Muslim American Views on National Security Issues

Immediately after 9/11, there was widespread denunciation of the attacks and terrorism in general. 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. One example includes the July 2005 “fatwa” against terrorism issued by the 18-member board of the Fiqh Council of North America. Another example is the July 2006 Amman Message, an anti-terrorism statement endorsed by over 500 of the most prominent Muslim religious scholars from around the world and representing all the major Islamic legal and theological schools of thought. In another case, over 6,000 conservative Indian Muslim scholars issued a collective anti-terrorism statement in November 2008.

As an organization working with mainstream Muslim American communities, MPAC is extremely concerned about preserving America’s core values while ensuring its national security. MPAC is committed to keeping our nation secure through grassroots efforts, such as our National Grassroots Campaign to Fight Terrorism, engagement with law enforcement officials locally and federally and providing expert testimony on Capitol Hill to assist policymakers.

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. Some have gone further, voicing doubt over the loyalty of Muslim Americans and argue they constitute a domestic security threat.

As we elaborated in other policy papers, fear of Muslims based on exaggerated analyses of possible terrorist threats is both contrary to American values and ineffective and counterproductive counterterrorism work.

A May 2007 poll by the Pew Research Center conducted the first-ever nationwide survey of Muslim Americans, Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream, to gauge their attitudes on a wide range of social, political and economic issues. Among other things, the research found:

- Muslims have an overall positive view of the larger American society,
- Most Muslim Americans believe as long as one works hard economic prosperity is possible to achieve, and
- Overall Muslims appear to be highly socially integrated into American society.

Nevertheless some biased commentators conducted a selective analysis of the poll’s results. As a result this raised two primary fears about American Muslims.
One of these concerns is over the loyalty of Muslim Americans to their country. The Pew survey found almost half of Muslim Americans (47%) surveyed said they “think of themselves first as a Muslim, rather than as an American.” While this might appear troubling at first, it must be compared to the findings from other communities. An earlier 2006 Pew poll found 42% of Christians (including 65% of Christian Evangelicals) said they were Christian first, rather than American.

Second, putting aside the fact that Muslim communities have stood strongly against terrorism – including proactively assisting law enforcement against violent threats (see p. 43) – the question itself is flawed. The question was presented in a way forcing Muslims to choose between their faith and citizenship. As a result of this methodological bias, it potentially skews results.

A 2008 study by the University of Washington, entitled Muslim American Public Opinion Survey (MAPOS), provides important insights. Similar in demographic makeup to the 2007 Pew poll, the MAPOS study avoids the “either-or” pitfall by asking respondents about the compatibility between Islam and American political values. The researchers found a plurality of Muslim Americans (34%) “very much” believes “Islamic teachings are compatible with participation in the American political system.” A further 32% said “somewhat” compatible, while 21% said “a little” and 13% said “not at all.”
The principal investigators of the MAPOS study, Matt Barreto and Karam Dana, analyzed the data further and came to an important conclusion: those with higher knowledge and practice of Islamic teachings were more likely to believe in the compatibility between American political participation and Islamic principles. In other words, the more religious an Muslim American is, the more likely s/he is to going to believe in the American political system and be civically engaged.

Another concern taken from the Pew study is whether or not Muslims are supportive of violence against civilians. The survey found only 8% of Muslim Americans believed suicide bombing against civilian targets is “often/sometimes” justified. Yet some biased commentators have spun the results to make it appear as though entire segments of Muslim American communities pose a security risk. Such skewed framing also fails to put these findings 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.” Yet no one has made similar accusations against these segments of American society.

Furthermore, such a biased approach also ignores empirical research examining the number of attempted and actual mass-casualty terrorist attacks against the United States perpetrated by Muslim and non-Muslim suspects. As of the time of this writing, according to MPAC’s Post-9/11 Terrorism Database, there have been 35 actual or attempted plots, both domestic and international, by Muslim violent extremists since 9/11.

In contrast, there have been 68 actual or attempted plots by domestic-only non-Muslim violent extremists since 9/11. This figure also includes at least five cases of actual or attempted possession of chemical and radiological weapons. (No such plots involving chemical or radiological weaponry were reported among the Muslim cases.)

### Domestic Terrorists & Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Possession

Our database shows five cases of attempted or actual possession of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear material. These five incidents are:

- **March 12, 2002**: Anarchist Joseph Konopka was found in possession of deadly amounts of sodium cyanide and potassium cyanide.
- **April 10, 2003**: Anti-government extremist William Krar is arrested in possession of a cache of small arms and a cyanide bomb capable of killing up to 6,000 people.
- **October 25, 2004**: Neo-Nazi Demetrius “Van” Crocker is arrested for attempting to acquire Sarin nerve agent and C-4 plastic explosives.
- **December 9, 2008**: The FBI discovers “radiological dispersal device components and literature, and radioactive materials” at the home of Neo-Nazi James Cummings.
- **March 2010**: Local police arrest White Supremacist brothers Daniel and Timothy Robinson in possession of materials to make bio-chemical weapons.
**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/](http://www.theamericanmuslim.org/tam.php/features/articles/muslim Voices_against_extremism_and_terrorism_2/).


3 See: [www.anmanmessage.com](http://www.anmanmessage.com).


5 For further information, see: [http://www.mpac.org/negft/](http://www.mpac.org/negft/).


8 Thomas L. Friedman, “If It’s a Muslim Problem, It Needs a Muslim Solution.” *New York Times*, (July 8, 2005). Available at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/08/opinion/08friedman.html?_r=1&incamp=article_popular_5](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/08/opinion/08friedman.html?_r=1&incamp=article_popular_5); Also see a bloggers analysis of an Associated Press article on the alleged silence of European Muslims against terrorism. See: “Why are Muslims Silent on Terrorism?” *Little Green Footballs*, (June 24, 2006). Available at: [http://littlegreenfootballs.com/article/21202_Why_Are_Muslims_Silent_on_Terrorism](http://littlegreenfootballs.com/article/21202_Why_Are_Muslims_Silent_on_Terrorism).


13 “Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream,” P. 31.


15 Ibid., P. 19.

16 Ibid., P. 37-38.

17 Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream,” P. 53.


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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