



Linking you to your dream home.
tampabay.com/homelink

St. Petersburg Times
tampabay.com

January 11, 2010

We must work with Muslim-Americans

By David Schanzer, special to the Times

Between the Christmas Day airliner attack, the recent spate of domestic terrorism arrests and the Fort Hood shooting, people are understandably concerned about homegrown terrorism involving Muslim-Americans.

Between the Christmas Day airliner attack, the recent spate of domestic terrorism arrests and the Fort Hood shooting, people are understandably concerned about homegrown terrorism involving Muslim-Americans. And while the potential for this form of terrorism is real, it is largely overstated.

Despite a troubling spike in terrorism arrests and incidents in 2009, violent terrorist activity by Muslim-Americans since 9/11 is rare. In the 100 months since 9/11, 139 Muslim-Americans have been accused of planning or carrying out terror-related violence.

To put this in perspective, more than 136,000 people have been murdered in the United States since 9/11, and only 31 of those murders were committed by these Muslim-Americans.

Together with University of North Carolina sociology professor Charles Kurzman and Duke University religion professor Ebrahim Moosa, I have been studying Muslim-Americans for the past two years to learn about how they deal with the threat of radicalization within their communities and to identify ways that may help prevent home-grown terrorism in the future.

We found:

- Muslim-Americans organizations and the vast majority of individuals who we interviewed firmly reject the radical extremist ideology that justifies the use of violence to achieve political ends.
- Muslim-Americans have taken a number of positive steps to reduce the potential for radicalization in their communities. They have consistently spoken out against terrorist incidents, and counseled or sometimes cast out from mosques and community groups those expressing radical views. Muslim-Americans also provide information to law enforcement about radical individuals who might engage in violence.
- Muslim-Americans feel the strain of living in America during the post-9/11 era. They perceive both official and societal discrimination, endure negative portrayals in the media and worry about the many barriers to assimilation and participation in mainstream American life.

- Muslim-Americans are responding to these concerns through increased political activity, community-building activities, and forming a strong identity as a religious subgroup.

Counterterrorism officials should take heed of these findings. Actions that distance Muslim-Americans from mainstream society and increase social isolation will likely reduce productive cooperation with law enforcement and possibly contribute to the conditions that lead to radicalization.

To stave off this possibility, Muslim-Americans should be encouraged to participate in political institutions, which provide an outlet for grievances and expose our political system to viewpoints that might otherwise be unheard. Political participation demonstrates to Muslims both here and around the world that, in America, normal, nonviolent action can lead to positive social change. It is therefore important that both political parties include Muslim-Americans in their organizations and actively seek support of Muslim-Americans through the political process.

We also recommend government support for community-building activities such as youth centers, public health clinics, housing initiatives and child care facilities. Such outreach would show Muslim-Americans that America cares about the strength and vibrancy of their communities, not just the contribution they can make to counterterrorism. It may turn out that the contacts made with Muslim-Americans through these initiatives will build the type of relationships that result in better counterterrorism intelligence. These activities are especially important in isolated immigrant communities.

Additionally, current tensions between Muslim-Americans and law enforcement need to be addressed, especially in regard to the use of informants within Muslim-American communities to build criminal cases. Some Muslim-Americans view many of the cases brought against Muslim-Americans as instances of entrapment. A clearing of the air on this issue is urgently needed. Law enforcement should develop a policy on when to use informants, especially actions involving infiltration of sacred spaces such as mosques. This policy should be discussed with Muslim-American organizations and strictly enforced. For their part, Muslim-Americans must realize that use of informants is a traditional, accepted law enforcement tactic that is appropriate in some cases.

Policies that alienate Muslim-American communities in an effort to crack down on terrorism are likely to exacerbate, not reduce, the threat of homegrown terrorism. Initiatives that treat Muslim-Americans as part of the solution to this problem are far more likely to be successful.

David Schanzer is an associate professor at Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy and director of the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security.

St. Petersburg Times



2010 St. Petersburg Times. Permission granted for up to 5 copies. All rights reserved.

You may forward this article or get additional permissions by typing <http://license.icopyright.net/3.86187>
`icx_id=1064665` into any web browser. St. Petersburg Times and St. Petersburg Times logos are registered trademarks of St. Petersburg Times. The iCopyright logo is a registered trademark of iCopyright, Inc.