

# A Guide to Lawful Islamism in the United States



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Over the past two decades, commentary and investigations by media, academia and political organizations on the subject of Islamism in the United States have focused disproportionately on jihadist networks. This focus has mostly left lawful Islamist movements free to flourish quietly, despite posing a grave, long term threat of their own. A full understanding of the make-up and intricacies of Islamism in the United States has remained curiously absent from public and political discussions, despite its extreme relevance.

Estimates of population numbers and demographics vary wildly. The most recent and extensive survey, carried out in 2017 by the Pew Research Center, estimated that 3.45 million Muslims live in the United States, equaling about 1 percent of the U.S. population.<sup>1</sup> Other surveys have estimated that 55 percent of U.S. Muslims identify themselves as Sunnis, 16 percent as Shia, with rest claiming no specific affiliation (describing themselves as “just a Muslim”). 58 percent of Muslims in the U.S. are first generation immigrants. Of the native-born, 18 percent are second generation. Muslim Americans have come from at least 77 different countries. 14 percent of Muslim immigrants to the United States come from the Arab world (Middle East and North Africa), 20 percent from South Asia, and 6 percent come from Iran.<sup>2</sup>

There is no good estimate for the number of Islamists within American Islam. Yet, in America and across the West, Muslims are often treated by policymakers as a homogenous bloc with a single collective voice. In fact, American Islam itself is extraordinarily varied. The dozens of religious sects and movements that constitute American Islam, however, have distinctly little say in how their own views are represented. For Muslims living in Western democracies, the lack of a hierarchical clergy within Sunni Islam, and the sheer diversity of Islam – its competing schools of theology, schools of jurisprudence, sects, ethnicities, cultures and mysticisms – produce a natural vacuum for political representation.

As inherently political movements, it is the seemingly unrepresentative Islamist groups that most easily fill that void. These Islamist groups are non-violent, in the sense that they have embraced the idea of introducing an Islamic state, or other theocratic ideals, through gradual political transition or pernicious public influence, as opposed to sudden violent imposition.<sup>3</sup> This publication is a guide to the lawful Islamist movements behind these theocratic endeavors.

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## Jamaat-e-Islami

Founded in British India in 1941 by the prominent Islamist theorist Abul Ala Maududi,<sup>4</sup> Jamaat-e-Islami today is active both across the Indian subcontinent and within the South Asia diaspora in the West. Maududi popularized the idea of Islamic revolution, writing that “the objective of the Islamic ‘Jihad’ is to eliminate the rule of an un-Islamic system and establish in its stead an Islamic system of state rule.”<sup>5</sup>

In 1971, Jamaat became a feared force across South Asia after its paramilitary groups assisted with the slaughter of tens of thousands of Bangladeshis during Bangladesh’s war of liberation from Pakistan. Since then, Jamaat has been closely involved with violence across the Indian subcontinent.<sup>6</sup> In 2014, IHS Jane’s Terrorism and Insurgency Centre named Jamaat’s student wing in Bangladesh, Islami Chhatra Shibir, as the third-most violent non-state armed group in the world.<sup>7</sup> In 2017, the U.S. government designated the head of a Jamaat affiliate in Pakistan and Kashmir as a “global terrorist.”<sup>8</sup> And in late 2018, Jamaat gained international notoriety over its rallies calling for the murder of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman who narrowly escaped the death penalty in Pakistan after being convicted of blasphemy.<sup>9</sup>

Despite never achieving significant political power or electoral success in South Asia, however, Jamaat exerts a high level of influence over Muslim communities in the West. Following the 1971 war, a number of Jamaatis escaped to Europe and America, where they established or joined Islamist groups posing as community organizations.<sup>10</sup> In 2013, for example, a Bangladeshi war-crimes tribunal convicted Ashrafuz Zaman Khan of leading a killing squad during Bangladesh’s 1971 war of independence, murdering 18 intellectuals.<sup>11</sup> Khan was tried *in absentia*, having fled to America after the 1971 war, where he served as vice-president of the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA).<sup>12</sup>

ICNA has long operated as the chief U.S. representative body of Jamaat-e-Islami. Originally named Halaqa Ahbab-e Islami, it described its mission as “to strengthen the Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan.”<sup>13</sup> In 1977, Halaqa Ahbabe Islami formally changed its name to ICNA.<sup>14</sup> The organization’s charter calls for the “establishment of the Islamic system of life” in the world, “whether it pertains to beliefs, rituals and morals or to economic, social or political spheres.”<sup>15</sup> ICNA’s curriculum promotes the teachings of Islamist scholar and Jamaat-e-Islami founder Maududi.<sup>16</sup> The organization’s 2010 *Member’s Handbook* lists five stages that involve going through the individual, family, societal, state, and global levels “to establish [a] true Islamic society” that “will lead to the unity of the Ummah [global Muslim community] and towards the establishment of the Khilafah [Caliphate].”<sup>17</sup>

ICNA has been a strong advocate<sup>18</sup> of the separatist movement in Kashmir. A 1997 article in its magazine, the *Message*, featured an exclusive interview with U.S.-designated Kashmiri terrorist Syed Salahuddin, and praised him as the “undisputed leader of the mujahideen struggling to liberate the territory of Kashmir from brutal Indian occupation.”<sup>19</sup>

Twice a year, ICNA hosts two enormous conferences in Chicago and Baltimore, in collaboration with the Muslim American Society (MAS). These conventions – which feature dozens of extreme Salafi clerics with histories of inciting hatred against Jews, women and homosexuals<sup>20</sup> – also include official representatives of Jamaat branches in South Asia.<sup>21</sup> Such collaboration with MAS, which was established by the Muslim Brotherhood, is not

unusual. Jamaat-e-Islami has long operated in partnership with the Muslim Brotherhood. Qazi Ahmad Hussain, a former head of Jamaat in Pakistan, has declared: “We consider ourselves as an integral part of the Brotherhood and the Islamic movement in Egypt... Our nation is one.”<sup>22</sup> In the West, Jamaat and the Brotherhood often work in tandem – an alliance sometimes referred to as the Ikhwan-Jamaat duopoly.<sup>23</sup>

But ICNA is not just one group; it is a coordinating body for a network of subsidiary organizations. Along with local branches, youth groups, foundations and medical clinics,<sup>24</sup> ICNA runs a youth group, named Young Muslims, and a number of *da'wah* [proselytization] campaigns – the most active of which is called WhyIslam. The “patron” of WhyIslam is Yusuf Islahi, a leader of Jamaat-e-Islami’s branch in India.<sup>25</sup> WhyIslam works in close collaboration with the Islamic Education & Research Academy, a U.K. Salafi organization condemned by British mainstream media for its extremist teachings.<sup>26</sup>

ICNA has also established two prominent aid charities: ICNA Relief, which works within the United States; and Helping Hand for Relief and Development (HHRD), which operates overseas – mostly in South Asia. HHRD funds and partners<sup>27</sup> with Jamaat-e-Islami’s welfare arm, Al Khidmat Foundation,<sup>28</sup> whose president, Naeem ur-Rehman, is closely involved with the designated Kashmiri jihadist group Hizbul Mujahideen.<sup>29</sup> Jamaat-e-Islami’s own website reports that Al-Khidmat has also funded the “Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas).”<sup>30</sup> In 2017, HHRD openly partnered with Lashkar-e-Taiba, the designated Pakistani terrorist organization responsible for the deadly 2008 Mumbai attacks.<sup>31</sup> ICNA Relief, meanwhile, is a partner of the READ Foundation, Al-Khidmat’s sister organization. Schools operated by READ Foundation in Kashmir have praised Mumtaz Qadri, an Islamic extremist who, in 2011, murdered Punjab governor Salman Taseer in retribution for Taseer’s public support for Asia Bibi.<sup>32</sup>

ICNA’s subsidiaries share staff and offices. Current HHRD chairman Mohsin Ansari also served as the head of ICNA Relief. Ansari openly identifies as a Jamaat member, promotes virulent anti-Semitism, and refers to the convicted 1971 war criminals as “heroes” whom the “Pakistani nation will remember... for centuries to come.”<sup>33</sup> In 2016, Ansari revealed that ICNA was asked to arrange funeral prayers for an executed Jamaat-e-Islami war criminal, Motiur Rahman Nizami, founder of the Al Badr killing squad. Ansari also mentioned Nizami’s son, Nakibur Rahman, stating that he “has worked in USA tirelessly for years to help relieve the victimization of Jamaat workers in Bangladesh.”<sup>34</sup>

Nakibur Rahman is part of the Muslim Ummah of North America (MUNA), another Jamaat-e-Islami organization that works closely with ICNA, but, more distinctly, represents supporters of Jamaat-e-Islami’s Bangladeshi branch. MUNA does not hide its Jamaati links. In 2010, MUNA organized a picnic with Muhammad Kamaruzzaman, JI’s assistant secretary general, as the guest of honor. A few years later, Kamaruzzaman was sentenced to death for his role in the massacre of 120 farmers during the 1971 War. In 2011, a senior JI leader, Mir Quasem Ali and his brother, Mir Masum Ali, who serves on MUNA’s executive board, reportedly spent over \$300,000 on lobbying to convince American lawmakers to oppose the Bangladeshi war crimes tribunal. Quasem Ali was hanged in September 2016 for his role in the atrocities.<sup>35</sup>

## Muslim Brotherhood

In Egypt and elsewhere across the Arab world, *Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimeen*, or the Muslim Brotherhood, since its very beginnings, has built bases of support and spread its ideology by establishing or wresting control of religious, community and charitable institutions.<sup>36</sup> The development of the Brotherhood in America is no different. In the United States, the origins of the Muslim Brotherhood lie with the Muslim Student Association (MSA), founded by Muslim Brotherhood activists who came to study in America during the 1960s. The MSA functioned as the organizational beachhead of Muslim Brotherhood activism in the US. Through conferences and events, publications, websites and other activities, the MSA promoted Islamism on university campuses throughout North America. The MSA was the predecessor to America's most prominent Muslim organizations, including the Muslim American Society, Council on American-Islamic Relations, Muslim Public Affairs Council, North American Islamic Trust, and the Islamic Society of North America.<sup>37</sup>

Decades later, in 2007, federal prosecutors named many of these Islamist groups and their officials as "unindicted co-conspirators" during the Holy Land Foundation terrorism financing trial. America's (self-proclaimed) Muslim leadership groups, the government discovered, were part of an Islamist network working to fund terrorism abroad and advance extremism at home.<sup>38</sup> And yet these activist organizations are the most prominent Islamic groups in American civil society. They are influential in local, state, and national politics and have established relationships with media outlets, academics, charities and other faith groups throughout the country.

Publicly, these groups are professionally-led activist organizations concerned with civil rights, religious education, political awareness, grass-roots organization, and other benign activities.<sup>39</sup> However, internal Brotherhood documents reveal another use for these organizations: promoting "the main goal of Islamic activism," which is "establishing the nation of Islam, the rule of God in the lives of humans, making people worship their Creator and cleansing the earth from the tyrants who assault God's sovereignty, the abominators in His earth and the suppressors of His creation."<sup>40</sup> Brotherhood officials have done so by promoting the creation of civic organizations with a covert, theocratic agenda – described by one Brotherhood official in the 1980s as "energizing political work fronts."<sup>41</sup>

### *The Muslim Student Association (MSA)*

Founded in 1963 by Brotherhood activists at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the MSA, or MSA National, served as a coordinating committee for Brotherhood activities during the organization's formative years in the United States.<sup>42</sup> Now a national organization, the MSA has about 98 affiliated university chapters in the United States and Canada.<sup>43</sup> The MSA proclaims "moderation," but public statements by MSA activists reveal an Islamist agenda and ideology. In 1999, an MSA publication at UCLA featured an editorial by MSA staff titled "The Spirit of Jihad," which stated, "When we hear someone refer to the great *Mujahid* (someone who struggles in Allah's cause) Osama bin Laden as a 'terrorist,' we should defend our brother and refer to him as a freedom fighter."<sup>44</sup> MSA officials have espoused the desire "to restore Islam to the leadership of society" and to be working toward "the reestablishment of the Islamic form of government."<sup>45</sup>

#### *The North American Islamic Trust (NAIT)*

NAIT was founded in 1973 by the MSA as a “national waqf (trust) organization.” NAIT’s website has stated: “Even though Muslims have been immigrating to the United States since the founding of the nation, many people and communities ultimately lost or abandoned their Islamic heritage due to social, and political reasons. Indeed, many indigenous masajid [mosques] and [Islamic] centers were lost or forgotten. To prevent this in the future, the organizers believed that creating a *waqf* or general trust to safeguard the properties of masajid and Islamic centers would be vital for the growth and maintenance of the American Muslim community.”<sup>46</sup> NAIT keeps a “foundational supporting relationship with MSA and the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA).”<sup>47</sup>

NAIT is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization and “holds titles to the real estate assets of Islamic centers and schools in more than forty states,”<sup>48</sup> making it, according to some analysts, a holding company and financial hub for various Muslim Brotherhood-tied groups in North America.<sup>49</sup> It also manages the Iman Fund, a no-load mutual fund, and runs American Trust Publications (which publishes Islamic literature, including the works of Brotherhood luminary Yusuf al Qaradawi<sup>50</sup>) and the Islamic Book Service.<sup>51</sup> A 1987 FBI investigation of NAIT concluded that the organization supported the “Islamic Revolution.” “Their support of JIHAD (a holy war) in the U.S. has been evidenced by the financial and organizational support provided through NAIT from Middle East countries to Muslims residing in the U.S. and Canada,” the FBI report concluded.

#### *The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA)*

ISNA, which emerged out of the MSA in 1981, was named as an unindicted co-conspirator in the Hamas financing trial against the Holy Land Foundation.<sup>52</sup> Along with NAIT, ISNA is included by federal prosecutors among the “individuals/entities who are and/or were members of the US Muslim Brotherhood.”<sup>53</sup> ISNA’s board of directors (Majlis Ash-Shura) included the chairman of NAIT, the president of the MSA, and the heads of ISNA’s other “constituent organizations”: the Association of Muslim Scientists, Engineers and Technology Professionals, the Islamic Medical Association of North America, the Canadian Islamic Trust, Muslim Youth of North America, and the Council of Islamic Schools of North America—some of which are explicitly named as Brotherhood-allied groups in internal Brotherhood documents.<sup>54</sup>

#### *Islamic Association for Palestine (IAP)*

IAP, which is now defunct, was a central player in the Muslim Brotherhood’s “Palestine Committee,” created to advance Hamas’ political and financial agenda in the United States.<sup>55</sup> IAP served as the Committee’s propaganda arm and its primary role involved organizing rallies and publishing magazines supporting Hamas. Other members of the Committee included its fundraising branch, the Holy Land for Relief and Development (HLF),<sup>56</sup> whose officials were convicted in 2008 of illegally routing more than \$12 million to Hamas.<sup>57</sup>

#### *The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)*

CAIR was founded in 1994 by three leaders of the Islamic Association for Palestine (IAP)—Nihad Awad, Omar Ahmad, and Rafeeq Jaber.<sup>58</sup> CAIR has defended convicted terrorists and other radicals and has opposed U.S. government prosecution of alleged terrorist financiers and supporters.<sup>59</sup> CAIR also claims that the “war on terrorism” is a “war on Islam” and has made repeated statements that reflect the group’s extremist and anti-Semitic positions.<sup>60</sup> The Anti-Defamation League has stated that CAIR is a key promoter of anti-Jewish sentiment.<sup>61</sup> CAIR was named an unindicted co-conspirator in the HLF trial.<sup>62</sup> During

testimony, FBI agent Lara Burns described CAIR as a front organization for Hamas.<sup>63</sup> In 2009, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) cut off contact with CAIR.<sup>64</sup> In 2014, the United Arab Emirates, a pious Muslim-majority government, designated CAIR as a terrorist organization.<sup>65</sup>

#### *The Muslim American Society (MAS)*

The Northern Virginia-based MAS was founded in 1993 as the Muslim Brotherhood's arm in the U.S., distinct from the Brotherhood's Egyptian branch.<sup>66</sup> Among its founding members was Ahmed Elkadi, who supposedly led the Brotherhood in the U.S. from 1984 to 1994.<sup>67</sup> Mohammad Mehdi Akef, the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt from 2004 to 2010, claims to have played a role in founding MAS in a push for more "openness" in the Brotherhood's activities in the U.S.<sup>68</sup>

MAS is reported to have instructed its leaders to distance themselves publicly from the Brotherhood. If a leader was asked about MAS' ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, he was to say that MAS was an independent organization.<sup>69</sup> Former MAS Secretary General Shaker El Sayed once said that: "MAS, like the Brotherhood, believes in the teachings of Brotherhood founder Hassan al-Banna, which are 'the closest reflection of how Islam should be in this life.'"<sup>70</sup>

MAS's ties to the Muslim Brotherhood were reaffirmed by convicted terrorist financier Abdurrahman Alamoudi, who told federal investigators in a 2012 interview that "[e]veryone knows that MAS is the Muslim Brotherhood."<sup>71</sup> MAS annually partners with ICNA to host its national conventions,<sup>72</sup> which feature extremist speakers who support jihadist violence<sup>73</sup> and advocate for Israel's destruction.<sup>74</sup>

#### *The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT)*

Conceived at a 1977 Islamic conference in Lugano, Switzerland, IIIT was founded four years later in Pennsylvania as "a private, non-profit, academic, cultural and educational institution, concerned with general issues of Islamic thought and education."<sup>75</sup> It is now based in Herndon, Virginia. IIIT ostensibly "promotes academic research on the methodology and philosophy of various disciplines, and gives special emphasis to the development of Islamic scholarship in contemporary social sciences."<sup>76</sup> However, IIIT has been accused by the U.S. government of contributing funds to the World and Islam Studies Enterprise (WISE), which was founded to support the Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorist organization.<sup>77</sup> IIIT is a part of a network of terror-linked companies and not-for-profit organizations based in Northern Virginia known as the SAAR Network.<sup>78</sup>

#### *American Muslims for Palestine (AMP)*

AMP is a virulently anti-Israeli group that actively defends Hamas<sup>79</sup> and has advocated for convicted terrorists.<sup>80</sup> The AMP is the successor to the Palestine Committee, whose members were at the heart of the Holy Land Foundation terrorism trial.<sup>81</sup> The Palestine Committee was created by the Muslim Brotherhood to advance Hamas' agenda politically and financially in the United States.<sup>82</sup> AMP hosts conferences<sup>83</sup> that feature openly anti-Semitic speakers and supports "resistance" against the "Zionist state."<sup>84</sup> The organization is also one of the main supporters of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) Movement against the Jewish state.

### *Islamic Relief*

Islamic Relief is one of the largest Islamic charities in the world. Founded in 1984, Islamic Relief today maintains branches and offices in over 20 countries and reports income of hundreds of millions of dollars, which includes sizeable grants from Western governments. The charity, first established in the U.K, was founded by Hani El Banna and Essam El Haddad. El-Haddad has also served as a member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's Guidance Bureau. In 2012, El-Haddad joined the election campaign of Muslim Brotherhood presidential candidate Mohamed Morsi, becoming his senior foreign policy adviser. Following the military intervention to remove Morsi, El-Haddad was charged by Egyptian prosecutors with collaborating with Hamas and Hezbollah. Islamic Relief collaborates with and funds several fronts for the designated terrorist organization Hamas.<sup>85</sup>

Islamic Relief's branch in America, Islamic Relief USA, is one of its largest, and is currently the most prominent Islamic aid charity in North America. The branch is chaired by Khaled Lamada, who is also the founder of Egyptian Americans for Democracy and Human Rights, one of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's lobbying arms in the United States. Lamada has circulated text praising the "jihad" of the "Mujahidin of Egypt" for "causing the Jews many defeats," and he has republished claims on Facebook that praise Hamas for inflicting a "huge defeat" against the "Zionist entity."<sup>86</sup>

Islamic Relief is beginning to feel the heat. In 2014, the United Arab Emirates designated Islamic Relief Worldwide as a terrorist organization, because of its links to the global Muslim Brotherhood. In 2017, the Bangladeshi government banned Islamic Relief from working with Rohingya refugees, and the UK Charity Commission opened an investigation into Islamic Relief's regular promotion of extremist preachers.<sup>87</sup> In 2018, members of Congress wrote to federal agencies demanding more information on an alleged investigation by the FBI, IRS and Office for Personnel Management into Islamic Relief's activities.<sup>88</sup> In 2020, the entire Islamic Relief board at its headquarters in the UK resigned after British media exposed the violent antisemitism of its officials.<sup>89</sup>

### American-style Islamism

As illustrated, leading American Muslim community organizations were founded and developed by Muslim Brotherhood operatives. In addition, mosques all over the country have been established with clear links to foreign Muslim Brotherhood branches. The Islamic Society of Boston, for example, is one of the largest mosques on the East Coast. Until recently, it operated under the control of the Muslim American Society, and its trustees have even included Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, the "spiritual leader" of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>90</sup> But the presence and influence of foreign Muslim Brotherhood leaders in American institutions has declined steadily over the past few decades. Mohamed Nimer, the former research director of CAIR, writes that since the 1980s, the Muslim Brotherhood network in America has "split into different formations that bore little resemblance to the old structures," and that Muslim Brotherhood-founded community groups such as MAS have "pursued survival through adaptation" by establishing autonomy from Arab Islamist leaders and even "watering down the expression of MB ideology."<sup>91</sup>

Supporters of Muslim Brotherhood ideology in the United States now appear to be led by an independent American Ikhwan - a specifically American version of the Islamist ideology brought by Arab immigrants to the United States in the 1960s. There is no evidence that American Brotherhood groups take directions any longer from Muslim Brotherhood leaders



in Cairo or Doha (although there is lots of evidence of continued general collaboration). The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood does continue to maintain, meanwhile, a small, distinct network of its own supporters in America, through groups such as Egyptian Americans for Freedom and Justice, which mostly campaigns against the Sisi regime in Egypt and has lobbied Congress against interdictions aimed at the global Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>92</sup>

While the old global and Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood eschewed involvement in Western politics, preferring to concentrate on the radicalization of Western Muslim communities, the American Ikhwan has meanwhile become closely involved with American progressive politics in recent years. This change is perhaps further development of the Brotherhood's covert strategy of co-option and exploitation, or perhaps it is partly to deflect from accusations of complicity with terror and extremism, as exposed by the 2008 Holy Land Foundation trial. Organizations such as CAIR, despite continued involvement with hardline Salafi clerics and regular promotion of extremist rhetoric, can now regularly be found rallying for Black Lives Matter and campaigning for "social justice," prison reform and higher minimum wages. As a result of this involvement with progressive causes, CAIR branches (whether by accident or design) are increasingly staffed with activists who spend more time promoting hardline progressivist agendas than involving themselves with traditional Islamist ideals – much to the concern of some Islamist clerics.<sup>93</sup> The Muslim Brotherhood component of American Islamism continues to develop fractiously. For all this change, however, this is little evidence of true moderation.

## Foreign Patronage

After funding the Muslim Brotherhood and its proxies in the United States for many years, Saudi Arabia began to withdraw support for the Brotherhood in 2013, before banning it a year later and denouncing its proxies in the United States.<sup>94</sup> American Islamists started to campaign against Saudi, supporting human rights campaigns against their former patrons.<sup>95</sup> Amid this tumult, Qatar quickly replaced Saudi, partnering with American Islamists and promoting their work through its regime-controlled institutions – particularly Al Jazeera. Senior CAIR officials have repeatedly visited Doha, enjoy regular features in Qatari media, and often speak at Qatari regime-linked events in the United States.<sup>96</sup> Officials from enormous regime entities, such as the Qatar Foundation, have spoken at events on the development of Islamic schooling organized by the Muslim Brotherhood-founded Islamic Society of North America.<sup>97</sup> And critics of Qatar have further documented instances of the Qatari regime's efforts to exploit the brutal murder of Jamal Khashoggi by Saudi Arabia with the assistance of American Islamist activists.<sup>98</sup>

Saudi was best known for the vast sums it donated to Islam in the West. There are a few examples of Qatari funding directly reaching Islamists in America: the Council on American-Islamic Relations has reportedly received over \$400,000 of Qatari funding;<sup>99</sup> the Memphis Islamic Center, home of modernist Salafi cleric Yasir Qadhi, was granted \$300,000 by the terror-linked Qatar Charity;<sup>100</sup> and Al Furqaan Foundation, an Illinois Salafi *da'wah* [proselytization] group, has received over \$1.6 million in "non-cash donations" – mostly comprising copies of the Quran – from the Qatari regime's RAF Foundation.<sup>101</sup> But there are not many other known examples. Qatar, in supplanting Saudi as a supporter of American Islamism, has eschewed direct funding of American Islam, preferring instead to echo

American Islamism's progressivist-themed Islamist rhetoric and influence the American public directly through its own institutions, such as Al Jazeera and the Qatar Foundation.<sup>102</sup>

Turkey has also become closely involved with the American Islamist scene in recent years, as Erdoğan-inspired Turkish Islamism has expanded in the U.S, finding ready allies among Muslim Brotherhood-offshoot groups. In 2016, Erdoğan travelled to Maryland to open the regime-funded Diyanet Center of America. Since then, the Center's events have featured prominent American Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi speakers.<sup>103</sup> The Diyanet Center is also planning close collaboration with the Muslim Brotherhood's chief thinktank, the International Institute of Islamic Thought.<sup>104</sup> CAIR director Nihad Awad has repeatedly met with Turkish regime officials,<sup>105</sup> and has spoken at pro-Erdoğan rallies organized by the regime-backed Turkish American National Steering Committee (TASC).<sup>106</sup> In 2016, Erdoğan's daughter attended the annual convention organized jointly by the Muslim American Society and the Islamic Circle of North America and spoke, defending her father's attacks on the Hizmet movement, which Erdoğan claims is responsible for an attempted coup.<sup>107</sup> The 2018 conference, meanwhile, featured the Turkish consul general in Chicago, Umut Acar, who delivered a message to attendees on behalf of President Erdoğan.<sup>108</sup>

## Islamists in Politics

Within the ambit of Islamist involvement in politics, unquestionably the most significant development of the last few years has been the increasing number of Islamist and Islamist-friendly politicians running for office. In 2018, Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar were elected to Congress with support of both Islamist and progressivist movements,<sup>109</sup> while Islamist activists such as Ibrahim Samirah (son of Muslim-Brotherhood operative Sabri Samirah)<sup>110</sup> were elected to state offices, despite accusations of anti-Semitism and extremist links.<sup>111</sup> Alongside enormous voter registration drives (a 2018 poll now claims that 75% of American Muslims are registered to vote, a 25% increase from 2016),<sup>112</sup> a major component of the Islamist electoral push has been the efforts of CAIR-linked organizations such as Engage and Jetpac to recruit, train, and promote candidates.<sup>113</sup> Over \$600,000 of campaign contributions from individuals linked to Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-e-Islami groups to political candidates has been logged.<sup>114</sup> American Islamism has shifted from merely cultivating political allies among progressive movements to seeking political power.

American Islamist movements have also invested considerable time in establishing lobby days in both the Capitol and in State Houses across America. In D.C., the annual National Muslim Advocacy Day, organized by Islamists tied to the Muslim Brotherhood and the Turkish regime, has brought hundreds of Islamist activists to meet with lawmakers – pushing legislation that benefits Islamist causes, and further legitimizing Islamists as representatives of ordinary American Muslims.<sup>115</sup>

## Salafism

Salafism in America is found in four distinct categories: quietists, activists, modernists and jihadists.

### *Quietists and Activists*

Most of the quietists – found in North American organizations such as the Quran and Sunnah Society – have long been strongly supportive of the Saudi regime, and have opposed political participation and involvement in jihadist causes. Consequently, the quietists have been staunchly opposed to political Islamist movements, especially the Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-e-Islami.<sup>116</sup>

The activist Salafis, on the other hand, primarily operated during the 1990s through the Islamic Assembly of North America (IANA). As the Salafi commentator Umar Lee notes in his memoir of Salafism in America, IANA was opposed to the Saudi regime (although its clerics were happy to study there) and “in favor of a global Islamic movement to bring about an Islamic state.”<sup>117</sup> Prominent Islamic figures involved with IANA included the notorious American Islamic leader Ali Al-Tamimi, who would later be convicted for supporting and encouraging jihad.<sup>118</sup>

But IANA was not the only voice of activist Salafism. A new generation of Black Salafi clerics and activists grew out of the Nation of Islam and Warith Deen Muhammad organizations from the 1970s to the 1990s. Some – including prominent clerics such as Siraj Wahhaj – were lured by offers of gratis religious training in Saudi Arabia; others were entranced by new charismatic leaders such as the former 1960s black power activist leader Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin (formerly known as H. Rap Brown), along with movements such as Darul Islam.<sup>119</sup> These activists were hardly Salafis as Saudi’s Wahhabis would have understood them; but these new clerics and movements fused activist various Salafi ideas with elements of black nationalism.

While the activist Salafis shared similar goals to those of political Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, during the 1990s, religious dogma and competition for adherents meant this did not lead to a fruitful alliance. Prominent mosques on the East Coast, such as Dar ul Hijrah in Virginia (whose imams later included Anwar Al-Awlaki, who went on to lead Al Qaeda in Yemen),<sup>120</sup> were a battleground for competing Islamist ideas. Umar Lee recounts that “the ‘Ikhwanis’ [Muslim Brotherhood] and Salafis fought in the area like the Bloods and Crips.”<sup>121</sup>

These schisms and intra-Islamist politics have been replaced with a very different array of Salafi forces today. Quietist Salafis are largely a spent force, with little influence and few supporters.<sup>122</sup> From the activist Salafis, on the other hand, a new modernist Salafi network was born, leading to an enormous collection of different clerical and activist organizations. The most prominent Salafi groups in America today are mostly either the original activist Salafis, who mostly continue to reject collaboration with political Islamist movements such as the Brotherhood; and a new generation of modernist Salafis, who advocate an ‘intersectional’ Islamism that has generated a powerful array of alliances with other radical movements, but Muslim and non-Muslim.

## *Modernists*

Modernist Salafis, best known by organizations such as the AlMaghrib Institute and the Yaqeen Institute, no longer fight the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood or Jamaat-e-Islami. Instead, the modernists have partly embraced Muslim Brotherhood involvement with modish mainstream political trends, and cemented alliances with leading Brotherhood community organizations. Clerics such as Yasir Qadhi and Omar Suleiman regularly partner with leading Muslim organizations such as CAIR, MAS and Islamic Relief. They have also embraced the idea of mixing old world Salafism with some elements of new world progressivism, mixing sermons about the ostensible evils of homosexuality and feminism<sup>123</sup> with praise of the Black Lives Matter movement and protests against the Trump administration's immigration policies.<sup>124</sup> MAS-ICNA, an annual conference organized by American Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-e-Islami activists, now relies heavily on modernist Salafi clerics to fill its speaker rosters.<sup>125</sup>

Modernist Salafis, despite Salafi seminary training and adherence to the Salafi jurisprudence carefully do not refer to themselves as Salafi, and even actively speak out against the term. Umar Lee, a traditionalist, and Yasir Qadhi, a modernist, both state that this is the product of previous over-zealous Salafi "inquisitions" that deemed some Muslims not Salafi enough, as well as intrusive edicts on proper Salafi behavior. While Qadhi rejects Salafism as a label, he makes it abundantly clear that he does not reject Salafi theology.<sup>126</sup>

In response to the rise of the modernist Salafi network, quietists and activists share a common concern over the purported dilution of Salafism – and of Islam – by the modernists. Some leading clerics preach that "Islam in the West is a resistance movement against totalitarian liberal ideology,"<sup>127</sup> and have looked at the activities of modernist Salafis with alarm. Activist and quietist Salafis accuse the modernists of trying to "westernise Islam" by appealing to progressivist impressions of Islam.<sup>128</sup>

Notwithstanding, the modernists have been remarkably successful, and have earned the trust of other politically-savvy Islamist movements. Over the past few years, the modernist Salafi network has become a leading Muslim voice in America. With wider appeal and better recognition, these modernist Salafis have established new seminaries, schools, mosques, lobby groups and even thinktanks to feed their growing presence.<sup>129</sup> Just a few years ago, modernist Salafis were mostly the clerical background noise of American Islamism, most often found serving the agendas of Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-e-Islami community organizations. Now, modernists are a distinct, media-savvy, politically-astute force, which has persuaded much of American society that they too speak on behalf of America's Muslims.

## *Jihadists*

There are a number of small U.S.-based formal and informal Salafi groups and networks that support violent jihad in America and elsewhere, but do not necessarily engage in violence themselves. Most of their activities are political and social in nature, consisting of provocative public statements and demonstrations.

Following the June 2017 London Bridge terror attack, in which 3 attackers killed 8 and wounded 48, Western media briefly turned their attention to an American cleric. The BBC reported that one of the attackers had been radicalized by Ahmed Musa Jibril, a prominent

Salafi preacher in Michigan.<sup>130</sup> Jibril has reportedly been a source of inspiration for a number of other Western terrorist operatives. But since his exclusion from several mosques in Michigan, Jibril and his network of supporters have primarily operated online – with his YouTube videos and social media accounts attracting tens of thousands of supporters from around the world.<sup>131</sup> One study found that 60 percent of foreign fighters in Syria followed Jibril on Twitter.<sup>132</sup>

There have been other attempts to form Salafi-Jihadist networks that skirt the line between ideological support for jihad and direct incitement to violence. Revolution Muslim [RM] was a New York-based *jihadist*-activist group that grew out of al-Muhajiroun, a prominent British Salafi jihadist movement.<sup>133</sup> Founded in 2007 “to invite people to proper Islam... and command the good... while forbidding the falsehood,” RM’s mission “is to one day see the Muslims united under one Khalifah [caliph] and under the commands of Allah.”<sup>134</sup> RM maintained an active blog and website, which serves as a forum for a dissemination of its views, proselytization, condemnation of U.S. policies, and even support for violence. In April 2014, Revolution Muslim co-founder Yousef al-Khattab was sentenced to two-and-a-half years in prison for advocating violence against the Chabad Jewish organization’s headquarters in Brooklyn.<sup>135</sup>

## Deobandis

Adherents of Deobandi Islam follow the Hanafi *maddhab* [school of jurisprudence], and almost all are of South Asian ethnicity. Today, the religious make-up of America’s South Asian Sunni Muslims somewhat mirrors the sectarian politics of South Asian Islam. As within South Asia, the two dominant groups are the Deobandis and Barelvis. Although both Deobandi and Barelvi Islam grew out of the Sufi tradition, Deobandism’s 19<sup>th</sup> century founding ideologues denounced many Sufi cultural traditions as idolatrous. In this sense, Deobandi Islam shares certain outlooks with its puritanical Arab cousins, the Salafis, despite following different schools of jurisprudence.<sup>136</sup> Some Salafis in the Middle East, such as the Saudi Wahhabi regime, have seen Deobandi Islam as an ideological ally, despite many Salafi clerics denouncing Deobandi theology as heretical. As with Salafism, Deobandi Islam breeds violence. In Pakistan, according to research conducted by Dr. Ejaz Hussain at the University of Pennsylvania, although it is estimated only about 20% of Muslims are Deobandi, an astonishing 90% of terrorist operatives are reportedly from Deobandi backgrounds.<sup>137</sup>

In a similar vein to Salafi networks in America, Deobandis are split over the extent to which followers should embrace civil society or isolate oneself from it. Broadly, most American Deobandis can be found in three camps: conservatives, modernists and a missionary movement – Tablighi Jamaat.

### *Conservatives*

Conservative Deobandis primarily operate through mosques and seminaries – the latter often named a Darul Uloom [house of knowledge]. Darul Uloom Al-Madania in Buffalo and the Institute of Islamic Education in Chicago operate the two longest running and largest Deobandi madrassahs in the United States, at which “strict gender segregation is a norm ... as is a general pattern of social isolation from the broader American society.”<sup>138</sup>

But while some conservative Deobandis eschew political participation, condemn music and dancing<sup>139</sup> and avoid proselytization efforts outside their own communities, inter alia, certainly not all isolate themselves from American society. An increasing number of conservative Deobandis can be found involved with interfaith activities,<sup>140</sup> establishing television channels,<sup>141</sup> and taking part in initiatives of political Islamist organizations linked to the Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-e-Islami.<sup>142</sup>

Notwithstanding, even the more forward-facing conservative Deobandi institutions maintain ties with hardline Pakistani madrassahs and clerics, and have had a number of congregants turn to terrorism. Adnan Shukrijumah, a former prayer leader at the Darul Uloom Institute in Florida, for instance, became one of Al Qaeda's highest-ranking officials.<sup>143</sup> Other congregants of the Darul Uloom Institute have included: Jose Padilla, who plotted to detonate a radioactive bomb; as well as Imran Mandhai and Shueyb Mossa Jokhan, who used the Darul Uloom Institute to plot a bombing campaign.<sup>144</sup> While the imam of the Institute, Shafayat Mohamed, has been praised by the media as a moderate – citing his interfaith dialogue efforts – in 2005, he wrote an article attacking Jews and claiming the 2004 Tsunami was punishment for homosexuality.<sup>145</sup> Other Darul Ulooms with terrorist congregants and students have included: Dar Al Uloom Al Islamiyah, at which the San Bernardino shooters prayed and married;<sup>146</sup> and the Flagler Mosque in Miami, whose imam, Hafiz Khan, was convicted in 2013 of funding the Taliban.<sup>147</sup>

A number of conservative Deobandis in the United States are also involved with Khatme Nubuwwat, an international movement, headquartered in Pakistan, that encourages violence against Ahmadiyyah Muslims. The Ahmadiyyah are a moderate Islamic sect founded in 19<sup>th</sup> century British India. However, many Islamic movements consider their beliefs heretical. Khatme Nubuwwat -- meaning "Finality of the Prophecy" – refers to the tenet held by most Islamic sects that there can be no prophet after Muhammad. Most Ahmadi Muslims, however, believe there was in fact another prophet. This belief, Canadian imam Usman Ahsan claims, is "enough to wage war" against them.<sup>148</sup> Khatme Nubuwwat offers a rare example of collaboration between Barelvi and Deobandi Muslims. In Pakistan, Khatme Nubuwwat is mostly led by Barelvis; in the United States, however, the Khatme Nubuwwat movement is run predominantly by Deobandi clerics. In 2017, conservative Deobandi clerics from across America gathered for a Khatme Nubuwwat conference, which was sponsored by several American Deobandi mosques, in Virginia. At the conference, Pakistani Deobandi cleric Qareeb ur Rehman noted that "those who claimed prophethood after Prophet Muhammad were not only given death sentences but were actually killed." Another Deobandi imam, Habib-ur-Rehman Ludhianvi, urged American Muslims to go before American courts to "explain that Qadianis [Ahmadis] are disrespecting Islam ... It should be made criminal for them to do so."<sup>149</sup>

### *Missionaries*

Conservative Deobandis also have a lot in common with Tablighi Jamaat (TJ) – the Deobandi missionary group, which, although a formally separate movement, operates mostly through Deobandi mosques in the West. TJ is a "world-wide movement which seeks to revive Islam by encouraging Muslims to lead their lives in accordance with the injunctions of Islamic law." In practice, TJ serves to bring ordinary Sunni Muslims into the Deobandi fold.<sup>150</sup> Rhetoric from TJ clerics is unmistakably extreme. One prominent cleric, Ebrahim Rangooni, has declared that TJ will "rescue the *ummah* [global Muslim community] from the culture

and civilisation of the Jews, the Christians and enemies of Islam” so as to “create such hatred for their ways as human beings have for urine and excreta.”<sup>151</sup> TJ promotes complete isolation from Western society. Some of its officials even refuse to use computers or keep written records.<sup>152</sup> Consequently, TJ promotes the use of internal community schooling and seminaries for Muslim children. Rangooni has warned TJ adherents about the “dangers” of Muslim children being educated by the “enemies of Allah” in non-Muslim schools: “Save your progeny from the education of school and college in the same way as you would save them from a lion or a wolf. ... To send them in the atmosphere of college is as dangerous as throwing them into hell with your own hands.”<sup>153</sup>

TJ is often described as a “quietist” movement that “remains aloof from worldly involvement, including, of course, all political affairs.”<sup>154</sup> However, analysts have also described TJ as a “driving force of Islamic extremism and a major recruiting agency for terrorist causes worldwide. ... Perhaps 80 percent of Islamist extremists in France come from Tablighi ranks, prompting French intelligence officers to call Tablighi Jamaat the ‘antechamber of fundamentalism.’”<sup>155</sup> Numerous terrorists have emerged from TJ networks, including “shoe bomber” Richard Reid, “dirty bomber” Jose Padilla, and American Taliban fighter John Walker Lindh.

In the United States, TJ is active up and down the East Coast, as well as in Houston, Los Angeles and San Francisco.<sup>156</sup> Its most prominent hub is the Al Falah Mosque in Corona, NY. Unusually, this institution openly acknowledges its affiliation with TJ.<sup>157</sup> A 2009 document seemingly authored by the New York Police Department states that dozens of the mosque’s congregants and visitors have been linked to jihadist operatives and terror plots, and claims that several congregants are members of Sipah-e-Sahaba, a designated Pakistani Deobandi terrorist organization.<sup>158</sup>

### *Modernists*

In stark contrast to the parochialism of TJ, in recent years, a new modernist strain of Deobandi Islam has appeared in the United States. Modernist Deobandis reject the isolationism of conservative Deobandis and appear to have little contact with missionary organizations such as TJ. Instead, the modernist Deobandis work closely with Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-e-Islami organizations, and partner closely with modernist Salafis. The most prominent example of a modernist Deobandi institution is the Qalam Institute. Founded in 2009, the Qalam Institute established a full-time seminary in 2013. Its two leading officials, Hussain Kamani and Abdul Nasir Jangda, both trained at traditional Deobandi seminaries: Kamani studied at Darul Uloom Bury, a U.K. seminary and the largest Deobandi institution in the West, which British newspapers have reported “preaches contempt for non-Muslims and warns of the ‘repulsive qualities’ of Christian and Jewish women”; while Jangda studied at Jamia Binoria in Karachi, which Pakistani officials have accused of terrorist links.<sup>159</sup>

But both Jangda and Kamani reject the insularity of their conservative Deobandi teachers. Both are regular speakers at conferences organized by the Jamaat-e-Islami-controlled Islamic Circle of North America, as well as at events organized by Muslim Brotherhood-linked groups such as the Muslim American Society and the Islamic Society of Boston.<sup>160</sup> Qalam Institute officials rely heavily on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, and have amassed hundreds of thousands of followers. Clerics such as Jangda takes a somewhat more liberal approach to the question of watching movies or

listening to music, which conservative Deobandi clerics generally teach is forbidden.<sup>161</sup> Despite these flashes of liberalism, Qalam officials have also expressed support for female sex slavery, encouraged the killing of adulterers, expressed virulent anti-Semitism and excused violent misogyny.<sup>162</sup>

### *Offshoots*

There are also a number of offshoots that emerged from conservative Deobandi circles but operate completely independently. Jamaat al Fuqra (JF) [Community of the Impoverished] was founded in New York in 1980 by Pakistani Deobandi religious leader Sheikh Mubarak Ali Gilani.<sup>163</sup> JF is accused of links to the Deobandi terrorist group in Pakistan, Jaish-e-Mohammad.<sup>164</sup> In the U.S, JF is a loosely structured movement primarily composed of African-American converts to Islam, who followed other Black American Muslims out of the Nation of Islam or Warith Deen Muhammad's movement. JF mixes Black Nationalist Salafism, which proved so popular with African-Americans in the 1970s-1990s, with elements of Deobandi Islam. JF functions officially through Muslims of the Americas, a non-profit organization, and the International Quranic Open University.<sup>165</sup> JF also runs a network of rural compounds in New York, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Arizona, Oregon, South Carolina, California and Colorado. Members of the group were involved in a wave of violent crime and fraud—including murder and arson—in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>166</sup>

A number of leading American clerics, closely involved with Islamist efforts, trained in Pakistan at institutions belonging to Tanzeem-e-Islami, an offshoot of Jamaat-e-Islami which was founded by the late Islamist thinker Israr Ahmed, who was a member of both Jamaat-e-Islami and Talibghi Jamaat.<sup>167</sup> Tanzeem-e-Islami mixes Deobandi theology and Jamaat-e-Islami political ideas.<sup>168</sup> The enormously popular American Islamic preachers Nouman Ali Khan and Wisam Sharieff both studied under Israr Ahmed, both run their own organizations for training and teaching Muslim youth, and both are involved with Salafi, Deobandi and Jamaat-e-Islami organizations across the United States.<sup>169</sup>

## Shia Islamism

In 1963, with the establishment of the Muslim Students Association (MSA) - in spite of the group's mostly Sunni membership and its links to the Muslim Brotherhood - four of its early presidents were in fact Shiites.<sup>170</sup> Over the next few decades, however, sectarian differences in both the Middle East and North America and the global growth of both Sunni and Shia Islamism fractured this interdenominational partnership, leading to the establishment of a rival Shia student organization: the Muslim Student Association Persian-Speaking Group (MSA-PSG). Over the next few decades, the number of Shia institutions increased - partly as a result of a growing Shia population in America, the exported fervor of the Iranian revolution and a new international Shiite consciousness; but it was also somewhat in response to the threat of Sunni Islamism, whose American institutions' claims to speak on behalf of all American Muslims concerned a new generation of awakened Shiite Muslims. Shia organizations decided to fight back. One organization, the Universal Muslim Association of America (UMAA), published a pamphlet in 2004 stating that "CAIR, ISNA, ICNA, MSA and other such organizations simply function as the outposts" for a "very large Wahhabi empire."<sup>171</sup> But UMAA, despite claiming to represent all Shiites, is in fact specifically linked to Ayatollah Sistani,<sup>172</sup> a leader within the Shiite Twelver community,



widely regarded as a moderate rival to Iran's Ayatollah Khamenei.<sup>173</sup> Shia Islam, like Sunni Islam, comprises many different groups and sects, and no one organization truly represents American Shia opinion.

Shia Muslims in America mostly consist of Nizari Ismailis, who follow Aga Khan; Bohras, who mostly hail from South Asia; and Twelvers, the largest group, which comprises a varied mix of Persians, Arabs, South Asians, East Africans and Africa-American converts. Estimates suggest Shiites constitute one fifth of American Muslims. The largest Shiite group in America is the Iranian Twelvers, whose population is estimated to be as high as one million. Islamism within Shia Islam is found predominantly among the Twelvers. Unlike Sunni Islam, Shia Islam is hierarchical, with many Twelvers following a specific *marja* [Shia judicial authority].<sup>174</sup> While there are dozens of recognized *maraji*, two clerics appear to command the most significant authority among American Twelver Shiites: Ayatollah Khamenei of Iran, and Ayatollah Sistani of Iraq.<sup>175</sup>

Previously, a considerable number of American Shiites followed the teachings of Ayatollah Al Khoei, but following his death in 1992, most of his followers and representative organizations in North America embraced Ayatollah Sistani's leadership. Similarly, the death of Ayatollah Fadlallah in 2010 has seen Lebanese American Twelvers shift their allegiance to either Sistani or Khamenei. Shiite organizations, clerics and worshippers all across America follow different *maraji*. The Al Khoei Foundation in New York and the Imam Mahdi Association of Marjaeya, for example, speak on behalf of Ayatollah Sistani. The prominent Californian Shia imam, Mustafa al-Qazwini, has served as a representative of Ayatollah Ruhani (an Iranian *marja* and critic of the Iranian regime). And the Islamic Institute of New York serves the followers of Ayatollah Khamenei.<sup>176</sup> There are also many other smaller groups representing lesser-known *maraji*. Some of these *maraji*, and their proxies in the United States vehemently oppose Iranian revolutionary Islamism, while others are overt supporters.

### Khomeinism

The most prominent supporters of Khomeinist Islamism in America fall into four main camps: the Iranian regime network, the Hezbollah network, African-American converts, and South Asian Shia Islamists.

#### *Iranian Regime Network*

A number of organizations and mosques across North America are distinct components of the Iranian regime network. The MSA-PSG, for example, has long promoted the Iranian regime and attacked (sometimes physically) its critics. In 1987, an FBI report revealed its members were required to pledge loyalty to the Iranian regime.<sup>177</sup>

Today, a leading component of the Iranian regime network is not a mosque or community, but a prominent New York charity: the Alavi Foundation. Established as the Pahlavi Foundation in 1958, it was later seized by the new Islamic regime following the 1979 revolution. It was renamed the Alavi Foundation in 1992. Since the early 1980s the Alavi Foundation has built and funded a number of prominent Shia centers, including the Islamic Education Center in Houston, the Islamic Education Center in New York, the Islamic Education Center in Maryland and the Qoba Foundation in California. All four institutions openly advocate for the Iranian regime and commemorate the Shia Islamist luminary,

Ayatollah Khomeini.<sup>178</sup> According to its website, the Alavi Foundation has also given financial donations to dozens of other Khomeinist Shiite institutions across North America.<sup>179</sup> In 2017, after a decade of legal battles, a federal jury found the Alavi Foundation to be a front for Tehran and guilty of funding the Iranian regime's activities, leading to a \$500 million Manhattan building, various other real estate and bank accounts forfeited to the United States government.<sup>180</sup>

There have also been several attempts among American Shia to establish counterpart organizations to national Sunni groups such as CAIR, ISNA and ICNA. In 2005, the Muslim Congress was launched – reportedly with the assistance of the Islamic Education Center of Houston,<sup>181</sup> an Alavi Foundation-funded institution that holds an annual event in celebration of Iran's 1979 revolution.<sup>182</sup> The Muslim Congress is a hardline alternative to the Sistani-leaning Universal Muslim Association of America, which, as reported by the *Associated Press*, openly promotes a virulent anti-Semitic and pro-Tehran narrative.<sup>183</sup> The Muslim Congress does not hide its Islamist links: its website openly publishes the writings of Ayatollah Khamenei;<sup>184</sup> it organizes marches for Al Quds Day, the Iranian regime's annual event in support of Hezbollah and violence against the state of Israel;<sup>185</sup> and its annual events feature hardline pro-regime Shiite Islamist clerics.<sup>186</sup>

In addition, several organizations in the U.S. lobby and campaign in support of the Iranian regime and against sanctions and military action by the United States. These include:

- the National Iranian American Council (NIAC), which partners closely with the Iranian regime, and is referred to in regime media as the “Iranian lobby” in the United States;<sup>187</sup>
- the Campaign Against Sanctions & Military Intervention in Iran (CASMI), whose members and board comprise leading regime supporters and officials;<sup>188</sup>
- and the American Iranian Council, whose officials have reportedly referred to the organization as an Iranian regime lobbying group, and whose staffers have included NIAC founder Trita Parsi.<sup>189</sup>

With the exception of the institutions listed above, however, most of the Iranian regime's network operates not through national political organizations, but through local religious organizations - mosques and community groups. This is in apparent contrast to Sunni Islamism in America, which sought, early on, to establish far-reaching national organizations and umbrella groups. The Islamic Institute of New York, for example, reportedly serves as Ayatollah Khamenei's liaison office in the United States, and regularly runs events with Iranian regime officials.<sup>190</sup> Another key center of Iranian regime activity is in Dearborn, Michigan. Khomeinism is preached openly in a number of mosques, which serve a very large Shiite population. The Islamic House of Wisdom, for example, was founded in 1995 by Ali Elahi,<sup>191</sup> a prominent Iranian regime operative who has been photographed meeting with Khomeini, as well as with Iranian leaders Rafsanjani and Khatami. According to a report published by the U.S. Institute of Peace, Elahi first came to the United States to “inspect American branches of Hizbullah (Tehran's network of agents) and to reinforce Tehran's influence on Shi'ite communities.”<sup>192</sup> Elahi is also a member of the Ahlulbayt World Assembly (one of the regime's most important international institutions), speaking at its general assembly in Tehran in 2015.<sup>193</sup>

## *Hezbollah*

Writing in 1994, the academic Linda Walbridge, revealed strong divisions among the Lebanese Shia communities of Dearborn, Michigan. Some congregants of prominent Twelver mosques, such as the Islamic Center of America, “express great American patriotism and even animosity toward Iran and the rule of Khomeini and his successor clerics,” while others are sympathetic to the “goals and ideals of the Islamic republic.”<sup>194</sup> The revolution in Iran exerted a powerful effect on Shia mosques all across America, including those which served Lebanese communities. After 1979, the leading cleric of the Islamic Center, Imam Mohamad Jawad Chirri, was increasingly supportive of the Iranian revolution. A large portrait of Ayatollah Khomeini was placed inside the Center, along with the caption, “I have come to perfect your religion.”<sup>195</sup> In the early 1980s, a new preacher at the Center, Abdul Latif Berry, encouraged an even more hardline position, to the distress of some of the congregants. Berry, a cleric from South Lebanon, subsequently left the Islamic Center, taking a number of congregants, and in 1983 founded the Islamic Institute of Knowledge.<sup>196</sup> Walbridge writes that “Those who supported [Berry’s] establishment of the institute had been deeply affected by the revolutionary form of Islam advocated by the Islamic Republic of Iran” and felt that the “Islamic Center had become too tolerant of Western ways.”<sup>197</sup>

But the question of the Iranian regime was not the only dividing factor in American Shia mosques. The violence of Lebanese politics has also long affected Lebanese American Twelver communities. In Dearborn, “it is commonly said that the [Islamic Center of America] is more sympathetic to the Harakaat Amal of Lebanon; the institute generally is seen as being closely aligned with the Hizbullah movement.”<sup>198</sup> The Islamic Institute’s founder and imam, Abdul Latif Berry, studied under Ayatollah Fadlallah – who was Lebanon’s leading cleric, and frequently named as Hezbollah’s “spiritual advisor”<sup>199</sup> – and the Institute publicly mourned his death in 2010.<sup>200</sup> Mosques and other institutions in America that support Hezbollah tend to be clearly aligned with two *maraji*: Iran’s Supreme Leader and Ayatollah Fadlallah.

In 1995, the Treasury Department designated Fadlallah as a terrorist, referring to him as a “leading ideological figure” of Hezbollah.<sup>201</sup> Mosques and charities that looked to Fadlallah’s leadership, however, continued to operate. Another institution in Dearborn, for example, is Al Mabarrat USA – the American branch of Fadlallah’s own Al-Mabarrat Charity Association, which is accused of serving as Hezbollah’s welfare arm.<sup>202</sup> Despite questions from federal agencies, and an FBI raid in 2007, Al Mabarrat’s American arm has continued to operate with impunity.<sup>203</sup> Other Shia charities have been less successful. In 2007, the FBI also raided and shut down the Goodwill Charitable Organization, the U.S. branch of Hezbollah’s Martyrs Foundation. Hezbollah leaders in Lebanon had previously instructed its supporters and members in the United States to direct their contributions to the Goodwill Charitable Organization.<sup>204</sup> In California, another Fadlallah-aligned institution, the Shia Association of Bay Area (also known as the SABA Islamic Center) employed, until 2002, a cleric named Rafic Labboun. In 2010, Labboun was jailed for stealing \$100,000 as part of a credit card fraud scheme. Prosecutors failed to prove it was part of a scheme to finance Hezbollah, but in 2012, Labboun was arrested in Mexico, while in the company of two known Hezbollah operatives.<sup>205</sup> Other imams at the SABA Islamic Center have also been found to express support for Hezbollah.<sup>206</sup>

While there have a few examples of violent Shiite Islamist plots in North America, including an effort to assassinate the Saudi ambassador,<sup>207</sup> Hezbollah’s activities in North America are

mostly relegated to propaganda and fundraising. Dozens of American Shiites have been indicted or convicted on charges relating to Hezbollah activity,<sup>208</sup> and numerous Hezbollah cells have been involved with various criminal and money laundering enterprises.<sup>209</sup> In 2008, the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) established a taskforce to target Hezbollah's role as a major cocaine supplier to the U.S. The DEA reportedly believed that Hezbollah was amassing \$1 billion a year through drug and weapons trafficking, bank fraud, and other criminal pursuits. An investigation by Josh Meyer at *Politico*, published in December 2017, however, reported that the Obama administration sabotaged the DEA's investigation over fears it would derail a deal with Iran over its nuclear program.<sup>210</sup> The Trump administration's opposition to the Iran deal is well-established, and efforts to combat Hezbollah's operations in the United States and neighboring countries have seen a noticeable increase in activity.<sup>211</sup>

### *South Asian Shiites*

There is also a significant population of South Asian Shiites in North America. The Khoja Shia, for example, hail from India, with many coming to the U.S. by way of East Africa, where they had settled for hundreds of years. Most Khojas were once Ismaili Shiites, but following a series of schisms and legal battles in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many turned to Twelver Shi'ism.<sup>212</sup> While many Khoja Twelvers follow Ayatollah Sistani,<sup>213</sup> a considerable number have looked to Iran for assistance since the revolution. In 1963, Khoja Twelvers established the Bilal Muslim Mission in Tanzania. In 1993, a U.S. branch was formed, which kept in close contact with the Tanzanian headquarters.<sup>214</sup> The Bilal Muslim Mission's own publications in the 1980s reveals that the effort to establish overseas branches was part of an agreement with the Iranian regime, in return for students and clerics training at the Qom, the Iranian regime's clerical base.<sup>215</sup> Other bodies for Khoja Twelvers in the United States include the North America Shi'a Ithnaasheri Muslim Communities (NASIMCO), whose member institutions include a mix of pro-Sistani and Khomeinist organizations.<sup>216</sup>

Not all South Asian Twelver Shiites are Khojas. In Pakistan, Tehrik-e-Jaffaria (TJP) – also known as Millat-e-Jaffaria - was established in 1979 by Arif Hussain al-Hussaini, a student of Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini.<sup>217</sup> Today, the current TJP leader describes himself as the "personal representative" of Iran's current supreme leader.<sup>218</sup> TJP fundraises in the United States. Based in Texas, Saviour USA is a registered 501(c)(3) and serves as an accredited United Nations body. It is, however, the U.S. branch of the Shaheed Foundation, a Pakistani charity which, according to Saviour USA's own website, "[serves] the families of martyrs of Millat-e-Jaffaria Pakistan [TJP]."<sup>219</sup> Saviour USA works with South Asian Twelver mosques serving a mix of congregants. The Metroplex Organization of Muslims in North Texas (MOMIN), for example, is listed as Saviour USA partner,<sup>220</sup> but collects *khums* [a Shia tax] for both Ayatollah Sistani and Ayatollah Khamenei.<sup>221</sup>

### *African-American Khomeinists*

In the wake of the Iranian revolution, just as Saudi Wahhabism drew a number of black Americans into the Salafi fold, Iran and its revolutionary ideals were beginning to attract some towards Shi'ism. The effects of the events in Iran were powerful – in 1982, reportedly "more than one thousand African Americans had converted to Shi'ism in the Philadelphia area alone."<sup>222</sup> Iranian regime clerics saw an opportunity, and, tapping into black consciousness, invited African-Americans to visit Iran, and study in Qom, the clerical base of Khomeinism. During the 1980s and 1990s, a considerable number of African-Americans

took advantage of this opportunity. Hashim Ali Alauddeen, for example, is a prominent black Shiite cleric, who mixes Twelver theology with black nationalist politics.<sup>223</sup> While in Qom, Alauddeen founded the Islamic Foundation Cooperation (IFC), which – to this day - specifically serves to encourage and fund black Americans to visit Iran and study Islam. In addition to Twelver theology, participants are taught about “poverty, racism and discrimination” and “how to deploy jihad as a weapon of spiritual resistance.”<sup>224</sup>

Upon their return to the United States, Black American Shiites both joined existing Shiite institutions and formed their own networks. Mujahid Abdul-Karim, for example, is a former Black Panther member credited with brokering a peace deal between Los Angeles’s Bloods and Crips gangs.<sup>225</sup> He lived and studied in Qom from 1983 to 1990.<sup>226</sup> Upon his return to the United States, he developed the Masjid al-Rasul Foundation, a Black Shiite network of institutions with mosques in Los Angeles, Chicago, Atlanta and several on the East Coast.<sup>227</sup> Today, the website of Masjid al-Rasul openly links to the extreme teachings of Ayatollah Khamenei, along with other regime clerics such as Naser Shirazi and Bashir Najafi.<sup>228</sup>

Other clerics joined existing Shia mosques, with mostly Arab and Persian congregants. Popular preacher Usama Abdulghani, for instance, is a Shia cleric in Dearborn, Michigan, who moved to Qom at 20, where he studied Islamic law for twenty years. Abdulghani’s videos promote Iran and its Supreme Leader Khamenei, along with Hezbollah and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. His videos often echo Iranian regime calls for Israel’s annihilation. In a dramatic video titled “Don’t Mess with Us, We’re Muslims,” Abdulghani narrates while clips of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and Ayatollahs Khamenei and Khomeini are shown along with Iranian warplanes and missiles attacking targets.<sup>229</sup> Although it is not clear whether Abdulghani has official ties with the Iranian government, his videos have been published by the Iranian news agency *Rasa*, which is “dedicated to promoting the discourse of the Islamic Revolution.”<sup>230</sup>

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