

Building Bridges

TO STRENGTHEN AMERICA

FORGING AN EFFECTIVE COUNTERTERRORISM ENTERPRISE
BETWEEN MUSLIM AMERICANS & LAW ENFORCEMENT

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PART 1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Making Muslims part of the solution since 1988
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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to outline a suggested “blueprint” for how Muslim American communities can be an asset in securing our nation while preserving the rights of all Americans, as defined by a Muslim American perspective. This report focuses on several key components:

- Assessing current public opinion and policy discourse on violent extremism
- Understanding processes leading to “radicalization” and violent extremism
- Critiquing the effectiveness of current counterterrorism policies such as informants, NSA wiretapping, racial profiling, and national security letters
- Outlining a model for a community-law enforcement partnership based on community-oriented policing
- Addressing potential challenges to community-oriented policing

Immediately after 9/11, hundreds of Muslim religious scholars, politicians and activists, in the United States and around the world, rejected the legitimacy of terrorism as contrary to Islamic teachings.¹

Despite the repeated denunciations and actions from Muslim leaders and institutions, a strong misperception persists – often repeated in media outlets – that Muslim Americans have remained silent about terrorism. Despite the fact that only 8% of Muslims believe suicide bombing against civilians is “often/sometimes” justified, some biased commentators have voiced doubt over the loyalty of Muslim Americans and argue they constitute a domestic security threat.

Such biased analyses ignored other important findings and failed to put the data into a comparative context. A University of Maryland survey found 24% of Americans thought “bombing or other attacks intentionally aimed at civilians” are “often or sometimes justified.”² Yet no one has made similar accusations against these segments of American society.

In addition to have an accurate understanding of Muslim Americans’ perceptions about national security issues, it is also necessary to know how extremist viewpoints become adopted by people. There are five key theories explaining why some Muslims become “radicalized”: 1) Socio-Economic Deprivation, 2) Identity Politics, 3) Social Affiliations, 4) Political Marginalization/Grievances, and 5) Presence of Radical Ideology.

While each theory makes important contributions to the study of violent extremism, each theory on its own is insufficient to describe what conditions lead to violent extremism. Using the work of Quintan Wiktorowicz, as its foundation, the report pieces together a hybrid theory of “radicalization” and terrorist recruitment. *Ultimately, radicalization is a complex and*

multi-faceted process that cannot be explained or dealt with through either simplistic analyses or uni-dimensional policy responses.

Current counterterrorism policies such as the under-regulation and overuse of informants, NSA domestic spying, and use of National Security Letters and Section 215 powers under the Patriot Act are thoroughly examined. Despite their wide-casting and invasive nature, these policies are ultimately ineffective and constitute counterproductive counterterrorism.

Instead, this report argues the most effective way to deal with the challenge of radicalization and violent extremism is for law enforcement and Muslim American community leaders to partner together. *More specifically, MPAC argues for a domestic counterterrorism enterprise centered on community-oriented policing.* Community-oriented policing is a proactive style of policing primarily focused on community partnerships and crime prevention.

In order to simplify the relationship between violent extremism and the community-oriented policing enterprise, this report uses a market analogy: *Both terrorist groups and the community-oriented policing enterprise are similar to business firms.*

A “terrorist business firm” uses recruitment “advertisements” to tap into a market of people experiencing identity crises. These identity-conflicted individuals are the labor pool or “market for martyrs” that terrorist business firms recruit from.

A community-oriented policing enterprise would compete against terrorist business firms in the “market for martyrs” and seek to maintain public security. The enterprise is analogous to a “product-extension merger,” and requires both a division of labor and cooperation between law enforcement and Muslim communities. *In this model, law enforcement focuses on criminal behavior while Muslim American communities deal with the ideological and social components which lead to violent extremism.*

Law enforcement needs to ensure that its actions do not undermine Muslim communities’ efforts and thus end up expanding the market for martyrs. Simultaneously, Muslim American communities need to maintain their willingness to assist legitimate law enforcement efforts to clamp down on terrorist firms’ ability to operate within the market without impunity.

The relationship between law enforcement and Muslim communities is a two-way street. For law enforcement agencies, we believe there are four essential principles for successful engagement with Muslim communities:

1. **Decisions and assessments of Muslim communities must be made based on credible information.** Law enforcement must make sure that whatever judgments it makes about Muslim communities must come from credible sources.
2. **Respect for communities’ civil rights and civil liberties.** In the current political climate, the actions of certain law enforcement agencies – whether spying on peaceful activist groups and houses of worship without reasonable suspicion, or religious profiling – have added to difficulties. These actions are not only contrary to American political values, they are counterproductive by eliciting fear within communities and making individuals less likely to cooperate with law enforcement.

3. **Move away from a “securitized” relationship.** Even if one were to look at this purely from a security perspective, a relationship based on fear of terrorism only adds to communities’ sense of isolation and alienation.
4. **Leave the counterradicalization to Muslim communities.** Aside from a respect for civil rights and liberties, law enforcement must make sure its actions avoid the theological and political issues Muslim communities must deal with themselves. Doing otherwise is a task law enforcement are ill-tasked to handle and will undermine mainstream Muslim voices.

Muslim American communities can serve an important counterradicalization role through intellectual and social service initiatives that create a hostile environment for terrorist recruitment. While law enforcement focuses on counterterrorism (criminal activity), Muslim communities can protect the nation through counterradicalization efforts.

On the ideological front, Muslim American leaders and communities have been very strong and consistent in their denunciations of terrorism since 9/11. However, intellectual responses like denunciation and prominent legal opinions are not the only response Muslim communities must take to effectively prevent radicalism. Here, Muslim institutions and communities must also take a lead role.

Muslim Americans must have the necessary social services available to them to inoculate their communities, including the most vulnerable members, against extremist ideologies. A vibrant civil society is necessary to the long-term defeat of extremist ideas. It ensures Muslims’ energies are channeled into mainstream activism that secures full integration into American society through political and civic engagement rather than fostering isolation and alienation that breeds extremism.

Attention must also be given to social programming that expands religious literacy and addresses social issues relevant to youth relevant like drug use, peer pressure and understanding one’s Muslim American identity. Furthermore, a long-term vision of Muslim institution building is necessary to develop social, political and intellectual growth of Muslim American communities.

Additionally, there are important tactical and strategic advantages to community-oriented policing over other forms of information gathering, such as intelligence-led policing. Unlike intelligence-led policing, community-oriented policing’s heavier emphasis on community partnerships reduces the negative impact on both community-police relations and democratic values. *Community-oriented policing also gathers and contextualizes various bits of information better to construct a fuller intelligence assessment.*

However, there are several challenges that come with a community-oriented policing strategy emanating from state and federal law enforcement agencies. By their very nature, federal entities have a much more difficult time engaging in community-oriented policing. This requires a greater focus on state and local efforts to develop information gathering capacities that can prevent and detect terrorist plots.

Some question whether or not local and state police can handle counterterrorism responsibilities. However, recent history going back no more than 30 years shows how local and state law enforcement have been at the forefront of detecting and preventing terrorists from carrying out attacks.

While some may have concerns about the effectiveness of eliciting citizen assistance in a community-oriented policing counterterrorism strategy, there have been a large number of plots, national and international, which have been prevented using such an approach. These successes include help from Muslims. **In fact Muslim communities have helped law enforcement foil 1 out of every 3 Al-Qaeda related plots directed at the United States since 9/11.**

Establishing and managing relationships with communities is a necessary, but also very challenging process. Those communities that tend to be confrontational and/or fearful of police are far less likely to act as cooperative partners. Achieving the optimal performance that mitigates or avoids confrontation is complex; however, various law enforcement agencies and communities have developed three strategies to deal with these issues. The first is synthesizing distinct values and priorities. Second is creating internal divisions of labor between those units that focus on violent crimes and those units which focus on disorder issues and community-oriented policing. The third strategy is to balance the competing values, priorities and approaches within policing organizations.

In addition, local police agencies have also developed a number of strategies to deal with the specific challenges posed when working with various immigrant communities:

- Partnering with other departments facing similar challenges
- Providing strong executive leadership
- Recruiting a more diverse police force
- Making a community internship part of the cadet curriculum.

A community-oriented policing counterterrorism strategy must also have the right kind of state and federal level structures to provide support. This includes not only ensuring that the actions taken by law enforcement at these levels do not undermine community relations, but also that they properly share information between police agencies at the various local, state and federal levels.

The two main entities responsible for such actions are the Fusion Centers and Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTFs). The current functions and structures of Fusion Centers and JTTFs are examined closely in this report. We find that neither of these two entities are properly structured to support community-oriented policing, therefore requiring reform. The current investigative approaches used by Fusion Centers and JTTFs end up gathering massive amounts of data, ultimately harming peoples' civil liberties, while failing to monitor and prevent real threats.

The report ends with a series of recommendations targeted towards various public and private entities.

To Muslim American Communities:

- Develop better programming and support networks, particularly for Muslim youth and converts.
- Promote partnership and information exchanges between Muslim communities and institutions.
- Invest in long-term homegrown religious leadership education and development.
- Invest in Muslim youth leadership training.
- Invest in long-term institutional creation and development.
- Counter cyber-based extremism.

To Law Enforcement:

- Continue to adopt community-oriented policing practices.
- Continue to research and adopt practices reconciling federal, local and state policing efforts and priorities within Joint Terrorism Task Forces.
- Adopt MPAC's principles for community engagement with Muslim Americans.
- Highlight Muslim American contributions to local and national security.

To Local, State and Federal Governments:

- Raise legal standards and build infrastructure to protect civil liberties.
- Take steps to end racial profiling.
- Overhaul the Fusion Center development process at the federal level.
- Encourage coordination of Fusion Center development at the state level.
- Expand investments in better human capital acquisition and training.
- Encourage further research and adoption of community-oriented policing practices.

Defining Important Terms

Before entering into the heart of our paper, it is important that we provide some important definitions upfront to the reader. Precise terminology is key to achieving a more accurate and nuanced understanding of concepts and, ultimately policies, that policymakers and communities must encounter and implement. The following definitions are offered:

Radicalization – A process where individuals or groups come to intellectually approve of the use of violence against civilians for political aims. Radicalization differs from violent extremism in that violent extremists explicitly encourage or commit acts of violence or provide material support to those who do. Radicals engage in lawful, constitutionally protected free speech and other non-violent and legal activities, but may adhere to an extremist ideology.

Violent Extremism – Is a criminal act inspired, at least in part, by political ideology that seeks to employ violence against unarmed civilians (as defined by the Geneva Conventions). Violent extremism differs from radicalization in that violent extremists explicitly commit acts of politically-motivated violence, incite people to politically-motivated violence, or provide material support to those who do. It moves from the realm of constitutionally-protected activities into criminal behavior.

Racial Profiling³ – The practice of targeting individuals for police or security interdiction, detention or other disparate treatment based primarily on their race, religion or ethnicity in the belief that certain racial, religious and/or ethnic groups are more likely to engage in unlawful behavior.

Endnotes

¹ For a comprehensive list of Muslim terror denunciations, see: “Muslim Voices Against Extremism and Terrorism.” *The Muslim American*, (June 1, 2007). Available at: http://www.theamericanmuslim.org/tam.php/features/articles/muslim_voices_against_extremism_and_terrorism_2/.

² Kenneth Ballen, “The Myth of Muslim Support for Terror.” *Christian Science Monitor*, (February 23, 2007). Available at: <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0223/p09s01-coop.html>.

³ This term was modified from the Congressional Research Service’s definition. See: Garrine P. Laney, “Racial Profiling: Issues and Federal Legislative Proposals and Options.” *Congressional Research Service*, (February 17, 2004). P. 1. Available at: http://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/crsreports/crsdocuments/RI.32231_02172004.pdf.



Founded in 1988, MPAC is an American institution which informs and shapes public opinion and policy by serving as a trusted resource to decision makers in government, media and policy institutions. MPAC is also committed to developing leaders with the purpose of enhancing the political and civic participation of Muslim Americans.

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