

## Pushing For Mosque Surveillance, Fox News Is Fighting The Last War

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Reaching for one of its favorite War on Terror talking points, Fox News is leading a charge in the wake of the Orlando gun massacre to push for surveillance of mosques in America. Convinced that a pressing response to the attack on a gay nightclub is for law enforcement to keep close tabs on Muslims at prayer, Fox News continues to hype the initiative as a solution to pending terror threats in the United States — and specifically, to stem the tide of ISIS recruitment in America.

But there's no indication domestic mosque surveillance uncovers useful terror information. Just ask the New York Police Department, whose extensive, post-9/11 Muslim surveillance program turned out to be a “failure by any reasonable standard,” according to the Cato Institute. And now with ISIS focusing its recruitment online and hoping for self-radicalization among converts, the notion that law enforcement can round up ISIS sympathizers meeting and plotting inside American mosques runs counter to the facts.

Nonetheless, Fox News is pushing for the divisive, Bush-era tactic to be revived and embraced. “How stupid is it to pull police officers out of the mosques? Absolutely stupid,” Rudy Giuliani complained on Fox News this week, while Greg Gutfeld compared Islam to biker gangs and suggested both needed to be watched closely to head off crime sprees.

Not surprisingly, Fox News is echoing allegations often made by members of the Republican Party about how mosques are a breeding ground for homegrown terrorism and need to be spied on.

“I want surveillance of certain mosques if that's OK,” Republican Party presumptive nominee Donald Trump told a crowd in Birmingham, Ala. last November. That same week Trump announced he'd “strongly consider” shutting down mosques in the U.S. Trump raised the idea again earlier this week at a rally in Atlanta, saying, “We have to maybe check, respectfully, the mosques and we have to check other places because this is a problem that, if we don't solve it, it's going to eat our country alive.”

For years, New York Republican Congressman Peter King, with the help of Fox News, led an anti-mosque crusade, complete with congressional hearings that were denounced as being McCarthy-like.

Today's endorsement of mosque surveillance represents Fox News' long-running attempt to collectively criminalize Islam in America and to often portray Muslims as would-be terrorists. (Recall the open hysteria Fox News helped foment in its opposition to the so-called "Ground Zero Mosque" in 2011.)

But Fox News' advocacy for mosque surveillance, and its suggestion that it would help ferret out dangerous ISIS sympathizers, runs counter to recent events and counter to research that indicates those handful of American Muslims who embrace deadly violence are mostly self-radicalized and they become that way online, not by listening to sermons from radical Imams in U.S. mosques.

In the wake of recent terror attacks in Boston, San Bernardino and Orlando, there were no findings that the bombers and gunmen were radicalized in their local mosques or planned their attacks there; that the mosques were in any way directly connected to the acts of violence. There were no sweeping indictments made by law enforcement.

In fact in Boston, bomber Tamerlan Tsarnaev had been threatened with expulsion from his mosque after he angrily interrupted a speaker who compared Prophet Muhammad with Dr. Martin Luther King. "The congregation shouted him out of the mosque," said a spokesman for the mosque.

And that fits what researchers have been reporting in recent years.

Last December, George Washington University's Program on Extremism issued a report, "ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa." It showed "how social media plays a crucial role in the radicalization and, at times, mobilization of U.S.-based ISIS sympathizers," according to the university.

Key points from the report included:

- "Several thousand Americans consume ISIS propaganda online creating what has been described as a 'radicalization echo chamber.' "
- "Twitter is 'by far the platform of choice' for American activists to connect. Other routes include Facebook, Google+ and Tumblr, along with messaging services like 'Kik, Telegram, surespot, and the dark web.'"

Additionally, the report noted that jihadist radicalization in the United States is "significantly smaller" than in most European countries, in part because of fewer "radicalizing agents" in America, such as "radical mosques, extremist preachers, and recruiting networks."

Also last year, Scott Atran, co-founder of the Center for the Resolution of Intractable Conflict at Oxford University, reported his research indicated, "More than 80 per cent who join the Islamic State do so through peer-to-peer relationships, mostly with friends and sometimes family. Very few join in mosques or through recruitment by anonymous strangers."

The Associated Press reported that Atran told a meeting of the United Nations' Security Council's counter-terrorism committee that "radicalization rarely occurs in mosques."

Meanwhile, a 2010 study by researchers at Duke University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill found that the number of radicalized Muslims in the U.S. was relatively low and that Muslim-American communities effectively prevent radicalization.

Rather than being a spawning ground for extremism, there are indications mosques are actively working to thwart it. That same 2010 study found “48 of the 120 Muslims suspected of plotting domestic terrorist attacks since Sept. 11, 2001, were turned in by fellow Muslims, including parents, mosque members and even a Facebook friend,” *The New York Times* reported.

Last year, the *Times* examined ISIS’ recruiting efforts in the United States and detailed one example of a local Imam dissuading a possible convert named Amir:

Amir then had some long talks with Imam Magid, who pointed him to passages in the Quran that forbid killing other Muslims, innocent women and children. Amir concluded that the Islamic State was only sowing chaos and hatred, which the Prophet Muhammad abhorred.

That kind of pushback against extremism from mosque leaders might be one reason why the NYPD’s massive surveillance program produced so little useful information. The operation, which remained secret for years, not only infiltrated mosques, but assigned detectives to map out entire Muslim communities, as well as track Muslims’ daily activities, and investigate college students.

The goal was to “sniff out would-be terrorists before they could launch attacks,” according to the Cato Institute.

Fox News likes to pretend it was an intelligence success, which is why it must be resuscitated. “We broke so many, so many plots by eavesdropping on these radical mosques,” Fox News’ Bo Dietl claimed last year.

In fact, the exact opposite was true.

“In more than six years of spying on Muslim neighborhoods, eavesdropping on conversations and cataloguing mosques, the New York Police Department’s secret Demographics Unit never generated a lead or triggered a terrorism investigation, the department acknowledged in court testimony unsealed late Monday,” the Associated Press reported.

Correct. Six years of mosque surveillance in New York City in the wake of 9/11 did not produce a single lead or trigger one terrorism investigation for the NYPD.

But now Fox News thinks in an age of online recruiting, snooping on U.S. mosques is the answer to unearthing terror threats?