national organization, the MSA has about 98 affiliated university chapters in the United States and Canada.¹⁵

Like all member organizations of the Ikhwan-Jama'at duopoly, the MSA proclaims "moderation," but public statements by MSA activists reveal an Islamist agenda and ideology. For instance, MSA officials have espoused the desire "to restore Islam to the leadership of society" and to be working toward "the reestablishment of the Islamic form of government."¹⁶ They have likewise emphasized the importance of dawah (propagation of faith) as a vehicle for the spread of Islam in the United States, with the ultimate goal of making America "a Muslim country."¹⁷

The North American Islamic Trust ("NAIT")

NAIT was founded in 1973 as a "national waqf (trust) organization" by the Muslim Students Association of the United States and Canada ("MSA") to ensure continuity of Islamic centers in North America. NAIT's website states: "Even though Muslims have been immigrating to the United States since the founding of the nation, many people and communities ultimately lost or abandoned their Islamic heritage due to social, and political reasons. Indeed, many indigenous masajid [mosque] and [Islamic] centers were lost or forgotten. To prevent this in the future, the organizers believed that creating a waqf or general trust

to safeguard the properties of masajid and Islamic centers would be vital for the growth and maintenance of the American Muslim community.”¹⁸ NAIT continues to retain its “foundational supporting relationship with MSA and the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA).”¹⁹

NAIT is a non-profit 501(c) (3) organization and “holds titles to the real estate assets of Islamic centers and schools in more than forty states,”²⁰ making it, according to some analysts, a holding company and financial hub for various Muslim Brotherhood-tied groups in North America.²¹ It also manages the Iman Fund, a no-load mutual fund, and runs American Trust Publications (which publishes Islamic literature, including the works of Brotherhood luminary Yusuf al Qaradawi²²) and the Islamic Book Service.²³ A 1987 FBI investigation of NAIT concluded that the organization supported the “Islamic Revolution.” “Their support of JIHAD (a holy war) in the U.S. has been evidenced by the financial and organizational support provided through NAIT from Middle East countries to Muslims residing in the U.S. and Canada,” the FBI report continued. The countries named as providing this support were Iran, Libya, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. “The organizational support provided by NAIT includes planning, organizing, and funding anti-U.S. and anti-Israel demonstrations, pro-PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] demonstrations and the distribution of political propaganda against U.S. policies in the Middle East and in support of the Islamic Revolution as advocated by the [Government of Iran]. NAIT also supports the recruitment, training and funding of black Muslims in the U.S. who support the Islamic Revolution.”²⁴

The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA)

ISNA, which emerged out of the MSA in 1981, was named as an unindicted co-conspirator in the Hamas financing trial against the Holy Land Foundation.²⁵ Like NAIT, ISNA is included among the “individuals/entities who are and/or were members of the US Muslim Brotherhood.”²⁶ There is no evidence that ISNA currently provides material support to terrorist organizations. However, as recently as November 2016, key U.S. Brotherhood activists held leadership positions in ISNA. ISNA’s board of directors (Majlis Ash-Shura) included the chairman of NAIT, the president of the MSA, and the heads of ISNA’s other “constituent organizations”: the Association of Muslim Scientists, Engineers and Technology Professionals, the Islamic Medical Association of North America, the Canadian Islamic Trust, Muslim Youth of North America, and the Council of Islamic Schools of North America—some of which are explicitly named as Brotherhood-allied groups in internal Brotherhood documents.²⁷

The Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA)

ICNA is the successor to the Pakistani-American organization Halaqa Ahbabe Islami, which sought to recruit “Islamic movement oriented Urdu speaking Muslims and to strengthen the Jama’at-e-Islami Pakistan.”²⁸ In 1977, Halaqa Ahbabe Islami formally changed its name to ICNA.²⁹ ICNA’s charter calls for the “establishment of the Islamic system of life” in the world, “whether it pertains to beliefs, rituals and morals or to economic, social or political spheres.”³⁰ The organization’s curriculum promotes³¹ the teachings of Islamist scholar and Jama’at-e-Islami founder Maulana Sayyid Abdul Ala Maududi³² who wrote that “the objective of the Islamic ‘Jihad’ is to eliminate the rule of an un-Islamic system and establish in its stead [sic] an Islamic system of state rule.”³³ The organization’s 2010 *Member’s Hand Book* lists five stages that involve going through the individual, family, societal, state, and global levels “to establish [a] true Islamic society” that “will lead to the unity of the Ummah [global Muslim community] and towards the establishment of the Khilafah [Caliphate].”³⁴ ICNA has also been closely affiliated with Islamist radicals and extremists. A former president of ICNA’s New York chapter, Ashrafuz Zaman Khan, was convicted for committing war crimes in the name of Maududi’s pan-Islamist ideology during Bangladesh’s 1971 war of independence.³⁵ ICNA is a strong advocate of the separatist movement in Kashmir.³⁶ A 1997 article in its magazine, *The Message*, featured an exclusive interview with U.S.-designated Kashmiri terrorist Syed Salahuddin, praised him as the “undisputed leader of the mujahideen struggling to liberate the territory

of Kashmir from brutal Indian occupation.”³⁷ Its overseas charitable arm, Helping Hands for Relief and Development, works closely with the Pakistani Jamaat charity, Al Khidmat Foundation, that has close ties to Kashmiri jihadists.³⁸

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)

CAIR’s mission statement is “to enhance understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, empower American Muslims, and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding.”³⁹ This statement is misleading and a closer look at the organization raises troubling questions about its stated purpose and origins in a Hamas-support network in the United States. CAIR was founded in 1994 by three leaders of the Islamic Association for Palestine (IAP)—Nihad Awad, Omar Ahmad, and Rafeeq Jaber.⁴⁰ IAP, which is now defunct, was a central player in the Muslim Brotherhood’s “Palestine Committee” created to advance Hamas’ political and financial agenda in the United States.⁴¹ It is worth noting that soon after its founding, CAIR was added to a Palestine Committee meeting agenda.⁴²

IAP served as the Committee’s propaganda arm and its primary role involved organizing rallies and publishing magazines supporting Hamas. Other members of the Committee included its fundraising branch, the Holy Land for Relief and Development (HLF),⁴³ which was convicted in 2008 along with five senior officials of illegally routing more than \$12 million to Hamas.⁴⁴ A Northern Virginia think tank called the United Association for Studies and Research (UASR) was “involved in passing Hamas communiqués to the United States-based Muslim Brotherhood community and relaying messages from the community back to Hamas”⁴⁵ and was headed by Hamas leader Mousa Abu Marzook.⁴⁶

CAIR has defended convicted terrorists and other radicals and opposed U.S. government prosecution of alleged terrorist financiers and supporters.⁴⁷ CAIR also claims that the “war on terrorism” is a “war on Islam” and has made repeated statements that reflect the group’s extremist and anti-Semitic positions.⁴⁸ CAIR was named an unindicted co-conspirator in the HLF trial⁴⁹ and during testimony FBI agent Lara Burns described CAIR as a front organization for Hamas.⁵⁰ In 2009, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) cut off contacts with CAIR over concerns the group had roots in a Hamas-support network.⁵¹

The Muslim American Society (MAS)

The Northern Virginia-based MAS was founded in 1993 as the Muslim Brotherhood’s arm in the U.S.⁵² Among its founding members was Ahmed Elkadi, who supposedly led the Brotherhood in the U.S. from 1984 to 1994.⁵³ Mohammad Mehdi Akef, the Supreme Guide of the global Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt from 2004 to 2010, claims to have played a role in founding MAS in a push for more “openness” in the Brotherhood’s activities in the U.S.⁵⁴

MAS is reported to have instructed its leaders to distance themselves publicly from the Brotherhood. If a leader was asked about MAS’ ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, he was to say that MAS was an independent organization.⁵⁵ Former MAS Secretary General Shaker El Sayed once said that: “MAS, like the Brotherhood, believes in the teachings of Brotherhood founder Hassan al-Banna, which are ‘the closest reflection of how Islam should be in this life.’”⁵⁶

MAS’ ties to the Muslim Brotherhood were reaffirmed by convicted terrorist financier Abdurrahman Alamoudi, who told federal investigators in a 2012 interview that “[e]veryone knows that MAS is the Muslim Brotherhood.”⁵⁷ Alamoudi, the former head of the American Muslim Council, was sentenced to 23 years in prison for illegal financial dealings with Libya. Alamoudi also confessed to taking part in a Libyan plot to assassinate the then crown Prince of Saudi Arabia.⁵⁸ MAS annually partners with ICNA to host its national conventions,⁵⁹ which feature extremist speakers who support jihad⁶⁰ and advocate for Israel’s destruction.⁶¹

The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT)

Conceived at a 1977 Islamic conference in Lugano, Switzerland, IIIT was founded four years later in Pennsylvania as “a private, non-profit, academic, cultural and educational institution, concerned with general issues of Islamic thought and education.”⁶² It is now based in Herndon, Virginia. IIIT ostensibly “promotes academic research on the methodology and philosophy of various disciplines, and gives special emphasis to the development of Islamic scholarship in contemporary social sciences.”⁶³ However, IIIT has been accused by the U.S. government of contributing funds to the World and Islam Studies Enterprise (WISE), which was founded to support the Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorist organization.⁶⁴ IIIT is a part of a network of companies and not-for-profit organizations based in Northern Virginia known as the SAAR Network or the Safa Group, which was under investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice since at least 2003, although no charges have been filed.⁶⁵ In May 2009, Ishaq Farhan, a trustee of IIIT, was chosen to head the Islamic Action Front (IAF)—the political party of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood—a post he had held before.⁶⁶ Farhan had long been associated with the IAF and is said to be one of the key figures behind its formation.⁶⁷ (Since then, Farhan has been replaced as head of the IAF by Hamza Mansour.⁶⁸ Ostensibly, however, Farhan still retains an affiliation—and a position of prominence—with the organization.)

American Muslims for Palestine (AMP)

AMP is a virulently anti-Israeli group that actively seeks to delegitimize the Jewish state,⁶⁹ and has defended Hamas⁷⁰ as well as advocated in support of convicted terrorists.⁷¹ In 2015, the Investigative Project on Terrorism first identified connections between AMP and a now-defunct network called the Palestine Committee.⁷² Foundation for the Defense of Democracies Vice President Jonathan Schanzer expanded on those connections in congressional testimony a year later.⁷³ The Palestine Committee was created by the Muslim Brotherhood to advance Hamas’ agenda politically and financially in the United States.⁷⁴ A lawsuit filed in Chicago federal court in May 2017 alleges that AMP and several of its activists are “alter egos and/or successors” of a Hamas-support network that was found liable for an American teen’s death in a 1996 terrorist attack in Israel.⁷⁵ AMP hosts conferences⁷⁶ that feature anti-Israel speakers and supports “resistance” against the “Zionist state.”⁷⁷ The organization is also one of the main supporters of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) Movement against the Jewish state.

Jamaat al Fuqra

Jama’at al Fuqra (JF, Arabic for “Community of the Impoverished”) was founded in New York in 1980 by Pakistani religious leader Sheikh Mubarak Ali Gilani.⁷⁸ JF has been described as a splinter group of Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM).⁷⁹ Daniel Pearl, the late *Wall Street Journal* reporter, was on his way to interview Gilani in 2002 when he was kidnapped in Pakistan and subsequently beheaded.

In the U.S., JF is a loosely structured movement primarily composed of African-American converts to Islam. JF functions officially through Muslims of the Americas, a non-profit organization, and the International Quranic Open University.⁸⁰ JF also operates a news publication called *The Islamic Post*.⁸¹ JF runs a network of rural compounds in New York, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Arizona, Oregon, South Carolina, California and Colorado. Members of the group were involved in a wave of violent crime and fraud—including murder and arson—in the 1980s and 1990s.⁸² Some members have also been known to attack Hindu places of worship.⁸³ Over the past decade, the group has been fairly quiet in the U.S. It received some attention in 2008 and 2009 as a result of a documentary on the group produced by the Christian Action Network entitled “Homegrown Jihad.”⁸⁴

Hizb ut-Tahrir

Hizb ut-Tahrir in America (HTA) has been led by Middle Eastern activists who moved to the U.S. in the 1980s. For most of its history, it has met with little success in expanding its native activist base. This

has been attributed to competition from other Islamist groups (mainly the Brotherhood); the limited ability of an older leadership to connect with the younger generation; and a level of paranoia and secrecy among the leadership that have limited outreach efforts, hindered online interaction, and may have turned off potential recruits.⁸⁵

The HTA website states that the organization's aim is "to resume the Islamic way of life and to convey the Islamic da'wah to the world."⁸⁶ HTA is currently well-networked and connected with the larger global presence of HuT. Their three-stage methodology for taking power is the same as that promoted by the global movement:

The First Stage: The stage of culturing to produce people who believe in the idea and the method of the Party, so that they form the Party group.

The Second Stage: The stage of interaction with the Ummah (global Muslim community), to let the Ummah embrace and carry Islam, so that the Ummah takes it up as its issue, and thus works to establish it in the affairs of life.

The Third Stage: The stage of establishing government, implementing Islam generally and comprehensively, and carrying it as a message to the world.⁸⁷

In the West, HuT seeks to foster a mass movement toward revolution, while in Muslim-majority countries it attempts to recruit members of the military for the purpose of carrying out a military coup.⁸⁸ According to one specialist, HTA "counts well-educated professionals who are influential in their communities among their members" and in recent years the group has expanded beyond their main hubs of activity in New York, Orange County (California), Chicago, and Milwaukee.⁸⁹

The jihadist-activist milieu

There are a number of small U.S.-based formal and informal groups and networks that support violent jihad in America and elsewhere, but do not necessarily engage in it themselves. Most of their activities are political and social in nature, consisting of provocative public statements and demonstrations. Two particularly prominent groups deserve mention in this regard.

Revolution Muslim [RM] was a New York-based *jihadist*-activist group. Founded in 2007 "to invite people to proper Islam... and command the good... while forbidding the falsehood," RM's mission "is to one day see the Muslims united under one Khalifah and under the commands of Allah."⁹⁰ RM maintained an active blog and website, which serves as a forum for a dissemination of its views, proselytization, condemnation of U.S. policies, and even support for violence. In April 2014, Revolution Muslim co-founder Yousef al-Khattab was sentenced to two-and-a-half years in prison for advocating violence against the Chabad Jewish organization's headquarters in Brooklyn.⁹¹ Khattab posted a photograph of the building, along with a map, to Revolution Muslim's website, and pointed out that "the man temple was always full at prayer times." In the past, he had told his readers to "deal with" prominent Jewish leaders "directly at their homes."⁹²

One of Revolution Muslim's other co-founders was Jesse Morton. Morton was arrested in 2011 after one of his associates published the home addresses of the writers of *South Park*, after an episode of the cartoon show mocked the Prophet Muhammad. Before that time, Morton was one of the most prolific recruiters for al-Qaeda in the United States.⁹³ After his arrest, Morton worked as an informant for the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and made contact with several of his former recruits.⁹⁴ In September 2016, Morton began a job as a researcher at George Washington University's Program on Extremism.⁹⁵ This affiliation, however, proved to be short-lived; Morton's affiliation with the University was severed after he was arrested in late 2016 on drug possession and solicitation of prostitution charges.⁹⁶

Homegrown jihadist cells and networks

Jihadi plots inspired by terrorist groups such as al Qaeda and the Islamic State continue to pose a threat to the United States. In a 2017 report, George Washington University's Program on Extremism identified 51 "successful" attacks in North America and Europe from the time of declaration of the Islamic Caliphate in June 2014 until June 2017. The highest number of attacks were in France (17) followed by the United States (16).⁹⁷

In December 2017, Bangladeshi immigrant Akayed Ullah set off a homemade pipe bomb at the Port Authority Bus Terminal in New York City. Five people were injured in the attack and Ullah sustained minor injuries. Ullah who had pled allegiance to ISIS, said the suicide bombing was in retaliation to U.S. bombing of ISIS-controlled territory in Syria and Iraq.⁹⁸ Earlier, in October 2017, Uzbek national Sayfullo Habibullaevich Saipov drove a rented pickup truck into cyclists and runners on a bike lane and pedestrian walkway in New York City. The attack killed eight people and injured 12 others. A flag and document indicating allegiance to the Islamic State were found in the truck.⁹⁹ In October 2017, Talha Haroon, along with Abdurahman El Bahnasawy and Russell Salic, were arrested for plotting to carry out terror attacks in New York City for the Islamic State. Haroon was a U.S. citizen residing in Pakistan and El Bahnasawy and Salic were from Canada and the Philippines, respectively. The three men plotted through Internet messaging applications to target concerts, subways and other landmarks in the name of ISIS in NYC during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan.¹⁰⁰

A large number of Islamist terrorist plots in the U.S. have been thwarted or uncovered over the past decade. Many of these were planned by cells of Muslims who were either born in the U.S. or lived there for many years. There were also episodes of Americans planning attacks against U.S. interests abroad and/or going to fight with foreign Islamist movements. These included:

- Daniel P. Boyd, an American convert to Islam, was accused in 2009 of heading a seven-man North Carolina-based cell that allegedly planned to provide material support to al-Qaeda, murder, kidnap, maim and injure persons in Israel and elsewhere, and kill U.S. military personnel stationed at Quantico, Virginia.¹⁰¹ Boyd pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit murder and conspiracy to provide material support to terrorists in U.S. District Court in February 2011, and subsequently cooperated with the government, providing testimony at trial against several of his co-conspirators, who were convicted that October.¹⁰²
- Hosam Maher Husein Smadi, a Jordanian national, was found guilty of planning to blow up the Fountain Place office complex in downtown Dallas with a vehicle bomb in 2009, and in 2010 was sentenced to twenty-four years in prison.¹⁰³ He also reportedly considered attacking a National Guard Armory and the Dallas Airport.¹⁰⁴
- In August 2013, a U.S. citizen and a foreign national were charged in a Miami federal court with providing financing and recruits to al-Qaeda and two other designated other foreign terrorist organizations. Gufran Ahmed Kauser Mohammed, a naturalized U.S. citizen born in India, and Mohamed Hussein Said, a Kenyan, were charged on a fifteen-count indictment after being arrested in Saudi Arabia and transferred to the U.S. The two men allegedly wired a total of \$96,000 to an al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria, the al Nusra Front, and to the militant group al Shabaab in Somalia.¹⁰⁵
- There was also a "lone wolf" Islamist terrorist attack launched at Fort Hood, Texas on November 5, 2011 by Major Nidal Malik Hasan, a U.S. Army psychiatrist, who had been in regular contact with Anwar al-Awlaki, an American-born imam of Yemeni descent who served as one of al-Qaeda's main ideologues before his death in September 2011 in an American drone strike. Hasan opened fire on the base, killing thirteen people and wounding 31 others. Hasan was shot multiple times, but survived.¹⁰⁶ In August 2013, Hasan was unanimously convicted by a jury of army officers.¹⁰⁷ Hasan's defense lawyer asked the judge to spare Hasan's life, but the request was denied and Hasan is scheduled to die by lethal injection (although a date for his execution has not been set).¹⁰⁸

The Department of Defense and White House declined to classify Hasan as a terrorist, however, instead labeled the Fort Hood incident as a case of workplace violence.¹⁰⁹ Numerous members of Congress have objected to this description, asserting that the attack was clearly one of “homegrown terror[ism]” and have urged the U.S. government to recognize this fact.¹¹⁰

- In April 2013, brothers Dzhokar Tsarnaev and Tamerlane Tsarnaev planted bombs at the annual Boston Marathon race. The resulting explosion killed three and injured more than 170.¹¹¹ Dzhokar was captured by police, and Tamerlane died after being shot several times and being run over by Dzhokar in his attempt to escape.¹¹² After his capture, the surviving Tsarnaev claimed that he and his brother were motivated by extremist Islamic beliefs, but that they were not connected to any militant group in particular. He also claimed they learned to build bombs through the website of the al-Qaeda affiliate in Yemen.¹¹³ In May 2015, a federal jury sentenced Tsarnaev to death.¹¹⁴
- In December 2015, married couple Syed Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik killed 14 people and injured 22 at a Christmas office party at Farook’s employment in San Bernardino, California. The couple was killed in a shootout with police that afternoon.¹¹⁵ The Islamic State later released a statement claiming responsibility for the attack, referring to Farook and Malik as “soldiers of the caliphate,” a term used to describe its soldiers.¹¹⁶
- In June 2016, Omar Mateen shot and killed 49 people in a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida. Mateen himself was shot and killed by Orlando police.¹¹⁷ During the massacre, Mateen called 911. In the recording, he identified himself, claimed responsibility for the shootings, and pledged allegiance to “Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi of the Islamic State.”¹¹⁸ Mateen also called Orlando news station News 13 and claimed his actions had been motivated by loyalty to the Islamic State.¹¹⁹
- In November 2016, Abdul Razak Ali Artan injured 11 people at Ohio State University before being shot by a police officer. Artan rammed a car into a crowd on campus and then stabbed several people with a butcher knife. Shortly before the attack, Artan posted angrily on Facebook about American interference in Muslim countries, referencing radical cleric Anwar al-Awlaki and lone wolf attacks.¹²⁰

ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

The U.S. has the most diverse Muslim population in the Western world. In 2016, the Pew Research Center estimated that 3.3 million Muslims live in the United States, equaling about 1 percent of the U.S. population.¹²¹ Sixty-five percent of U.S. Muslims identify themselves as Sunnis, 11 percent as Shia, and 24 percent as having no specific affiliation (describing themselves as “just a Muslim”).¹²² A large proportion of Muslims in the U.S. are first generation immigrants (63 percent), and 37 percent are native-born, with 15 percent being second generation.¹²³ Foreign-born Muslim Americans have come from at least 77 different countries. Twenty-six percent of Muslim immigrants to the United States come from the Arab world (Middle East and North Africa), nine percent from Pakistan, seven percent from other South Asian countries (including Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Afghanistan), three percent come from Iran, five percent come from Europe, and seven percent come from Sub-Saharan Africa. One-third of all Muslim immigrants came to the U.S. during the 1990s and 40 percent have come after 2000. Over three-quarters (81 percent) of all Muslim-Americans are U.S. citizens.¹²⁴ At 30 percent, whites make up the largest proportion of Muslims in America.¹²⁵ Muslims in America, as a group, are younger than other major religious groups in the U.S.¹²⁶

Seventy percent of Muslim Americans hold very unfavorable views of al-Qaeda, and 81 percent of Muslims in the United States say that violence against civilians and suicide bombings are never justified. Furthermore, 21 percent of American Muslims believe there is either a great deal or a fair amount of support for extremism within their community. Forty-eight percent say that Muslim leaders are not doing enough to challenge extremists.¹²⁷

The fact that the most influential and well-resourced Muslim-American civil society groups are, in a very concrete sense, affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood and Jama'at-e-Islami is not widely held knowledge. This is partially because Islamist organizations have successfully framed themselves as “moderate,” “mainstream,” and representative American Muslim religious and civil rights organizations. This has allowed them to avoid widespread public distrust and frame criticism of them as Islamophobia targeting the Muslim-American community rather than criticism of the organizations themselves.

ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

Defeating jihadist terrorists is a top priority for President Donald Trump’s administration, as ISIS and al-Qaeda continue to ideologically inspire Americans and others to perpetrate terror attacks. The National Security Strategy released by the White House in December 2017 describes the threat from Islamist terrorism and its ideology as follows: “America, alongside our allies and partners, is fighting a long war against these fanatics who advance a totalitarian vision for a global Islamist caliphate that justifies murder and slavery, promotes repression, and seeks to undermine the American way of life. Jihadist terrorists use virtual and physical networks around the world to radicalize isolated individuals, exploit vulnerable populations, and inspire and direct plots.”¹²⁸ The strategy details the administration’s “priority actions” to defeat the threat, including efforts to disrupt terror plots, eliminate terrorist safe havens, and combat radicalization and recruitment in communities.¹²⁹

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has set up the Terrorism Prevention Partnerships (TPP) “to address the root causes of violent extremism by providing resources to communities to build and sustain local prevention efforts and promote the use of counter-narratives to confront violent extremist messaging online.”¹³⁰ In July 2016, DHS announced the Countering Violent Extremism (“CVE”) Grant Program that seeks to provide grants to “state, local and tribal partners and community groups—religious groups, mental health and social service providers, educators and other NGOs—with the ability to build prevention programs that address the root causes of violent extremism and deter individuals who may already be radicalizing to violence.”¹³¹

The U.S. government has moved aggressively to disrupt homegrown terror plots and since March 2014, a total of 153 individuals have been charged in the United States on terrorism offenses related to the Islamic State.¹³² 32% of the individuals charged were alleged to have been involved in plots targeting the U.S. homeland and 58% were arrested in government sting operations.¹³³

Soon after assuming office in January 2017, President Trump signed an executive order which immediately barred entry of individuals into the U.S. from seven Muslim-majority nations—Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. The order dubbed “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States” also put a hold on the U.S. refugee program for 120 days and indefinitely barred Syrian refugees from entering the country.¹³⁴

The travel ban generated widespread controversy among the American public resulting in President Trump issuing Executive Order 13780 on March 6, 2017 that took into consideration certain legal objections and removed Iraq from the list of affected countries.¹³⁵ On September 24, 2017, Presidential Proclamation 9645 superseded Executive Order 13780 and North Korea and Venezuela were added to the list of countries impacted by the travel ban.¹³⁶ The Supreme Court upheld President Trump’s controversial travel ban in a landmark decision on June 26, 2018.¹³⁷

A report released in January 2018 by the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security found that a majority of terrorists convicted of “international terrorism-related charges” in the U.S. since 2001 were foreign-born. Out of 549 convictions for international terrorism-related charges in U.S. federal courts between September 11, 2001 and December 31, 2016, approximately 73 percent (402 of the 549 individuals) were foreign-born.¹³⁸

Designation of the Muslim Brotherhood as an international terrorist organization has been the topic

of considerable debate¹³⁹ in Washington since Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) and Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL) introduced a bill called the “Muslim Brotherhood Terrorist Designation Act” in January 2017.¹⁴⁰ The debate lost steam after an internal State Department report “advised against it because of the movement’s loose-knit structure and far-flung political ties across the Middle East.”¹⁴¹ However, such a designation, or lesser related actions that might be undertaken by the Administration, remain actively discussed within the Administration and the Washington policy community.¹⁴²

ENDNOTES

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