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“Sheikh” Abdullah Faisal: Ideologue of Hate

Background Information from the Center on Extremism

Our Mission:

**To stop the defamation of the Jewish people
and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.**

ABOUT THE CENTER ON EXTREMISM

The ADL Center on Extremism (COE) is one of the world's foremost authorities on extremism, terrorism, anti-Semitism and all forms of hate. For decades, COE's staff of seasoned investigators, analysts and researchers have tracked extremist activity and hate in the U.S. and abroad – online and on the ground. The staff, which represent a combined total of substantially more than 100 years of experience in this arena, routinely assist law enforcement with extremist-related investigations, provide tech companies with critical data and expertise and respond to wide-ranging media requests.

As ADL's research and investigative arm, COE is a clearinghouse of real-time information about extremism and hate of all types. COE staff regularly serve as expert witnesses, provide congressional testimony and speak to national and international conference audiences about the threats posed by extremism and anti-Semitism. You can find the full complement of COE's research and publications at [ADL.org](https://www.adl.org).

ADL is a leading anti-hate organization that was founded in 1913 in response to an escalating climate of anti-Semitism and bigotry. Today, ADL is still the first call when acts of anti-Semitism occur and continues to fight all forms of hate. A global leader in exposing extremism, delivering anti-bias education and fighting hate online, ADL's ultimate goal is a world in which no group or individual suffers from bias, discrimination or hate.

“Sheikh” Abdullah Faisal: Ideologue of Hate

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“Sheikh” Abdullah Faisal: Ideologue of Hate

- Sheikh Abdullah Faisal was an influential Islamist extremist and charismatic preacher whose fiery speeches in Britain and the U.S. attracted and influenced followers in both countries
- Faisal founded Revolution Muslim, a U.S.-based group focused on recruitment and disseminating Faisal’s brand of jihadi-salafi extremism to Americans
- Revolution Muslim promoted messages that legitimized violence against American — and more specifically Jewish — targets. The organization was by far the most influential Islamist extremist group in the U.S., inspiring a range of domestic extremists and attempted terrorists
- Faisal was arrested in August 2017 and is currently in Jamaica, fighting extradition to the U.S.

SHEIKH ABDULLAH FAISAL AND HIS IDEOLOGY OF HATE

*“[The] **United Snakes of America** is the most racist country in the world. The white man in America is a dictator because he suffers from white supremacy. He goes to countries and tries to dictate how the country should run and operate.”*

*“Any Mujahid [religious fighter] who doesn’t give his bayah (**allegiance**) to Dawla (**ISIS**) is a **fake** Jihadi **and his death will** b in vain. So please b warned.”*

“Our females make us proud by joining IS (The Islamic State, or ISIS).”

*“When you see that the Dawla **cut off the heads of Shi’as** you will think that’s extreme, these people are crazy...first of all, the classical scholars did not consider Shi’as as Muslims...you don’t know what the **Shi’as** believe and you don’t know why the Dawla **is so harsh against the Shi’as**.”*

*“The **Jews** are the most racist people in the world because they reject Muhammad in the name of racism.”*

*“The **Jews** wrote a book called the Talmud. This book is the most racist book. The book states that the Goy (non-Jews) were created to work as slaves for the **Jews**.”*

*“Another example is if a Muslim man cannot find a Muslim woman to marry and he has the option of marrying a Christian or a Jew he should marry the Christian and shun the **Jew** because Allah said those who hate Muslims the most are **Jews** and Pagans.”*

*“Allah made takfeer [declaring an individual as a non-believer] on the **Gays** in the Quran.” “Therefore, Allah didn’t give **Gays** the right to be Muslims.”*

*“In the Hadith below of ibn Abbas the Holy Prophet (saw) has commanded us to kill all **homosexuals** who are caught in the act.”*

*“However, Allah has made takfir [declaring an individual as a non-believer] on the **Jews and Christians** and said they are the worst of created creatures in the Ayah below:*

*“To call Jesus(as) God, like **Christians**, is shirk [the sin of practicing idolatry or polytheism].”*

FOREWORD NOTES ON A COUNTERTERRORISM COLLABORATION

On August 25, 2017, the District Attorney's Office for New York County issued an indictment for "Sheikh" Abdullah Faisal, who was living in Jamaica. He was soon taken into custody by Jamaican authorities on request for extradition to New York City.¹ Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance explained the indictment's significance.

*"Sheikh Faisal has dedicated his life to terror recruitment. Through his lectures, website, and videos, he incites untold numbers of people around the world to take up the cause of jihad... The defendant also served as the fulcrum of a recruitment effort that encouraged individuals to carry out acts of terrorism in the name of the Islamic State and connected them with other radical supporters who were willing—or already in the process—of doing the same in countries around the world."*²

From 2007 – 11, Sheikh Faisal was the "religious sanctioner" for the foremost Islamist extremist group in the U.S., called Revolution Muslim. From December 2007 through May 2011, Revolution Muslim, based primarily in New York City, brought Al-Qaeda's ideology to the United States and, with it, a rabid anti-Semitism.

Revolution Muslim promoted messages that legitimized violence against American — and more specifically Jewish — targets. The organization was by far the most influential Islamist extremist group in the U.S., inspiring a range of domestic extremists and attempted terrorists. In 2012, federal prosecutor Gordon Kromberg, who prosecuted the cases of Yousef al-Khattab, Jesse Morton and Zachary Chesser, all figures at the core of Revolution Muslim, stated: "It is amazing from the perspective of time to look back at Revolution Muslim. In our pleading we listed ... 15 different defendants ... who engage[d] in terrorism or attempted to engage in terrorism [and] all were connected to Revolution Muslim."³

Even as we at the NYPD were actively monitoring and investigating Revolution Muslim, ADL's Center on Extremism (COE) always provided comprehensive threat documentation and analysis. It was very helpful to have another set of eyes watching the group online—and capturing evidence of the explicit threats that appeared on its web site. The COE intelligence-gathering capability and expertise helped law enforcement secure the ultimate arrests associated with Revolution Muslim. As a result of work by the NYPD, the federal authorities and the COE, Revolution Muslim, and hopefully Abdullah Faisal as well, will no longer exert influence.

THE BACKGROUND

Charismatic preachers in the Islamist extremist world are a puzzle dilemma for researchers, policymakers and law enforcement officials engaged in countering extremism, who struggle with questions regarding their particular significance and the role their online presence plays "strengthening the charismatic bond" between extremists.⁴ Charismatic preachers such as Abdullah Faisal typically operate within the law, or at least on the border of free speech and unprotected speech-related crimes, where they help embed radicalized Westerners within a network that facilitates contact with Islamist extremist recruiters.

"Sheikh" Abdullah Faisal, one such charismatic preacher, was one of the most important, influential and deadly English-language "ideologues of hate," before 9/11. Faisal supported bin Laden and Al-Qaeda even before the September 11th attacks and was quick to align with ISIS as soon as they officially split from under Al-Qaeda's control. In many ways, Faisal was "ISIS before there was ISIS."⁵

ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) has long been concerned about Faisal and has followed his activity since 2007, when his hate speech first entered the American sphere, through his arrest in 2017.⁶ This case study provides a unique, multifaceted examination of Faisal's actions, and explores his personal history, and notes his longstanding impact. Better understanding an ideologue's means and methods can help law enforcement, intelligence and non-governmental entities, like ADL, continue to identify, publicize and (hopefully) disrupt future charismatic preachers who call others to violent extremism.

This study is authored by Mitch Silber, who was the director of intelligence analysis at the NYPD during Revolution Muslim's active era, and Jesse Morton (aka Younus Abdullah Muhammad, as he will be referred to throughout this paper), a founder of Revolution Muslim. Today, Morton is a former extremist. He deradicalized after he was arrested in May of 2011 in Casablanca, Morocco for his leadership role in Revolution Muslim and for making threats against the writers of Comedy Central's South Park.⁷ Today, they work together at Parallel Networks, a nonprofit dedicated to combating the violent extremism Jesse espoused alongside Abdullah Faisal, which Mitch and ADL fought against.

SHEIKH ABDULLAH FAISAL IS THE MOST EXTREME IMAM IN LONDON

*On March 7, 2003, Sheikh Abdullah Faisal was found guilty in the United Kingdom for soliciting the murder of Jews, Americans and Hindus, and on two charges of using threatening words to stir up racial hatred.*⁸

Faisal's conviction can be traced back to events in December 2001, when, in a totally unrelated action, police officers in Dorset, England, stopped the car of a criminal suspect who was wanted for rape, assault, causing bodily harm and making threats. The suspect had allegedly assaulted two women, aged 17 and 19.⁹ While searching the vehicle, police discovered several CD's produced and distributed by "Sheikh" Faisal.

In the subsequent months, investigators purchased Faisal's CD's from Islamic bookshops in London. They eventually searched Faisal's home and found the cover of a CD showing the World Trade Center in flames, a translated version of Osama bin Laden's Declaration of War against the Americans, as well as other provocative material. During the interrogation, Faisal told UK police that he'd "been in the United Kingdom for some 10 years," that he had traveled around the country giving the lectures and that his "talks were sometimes attended by a 100 people and sometimes by 500."¹⁰

The investigation also turned up recordings of two lectures issued after 9/11 that incited support for Al-Qaeda. In one of them, Faisal encouraged British Muslims who were fifteen and older to seek out weapons training programs during school vacations and to assume a "jihad mentality". In his speeches he said that non-Muslims, including Hindus and Jews, should be killed like «cockroaches.»¹¹

Faisal was ultimately brought to trial, where prosecutors played tapes of him calling to "[k]ill the pagans wherever you find them. You can use biological warfare and chemical warfare, providing you use them against the soldiers of the disbelievers."¹² It was almost certainly a reference to a fringe fatwa issued by jailed Saudi scholar Nasr Fahd on behalf of Al-Qaeda.¹³ During the long trial, Faisal claimed that the Quran itself was on trial.¹⁴ He asserted that suicide bombings were "permissible" but explained, "I don't legitimize suicide bombings against civilian targets."¹⁵

One of his followers attempted to bribe the judge,¹⁶ and supporters, including Al-Muhajiroun members and Abu Hamza al-Masri, protested outside the Old Bailey courthouse.¹⁷ On March 7, 2003, Faisal was found guilty for soliciting the murder of Jews, Americans and Hindus, and on two charges of using threatening words to stir up racial hatred. He was sentenced (originally) to nine years.¹⁸ Despite the threatening statements found on the cassettes, no link between Faisal and direct recruitment could be substantiated. However, as Peter Clark, head of the Metropolitan Police anti-terrorist branch, stated after the conviction, "We will never know how many of those young, impressionable people whom Faisal spoke to then went abroad to areas of conflict or training camps and have never returned... as a result of listening to him."¹⁹

In this single sentence, Clark identified one of the most challenging aspects of combating "ideologues of hate"—their role is rarely operational, but it is certainly inspirational. In fact, the trial documented Faisal's heavy ideological influence but left no proof of the man facilitating actual engagement in violence, either domestically or abroad.

For example, the trial documented Faisal's intimate connections to James Ujaama.²⁰ Ujaama, who was also an American disciple of Abu Hamza, was ultimately convicted in the U.S. for setting up a jihadi training camp in Oregon.²¹ Detectives were unable to prove that Faisal had influenced Richard Reid (the "shoe bomber" then serving life in the United States), or Zacharias Moussoui (the alleged 20th 9/11 hijacker).

At trial, additional evidence of Faisal's influence emerged: From 1999 until his arrest, Faisal gave talks at a Tipton community center outside London, where he "spoke mainly about the duty of Muslims and the situation in Afghanistan and then started saying how it was a Muslim's duty to go there and fight."²² Three of the young Britons in attendance, apparently impressed by Faisal's exhortations, traveled to Afghanistan in the weeks after 9/11. By Faisal's trial, they were detainees in Guantanamo Bay.

On July 7, 2005, during Faisal's incarceration, terrorists attacked the London Metro, killing 52 people. The bombers were alleged to have been influenced by Faisal's preaching in Beeston, north of London. Three of the four bombers, Mohammed Siddique Khan, Shehzad Tanweer and Hasib Hussain, grew up in the community, and an imam in Beeston reported that Khan had listened to Faisal's audio tapes and asked questions.²³ Germaine Lindsey, the fourth bomber, was also a Faisal acolyte. At Faisal's eventual appeal hearing, Tory MP Patrick Mercer explained, "Lindsay is believed to have attended at least one lecture and to have listened to tapes of other lectures by him."²⁴

But how was it that a Jamaican convert to Islam had such a toxic effect on young British and American Muslims? In order to better understand this phenomenon, it is helpful to go back in Faisal's history.

CONVERSION AND ISLAMIC AWAKENING

Like so many other conversion stories, “Sheikh” Abdullah Faisal’s own journey into jihadi-salafi Islam²⁵ is unique and complex. Born in 1963, Trevor William Forrest was raised in a single-parent household in Jamaica. His mother, an evangelical Christian, was a devoted proselytizer for the Salvation Army. Trevor’s personality was shaped, at least in part, by his mother’s hard work and devotion. Her commitment to the Salvation Army impacted her son’s studious nature and heightened his keen interest in religion — though he resented the Salvation Army’s military structure and history as an “arm of British colonialism.”²⁶

A bright student, Trevor was known throughout his community as “the dictionary.” He read extensively and was drawn to the radical black nationalism of activists like Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X. In school, his business administration teacher introduced him to Islam, a faith he found the “most articulate and profound.”²⁷ Just a few months later, at the age of sixteen, Trevor converted and changed his name to Abdullah Ibrahim el-Faisal. He immediately immersed himself in Islamic studies²⁸.

Faisal soon met Abdullah Hakim Quick²⁹, a fellow Jamaican and graduate of the University of Medina in Saudi Arabia. Quick fused black nationalism and a politicized orthodox Islam.³⁰ He taught apocalyptic viewpoints and Illuminati and Freemasonic conspiracy theories.³¹ After Faisal completed a six-week course on fundamentalist Islam in Trinidad and one year of Arabic studies in Guyana, the Saudi government, on Hakim Quick’s recommendation, awarded Faisal a scholarship to study at Muhammad ibn Saud University in Riyadh. He would spend seven years there and was on the verge of earning a bachelor’s degree in Islamic Studies when the First Gulf War erupted in 1991. Faisal departed from Saudi Arabia soon thereafter — “just as the Americans were occupying the Holy Sanctuary.”³²

Faisal did not return to Jamaica when he received his degree. Instead, he followed the advice of a few of his fellow Saudi students and a wealthy teacher, Sheikh Abdulaziz Al-Rajhi, and relocated to the United Kingdom.³³ The suggestion to use his visa and enter the United Kingdom to preach salafi Islam³⁴ was seconded by his old friend Hakim Quick, as well as another Jamaican convert; Abu Bilal Phillips.³⁵ Phillips, a graduate of the University of Medina was also a student of Muhammad Qutb,³⁶ Syed Qutb’s³⁷ brother. They recommended Faisal embed in the Southeast Asian community,³⁸ but the newly-appointed cleric settled instead in South London and started preaching at the ultraorthodox Brixton Mosque in 1992.³⁹

A year later, Faisal claimed that a congregation of mostly African and Caribbean Muslims that numbered 60 in 1987 had grown to 4,000 members.⁴⁰ His Saudi backers issued him a regular stipend. While there, Faisal adopted increasingly combative and militant religious views that put him at odds with the apolitical Saudi-aligned salafists at Brixton Mosque. This, along with the realization that he was listening to the lectures of Abu Hamza al-Masri,⁴¹ the hook-handed extremist cleric who went on to lead the notorious Finsbury Park masjid,⁴² led to his removal.⁴³ In 1994, Faisal departed from the Brixton Mosque, having bitten the Saudi hand that had educated him. This marked the beginning of his drift towards hate.

Faisal left Brixton with no mosque affiliation and no organization of his own, but he soon found a niche preaching throughout Britain, where he received the honorific title “Sheikh” from his growing number of adherents.

FAISAL DECLARES WAR ON FELLOW MUSLIMS

"Salafis of Brixton— You are Jews!"

Following his removal from the Brixton Mosque, Faisal took a more extremist turn, and began to label his fellow Muslim co-religionists who didn't adopt his fringe extremist, violent views, as hypocrites, disbelievers and "Jews." Essentially, he sought to shame them in their observance of an apolitical Islam and threatened anyone not adopting his views with excommunication (takfir) from Islam.

After his removal from Brixton Mosque, Abdullah Faisal relocated to Tower Hamlets in East London and embedded in the Southeast Asian Muslim community there. He started with a small table for preaching (dawa stall) and was soon giving Friday sermons and lectures throughout the borough. Faisal became a traveling cleric, speaking in Manchester, Birmingham, Coventry, Maidenhead and London. Every Saturday he would address followers at the Jagonari educational center in Whitechapel, which received assistance from the European Development Fund and Tower Hamlets council. His fiery speeches and widespread travels allowed him to build up a national following. Islamic bookstores sold recordings of his lectures on CDs. Faisal apparently had no qualms about these CD labels honoring him as a "sheikh," despite the fact that he clearly does not qualify for the title by any rigorous religious salafi standard.

In the late 1990's, the Taliban were ruling by sharia in Afghanistan, and Osama bin Laden made his initial proclamation of war against America during a CNN interview with Peter Bergen.⁴⁴ Faisal celebrated these developments repeatedly in his lectures. In retrospect, it's clear that although Faisal's influence in the realms of inciting and recruiting would not be exposed for years, it was actually quite apparent from the beginning.

Shortly after the release of a 1998 sermon by Sheikh Hudhaifi, the chief imam of the Great mosque of Medina and an opposition activist against the ruling family in Saudi Arabia gave a joint sermon that chastised the Shiites, Jews and Americans. Faisal translated a recording of it for one of his Saturday sermons, pausing from time to time to offer vitriolic explanations and elaborations.⁴⁵ The congregation's revolutionary zeal is apparent in the recorded question and answer session.

Towards the end of the Q & A, a question was posed to Faisal from the female (sisters) section, criticizing the discussions as "just talk" and urging brothers to "take up arms and fund each other to go for jihad." Sheikh Faisal's answer was matter-of-fact. He explained, "The brothers have already started (...). Not because we don't broadcast that doesn't mean it's not happening."

Faisal preached, and his associates facilitated travel and raised money. It was a method of recruitment that allowed him to be vocal while preventing legal consequence, a model that was already popular with Britain's radical imams, who played a leading role in radicalization and recruitment throughout the late 1990's and into the onset of the War on Terror.⁴⁶ As he gained notoriety, Faisal grew ever more extreme. He and his peers, such as Abu-Hamza al-Masri and Omar Bakri Muhammad, set a foundation upon which the jihadi-salafi interpretation of Islam would gradually take root in the West.

After his split from the Brixton Mosque, Faisal continued to reject Saudi-aligned apolitical salafist views in public and private. His apparent resentment culminated in 1999 when he gave perhaps his most infamous lecture, "The Devil's Deception of the Saudi Salafis."⁴⁷ It was a verbal takfir (excommunication) even most hardcore jihadists would reject. For Faisal, there was no difference between the regime leaders and any salafi who supported the regime; explicit or implicit support was tantamount to disbelief in Islam altogether. In his diatribe, Faisal outlined the general disagreement between Saudi-aligned salafis and the jihadi movement and then went on to issue his own ruling:

"Salafis are major hypocrites (kuffar)... Salafis they will fight and kill for King Fahd who dismantled the Shariah... Therefore you are not allowed to pray behind a Salafi.... They are mega hypocrites...How can they be true believers when they take sides with people who dismantle the Sharia, and they sell their religion, they exchange their religion, for money, pomp and glitter of the life of this world? And any woman who is married to a Salafi, she has to disassociate herself from him, and make baraa' (disassociation with hate) from him. How can she cohabit with a man who betrays Allah Ta'ala, His Messenger, Al Islam, and the Muslims?"

The majority of British Muslims found Faisal's position to be ultra-extreme. Nevertheless, impressionable, young British Muslims – particularly those with minimal understanding of Arabic or the religion – supported him, largely for his controversial views and their own vulnerability to revolutionary views. After issuing the tape, he grew in popularity. However, Faisal's consistent adoption of the most extremist positions would eventually be rebuked, not merely by the Saudi-aligned salafists at Brixton but by those who had been his jihadi-salafi allies among Londonistan's extremist clerical set.

In the late 1990's, Faisal accompanied the Jordanian Al-Qaeda preacher, Abu Qatada, to debates around greater London with the salafis back at the Brixton Mosque. During one of them, Faisal's old friend Bilal Phillips asked Faisal to make his stance on the salafis clear. So, Faisal stood and pronounced explicitly, "Salafis of Brixton: You are Jews!" At the request of Abu Qatada, Faisal went on to clarify that they had certain characteristics of the Jews. After reading a translation of "The Devil's Deception of the Saudi Salafis," Abu Qatada requested a public debate. In it, Qatada emphasized that Faisal's characterizations of these salafis was too general.⁴⁸ However, Faisal refused to alter his position. And because much of the audience was dependent on Faisal's translation of Abu Qatada's Arabic into English, many of them believed Faisal was the victor.

Having attracted widespread attention for his stance regarding other salafis, Faisal grew increasingly extreme. Notably, he held grudges against Abu Hamza and Abu Qatada from that point forward. For example, upon his release from prison in late-2007, Faisal informed an acolyte and associate that he had "destroyed Abu Qatada," and that "Abu Hamza is not a scholar. He was a bar bouncer in Britain and is trained as an engineer."⁴⁹

As a result of these tensions, Abu Hamza penned a treatise, "Beware of Takfir"⁵⁰, warning that Faisal was entering into Kharijism, an extremist sect that Islamic scripture warns about repeatedly. Abu Hamza pointed out that only a year earlier Faisal had stated in a lecture entitled "The Way of the Sahaaba" that "[m]any of them [Saudi-Salafis] (...) just blind [sic]follow their sheikhs. But we don't call them kuffar." After documenting his progression, Abu Hamza warned that if Faisal, "refuses to be corrected (...), he should be ostracized."⁵¹

To put Faisal's actions into historical context, one has to return to the aftermath of the first Gulf War. In 1994, Sheikh Abdul Aziz ibn Baaz, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, issued an edict permitting the Saudi regime to engage in peaceful relations with Israel. It generated controversy and ushered in a new era of turmoil among Islamists in the Middle East. At the time, Bin Laden was still in Sudan, and he issued an open letter to Bin Baaz.⁵² The Mufti's position was also criticized by Yusef al-Qaradawi and other lesser-ranking scholars in Saudi Arabia and throughout the Gulf. As a result of their critical stance, many were imprisoned, and their books and lectures confiscated.⁵³ Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, a preeminent jihadi-salafi scholar,⁵⁴ who authored the seminal work *Millat Ibrahim*⁵⁵ (1994), soon declared the Saudi Arabian regime itself a kuffar⁵⁶ (disbelievers) and issued a criticism of Bin Baaz.⁵⁷

Baaz's edict became a galvanizing topic for the jihadi salafi movement, who had now turned on the Saudi establishment clerical class as well. Jihadi-salafists bickered among themselves about the criticism.⁵⁸ It was this splinter that would birth Al-Qaeda and lead Bin Laden to adopt Ayman al-Zawahiri's "far enemy" strategy, a platform that suggested "tyrannical" regimes in the Muslim world could not be brought down until the United States was rendered incapable of defending them.

So, Faisal went a step further and labeled Sheikh Abdul Aziz ibn Baaz, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia a kaafir (disbeliever) as well. In a lecture entitled "Towards Liberating the Holy Lands," Faisal said:

The Imam of the Prophet's Mosque [Hudhaifah], Alhamdulillah, he (...) is not like Bin Baaz who supports the regime. So, he is sincere, we have to make du`aa for him. And I would like to reiterate the point that the regime is a kaafir regime. And the army who supports the regime (...) [a]nd the scholars who support the regime, [a]nd the Salafis who support the scholars, they are also kaafirs.

Faisal's increasingly extremist discourse only multiplied his following among those least educated in Islam. While ostracized by some, Faisal continued to travel throughout the U.K. speaking and selling CD recordings for two pounds each, while appealing to a specific subset of Britain's Muslim population. Faisal issued verdicts that labeled 95% of Muslim disbelievers.⁵⁹ He continued to provoke the Brixton salafis with provocative titles such as the "Devil's Deception of the 20th Century House Niggers,"⁶⁰ and issued several anti-Semitic lectures, including "No Peace with the Jews."⁶¹

He translated and endorsed Osama bin Laden's Declaration of War against the Americans,⁶² a fatwa that claims killing "the Americans and their allies – civilians and military – is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it."⁶³

In the years before 9/11, Faisal had laid a foundation for Al-Qaeda support amongst English-speaking Muslim youth.

ONLINE JIHAD ADVANCES WHILE FAISAL IS IN PRISON

While Faisal was incarcerated, from 2004–07, advancing technology in online communications proved crucial to maintaining jihadi influence and relevance. At the start of the war in Iraq in March 2003, Al-Qaeda strategists had already created a “virtual university of jihad”⁶⁴ online. Additionally, Al-Qaeda operational leader Sayf al-Adl was authoring a master plan for Al-Qaeda that envisioned an “Eye-Opening Stage,” from 2003–06. The goal of the three-year plan was to spread the brand and vision of Al-Qaeda and establish the necessary ideological awareness infrastructure to wage a global “electronic jihad.”⁶⁵

In Iraq, Jordanian jihadist leader Abu Musab al Zarqawi witnessed firsthand the power of propaganda and the prospects of the Internet. His group, Al-Qaeda in Iraq, was one of the earliest jihadi groups to utilize the Internet. They had a website that was “state-of-the-art by 2001 standards,” which “printed videos onto CD format for manual distribution across the Middle East.”⁶⁶ It was a method that had been common in Britain and was familiar to Faisal. More importantly, though, Al-Qaeda developed its own online media outlet, As-Sahab (the clouds).⁶⁷ Meanwhile, a widely disseminated tract (translated into English) further encouraged “performing electronic jihad” and called it a “blessed field which contains much benefit.”⁶⁸

By the July 7, 2005 London bombings, Zarqawi was advancing a barbaric approach that sought to create civil war. Ayman al Zawahiri, then deputy to Osama bin Laden, scolded Zarqawi and stressed that, “We are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of our global Muslim community (ummah).”⁶⁹ Meanwhile, a manifesto from Al-Qaeda’s chief strategist, Abu Mus’ab al-Suri, was making the rounds on jihadist forums. Al-Suri’s 1,600-page tome, “A Call to Global Islamic Resistance (Dawat al-Muqawamah al-Islamayyah al-Alamiyyah),” argued for a decentralized system, rather than top-down, hierarchical structure (nizam, la tanzim, which means “system, not organization”). This would require a shift from command-cadre terrorism to leaderless resistance, “individual operations and (...) operation of small, completely independent cells, so that they will not be linked, except by the mutual objective, a common name, the methodology of belief, and the way of education.”⁷⁰

Suri’s strategy called for diffused proselytization (dawa) departments to publicize “the focus of the call, its political and jurisprudential methodology, its educational methodology, its dynamic methodology, and to spread this to all levels of the ummah.”⁷¹ Al-Suri’s revolutionary strategy helped widen “the appeal of jihadism to new audiences, especially among young, well-educated Westernized Muslims who seem to be motivated more by a mixture of leftist radicalism and militant pan-Islamic nationalism than by religion.”⁷² Before long, Western counterterrorism officials were explaining that homegrown attacks by “lone wolves” or “terrorist wannabes,”⁷³ now represented the primary domestic threat. Now anyone, anywhere, could play a role in Al-Qaeda’s global jihad. The English language world was a ripe audience for this type of content.

IMPORTED INTO AMERICA BY REVOLUTION MUSLIM

Faisal, who served his time in Britain's notorious Belmarsh prison,⁷⁴ claimed that he had radicalized hundreds of fellow inmates and complained of suffering at the hands of "white kuffar at war with Islam because Islam will end white rule."⁷⁵ Faisal ended up serving four years before he was paroled on condition of his deportation to Jamaica.

In May 2007, Faisal was released. Upon his arrival in Jamaica, he was met by two followers at the Kingston airport. One of them, a 27-year supporter, told the Jamaican press, "We will give him a platform for teaching, because there are many persons waiting to hear from him."⁷⁶ Soon after Faisal's arrival, the supporter facilitated a phone call between Faisal and Younus Abdullah Muhammad,⁷⁷ (former extremist and co-author of this report), a convert to Islam and preacher with a New York-based Al-Muhajiroun-offshoot, the Islamic Thinkers Society. Younus had established written correspondence with Faisal through an intermediary while Faisal was in Belmarsh. Through a Skype call, Younus informed the "sheikh" of plans to bring his radical message to the United States and explained that the conditions were ripe for positive reception.⁷⁸ Mitch Silber (another co-author) describes the law enforcement community's concern regarding Faisal's return: "With Faisal coming to this side of the Atlantic and the transnational power and reach of the internet, the NYPD was concerned about the adverse effect that Sheikh Faisal might have on New Yorkers who were already radicalizing to violence."⁷⁹

SHEIKH FAISAL MIDWIFES THE BIRTH OF REVOLUTION MUSLIM

Faisal instructed Younus to await his directive but to prepare to initiate a new Muslim movement. During subsequent conversations, Faisal told Younus that he was planning a return to proselytizing soon, but that Younus would have to be patient. "I was in America once and the Muslims there are open to the message, but it is not time now,"⁸⁰ he explained.

Over the next few months, Younus and Faisal's communication continued, and Faisal took it upon himself to tutor Younus, offering him personal instruction in radicalization techniques. According to Faisal, effective recruiters (da'ee) needed to know the jihadi-salafi ideology thoroughly. Faisal stressed that comprehending the actual currents of jihadi-salafi thought required that the student master the work of two scholars, Ibn Tamiya and Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab, and then apply their works and principles to modern jihadi scholars from the post-Afghan-Soviet war period. He emphasized that Younus' academic background as a current student at Columbia University's graduate school for international affairs (SIPA) could be a major asset, but he must master the religion (deen) as well. To encourage Younus, Faisal referred him to Islamic (theological) literature, and instructed him on the roots of jihadist interpretation of Islam, religious principles, politics and global jihad.⁸¹

Younus informed the leader of the Islamic Thinkers Society, Al-Muhajiroun's offshoot in the U.S., that Sheikh Faisal had been released, and recommended that they consider incorporating Faisal's work into the organization. However, the group's leader, a close confidante of one of Faisal's rival London clerics, Omar Bakri Muhammad, was opposed, due to Faisal's "content." As a result, Younus began to consider alternatives, and Faisal soon gave Younus permission to start an independent organization. Faisal encouraged Younus to utilize the method of radicalization he had taught him, while Younus encouraged his "sheikh" to consider exploring the use of the internet and emphasized that the organization would concentrate on offline and online dawa to "show people that Islam requires physical action."⁸²

In December of 2007, Younus recruited his best friend, Yousef al-Khattab,⁸³ to co-found Revolution Muslim. The organization would be dedicated to unabashedly promoting Al-Qaeda's message in the U.S. and the English-speaking world generally. Younus explained that they were going to adopt the "street dawa" model of Al-Muhajiroun with aggressive proselytization in public but would also harness the power of social media. New interactive social media contributed to a mounting "violent jihadi online milieu."⁸⁴ They soon collaborated with others to found RevolutionMuslim.com, a website that would become a key hub in the English-language jihadi-salafi network.⁸⁵

WEAPONIZING WEB 2.0

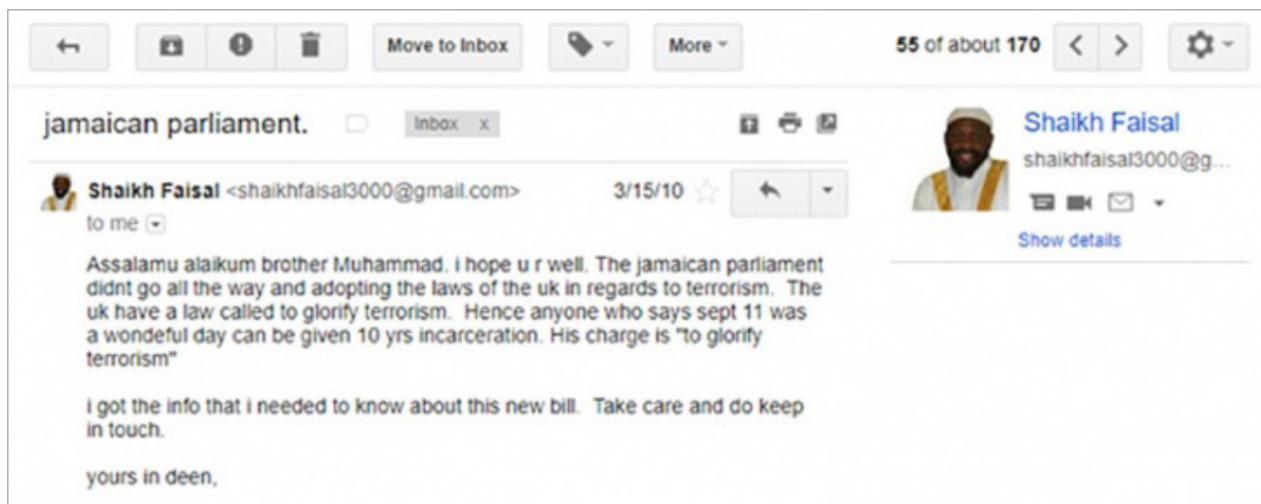
The Revolution Muslim website launched in January 2007, featuring articles penned by Younus—several of which made takfir (excommunication) of the ruling family in Saudi Arabia — a video entitled "Oil, Occupation and the American Dream,"⁸⁶ which outlined the U.S.'s "imperial project" in the Muslim world, and a call for donations with a request list for a "Laptop for Sheikh Faisal- In order to develop online study circles, or halaqa's."⁸⁷ From the outset, the website incorporated external links to radical material, hand-written articles, vitriolic videos and commentary from Yousef and recycled lectures from Faisal's time in Britain alongside newly recorded Q & A sessions.

Viewers were invited to submit their questions, providing an interactive component. Soon, Revolution Muslim launched an online forum.⁸⁸

The triumvirate at the organization's core proved ideal for propagating the hateful jihadist ideology. Younus penned lengthy articles that laid out an organizational platform. He positioned Yousef as the organization's leader (amir). They developed a newsletter, *Radical Review*, for distribution outside mosques after Friday prayers. A key leader from the Islamic Thinkers Society set up the website utilizing a template turned over by StreetDawa.com, a former gateway organization from the U.K. The new template included an AK-47 in the upper right-hand corner that would activate inspirational nasheeds (jihadi anthems)⁹⁰ and short Q & A clips of recordings between Younus and Faisal. Meanwhile, Yousef initiated interactive social media accounts on platforms such as YouTube, Blip.tv, Myspace and on the most popular radical web forums, such as Islamic Awakening and Ahul Hadith. As Yousef described it, "Everything we did was basically open. (...) That's basically what it was all about."⁸⁹

On Fridays, Yousef and Younus would recruit outside New York City mosques after services. A group member would film Younus preaching about jihad as Yousef handed out copies of the newsletter and Sheikh Faisal CDs. Each Friday, the group collected several hundred dollars in donations. These efforts generated new content for the website and kept the organization running. Revolution Muslims soon expanded its network and rapidly developed as a hub for radicalization and recruitment in the U.S.

Faisal quickly became a prominent presence in the U. S., and because Revolution Muslim was protected by that country's less restrictive speech laws, the group was able to circumvent anti-terror legislation in other countries. Revolution Muslim quickly attracted a large following throughout the English-speaking world.



TERRORIZING THE DISBELIEVERS

By 2009, Revolution Muslim was attracting quite a bit of attention in the U.S. Younus had graduated from Columbia and moved to Saudi Arabia to teach at Muhammad ibn Saud University, Faisal's alma mater. CNN aired an interview with Younus and Yousef⁹⁰. In it, Yousef stated that he loved Osama bin Laden more than he loved himself and Younus made the following comments:

Reporter: You're commanded to terrorize the disbelievers?

Younus: The Koran says very clearly in the Arabic language... this means "terrorize them." It's a command from Allah.⁹¹

Concern about terrorism in the U.S. was increasing as incidents and attacks continued: Carlos Bledsoe shot two members of the military outside the Army recruiting office in Little Rock;⁹² Major Nidal Hassan fatally shot thirteen people at Fort Hood;⁹³ Umar Farouk Abdul Muttalab attempted to detonate an underwear bomb on a flight from Europe to Detroit;⁹⁴ and Najibullah Zazi and two accomplices attempted to carry out suicide bombings on the New York City Subway system.⁹⁵ Arrests for terror-related charges were on the rise⁹⁶ and Revolution Muslim and Faisal were consistently cited by terrorists as inspiration. Both Farouk Abdul Muttalab Faisal, the 2008 underwear bomber, and Faisal Shehzad, the 2010 Times Square bomber, claimed to be influenced by Faisal's English-language lectures.⁹⁷

Consequently, concern within the American counterterrorism community increased significantly. "Faisal is focused on propaganda," one U.S. counterterror official in Washington told the Daily News. "But the last few years, he's dabbled in operational things like recruitment and facilitation." Mitch Silber, coauthor of this report and then-head of the NYPD's intelligence analysis division, explained that "[t]he number of American wanna-be jihadists has increased since more English speakers landed on the scene. It's more effective . . . than someone ranting in Arabic pointing a finger at Western audiences." Terrorist expert Evan Kohlmann stated that Faisal aspired to be a new Awlaki but was "willing to say things that would make even Awlaki turn pale."⁹⁸

FAISAL AND REVOLUTION MUSLIM: INSPIRATIONAL, NOT OPERATIONAL

With Revolution Muslim, Faisal helped establish an enduring template for propaganda and recruitment that "firmly established the Internet as a tool to rapidly radicalize, train and connect a growing, but small number of disenfranchised or unstable young people to violence."⁹⁹ Revolution Muslim helped lay a foundation for what would later be termed "open source jihad," as defined in Inspire, the Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's (AQAP) English magazine that Revolution Muslim helped establish¹⁰⁰ as "America's worst nightmare [allowing] Muslims to train at home instead of risking a dangerous travel abroad."

In April 2010, Revolution Muslim initiated threats against the writers of South Park, the satirical television, show for portraying the Prophet Muhammad. The threats reverberated around the globe, and it became apparent that the controversy was likely to lead to criminal charges. A woman in Seattle started a Facebook page, "Everybody Draw Muhammad Day."¹⁰¹ In reaction, Pakistan shut down Facebook temporarily,¹⁰² and Anwar al-Awlaki and Samir Khan, now embedded with Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, issued the first edition of Inspire magazine.¹⁰³

In May 2010, a few weeks after the "South Park scandal," Revolution Muslim held a demonstration in Times Square.¹⁰⁴ Late that afternoon, just a few blocks from the demonstration, smoke poured from an SUV. Within hours, it was identified as a failed car bomb. Because the SUV was parked in proximity to Viacom, owner of Comedy Central, links between Revolution Muslim and the attempted attack were investigated.¹⁰⁵

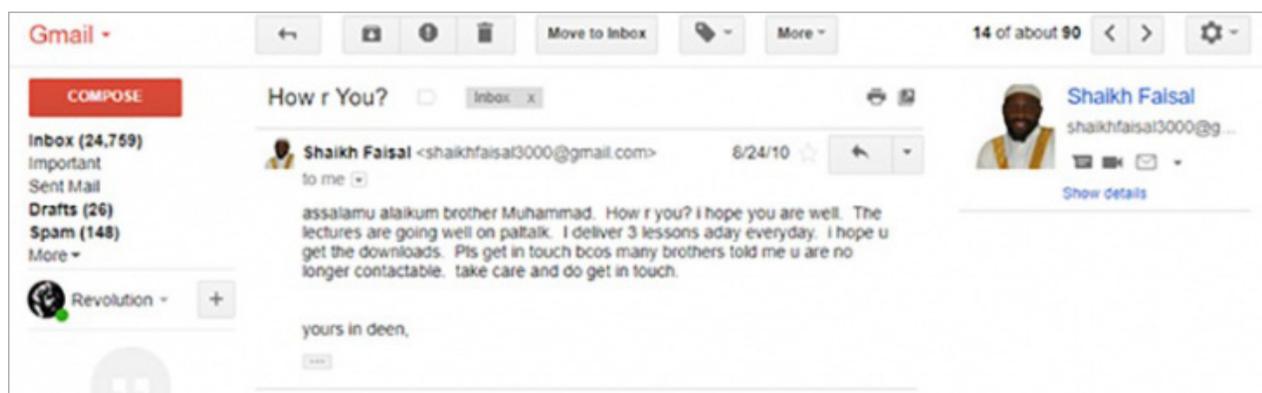
Within 48 hours, Faisal Shahzad, a Pakistani-American who had traveled to Pakistan to train for the operation with an Al-Qaeda aligned organization,¹⁰⁶ was apprehended and charged as the perpetrator.¹⁰⁷ Shehzad soon claimed responsibility and mentioned to investigators that he was radicalized online through the lectures of Anwar al-Awlaki and Sheikh Faisal, "the only two clerics who have got it right."¹⁰⁸ When questioned about his links to Shahzad, Faisal explained that he has a way of influencing people but denied direct responsibility, saying, "[t] here are people who are inspired, and they take things into their own hands."¹⁰⁹

FAISAL'S INDEPENDENT PLATFORM: AUTHENTIC TAUHEED

As pressure increased on the cofounders of Revolution Muslim, Faisal needed a platform to amplify his message, expand the group's reach, and maintain his activity in the event the Revolution Muslim outfit was shut down. Paltalk was the answer. Paltalk is a free downloadable program that allows users to communicate via video, chat and voice. Listeners could post freely during the lectures over a public chat service, and the platform also facilitated more private avenues of correspondence.

In July 2010, Revolution Muslim announced the creation of a new website called "Authentic Tauheed."¹¹⁰ The site centered around Sheikh Faisal, but its main purpose was to provide access to live 24-7 Paltalk discussions, with contributors from the Revolution Muslim website, alongside interactive lectures from radical clerics.¹¹¹ Paltalk, in an era before Google+ hangouts, was a unique live blog with audio capability. Lectures were promoted over RevolutionMuslim.com and sent out to their growing email list. Lecture times were promoted in New York City,

London and Sydney. In fact, Faisal started giving lectures three times a day. The website was an immediate draw among individuals who were interested in the jihadist narrative. Within months, Faisal recognized the power of Paltalk. He sent Younus, who had then fled to Morocco to avoid prosecution,¹¹² an email (see below):



Soon, their audience and network overlapped with the new Authentic Tauheed enterprise. Conferences drew a larger audience because they were formatted to include several preachers commenting on a specific issue. On July 31, 2010, for example, Authentic Tauheed coordinated a conference entitled "Ghazatul Washington" — the Battle for Washington.¹¹³ The event included Abdullah Muhammad, who was residing in Morocco, Anjem Choudhary from Shariah4UK; Abu Waleed from Salafi Media in the UK; Omar Bakri from Lebanon; and Abdullah Faisal from Jamaica. It was a means of documenting jihadi unity and it enhanced the already evolving online jihadi network.¹¹⁴



On May 21, 2011, three weeks after Osama bin Laden was killed, Younus was arrested in Casablanca and charged with solicitation of murder over the "South Park" scandal.¹¹⁵ While Younus awaited extradition back to America, Revolution Muslim associates Anwar al-Awlaki and Samir Khan were killed in Yemen by a drone strike.¹¹⁶

Eventually, counterterrorism specialists reported that the organization "appeared to have some connection to almost every formal terrorism investigation they opened."¹¹⁷ From September 11, 2001 to May 2009, there were 21 cases of homegrown violent jihadist plots or attacks in the United States. From May 2009 to August 2010, seven of the 23 terrorism cases in the United States were connected to Revolution Muslim.¹¹⁸ From May 2009 to November 2010, arrests were made connected to 22 independent cases.¹¹⁹

In 2012, a federal prosecutor told a judge in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, "It is amazing from the perspective of time to look back at Revolution Muslim. In our pleading we listed 15 different cases, different defendants in fourteen different cases of individuals who engaged in terrorism or attempted to engage in terrorism all were connected to Revolution Muslim."¹²⁰

PIVOT FROM REVOLUTION MUSLIM TO THE ISLAMIC STATE

Revolution Muslim effectively closed shop in mid-2011, as the Arab Spring was still unfolding. The Arab Spring seemed a complete rejection of the jihadi-salafi platform and was widely framed as an endorsement of democracy. Al-Qaeda was viewed as diminished,¹²¹ and the West was contemplating an end to the War on Terror.¹²² According to John Brennan, President Obama's assistant for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, it was the "most profound change in the modern history of the Arab world, and Al-Qaeda and its ilk have been left on the sidelines(...)."¹²³ Jihadists, however, saw this power vacuum as an opportunity.

While Al-Qaeda accurately assessed the instability created by the Arab Spring and shifted to a population-centric strategy aimed at winning over the "hearts and minds" of the masses, fissures were developing between it and the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI)¹²⁴ regarding the nascent rebellion against Bashar al Assad in Syria. The ISI called on jihadists everywhere to fill with violence the vacuum left by pro-democracy movements. These rifts set the stage for the future official split between Al-Qaeda and ISIS in Syria.

When faced with divisions in the jihadist movement, Faisal always sided with the most extremist faction. Faisal promoted the idea that the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen "are fake," saying "none of these are 'Islamic' because they brought about governments to appease the west," that "those who died in these revolutions, died as democrats" and that "we can only rejoice when these bring about sharia." He continued preaching this message over his Paltalk platform as hopes for Middle Eastern democracy slowly died.

With Revolution Muslim disbanded, Faisal concentrated on developing his Authentic Tauheed platform, turning it towards Syria and Iraq. He endorsed and frequently promoted the belief that it was permissible to kill civilians.¹²⁵ His audiences were small (25–50 people in any given lecture), but the speeches were recorded and preserved for posterity on AuthenticTauheed.com. Additionally, Faisal established profiles on social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp.¹²⁶

By mid-2012, it became apparent that the uprisings against Bashar al-Assad in Syria were "becoming more radicalized: home-grown Muslim jihadists, as well as small groups of fighters from Al-Qaeda, are taking a more prominent role and demanding a say in running the resistance."¹²⁷ Faisal, by then, was hardly in the media and had found himself a sort of refuge in his native Jamaica. As images of Syria flooded social media, Faisal was quietly grooming the next generation of Western youth, who would go on to support ISIS. By the time ISIS announced its caliphate, the association network Faisal helped establish through Revolution Muslim hit a tipping point and Authentic Tauheed had become its own hub in an expanding jihadi online social network.

On June 28, 2014, ISIS announced itself as a caliphate and called on Muslims around the globe to support it.¹²⁸ Ten days later, in the month of Ramadan, Faisal gave a lecture on Paltalk entitled the "Importance of Hijra." In it, he blatantly encouraged followers to join the caliphate,¹²⁹ emphasizing that those living in the West tend to make excuses for not going, that they have a passport, but they don't leave because they fear poverty, and that they "worry about their bellies and their private parts."¹³⁰

A few weeks later, Faisal gave a lecture called "Is the Caliphate Valid?" In it, he explained to his audience that ISIS's proclamation of the caliphate was the fulfillment of prophecy.

If you are blessed to witness this prophecy you should of said al-hamdu'lilah (praise god), and you should have cried tears of joy instead of condemning the khilafah and casting doubts on the khilafah and instead of bad mouthing the mujahideen who brought back the khilafah by Allah's permission with the blood of the saliheen (righteous) and shuhadaa (martyrs). You should have cried tears of joy instead of jumping on the bandwagon of the hypocrites.¹³¹

Anyone who rejected the caliphate and failed to support it was "behaving like a Jew" and was a hypocrite. He said, "There is no doubt that he (Bagdadhi) is the legitimate caliph and it is incumbent upon you to give your bayah (allegiance)." Later Faisal added, "So take up arms, take up arms, O soldiers of the Islamic State! And fight, fight!"



Ad for the Authentic Tauheed conference supporting ISIS

On September 6, 2014, Faisal headed yet another conference, "Al-Khilafah: Allah's Governance on Earth." He participated with a group of English language jihadi ideologues in the West (primarily London) that included of Abu Walid (salafimedia.com), Abu Baraa (Anjem Choudhary's underling) and Abu Abdullah (formerly Abu Hamza al-Masri's bodyguard and student). With the demise of Revolution Muslim, the older Al-Muhajiroun network based in London reactivated and ultimately served as the connective tissue for an overwhelming number of ISIS foreign fighter social media accounts.¹³²

Besides Faisal, two of the clerics who spoke at the conference have been known to incite extremism. One, Atila Ahmed from London (also known as Abu Abdullah) was sentenced to nearly seven years in prison in 2008 on charges of soliciting murder. The second, Mizanur Rahman from London (also known as Abu Baraa), was convicted in the UK for hate speech and solicitation to murder in 2006. Remarks during the conference ranged from endorsement of ISIS to anti-Semitism and anti-LGBT statements.¹³³

Faisal maintained a fairly high profile on social media, endorsing the Islamic State on Twitter and Facebook with tweets such as: "Our females make us proud by joining IS," and "Any Mujahid (fighter) who doesn't give his bayah (allegiance) to Dawla (ISIS) is a fake Jihadi and his death will b in vain. So please b warned."¹³⁴ It was clear that Faisal had endorsed the Islamic State.

In fact, when other Muslim scholars publicly criticized the barbarity of the Islamic State in February 2015, Faisal took it upon himself to defend the Caliphate and produced a series of lectures called "Debunking the Letter of the Wicked Scholars to Amirul Muhmineen."¹³⁵ It was a reaction to an open letter issued by hundreds of leaders and scholars around the Muslim world rebuking Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The open letter emphasized the idea that it is forbidden in Islam to kill civilians. To this, Faisal responded, "War is a dirty business. There is no such thing as a clean war." Then, echoing his own lectures, Faisal cited a fatwa from Ibn Uthaymeen, a Saudi scholar, explaining that:

Uthaymeen said if they are killing your women and children and the only way to stop them is to kill their women and children to deter them, you are allowed to do that¹³⁶. This fatwa went viral over the internet and then YouTube took it down, but it was too late[.]

Faisal ended by explaining that ISIS was “[s]urgically removing various cancers from the body of the ummah (global Islamic community).” Faisal frequently instructed his administrators to post links to the fatwa’s recording on YouTube and would scold those who did not accept it, saying things like, “Anyone that cannot handle the fatwa of bin Uthaymeen, it means that you have a disease of hypocrisy in your heart.”¹³⁷

IDEOLOGUE AND RECRUITER FOR THE ISLAMIC STATE

As territory under ISIS’s control gradually decreased, Faisal continued proselytizing on their behalf. On March 18, 2017, Faisal release a new message, “Can the Khilafa Survive.” The message condemned Jews and claimed that Christians had organized 68 nations to fight the caliphate, “the biggest coalition of human history.” He repeated Ibn Uthaymeen’s fatwa, saying that in response to coalition airstrikes in Mosul and Raqqa, “you are allowed to kill their women and children.”¹³⁸ A few months later, in one of his final lectures, Faisal vehemently stressed his authorization to kill civilians, craftily utilizing Ibn Uthaymeen’s rhetoric to justify and encourage terrorism in Western countries by Muslim citizens.¹³⁹

Yet, because he personally never sought media attention in the manner of Al-Muhajiroun or Revolution Muslim, Faisal remained mostly off the public’s radar. Nevertheless, his influence remained significant.

Faisal developed a system of anonymity, giving moderators on the Authentic Tauheed website account names such as AT1, AT2, AT3 and so on. It was the same system that ISIS supporters would go on to utilize on Twitter.¹⁴⁰ Yet, Faisal’s speech was protected and, therefore, he remained free, though his apparent influence and links to terror-related cases remained clear.

Faisal crossed the line into terrorism again with his specific call for emigration to ISIS’s caliphate (hijra). On August 25, 2017, the District Attorney’s Office for New York County issued an indictment for “Sheikh” Abdullah Faisal, and his arrest came after a year-long investigation by the NYPD Intelligence Bureau and Manhattan District Attorney’s Office’s Counter Terrorism Program, during which an undercover officer communicated remotely with Faisal. According to the NYPD, Faisal sent the officer propaganda material from official ISIS channels and offered to help him travel to the Middle East “to support foreign fighters abroad.”¹⁴¹

He was soon taken into custody by Jamaican authorities on request for extradition.¹⁴² The indictment alleged that Faisal had engaged a confidential informant online and agreed to connect the informant with contacts in Raqqa — essentially engaging in recruitment. After the informant confirmed his ostensible desire to join ISIS, Faisal suggested that the undercover officer enter into a marriage with someone residing in ISIS-controlled territory in order to facilitate travel abroad. The indictment alleged that Faisal began directing Muslims to join ISIS as early as July 2014 and noted that after issuing the lecture “The Importance of Hijra,” Faisal emailed an individual with the subject line “dawla numbers.”¹⁴³

Faisal’s arrest and conviction may very well prove to be the demise of the notorious cleric. Cyrus Vance explained the indictment’s significance.

Sheikh Faisal has dedicated his life to terror recruitment. Through his lectures, website, and videos, he incites untold numbers of people around the world to take up the cause of jihad... The defendant also served as the fulcrum of a recruitment effort that encouraged individuals to carry out acts of terrorism in the name of the Islamic State and connected them with other radical supporters who were willing — or already in the process — of doing the same in countries around the world.¹⁴⁴

Three days after Faisal’s arrest, on August 28th, 2017, a 22-year-old New Yorker from Queens was arrested on charges of attempting to materially support the Islamic State. The Authentic Tauheed page appeared in the “like” section of his Facebook profile. In June, Parveg Ahmad traveled to Saudi Arabia, allegedly to celebrate an Islamic religious holiday,

but when he attempted to travel to Syria. He was deported back to the United States and arrested at John F. Kennedy International Airport. It is still not entirely clear the extent to which Faisal’s works impacted Ahmed, but his public endorsement of Faisal’s website and social media activity is notable.¹⁴⁵

For now, Faisal, currently in Jamaica, has been removed from the playing field. Today he is fighting extradition to the U.S. If he is convicted in the U.S., however, it is likely that he will face a lengthy prison sentence. After Faisal’s arrest, New York City Police Commissioner James P. O’Neill stated:

Sheikh Faisal has used his influence and direction to groom and inspire terrorists (...). His arrest for his efforts to recruit people for ISIS, a terrorist group that has plotted attacks against New York City, should bring an abrupt end to his global outreach in support of terror groups such as al-Qaida and ISIS.¹⁴⁶



THE POSSIBLE DEMISE OF THE IDEOLOGUES OF HATE

Faisal's arrest may be of greater significance than most imagine. Although Faisal never garnered the level of public infamy of Anwar al Awlaki, Omar Bakri, Abu Hamza or Abu Qatada, he remained the last active charismatic preacher from the early post-9/11 period, and the one who was uniquely able to transition his support from pre- 9/11 Al-Qaeda to the self-declared Caliphate of the Islamic State in 2014. His longevity amplified his influence and impact.

In 2015, an ISIS foreign fighter posted a list of influential jihadi scholars who support ISIS, including six from the West: Omar Bakri, Anjem Choudhary, and Minazur Rahman from Al-Muhajiroun, Musa Cerantonio¹⁴⁷, Ahmed Musa Jibril¹⁴⁸ and Faisal.¹⁴⁹ Everyone but Faisal has been removed from the recruiting sphere.

Unfortunately, it is likely that regardless of any criminal sentence, Faisal's influence will continue. His preaching and lectures will be preserved indefinitely online, and the network he developed will continue to exert influence – directly or indirectly. To further illustrate this point, it is worthwhile to review a case that offers a picture of the network and influence surrounding him.

Keonna Thomas of Philadelphia, was 33 years old on April 4, 2015, when the Department of Justice filed a criminal complaint in the U.S. District Court of Eastern Pennsylvania. The complaint alleged that she had attempted to “travel overseas to join, fight with, and martyr herself on behalf of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).¹⁵⁰”

Thomas lived a double life: The quiet mother of two was also an online propagandist for ISIS. She ran a prolific Twitter account under the names “Fatayat Al Khalifah” and “Young Lioness.”¹⁵¹ The FBI's complaint revealed that from August 2013 until her arrest, Thomas was in touch with three high profile individuals: Mujahid Miski (born Muhammad Abdullahi Hassan), a US permanent resident that had joined Al-Shabaab in Somalia in 2008, Shawn Parsons (known as Abu Khalid al-Amriki), a Trinidadian that joined ISIS in Raqqa, and “Sheikh” Abdullah Faisal.

She eventually planned for travel overseas via direct correspondence with Mujahid Miski. In the interim, she continued tweeting support for ISIS, her desire to travel and to attain istashaad (martyrdom for the cause). Soon after her correspondence with Miski, she engaged in yet more conversation with Shawn Parsons, whom she went on to marry in an online ceremony. In December 2014, Parsons contacted Thomas to let her know that he had made it from Trinidad to Raqqa. Parson's mother would later tell investigators that her son had radicalized online but that she thought his wife played a role in his recruitment.¹⁵² Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the radicalization of the “Young Lioness,” however, lies in her connection to Faisal.

Electronic communications between Thomas and Faisal reveal her desire to travel for “the cause” and the steps she took to do so, including the fact that she requested travel advice from Parsons after their marriage. Such exchanges suggest that Faisal exerted an ideological influence on Thomas and that he knew and influenced Parsons as well.

It is clear that Faisal influenced Keonna Thomas directly, but the connections to Parsons and Miski indicate an indirect influence on a constantly mutating, ever-expanding Western jihadist network. Faisal's intimate connection to Parsons is far from the only case that documents his Caribbean influence.

The number of Trinidadians that joined ISIS has long puzzled policy-makers and counterterrorism officials. With a population of just 1.3 million, Trinidad and Tobago have the highest percentages of citizens who have travelled to fight for ISIS. This expanding network is, at least in part, a consequence of Faisal's influence. For example, we know that a five-person group of Trinidadians that traveled to Syria in 2013 were radicalized by Faisal's online lectures. According to Umar Abdullah, a moderate imam in Trinidad who knew them, they fell prey to Faisal and his online lectures, which influenced their readings of texts. "Verses that led toward jihad would be referenced to in a way to justify their actions," he says.¹⁵³ Abdullah calls Faisal "Sheikh Google," and if his lectures remain online, it is likely Faisal's legacy will continue to affect Caribbean Muslims.

As for Keonna Thomas, she was sentenced to eight years in federal prison. At the sentencing hearing, she explained, "I'm not an evil or malicious person. I'm just someone who, I guess, at one point was impressionable."¹⁵⁴ Thomas' case, like so many others, contests the degree to which those engaging propagandists are "brain-washed," and the degree to which their engagement is a result of their own agency. Regardless, it seems evident that without her connection to Faisal, she may not have made the same choices.

Today, the West's predominant charismatic jihadi preachers from the early days of the War on Terror have been removed from the streets of London, Yemen, Jamaica and other locales, but the ideas they espoused remain and will continue to exert influence, both directly and indirectly. One remaining question is whether others will step in to replace these now-absent ideologues of hate.

A potential early indicator of what was that a few days after Faisal was arrested, an Authentic Tauheed administrator announced on her Facebook page that "in'sha'Allah Abu Nusayba [one of Faisal's primary students] will be able to make some time to teach on Paltalk." Clearly Faisal's influence will continue.

CONCLUSION

As of late 2015, more than 20,000 foreign fighters had arrived in Syria, at least 7,000 of them were nationals from Western Europe and North America.¹⁵⁵ While the dynamics between recruit and recruiter, and teacher and student, are as complex as the individual radicalization process, it is crucial that we continue to gain a better understanding of the nature of radicalization hubs (online and physical world) and the role that ideologues can play in encouraging, legitimizing, and even connecting Western recruits to overseas battlefields. Though the threat from ISIS has ebbed, it would be a mistake to assume that the overall jihadist threat to the West has subsided permanently.

Understanding and interrupting the processes associated with an individual's radicalization remains a key component of preventing, countering and addressing the core causes related to terrorism. Notably, only a limited body of scholarly work focuses specifically on the role of radicalization and recruitment agencies and agents. The literature tends to diminish the vital interplay between individuals and the charismatic preachers that form the center of hubs for radicalization. Better understanding the nature, role and influence of charismatic preachers is crucial to expanding knowledge of how and why some impressionable individuals go on to engage in violent extremist action.¹⁵⁶

Extremist mosques were once the heart of real-world radicalization; today, hubs have largely gone online. Faisal took full advantage of this transition, first with Revolution Muslim and then ultimately via AuthenticTauheed.com and related platforms. However, as open online communication continues to be further restricted on social media, jihadi ideologues sympathizers and supporters will likely migrate to alternative and encrypted platforms.

A data-driven study of online ISIS activity suggests that "operational pro-ISIS and protest narratives develop through self-organized online aggregates, each of which is an ad hoc group of followers of an online page created through Facebook or its global equivalents." This suggests a further decentralization of the message associated with the demise of charismatic preachers. Nevertheless the study's authors identified the role of radicalization hubs where they concluded after mapping the ISIS online network that "instead of having to analyze the online activities of many millions of individual potential actors world-wide interested parties can shift their focus to aggregates, of which there will typically be only a few hundred."¹⁵⁷ These aggregates comprise the radicalization hubs in an alternative online reality, and all too often have revolved around the views of a specific extremist preacher. As a result, Counterterrorism analysts attempting to identify would-be jihadists would be well advised to identify ideologues of hate and track their online presence, whether on open platforms or via encrypted networks.

Finally, Faisal's story highlights the role of a jihadi ideologue in both the political and religious spheres¹⁵⁸ and shows the ways in which an individual's personal and political grievances can ultimately be used to mobilize them to action. Faisal represents the epitome of the charismatic preacher phenomenon; he used ideas and propaganda to mobilize individuals into action. His case highlights the importance of recognizing the role that hate speech can have in facilitating progression along the continuum between radical ideas and terrorist behavior. Faisal's arrest is certainly a step in the right direction. Unfortunately, in the same way Anwar al-Awlaki exerts influence "beyond the grave,"¹⁵⁹ Faisal's legacy is likely to continue to have reverberative, lasting effects going forward.

POSTSCRIPT KEY THEMES OF JIHADI SALAFI HATE

As we learn more about extremists, we are often left wondering: where does their hate come from? In the case of Sheikh Faisal, there is a clear ideology at the root of his anti-Semitism, anti-Christian, anti-Shiite and anti-gay worldview.

Like other great religions, Islam has liberal, mainstream, conservative, orthodox and ultra-literalist-extremist currents. Faisal clearly adheres to an "ultra-literalist-extremist" interpretation of Islam called jihadi-salafi.¹⁶⁰ Key themes that drive this narrative and the mobilization to violence include:

ANTI-GAY.

Faisal's anti-gay stance is similar to that of other orthodox Muslims and has roots in the Old Testament's story of Lot and Sodom and Gomorrah shared with Judaism and Christianity. Faisal notes, "There is no such thing as a gay Muslim." "Therefore, when you come 'Out of the closet' and say, 'I am gay,' you have left the fold of Islam."¹⁶¹

Where Faisal differentiates himself is not in his anti-gay stance, but rather in his direction to followers that homosexuality is ground for exclusion from Islam and more disturbingly, excommunication. "Allah made takfeer [declaring an individual as a non-believer] on the gays in the Quran."¹⁶²

And then there is Faisal's dictate regarding what should be done to gay people, or "people of Loot" [biblical Lot]. "Ibn 'Abbas said: The Messenger of Allah (SAW) said: 'Whoever you find doing the action of the people of Loot [Lot], execute the one who does it and the one to whom it is done.'¹⁶³

ANTI-CHRISTIAN.

The rise of Islam followed Christianity, and some Muslims saw themselves in competition with the older religion. While Muslims revere Jesus (Issa) as a prophet, early Islam found reasons to critique Christianity in order to distinguish themselves, and to give the new religion an air of superiority.

Historically, Muslim jurists trying to denigrate Christianity have focused on the idea of the trinity (the Christian belief in God, Jesus and the Holy Ghost). Faisal, citing previous Muslim scholars, claims that worshipping the trinity constitutes polytheism. Faisal notes, "To call Jesus(AS) God, like Christians, is shirk [the sin of practicing idolatry or polytheism]." "Also, shirk [polytheism/idolatry] is believing in the 'trinity.'¹⁶⁴

And for those Christians who don't believe the teachings of Islam, Faisal says, "Verily, those who disbelieve (in the religion of Islam, the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him)) from among the people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians) and Al-Mushrikun will abide in the Fire of Hell. They are the worst of creatures. (Al-Baiyinah 98:6)"

ANTI-SHI'A MUSLIM.

Sunni Islam and Shi'a Islam have been locked in a sectarian battle for centuries. As a result, religious (primarily Sunni) jurists have found religious reasons to provide legitimacy for the political battles for power and control in the Muslim world. Faisal didn't have to reach far to find these arguments against his fellow co-religionists.

"There is no doubt that there is a big fitna (hardship and animosity) in the ummah between the sunnis and the shia. We cannot pretend it doesn't exist. The word 'shia' was mentioned in the Qur'an. Allah (swt) told you not to become a shia."¹⁶⁵

Sunni Salafi Muslims believe that Shi'a Muslims revere and visit the graves of former religious leaders, which allows Sunnis to argue that Shi'a are "worshipping" a being other than G-d/Allah. "So, they elevate their imams above Allah."¹⁶⁶

And Faisal's prescription for Shi'a Muslims is excommunication and death, which is what ISIS has done. "When you see that the Dawla [ISIS] cut off the heads of Shi'as you will think that's extreme, these people are crazy...first of all, the classical scholars did not consider Shi'as as Muslims...you don't know what the Shi'as believe and you don't know why the Dawla is so harsh against the Shi'as."¹⁶⁷

ANTI-SEMITISM.

Clearly some of Faisal's most venomous hate is directed at Jews. The origin of his hatred of Jews is two-fold. First, de-contextualized early Islamic rationales are used today to denigrate Judaism. And Second, the anti-Semitism imported into the Middle East from Europe during World War II has metastasized and been politicized as Israel was founded and fought wars against Arab states.

Faisal uses both elements to lambast Jews. First, is his religious critique that "[t]he Jews wrote a book called the Talmud. This book is the most racist book. The book states that the Goy (non-Jews) were created to work as slaves for the Jews." He continues, "Allah has made takfir [declaring an individual as a non-believer] on the Jews and the Christians many times in the Quran"¹⁶⁸

Second, he makes the modern political, anti-Semitic, anti-Zionist critique, where he invokes The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. In this critique he claims, "I was taught the protocols of zion [sic] in Univ. Hence I would recommend it as an excellent source of knowledge."¹⁶⁹

And finally, mixing Islam's rivalry with Judaism and more recent European anti-Semitism, Faisal suggests the following treatment of Jews: "There is a Quranic verse where Allah (SWT) pronounced Jews and Christians as Kuffar (apostates) even before the hujjah (in this context, punishment for not following Islam) was established against them."¹⁷⁰

Support for ISIS. Many of the aforementioned themes converge in the Islamic State's efforts against its enemies. On March 18th, 2017, Faisal released an audio message, "Can the Khilaafa Survive (Audio)," where he lists the "many enemies of the caliphate," including the Jews. Faisal says, "I don't think the Jews would be happy with a caliphate. I can't see the Jews being happy with a caliphate." The other enemies, he says, are the Christians. "Christians put together sixty-eight nations to fight the caliphate...the biggest coalition of human history."

Calling those coalition members "Crusaders," Faisal commands followers to "fight them 'til there's no more fitnah." Fitnah is an Arabic word meaning trial, affliction or distress. Finally, about coalition airstrikes in Raqqa and Mosul, Faisal states, "If the kuffar [unbelievers/infidels] kill your women and children, you are allowed to kill their women and children." Ultimately, he suggests the only way to control the caliphate's skies is to "shoot down the planes of the kuffar" with surface-to-air missiles.¹⁷¹

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ADL by the numbers | **OUR IMPACT**

EDUCATE

5.2M
STUDENTS



impacted through our Holocaust education program, Echoes & Reflections, since inception in 2005

27k
EDUCATORS



acquired skills to teach anti-bias concepts and support students in using ally behaviors to challenge bias and identity-based bullying

30,000
EDUCATORS



receive ADL Education Updates and Curriculum resources

ADVOCATE

45
STATES + D.C.



have enacted Hate Crimes legislation based on, or similar to, the ADL model produced in 1981

MONITOR

2.6M
TWEETS



Tweets containing anti-Semitic language were identified in our 2016 report about online harassment of journalists

250



WHITE SUPREMACISTS

who attended the 2017 “Unite the Right” Rally in Charlottesville were identified by ADL in cooperation with local law enforcement

PARTNERS

300+
MAYORS



pledged to join ADL through the Mayors’ Compact to Combat Hate, Extremism and Discrimination, a new partnership with the U.S. Conference of Mayors

INVESTIGATE

11k 
CASES

in which ADL has provided extremist related information to law enforcement, including critical, up-to-the-minute background on extremist threats

TRAIN

100% 

Of all new FBI agents have been trained by ADL since 2001

+150k 
**LAW ENFORCEMENT
PROFESSIONALS**

were trained by ADL in the last 10 years, helping them to fight extremism and build trust with the communities they serve

How ADL is Responding

ADL has a comprehensive approach to address anti-Semitic incidents and to counter all forms of hate. ADL's Center on Extremism is a foremost authority on extremism, terrorism and all forms of hate. The COE's team of investigators and analysts strategically monitors and exposes extremist movements and individuals, using cutting-edge technology to track real time developments and provide actionable intelligence and data-based analysis to law enforcement, public officials, community leaders and technology companies.

ADL also does this work through:

- **Reaching 1.5 million students** annually with our anti-bias and anti-bullying programs
- **Building coalitions among diverse organizations and communities,** and boldly advocating against government policies, organizations and people that promote anti-Semitism, racism and bigotry
- **Working in Silicon Valley through ADL's Center on Technology and Society,** which works in close partnership with tech industry leaders to establish best practices for addressing cyber hate and to develop proactive solutions to fight the spread of anti-Semitism and other forms of hate online

From a database of reports and resources on technology, extremism and more, visit [ADL.org](https://www.adl.org).

 Anti-Defamation League

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