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The Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America

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Fast facts on the Islamophobia network

This in-depth investigation conducted by the Center for American Progress Action Fund reveals not a vast right-wing conspiracy behind the rise of Islamophobia in our nation but rather a small, tightly networked group of misinformation experts guiding an effort that reaches millions of Americans through effective advocates, media partners, and grassroots organizing. This spreading of hate and misinformation primarily starts with five key people and their organizations, which are sustained by funding from a clutch of key foundations.

The funding

- More than \$40 million flowed from seven foundations over 10 years.
- The foundations funding the misinformation experts: Donors Capital Fund; Richard Mellon Scaife Foundation; Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation; Newton and Rochelle Becker Foundation and Newton and Rochelle Becker Charitable Trust; Russell Berrie Foundation, Anchorage Charitable Fund and William Rosenwald Family Fund; Fairbrook Foundation.

The misinformation experts

- Five experts generate the false facts and materials used by political leaders, grassroots groups, and the media:
 - Frank Gaffney at the Center for Security Policy
 - David Yerushalmi at the Society of Americans for National Existence
 - Daniel Pipes at the Middle East Forum
 - Robert Spencer of Jihad Watch and Stop Islamization of America
 - Steven Emerson of the Investigative Project on Terrorism
- These experts travel the country and work with or testify before state legislatures calling for a ban on the nonexistent threat of Sharia law in America and proclaiming that the vast majority of mosques in our country harbor Islamist terrorists or sympathizers.
- David Yerushalmi's "model legislation" banning Sharia law has been cut and pasted into bills in South Carolina, Texas, and Alaska. His video on how to draft an anti-Sharia bill and his online tools have been picked up nationwide.

The reach

- The movement is moving nationwide in more than 23 states—made possible by a combination of new, single-minded Islamophobia groups, exemplified by Brigitte Gabriel's ACT! For America, Pam Geller's Stop Islamization of America, David Horowitz's Freedom Center, and existing groups such as the American Family Association and the Eagle Forum.
- Misinformation experts are broadcast around the country and the world, with their work cited many times by (among others) confessed Norway terrorist Anders Breivik.
- U.S. politicians such as Reps. Peter King (R-NY), Allen West (R-FL), and Michele Bachmann (R-MN) repeat these anti-Muslim attacks give credence to incorrect facts.

The impact

- This small network of people is driving the national and global debates that have real consequences on the public dialogue and on American Muslims.
- In September 2010, a *Washington Post*-ABC News poll showed that 49 percent of Americans held an unfavorable view of Islam, a significant increase from 39 percent in October of 2002.

Why it matters

- These attacks go right to the heart of two critically important national issues: the fabric and strength of our democracy and our national security. Our Constitution upholds freedom of religion for all Americans. Contending that some religions are not part of the promise of American freedoms established by our founders directly challenges who we are as a nation.
- One of Al Qaeda's greatest recruitment and propaganda tool is the assertion that the West is at war with Islam and Muslims—an argument that is strengthened every day by those who suggest all Muslims are terrorists and all those practicing Islam are jeopardizing U.S. security.

Introduction and summary

On July 22, a man planted a bomb in an Oslo government building that killed eight people. A few hours after the explosion, he shot and killed 68 people, mostly teenagers, at a Labor Party youth camp on Norway's Utoya Island.¹

By midday, pundits were speculating as to who had perpetrated the greatest massacre in Norwegian history since World War II. Numerous mainstream media outlets, including *The New York Times*,² *The Washington Post*,³ and *The Atlantic*,⁴ speculated about an Al Qaeda connection and a "jihadist" motivation behind the attacks. But by the next morning it was clear that the attacker was a 32-year-old, white, blond-haired and blue-eyed Norwegian named Anders Breivik. He was not a Muslim, but rather a self-described Christian conservative.⁵

According to his attorney, Breivik claimed responsibility for his self-described "gruesome but necessary" actions.⁶ On July 26, Breivik told the court that violence was "necessary" to save Europe from Marxism and "Muslimization." In his 1,500-page manifesto, which meticulously details his attack methods and aims to inspire others to extremist violence, Breivik vows "brutal and breathtaking operations which will result in casualties" to fight the alleged "ongoing Islamic Colonization of Europe."⁷

Breivik's manifesto contains numerous footnotes and in-text citations to American bloggers and pundits, quoting them as experts on Islam's "war against the West." This small group of anti-Muslim organizations and individuals in our nation is obscure to most Americans but wields great influence in shaping the national and international political debate. Their names are heralded within communities that are actively organizing against Islam and targeting Muslims in the United States.

Breivik, for example, cited Robert Spencer, one of the anti-Muslim misinformation scholars we profile in this report, and his blog, Jihad Watch, 162 times in his manifesto.⁸ Spencer's website, which "tracks the attempts of radical Islam to subvert Western culture," boasts another member of this Islamophobia network in America, David Horowitz, on his Freedom Center website. Pamela Geller, Spencer's frequent collaborator, and her blog, Atlas Shrugs, was mentioned 12 times.⁹

Geller and Spencer co-founded the organization Stop Islamization of America, a group whose actions and rhetoric the Anti-Defamation League concluded “promotes a conspiratorial anti-Muslim agenda under the guise of fighting radical Islam.”¹⁰ The group seeks to rouse public fears by consistently vilifying the Islamic faith and asserting the existence of an Islamic conspiracy to destroy “American values.” Based on Breivik’s sheer number of citations and references to the writings of these individuals, it is clear that he read and relied on the hateful, anti-Muslim ideology of a number of men and women detailed in this report—a select handful of scholars and activists who work together to create and promote misinformation about Muslims.

While these bloggers and pundits were not responsible for Breivik’s deadly attacks, their writings on Islam and multiculturalism appear to have helped create a world view, held by this lone Norwegian gunman, that sees Islam as at war with the West and the West needing to be defended. According to former CIA officer and terrorism consultant Marc Sageman, just as religious extremism “is the infrastructure from which Al Qaeda emerged,” the writings of these anti-Muslim misinformation experts are “the infrastructure from which Breivik emerged.” Sageman adds that their rhetoric “is not cost-free.”¹¹

Anti-Muslim
rhetoric “is not
cost-free”, says
former CIA officer
Sageman.

These pundits and bloggers, however, are not the only members of the Islamophobia infrastructure. Breivik’s manifesto also cites think tanks, such as the Center for Security Policy, the Middle East Forum, and the Investigative Project on Terrorism—three other organizations we profile in this report. Together, this core group of deeply intertwined individuals and organizations manufacture and exaggerate threats of “creeping Sharia,” Islamic domination of the West, and purported obligatory calls to violence against all non-Muslims by the Koran.

This network of hate is not a new presence in the United States. Indeed, its ability to organize, coordinate, and disseminate its ideology through grassroots organizations increased dramatically over the past 10 years. Furthermore, its ability to influence politicians’ talking points and wedge issues for the upcoming 2012 elections has mainstreamed what was once considered fringe, extremist rhetoric.

And it all starts with the money flowing from a select group of foundations. A small group of foundations and wealthy donors are the lifeblood of the Islamophobia network in America, providing critical funding to a clutch of right-wing think tanks that peddle hate and fear of Muslims and Islam—in the form of books, reports, websites, blogs, and carefully crafted talking points that anti-Islam grassroots organizations and some right-wing religious groups use as propaganda for their constituency.

Some of these foundations and wealthy donors also provide direct funding to anti-Islam grassroots groups. According to our extensive analysis, here are the top seven contributors to promoting Islamophobia in our country:

- Donors Capital Fund
- Richard Mellon Scaife foundations
- Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation
- Newton D. & Rochelle F. Becker foundations and charitable trust
- Russell Berrie Foundation
- Anchorage Charitable Fund and William Rosenwald Family Fund
- Fairbrook Foundation

Altogether, these seven charitable groups provided \$42.6 million to Islamophobia think tanks between 2001 and 2009—funding that supports the scholars and experts that are the subject of our next chapter as well as some of the grassroots groups that are the subject of Chapter 3 of our report.

And what does this money fund? Well, here's one of many cases in point: Last July, former Speaker of the House of Representatives Newt Gingrich warned a conservative audience at the American Enterprise Institute that the Islamic practice of Sharia was “a mortal threat to the survival of freedom in the United States and in the world as we know it.” Gingrich went on to claim that “Sharia in its natural form has principles and punishments totally abhorrent to the Western world.”¹²

Sharia, or Muslim religious code, includes practices such as charitable giving, prayer, and honoring one's parents—precepts virtually identical to those of Christianity and Judaism. But Gingrich and other conservatives promote alarmist notions about a nearly 1,500-year-old religion for a variety of sinister political, financial, and ideological motives. In his remarks that day, Gingrich mimicked the language of conservative analyst Andrew McCarthy, who co-wrote a report calling Sharia “the preeminent totalitarian threat of our time.”¹³ Such similarities in language are no accident. Look no further than the organization that released McCarthy's anti-Sharia report: the aforementioned Center for Security Policy, which is a central hub of the anti-Muslim network and an active promoter of anti-Sharia messaging and anti-Muslim rhetoric.

In fact, CSP is a key source for right-wing politicians, pundits, and grassroots organizations, providing them with a steady stream of reports mischaracterizing Islam and warnings about the dangers of Islam and American Muslims. Operating under the leadership of Frank Gaffney, the organization is funded by a small num-

The Islamophobia megaphone

How a tight network of anti-Muslim, anti-Islam foundations, misinformation experts, validators, grass roots organizations, religious right groups, and their allies in the media and in politics profoundly misrepresent Islam and American Muslims in the United States



The Islamophobia echo chamber

The religious right

Pat Robertson
John Hagee
Ralph Reed
Franklin Graham

The media

Fox News Channel
David Horowitz
Freedom Center
Pamela Geller and Atlas Shrugs
Washington Times
The National Review
Christian Broadcast Network
Clarion Fund
Rush Limbaugh
Sean Hannity
Mike Savage
Glenn Beck
Mark Levin
Bryan Fischer

The political players

Rep. Peter King
Rep. Sue Myrick
Rep. Allen West
Rep. Renee Elmers
Rep. Paul Broun
Rep. Michele Bachmann

The grassroots organizations

Brigitte Gabriel's
ACT! For America
Pamela Geller's
Stop Islamization of America
Eagle Forum
Tennessee Freedom Coalition
State Tea Party movements
American Family Association



Amplifying
fear and
misinformation
in this
Islamophobia
echo chamber

Misleading
the public

The public

ber of foundations and donors with a deep understanding of how to influence U.S. politics by promoting highly alarming threats to our national security. CSP is joined by other anti-Muslim organizations in this lucrative business, such as Stop Islamization of America and the Society of Americans for National Existence. Many of the leaders of these organizations are well-schooled in the art of getting attention in the press, particularly Fox News, *The Washington Times*, and a variety of right-wing websites and radio outlets.

Misinformation experts such as Gaffney consult and work with such right-wing grassroots organizations as ACT! for America and the Eagle Forum, as well as religious right groups such as the Faith and Freedom Coalition and American Family Association, to spread their message. Speaking at their conferences, writing on their websites, and appearing on their radio shows, these experts rail against Islam and cast suspicion on American Muslims. Much of their propaganda gets churned into fundraising appeals by grassroots and religious right groups. The money they raise then enters the political process and helps fund ads supporting politicians who echo alarmist warnings and sponsor anti-Muslim attacks.

These efforts recall some of the darkest episodes in American history, in which religious, ethnic, and racial minorities were discriminated against and persecuted. From Catholics, Mormons, Japanese Americans, European immigrants, Jews, and African Americans, the story of America is one of struggle to achieve in practice our founding ideals. Unfortunately, American Muslims and Islam are the latest chapter in a long American struggle against scapegoating based on religion, race, or creed.

Due in part to the relentless efforts of this small group of individuals and organizations, Islam is now the most negatively viewed religion in America. Only 37 percent of Americans have a favorable opinion of Islam: the lowest favorability rating since 2001, according to a 2010 ABC News/*Washington Post* poll.¹⁴ According to a 2010 *Time* magazine poll, 28 percent of voters do not believe Muslims should be eligible to sit on the U.S. Supreme Court, and nearly one-third of the country thinks followers of Islam should be barred from running for president.¹⁵

The terrorist attacks on 9/11 alone did not drive Americans' perceptions of Muslims and Islam. President George W. Bush reflected the general opinion of the American public at the time when he went to great lengths to make clear that Islam and Muslims are not the enemy. Speaking to a roundtable of Arab

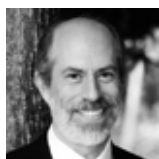
The leading lights of the Islamophobia network

The main players who conjure up and spread misinformation about American Muslims and Islam in the United States

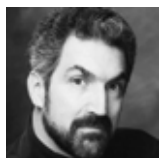
The scholars



Steven Emerson
The Investigative
Project on Terrorism



Frank Gaffney
Center for Security Policy



Daniel Pipes
Middle East Forum



Robert Spencer
Jihad Watch & Stop
Islamization of America



David Yerushalmi
Society of Americans for
National Existence

The validators



Nonie Darwish
Former Muslims United
and Arabs for Israel



Zuhr Jasser
American Islamic
Forum for Democracy



Walid Phares
Future Terrorism Project



Walid Shoebat
Former purported Islamic
terrorist turned apocalyptic
Christian

The activists



Brigitte Gabriel
ACT! for America



Pamela Geller
Stop Islamization
of America



David Horowitz
David Horowitz
Freedom Center

and Muslim American leaders at the Afghanistan embassy in 2002, for example, President Bush said, “All Americans must recognize that the face of terror is not the true faith—face of Islam. Islam is a faith that brings comfort to a billion people around the world. It’s a faith that has made brothers and sisters of every race. It’s a faith based upon love, not hate.”¹⁶

Unfortunately, President Bush’s words were soon eclipsed by an organized escalation of hateful statements about Muslims and Islam from the members of the Islamophobia network profiled in this report. This is as sad as it is dangerous. It is enormously important to understand that alienating the Muslim American community not only threatens our fundamental promise of religious freedom, it also hurts our efforts to combat terrorism. Since 9/11, the Muslim American community has helped security and law enforcement officials prevent more than 40 percent of Al Qaeda terrorist plots threatening America.¹⁷ The largest single source of initial information to authorities about the few Muslim American plots has come from the Muslim American community.¹⁸

Around the world, there are people killing people in the name of Islam, with which most Muslims disagree. Indeed, in most cases of radicalized neighbors, family members, or friends, the Muslim American community is as baffled, disturbed, and surprised by their appearance as the general public. Treating Muslim American citizens and neighbors as part of the problem, rather than part of the solution, is not only offensive to America’s core values, it is utterly ineffective in combating terrorism and violent extremism.

The White House recently released the national strategy for combating violent extremism, “Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States.” One of the top focal points of the effort is to “counter al-Qa’ida’s propaganda that the United States is somehow at war with Islam.”¹⁹ Yet orchestrated efforts by the individuals and organizations detailed in this report make it easy for al-Qa’ida to assert that America hates Muslims and that Muslims around the world are persecuted for the simple crime of being Muslims and practicing their religion.

Sadly, the current isolation of American Muslims echoes past witch hunts in our history—from the divisive McCarthyite purges of the 1950s to the sometimes

violent anti-immigrant campaigns in the 19th and 20th centuries. New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg has compared the fear-mongering of Muslims with anti-Catholic sentiment of the past. In response to the fabricated “Ground Zero mosque” controversy in New York last summer, Mayor Bloomberg said:

In the 1700s, even as religious freedom took hold in America, Catholics in New York were effectively prohibited from practicing their religion, and priests could be arrested. Largely as a result, the first Catholic parish in New York City was not established until the 1780s, St. Peter’s on Barclay Street, which still stands just one block north of the World Trade Center site, and one block south of the proposed mosque and community center... We would betray our values and play into our enemies’ hands if we were to treat Muslims differently than anyone else.²⁰

This report shines a light on the Islamophobia network of so-called experts, academics, institutions, grassroots organizations, media outlets, and donors who manufacture, produce, distribute, and mainstream an irrational fear of Islam and Muslims. Let us learn the proper lesson from the past, and rise above fear-mongering to public awareness, acceptance, and respect for our fellow Americans. In doing so, let us prevent hatred from infecting and endangering our country again.

In the pages that follow, we profile the small number of funders, organizations, and individuals who have contributed to the discourse on Islamophobia in this country. We begin with the money trail in Chapter 1—our analysis of the funding streams that support anti-Muslim activities. Chapter 2 identifies the intellectual nexus of the Islamophobia network. Chapter 3 highlights the key grassroots players and organizations that help spread the messages of hate. Chapter 4 aggregates the key media amplifiers of Islamophobia. And Chapter 5 brings attention to the elected officials who frequently support the causes of anti-Muslim organizing.

Before we begin, a word about the term “Islamophobia.” We don’t use this term lightly. We define it as an exaggerated fear, hatred, and hostility toward Islam and Muslims that is perpetuated by negative stereotypes resulting in bias, discrimination, and the marginalization and exclusion of Muslims from America’s social, political, and civic life.

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It is our view that in order to safeguard our national security and uphold America's core values, we must return to a fact-based civil discourse regarding the challenges we face as a nation and world. This discourse must be frank and honest, but also consistent with American values of religious liberty, equal justice under the law, and respect for pluralism. A first step toward the goal of honest, civil discourse is to expose—and marginalize—the influence of the individuals and groups who make up the Islamophobia network in America by actively working to divide Americans against one another through misinformation.

Endnotes

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