

Muslim-American Terrorism in the Decade Since 9/11

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Muslim-American Terrorism Down in 2011

Twenty Muslim-Americans were indicted for violent terrorist plots in 2011, down from 26 the year before, bringing the total since 9/11 to 193, or just under 20 per year (see Figure 1). This number is not negligible -- small numbers of Muslim-Americans continue to radicalize each year and plot violence. However, the rate of radicalization is far less than many feared in the aftermath of 9/11. In early 2003, for example, Robert Mueller, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, told Congress that "FBI investigations have revealed militant Islamics [sic] in the US. We strongly suspect that several hundred of these extremists are linked to al-Qaeda."¹ Fortunately, we have not seen violence on this scale.

The scale of homegrown Muslim-American terrorism in 2011 does not appear to have corroborated the warnings issued by

This is the third annual report on Muslim-American terrorism suspects and perpetrators published by the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security. The first report, co-authored by David Schanzer, Charles Kurzman, and Ebrahim Moosa in early 2010, also examined efforts by Muslim-Americans to prevent radicalization. The second report, authored by Charles Kurzman and issued in early 2011, also examined the source of the initial tips that brought these cases to the attention of law-enforcement authorities. This third report, authored by Charles Kurzman and issued in early 2012, focuses on cases of support for terrorism, in addition to violent plots. These reports, and the data on which they are based, are available at <http://kurzman.unc.edu/muslim-american-terrorism>.

government officials early in the year. In March 2011, Mueller testified to Congress that this threat had become even more complex and difficult to combat, as "we are seeing an

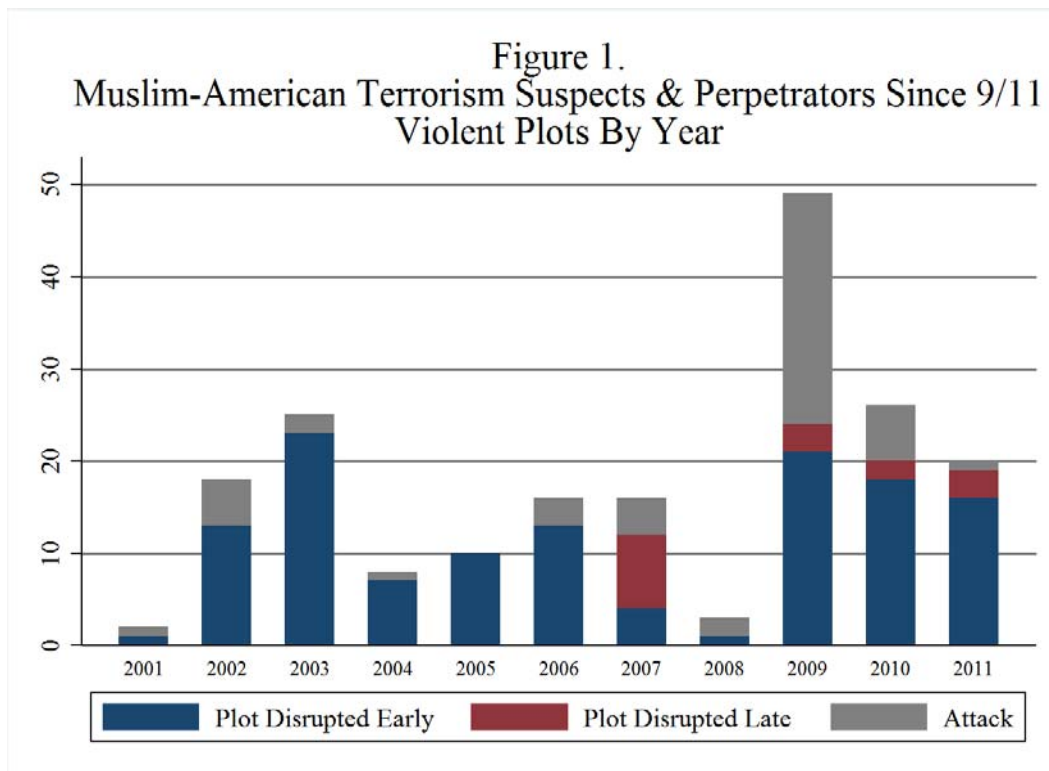


Figure 2. Muslim-American Terrorism Suspects and Perpetrators, Violent Plots, 2011

Name	Location	Plot or alleged plot	Disrupted	Status of case
Emerson Begolly	Mayport, PA	Arrested for biting 2 FBI agents	Early	Trial pending
Roger Stockham	San Diego, CA	Plot to attack Shia mosque in Michigan	Late	Trial pending
Alwar Pouryan	Phoenix, AZ	Selling weapons to Taliban in Romania	Early	Trial pending
Khalid Ali-M Aldawsari	Lubbock, TX	Buying chemicals for weapon	Early	Trial pending
Ahmed Ferhani	New York, NY	Plot to bomb synagogues, churches, and Empire State Building	Early	Trial pending
Mohamed Mamdouh	New York, NY			
Joseph Jeffrey Brice	Clarkston, WA	Testing explosives	Late	Trial pending
Jesse Curtis Morton	New York, NY	Threatening "South Park" creators	Early	Trial pending
Waad Ramadan Alwan	Bowling Green,	Plot to send weapons and money to Iraqi insurgents	Early	Trial pending
Shareef Hammadi	Bowling Green,			
Yonathan Melaku	Washington, DC	Shooting at military buildings in Virginia	No	Trial pending
Abu Khalid Abdul-Latif	Seattle, WA	Plot to attack military office in Seattle	Early	Trial pending
Walli Mujahidh	Los Angeles, CA			
Mohammad Hassan Khalid	Baltimore, MD	"Jihad Jane" plot on Swedish cartoonist	Early	Trial pending
Nasser Jason Abdo	Killeen, TX	Buying gunpowder for attack on Fort Hood	Late	Trial pending
Agron Hasbajrami	New York, NY	Travel to Pakistan to join terrorist group	Early	Trial pending
Rezwan Ferdous	Ashland, MA	Plot to attack D.C. with remote-control aircraft	Early	Trial pending
Mansour Arbabsiar	Austin, TX	Plot to assassinate Saudi ambassador in D.C.	Early	Trial pending
Jose Pimentel	New York, NY	Building pipe bomb to attack mailboxes, banks,	Early	Trial pending
Craig Baxam	Laurel, MD	Travel to Kenya to join al-Shabaab in Somalia	Early	Trial pending

increase in the sources of terrorism, a wider array of terrorist targets, and an evolution in terrorist tactics and means of communication."² Janet Napolitano, secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, echoed Mueller's concern in her 2011 "State of America's Homeland Security Address": "the terrorist threat facing our country has evolved significantly in the last ten years – and continues to evolve – so that, in some ways, the threat facing us is at its most heightened state since those attacks."³ Congressman Peter King, chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security in the U.S. House of Representatives, held four hearings in 2011 to alert Americans to the "the extent of Muslim-American radicalization by al-Qaeda in their communities today and how terrible it is, the impact it has on families, how extensive it is, and also that the main victims of this are Muslim-Americans themselves."⁴

These and similar warnings have braced Americans for a possible upsurge in Muslim-American terrorism, which has not occurred. Instead, terrorist plots have decreased in each of the past two years, since the spike of cases in 2009. Threats remain: violent plots have not dwindled to zero, and revolutionary Islamist organizations overseas continue to call for Muslim-Americans to engage in violence. However, the number of Muslim-Americans who have responded to these calls continues to be tiny, when compared with the population of more than 2 million Muslims in the United States⁵ and when compared with the total level of violence in the United States, which was on track to register 14,000 murders in 2011.⁶

Of the 20 Muslim-Americans accused of violent terrorist plots in 2011 (Figure 2), only one, Yonathan Melaku, was charged with carrying out an attack, firing shots at military buildings in northern Virginia (Figure 3).

Nobody was injured. This figure represents a significant decrease from 2010, when six Muslim-Americans carried out terrorist attacks, five of them joining militants in Somalia and Yemen and one carrying out a domestic attack: Faizal Shahzad's attempted car-bomb near Times Square in New York City, which would have killed hundreds of people, perhaps more than a thousand, if the bomb had been constructed properly.⁷

Another three individuals were arrested in 2011 after gathering explosives: Roger Stockham, who was arrested with fireworks in his car trunk after bragging to a bartender that he intended to blow up a Shia Muslim mosque in Michigan; Joseph Jeffrey Brice, who injured himself testing explosives near a highway in eastern Washington; and Naser Jason Abdo, who bought explosives for an alleged plot to attack Fort Hood in Texas. The other 16 suspects -- none have been convicted yet -- were arrested at an early stage in their plots.

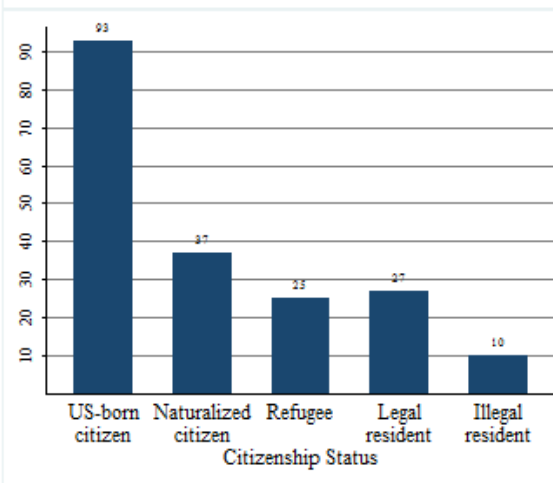
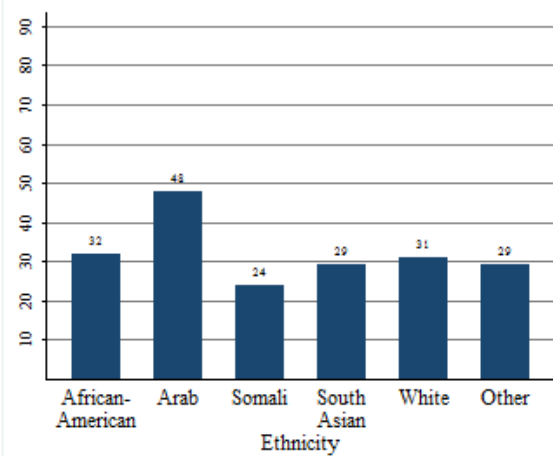
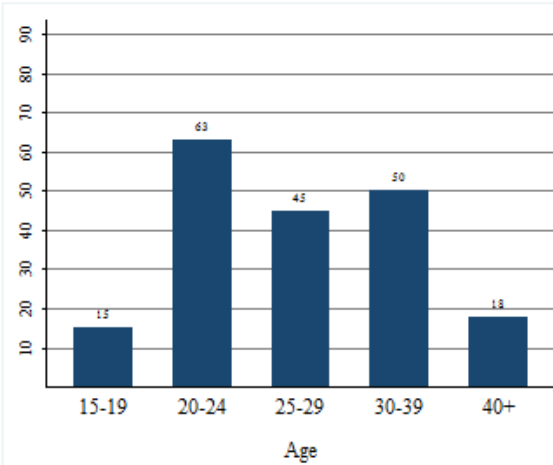
Two suspects in 2011 received terrorist training abroad, down from eight in 2010 and 28 in 2009: Waad Ramadan Alwan and Shareef Hammadi, who were arrested in Kentucky for plotting to send weapons and money to Iraqi insurgents they allegedly served with before coming to the U.S. in 2009.

In terms of the potential for casualties, the bulk of the suspects in 2011 appeared to have been limited in competence. The first terrorism-related arrest of a Muslim-American in 2011, for example, involved Emerson Begolly, a 21-year-old former white supremacist who converted to Islam and posted violent-sounding material on the Internet. When his mother tricked him into meeting with FBI agents outside a fast-food restaurant, he got into a tussle and bit them. The second case of the year involved Roger Stockham, who stopped at a bar on the way to his attack and bragged to the bartender about his hostility toward Shia Muslims and his plan to attack a local Shia mosque. The bartender, an Arab-American, called the police. The third case involved Alwar Pouryan, an Iranian-American who allegedly conspired with a Jewish Israeli-American, Oded Orbach, to sell weapons in Romania to an agent of the Taliban, who was actually an undercover agent of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency. The fourth case involved a Saudi student in Texas, Khalid Aldawsari, who tried to buy a large amount of chemicals over the Internet from a company in North Carolina. The company called the FBI. These and other cases do not appear to be the actions of sophisticated, well-trained Islamist revolutionaries.

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	2002	"Beltway Snipers," metropolitan Washington, D.C. area	11
Lee Boyd Malvo	2002		
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 Talovic	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	Allegedly shot at military buildings in northern Virginia	0

Figure 4.
Muslim-American Terrorism
Suspects & Perpetrators Since 9/11
Violent Plots by Demographics



As in previous years, 2011's Muslim-American terrorism suspects did not fit any particular demographic profile (Figure 4). 30 percent were age 30 and older, as compared with 35 percent of all cases since 9/11. 70 percent were U.S. citizens, as compared with 68 percent of all cases since 9/11. The suspects came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds – 30 percent Arab, 25 percent white, and 15 percent African-American. 40 percent were converts, as compared with 35 percent of all cases since 9/11.

One demographic difference in 2011's cases was the absence of Somali-Americans, as compared with three in 2010, 18 in 2009, and three in the years 2003-2008. Public concern over Somali-American radicalization continued to echo throughout the year, including a Congressional hearing on the subject,⁸ but there were no new cases of Somali-American terrorism in 2011.

Muslim-Americans continued to be a source of initial tips alerting law-enforcement authorities to violent terrorist plots. Muslim-Americans turned in 2 of 14 individuals in 2011 whose initial tip could be identified, bringing the total to 52 of 140 since 9/11.

One of 2011's 20 suspects had prison experience: Abu Khalid Abdul-Latif, who was arrested for plotting to attack a military induction center. Abdul-Latif was incarcerated in 2002-2004 for robbery and assault. Since 9/11, fewer than one tenth of suspects and perpetrators (17 of 193) had been incarcerated, 14 in American prisons and three overseas. Prison does not seem to be a major source of Islamic radicalization.⁹

An unusually large ratio of suspects in 2011 (4 of 20) had military experience. Since 9/11, fewer than one tenth of suspects and perpetrators (15 of 193) had served in the United States military.

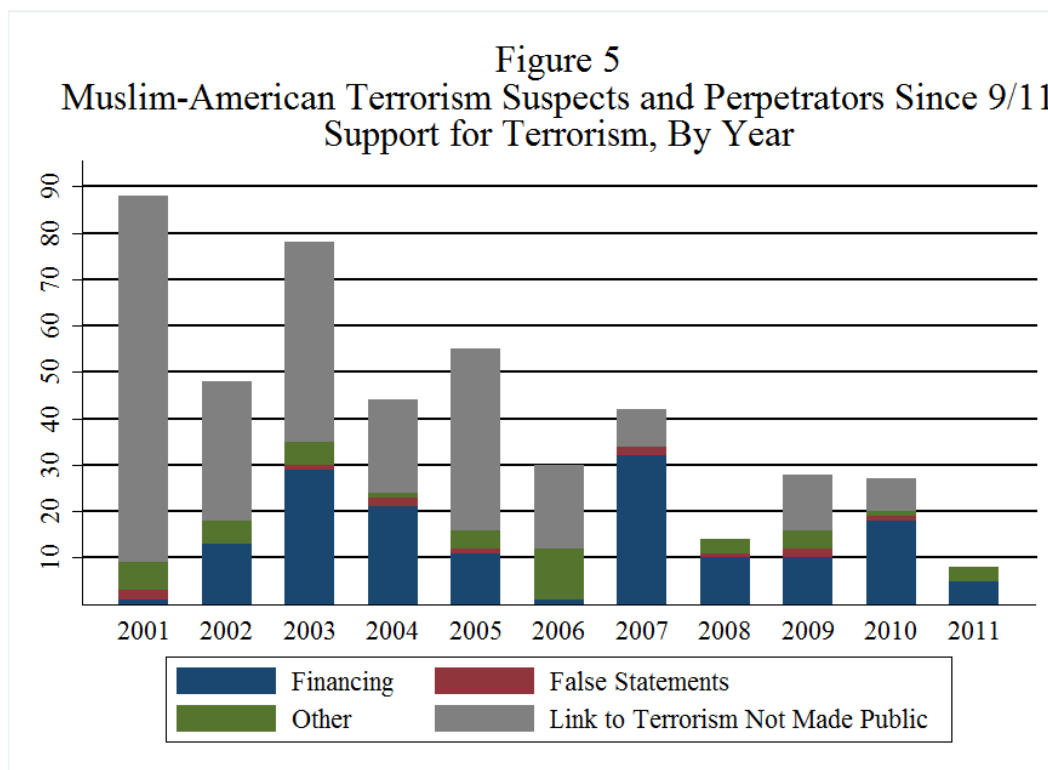
Support for Terrorism

In addition to the decline in violent plots, the number of Muslim-Americans indicted for support of terrorism -- financing, false statements, and other connections with terrorist plots and organizations, aside from violent plots -- fell from 27 individuals in 2010 to 8 in 2011, bringing the total to 462 since 9/11 (Figure 5).

These statistics, analyzed here for the first time, include 256 Muslim-Americans whose cases were classified as "terrorism-related" in a 2010 report by the U.S. Department of Justice, but who were not charged with terrorism-related offenses, and whose connection to terrorism was not made public.¹⁰ Some of these cases seem somewhat removed from actual terrorist threats – for example, Zameer Nooralla Mohamed, who was convicted for making a

hoax call to the FBI claiming that four acquaintances, including an ex-girlfriend and a colleague who owed him money, were planning an attack. In other cases, the government may have chosen to prosecute a lesser crime rather than make terrorism-related intelligence public.

In cases where the connection to terrorism is publicly known, 151 individuals were prosecuted for financing terrorist plots or organizations; 12 individuals were accused of making false statements during terrorism investigations; and 43 individuals had other connections with terrorism, such as producing a video for a foreign terrorist organization, sending cassette tapes or raincoats to members of a terrorist organization, or personal associations with members of terrorist organizations.

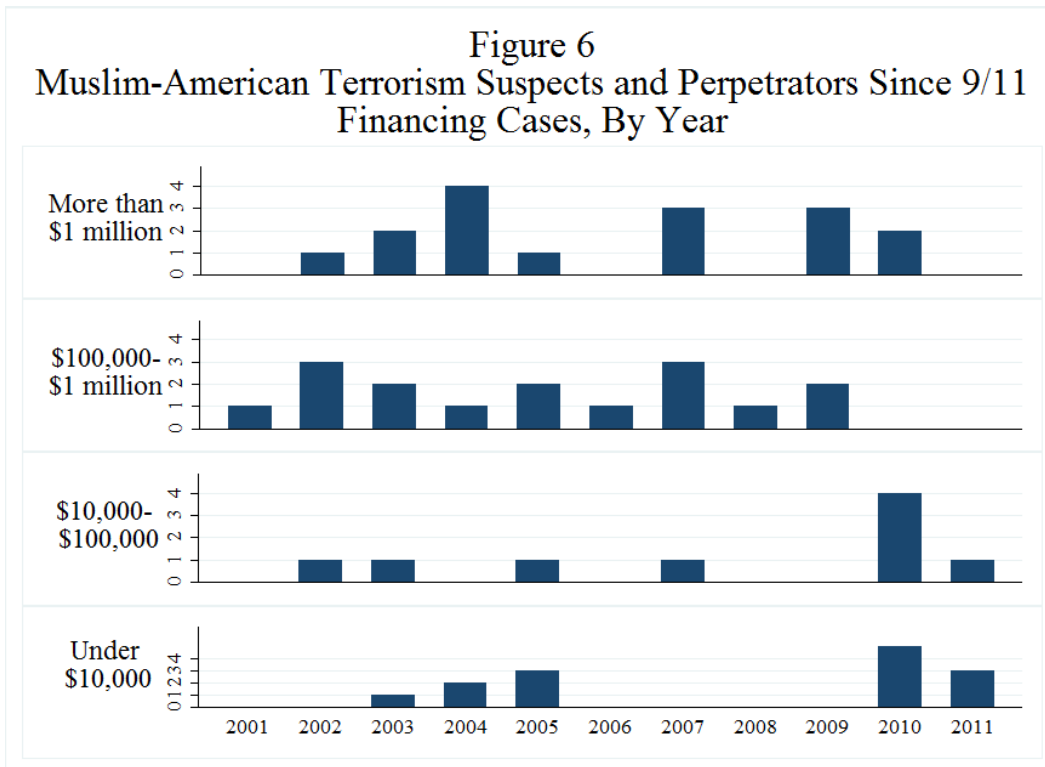


These statistics were supplemented with information from the Terrorist Trial Report Card produced by New York University School of Law’s Center on Law and Security, which generously made its dataset available for this project;¹¹ the Investigative Project on Terrorism, which lists terrorism-related court cases;¹² and Mother Jones magazine’s online dataset of terrorism investigations.¹³

The decline in prosecutions of Muslim-Americans for support of terrorism over the past decade is particularly notable in view of the heightened scrutiny that terrorism financing now receives from law enforcement agencies, which “have established an increasingly difficult environment within which terrorist financiers can operate undetected,” and “have made the concealment and transfer of terrorism related funds more difficult,” according to Congressional testimony by the acting assistant director of the FBI’s Counterterrorism Division.¹⁴

In recent years, terrorist financing cases have involved smaller amounts of money (Figure 6). Of the 16 cases involving more than a million dollars, only five occurred in the last four years, and none in 2011. By contrast, most cases in the past four years -- 13 of 23 cases in which the estimated value of the financing was made public, and all four cases in 2011 -- involved less than \$100,000. The scale of the financing is not known for six cases. (Note that Figure 6 counts cases, while previous charts counted individuals.)

The number of Muslim-Americans indicted for support for terrorism is more than double the number indicted for violent plots – perhaps not surprising, since it would appear to be far less of a commitment to engage in financing than to engage in violence. Nonetheless, this finding underscores the relatively low level of radicalization among Muslim-Americans.¹⁵



Conclusion

Almost 200 Muslim-Americans have been involved in violent plots of terrorism over this decade, and more than 400 Muslim-Americans have been indicted or convicted for supporting terrorism. In 2011, the numbers dropped in both categories, and the severity of the cases also appeared to lessen: Muslim-American terrorist plots led to no fatalities in the United States, and the year's four indictments for terrorist financing indictments involved relatively small amounts of money.

As in previous years, non-Muslims were also involved in domestic terrorism, proving once again that Muslims do not have a monopoly on violence. This study has not attempted to analyze those cases.

The limited scale of Muslim-American terrorism in 2011 runs counter to the fears that many Americans shared in the days and months after 9/11, that domestic Muslim-American terrorism would escalate. The spike in terrorism cases in 2009 renewed these concerns, as have repeated warnings from U.S. government officials about a possible surge in homegrown Islamic terrorism. The predicted surge has not materialized.

Repeated alerts by government officials may be issued as a precaution, even when the underlying threat is uncertain. Officials may be concerned about how they would look if an attack did take place and subsequent investigations showed that officials had failed to warn the public. But a byproduct of these alerts is a sense of heightened tension that is out of proportion to the actual number of terrorist attacks in the United States since 9/11.

This study's findings challenge Americans to be vigilant against the threat of homegrown terrorism while maintaining a responsible sense of proportion.

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 latest book, *The Missing Martyrs: Why There Are So Few Muslim Terrorists*, was published by Oxford University Press in 2011. Jacob Filip assisted with the research for this report.

Notes

¹ Charles Kurzman, *The Missing Martyrs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 13.

² Robert Mueller, testimony Before the Judiciary Committee, U.S. House of Representatives, March 16, 2011.

³ Janet Napolitano, "Understanding the Homeland Threat Landscape -- Considerations for the 112th Congress," testimony before the Committee on Homeland Security, U.S. House of Representatives, February 9, 2011. Two weeks earlier, by contrast, Napolitano commented that "our homeland is more secure that it was ten years ago, and, indeed, more secure than it was two years ago." "State of America's Homeland Security Address," George Washington University, January 27, 2011. For a discussion of these diverging assessments, see Charles Kurzman, David Schanzer, and Ebrahim Moosa, "Muslim American Terrorism Since 9/11: Why So Rare?" *The Muslim World*, July 2011, pages 464-483.

⁴ CNN, March 10, 2011.

⁵ Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "Mapping the Global Muslim Population," October 2009.

⁶ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Preliminary Semiannual Uniform Crime Report, January-June, 2011."

⁷ Charles Kurzman, "Muslim-American Terrorism Since 9/11: An Accounting," Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security, February 2, 2011.

⁸ Committee on Homeland Security, U.S. House of Representatives, "Hearing on Al Shabaab: Recruitment and Radicalization within the Muslim American Community and the Threat to the Homeland," July 27, 2011.

⁹ Bert Useem, testimony before the Committee on Homeland Security, U.S. House of Representatives, "Hearing on the Threat of Muslim-American Radicalization in U.S. Prisons," June 15, 2011.

¹⁰ Department of Justice, *Introduction to National Security Division Statistics on Unsealed International Terrorism and Terrorism-Related Convictions* (2010). This list is based on convictions, rather than indictments, and there may be more cases, especially in recent years, that have not yet been resolved.

¹¹ Center on Law and Security, New York University School of Law, *Terrorist Trial Report Card: September 11, 2001-September 11, 2011*, <http://www.lawandsecurity.org/Portals/0/Documents/TTRC%20Ten%20Year%20Issue.pdf>.

¹² The Investigative Project on Terrorism, <http://investigativeproject.org>.

¹³ Trevor Aaronson, "The Informants," *Mother Jones*, August/September 2011; dataset available at <http://motherjones.com/fbi-terrorist>.

¹⁴ Ralph S. Boelter, Acting Assistant Director, Counterterrorism Division, Federal Bureau of Investigation, testimony before the Subcommittee on Crime and Terrorism, Judiciary Committee, U.S. Senate, September 21, 2011.

¹⁵ These findings contradict the conclusion of a recent study of Muslim-American terrorism by the New America Foundation and Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Public Policy, *Post-9/11 Jihadist Terrorism Cases Involving U.S. Citizens and Residents*, 2011. That study included 11 cases of terrorism financing in 2010, in addition to violent plots, but counted only violent plots in previous years, skewing the trend data and giving the false impression that terrorism was on the rise.