



THE INVESTIGATIVE PROJECT ON TERRORISM

HARIS TARIN



Haris Tarin visited the White House at least 21 times. He met with Paul Monterio, Associate Director of the White House Office of Public Engagement on March 9, 2011; April 29, 2012; May 11, 2012; June 29; 2011; July 14, 2010; July 16, 2010; August 10, 2011; August 5, 2011. Tarin met with Quintan Wiktorowicz, Senior Director for Global Engagement at the National Security Council on November 4, 2011 twice; March 13, 2012; March 9, 2012; July 18, 2011. Tarin met with Karen Richardson, Associate Director, Office of Public Engagement, on April 15, 2011. He met with Victoria McCullough, Staff Assistant at the White House Office of Public Engagement on April 20, 2012. Tarin met with Rashad Hussain, the U.S. Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on June 24, 2011 and July 14, 2011. Tarin met with Matthew Tranchin on October 14, 2009; Jayne Thomisee on December 9, 2009; Michael Wear on May 19, 2010; and Tim Nusraty on September 6, 2011.

Biography

Haris Tarin is the Director of the Washington DC office of the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC). In this capacity, he engages various agencies within government including the White House, the Departments of Justice, State, and Homeland Security, and offices on Capitol Hill.¹

Critical of U.S. Counter-terrorism Efforts

- Most recently, Tarin co-authored an op-ed with Alejandro Beutel in which the two MPAC members criticized NYPD surveillance of Muslim student groups across the Northeast: “The NYPD’s surveillance of an entire community based on their faith -- with no evidence of criminal activity -- is a blow against democracy and an ineffective and counterproductive offense to its mandate to ‘protect and serve.’ When students and their parents feel intimidated, there is a chilling affect

¹ <http://www.mpac.org/about/staff-board/haris-tarin.php>,

on civic engagement and political discourse on campus...When students do not have a safe space to talk to their peers, discuss issues of identity and feel confident enough to express their views, toxic ideas will never be challenged.”²

- On Feb. 20, 2010, Tarin spoke in a Web town hall on youth radicalization.³ In his remarks, he expressed mistrust of law enforcement and implied that law-enforcement agencies seek to marginalize the Muslim community. He stated that “this conversation continues to take place in government circles, intellectual circles, law enforcement circles especially – and I think that’s a point to emphasize, law-enforcement circles especially – and by Islamophobes, really those who have an agenda to ensure, who want to marginalize the Muslim community, especially in the States.” In the same Town Hall, he stated, “Islamophobes – those who seek to marginalize the Muslim American community with a specific agenda in mind – continue to put forth problematic opinions, and these opinions and these policies make it to government officials. That’s where the problem lies.” Tarin then went on to criticize official reports on radicalization, like the 2007 NYPD report on the stages of radicalization, which are utilized by the government in designing its counterterrorism strategy. “We have been pushing back for years now on the concepts that have been put forth by the papers like the New York Police Department’s report on radicalization, which cast a wide net of suspicion on mosques, organizations and even coffee shops and cafes which they claim are incubators of radicalization. These reports and these ideas must be debunked.” Tarin added, “Community leaders, parents, activists cannot be intimidated into thinking that if they talk about policy grievances like Iraq, Afghanistan, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, at mosques or at MSAs that they will have law enforcement agents at their door questioning them.”⁴
- At a December 2009 press conference, MPAC presented a counterterrorism paper entitled, “Building Bridges to Strengthen America: Forging an Effective Domestic Counterterrorism Enterprise between Muslim Americans and Law Enforcement.”⁵ In his remarks, Tarin questioned the appropriateness of U.S. law-enforcement investigations of suspected jihadist activity. “We decided to publicly launch this paper now due to the recent arrest of 5 young Muslim Americans, Muslim American men who *allegedly* traveled to Pakistan to *allegedly* partake in violent extremist activity,”⁶ he said. However, the evidence strongly suggested they were jihadist radicals. The five, Ramy Zamzam and four friends, reportedly told police they tried to join an al-Qaida group and that their ultimate goal was to

² Alejandro J. Beutel and Haris Tarin, “NYPD Spying On College Students Is Counterproductive,” *Huffington Post*, March 26, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alejandro-j-beutel/nypd-spying-on-college-st_b_1376201.html

³ “DC Director Participates in Virtual Townhall on 'Radicalization,'" February 26, 2010. <http://www.mpac.org/issues/national-security/dc-director-participates-in-virtual-townhall-on-radicalization.php>

⁴ Audio posted at <http://www.suhaibwebb.com/multimedia/youth-radicalization-town-hall-recording/>

⁵ Joe Sterling, “U.S. Muslims pen strategy to wrest 'narrative' from militants,” CNN, December 11, 2009 <http://www.cnn.com/2009/US/12/11/muslim.policing/>

⁶ MPAC Press Conference, National Press Club, Washington D.C., December 11, 2009.

fight American troops in Afghanistan.⁷ Zamzam left behind a jihadist video before leaving for Pakistan. All were all convicted in 2010 and sentenced to 10-year prison terms in Pakistan for jihadist activity there. “We are not terrorists,” Zamzam told a reporter while leaving court in January 2010. “We are jihadists, and jihad is not terrorism.”⁸

Critical of U.S. Foreign Policy

- Speaking on the Jesse Peterson Radio Show discussing Obama’s May 18, 2011 Middle East policy speech, Tarin said⁹:
 - “The fact that we’ve been supporting an array of authoritarian regimes, where we’ve focused on our short-term interests rather than our long term vision and American values that makes this country so great. We’ve focused on the short-term interests and have forgotten the values and I think the President was trying to realign that and he made a few remarks regarding that specifically where he said, that has to change. For our long-term stability and national security, we have to be able to make that shift from short-term interests to long-term values and interests also.”
- At the May 2, 2011 State Department Foreign Press Center meeting¹⁰ regarding Osama bin Laden’s death, Tarin was again critical¹¹ of the U.S. handling of its foreign relations with Muslim countries. “We hope that today, this will be a new chapter in our country’s moving forward in terms of our national security and in our relationships with the Muslim-majority countries and ensuring that we no longer completely securitize that relationship and engage, as the president had said, in our mutual understanding and mutual respect of one another.”
 - He added: “In terms of the effects that this will have on policies...I can say one thing. It is time for us as a country to have a more constructive conversation as it relates to our relationship, whether it be with Pakistan or Afghanistan. The people who are suffering in Afghanistan, the people who are suffering in Pakistan could probably care less about Osama bin Laden. There’s a human side to this conversation that needs to be had. Whether we want to continue to invest in a securitized relationship, that I

⁷ "Americans detained in Pakistan defend 'jihad' plans," *Associated Press*, January 4, 2010, http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2010-01-03-pakistan-americans-court_N.htm

⁸ "Americans detained in Pakistan defend 'jihad' plans," *Associated Press*, January 4, 2010, http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2010-01-03-pakistan-americans-court_N.htm

⁹ <http://www.revolutionboston.com/sites/default/files/podcasts/2011/May/Jeff%20Santos%20-%20Haris%20Tarin%20-%2005-20-11.Mp3>

¹⁰ “Death of Usama bin Ladin and the Reaction of the Muslim-American Community: Dr. Mohamed Elsanousi, Communications Director of the Islamic Society of North America; Dr. Sayyid Syeed, Islamic Society of North America’s National Director for Interfaith and Community Alliances; and Haris Tarin, Director, Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), " U.S. State Department Foreign Press Center Briefing, Washington, DC, May 2, 2011, <http://fpc.state.gov/162415.htm>

¹¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JF2i8x82X3Q>

said before, focused on our military approach or a civil relationship where we're able to invest in civil society, we're able to invest in education, we're able to have a relationship beyond terrorism and the security lens that we've unfortunately developed over the past decade.”

- Lastly, Tarin expressed his organization's displeasure with America's military endeavors. “Our organization's stance has been clear. We are against military intervention in a way that would affect the lives of civilians, whether they be drone attacks, whether they be conventional military means. We continue to engage in a conversation of civility...That's what our position has been since 9/11.”

Whitewashing Jihadist Threat

- Speaking before Muslim-American religious experts on May 2, 2011 at the Foreign Press Center in Washington following Osama bin-Laden's death, Tarin downplayed the significance of his radical message: ¹²
 - “We also have to put into perspective the fact that we don't want to overestimate the power of Osama bin Laden and his followers. He does not have thousands of followers in Afghanistan or in Pakistan or in the Muslim world. As I mentioned, the narrative that he has presented for many years has been rejected. Poll numbers show that any level of support that he had in the Muslim world was on the decline and that there was no sympathy in the streets of Muslim-majority countries by the masses for Osama bin Laden. And we saw that in the Arab Spring; not one slogan of Osama bin Laden was used, not one flag of America was burned; not one Israeli flag was burned because it's not about America, it's not about Israel, it's about the people.”
- On Feb. 20, 2010, Tarin spoke in a Web Town Hall on the topic of Youth Radicalization. In his lecture, he again minimized the seriousness of Islamic extremism in America, and especially among American youth. “The so-called radicalization and violent extremism phenomenon is not the defining issue for our youth, period,” Tarin told the audience.
- At a Dec. 2009 press conference held at CAIR headquarters in DC regarding five missing Muslim-Americans from the DC area who were suspected of traveling to Pakistan for terrorist training, Tarin sought to portray the case as a secluded incident not reflective of the broader Muslim community. “This case highlights the critical nature of the relationship between the Muslim American community

¹² “Death of Usama bin Ladin and the Reaction of the Muslim-American Community: Dr. Mohamed Elsanousi, Communications Director of the Islamic Society of North America; Dr. Sayyid Syeed, Islamic Society of North America's National Director for Interfaith and Community Alliances; and Haris Tarin, Director, Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), " U.S. State Department Foreign Press Center Briefing, Washington, DC, May 2, 2011, <http://fpc.state.gov/162415.htm> and video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JF2i8x82X3Q>

and law enforcement. ***We understand, as was said by Nihad [Awad], that there is an issue, a problem, in our community, although it is isolated.*** But any problem is a major problem for our community, and we as community organizations, mosques, leaders will be addressing this and continue to address this problem.”

Warning of “Islamophobia”

- At the MSA National Convention (sponsored along with ISNA) in Rosemont, IL, on August 31 - Sept. 3, 2007, Tarin warned of “Islamophobia” in America:
 - “When a person in broader society has a fear of Islam, mistrust of Islam and Muslims, how are they going to react? First, they are going to try to make you irrelevant. And the second, try to annihilate you.”
 - He also suggested that for some unspecified dark forces in American politics, the 2006 U.S. midterm elections centered on vilifying Muslims and attacking immigrants. “So you see how it is taking place and taking a foothold in the media. And also [UI 5-7] in our country and how they have allowed Islamophobia to really penetrate into different parts of our society, and some of them actually in ’06, their whole campaign platform was against anti-immigration and anti-Muslim sentiments.”

Wooing Qaradawi, Embracing Ghannouchi

- During the Web Town Hall on Youth Radicalization on Feb. 20, 2011, Tarin referred to Yusuf Qaradawi as an “intellectual” and suggested he was an authority on Muslim youth radicalization, granted his work legitimacy. “Nor is this an issue that is new to the Muslim intellectual and activism discourse. Dr. Yusuf Qaradawi—has spent much time researching and writing about the subject [youth radicalization].”
- At the same meeting, Tarin backed the “Irvine 11,” Islamist radicals who disrupted a speech delivered by Israeli Amb. Michael Oren at the University of California-Irvine. “That is why ensuring them [youth] to have a safe space, as in the case of the Irvine 11 or many other cases, is extremely important so that they can be vocal, so that the debate and discourse about many of these grievances are out in the public and not in the shadows and on the Internet only.”
- On Nov. 28, 2011, Tarin boasted on his Facebook profile about MPAC playing host to radical Tunisian leader Rachid Ghannouchi¹³ in DC, lauding Ghannouchi,

¹³ "Attend MPAC-DC Forum on Islamic Political Movements & Dinner with Ghannouchi, Tunisian Revolution Leader," November 29, 2011, <http://www.mpac.org/events/attend-mpac-dc-forum-on-islamic-political-movements-dinner-with-ghannouchi-tunisian-revolution-leader.php> and "MPAC Proud to Host Radical Tunisian Leader," IPT News, November 28, 2011, <http://www.investigativeproject.org/3311/mpac-proud-to-host-radical-tunisian-leader>

a man who defended Hamas, praised the mothers of suicide bombers and described Israel as a “bacillus.”

- Despite this record, Tarin exhorted colleagues in Washington to attend a Ghannouchi speech. Tarin praised the Tunisian Islamist as "one of the most important figures in modern Islamic political thought and theory."
"Confirmed! MPAC hosting Rachid Ghannouchi on Tuesday evening for a forum on Islam, Democracy and the Arab Spring in Washington DC!
Ghannouchi is an [sic] modern intellectual giant on Islam and governance.
BIG TIME! If you are in DC and want to come, hit me up!"
- At the MSA National Convention in 2007, Tarin suggested (without providing specifics) that “former Israeli intelligence officers” had fabricated radical quotes to defame militant Palestinians: “These documentaries are actually put together by a group called honestreporting.com. You can check this out, Google this. Honestreporting.com was created by a group of former Israeli intelligence officers. And what they do is they take clips from the Muslim world, mainly from Palestinian territories on TV, and they translate these clips word for word from Arabic into English, and basically have some horrible clips that they put together - all taken out of context, the majority taken out of context - and they bring this onto our shores and say, “This is what the Muslim world thinks of the West, thinks of America, thinks of Christians, and thinks of Jews. And if you allow these people to get a foothold in our country, this is what they are going to bring to us.”
- Tarin also defended the MSA and suggested that unspecified enemies were conspiring against it: “First, they try to marginalize MSA on campus. They want to make the MSAs become irrelevant. They want to make the MSAs seem violent. They want the MSAs on campus to be viewed as people who only stand for hatred and ideology. So that is something that we as MSAs have to be very careful. That is the first thing...And the thing that they do is they create a very unhealthy atmosphere among the student body especially and this is something I will get you, especially between the Jewish and Muslim students.”