

“9-11 damaged the status of Muslims in the United Kingdom”. Discuss.

We're approaching two decades since the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the effects are still felt around the world today. The USA and the UK were impacted the most following the attacks which killed or injured people from across the world¹. The status of Muslims in our communities was impacted directly as a result of these attacks which left their communities feeling more vulnerable than before. Focusing on the events which followed 9/11, the impact they had on Muslim communities in the UK can be categorised into short term and long term, this paper will focus on the short term effects. Despite being nearly two decades ago, the full impact of 9-11 and the long term effects it has had on Muslims and their status will only be seen when more time has passed, it still feels as though we are too close to the events to look back objectively and see the true impacts. It is also important to keep in mind the complexity of this topic and whilst this paper can only provide a brief overview additional information which may be of interest will be available in the bibliography.

Prior to 9-11 the Terrorism Act was founded in 2000². This Act was published in response to a growing terrorist threat. The aim of this was to recognise the potential risk levels of an attack happening and to attempt to prevent the attacks and potential radicalisation of others. Following 9-11 more powers were brought in to tighten punishments for involvement in terrorist activities. Similar measures were taken across Europe which have since been proven to impact Muslims more than any other religions³. Back in the UK, since 2001 Government data shows that more Muslims were charged with terror offences between 2001 and 2013 than any other religion, or those of no religion⁴. Though it can be argued that this data is purely coincidental, through considering that these new laws have effected more Muslims than other it gives the impression that they have a lower status in our communities. It could also be argued that as this could add to fuelling stereotypes which again would have a negative impact on Muslims in the UK.

As a result of the 9-11 attacks and years of growing frustrations the US government invaded Afghanistan in order to beat the Taliban, this was called Operation Enduring Freedom. George W. Bush made it clear that terrorism was not going to be tolerated. This evolved to a joint effort between the USA and UK to try and replace the government in Afghanistan with an American peaceful alternative⁵. These events only added to the “Islam vs the West” attitudes and created a divide. Though an attempt to eradicate al-Qaeda and the Taliban, who by the summer of 2001 were growing in power and controlled most of Afghan territory, the narrative only added to the hatred against Islam in the UK and USA. The narratives that were given of the interpretations of severe Islamic Law in places such as Kabul where girls had no right to education and the extreme punishments that were in place for breaking such rules only added pressure to an increasingly tense situation⁶. Without context or prior education, the general public could only rely on what was being told to them through the British news channels. It is not a surprise that growing tension and constant negativity in the press damaged the status of Muslims in the UK as it added pressure to an ever forming divide between the two groups. Beliefs that some still hold today, almost twenty years later.

¹ Darcie Rives-East, *Surveillance And Terror In Post-9/11 British And American Television* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), pp. 1-8.

² UK Parliament, *Terrorism In Great Britain: The Statistics* (London: House of Commons Library, 2020), pp. 3-25.

³ Tufyal Choudhury and Helen Fenwick, "The Impact Of Counter-Terrorism Measures On Muslim Communities", *International Review Of Law, Computers & Technology*, 25.3 (2011), 151-181 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/13600869.2011.617491>>.

⁴ UK Parliament, pp. 3-25.

⁵ Griff Witte, "Afghanistan War", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2020 <<https://www.britannica.com/event/Afghanistan-War>> [Accessed 7 January 2021].

⁶ Ibid.

Whilst the leaders of the UK and USA were at war trying to eradicate the group that caused such pain to their countries, the response from Muslims couldn't be more different. The responses from Mosques and religious leaders following the attacks shared a common message, that Islam condemns terrorism⁷. A peaceful narrative which was far less publicised than the narrative of war and anger being broadcasted. It is common human behaviour from many to believe what you see the most of, which clearly had a damaging impact on the status of Muslims in the UK.

New studies on terrorism have been conducted frequently following 9-11. Due to the increase in these studies on terrorism there are more talks on culture taking place. Whilst this new dialogue isn't necessarily a negative thing, it has invited responses from some who lack a basic understanding of Islam and its beliefs. Jocelyne Cesaris warns of the increase how new studies on terrorism are key examples of how a basic understanding behind the beliefs of Islam from both scholars and politicians can be dangerous to the faith and its followers, which has an effect on the status of the faith⁸. This in itself could damage the status of Muslims in the UK as it can lead to forming negative stereotypes. Another example of this is the images of 'Islam vs. the West' or 'religious vs. secular'. Islamic terrorism is often linked to religion and not extremism or politics. Many narratives post 9-11 failed to distinguish between Muslims and extremists or offer any basic background or education on the primary beliefs of Islam. Instead the post 9-11 narrative focused on Osama Bin Laden and how he often recruited Muslims⁹, without offering more context. Without defining differences it leads to additional misunderstanding which portrays Muslim in an unjust light, which has a direct impact on the status of Muslims in the UK. Cesaris¹⁰ work can also be used to support this argument as she warns of the damaging results of misinformation against Muslims and Islam which were seen more often in the years following 9-11.

Another key issue when discussing Islam post 9-11 is that there is so many resources available for research. In his book Richard Jackson makes references to the masses of oral and written texts by scholars and politicians on 9-11¹¹. In this single book and short space of time we can see how many responses there have been to Muslims post 9-11. In addition to the academic resources the media, film and television have also played a role in how Muslims have been portrayed after 9-11. The attacks have become the centre point for many television dramas, films and documentaries each of which hold a slightly different narrative of events¹². Through the key points remain the same, the way in which Muslims are portrayed in this programmes holds the potential to further damage or maybe even repair the image of Muslims in the UK which clearly has the

The internet was developing and had already began to form parts of every day lives. For the first time people had a world wide platform to share their thoughts and feelings whether they positive or negative, By today, online hate can be blocked and reported, however in 2001 where the internet was far less regulated such things were not as easily accessible meaning that an increasing number of people could read and spread such feelings of negativity more freely. Though it is not possible to say that all comments were negative, It is clear that this could damage the status of Muslims in the UK and beyond.

⁷ Professor Alan Godlas, "The Events Of 9/11 And Islam, The Taliban, And Bin Laden", *Jihad, War, Terrorism, And Peace In Islam*, 1998 <<http://islam.uga.edu/nineeleven.html#muslimresponses>> [Accessed 7 January 2021].

⁸ Jocelyne Cesari, *Muslims In The West After 9/11* (Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis, 2009), pp. 1-22.

⁹ Natana J. DeLong-Bas, "Bin Laden, Osama", *Oxford Islamic Studies* <<http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0883>> [Accessed 7 January 2021].

¹⁰ Cesari, *Muslims In The West After 9/11*, pp. 1-22.

¹¹ Richard Jackson, *Writing The War On Terrorism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press).

¹² Rives-East, *Surveillance And Terror In Post-9/11 British And American Television*, pp. 1-8.

Therefore to conclude, it is clear to see that 9/11 has damaged the status of Muslims in the UK. Fear had a huge impact on the world after the attacks. People feared Muslims as they believed them to be responsible. Whereas Muslims feared that their communities were vulnerable once more, even more than ever before. Muslims lived in fear of attacks against them, they were subjects to prejudice and discrimination. It is clear to see how this would have a long term impact on the status of Muslims in the UK. Though there may have been some developments in this dialogue and that things may have improved from the initial months end years after the attacks some of the negative rhetoric still exists and has had a clear impact on the status of Muslims in the UK potentially irreversibly.

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