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**Global Research in International Affairs (GLORIA) Center  
THE PROJECT FOR THE RESEARCH OF ISLAMIST MOVEMENTS  
(PRISM)**

**OCCASIONAL PAPERS**

**Volume 5 (2007), Number 4 (November 2007)**

**Director: Reuven Paz**

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**Abstract:** This is a series of papers that translate and analyze articles, reports, religious decrees, and other documents, written primarily in Arabic by Islamist scholars, clerics, operatives, or intellectuals.

**Radical Islam in the Caribbean Basin:  
A Local Problem or a Global Threat?  
By Moshe Terdman**

**Introduction**

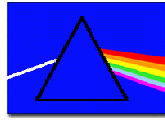
On June 2, 2007, U.S. federal authorities announced that they broke up an alleged terrorist plot by four Afro-Caribbean converts to Islam and radical Muslims from Guyana and Trinidad & Tobago, to blow up fuel tanks and pipelines at John F. Kennedy International Airport. The plot was in its planning stages, and had been followed by the FBI for 16 months. Despite not being close to completion, the intention of the plotters was to create maximum havoc and destruction, hoping that the fuel dumps would then destroy terminal buildings and aircrafts on the ground.<sup>1</sup>

The exposure of this plot has brought to the fore the issue of the domestic threat posed by radical Muslims from the Caribbean and, thus, by radical Islam acquiring a foothold in the Caribbean basin, a geographical area which is located in the US backyard.

The Caribbean Basin is formed out of 31 countries, which are classified linguistically into four regions including 19 English-speaking countries, 5 French-speaking countries, 3 Spanish-speaking countries, and 4 Dutch-speaking countries. Out of a total population of about 35 million, only about 300,000 are Muslims. Small concentrations of Muslims can be found all over the Caribbean basin. However, the largest Muslim populations are in the English-speaking countries of Guyana, where they comprise approximately 13% of the overall population; and Trinidad & Tobago, where they comprise approximately 8% of the overall population; as well as in

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<sup>1</sup> See on-line at: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/18999503/>;  
<http://www.nationnews.com/story/315859127098570.php>;  
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=10672115>



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Suriname, which is a Dutch-speaking country, where there are nowadays about 120,000 Muslims, who comprise approximately 28% of the overall population.<sup>2</sup>

Most of the small Muslim communities that are scattered throughout the Caribbean basin have a common problem of permanent work permit for their imams or other religious workers. Furthermore, most of them have no mosques as yet but only prayer places in houses instead.<sup>3</sup>

The first Muslims who arrived at the Caribbean were Sub-Saharan Africans from West Africa, who were enslaved to serve in the Caribbean plantations. Due to the severe conditions of slavery, most of these slaves gradually abandoned their Islamic religion and converted into Christianity.

Yet, despite the forced baptism there were still West African Muslim slaves, who continued in spirit, if not in reality, to study and observe Islamic life. Some of them even resisted slavery and led slave riots. In December 1831-January 1832, there was an island-wide rebellion. The rebellion, misinterpreted as the Baptist War, is reported to be in response to the call for jihad made through *Wathiqah*, or *Wathiqat Ahl Sudan*, which exhorted all Muslims to be true and faithful to religion if they wished to enter Paradise. Apparently, this document was written in Africa in 1789 by the great West African Muslim scholar and reformer, Othman dan Fodio (1754–1817), and was circulated in Jamaica in the late 1820s, reaching the hands of Muhammad Kaba, a Muslim slave of Spice Grove Estate who had been baptized and known by his Christian name Robert Tuffit or Robert Peart. Of Mandingo parentage, Kaba came from Bouka, a short distance east of Timbuktu, and belonged to a well-to-do family learned in law and Islamic teachings. Apparently Kaba, who studied the Qur'anic law at Timbuktu, which was then regarded to be one of the most important centers of Arabic and Muslim studies, was a *marabout* and a Sufi. So strong was Muhammad Kaba's belief in Islam that never in practice or in spirit did he give up his faith. Even as a member of the Moravian Church, Kaba and many of his fellow brethren who had gone through the process of baptism were practicing Islam. These Muslim slaves, who were inspired by the *Wathiqah*, which called on the Muslims to wage Jihad and resist slavery, rebelled against their white owners. Commonly known as the Baptist Rebellion or the Baptist War, the slave's revolt of 1832 wrought havoc of irreparable dimension to the plantation system in Jamaica and hastened the Emancipation Act, which abolished slavery in the British Empire, in 1833.<sup>4</sup>

Later on, as from the 1830s, when slavery was formally abolished, hundreds of thousands of indentured laborers from the Sub-Indian continent and Indonesia were brought to the Caribbean basin. Among them were also many Muslims.<sup>5</sup>

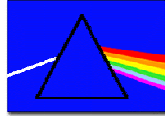
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<sup>2</sup> See on-line at: <http://islamweb.net/ver2/archive/article.php?lang=E&id=136012>;  
<http://www.islamawareness.net/Caribbean/caribbean.html>

<sup>3</sup> See on-line at: <http://www.islamawareness.net/Caribbean/caribbean.html>

<sup>4</sup> See on-line at: <http://gess.wordpress.com/the-jihad-of-1831%E2%80%931832-the-misunderstood-baptist-rebellion-in-jamaica/>; <http://www.webstar.co.uk/~ubugaje/beyond6.html>

<sup>5</sup> See on-line at: [http://www.guyana.org/features/guyanese\\_muslim.html](http://www.guyana.org/features/guyanese_muslim.html)



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Thus, the region's small Muslim population is nowadays comprised mostly of South and Southeast Asians with deep roots stemming back to the colonial period. In the last decades, the region has also experienced an increase of migrants from the Middle East. Recent Arab migrants tend to be more pious and traditional relative to their second and third generation Arab and Muslim counterparts. Moreover, there is a growing number of locals converting to Islam, especially among the marginalized populations of African descent in the Caribbean basin. Most Muslim converts embrace Islam for purely spiritual reasons and do not harbor any inclination towards political or religious extremism. Many perceive Islam as a rite of empowerment in societies where they are underserved and experience discrimination.<sup>6</sup>

Nowadays, a process of Islamic revival takes place among Muslim communities in various parts of the Caribbean, and particularly among Muslims in Guyana, Suriname, and Trinidad & Tobago. This process is manifested by vocal claims for the introduction of Arabic in the curriculum of primary and secondary schools, which, for the time being, is taught privately and mostly in religious contexts. These vocal claims have been stimulated by the overseas communities in South Asia and the Middle East which frequently send missionaries and receive Caribbean students for training. This process is further manifested by processes of Sunnification and radicalization taking place currently within the Muslim communities in these countries, which happen to have also the largest, as well as the most significant, Muslim communities throughout the Caribbean basin.

### **The Sunnification and Islamization Processes in Guyana<sup>7</sup>**

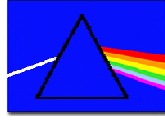
Guyana is a multi-ethnic republic situated in the northern coast of South America. The country is inhabited by heterogeneous population in terms of ethnicity and religious affiliation. Amerindians are the indigenous people of Guyana. In the seventeenth century, the country became populated by waves of immigrants brought in under colonialism as slaves from Africa or as indentured workers from the Indian Sub-continent. Thus, the Dutch and later the British colonial mercantile interests shaped the socio-cultural environment of the country. In 1966, it gained its independence from the British, which marked the transfer of political power to the Afro-Christian population. However, the majority is of South Asian descent and form roughly 51% of the population. Yet, they remained disenfranchised until the 1992 general elections.

According to the Central Islamic Organization of Guyana (CIOG), there are about 125 formal and improvised mosques scattered throughout the country. Muslims form about 13% of the total population. Nowadays, there are in Guyana several active

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<sup>6</sup> See on-line at: <http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369812>

<sup>7</sup> This part of the article dealing with Guyana is based on three main articles: Raymond, Chickrie, "Muslims in Guyana: History, Traditions, Conflict and change" (September 9, 2001). See on-line at: [http://www.guyana.org/features/guyanese\\_muslim.html](http://www.guyana.org/features/guyanese_muslim.html); Raymond, Chickrie, "The Afghan Muslims of Guyana and Suriname" (March 2003). See on-line at: [http://www.guyana.org/features/afhanguyanese\\_muslim.html](http://www.guyana.org/features/afhanguyanese_muslim.html); Chris, Zambelis, "The Threat of Religious Radicalism in Guyana", *Terrorism Monitor*, Volume 4, issue 15 (July 27, 2006). See on-line at: <http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2370085>



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Islamic groups, including the central Islamic Organization of Guyana (CIOG), the Hajjatul Ulamaa, the Muslim Youth Organization (MYO), the Guyana Islamic Trust (GIT), the Guyana Muslim Mission Limited (GMML), the Guyana United Sad'r Islamic Anjuman (GUSIA), the Tabligh Jamaat, the Rose Hall Town Islamic Center, and the Salafi Group. Two Islamic holidays are nationally recognized in Guyana: Eid al-Azha or Bakra Eid and Youm an-Nabi or Eid-Milad-Nabi. Furthermore, in mid-1998 Guyana became the 56th permanent member of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC).

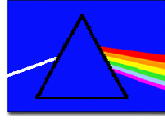
Islam was formally reintroduced in Guyana with the arrival of South Asian Muslims in 1838. However, there was an earlier Muslim presence in Guyana, by the African slaves who were brought to Guyana. Mandingo and Fulani Muslims were first to be brought from West Africa to work in Guyana's sugar plantations. Yet, the cruelty of slavery neutralized the Muslims and the practice of Islam vanished until 1838. However, even today Muslims in Guyana are referred to as Fula, linking them to their West African ancestry. Between 1835 to 1917, over 240,000 East Indians, mostly illiterate, Urdu-speaking villagers, were brought to Guyana. Of these 84% were Hindus, but 16% were Sunni Muslims. There were also some Shi'is and later on Ahmadis. However, their numbers are too insignificant to cause any friction within the Muslim community.

Before the 1960s, Muslim missionaries who frequently visited Guyana came almost exclusively from the Indian subcontinent. This influx of missionaries and the Islamic literature they brought with them helped to promote and maintain the Sunni Hanafi School of law. However, in 1966, after Guyana won its independence, it established diplomatic relations with many Arab countries, and Egypt, Iraq, and Libya opened embassies in Georgetown, Guyana's capital. Many Guyanese Muslim youths went to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Libya to study Islamic theology and Arabic language.

These Guyanese Muslims who returned from the Arab world to Guyana began introducing changes that irked the local Muslims. Many who studied in Saudi Arabia were highly influenced by Wahhabism, and thus a new interpretation of Islam was brought to Guyana, which confused the locals. Wahhabi interpretation of Islam came in conflict with some aspects of the Muslim culture of the Indian subcontinent.

In the 1970s, Guyanese Muslims began moving toward greater homogenization and uniformity. Greater orthodoxy or Sunnification accompanied this tendency towards uniformity. Sunnification in this context means the abandonment of local and sectarian practices originating in South Asian Islam in favor of a uniform orthodox practice originating in the Arab world. In other words, it seems that nowadays in Guyana, Arabic and Arab-ness legitimize Islam, and South Asian Islam is now viewed as un-Islamic and polluted with innovations.

In the background of this Sunnification process stood the political competition between Hindus and Muslims in Guyana. With this in mind, it seems that the Sunnification process is an expression of a need for a separate Muslim identity as well as of a Muslim refusal to be dominated by Christians and Hindus.



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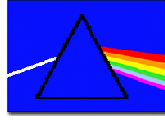
The tendency toward orthodoxy seems to have affected local religious practices, as can be seen in the gradual disappearance of the observance of Muharram and the complete disappearance of the Ta'zia, both of which are associated with the Shi'a Muslim tradition. Currently, Muslim leaders constantly stress orthodoxy. Religious leaders both in Guyana and from those who return from studies overseas, mostly from the Arab world, preach strongly against what are considered to be un-Islamic practices. Thus, it is no wonder that there are many disputes between orthodox and traditionalists in which the former accuse the latter of pagan practices.

Another manifestation of the Sunnification process is a reconstruction of the past by Guyanese Muslims who returned from studies in the Arab world. They have tried to de-emphasize their Indian cultural heritage by reconstructing their history in order to distinguish themselves from the Hindus and promote separate Muslim identity. Thus, although the vast majority of Guyanese Muslims are descendants of South Asian indentured laborers, they have presented themselves as the descendants of Arabs. While their mother tongue was Urdu, many have claimed it was Arabic. During the mid-1970s, a powerful Arabization movement has emerged in Guyana, and, thus, it became more appealing to the orthodox Muslims in Guyana to be part of this movement than to trace one's roots in Pakistan or India. This movement to create a purer Islamic identity was contested by other traditionalists, especially the older generation, who has clung to their South Asian practices and tradition.

The shift from Urdu to Arabic and the emphasis on eliminating traditional practices, illustrates the attempts to emphasize Muslim cultural identity. They link these practices to Hinduism, and as a consequence, would like to purge Islam of these "innovations". The association of Arabic with Muslims is new in Guyana and the demand for Arabic illustrates the emphasis to differentiate from the Hindus. Muslim children are taught Arabic and Urdu during the evenings at Muslim schools. These languages are restricted to religious contexts because all Guyanese Muslims speak English.

As part of the Islamization and Arabization processes, new elements derived from the Middle Eastern culture, such as architecture of the mosques and their domes, have been introduced. Another Arab influence is the manner of greeting among Muslim men, particularly after prayers in the mosque, which involves embracing and shaking hands. Other Middle Eastern influences include: the incorporation of Arabic words and terms instead of Urdu words and terms; Guyanese Muslims who can afford it, take the pilgrimage to Meccah; Some men have started wearing the long shirts (*Jilbab*), which they acquired after the pilgrimage, and raising long beards while some women have started wearing head scarf (*hijab*).

Furthermore, there is a move toward a more literary tradition in conformity with Islam at the expense of local traditions. In this religious discourse, the interpretation provided by orthodox Muslims relying on the scriptural tradition seems to become more hegemonic, creating religious authority itself. There is stronger emphasis on the need to learn Arabic for the daily worship (*namaz*) and on correct pronunciation, as well as the ability to recite and understand the Qur'an. In Guyana today, the emphasis



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is on practicing orthodox and Sunni Islam. This is voiced by many imams who advocate strict adherence to the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet.

Nowadays, the movement to purge Islam of South Asian traditions continues unabated in Guyana. Guyanese Muslims, who have returned from studies in educational institutions in the Arab world, are encouraging the younger generation to study in the Arabic-speaking countries instead of in Pakistan, India or Malaysia. Currently, many Islamic organizations in Guyana also tend to send young people to the Arab world. Some of these organizations have established strong ties with Saudi Arabia, Libya, Iraq, Kuwait, and Egypt. However, Muslims still have the opportunity to study in Malaysia, Pakistan, or India. But the latter are not in the top list of the younger Muslim generation. The Muslim religious scholars now look to the Arabic-speaking world for leadership and religious guidance.

This alignment with the Arab world might bring with it some Wahhabi and Salafi influences into Guyana. Yet, as for now, they are not significant. However, if these processes of Sunnification and Arabization continue, these radical influences might have much more impact on Guyanese Muslims and radical Islamic tendencies might evolve out of them.

This process of Sunnification and Islamization taking place within a majority population of south Asian descent, in which the Muslims comprise only the minority, is not limited to Guyana alone. The same process occurs nowadays and from the same reasons within Muslim minority populations of south Asian descent in other countries, such as Suriname and Mauritius.<sup>8</sup>

### **Radical Islam in Trinidad & Tobago**

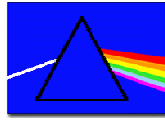
In Trinidad & Tobago there is no question as to the existence or significance of radical Islamic tendencies among the local Muslim community. As a matter of fact, it is the only Caribbean country where radical Islam has been already there in the open as from the 1980s.

Yet, before dealing with radical Islam in the country, some information about Trinidad & Tobago and the Muslim community there is in order. Trinidad & Tobago is, in fact, the southernmost of the Caribbean Islands and the last before Venezuela. Trinidad is about evenly split between Afro-Trinidadians and people who trace their ancestry to South East Asia, most of them Hindus but there are also some Muslims among them. Thus, Trinidad & Tobago's political parties are largely race-based, with Afro-Trinidadians dominating the ruling People's National Movement and South Asians making up the bulk of the United National Congress.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> As to the Sunnification and Islamization processes taking place nowadays in Mauritius see: [http://www.e-prism.org/images/Islam\\_in\\_Africa\\_Newsletter\\_-\\_No3\\_vol\\_2\\_-\\_July\\_2007.pdf](http://www.e-prism.org/images/Islam_in_Africa_Newsletter_-_No3_vol_2_-_July_2007.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> See on-line at: <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/islam-by-country>;  
[http://www.islamicpopulation.com/caribbean\\_muslim.html](http://www.islamicpopulation.com/caribbean_muslim.html)  
<http://www.iags.org/n1115045.htm>



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The same racial divide found in politics exists in the country's religious communities, with most of the country's churches and mosques either Black or Indian. The Muslims comprise about 8% of the country's population. Most of them live in Trinidad but there is a handful in Tobago as well. The first Muslims to arrive in the country were brought from Africa as slaves by the colonialists. The next wave of Muslims came from South Asia as indentured laborers to work on the sugar cane and cacao plantations. Muslims today comprise mostly of South Asian descent, but there are many Afro-Trinidadian converts lately. Several Muslim organizations flourish in Trinidad, among which is the Islamic Coordinating Council – the instrument of the dominant South Asian Muslim community - which comprises the three major Islamic groups: the Anjuman Sunnat-ul-Jamaat Association (ASJA), the Trinidad Muslim League (TML), the Trinidad Islamic Association (TIA), and the United Islamic Organization. The latter comprises 14 smaller and more radical Muslim organizations, some of which were formed as a consequence of Middle Eastern missionary activity. In addition, there are other Islamic groups, such as the Trinidad Muslim League, the Islamic Trust, the Tabligh Jamaat, and the Islamic Missionaries Guild of South America and the Caribbean. All have significant followings there.<sup>10</sup>

Among the radical Islamic organizations, Jamaat al-Muslimeen (Muslim Group) is the most notorious and well-known throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The founder and leader of Jamaat al-Muslimeen (JAM), which was founded in the mid-1980s, is Yasin Abu Bakr. Abu Bakr, formerly Lennox Phillips, the eighth of fifteen children is the son of a soldier in the Trinidad army. Born in 1941, Lennox, an Afro-Trinidadian not yet 18, joined the Police Service in 1959. Becoming disenchanted with the service and with Trinidad in general, he migrated to Canada in 1968. He was converted to Islam while being a student in Canada and by the early 1970s returned to Trinidad as Abu Bakr. JAM has several hundred members. The organization has traditionally been comprised primarily of Afro-Trinidadian Muslim converts to Sunni Islam, who converted to Islam in the 1980s, following the rise of the Nation of Islam in the US. Thus, its ideology and discourse combine a mixture of the most extreme fringes of pan-African nationalism and Black power ideology and identity politics, with Islamist rhetoric and symbolism. Indeed, Abu Bakr maintained links with Libya in the 1980s and 1990s. JAM reportedly received funds through Libya's Islamic NGO—World Islamic Call Society—to finance the construction of its main mosque, schools, and a medical center.<sup>11</sup>

JAM has portrayed itself through the years as an advocate for all Afro-Trinidadians, including non-Muslims, against the South Asians, who have comprised a frequent target for its attacks during the years. On this background, it launched its violent 1990

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<sup>10</sup> See on-line at: <http://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1033&context=laccopsd>;  
<http://www.iags.org/n1115045.htm>;  
<http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369924>; :  
<http://jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369812>

<sup>11</sup> See on-line at:  
[http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/encyclopedia/J/Ja/Jamaat\\_al\\_Muslimeen.htm](http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/encyclopedia/J/Ja/Jamaat_al_Muslimeen.htm)  
[http://www.trinidadandtobagonews.com/forum/webbs\\_config.pl/noframes/read/1180](http://www.trinidadandtobagonews.com/forum/webbs_config.pl/noframes/read/1180)  
<http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Yasin-Abu-Bakr>  
<http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369924>



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attempt to overthrow the Trinidadian government over grievances related to land ownership, social and economic inequality, and government corruption, and to erect an Islamic state instead. On July 27, 1990, 114 members of JAM, led by Yasin Abu Bakr and Bilal Abdullah stormed the Red House—the seat of the national parliament—while the parliament was in session. They took the Prime Minister, A.N.R. Robinson—who was shot and wounded amid the ensuing chaos—and most of his cabinet hostages. At the same time, they attacked the offices of Trinidad & Tobago Television, then the only TV station in the country, and the Trinidad Broadcasting Company, then one of only two radio stations. The ensuing standoff lasted for five days while rioting and looting gripped the Capital, Port of Spain, leading to the death of 24 people and to the destruction of millions of dollars worth of property. On August 1, after six days of negotiation, JAM's members surrendered and were taken into custody. They were tried for treason, but the Court of Appeal upheld the amnesty offered to secure their surrender, and they were released. The Privy Council later invalidated the amnesty, but JAM's members were not re-arrested and the case was abandoned. It should be noted that although most Trinidadians did not support his 1990 coup attempt, many at the time agreed with the issues raised by the JAM during the crisis, especially impoverished Afro-Trinidadians.<sup>12</sup>

Subsequent to the attempted coup, JAM aligned itself publicly with the United National Congress, in the run-up to the 1995 General Elections. Later on it aligned itself with the People's National Movement, the party which forms the current government of Trinidad & Tobago. Before and since those elections, present and past members of JAM have been connected to or prosecuted for serious violent crimes. These crimes included drug and weapons trafficking, drug and gang related killings, money laundering, rape, and a current spree of kidnappings for ransom targeting mainly South Asian Trinidadian members of the local upper and middle class.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, in 2005, JAM has been connected to a series of four bombs set off in and around the capital, Port of Spain. The first went off on July 12, hidden in a trash bin a few blocks from the parliament. As a result, 13 people were injured, two of them critically. The last bomb exploded on October 14, at a nightclub in St. James, a suburb of the capital. Ten people were injured. As a result, Abu Bakr was taken into custody, along with other members of JAM, but they were all released shortly afterwards. Still, on November 19, 2005, another JAM member, Lenville Small, was arrested on suspicion of carrying out the bombings, but he was later released without charges.<sup>14</sup>

Most recently, Yasin Abu Bakr was put on trial, together with six other members of JAM, for the attempted murder of two former JAM members, Salim "small Salim"

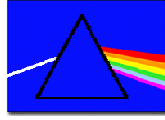
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<sup>12</sup> See on-line at:

[http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/encyclopedia/j/ja/jamaat\\_al\\_muslimeen\\_coup\\_att...](http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/encyclopedia/j/ja/jamaat_al_muslimeen_coup_att...)  
<http://209.157.64.200/focus/f-news/813890/posts>; <http://www.iags.org/n1115045.htm>;  
<http://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1033&context=laccopsd>  
<http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369924>

<sup>13</sup> See on-line at: <http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369924>

<sup>14</sup> See on-line at: <http://radioequalizer.blogspot.com/2005/07/new-attack-tied-to-al-qaeda.html>;  
<http://www.knowprose.com/node/2923>; <http://www.caribbeanetnews.com/2005/07/12/blast.shtml>;  
[http://www.libertyforum.org/showflat.php?Cat=&Board=news\\_news&Number=2938...](http://www.libertyforum.org/showflat.php?Cat=&Board=news_news&Number=2938...)  
<http://www.guardian.co.tt/archives/2005-10-28/news1.html>;



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Rashid and Zaki Aubaidah, who were expelled or split from the group on June 4, 2003, because of ideological differences or shifts in allegiance to rival Afro-Trinidadian Muslim groups. Zaki Aubaidah happens to be Abu Bakr's son-in-law. This plot, however, resulted in the killing of a woman with no ties to the organization. As in the past, Abu Bakr was found not guilty and released, but he still faces sedition and terrorism charges stemming from a November 4, 2005 televised sermon. In the sermon, celebrating *'Idd al-Fitr* (the end of Ramadan), Abu Bakr declared "bloodshed and war in 2006" on wealthy Muslims, i.e., most probably the South Asian Muslim community, if they did not donate a percentage of their income to charity. Following this sermon, Abu Bakr was arrested. He was charged on November 10, 2005 with incitement, sedition and extortion, and on November 22, was additionally charged with terrorism. According to the BBC this was the first case brought under Trinidad's new Anti-Terrorism Act.<sup>15</sup>

JAM has also been linked to crime in the US. JAM member Louis Akhtab Hanif, a former resident of Pompano Beach, Florida, who is also known as Louis Sinclair Coleman, purchased at gun shows and shops in southern Florida, most of the weapons used by his associates during the 1990 coup attempt and exported them to Trinidad. After being convicted for his role in smuggling the weapons to Trinidad, he spent four years in US federal prison. In 2004, another JAM member, Olive Enyahooma El, also known as Clive Lancelot Small, was convicted in Miami on charges of attempting to smuggle automatic weapons and silencers from Florida to Trinidad in 2001. In 2001, JAM member Keith Andre Glaude was arrested during a sting operation in Fort Lauderdale for attempting to purchase automatic weapons and silencers for export to JAM in Trinidad.<sup>16</sup>

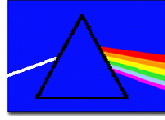
In recent years, JAM has maintained a lower profile due to increased government pressure and a series of high-profile arrests of its members. Nevertheless, the group has remained a vocal player in Trinidadian politics. Indeed, until now, Abu Bakr's influence among a narrow, albeit vocal segment of the Afro-Trinidadian population, and his willingness to resort to violence and other radical measures, made him virtually untouchable. His reach extends from corrupt elements of the police and security services all the way to the upper echelons of political power, including Trinidad's major political parties. This influence insulated him from prosecution. It is his ability to pressure the government in vulnerable areas that makes him so influential. In a testament to that influence, Abu Bakr convinced in 2002, the state to grant him the authority over lucrative state-owned land in Valencia. He later mined

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<sup>15</sup> See on-line at: <http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369924>;  
<http://jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369812>;  
<http://www.ttgapers.com/Article1406.html>;  
<http://www.ttgapers.com/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=1361>; <http://www.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20060106/carib/carib2.html>;

<http://www.radiojamaica.com/news/story.php?category=6&story=22906>;  
[http://www.trinidadexpress.com/index.pl/article\\_news?id=27335014](http://www.trinidadexpress.com/index.pl/article_news?id=27335014)

<sup>16</sup> See on-line at: <http://www.nationnews.com/309250909145992.php>;  
[http://cbs4.com/newslocal/topstoriesmia\\_story\\_217134232.html](http://cbs4.com/newslocal/topstoriesmia_story_217134232.html)  
<http://www.caribvoice.org/Features/gunrunner.html>;  
<http://www.gasandoil.com/goc/features/fex13168.htm>



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the land, only to resell the extracted materials back to the government. In doing so, JAM was able to earn vital revenue and provide jobs and social services to its members and supporters.<sup>17</sup>

Trinidadians, however, continue to characterize JAM as a criminal organization rather than a religious or political one. Thus, in light of the recent crime wave threatening the stability in the country, the Trinidadian government has made true efforts to go after JAM and to curb its activity. For example, Abu Bakr continues to be denied bail, which was unheard of in the past, despite JAM assurances that they will do everything in their power to topple the current government if their leader is not freed. The state is also moving to confiscate his properties and to evict his four wives from his numerous homes. It is also pressing JAM to pay back over \$30 million to the state for property damaged during the coup attempt. Whether these efforts will bear fruit is hard to say at this point. One of the difficulties in the way to curb the activity of JAM is the existence of other small radical groups in Trinidad, all of them being connected somehow to JAM.

One of these groups is the Waajihat-ul-Islamiyyah (Islamic Front), headed by Omar Abdullah, himself an Afro-Trinidadian Muslim convert. It has also been identified as a potential threat by U.S. intelligence and Trinidadian authorities. Like JAM, the Waajihat-ul-Islamiyyah is comprised mostly of Afro-Trinidadian converts to Islam. Local sources allege that Abdullah harbors extremist leanings. The Islamic Front has been accused of publishing material expressing support for al-Qaeda, but Trinidadian authorities have not provided conclusive evidence of any direct links with global Jihad. Omar Abdullah is often outspoken in his criticism of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East and the Trinidadian government's policy towards Muslims. Trinidadian authorities also tie Abdullah to local crime and other illicit dealings. Abdullah was born and grew up in Tableland. He boarded both a Presbyterian and Hindu primary schools and later St. Stephen's College, Princes Town, an Anglican Church assisted secondary school. Abdullah started to practice Islam about twenty years ago and has always been described as a "hard line Muslim". He is believed to be smuggling AK-47s, Tech-9s and Glocks into Trinidad & Tobago. He might have even fought in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union during the 1980s.<sup>18</sup>

Another such radical Islamic groups active nowadays in Trinidad & Tobago are the Jamaat al-Murabiteen (Almoravids, after the African Muslim dynasty that ruled Morocco and Spain in the 11th and 12th Century) and the related Jamaat al-Islami al-Karibi (Caribbean Islamic Group). These groups are associated with one time JAM chief of security and imam of its San Fernando Mosque, Maulana Hasan Anyabwile, formerly Beville Marshall. He had been a member of JAM for 27 years and was among the participants in the failed coup attempt in 1990. In 2001, he split with Abu Bakr over what Trinidadian sources allege was a personal rift with the group's leader. Anyabwile hosted a radio show where he was known to criticize Trinidadian Hindus, South Asian Muslims, and his former JAM associates, for their purported failure in

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<sup>17</sup> See on-line at: <http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369924>

<sup>18</sup> See on-line at: <http://www.insightmag.com/media/paper441/news/2003/01/07/World/The-World.Tri...>; [http://www.trinidadandtobagonews.com/forum/webbs\\_config.pl/noframes/read/899](http://www.trinidadandtobagonews.com/forum/webbs_config.pl/noframes/read/899)



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improving the lot of Muslims in Trinidad & Tobago. Local sources also allege that he is an extremist. In 2002, Anyabwile was shot and critically wounded by an unknown attacker in what many believe was part of a larger turf war between rival Muslim activists, most likely the JAM. Now a paraplegic, Anyabwile continues to fear for his life, but remains an outspoken critic of Abu Bakr.<sup>19</sup>

All these groups took advantage of a “crime wave” during 2001, which affected mostly the urban areas. There, the radical Islamic groups have been recruiting among the poor. Some of these jihadist recruits have been allegedly traveling to Pakistan and Afghanistan and back.

### **Conclusion**

A key aspect of radical Islam in Trinidad is the Afro-Trinidadian character of groups such as JAM, Waajihat-ul-Islamiyyah, Jamaat al-Murabiteen, and Jamaat al-Islami al-Karibi. Abu Bakr's worldview was influenced strongly by the "Black Power" movements that emerged in the US and the Caribbean in the 1960s and 1970s. He claims to be inspired by what is known in Trinidad as the 1970 "Black Power Revolt", which entailed bloody race riots between Afro-Trinidadians and South Asian Trinidadians. Thus, the discourse of groups such as JAM borrows heavily from the militant fringes of pan-African nationalist movements such as the Nation of Islam. Like the Nation of Islam, Afro-Trinidadian Islamists claim to advocate for all Afro-Trinidadians, and not only to the tiny Afro-Trinidadian Muslim community. For many Afro-Trinidadians, conversion to Islam signifies their assertion of identity in a society in which they are underserved and face discrimination. Yet, it must be stressed that because most of Trinidad's radical Islamic groups are dominated by Afro-Trinidadian Muslim converts, not all Afro-Trinidadian Muslim converts can be labeled as radical.

Abu Bakr's prosecution is unlikely to lead to the end of JAM, or, generally speaking, to the end of the present radical Islamic current among Afro-Trinidadian Muslim groups, at least in the near future. Due to his influence over JAM, his departure would certainly land a massive blow to the group's viability. Dedicated followers of Abu Bakr are likely to carry on their efforts under the leadership of Kala Aki Bua, JAM's welfare officer and second in command. He assumed a leadership role after Abu Bakr's latest arrest, but it is unclear whether he would be able to carry on much longer as the group's leader. Instead, many may look to other groups for guidance while others may choose to start their own movements.

Trinidadian and international sources often point to the presence of al-Qaeda and other international terrorist organizations in Trinidad & Tobago, with the potential to threaten U.S. interests in the Caribbean Basin and Latin America. Due to its lucrative energy reserves and its strategic location in the Caribbean off the coast of Venezuela, and its Muslim minority—part of which has a history of resorting to political

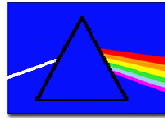
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<sup>19</sup> See on-line at:

<http://www.guardian.co.tt/archives/2004-07-27/news1.html>

<http://jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369812>

<http://www.guardian.co.tt/archives/2004-08-01/lennox.html>



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violence—many observers believe that Trinidad represents an attractive target for groups such as al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda's documented successes recruiting Muslim converts elsewhere, including Afro-Caribbean converts, is also a point of concern. The tendency of groups such as JAM to resort to violence against the state and its rivals and to engage in criminal activities, has also led some to worry about the influence of radicals such as Abu Bakr and their potential to collaborate with international and Jihadi terrorist organizations with broader agendas. In reality, the brand of radical Islam found in Trinidad has so far remained a strictly Trinidadian phenomenon, stemming from a narrow fringe of the Muslim community. The ethnic divide between the Afro-Trinidadian and South Asian communities that transcends sectarian affiliation, in addition to the rivalry between the tiny Afro-Trinidadian Muslim minority and Trinidad's influential South Asian Muslim community in particular, goes far in explaining the trajectory of the movement. Given this background, there is little evidence to suggest that groups such as JAM or its offshoots in Trinidad represent ideal allies for al-Qaeda, although their documented role in extensive crime should be of concern.

Yet, the radical Islamic challenge emanating from the Caribbean Islands is expected only to grow together with the ever growing social and economical tension that has prevailed during the last two or three decades in the Caribbean between the main two groups which share it; Afro-Caribbeans and South Asians and even among the South Asians themselves, such as the situation prevailing in Guyana, between Muslims and Hindus. If we look at who are the Trinidadian radical Muslims, we can see that most of them are Afro-Trinidadian converts to Islam, who are poor in comparison to the affluent South Asian Muslims and Hindus.

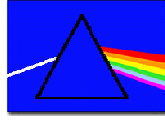
These Afro-Trinidadian converts to Islam are also influenced by the heritage of Othman dan Fodio, who, by making Islam a rallying point and symbol of liberation from the shackle of the oppressions of the white man, through the *Wathiqah*, which was circulated in the late 1820s among West African Muslim slaves in Jamaica, had helped transform Islam into a liberating force. This posture of Islam in the Americas and the Caribbean has endured to this day and remains one of the most motivating factors for the increasing conversions to Islam among the Afro-Caribbeans. They return in their minds to the glamorous period of Uthman Dan Fodio and the African Jihad, while trying to do the same in the Caribbean or, at least, in Trinidad and Tobago.<sup>20</sup>

The best manifestation of Othman dan Fodio's impact on cotemporary Afro-Caribbeans is the internet site of Hassan Anyabwile. He owns as a member of JAM, a website called New Madina. In this site, one can see clearly the African Jihadist influence upon him in the form of an e-mail address -- [sokoton@yahoo.com](mailto:sokoton@yahoo.com). It refers to the Sokoto Empire, established by Uthman dan Fodio in the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See on-line at: <http://www.webstar.co.uk/~ubugaje/beyond6.html>

<sup>21</sup> See on-line at: <http://www.geocities.com/sokoton/?200530>



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The US should carefully look at the Islamic developments in the Caribbeans not only for its geo-political location, but also for the combination of converts to Islam, prisoners, criminals and ex-criminals, and “Black Power.” These are the most crucial elements regarding American homeland security. In an interview with the Jihadi “news agency” Al-Sahab, in 5 May 2007, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri made an effort to raise this issue by praising the “Shahid” Malcolm-X, himself a convert to Islam in the 1960s, quoting some of his statements to the African-American public:

"No, I'm not an American. I'm one of the 22 million black people who are the victims of Americanism, one of the 22 million black people who are the victims of democracy...I see America through the eyes of a victim. I don't see any American dream, I see an American nightmare."

If in the US, so far, African-Americans have always proved their loyalty and patriotism. Moreover, the largest Islamic group of the “Nation of Islam” is not perceived by Salafi and radical Islamists as Muslim, but rather as infidel. However, the situation may differ in the Caribbeans.

Another element to consider is the growing linkage between radical Islam in the Caribbeans and in Sub-Saharan Africa.