Muslim American Terrorism Since 9/11: Why So Rare?

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In the years after 9/11, Americans wondered how many more terrorist attacks would be unleashed against the United States. Government officials offered divergent information about the scope of the threat. Frances Fragos Townsend, assistant to President George W. Bush for homeland security and counterterrorism, told reporters that al-Qaida was so small in scale that it had been unable to recruit enough militants to conduct 9/11 attacks on both the East Coast and the West Coast of the United States at the same time, as was the original plan. By contrast, Robert S. Mueller III, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, told Congress that government investigations had uncovered a much larger number of Islamist militants in the United States, and that "we strongly suspect that several hundred of these extremists are linked to al-Qaeda."[1]

The Obama Administration has continued to offer divergent information about the scope of this threat. Janet Napolitano, secretary of homeland security, commented in her 2011 "State of America's Homeland Security Address" that "our homeland is more secure that it was ten years ago, and, indeed, more secure than it was two years ago." Two weeks later, Napolitano told Congress that "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."[2]

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[1] Frances Fragos Townsend, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, "Press Briefing on the West Coast Terrorist Plot," February 9, 2006; Robert S. Mueller III, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, "War on Terrorism," testimony before the Select Committee on Intelligence of the United States Senate, February 11, 2003.

[2] Janet Napolitano, Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, "State of America's Homeland Security Address," George Washington University, January 27, 2011; Janet Napolitano, "Understanding the Homeland Threat Landscape — Considerations for the 112th Congress," testimony before the United States House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security, February 9, 2011.

These contradictory assessments have allowed observers to find official confirmation for whatever level of threat they find emotionally or politically satisfying. Terrorist front organizations and their multicultural enablers claim that the threat of Islamic terrorism is exaggerated. Right-wing Islamophobes claim that the threat of Islamic terrorism is not being taken seriously enough. So which is it?

In order to bring evidence to bear on this vexatious issue, we have attempted to gather information on every Muslim-American terrorism suspect and perpetrator since September 11, 2011. Drawing on news sources, court documents, and the work of other researchers,[3] we created a list according to the following criteria:

1. Muslim-Americans are defined as Muslims who lived in the U.S. for an extended period. The perpetrators of 9/11, who came to the U.S. solely to carry out their attack, would not be counted as Muslim-Americans by this standard.
2. Only Muslim-Americans who have been involved in violent plots are counted, not those who are involved in financing or other connections to terrorism.
3. Plots are included if we believe that the perpetrators may have had terrorist intentions, even if terrorism charges were not brought against the perpetrators and their intentions have not been documented publicly.
4. Targets of terrorist plots may be within the United States or abroad.
5. Individuals are included even if their affiliation with Islam is tenuous, including two possible members of the Nation of Islam, whose theology is distinct from orthodox interpretations of Islam.
6. Muslim-Americans who joined or attempted to join groups on the U.S. government's list of terrorist organizations are included.
7. Unidentified co-conspirators are not included until they are indicted or engage in an attack. This excludes individuals such as "Unindicted Associate One," who is described in the indictment of alleged Christmas Tree bomber Mohamed Osman Mohamud as a "brother from Oregon who is now far away" in Yemen, then in northwest Pakistan.[4]
8. Suspects whose trials are pending are included. If they are found not guilty, they will be removed from the list.

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[3] Among other sources, we have drawn on Peter Bergen and William Banks, *Post-9/11 Jihadist Terrorism Cases Involving U.S. Citizens and Residents* (Washington, DC: New America Foundation; and Syracuse, NY: Maxwell School of Public Policy, Syracuse University, 2011); Alejandro J. Beutel, *Data on Post-9/11 Terrorism in the United States* (Washington, DC: Muslim Public Affairs Council, 2011); Jerome P. Bjelopera and Mark A. Randol, *American Jihadist Terrorism: Combating a Complex Threat* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2010); Steven Emerson *et al.*, *The Investigative Project on Terrorism*, investigativeproject.org; Karen J. Greenberg *et al.*, *Terrorist Trial Report Card: September 11, 2001–September 11, 2010* (New York: Center on Law and Security, New York University School of Law, 2010); Brian Michael Jenkins, *Would-Be Warriors: Incidents of Jihadist Terrorist Radicalization in the United States Since September 11, 2001* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010); Kevin Strom *et al.*, *Building on Clues: Examining Successes and Failures in Detecting U.S. Terrorist Plots, 1999-2009* (Research Triangle Park, NC: Institute for Homeland Security Solutions, 2010).

[4] Affidavit of FBI Special Agent Ryan Dwyer, *USA v. Mohamed Osman Mohamud*, Criminal Complaint, November 26, 2010.
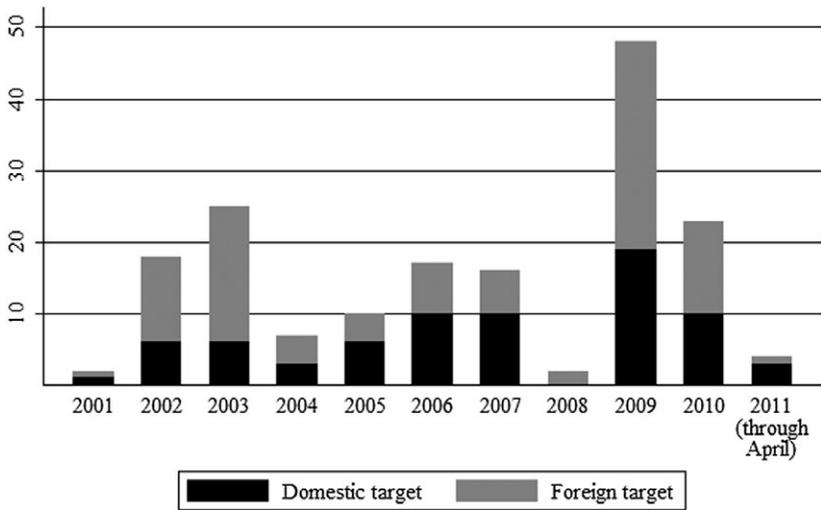
Figure 1. Muslim-American Terrorism Suspects &
Perpetrators Since 9/11: Annual Totals

Using these criteria, we identified 172 Muslim-American terrorism suspects and perpetrators from September 11, 2001, through May 1, 2011. (A full listing of these cases is available from the authors.) This total is considerable, but lower than the "several hundred" extremists mentioned by Robert Mueller. Of the 157 individuals who were indicted in U.S. courts, 63 pled guilty, 29 are on trial as of this writing, and 15 cases are on hold because the suspects are not in custody.

As shown in Figure 1, the annual total of terrorist indictments and incidents has ranged from two individuals in 2001 (after 9/11) and 2008 to 48 individuals in 2009, a year that witnessed an unprecedented spike and raised concerns that a new wave of Muslim-American radicalization was emerging. However, the total for 2010 dropped by half (from 48 to 23), and the rate for the first third of 2011 dropped by half again (from 23 to a projected annual total of 12), suggesting that 2009 may have been an anomaly. The total for 2009 is due in part to the 17 Somali-Americans who joined al-Shabaab in Somalia (most of these individuals had actually left the U.S. in 2007 and 2008, but are included in the total for 2009 because that is when they were indicted); it appears that only one additional Somali-American was indicted in 2010 for joining al-Shabaab. Plots with domestic targets also dropped considerably, from 18 in 2009 to 10 in 2010.

Of these 172 individuals, 65 plotted against targets outside of the United States, 61 plotted against targets within the United States, 13 plotted against both, and the targets were unknown for 33. Of the 172 individuals, 47 succeeded in carrying out their plot, either by engaging in an act of violence or by joining a militant organization abroad such as al-Qaʿida or al-Shabaab. Eleven of these 47 individuals engaged in attacks within the United States, killing a total of 33 individuals, not including themselves (see Table 1). The

Table 1. Muslim-American Domestic Terrorist Attacks Since 9/11

Name	Year	Plot	Fatalities (other than self)
Hesham Hadayet	2002	Shot Israeli airline personnel, Los Angeles, California	2
Charles Bishop	2002	Flew plane into office tower, Tampa, Florida	0
John Allen Muhammad	2002	"Beltway Snipers," metropolitan Washington, D.C.	11
Lee Boyd Malvo	2002		
Mohammed Taheri-Azar	2006	Ran over students with rental car, Chapel Hill, North Carolina	0
Naveed Haq	2006	Shot people at Jewish center, Seattle, Washington	1
Sulejmen Talovic	2007	Shot people at shopping center, Salt Lake City, Utah	5
Tahmeed Ahmad	2007	Attacked military police, Homestead Air Reserve Base, Florida	0
Abdulhakim Muhammad	2009	Shot military recruiters, Little Rock, Arkansas	1
Nidal Hasan	2009	Shot military personnel, Fort Hood, Texas	13
Faisal Shahzad	2010	Car-bomb near Times Square, New York City	0

death toll for these attacks would have been far greater if the attackers had been more competent. If Faisal Shahzad had used better-grade detonators and explosives, for example, he might have killed more than a thousand people, according to a re-enactment of his Times Square car-bomb by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.[5] To put these figures in perspective, there have been more than 150,000 murders in the United States since 9/11.[6]

The initial source of information that brought suspects to the attention of U.S. government authorities has been publicly disclosed in 128 cases (see Figure 2). In an additional 16 cases, it appears that U.S. authorities learned about the plots only from the execution of a terrorist attack. The two largest sources of initial information — 48 cases each — involved tips from the Muslim-American community and ongoing government investigations. (The figure for Muslim-American tips does not include information delivered by government questioning of terrorism suspects.) In some cases, family members reported that the suspects were missing overseas — for example, Omar Hammami, who traveled to Somalia and joined al-Shabaab in 2006; the Somali-Americans in Minnesota who left for Somalia in 2007 and 2008; and five young men from Northern Virginia who traveled to Pakistan in 2009. In other cases, members

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[5] Associated Press, July 20, 2010; *New York Post*, July 20, 2010.
[6] Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States, 2009*, Table 1, "Crime in the United States by Volume and Rate per 100,000 Inhabitants, 1990–2009," and *Preliminary Semiannual Uniform Crime Report, January–June, 2010*, fbi.gov.
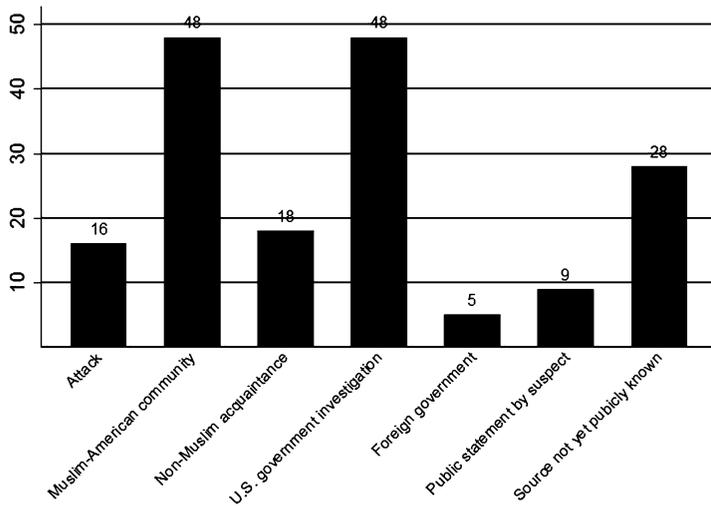
**Figure 2. Muslim-American Terrorism Suspects &
Perpetrators Since 9/11: Initial Source of Information**

of the Muslim-American community reported suspicious activities. For example, an anonymous letter from a Yemeni-American led authorities to investigate the Lackawanna Six in 2001 (they were arrested in 2002).[7] Farooque Ahmed in Virginia "came to the attention of American authorities in April [2010] when he told associates that he wanted to engage in jihad, [an unnamed federal] official said. This information was passed on to law enforcement agencies, which began to monitor him."[8] The FBI began to investigate Antonio Martinez in Maryland after a Muslim Facebook friend called about his violent postings.[9] In some communities, Muslim-Americans have been so concerned about extremists in their midst that they have turned in people who turned out to be undercover informants, including Craig Monteilh in Orange County, California, and Darren Griffin in Toledo, Ohio.[10]

An equal number of cases were initiated by ongoing government investigations. Of these, 29 cases involved investigations of other terrorism suspects. For example, Tarek Mehanna in Massachusetts was first identified as a person of interest in 2006 through the phone records of Daniel Maldonado, who had fought with al-Shabaab in Somalia and was turned over to U.S. authorities by the Kenyan military.[11] Iyman Faris, who pled guilty to a plot to attack the Brooklyn Bridge, was identified through the interrogation of

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[7] Dina Temple-Raston, *The Jihad Next Door* (New York: Public Affairs, 2007), 124.

[8] *New York Times*, October 28, 2010.

[9] Affidavit by FBI Special Agent Keith E. Bender, *USA v. Antonio Martinez*, Criminal Complaint, December 8, 2010.

[10] *Los Angeles Times*, February 26, 2009; *Toledo Blade*, April 3, 2008.

[11] Affidavit of FBI Special Agent Andrew Nambu, *USA v. Tarek Mehanna*, Criminal Complaint, November 7, 2008.

detainee Khalid Sheikh Mohammed at a secret CIA facility (Mohammed was later transferred to the Guantánamo detention facility).[12] Other terror-related government investigations included material uncovered during American military and intelligence operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and suspects who turned state's evidence. Another 11 cases came to the attention of authorities through extremist statements they made to undercover agents who had been sent into Muslim-American communities. This includes James Cromitie and three co-conspirators in Newburgh, New York, who were convicted of trying to bomb a synagogue in New York City; they were first identified as potential suspects by an informant who "was told to keep his ear open for 'radical Islamic thoughts,' " according to testimony by the informant's FBI handler. Cromitie struck up a conversation with the informant in a mosque parking lot and shared an inclination toward violence.[13] A final 8 cases involved government investigations into non-terrorist crimes. For example, Kevin James and three co-conspirators in California, who were ultimately convicted of a plot to wage war on the U.S., came to authorities' attention through investigation of two colleagues who were apprehended while making their getaway from a bank robbery.[14]

More than a third of government investigations — 63 cases — involved undercover informants. As noted in a recent report by the New York University Center for Law and Security, which identified a slightly higher proportion of cases involving informants in an overlapping set of cases, the defendants' claims of entrapment have not yet worked in U.S. courts.[15]

Most Muslim-American terrorism suspects — 125 of the 172 individuals on our list — were arrested before they could carry out an attack. Of these foiled plots, almost all — 111 of 125 individuals — came to the attention of U.S. government authorities at an early stage of their plots, before weapons or explosives had been obtained (see Figure 3). Information on plot disruption is drawn from criminal complaints and news coverage of trial testimony. In more than a dozen cases, government authorities provided fake weapons to the suspects, who thought that they were carrying out a terrorist attack. In September 2009, for example, Michael Finton thought he was detonating a van full of explosives outside a federal courthouse in Springfield, Illinois; the next day, Hosam Smadi thought he was activating a bomb at a Dallas office building. Both men later pled guilty to these plots. Mohamed Mohamud allegedly thought that he was activating a car bomb at a Christmas Tree lighting ceremony in Portland, Oregon, in November 2010. As of this writing, his case is still pending.

Muslim-American terrorism does not appear to fit any single profile, aside from being male — there is only one woman on the list, Aafia Siddiqui, who was suspected of association with terrorist plots in Pakistan and was convicted for attacking military

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[12] *Columbus Dispatch*, August 26, 2009.
[13] *New York Times*, August 26, 2010.
[14] *Orange County Register*, September 3, 2005.
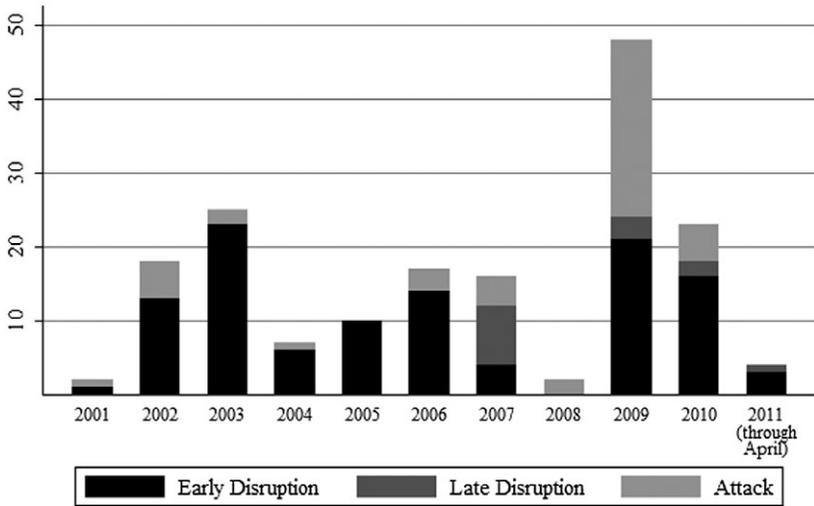[15] Greenberg *et al.*, *Terrorist Trial Report Card*.

**Figure 3. Muslim-American Terrorism Suspects &
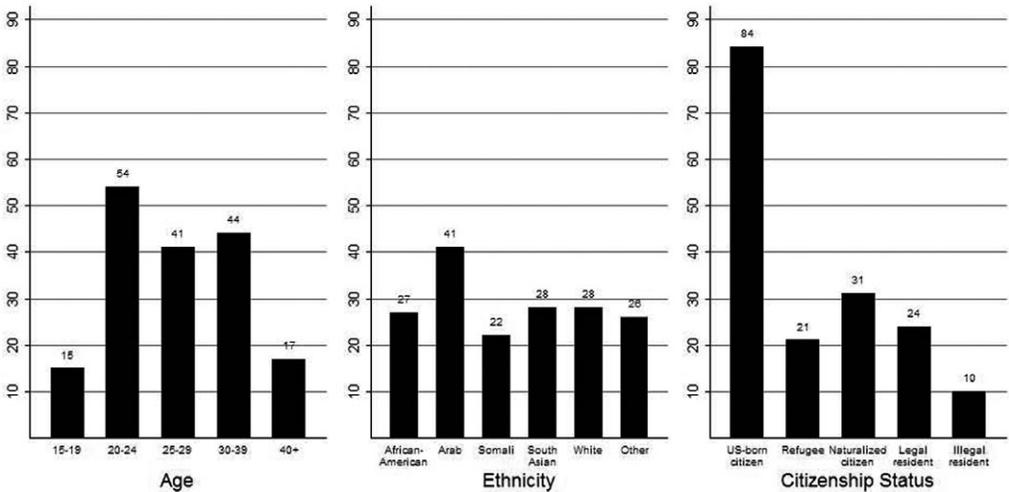Perpetrators Since 9/11: Stage of Plot Disruption**

**Figure 4. Muslim-American Terrorism Suspects &
Perpetrators Since 9/11: Demographics**

personnel while in custody in Afghanistan. Over half were in their 20s at the time of their attack or indictment; a quarter were in their 30s; just under 10 percent were in their teens, and another 10 percent were 40 or over (see Figure 4). No single ethnicity dominates the list: Arab-Americans are most numerous, with 41 individuals, but there are significant numbers of South Asians, Whites, African-Americans, African immigrants, and others. Almost half of the individuals were born in the United States; almost all of the rest were legal immigrants with naturalized citizenship, permanent residenting, refugee status, or

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student visas. Only 10 individuals were residing illegally in the United States. The cases come from 24 different states around the country — only 17 percent took place in the four largest Muslim communities in the country, the Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, and New York metropolitan areas. This diversity has undermined efforts to create a demographic profile to identify likely Muslim-American terrorists.

In addition, there seems to be no common path to radicalization. Some of these terrorist suspects and perpetrators had lived in the United States for their entire lives, while others, like Khalid Al-Dawsari, a Saudi Arabian college student in Texas who was arrested after allegedly ordering bomb-making materials from a chemical company, were relatively recent arrivals. Of the 172 individuals on our list, 64 attended a terrorist training camp in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia; of these, 30 returned to the United States, 10 were detained abroad, 7 were killed abroad, and 17 remain at large abroad. Most of the individuals, however, had no on-the-ground training. Several of them were apparently in contact with Anwar al-Awlaki, the militant Yemeni-American preacher who has been convicted by a Yemeni court for inspiring a terrorist attack and has been targeted for assassination by the U.S. government, including Shahzad, the Times Square bomber; Nidal Hasan, who is accused of killing 13 soldiers in a shooting rampage at Fort Hood in Texas; and Paul Rockwood of King Salmon, Alaska, who pled guilty in July 2010 to developing a list of terrorist targets.[16] Some individuals radicalized together in a small group, unconnected to terrorist organizations overseas. Others — like Hesham Hadayet, who opened fire at the El Al counter in the Los Angeles airport, or Mohammed Reza Taheri-Azar, who ran people over with a rental car at the University of North Carolina — were disturbed loners.

Why So Few?

These figures depict a persistent recurrence of Muslim-American terrorist plots over the past decade. We do not have similarly precise figures for terrorism by non-Muslim Americans, but it seems clear that Muslim-Americans have engaged in terrorist plots at a rate far greater than their proportion of the U.S. population, which is only about 1 percent. Most accounts of Muslim-American terrorism have sought to explain this disproportionate rate, focusing on Muslim-American grievances with U.S. foreign policy, the influence of transnational militancy, and the availability of radical religious inter-pretations via the Internet. At the same time, Muslim-American terrorism has remained very rare, both in comparison with other causes of death and in comparison with the expectations of Islamic terrorists, who have complained for years about Muslim-American complacency.[17] This study seeks to account for the rarity of Muslim-American terrorism.

One explanation involves Muslim-American demographics. Unlike Muslim minori-ties in many countries of Western Europe, Muslim-Americans have attained higher

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[16] *USA v. Paul Gene Rockwood, Jr.*, Plea Agreement, July 20, 2010.
[17] Charles Kurzman, *The Missing Martyrs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

education and middle-class incomes at roughly the same rate as society as a whole. Their lives are less segregated than in Western Europe, and their political views on most issues are similar to other Americans. Many immigrants — who, according to various estimates, compose about one-half to two-thirds of the Muslim-American population — came to the United States for educational or economic opportunities, and this population still retains an optimistic view of the United States as a land of opportunity.[18]

Another explanation may be that U.S. law enforcement has been aggressive in rooting out terrorist plots. This aggressive posture is evident in the number of cases based on undercover informants, the expansion of government surveillance programs, the heightened security at airports and other locations, and the several thousand Muslim-Americans who have been detained or deported since 9/11.[19] Some of this government activity may well have prevented terrorist plots without coming to public attention.

We propose a further set of explanations for the rarity of Muslim-American terrorism that involves actions taken by Muslim-American communities themselves. These findings emerge from a two-year study that focused on Muslim-Americans in four communities: Seattle, Washington; Houston, Texas; Buffalo, New York; and Raleigh/Durham, North Carolina. These communities were chosen because they are moderate sized and had not been subject to prior research efforts, like the largest Muslim-American communities such as Detroit or New York. In addition, our researchers would be able to contact and interview leaders at most of these sites' Islamic organizations. Furthermore, because each of these communities had some experience with isolated instances of radicalization, they offered opportunities to examine how Muslim-American organizations have in general responded to the challenges surrounding radicalization and homegrown terrorism. Members of our research team lived in each of these communities for two- to three-month periods and conducted more than 120 in-depth interviews with community leaders and other Muslim-Americans. Interviews probed how individuals, parents, and community organizations, including religious organizations, have dealt with the challenge of Islamic radicalism. Interviewees were asked about the steps that their communities have taken to prevent radicalization and their views on governmental outreach efforts and counterterrorism policies. In addition to these interviews, data was also drawn from an extensive review of Muslim-American publications and websites of major Muslim-American organizations. The interviews were not intended to probe for illegal activities, and none was disclosed. However, given the sensitivity of the issues

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[18] Council on American-Islamic Relations, *American Muslim Voters: A Demographic Profile and Survey of Attitudes*, October 24, 2006, http://www.cair.com/Portals/0/pdf/American_Muslim_Voter_Survey_2006.pdf; Pew Research Center, *Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream*, May 22, 2007, http://pewresearch.org/assets/pdf/muslim-americans.pdf; Gallup, *Muslim Americans: A National Portrait*, March 2, 2009, http://www.muslimwestfacts.com/mwf/File/116074/AmericanMuslimReport.pdf; Akbar Ahmed, *Journey into America: The Challenge of Islam* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2010).

[19] Anny Bakalian and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, *Backlash 9/11* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009); Louise Cainkar, *Homeland Insecurity* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009).

surrounding terrorism and counterterrorism, some respondents may have wished to provide an overly rosy image of the local Muslim-American community. To mitigate this possibility, the project cross-checked information with additional respondents and with digital searches of local newspapers. No significant discrepancies were discovered.[20]

This research identified five ways in which Muslim-American communities may have minimized radicalization:

1. Public and Private Denunciations of Violence. Since 9/11, Muslim-American communities have been very vocal in denouncing terrorist violence. Much of this has gone unnoticed in the mainstream press, and many Americans wonder — erroneously — why Muslims have been silent on the subject. Far from being silent, Muslim-Americans have issued press releases, spoken out in mosques, and created community organizations to convey the message, in public and in private, that terrorism is religiously prohibited and strategically foolish. In the days after 9/11, for example, senior Islamic scholars in the United States and the Middle East issued a fatwa urging Muslims to support military action against the perpetrators of 9/11:

> All Muslims ought to be united against all those who terrorize the innocents, and those who permit the killing of non-combatants without a justifiable reason. Islam has declared the spilling of blood and the destruction of property as absolute prohibitions until the Day of Judgment. . . . [It is] necessary to apprehend the true perpetrators of these crimes, as well as those who aid and abet them through incitement, financing or other support. They must be brought to justice in an impartial court of law and [punished] appropriately. . . . [It is] a duty of Muslims to participate in this effort with all possible means.[21]

In the United States, Muslim-Americans also expressed outrage at the attacks, then and later. One such document, drafted by the Fiqh Council of North America and endorsed by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), the Muslim American Society (MAS), the Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS), the Association of Muslim Scientists and Engineers (AMSE), the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), and more than 130 Muslim organizations, mosques and leaders in the United States, stated this forcefully:

> We have consistently condemned terrorism and extremism in all forms and under all circumstances, and we reiterate this unequivocal position. Islam strictly condemns religious extremism and the use of violence against innocent lives. There is no justification in Islam for extremism or terrorism. Targeting civilians' life and property through suicide bombings or any other method of attack is haram —

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[20] Notes from the interviews have been archived with the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan.

[21] Shaykh Yusuf Qaradawi, Qatar; Tariq Bishri, Egypt; Muḥammad S. Awwa, Egypt; Fahmi Huwaydi, Egypt; Haytham Khayyat, Syria; Shaykh Taha Jabir al-Alwani, U.S., statement published in *The Washington Post*, October 11, 2001. The Arabic original is posted at http://kurzman.unc.edu/islamic-statements-against-terrorism, along with numerous similar statements by Muslim leaders from around the world.

prohibited in Islam — and those who commit these barbaric acts are criminals, not 'martyrs.'[22]

There is only one Muslim-American organization, a tiny group called the Islamic Thinkers Society, that openly espouses violence — abroad, not in the United States. It calls all of the larger Muslim-American organizations "so-called Muslim organizations" and denounces "their spiritually impotent and politically retarded 'leadership.' "[23]

Some observers fear that denunciations of terrorism are intended solely to fool non-Muslims and do not reflect Muslim-Americans' true beliefs. The label of *taqiyya* — a medieval Islamic concept that permits dissimulation in times of danger — is sometimes attached to this practice, though Islamist terrorists do not recognize this concept.[24] There have undoubtedly been cases of Muslim-American terrorists hiding their militant plans with peaceful-sounding rhetoric — al-Awlaki, for example, denounced the attacks of 9/11 while he was in the United States, then celebrated the attacks and called for more when he moved to Yemen in 2002.

But the constant denunciation of violence is not just a smokescreen for a couple hundred terrorists — it is the primary discourse on the subject of terrorism among millions of non-terrorist Muslim-Americans. Among religiously liberal Muslim-Americans, denunciations of violence emphasizes the themes that they viewed as the spirit of Islam, including tolerance of diversity, intercommunal coexistence, and support for democratic politics. Quotations from the Qur'ān and the hadith — eyewitness reports of the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muḥammad and his companions — are common in discussions of these topics. Religiously conservative Muslim-Americans are just as vehement in denouncing violence. Their critique often centers on the importance of ethical practices, with an insistence on the "middle path" (as opposed to extremism) and "correct" orthodox belief, which they understand to mean apolitical piety. Conversations on these topics often referred to Qur'ānic verses and hadith reports that require obedience to the laws of the land, sober and modest comportment, and proper treatment of strangers. These themes are especially visible among Salafi communities in the U.S. The term Salafī, which means a follower of the first generations of Muslims (the *salaf*), has been adopted by some terrorist groups in the Middle East and elsewhere. However, the term is far more commonly used to refer to an intense form of personal religiosity, with no political implications. With this understand-

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[22] "Fatwa by U.S. Muslims Against Religious Extremism," July 25, 2005, http://www.mpac.org/bucket_downloads/fatwa-on-terrorism.pdf.

[23] Islamic Thinkers Society, "Press Release on FCNA [Fiqh Council of North America] & Their Pathetic Fatwa," September 3, 2005, http://www.islamicthinkers.com/index/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=299&Itemid=2.

[24] The only contemporary sources on *taqiyya* cited by counterterrorism "experts" are Shiʿa (such as the al-islam.org website) or Druze (such as the book *al-Taqiyya fī l-Islām*), not Sunni. See Raymond Ibrahim, "How Taqiyya Alters Islam's Rules of War," *Middle East Quarterly,* Winter 2010; Frank Salvato, "*Al Taqiyya*: The Islamist Terrorist Weapon of Deception," BasicsProject.org, undated. All but two of the 172 Muslim-American terrorism suspects and perpetrators on our list are Sunni.

ing in mind, according to a survey of American mosques conducted in 2000, almost 70 percent of mosque administrators identified "the teachings of the righteous *salaf*" as an important source of authority.[25] This came to be misinterpreted in the American media as "Salafi teachings," which supposedly provide "a lot of quiet help — as well as a hiding place [for] would-be terrorists."[26] By contrast, the self-described Salafis that our project interviewed were among the most hostile to radical Islamic movements, which they considered *ḥarām*, or religiously impermissible. "We are not really concerned with politics, you know, those are affairs you can't change," one self-described Salafi imam told us. "Change really comes from Allah, you know. . . . A lot of that stuff [politics] gets people distracted from what's really important."[27]

Our research indicated that Muslim-Americans do not support terrorism directed at the United States or innocent civilians. At the same time, some of our interviewees were less quick to condemn other acts of violence outside the United States in instances where they considered the targets to be part of a genuine armed conflict. Because this project focused on domestic terrorism, we did not attempt to gauge the extent of this support or probe interviewees on these issues.

2. Self-Policing. Muslim-Americans' statements denouncing terrorism have been reinforced with concrete actions in their communities to monitor signs of radicalization. The rarity of terrorism in the United States means that few Muslim-Americans have ever encountered an actual terrorist, or even an individual who has expressed a willingness to engage in violence. Nonetheless, our research indicates that Muslim-Americans are engaged in a heightened level of self-policing against radicalization that may help to account for the infrequency of terrorist activities by Muslim-Americans.

Even before 9/11, terrorist organizations considered Muslim-American communities to be unlikely collaborators. Although a variety of radical Islamic movements sought to raise funds in the United States for their revolutionary campaigns abroad, there was little recruitment of Muslim-Americans for domestic terrorism in the United States. In fact, according to interrogation summaries made available by the government, Khalid Sheik Mohammed forbade the 9/11 hijackers from confiding in Muslim-Americans. He "explicitly told Mohammad Atta and the other pilots and muscle operatives not to speak with any Muslims once in the United States. The only exception to this rule was concerning Khalid al-Mihdhar and Nawaf al-Hazmi, whom he instructed to contact an Islamic Center or Mosque to help them get settled in the country since they did not speak English."[28] To our knowledge, no Muslim-Americans were indicted for knowingly aiding or abetting the 9/11 attacks.

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[25] Ihsan Bagby, Paul M. Perl, and Bryan T. Froehle, *The Mosque in America: A National Portrait* (Washington, DC: Council on American-Islamic Relations, April 26, 2001), 28.

[26] Sarah Downey and Michael Hirsh, "A Safe Haven?" *Newsweek*, September 30, 2002, p. 31.

[27] North Carolina interview #3, May 2008.

[28] "Substitution for the Testimony of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed," *U.S. v. Zacarias Moussaoui*, defendant's exhibit DX–0941, p. 36, introduced March 28, 2006; posted on-line by the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, http://www.rcfp.org/moussaoui/pdf/DX–0941.pdf.

Since 9/11, Muslim-Americans have been attentive to possible radicalization when it appears. In Houston, for example, a Muslim religious leader harshly scolded a man who "told me that he would've been proud if it was his sons [who were responsible for 9/11]. . . . I whupped the hell out of him, afterwards he left with a different disposition. Now, we don't know where people come from, we don't know what experiences they've had that have shaped them. So, I'm not going to judge him, because when he got the right information, his disposition changed."[29] In North Carolina, another religious leader said he called the FBI when a young man in the community appeared to be on the verge of violence: "I reached the point where I felt, I have to report this to the authorities, because if, Allah forbid, if he left and did something, even just harming himself, I would be liable before Allah, why didn't I tell the authorities so that they could stop him."[30] Another man said he called the authorities when a friend of his started talking angrily about possibly avenging civilian casualties in Iraq: "He was talking about how bridges are going to be blown up into the sky, and stuff, and I was really thinking, somebody is going to do something like this, the way this friend of mine was talking. I was suspicious of the way he was talking with me. I called the FBI myself, and I told them this person, this name, this telephone number. . . . The way he talked, it wasn't comfortable for me."[31]

Of more than 120 interviews conducted for this project, only one respondent expressed hesitancy about reporting a potential act of terrorism to the authorities:

> In the African-American and African-American Muslim community, all we are concerned about is taking care of your family. That's all we're concerned about. . . . We need to eat — we ain't got the time to be concerned doing the police's job. . . . It's like this, I'll tell you from the heart. If I knew of a plot that a thousand airplanes, all at once, were to fall out of the sky — if I knew that there was another Timothy McVeigh was going to rise up, and I had absolute knowledge of it — I wouldn't care.
>
> Interviewer: Really?
>
> I wouldn't care. I say that as an African-American and as a Muslim.
>
> Interviewer: But . . .
>
> I wouldn't care.
>
> Interviewer: What about saving human lives?
>
> Saving what? I'm concerned about me. I'm concerned about me and my family.[32]

Other respondents in the area — including African-American Muslims — who were asked about this respondent's opinion, rejected it entirely. One of the community's

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[29] Houston interview #29, February 2009.
[30] North Carolina interview #7, June 2008.
[31] Buffalo interview #17, January 2009.
[32] Seattle interview #15, July 2008.

leading Islamic scholars, an African-American man, said, "I would say that that individual does not understand Islam. . . . When I give *khuṭbas*, I tell people, "Look, don't come here with that foolishness. I'll tell you right now that I'll call the police right now. And you can call me a snitch or a rat, but call me a Muslim."[33]

Other Muslim organizations have not waited passively to learn about possible radicalization, but have instead organized events with teenagers and young adults, raising controversial topics that might identify potential problems. In Houston, an organization that works with Muslim-American youths arranged what one of the group's founders called "venting sessions." These sessions encourage participants to express feelings of anger, prejudice, and hostility about difficult issues in order to counteract them.[34] This approach is controversial, since it raises raw emotions that could potentially instigate radicalization rather than calm it. However, the outcome seems to have been effective. While it is disturbing that negative attitudes exist, none of the participants in these sessions, to our knowledge, has ever been accused of terrorist activity.

Muslim-Americans have also become more cautious about the content of messages delivered in mosques. In Buffalo, where Muslim-Americans have been under intense scrutiny since the conviction of the Lackawanna Six, mosques perform significant background checks on proposed speakers. Even before the Lackawanna case, local mosques were uneasy about radical imams who occasionally visited the area. One imam who came through in early 2001 and spoke of revolutionary jihad at the main Yemeni mosque was immediately banned from the premises. The militant who recruited six local youths to attend training camps in Afghanistan in early 2001 did not use the mosque for his meetings, but a nearby apartment instead.[35] Since then, Muslim-Americans in Buffalo have not left this to chance, as one community leader explained:

> We monitor the groups that come through our masjids. There's no other way to say it. We monitor our masjids. If you want to speak at our masjids, we want to know who you are and what you're going to talk about. You're not just going to come in and speak to our youth and we're going to be disappointed with certain things after you start talking. That's not going to happen anymore.[36]

While some of the motivation for self-policing by Muslim-Americans is clearly self-preservation — not wanting to be caught up in a sting operation or be associated with anybody who is causing trouble — self-policing does not appear to be reducible simply to strategic calculations of self-interest. In addition to anxiety that another act of terrorism in the U.S. could result in collective punishment against all Muslim-Americans, our respondents also cited ethical principles and sacred sources when speaking of self-policing, suggesting that this is simply proper religious comportment.

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[33] Seattle interview #21, July 2008.
[34] Houston interview #20, March 2009.
[35] Temple-Raston, *The Jihad Next Door*.
[36] Buffalo interview #16, January 2009.

3. Community-Building. Of Muslim-Americans who have engaged in terrorist violence since September 11, 2001, some were loners who had little connection to any community at all; some had deeper connections abroad than locally; and some had stronger ties with a handful of buddies than with their community as a whole. There appear to have been few who were well-integrated into Muslim-American organizations. More commonly, as in the case of the seven men in North Carolina who were indicted on terrorism-related charges in 2009, the individuals were initially integrated into the community, but as they radicalized, they left their communal organizations and became more isolated.

This image runs counter to some of the concerns expressed by non-Muslim Americans about Islamic organizations in the United States, which they perceive are channels for radicalization. Our evidence suggests the opposite: Muslim-American community-building is a significant factor in the prevention of radicalization. Muslim-American community-building includes a variety of activities, some openly religious and some not. Our interview respondents and almost all observers agree that Muslim-Americans have stepped up community-building in all forms over the past two decades, especially since 9/11. The direct goal of these activities is not to prevent radicalization, though that may have been an unintended outcome. Instead, these activities are intended to strengthen Muslim-American communities and serve community goals, which include protecting Muslim-Americans' rights, deepening community members' faith, and spreading the message of Islam to non-Muslims.

Of particular concern to Muslim-Americans in community-building activities are Muslim youth. Many adults, both immigrants and U.S.-born, express concern that the younger generation may drift away from their Islamic identity due to immersion in mainstream American culture. "I think that our community is more trying to combat youth looking at porn sites than radical Islam sites," one young man said. At the same time, he observed, these mosque-sponsored activities also serve to reduce alienation in rare cases of potential radicalization:

> The community is prepared to deal with [this], because there have been like two or three instances, and they would deal with it in the same way [as youths who are looking at porn sites]. They would try to take this person aside, talk to them, try to incorporate them into the community atmosphere, try to get them involved in more youth activities in the community.[37]

The case of the young men from Minneapolis who traveled to Somalia to join the Shabaab demonstrates how these integrative efforts have not always been successful. Several of our interview respondents said that their communities were reaching out to socially isolated individuals to ensure that they did not engage in negative behaviors. "When you don't get engaged in positive stuff, you're going to get engaged in self-defeating stuff," a community activist in North Carolina told us. "Disengagement —

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[37] North Carolina interview #2, May 2008.

I don't think it has led to much radical action, it has led mainly to self-defeating action, by making this society or this community seem to be an unacceptable community."[38]

It is worth noting a trend that runs counter to Muslim-American community-building efforts: the impulse to expel potential trouble-makers from community organizations. This trend grows out of the community's desire to self-police, to protect its members from the actions of the troublesome individual or from suspicion or backlash if the individual were to break any laws. Several of our respondents noted that the recent climate of heightened security concerns has made some people wary of being associated in any way with individuals who might be the focus of law enforcement operations. These concerns undermine the social connections that might allow the community to moderate or, in worst case scenarios, monitor individuals who express radical views.

4. Political Engagement. A further set of efforts that Muslim-Americans have undertaken since September 11, 2001, involve participation in the democratic politics of the United States. As with other activities of Muslim-American communities, the primary goal is not preventing radicalization, but is, instead, the defense of the rights and interests of Muslim-Americans in a political environment that they experience as threatening. Nonetheless, this political mobilization has the effect of channeling grievances into democratic forums and integrating Muslim-Americans into the democratic system.

This pattern follows in the footsteps of other minority and immigrant groups in the United States, such as the Irish in the mid-19th century, Jews in the early 20th century, and African-Americans in the mid-20th century. Muslim-Americans often liken their current situation to the trajectory of these other groups, especially the models of African-American civil rights activism and Jewish-American political engagement. Several Muslim-American groups have followed the example of other minority groups, conducting voter-registration drives and issue-advocacy campaigns at the national, state, and local levels. Muslim-American groups have come together to support Muslim candidates, some of whom have been elected to office in non-Muslim-majority districts, including a state senator in North Carolina, a city councilor in Houston, and school board members in the Buffalo region and elsewhere.

Perhaps more importantly, Muslim-Americans have mobilized around local issues that they consider serious grievances for their affected communities. In North Carolina, for example, a mosque sought a building permit to expand to accommodate the growing Muslim-American population in the region. Two city council members blocked the permit. The imam did not believe that it was religiously justified for Muslims to participate politically in a non-Muslim country, but a conversation with the mosque's attorney changed his mind, and he later drew on Islamic jurisprudence to bolster this position.[39] In the Buffalo area, where Muslim-Americans have been a significant presence for several generations, political participation has historically been limited, but

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[38] North Carolina interview #5, June 2008.
[39] North Carolina interview #7, June 2008.

that is changing. One young man, a third-generation Yemeni-American, described his Muslim-American identity and the beginnings of political involvement at the local level, where the most pressing issues involve potholes and schools.[40]

These mechanisms for political representation enable the experience of discrimination and other grievances to be directed toward the government, where they can be addressed. Such political self-assertion treats democracy as part of the solution, not part of the problem. Some Muslim-Americans express impatience with these solutions, just as some African-Americans expressed impatience with the civil rights movement in the 1960s. Now, as then, the question is whether political action will yield sufficient returns to keep militancy at bay.

5. Identity Politics. The expression of a Muslim-American identity has taken on an increasingly assertive tone in the years since the 9/11 attacks. This trend has taken the form of young women wearing headscarves at political rallies, young men growing beards as an embodiment of their faith, workers in various industries claiming the right to take breaks for prayers; parents sending their children to Islamic schools, and other public expressions of Islamic piety.

While some observers are concerned that heightened expressions of Muslim-American piety may be a sign of impending radicalization, there is evidence to the contrary. The Pew Research Center's 2007 survey of Muslim-Americans found that respondents who said religion was very important in their lives were one-third less likely than other respondents to consider attacks on civilians to be sometimes or often justified "in order to defend Islam from its enemies.[41]" (Justifications of these attacks were very unlikely — under 10 percent — among both sets of Muslim-American respondents. By way of comparison, according to a separate poll of a national sample, 24 percent of Americans considered "bombing and other types of attacks intentionally aimed at civilians" to be sometimes or often justified.)[42]

The pan-ethnic Muslim-American identity has deep roots in Islamic history, originating in debates in the first generations of Islam over whether non-Arabs could be considered full Muslims. Today, many Islamic groups, including terrorist groups, claim to speak on behalf of the entire *Umma*, the global community of Muslims. However, the pan-ethnic identity of Muslim-Americans serves to undermine terrorism by emphasizing the compatibility of Muslim-ness and American-ness. These are not two civilizations on a crash course, but instead two civilizations overlapping and melding. A recent book offers an outspoken vision of this double identity:

> This anthology is about women who don't remember a time when they weren't both American and Muslim. . . . We wore Underoos and watched MTV. We know *juz' 'amma* (the final thirtieth [section] of the Qur'ān) and Michael Jackson's

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[40] Buffalo interview #35, January 2009.

[41] Data analysis based on Pew Research Center, *2007 Muslim American Survey*, May 22, 2007.

[42] WorldPublicOpinion.org, "Public Opinion in Iran and America on Key International Issues," January 24, 2007.

Thriller by heart. We played Atari and Game Boy and competed in Qur'anic recitation competitions. As we enter our twenties, thirties, and forties we have settled into the American Muslim identity that we've pioneered.[43]

One of our respondents, a religiously conservative young man who was born and raised in New York State, echoed this double identity, drawing out its implications as a bulwark against radicalization:

> Muslims who grow up in this country, who know Americans and who know America, who consider themselves American — I consider myself American, my kid will be an American. Why would he hate himself? . . . See, people would look at me and they'd think, this guy is a radical, and I understand how they would come up with that conclusion, because they look at what they see on TV and they look at me and they put two and two together. So I hope to see a Muslim revival among Muslims and among non-Muslims in the United States. I hope to see more Muslims practicing Islam and proud of their Islam. . . . I'd like to see a religious revival among American Muslims, but that doesn't mean radicalization, it doesn't mean that they are going to hate America and everything that we as Americans stand for.[44]

Conclusion

In early 2011, as the tenth anniversary of 9/11 approached, the U.S. House of Representatives held hearings on the scope and danger of Muslim-American terrorism. Congressman Peter King of New York announced the hearings one month after he became chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security. He used to be a supporter of Muslim organizations in his district on Long Island, he said, but he was outraged by their denial of Muslim complicity in the attacks of September 11:

> As I became more immersed in attempting to unravel the radical Islamic threat to our nation and our civilization, it became more and more obvious to me that the moral myopia of Long Island's Muslim leaders and their apologists in the media was the rule — and that there were few exceptions. Federal and local law enforcement officials throughout the country told me they received little or — in most cases — no cooperation from Muslim leaders and imams.[45]

King told a radio interviewer that he believed that "over 80 percent of the mosques in this country are controlled by radical imams. Certainly from what I've seen and dealings I've had, that number seems accurate."[46]

By the time that the hearings were actually held in March 2011, with immense publicity, King had backed away from these statements. Instead of claiming that 80

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[43] Saleemah Abdul-Ghafur, editor, *Living Islam Out Loud: American Muslim Women Speak* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2005), 1.
[44] Buffalo interview #6, December 2008.
[45] *Newsday*, December 19, 2010.
[46] *The Laura Ingraham Show*, January 24, 2011.

percent of mosques were led by radicals, King spoke of the 15 percent of young Muslim-American men who "could support suicide bombings," citing a survey by the Pew Foundation. "This is the segment of the community al-Qaeda is attempting to recruit." Still, King claimed that Muslim-Americans lacked responsible communal leadership: "To combat this threat, moderate leadership must emerge from the Muslim community."[47]

King originally planned to invite critics of Islam to testify at the hearing — non-Muslims who consider Islam to be inherently violent and oppressive, such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the Somali-Dutch activist, and counterterrorism author Steven Emerson.[48] Ultimately, he decided instead to feature three Muslim-Americans who spoke about the lack of counterterrorism efforts in their communities. Emerson was so incensed not to be selected as a witness that he wrote an angry letter to King: "For years, I had been a long supporter of your singularly courageous efforts to respond to the deception perpetrated by radical Islamic groups in falsely claiming they were 'moderate.' I praised your courageous efforts every place I could go. But sadly I cannot do that anymore."[49] Other allies of King also accused him to "caving" to liberal and Islamist pressure.[50]

King added one law enforcement officer to the witness list — Los Angeles County Sheriff Lee Baca, who was nominated by Democrats on the House committee. Baca testified that the premise for the hearing was flawed:

> Since we are gathered to share information about the American Muslim Community and its response to radicalization, I can deliver very good news. The Muslim Community in Los Angeles is an active participant in the securing of our Homeland. . . . The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department has long been a leader in the development of relationships with the various ethnic, cultural and religious communities that thrive in the Los Angeles area. Nowhere is that relationship more positive than that which exists between my agency and the American Muslim Community. We have established strong bonds through continuing outreach and physical presence at events important to the community and law enforcement.[51]

King was not convinced that Baca's experience was typical. In a press conference after the hearing, King said the testimony demonstrated "the lack of support [Muslim-Americans] receive from the people in their community who should be the

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[47] Peter King, opening remarks, House Committee on Homeland Security, Hearing on "The Extent of Radicalization in the American Muslim Community and that Community's Response," March 10, 2011.
[48] *New York Times*, February 7, 2011.
[49] Ben Smith, "King Witness List Provokes Bitter Split Among Islam Critics," *Politico*, January 19, 2011.
[50] Pamela Geller, "Over Before It Started," *Atlas Shrugs*, January 18, 2011; Robert Emerson, "King Caves Again," *Jihad Watch*, February 28, 2011; "King Hearing Falls Short, As Predicted," *Investor's Business Daily*, March 14, 2011.
[51] Lee Baca, testimony before the House Committee on Homeland Security, Hearing on "The Extent of Radicalization in the American Muslim Community and that Community's Response," March 10, 2011.

leaders."[52] The question remained "whether or not [Muslim-Americans] are fully cooperating with police and law enforcement," King said on national television that evening.[53]

This hearing highlights ongoing disagreement over the extent and threat of Muslim-American terrorism. Like other minority groups in American history, Muslim-Americans are suspected of harboring extremists, of imperfect loyalty to the United States, of an inability to assimilate to dominant cultures — similar suspicions surrounded German-Americans during World War I, Italian-Americans during the Anarchist and Red Scares of the late 19th and early 20th century, and Japanese-Americans during World War II, among other episodes. After his Congressional hearing, Representative King told reporters, "In a democracy, I believe that putting the facts on the table is the best way to address these issues."[54] This paper attempts to put facts on the table.[55]

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[52] Peter King on C-SPAN, March 10, 2011.

[53] Peter King on "The Sean Hannity Show," Fox News, March 10, 2011.

[54] C-SPAN, March 10, 2011.

[55] Acknowledgments