News Release

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Report shows most Muslim-American terrorism cases last year involved fighters going to Syria

Violent extremism involved a small number of Muslim-Americans in 2014

(Durham, N.C. – Feb. 9, 2015) – A new report issued this week by the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security shows that terrorist plots involving Muslim-Americans accounted for only a small fraction of the threats to public safety in the United States.

The center publishes its report annually to offer systematic evidence on the pressing issues of terrorism and homeland security. Data from past reports has been cited in Congressional testimony, White House policy documents, national and international media, and scholarly work on these subjects.

The 2014 report shows that growth in terrorism cases involving Muslim-Americans can be attributed to individuals seeking to join revolutionary groups in Syria. Of the 25 Muslim-Americans associated with terrorism in 2014, six plotted or engaged in violence in the United States. This number equals the lowest total since 2008.

“That’s far less than one would guess from media coverage and government resources devoted to this concern,” said Charles Kurzman, a professor of sociology in UNC-Chapel Hill’s College of Arts and Sciences and author of the report. “Despite concern about the radicalizing effect of the civil wars in Syria and elsewhere, violent extremism continued to attract a miniscule number of adherents among Muslim-Americans in 2014.”

David Schanzer, director of the center and an associate professor of the practice at Duke University, said it comes as no surprise that the brutal Syrian civil war is stimulating a small number of American youth to attempt to join the fighting.

“This report is striking, however, for the data showing that hardly any Muslim-Americans—about eight per year—have been involved in terrorism offenses against targets inside the United States since 9/11,” Schanzer said. “This terrorism has caused 50 deaths in over 13 years, whereas 136 people were killed in mass shooting incidents in the United States in 2014 alone.”
The center is a collaborative effort among Duke University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and RTI International. For more information and to view the report, visit the Triangle Center on Homeland Security: http://sites.duke.edu/tcth.

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