

Trump's Curious Pro-Islamist Legacy

by Sam Westrop

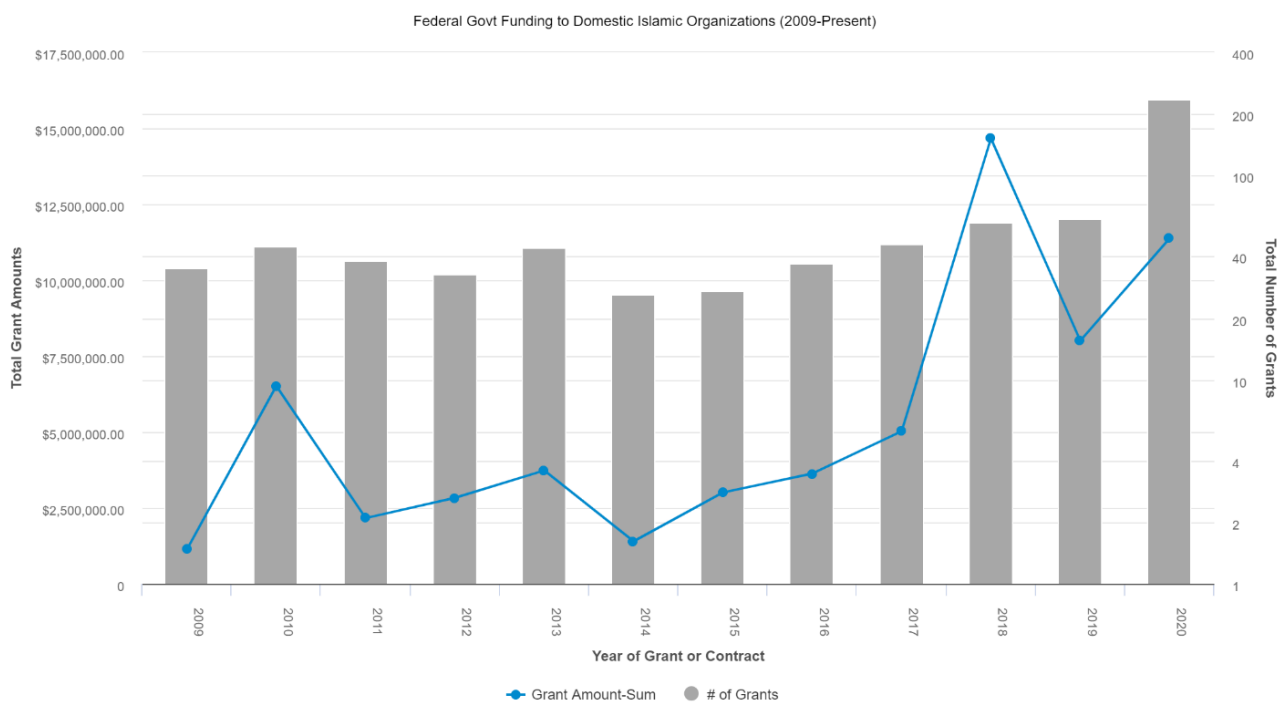


The last four years have been extremely lucrative for American Islamists. Despite the former President's rhetoric and pledges on the subject of "radical Islam," and the loud accusations proclaimed of his administration's ostensible anti-Muslim bias, more federal money was in fact handed out to domestic Islamic organizations than under any previous administration, even discounting COVID relief grants and loans. Meanwhile, not a single domestic reformist Muslim organization received any support at all.

Trump's federal government gave out, on average, almost three times as much cash to American Islamic organizations per year as it did under Obama. Even if some are convinced that the government should ever be in the business of funding or

subsidizing religious organizations of any faith, we can at least all oppose funding that ends up in the pockets of extremists – particularly those with overt ties to terrorist movements.

Consistently, under both the past two administrations, according to the federal government's [own data](#), from of the \$63.5 million of federal monies given to domestic Islamic groups since 2009, \$37.6 million has gone to groups with some degree of Islamist influence. In just four years, the Trump administration was responsible for over \$26 million of that total sum. In other words, under Trump, America has served as a leading state sponsor of nonviolent Islamism.



As I have previously [noted](#), over \$1 million of this sum in 2020 was given under the Small Business Administration's notoriously mismanaged COVID relief grant and loan schemes, ending up in the pockets of to some extremely dangerous theocrats. Recipients included organizations such as Khatme Nubuwwat, a violent South Asian Sunni Islamist movement dedicated to the violent eradication of the much-persecuted, minority Ahmadiyyah Muslim sect. In 2017, the very same Khatme Nubuwwat Center in Virginia that received federal monies

organized a conference at which speakers [encouraged](#) the use of violence against Ahmadi Muslims and discussed their hopes for following Pakistan's lead and criminalizing the Ahmadiyyah faith in the West.

Other beneficiaries of federal largesse included [anti-Hindu](#) organizations such as the Indian American Muslim Council, which has previously been linked to SIMI (a banned terrorist organization in India); the U.S. branch of Dawat-e-Islami, a [radical Barelvi](#) organization; as well as charities that appear closely tied to Hamas and are run by [former Taliban fundraisers](#), such as the Texas-based [Baitulmaal](#).

But COVID funding does not explain the enormous increase in funding under Trump. In fact, COVID relief grants only accounted for 1/25th of taxpayers' monies given out in 2020 to domestic Islamic organizations.

After careful analysis of every single recipient of federal funds, the Middle East Forum has found that a clear majority of all federal monies handed out to Islamic organizations went to Islamist-linked or Islamist-controlled organizations. In contrast to the COVID funding, these other federal grants were not handed out blindly; instead, every recipient organization was subject to review.

The largest single grant given to a domestic Islamic organization under the Trump presidency was \$8.8 million handed out to the charitable arm of the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) – a major branch of the violent South Asian movement Jamaat-e-Islami, [according](#) to John Hopkins academic Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr.

Writing in *National Review* in 2017, I [revealed](#) that ICNA's sister organization, Helping Hand for Relief and Development (with which it shares staff and officials) was openly collaborating with the designated Pakistani terrorist organization Lashkar-e-Taiba. In 2019, a Congressional

Resolution [picked up on this fact](#) and called on the U.S. government to ban all funding to the network.

Two branches of the Muslim American Society (MAS) received a total of \$220,000 from the taxpayer. [Named](#) by federal prosecutors as the “overt arm of the Muslim Brotherhood in the United States,” MAS was [designated](#) by the United Arab Emirates in 2014 as a terrorist organization. In 2019, MAS’s Philadelphia branch made national news after it hosted an event at which [children sang](#) about torturing and beheading Jews. (Incidentally, that same branch received an additional \$3,000 of COVID relief from the federal government.)

In 2019, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) received \$100,000 from the Department of Homeland Security, as part of a \$4.5 million “non-profit security program.” CAIR was blacklisted by the [Justice Department](#) in 2009 because of its close involvement with the Holy Land Foundation, a major terrorist financing organization. Despite its reputation as a civil rights group, today, CAIR officials continue to [promote](#) violently anti-American and anti-Semitic rhetoric.

The prominent Virginia mosque, Dar Al-Hijrah, also received \$100,000 from Trump’s DHS under the same security program. With a long history as a base for both hardline Salafi and [Hamas activists](#), the mosque’s most famous graduate is its former imam, Anwar Al-Awlaki, who became leader of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, before his death in a 2011 U.S. drone strike. The mosque has not moderated: its current imam, Shaker Elsayed, is an unrepentant [anti-Semite](#), [an apologist](#) for the terrorist group Hamas, and has [defended](#) barbaric practices such as female genital mutilation.

Another mosque, the Islamic Center of Passaic County, received a federal grant worth over \$31,000 in 2017, despite the fact that its imam Mohammad Qatanani, is [accused](#) by federal law enforcement of involvement with the terrorist group Hamas.

From 2017 to 2018, the Department of Agriculture gave almost \$800,000 to the Islamic Institute of Knowledge, a mosque founded by a disciple of a senior Hezbollah cleric, and which [runs events](#) praising Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini.

Indeed, spending by the Department of Agriculture – mostly, for some reason, school lunch programs – account for a great deal of the funding. Between 2017 and 2020, the Department also gave out over two dozen grants through such programs, totaling \$9.7 million, to the Islamic Center of Detroit, a mosque with a [long history](#) of giving platforms to some of America's most hardline Salafi clerics.

In Missouri, the Islamic Society of Greater Kansas City, received almost \$900,000 under the Trump administration, despite its [long history](#) as a key center for radical activity. A school closely affiliated with the mosque, the Islamic Society of Greater Kansas City, received an additional \$330,000. With officials and teachers [openly linked](#) to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, the school's graduates have [included](#) Mohamed Soltan, who was imprisoned in Egypt from 2013 to 2015 for his involvement with the short-lived, extremist Morsi regime.

Another school, the Miftaahul Uloom Academy in New Jersey, received over \$68,000. Its Islamic studies teacher, Wesley Lebron, is a prominent Islamist activist who has promoted videos [claiming](#) that "Jews did 9/11" and [warns](#) Muslims to "not become like the Jews." Meanwhile, the FEC handed over \$4,000 to the American Youth Academy, which was originally [founded](#) (under a different name) by Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) terrorist Sami Al-Arian. The school's extremism, even without Al-Arian, has persisted. A regular [guest speaker](#) at Academy events is Kifah Mustapha, a radical imam whom federal prosecutors previously [exposed](#) as a overt support of the terrorist group Hamas.

The list goes on – in fact, we have barely scratched the

surface. All this raw data can be found in the federal government's own [USAspending.gov dataset](https://www.usaspending.gov).

Radical organizations with long-held ties to extremism use government funding not just to line their own pockets, but to enhance their leadership over American Muslims and legitimize their place in American life. Indeed, European leaders have [declared](#) in their own reviews of counter-extremism policies that there are few better ways for Islamists to hijack Muslim communities, and sideline moderates, than by securing government backing.

And the Trump administration was certainly willing to offer such backing. Over the administration's four years, federal agencies handed out over 400 grants (along with a couple of contracts and loans) worth \$39 million to over 260 Islamic organizations without any apparent thought to the ideological implications of handing over such enormous sums.

That two thirds of this, \$26 million, ended up in the coffers of Islamist organizations is only slightly different, proportionally, to the behavior of the Obama administration, which gave out, over eight years, a total of just \$24.4 million to American Islamic organizations, of which just under half, \$11.5 million, benefited Islamist organizations. Despite its own troubling domestic funding arrangements, and its well-documented [sympathy](#) for Islamist movements overseas, at least the Obama administration, in contrast with Trump, also funded one domestic reformist, counter-Islamist group, the American Islamic Congress.

Meanwhile, funding to international Islamist groups (not included in the figures above) remained as high under the Trump administration as under Obama. For example, branches of the international charitable franchise, Islamic Relief, received, from 2018 to 2019, over \$1.1 million from the State Department's U.S. Agency for International Development.

These grants were provided despite European allies drastically [cutting](#) backing funding for the franchise, in light of growing evidence of the charity's close links with the Muslim Brotherhood and its officials violent anti-Semitism and support for terrorist groups.

In fact, Islamic Relief's extremism has become so well-established, in fact, that in December 2020, the same State Department that has handed over so much taxpayers' money [published a statement](#) noting the glorification of terror and extremism of senior Islamic Relief officials, and condemning the "well-documented record of anti-Semitic attitudes and remarks made by the senior leadership of Islamic Relief Worldwide."

So what explains the fact that America's most "[anti-Muslim](#)" President ended up being Islamist organizations' most generous patron? Most, I suppose, would point to ignorance; others, perhaps, to unrestrained civil servants dwelling more happily than ever in a swamp that, today, remains markedly undrained. Certainly, few could come up with serious ideological basis for the administration's apparent support for American Islamists.

The actual reasoning is perhaps more pathetic: the Trump administration never really cared and lacked the patience ever to understand. The White House made no effort at all to fulfil Trump's early [pledges](#) to establish a Commission on Radical Islam, work with reformist Muslims or have the "support networks for Radical Islam stripped out and removed one by one." The administration's counter-terrorism plan, meanwhile, [appeared](#) mostly copy and pasted from previous documents.

With a lack of a coherent anti-Islamist policy – as I [noted last year](#) in an essay on the subject – the Trump administration's dalliance with domestic Islamism was not just limited to financial support. For the last four years, administration officials have been happy to embrace and play

host to officials of some of the above-mentioned Islamist groups, including the anti-Jewish, terror-tied Islamic Relief franchise – undoubtedly aware that the White House was hardly likely to pay any attention to such friendships.

In fact, just six months ago, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) published [two videos](#) praising the work and partnership of both Islamic Relief and the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA), despite ongoing federal [investigations](#) into ICNA officials' ties to terrorism and the growing [global condemnation](#) of Islamic Relief.

The Trump administration was far too feckless ever to be a serious counter-Islamist force. For Islamists such as CAIR, Islamic Relief and their allies, the Trump presidency paradoxically afforded these extremists both the opportunity to join the progressivist fight and protest Trump loudly in front of the cameras, while simultaneously benefitting from federal largesse and administration naivety behind closed doors. In many ways, the Trump administration has been the perfect Islamist patron.

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