



# Muslim-American Terrorism in 2013

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Sixteen Muslim-Americans were indicted for or killed during violent terrorist plots in 2013, similar to the 2012 total of 14, bringing the total since 9/11 to 225, or less than 20 per year (see Figure 1). Six individuals plotted attacks in the United States (see Figure 2), the fewest since 2008.

This is the fifth annual report on Muslim-American terrorism suspects and perpetrators published by the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security. These reports, and the data on which they are based, are available at <http://kurzman.unc.edu/muslim-american-terrorism>.

Muslim-American terrorism plots in 2013 included the bombing at the Boston Marathon on April 15, which claimed four lives, plus one of the suspects, and injured more than 200 people, including more than a dozen people who suffered amputations. This incident involved the first U.S. fatalities from Muslim-American terrorism since the shooting at Fort Hood in Texas in 2009.

the Washington Navy Yard on September 16, killed 12 people. Mass killings in 2013 led to 137 fatalities, more than three times the victims killed by Muslim-American terrorism in the United States since 9/11.

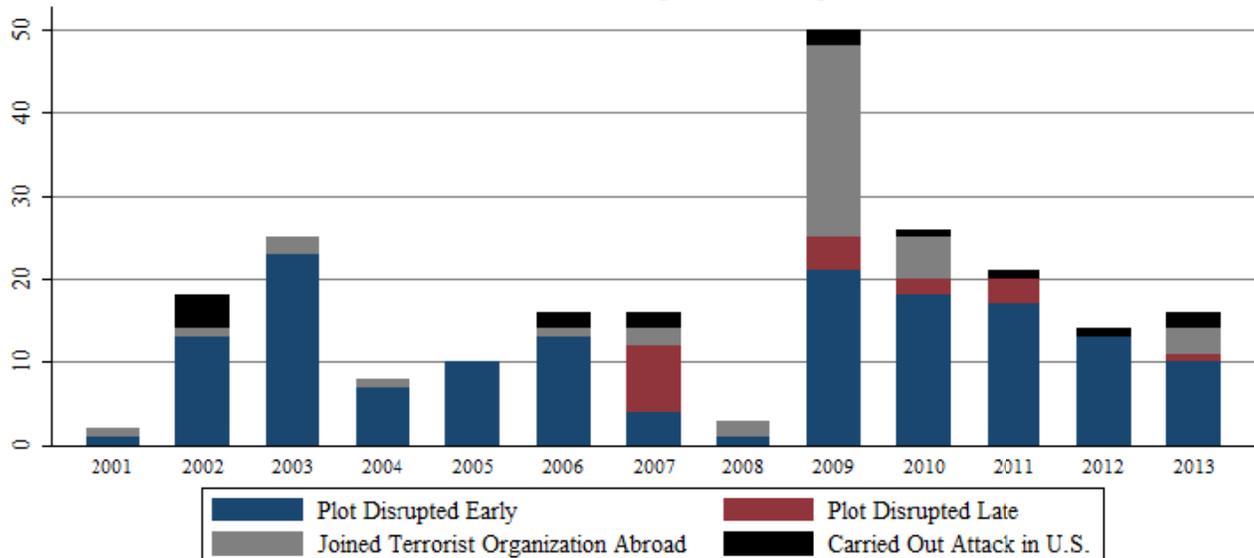
Meanwhile, the United States suffered approximately 14,000 murders in 2013.<sup>1</sup> Since 9/11, Muslim-American terrorism has claimed 37 lives in the United States (Figure 3), out of more than 190,000 murders during this period.

As in previous years' editions of this report, cases of Muslim-American terrorism were identified through monitoring of news media, social media, government agency statements, and other researchers' work on the subject.<sup>3</sup>

The Boston Marathon bombing was one of 30 mass killings in 2013 with four or more fatalities, according to data compiled by *USA Today*.<sup>2</sup> The deadliest incident, the shooting at

Most of the cases of Muslim-American terrorism in 2013 involved individuals joining or attempting to join terrorist organizations overseas: one in Afghanistan, one in Pakistan, four in Yemen, and five in Syria. American officials have identified Syria as a particularly troubling breeding ground for terrorist attacks in the U.S. The director of the National

Figure 1  
Muslim-American Terrorism Suspects & Perpetrators Since 9/11



**Figure 2. Muslim-American Terrorism Suspects and Perpetrators, Violent Plots, 2013**

Name	Location	Plot or alleged plot	Disrupted	Status of case
Erwin Antonio Rios	Fayetteville, NC	Planning handgun attack on Fort Bragg	Early	Pled guilty
Matthew Aaron Llana	San Jose, CA	Attempting to bomb bank and join Taliban	Early	Trial pending
Eric Harroun	Phoenix, AZ	Joined terrorist group in Syria	No	Trial pending
Tamerlan Tsarnaev	Boston, MA	Boston Marathon bombing	No	Deceased
Dzhokhar Tsarnaev				Trial pending
Abdella Ahmad Tounisi	Chicago, IL	Attempting to join terrorist group in Syria	Early	Trial pending
Nicole Mansfield	Flint, MI	Joined terrorist group in Syria	No	Deceased
Shelton Thomas Bell	Jacksonville, FL	Attempting to join terrorist group in Yemen	Early	Trial pending
Unnamed minor				
Amiir Farouk Ibrahim	Pittsburgh, PA	Joined terrorist group in Syria	No	Deceased
Atal Bashar	Alexandria, VA	Explosives discovered in home by cleaners	Late	Trial pending
Sinh Vinh Ngo Nguyen	Santa Ana, CA	Attempting to join terrorist group in Pakistan	Early	Pled guilty
Justin Kaliebe	Islip, NY	Attempting to join terrorist group in Yemen	Early	Pled guilty
Marcos Alonso Zea				Trial pending
Basit Javed Sheikh	Raleigh, NC	Attempting to join terrorist group in Syria	Early	Trial pending
Terry L. Loewen	Wichita, KS	Attempting to bring explosives into airport	Early	Trial pending

Early disruption is defined here as coming to the attention of authorities prior to the gathering of weapons or explosives.

Counterterrorism Center, Matthew Olsen, told Congress that travel to Syria by Muslims from the U.S. and Europe “raises concerns that capable individuals with extremist contacts and battlefield experience could return to their home countries to commit violence.”<sup>4</sup>

The scale of Muslim-American involvement with terrorist groups in Syria is still unclear. Five Muslim-Americans were publicly identified in 2013 as having joined Syrian rebel groups. Two were killed in Syria (Amiir Farouk Ibrahim and Nicole Mansfield),<sup>5</sup> and three returned to the United States (Eric Hassoun, Sinh Vinh Ngo Nguyen, and Basit Javed Sheikh). Another individual (Abdella Tounisi) was arrested en route to Syria.

According to U.S. officials, these individuals are only a small portion of the total: “At least 70 Americans have either traveled to Syria, or tried to, since the civil war started three years ago.”<sup>6</sup> It is not publicly known how many of these individuals succeeded in reaching Syria.

It is also unknown how many of these individuals were associated with rebel groups designated by the U.S. government as terrorist organizations, such as the Nusra Front and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, and how many were associated with Syrian rebels that have battled these organizations, including groups that received U.S. support until December 2013. Nguyen and Sheikh, for example, were apparently associated with the Free Syrian Army,<sup>7</sup> which the U.S. government does not consider a terrorist organization. They were not indicted for this activity but for actions after their return to the United States, when they planned with undercover FBI agents to go overseas again, this time to join al-Qa’ida affiliates.<sup>8</sup>

Additional individuals who have joined or attempted to join terrorist organizations in Syria will be counted in future versions of this report when they are indicted or when they are known to have engaged in an act of terrorism.

With the tragic exception of the Boston Marathon bombing, the other four domestic terrorism plots by Muslim-Americans in 2013 posed little risk to public safety. In three of the cases (Erwin Antonio Rios, Matthew Aaron Llaneza, and Terry L. Loewen), undercover agents were involved in the plots from an early stage. Rios obtained an inoperable handgun from an undercover FBI employee he was introduced to by another undercover

However, this sparse record of terrorist plots was overshadowed by the violence of the Boston Marathon bombing on April 15. Brothers Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev allegedly constructed two explosive devices and detonated them near the finish line of the race, killing three spectators and injuring 264 more. After hiding for several days, the perpetrators then killed a campus police officer in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and tried to take his gun. Tamerlan was killed and Dzhokhar was wounded and arrested after a manhunt that shut down large portions of the Boston metropolitan area.

### Disrupted Plots

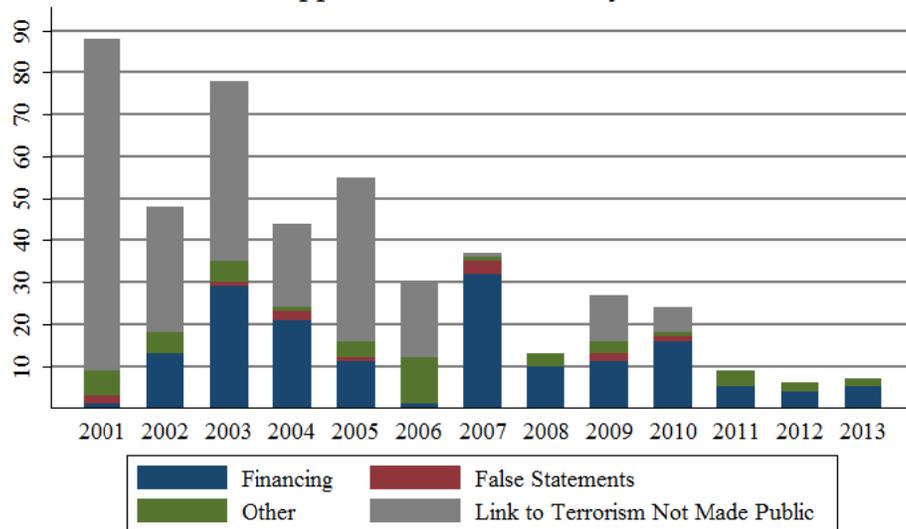
Of the violent plots that were disrupted, most (7 of 12 individuals) were discovered through the suspects' own statements. Two of these involved statements to informants at mosques.<sup>9</sup> Another two individuals (Shelton Thomas Bell and a minor whose name was not released) appear to have been brought to the attention of law enforcement authorities by fellow mosque-goers who were concerned about their extremist comments.<sup>10</sup> Another individual bragged on Facebook about militant activities in Syria (Eric Harroun), and another two alerted law enforcement by contacting fake Syrian rebel web pages operated by the FBI (Basit Sheikh and Abdella Tounisi).<sup>11</sup>

Since 9/11, 54 Muslim-American terrorism suspects and perpetrators were brought to the attention of law enforcement by members of the Muslim-American community, out of 188 individuals where the initial tip was made public. Another 52 individuals were discovered through U.S. government investigations.

**Figure 3. Muslim-American Domestic Terrorist Attacks Since 9/11**

Name	Year	Plot	Fatalities
Hesham Hadayet	2002	Shot Israeli airline personnel, Los Angeles, California	2 (plus himself)
Charles Bishop	2002	Flew plane into office tower, Tampa, Florida	0 (plus himself)
John Allen Muhammad Lee Boyd Malvo	2002	"Beltway Snipers," metropolitan Washington, D.C. area	11
Mohammed Taheri-Azar	2006	Ran over students with rented SUV, Chapel Hill, North Carolina	0
Naveed Haq	2006	Shot workers at Jewish center, Seattle, Washington	1
Sulejmen Talovich	2007	Shot people at shopping center, Salt Lake City, Utah	5 (plus himself)
Tahmeed Ahmad	2007	Attacked military police at Homestead Air Reserve Base, Florida	0
Abdulhakim Muhammad	2009	Shooting at military recruitment center, Little Rock, Arkansas	1
Nidal Hasan	2009	Fort Hood shooting, Texas	13
Faisal Shahzad	2010	Times Square car-bomb, New York City	0
Yonathan Melaku	2011	Shot at military buildings in northern Virginia	0
Abdullatif Aldosary	2012	Allegedly detonated explosive at Social Security office in Arizona	0
Tamerlan Tsarnaev Dzhokhar Tsarnaev	2013	Boston Marathon bombing	4 (plus T. Tsarnaev)

Figure 4  
Muslim-American Terrorism Suspects and Perpetrators Since 9/11  
Support for Terrorism, By Year



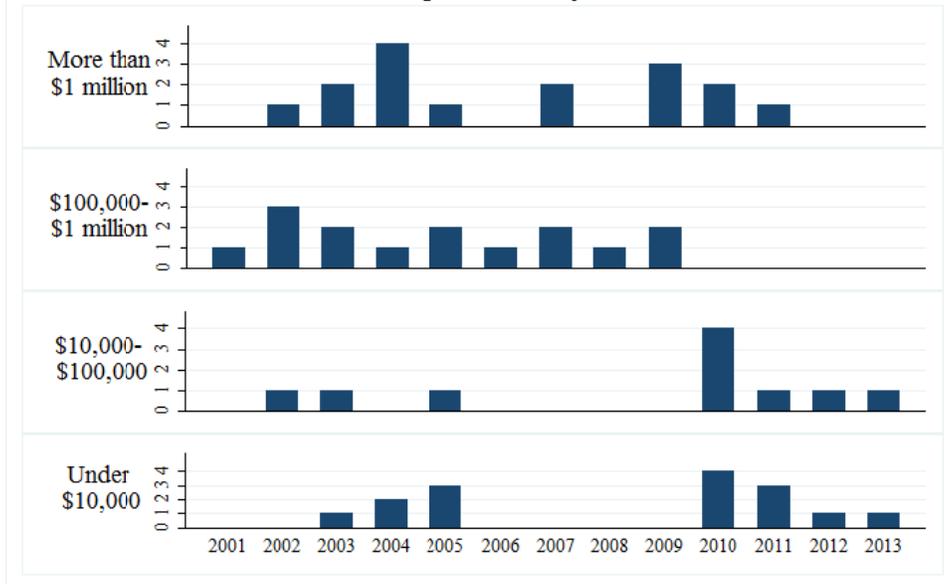
Fewer than 10 percent of the plots disrupted in recent years may have resulted from the National Security Agency surveillance programs that came to light through leaks last year.<sup>12</sup> General Keith Alexander, director of the NSA, stated in June 2013 that the agency's databases of e-mail and telephone records had helped to prevent "at least 10" potential terrorist events involving "homeland-based threats." Alexander and FBI Deputy Director Sean Joyce identified four disrupted plots in their testimony to Congress, three of which involved support for terrorist groups overseas.<sup>13</sup> An independent review panel that received classified briefings and documents from the NSA concluded that the collection of bulk telephone records had identified only one terrorism suspect, who was not involved in planning an attack. The panel concluded: "we are aware of no instance in which the [NSA's telephone records] program directly contributed to the discovery of a previously unknown terrorist plot or the disruption of a terrorist attack," and no cases in which the program "made a concrete difference in the outcome of a counterterrorism investigation."<sup>14</sup>

#### Material Support for Terrorism

After the Boston Marathon bombing, two Muslim students from Central Asia, friends of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, were arrested for throwing away evidence that linked Dzhokhar to the explosives. If these students are counted as Muslim-Americans, using the criteria of previous year's reports – at least one year's residence in the United States prior to involvement in terrorist activity – they brought the number of indictments for nonviolent support of terrorism in 2013 to seven, the second lowest annual figure since 9/11 (see Figure 4). These figures include forms of assistance, such as money or services, that may be classified as "material support for terrorism" but do not involve acts of violence.

The other five cases of support for terrorism involved relatively small amounts of money (see Figure 5), plus one case of computer assistance and one case that involved sending winter clothes to the Taliban.

Figure 5  
Muslim-American Terrorism Suspects and Perpetrators Since 9/11  
Financing Cases, By Year



### Fears vs. Facts

After the Boston Marathon bombing, numerous commentators expressed concern that Muslim-American terrorism was on an upward trend. One terrorism expert pointed to a possible “rise in the number of individuals that are radicalizing in the United States.”<sup>15</sup> Security officials worried about the attack’s “copycat appeal” and expressed surprise that “this didn’t happen sooner.”<sup>16</sup> James Clapper, the Director of National Intelligence, offered the assessment that “US-based extremists will likely continue to pose the most frequent threat to the US Homeland.”<sup>17</sup>

Yet no copycat incidents occurred during the remaining eight months of 2013. The Boston Marathon bombing, like the handful of other terrorist attacks in the U.S. by Muslim-Americans in the dozen years since 9/11, remained an isolated, rare incident – deadly and frightening but not a trigger for an upsurge in violent radicalization.

### About the author:

Charles Kurzman is a professor of sociology at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and a specialist on Islamic movements. His book, *The Missing Martyrs: Why There Are So Few Muslim Terrorists*, was published by Oxford University Press in 2011. He can be contacted through his website, <http://kurzman.unc.edu>.

