

# Big Tech: Anti-Muslim Racism, Surveillance, and Violence in the 20 Years since 9/11

*Panelists: Fatema Ahmad, Linda Sarsour, Ramah Kudaimi  
Moderated by Dr. Koki Mendis*

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**Koki Mendis:** Alrighty, we'll go ahead and get started now as people filter in slowly.

Thank you all for joining Political Research Associates today for the first discussion in our series on [Subverting State Violence](#). Today, we will be taking a close look at anti-Muslim racism, surveillance and violence, and the role that big tech has had in perpetuating this system, in the 20 years since 9/11

Our webinar today is a collaboration between PRA and Crescendo, a project of [ACRE](#), [Little Sis](#), and [MPower Change](#), that is focused on researching and campaigning against anti-Muslim corporations.

We begin this series on the eve of PRA's 40th anniversary celebration commencing in November of this year. PRA or Political Research Associates is a national nonprofit that has researched, monitored, and publicized the agenda and strategies of the U.S and global Right, revealing the powerful intersections of Christian nationalism, White nationalism, and patriarchy over the past four decades. PRA produces investigative reports, articles, and tools; publishes the peer reviewed quarterly magazine, *The Public Eye*; advises social justice movement organizers, and offers expert commentary for local and national media outlets. Our core issue areas span reproductive justice, LGBTQ rights, racial and immigrant justice, civil liberties, and economic justice.

For today's discussion, we are joined by three people working to expose and end this surveillance and violence enacted on Muslim communities in the U.S. We are honored to be joined by Fatema Ahmad, Executive Director at [Muslim Justice League](#), where she leads MJL's efforts to dismantle the criminalization and policing of marginalized communities under national security pretext. Linda Sarsour, award-winning, [racial justice and civil rights activist](#), seasoned community organizer, mother of three, and a Palestinian Muslim American, born and raised in Brooklyn. And Ramah Kudaimi, deputy campaign director of the Crescendo Project at the [Action Center on Race and the Economy](#), which

focuses on corporate complicity in Islamophobia and anti-Muslim violence.

Thank you so much for our esteemed panelists and to you, our wonderful audience, for joining us today. Please note, the webinar will be recorded and the recording will be distributed by email and on our website in the next few days. Our audience today also has access to live closed captioning, which you can toggle on at the bottom of your screen.

Audience members feel free to introduce yourself in the chat so we can see who all is with us. We will also be taking time for today for audience questions which can be dropped into the chat at any point in the discussion. So I will get us started with our questions and keep an eye on the chat for any audience questions that may come in.

As we know, anti-Muslim racism is not a 21st century phenomenon in the United States, but we can also say, unconditionally, that September 11th, 2001, the 20th anniversary of which is this weekend, ushered in a new heightened era of surveillance, policing, and the demonization of Muslims across the country.

Linda, in a 2020 [interview with Laura Flanders](#), you made some incredibly resonant comparisons between the fear and isolation of the early pandemic with the immediate post 9/11 period for Muslim Americans. “As a New Yorker, the sirens, and being part of a community that was not only directly impacted by 9/11, as any other New Yorkers where we then had to feel the aftermath of becoming the suspect community. Somehow being connected to something that had nothing to do with us. So I feel the same darkness that I felt immediately after the horrific attacks of 9/11...muslim women decided not to go out to the grocery store. Many of them would not even take their children to school for the first maybe week or two after 9/11, because the bottom line was it wasn't safe for many of us, and many particularly immigrant women in our community, who did not feel safe wearing hijab and going out. Now, I feel a different kind of sense, because going out to the grocery store for essential items, I'm covering my face. And it's interesting, as you know, around the world, there have been policies targeting Muslim women in particular, who wear Niqabs, who cover their face, talking about security threats. And now we're in a global pandemic and we're encouraging people to cover their faces. And it's just the irony.”

I found this comparison really evocative, especially as we reflect on the past 20 years in the midst of year two of global pandemic. Linda, can you talk to the sociocultural political shifts you witnessed in the period directly after 9/11? I am particularly interested in hearing how it impacted your politics and activism. And then I'd like to open this question to our other panelists.

**Linda Sarsour:** Thank you so much. First I want to say I'm very deeply honored and humbled to be with all of you today, and hope that you all check out the [report](#) that came out today from ACRE, Little Sis, and MPower Change, which, I think, is, you know, it's groundbreaking in one sense and another sense it's reaffirming things we already knew for many, many years, unfortunately.

You know, I've been really triggered this past week, just talking in general about... just kind of reflecting back on the last 20 years since the horrific attacks of 9/11. I'm a New Yorker. I'm born and raised in Brooklyn. I was a college student. And I'm born and raised in the largest Muslim American community in New York City. I live in a community where people look like me, where they speak my language. Places of safety and security, was a sanctuary. You actually—if you were an immigrant from a country, from the Arab world, you actually didn't have to speak English in the community that I grew up in. You could go to a grocery store, you could go to a doctor, you can go to a bookstore. You could really go anywhere and be able to engage in a normal life without even having to speak the English language. And that's how safe it was. Particularly for new immigrants. Then 9/11 happens, and all of a sudden, we go from being a community that's traumatized by the horrific attacks, as all New Yorkers were, to literally becoming a direct target of all levels of law enforcement, including law enforcement agencies I've never heard of. And watching raids on apartment buildings in Brooklyn, watching men detained. And when I say detained, I mean, kidnapped. I'm talking about like literally disappear off the face of the earth. These weren't you know, the shows you watch where they say, "oh, someone's getting arrested and they get this one phone call when they get down to the station." These were men who were lost in the abyss of law enforcement for sometimes days, weeks, and some months at a time. And I got to witness all of this. I got to witness this as a New Yorker, as an American. You know, I—I'm not—I wasn't naive to injustice. I didn't think that the United States was this, you know, place of like, you know, equality, and we all had these great—this great life, but I had never experienced it so overtly, and so in my face in the community that I was from.

And just the way in which the community began to operate. Like, again, women who didn't feel safe, doing normal things like taking their kids to school. In fact, there was a very large AmeriCorps program in our district where AmeriCorps members, many of whom were not Arab or Muslim, would actually come and escort women in our community to take their children to school. Like this is how serious we were in experiencing the backlash, the hate crimes, the woman being harassed and accosted in train stations. People decided not to take trains, not to get on buses for a while because they did not feel safe being in these public spaces.

And our school system, we recorded at the time, you know, probably quadruple bullying cases. We couldn't even...like we couldn't handle it. We just didn't know. We were trying to understand how is it possible that there are all these adults in these schools and these types of bullying and many oftentimes it wasn't just bullying of words. It was physical assaults of children who had names like Osama, or Mohammed, or just things that young people were you know, misconstruing with the larger narrative they're watching on television. And so it just changed the whole apparatus of the community. People just didn't feel safe there. The chilling of free speech, people that didn't want to talk about, you know, what was happening.

And that was kind of my entry point into this work really was unfortunately, the horrific attacks of 9/11. I was never an aspiring activist. This is not what I wanted to do with my life. I was actually studying to be a high school English teacher. And I got stripped out of my life that I was living. I was a mom to two kids at the age. At the time I was 21 years old. I already had two kids at the time. And so I was trying to be a mom. I was trying to like, you know, live a normal life. And then my life changed because you know, I happen to be bilingual in Arabic. And being able to speak fluent English and fluent Arabic and I became a translator. So that was my initial kind of introduction into organizing really. I was a translator for a lot of these women. I went to detention centers in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, and downtown Manhattan. Trying to help people look for their loved ones. And I've been here ever since.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Linda. It's really interesting to hear how an event that changed our country, changed the world, really changed your life too, as an individual. Fatema, Ramah, would either of you like to chime in on this period for you and the impact it's had on your choices to date?

**Fatema Ahmad:** Yeah, I can share. I lived in basically the opposite community of what Linda was in. You know, I grew up in a place where we were the only Muslims. I was the only visible you know, Muslim kid in school for miles. And so we were an immediate target of, you know, hate and violence. We were definitely not in a big enough place to have law enforcement really impact us at that point. But you know, quite literally that day, you know, taking the school bus home, I was harassed by people that I knew, you know, people who I knew them. I knew their families, you know, again, living in a very small place. This was coming from my neighbors, from people in my community who I really grew up with. And I was actually extremely shy as a kid. And I was still a kid at that point, you know, I had just started high school and I was very much put on the spot by well-meaning teachers who had asked me to speak about Islam

for, you know, the whole class. Not realizing exactly what would happen, right? But I would say something and then someone would say something horrible about, right, bombing, you know, Muslim majority countries.

So what I was seeing you know, was not only that kind of direct violence targeted towards me, but also this strong desire from people around me to go to war abroad. You know, I knew so many people who were joining the military. For economic reasons sometimes, sure, but also because they actually believed in this, right? That they believed that that was a necessary and justified thing to do. And that I was an example of, you know, who they were trying to go after locally.

So, you know, it was really difficult to respond to that as a young person. And I found that so many well-intentioned people around me also didn't know how to respond, and I had to figure out how to respond myself, and how to speak up. I didn't become an organizer immediately. I stayed on my engineer, science, and math track, because that was a really good way to get out of my hometown.

But I realized, once I left, you know, that, that kind of interpersonal violence and really overt Islamophobia and racism that I faced, was actually everywhere. That liberal people would say the same thing, you know, maybe with different words, but still believe the same thing. And so it was over the years of, you know, leaving my hometown, witnessing a really liberal racism and liberal Islamophobia, and then seeing the larger impacts of the War on Terror, globally and domestically, that moved me to quit engineering and become a community organizer and focus on this work.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Fatema. I think, you know, sort of contrasting your's and Linda's experiences is fascinating given the radically different contexts, but sort of similar impact it had on your trajectories. Ramah, did you want to chime in here before we continue?

**Ramah Kudaimi:** Yeah, I can add. So I am really honored to be on this panel with everyone here.

So I was in high school when 9/11 happened. In the suburbs of Chicago was where I was living. So another area with a lot of different Muslim communities and particularly, you know, where I attended school and went to the mosque was the Bridgeview community, which for folks who are familiar with the history of that community, one that, you know, even before 9/11 was heavily surveilled through, by the FBI and post 9/11, it became even more so. And there's a long history, obviously, similar to what Linda was describing, of community members being arrested, being charged with terrorism and other

sorts of crimes like that, based on nothing more other than their activism, their outspokenness. Particularly this is a community with many Palestinians, so that definitely became you know, a big part of the issue in a post 9/11 world and kind of looking in terms of how you criminalize people. And unfortunately, Palestine activism is a very easy one people use to criminalize Muslim and other communities.

And so, yeah, I think like it's interesting cause like, you know, in high school, I don't think I necessarily knew exactly what I wanted to do. But it is like a long lasting impact of like what, you know, what radicalizes you in terms of your politics. And that is very much it. And I think like these, you know...pretty much any Muslim millennial in those days would tell you that kind of was a big moving factor and whether...whatever you chose to do after it just hits you. And I think it's...you know, I think both Fatema and Linda are right, like these past few weeks, it's been very interesting reflecting back on 20 years, and kind of, you know, what you believed or thought of, where you grew up versus what the reality is that we were forced to confront once 9/11 happened and realizing that you know, since, you know, we're all, you know, being the daughter of immigrants and kind of being cast as like, you know, the good immigrant that came here, and then, you know what that reality is actually for folks who are not, that don't have those kinds of privileges. And all of a sudden they're having to learn that, you know, what you potentially were taught in schools and things is not, is not in fact the truth. And like you now have to undo all of that while at the same time, then you're like, "okay, maybe I need to like rethink kind of my role in this post 9/11 world."

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Ramah. You know, I think that strikes me as sort of how young you all were, too, in this moment, and how the past 20 years have really...were rooted in this moment of sort of early adulthood or still late childhood and how that was abruptly disrupted by sort of the reaction to 9/11 in your individual communities.

I really appreciate you all sharing your individual experiences and sort of contextualizing us in the moment. And I would love to continue our conversation by broadening our conversation out to sort of the far reaching institutional, international, and policy impacts of the so-called War on Terror, that resulted from the 9/11 attacks in New York. Ramah, in your article, "[Biden Repealed the Muslim Ban. That's Nowhere Near Enough.](#)" earlier this year, you provide a particularly concise and comprehensive overview of the boundless and borderless impact of this 20 year war. "Other countries have joined in to make this truly a Global War on Terror from Israel's ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people, to Turkey's attacks on Kurdish communities, to Russia in

Iran, backing of Bashar Al Assad in his destruction of Syria. All these deeds claim their violence in the name of fighting terrorism. China has used the War on Terror as cover for its war against the Uyghur people, the same with India and Kashmir, Myanmar and the Rohingya, and Saudi Arabia and UAE with Yemen.” I will also add that I’m watching the same phenomenon occurring in Sri Lanka, where my family is from, where the post civil war period of relative peace is now imminently threatened by state violence repression being lobbied at Sri Lankan Muslims, which is a relatively recent phenomenon in the country’s history.

Ramah can you help us delve deeper into this horrific trend we’re seeing across the globe and speak to the relationship between the U.S. War on Terror and these more recent iterations occurring abroad?

**Ramah Kudaimi:** Yeah. I think something that, you know, we need to remember when we’re talking about the War on Terror or especially in these moments, you know, in the last few weeks, “oh, the war...the endless wars are ending. the troops are home,” is that the entire apparatus of the U.S. government shifted in a post 9/11 world, and counterterrorism became an obsession with pretty much any government agency, with the media, with universities, and think tanks, and like cultural institutions. I mean, just think in the last 20 years, how many shows have been out there with, you know, the enemy of terrorists, you know, from Homeland and beyond.

And so this has been the obsession in the last 20 years, no matter what the media is currently telling us in terms of, “oh, it’s over, you know, let’s we’re moving on”. No one’s being held accountable. And I think there’s like a unique...I know Vanessa was going to join us today. And maybe we can talk a bit..but we can share some of her articles in terms of like, there’s obviously a long history, pre 9/11, in terms of the use of terrorism, particularly towards, you know, folks working in Black liberation, particularly then Black Muslims. And at the same time, I think there was something that, you know, unique that happened post 9/11 as well. And this uniqueness, you know, was launched when, you know, when George W. Bush said, I’m launching the Global War on Terror. And then Barack Obama, and Donald Trump continued and expanded the war and made it their own. And now Biden, himself, you know, talking about how he wants to push against “domestic terrorism”. And him being very clear that the troops are coming home, but we don’t need ground troops to fight terrorism...continue fighting terrorism.

And we need to understand, too, that like it’s not only the—obviously the air strikes and the ground warfare, the War on Terror, you know, included unlawful detention, black sites, and torture, massive surveillance, and Counter

Violent Extremism programs, militarized borders, and policing, and building of walls and implementation. And to this day, there are still 39, you know, Muslim men in prison in Guantanamo Bay. And the majority of whom have never been charged. So when we're talking, you know, Global War on Terror that George W. Bush said, it truly was global in terms of what it entailed, but also the geography of where the war was fought.

And so again, the U.S. invaded, obviously it occupied Afghanistan and Iraq. And then since 2001 with the help of dozens of allies has bombed, Afghanistan and Iraq, Pakistan Yemen, Somalia, Syria, Libya, all very clearly Muslim majority countries. And throughout these air wars, the U.S. has claimed to, again, target "terrorists", but the reality has been that tens of thousands of people have died. And including, you know, there are direct hits on weddings, for example, or hospitals and mosques. And so this idea, again, that like terrorism was being fought becomes very clear that it wasn't. And the reason we get to keep this up is because we've been able to dehumanize Muslims, any and all Muslims, as terrorists. And because you are able to dehumanize Muslims as terrorists and terrorism then is presented as like some sort of irrational and unlawful violence, versus state violence which was always presented as defensive and in pursuit of national security and thus lawful, then it becomes okay to unleash massive state violence in order to defeat terrorism.

And so it becomes a very good excuse to repress liberation movements all across the globe. And to police, you know, for example in the U.S, Black, Indigenous, and people of color activists, to militarized borders, and cage people because we've built out this reasoning that in the name of counterterrorism, anything is allowed.

And then there are entire industries and institutions built on the need to keep terrorism as a problem. And so as the U.S. is doing this, obviously, the rest of the world is looking and saying, "hey, they are doing this. They're able to get away with it. Why can't we do the same?" And very clearly it has become something that other countries have done. So we're talking about also like the vastness of the global, it's also who's the state actors that are participating. So for example, France has been carrying out air strikes in Mali since 2013 in the name of counterterrorism. You know, Russia began bombing Syria in the name of counterterrorism in 2015. The genocide we're seeing of the Uyghur people in Xinjiang at this moment, where China has very clearly said, this is our own War on Terror, and has involved mass detention, surveillance, torture, and other crimes against humanity. And then, you know, when we—and like, yeah, like you mentioned, like Myanmar's genocide of the Rohingya people, and then, you know, Israel, Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, India, and on and on. And all of them have used the excuse of counterterrorism when they have gone and



killed Palestinians, Kurds, Yemenis, Syrians, Kashmiris, and others.

And so it's very important then that we think about why we need to disrupt the use of the terrorism framework. Because it's become so useful for the states to just use it, to pursue any and all state violence they want. And just to think critically of what it means when we talk about, well, now we need to just call White supremacists terrorists because that's not necessarily what the War on Terror was meant to do. And even...you can push as much as you want to do that. I highly doubt that's gonna change the fact that the primary victims are going to continue to be Muslim, Black, Brown, Indigenous communities, and other people of color and communities, because the Islamophobia's so seeped into our consciousness of what a terrorist or extremist is. Just look, again, January 6th and the attack on the Capitol, when, like reporters were like reporting, and they're like, "this looks like Baghdad." And it's like, "no, maybe it looks like KKK attacks," you know? Or like last week with the anti-abortion, you know, law in Texas that people were like, "oh, now it's the Texas Taliban," all of a sudden. It's like, "no, these are right-wing actions that are firmly rooted in the history of White supremacy in the U.S." So why are you parking back to an example of Muslims to make the point that this is a problem.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you Ramah. I particularly appreciate your emphasis on disrupting this narrative that the War on Terror is over because the war in Afghanistan is, you know, ostensibly over, especially, you know, our conversation today, we're going to continue talking about the domestic component of sort of the 9/11 fallout. But from a global perspective, the War on Terror has absolutely found roots and been exported to other countries. And there, there are millions of people living under their own War on Terror regimes. So I really appreciate you bringing that perspective, especially given recent news. Linda, or Fatema would either of you like to chime in on this question of the global, before we returned to the domestic.

**Linda Sarsour:** I think Ramah did a wonderful job really covering that. And I think going back to the implications of the Global War on Terror domestically is kind of like my area of expertise. So I appreciate Ramah for sharing.

**Koki Mendis:** Great. Thank you. Before we take a look at the relationship between big tech, private capital, and state violence, in the second part of our discussion today, I'd like to hear more on, sort of something that Ramah brought up, with White supremacist violence in the U.S, with Fatema, yours and Muslim Justice League's incredible work, opposing CVE, or Countering Violent Extremism programs. In an [forthcoming op-ed](#), you described CVE as

thus: “many people, especially progressives, have pushed for CVE programming to address all types of violence, including the rise of White nationalism and White supremacists movements. There is no data that defends it. Convincing teachers, community leaders, and healthcare providers to conduct surveillance based on religion, race, and politics has not prevented the acceleration of violence in our communities, and is not a soft alternative to counterterrorism policing. CVE only furthers White supremacy by relying on the Islamophobic theory of radicalization and promoting racial and religious profiling. If you remember the story of a boy named Ahmed, arrested and suspended for bringing a clock to school, (which I completely had forgotten about and then \*snaps fingers\* as soon as I read that, popped right back into my mind) then you can imagine how encouraging neighbors and colleagues to identify individuals who seem potentially violent will lead to increase racism for all communities deemed suspect.”

Fatema, can you walk us through the shift from the international terrorism framework that characterized the early rhetoric of the War on Terror, to the domestic terrorism framework that has resulted in the widespread use of CVE today? Can you also provide us with an overview, which Ramah mentioned, of CVS resurgence today, particularly in the calls to action following January 6th, and the implications of a renewed emphasis on this form of policing and surveillance?

**Fatema Ahmad:** Yeah, I am so happy to talk about this. I think that, you know what Ramah was just talking about with how we consistently name Muslims as some sort of like extreme, is a big part of this. So when we talk about the terrorism framework, you know, not just right after 9/11, but before 9/11, you know, Muslims had been, you know, portrayed, characterized in a certain way, you know, culturally, in the U.S, right? You have this connection between the term terrorism and Iran and Palestine and you know, other places in the region, or other Muslim majority countries. But after 9/11, you know, this becomes much more common terminology, right. And a much stronger connection, culturally, for most people.

And what you see, you know, in recent years is unfortunately, the wrong kind of response to this. The problem with, you know, calling Muslims terrorists is not that you need to also apply this to other people, right. Just doing this, kind of like, equal opportunity version using these phrases like terrorism, extremism, radicalization doesn't make them any less harmful. In fact, it's more harmful because you have a lot of progressives who are using this sort of “both sides” rhetoric. And what's happened is, you know, within the Department of Homeland Security, within the Department of Justice, the CIA, the FBI, and so

on, they use this to their advantage. So you have this idea that there's some kind of foreign terrorism and some kind of domestic terrorism, which really means Muslims and White people, right? That's quite obviously what we're talking about, but they won't actually explicitly say that. And we know that there's a difference because I quite literally just heard somebody from one of the U.S. attorney's offices talking about how, you know, there's domestic terrorism, and then there's homegrown terrorism. Which, you know, really means I would be a homegrown terrorist, right. A Muslim born here, anything that I do is obviously connected to Al Qaeda, or ISIS, or something abroad. Versus a domestic terrorist who is only inspired by, you know, something domestic.

The problem here, you know, again, is not that we need to equate these two things or apply them evenly. None of these terms actually reckon with the real cause of violence, right? None of this rhetoric addresses, like why did 9/11 actually happen? You know, do you really believe that people are just moved to commit acts of violence, like out of nowhere? You know, none of this addresses the political reasons, and the political causes of these types of violence. And so we have to actually talk about it as political violence, right. We have to actually address that it's state violence that either supports or, you know, causes a reactionary violence, right? So really it's not that, you know, ISIS and the Proud Boys are on two ends of the spectrum and that they're just equal in what kind of violence they use, or they're equally extreme, as a lot of people think, or, you know, frame them. Really you know, if we want to say that there's a commonality between the two, it's that they both came out of White supremacy, right. But one is in direct support of you know, White supremacy, and one is in response to White supremacist violence. And that if we actually want to address those, we would have to take a look at the same departments, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of War AKA the Department of Defense, you know, the Department of Justice, and the FBI, and what they have done.

You know, there's no...there's no reckoning, right? There's no, you know, not within the government, not even within the public at this moment, reckoning with where these types of violence come from. And so you unfortunately have, actually, progressives calling for increased surveillance, increased policing, thinking that it's going to address White supremacy, but it's actually just going to promote more White supremacy. So we've already seen an increase in the budgets of all of these law enforcement agencies. We have the Department of Homeland Security just started social media monitoring. And this is all because in the wake of January 6th, in the wake of Charlottesville, and so many other similar incidents you know, progressives are not actually listening to Muslims, and folks who are impacted by both White supremacist violence, and policing,

and surveillance who have said “this is not it, this is not the solution.”

So unfortunately we’re seeing a resurgence of CVE under the Biden administration, because again, Democrats and progressives love this kind of rhetoric, you know. Something that is seen as like soft counterterrorism, but is still supposedly going to address terrorism without ever questioning, you know, the idea of terrorism to begin with.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Fatema. I think that really highlights... I think, from a sort of self promotional way, like the subverting state violence framework of the series, you know, and really complicating, like Ramah said, sort of the legitimation of state violence as unquestioned, as taken as a given and everything in reaction to state violence as the problem as, you know, necessitating increased policing. And I think sort of your work on CVE really makes a very clear distinction that White supremacy is not going to be solved by increasing a framework of terrorism, right. And applying that logic indiscriminately or more fairly, right, across sort of religious and racial identities. Ramah, Linda, would either of you like to follow up? Or should we move on to our next question?

**Linda Sarsour:** I just wanted to add, because I think oftentimes when we talk about you know, anything around surveillance or...it’s very theoretical to some people who’ve never experienced it, and don’t understand what it actually feels like in the communities. And there’s also been a lot of conversation in the last few years, particularly under the Trump administration. There was a lot of, you know, progressives and leftists, and others, allies, were like, “we’re going to go register as Muslims”. You know, this kind of, new kind of solidarity. And, you know, and I think the reason why these conversations are important, particularly with, you know, with folks who are not Muslim is that we were all kind of sitting around like where have you been? You know? And so I think a lot of the things that we’ve experienced as a community, and I’m talking domestically. I mean, when people...during the 2016 election people talked about...Ted Cruz said, “let’s monitor all the mosques” and the Muslims were like “which ones are left” because we already know we’re under surveillance. I mean, in New York, as you know, The Associated Press came out with an exposé back in 2011, that really reaffirmed what the Muslim community in the Northeast was already saying. That our communities were under surveillance, technological surveillance. They were under...I mean, the New York Police Department had a larger counterterrorism division than the Federal Bureau of Investigations. I mean, the amounts of billions of dollars that went into mapping Muslim communities in New York, including the communities that

I was from. Going after, you know, kind of...and even the philosophy around what constituted a radicalization or a threat.

So for example, in New York, the NYPD had hired senior level CIA agent who came up with a report called "Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat." And in fact, what that report really said, (and it's still public online and people can find it). It said things like if a young man grows a beard and becomes more religious and starts frequenting mosque, that would be red flag for law enforcement to then basically categorize this young man as someone who was on the pathway to radicalization. So even normal things that Muslims were doing, that we were being categorized by law enforcement, and being criminalized for things that this is what we do as Muslims. Like there's kind of no way around it.

And when people talked about...you know, Donald Trump and others were alluding to this idea of registering Muslims. But we already registered Muslims. In 2003, the Department of Homeland Security, at the time, came out with a program called Special Call-In Registration, where they called on men who were over the age of 16, were not, you know, U.S. citizens or green card holders, to come from these very specific countries, a list of countries, all of them were Arab and/or Muslim majority countries, except for North Korea. I mean the imagery in 26, Federal Plaza, New York, with grown men sleeping on the streets of New York, literally around Federal Plaza, going to register. And about 110,000 men registered for this program. And there wasn't much talk about it. It wasn't something in the media. Progressives weren't working on this issue. Obviously there were some limited, but mostly in general, in the larger progressive movement, it wasn't really a thing. And about 10% of these men were put on deportation proceedings. And when we think about, you know, the informants, I mean the New York Police Department had names for them. They nicknamed them "mosque crawlers". Like they actually...somebody sat down and thought this was the thing to do.

You know, when I think about things like in 2006, the Bureau of Prisons, created the Communications Management Units. And there's a lot of people, obviously MPower Change is one of those groups that are like "close Guantanamo. We've got to close Guantanamo." I'm with it. Let's close Guantanamo. But we have Guantanamo North in places like Indiana. We have Muslims who are literally in 24 hours of solitary confinement, have no connection to the outside world, including sometimes not even to their families, no access to the media. And so we do have...we are operating Guantanamo style prisons here on U.S. soil. And not only that, I want people to imagine: we know families of people who have loved ones in prisons, like the CMUs in Indiana, who have been convicted on what the government calls secret evidence. So

imagine you're in prison, and you're in there for 30, 40, 50 years. God knows how long. And when you're asked why you're in there, you're like, "I don't know, because the government says, if they tell me why I'm in here, it's some sort of breach of national security."

And when we think about this, the Global War on Terror, and how it impacts domestically, it's not just, you know, law enforcement, and any administration. It's now been codified. It's codified through the Patriot Act. It's codified through the National Defense and Authorization Act. So it's being legislated even outside of any presidential administration. And one thing that Muslims will tell you is that, you know—when people tell me, Hey, do you do nonpartisan work? The bottom line is Democrats and Republicans oftentimes for us, you know, are the same, when it comes to the Global War on Terror. They have justified the same funding, they have supported law enforcement agencies to quote counterterrorism. So, you know, obviously there's always a little bit of difference on some issues. Maybe around immigration, or even some economic policies, healthcare. But when it comes to the War on Terror, you know, we as Muslims, you know, don't feel like there are any...there is no political entities who have really kept our community, in the sense.

Or even I remember even during 2016 election when Hillary Clinton was running against Donald Trump. And she was asked at some point...they took her to like some Muslim event, somewhere in like Los Angeles or something, with people from our community who support CVE and all kinds of other programs. But that's not the point. She...the only way she spoke about us, understanding that it was important for her to garner Muslim votes, especially in places like Michigan and Wisconsin, and some of these states, she only spoke about us through this lens of national security. The way that she thought she was going to appeal to our communities by saying, "Muslims are a part of the fabric of the society. They are our eyes and ears to counterterrorism." And that's really how it's been in politics up until a few years, when more young people have gotten involved in the political process to say, "Hey, we care about education. We care about Palestine. We care about racial justice, criminal justice. We care about immigration and immigrant rights, and healthcare, and Medicare, and all these issues. Stop talking to us about how we're somehow, you know, agents of the state that we're here to help you counter terrorism. That is not our job."

And in fact, what has happened is that...we've never even been approached in that way, anyway. We've been approached as the enemy within. And there's a great book that I recommend for people to read. It was written by the Pulitzer Prize winning AP reporters who wrote about the NYPD surveillance. And just because they write stories, there's a lot of, you know, kind of anecdotes. So it's not just like research. And it's a book called *The Enemy Within*. And it

really talks a lot about, kind of, the experiences of how law enforcement really manifested in its programs and how it impacted communities.

And the last thing that I'll say on this, because storytelling is really important to me, is I want people to...and I'm going to write it in the chat, I want people to look up the story of Fahad Hashmi. Because when we're talking about 20 years from post 9/11, I want people to remember that there are still people from our communities who are languishing in prisons now because of this Global War on Terror.

And Fahad Hashmi was a young college student in New York City at Brooklyn college, beloved by his professors, by fellow students. A professor, Jeanne Theoharris, who many people know as the author of the *Rebellious Life of Rosa Parks*, was a professor at Brooklyn college. She actually led a campaign, for many years in support of Fahad.

Fahad was Pakistani. He was Muslim. He went to London for a winter vacation. A friend called him and said, "Hey, could you let my friend, Babar, stay with you for two days? He's going to be passing by in London." So of course, that's what we Muslims do. You call me, I'm going to let whoever you tell me to sleep over, sleep over. Babar comes sleeps over in London. Says, "Hey can I use your cell phone?" Fahad's like "Yeah sure" as we would do, that's just who we are. Babar uses Fahad's cell phone, then he leaves. And Babar is carrying a duffel bag with waterproof socks and raincoats. He ends up going back to Pakistan. Somehow that duffel bag, according to the U.S. government, is handed from one person to the next and gets into the hands of somebody that's associated with the Taliban.

Of course, Fahad knows nothing about any of this. He was just being a hospitable Pakistani Muslim. And comes back to JFK airport. And he's detained at JFK airport. And he is put in federal maximum security prison, and eventually attorneys in our country—which is another major problem we have. Attorneys even don't have any confidence in the U.S. government. So they don't like going up against the government in national security cases. So they told Fahad to take a plea with the United States government. Until today, right now, Fahad Hashmi is languishing in a prison. A young, vibrant, wonderful human being who did absolutely nothing wrong, did nothing that we would not have done ourselves, is in a prison right now. And probably won't be released for the next couple of years.

And so just to reiterate that this is not just, "oh, it's a blanket. The Muslim community was impacted." These are human beings. These are people's sons and daughters and family members who continue till this day. This is not a story from 10 years ago or 20 years ago. Today, there are people.

And the story of also Noor Salmaan, who many of you know, was the wife of

the Orlando shooter. Never in the history of ever, in the United States, has there been a mass shooter, particularly a White man who went up and shot up a, you know, a movie theater, a mall, a church, we've never seen the prosecution of wives, of mothers, of partners, of anyone. We usually also don't even know who those people are. We're never even introduced to those people. In the case of the Orlando shooter, who was already murdered by the law enforcement, Noor Salmaan was stripped from her son, detained by the United States government, put in solitary confinement for 13 months. A woman that had...that was a victim of domestic violence. This is a woman who had domestic violence on the record. She was also a woman who suffered mental health issues. She had an IQ of 79. I mean, the list goes on.

And so my point is that even though when you look at a case, like we've seen again, similar cases of mass shootings, because Noor was Muslim she was targeted by the United States government, and this larger terrorism case, right. Which is of course, you know, a Muslim guy, or any guy, you can say, shot 49 people. 49, innocent people died. But the wife was prosecuted. And I believe wholeheartedly if the mass shooter was not a Muslim guy, and was not married to a Muslim woman, Noor would not have had her civil liberties violated for 13 months. And then acquitted of all charges, and innocent and went back to the world with her son.

But for me, those 13 months is something that the United States government has to understand...is this idea of like violating the constitution, it just doesn't apply to us as Muslims. And it still doesn't apply. So these stories are also stories... that just happened, like what three years ago. And so these, again, we're going back and forth saying we're 20 years later, we're moving on, we withdrew from Afghanistan, but really when you get deep down into it, nothing has changed. And especially in the cases of how the criminal justice system, in the context of national security works. And a lot of people have written about this, that there's a separate justice system in America for Muslims. And the examples are endless.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Linda, that was extremely evocative, I think. And really elucidates sort of the concerns that Fatema, and Ramah, and you have all raised about sort of what it means for CVE to continue to be put forth as a solution. And how, sort of the framing of the War on Terror as over fails to recognize the experience of individuals who continue to suffer the consequences of sort of terrorism, policing. I, you know, I really encourage, if you could share that link, that would be excellent. I also encourage our readers, the New York Times Magazine just released a feature including a ton of interview data captured from Terry Albury, a former FBI agent. And so



from sort of the other side of this narrative, and sort of personal storytelling in sort of reflecting on his 20 years in law enforcement, or prosecuted—or investigating, and prosecuting people based on this rhetoric of terrorism. Sort of the mundanity of activities that would lead Muslim community members to be surveilled, incarcerated. And again, really drives home the point that there is an extralegal experience for American Muslims as a result of the last 20 years, and the rhetoric that has flourished. Thank you. I think it's really important to always bring in sort of individual examples to help us understand, especially those of us who are not Muslim Americans, what this looks like in an individual level.

As we've heard, and as we've been talking about state surveillance is not a recent phenomenon. But the technologies behind covert intrusion into private spaces have multiplied rapidly in the internet era and become more sophisticated and more intrusive than ever before. These technologies though were not developed by the state, but instead by corporations monetizing our every click, our every scroll. Ramah, who profits from the proliferation of the surveillance state, and how are they working to perpetuate state violence for gain?

**Ramah Kudaimi:** Yeah. So at Crescendo, which we are honored to lead at ACRE, with our partners MPower Change, and LittleSis, we just launched a website this morning called [bigtechsellswar.com](http://bigtechsellswar.com). Folks should definitely check it out. I saw a link dropped earlier. To really highlight how big tech corporations like Google, Amazon, Microsoft, Facebook, and Twitter have become, even as they've become, you know, part of our everyday lives, over the last 20 years. They have also been providing tools to the U.S. military and government to help fuel this War on Terror that has impacted Muslim communities, and other Black and Brown communities across the globe. And what we see is that big tech is really benefiting from, what some have labeled, terror capitalism. This phenomena that corporations are profiting off of defining entire communities as terrorists and using them, these communities, as test subjects for a technology developed in service of counterterrorism, but then obviously can be deployed for other purposes. So as we've discussed, for the Global War on Terror, it is Muslim communities across the globe who have been dehumanized and labeled as terrorists and thus have become test subjects for a wide range of technology. And so this connection also between terror capitalism, and surveillance capitalism is very close. Because with surveillance capitalism, corporations are obviously able to profit off of the collection of data, computing that data, and then selling it off, you know, to all kinds of parties, who want to know about our private data, our experiences, and our habits.

And so this reliance of the War on Terror, on surveillance and data-based technology from the start really laid the groundwork for what people call the data economy. So where our personal data, like I said, is collected, on profit driven platforms like these tech companies, and then sold to these third partners from law enforcement to the federal government. And so U.S. big tech has become very complicit and entrenched in the Global War on Terror and has profited off of this never ending war against Muslims at home, and abroad. And we talk a lot about like weapons manufacturers having, you know, being war profiteers, especially these last few weeks in terms of who has made the most money off of, you know, the war on Afghanistan. But we also have to realize like the war—the tools that we now need to fight war are different, and are focused on what the tech and military industries called the digital battlefield. So we're talking about metadata, drones, artificial intelligence, which, you know, they say, "well, you know, it just becomes more efficient." But that doesn't actually make it any more humane. And, you know, even the efficiency thing should be questioned.

And so what we found in our research is that since 2004 five government agencies, including the Pentagon, the Department of Homeland Security, and the State Department, have spent at least \$44 billion on services with these five tech companies. And this increase in big tech's contracts has far outpaced that of traditional defense contractors. So for example, since 2010 Raytheon and Northrop Grumman, you know, well-known weapons manufacturers, the number of contracts they've had with the federal government has stayed steady, and even, you know, in the last couple of years has actually declined a bit. But from 2007 to 2019 DHS contracts and subcontracts with these five tech companies we talked about, have actually increased 50 fold. And then during the Trump administration, the Pentagon actually nearly doubled their contracts and subcontracts with these corporations. So we're seeing an increasing reliance from federal government agencies on tech to do things like surveillance, and better their drone strikes. Again, things that we are very much entrenched in the War on Terror.

And it's interesting because big tech has also been a vehicle for the rapid spread of Islamophobia since the War on Terror. So imagine, you know, we've seen again and again, reports about Facebook, Twitter, and Google's YouTube, and how they platform disinformation against Muslims, anti-Muslim violence, xenophobic hate speech, conspiracies, that then fuel you know, violent attacks such like the 2019 Christchurch attack in New Zealand, in which 15 worshippers were killed by a White supremacist. And it was, you know, it's been found, again, that he was inspired by watching YouTube videos.

These platforms also allow think tanks, and individuals, who are very

invested in the War on Terror for their own careers, to continue to spread disinformation in order to justify the continuation. So like Google which you know, at the same time can create artificial intelligence for the military drones that are then used to target Muslims. While at the same time, they are perpetuating criminalization of that very same community by spreading bigotry on a platform like YouTube. And so they can both profit from creating the conditions to make “an enemy” of Muslim communities, and then also create the machinery that can target and kill them. So it’s like a very, you know, sick way that these tech companies are really supporting and profiting off of the War on Terror. And at the same time, they also sensor, you know, Black, Indigenous, people of color communities, and activists when they speak out against this type of state violence.

And I think the other thing I’ll note in terms of what we found is that we found this like revolve...You know, in addition to the profiteering, and the contracts, we found there is like a revolving door between U.S. government agencies who are running different parts of the War on Terror, and big tech jobs. And like hundreds of people have rotated in and out of government and tech jobs between the past 20 years. And we’re talking like major figures from agencies, such as DHS, and the Pentagon, and the FBI, now have major roles in big tech. And again, brings up the question, well, what does that mean then, if you go from working for the government and then working for tech? Like, you know, that brings into, and what is the...what then are your intentions in these jobs in tech, if not to like potentially serve the priorities of the government that used to be serving in a job right prior, before you joined this tech. And what does it mean in terms of creating demand for war driven tech in the first place, if you were in that position in the first place.

And so I think that’s like...you know, the one...I definitely encourage people to check out the website. There’s like a...there’s like much more details about these contracts. Kind of interactive calculator that lets you see like, okay, what could the have this money being used for instead of lining the pockets of these tech executives. There’s a couple of different timelines. One is like just a you know, a timeline of the past 20 years in terms of major actions that have taken place, as part of the War on Terror, but the timelines that are also specific to how tech itself has grown as an industry in the last 20 years. And that defines also the specific ways tech, and these government agencies have grown hand in hand, and you know, talked about the...and pushed forward, really these War on Terror policies.

I think the last point I’ll just bring up is that these tech companies, again, because all they care about is profits over people. And we must really make clear in this moment that like tech is going to continue the wars. I think we’ve

mentioned this several times. I want to re-emphasize. The troops coming home doesn't mean any of these wars have ended. And I think Linda and Fatema have brought up those points too, of just like, you're still gonna need tech for airstrikes and, you know, especially artificial intelligence. Again, people think that will make it more efficient or more humane because you're being more precise. There's nothing precise about dropping a bomb on a house. It doesn't matter who you think you're killing or not. It's not precise. And so this is going to continue. This inhumanity and violence against people is going to continue. Obviously you need more tech to do this massive collection and analysis of data to terrorize communities. Whether at the borders or airports or press people through surveillance. And policing and big tech, again, is completely fine putting this profit over people. They're like competing now for new contracts with the Pentagon, contracts with ICE. Or they're trying to sell technology abroad, and using, like, examples in the U.S. So like a couple months ago, there was this article about Oracle, you know, has this analytics software technology that the Chicago Police Department had used against protesters. And that was their selling point when they were trying to get China to buy it from them. So it's very important, I think, too, like when we're talking about the War on Terror, is also think about the corporations who have profited. And we think big tech is definitely one that is playing a huge role in pushing forward and selling this war on our communities. And it's time we, you know, demand that they stopped doing that.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you Ramah. That was an incredible overview in one question I really appreciate you taking the time to talk us through that work. I, you know, I think it's fascinating. And like you said, it always important to identify who profits, and where capital plays a role in repression and state violence.

I will also say that it brought to mind for me, sort of the policing, and the censorship of Palestinian liberation protests, especially earlier this year, where there was a lot of reports of social media censoring the Palestinian liberation movement. And I think this is a good opportunity, Linda, to turn to you. I'd really like us to have a moment to talk about what the last 20 years, and the current moment that we're in, what it implies for the more-than-century-long project to establish Palestinian liberation and self determination, both within Palestine-Israel, but also here in the U.S. Thinking through anti-protest legislation that is, you know, fueled in part by a desire to tamp down on the Palestinian liberation movement. So if you could give us some insight there, that would be great.

**Linda Sarsour:** When you were asking that question, Koki, I started thinking about something that I read yesterday. It was a CNN op-ed—or maybe it was the day before yesterday, a CNN op-ed by Jonathan Greenblatt from the ADL. And one of the things that is hugely just, it...it just made my blood boil, like boil over and over and over again. I went to bed in total...like my brain was like, no, this is not gonna work for me.

What's really interesting about the Global War on Terror and the justification of, you know, surveillance and targeting of Muslim communities, are actually often supported by, and lifted by and reaffirmed by, pro-Israel groups in the United States of America. They loved it. I remember in New York City, during the big controversy around the NYPD surveillance of Muslim communities, pro-Israel leaders were actually writing op-eds defending the police commissioner of the New York Police Department. They were clearly you know, on the opposite side, you know. I remember we had a very high ranking right-wing Zionist, Democratic assemblyman here in New York City, who literally was like, "yeah, of course you stop the Muslims and profile the Muslims. Like, what are you supposed to do? Stop the White grandmas?" Like they were overt in support of surveillance of our communities and targeting. The very right-wing Zionist groups were very, very public about that.

And so for me, when I think about the silencing of, you know, the kind of Palestinian dissent, again, it's back to the same groups. It's all kind of goes back in hand in hand. Pro-police, pro-military, anti-Palestinian, pro-Israel. There's just some sort of interesting marriage that happens in that. And I even remember just from the tech conversation, we worked with the coalition on a campaign to target Microsoft on a program they had called Any Vision, where they were literally teaming up with the Israeli government to have this new kind of surveillance program that really would surveil Palestinians at checkpoints, really, is the bottom line for that. And having Americans go to Microsoft and be like, "what the hell are you doing? Like, this is not okay. This is what you're investing your money in." And then having, during a global pandemic, having Microsoft publicly withdraw their multimillion dollar investment from this program, Any Vision.

And really watching just recently in the kind of, you know, uprisings that have happened recently. It was kind of two folds for me. It was like, yes, the silencing of Palestinians, and pro-Palestinian voices on social media from tech. There was also a campaign against Facebook, and they never really went through with it, and hopefully that never happens, where they were trying to label the term Zionist as a form of hate speech. And for people who are Palestinian or part...or even researchers, even if you're an academia, or someone who's like a historian, or you know, if you want to talk about what's happening

in Palestine, you really can't have that conversation without saying Zionism and Zionist. It just doesn't work. I mean, those are very important terms in the larger context of that conversation. So they never went through with it, but these are the types of campaigns that we go up against all the time.

And the silencing of Palestinian voices. But what was really beautiful about this past uprising, like the most recent one, all of a sudden many progressives, what we call...or a lot of people call progressive, except for Palestine, all of a sudden started talking about Palestine. So it became a little more mainstream, not all the way mainstream, but a little more mainstream to join forces and to talk about Palestine. And why that was important was it allowed for the algorithms...when there's more people just talking about it, it's harder for these big tech companies, particularly social media platforms to suppress the conversation. Versus if it was just, you know, the specific pro-Palestinian solidarity movement.

So I think that there's a lot of great work that's been happening around digital rights for Palestine, by groups like 7amleh, by groups like Adalah, by other groups who are doing pro-Palestine work. And that in addition to allies who have stepped up and said, "we're in, tell us what you need us to say, what we need to do, who do we need to target on suppressing Palestinian voices."

And I'll put the link in here too, a little separate, but we're still going through these things, again, 20 years later. We have a campaign up right now to support students at Fordham University who for six years have been blocked from having a Students for Justice in Palestine. I mean, this is what we're talking about. A social justice group on a college campus. The college campuses have SJPs across the country. And there are some college campuses based on donors and other kind of, political reasons who will deny our young people, the opportunity to organize around issues that they deem important. And so I hope when you hear those stories around the country, that people are stepping in to support those young people. And right now we are in an all-in campaign to support the students of Fordham University.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you, Linda. I really appreciate that. I think, you know, it's a perfect transition to talk about sort of, the recent success, and growth of the Palestinian liberation and pro-Palestinian movement in the U.S. in the recent years, to my next question. I will also say, and plug really quickly, that PRA is about to embark on a donor education program to shift the funding landscape around Christian Zionism, which was one of the largest and most well-resourced movements contributing to the perpetuation of the suppression, and violence against Palestinians. Both in, you know, Palestine/Israel, but also in the U.S. And so for those of you on this call and our audience who's interested in,

you know, how to change the funding around sort of the continued repression of Palestinian liberation cause, I definitely direct you to this upcoming series. And my colleague Aidan will drop their contact info for more information.

But, you know, I really appreciate a note of optimism. I, you know, I think we've been talking about the War on Terror as ongoing, as insidious as, you know, both globally impactful and it's sort of, in also continuing for individuals in the United States today. And so before we close, I want to take, in the service of optimism and resiliency, to spend a few minutes reflecting on recent wins you all have experienced in your work, and your activism that keeps you engaged in this ongoing struggle against state surveillance and violence, and against the corporations profiting from it, perpetuating it.

So to start us off, Fatema, can you tell us about MJL's recent campaign against the local fusion center in Boston, where your organization is based, The Boston Regional Intelligence Center, and including a description of what are fusion centers?

**Fatema Ahmad:** Gladly! Fusion centers are, you know, one of the post 9/11 structures that have, you know, increased and expanded policing and surveillance, not just of Muslims, but of all, you know, targeted communities. So much like, you know, 20 years ago today, the Department of Homeland Security did not exist, right? ICE did not exist. Fusion centers did not exist. And what you have post 9/11, is not only a huge increase in surveillance of Muslims, but you also have that... you know, you have these structures used against other communities as well. So, whether that's at the border, you know, through ICE, through DHS, through the militarization of police.

You know, as Linda just talked about with solidarity, what we saw during Ferguson was like, right, Palestinian activists sharing, you know, how they deal with the day to day militarized violence that they see because folks, you know, protesting for Black lives were facing the same thing. And to be clear when we protest the militarization of police here, you know, we also have to protest, you know, militarized violence globally. It's not okay for that to be used against anybody, right? If we're talking about the War on Terror, you know, that's especially pertinent.

And so fusion centers are an example of this where most people don't know that they exist, don't know what they're doing. And what they essentially are, you know, are centers that were originally funded by DHS to allow for really broad information collection, and information sharing. So the entire point of fusion centers is, right, to fuse various law enforcement agencies. So you have everyone from, local law enforcement, local transportation departments, local government and non-government agencies, sharing information with DHS,

with the FBI. Just really openly with no, you know, no awareness from local communities that that's happening.

So Boston has our own special fusion center which we call the Brick. And, you know, one of the wins here is not just the material wins that we've had with this campaign, but the solidarity that we've built. So, you know, as Linda mentioned, as other folks have talked about, you have all of these oppressive forces working together, right? And fusion centers are a really good example of that. And they're targeting all of us. It's not just Muslims who are impacted. So Brick, you know, runs the local gang database, that has predominantly Black and Brown young men in it. Not all of them are Muslim. Many of them are not, you know. It's mostly not Muslim folks in that gang database. But it's justified by this counterterrorism, Islamophobic rhetoric. They have 750 cameras across the city of Boston. According to Stanford University, Boston has the highest density of surveillance cameras of large American cities. Because you know, we're progressive. So we'd rather do our policing through cameras. And Brick also, you know, was caught doing social media surveillance, where they were flagging muslim social media for using common terms like ummah, which means community. You know, using Muslim Lives Matter, or folks using Black Lives Matter.

So over the years, we've been able to show people and build this narrative around how, you know, Brick came to exist because of Islamphobia and impacts Muslims, but now impacts Black and Brown folks, immigrants broadly in the area. And so we've also built solidarity with immigrant rights organizations, with other abolitionist organizations like ourselves, to take it down. And so you have, in Boston, currently with our city elections, actually, you know, all of the candidates being asked if they support abolishing this fusion center. Just sort of unheard of you know, nationally people are not necessarily taking on fusion centers. Again, people don't necessarily know that they exist. So we have this unique situation here in Boston, where a lot of people know about Brick now, and a lot of people hate it for a lot of different reasons, which is beautiful for us. Right. It's really boosted this campaign so much from that solidarity.

And so we had a recent win. You know, just in the in the past few months where Brick was supposed to get an \$850,000 grant to expand their staffing, for their spy center, for their real time crime center. And you know, all of the pressure that we put on city council, that thousands of people put on city council, you know, pushed them to vote no, and deny them this money. Which again, is sort of unheard of for our city council to just say no to money coming out of nowhere. You know, so that was just such a huge, powerful moment for the campaign. But we're really hoping you know, to build on that momentum and actually abolish the entire thing in the near future.



**Koki Mendis:** That is an excellent story, Fatema. I think that's a great example of why we do this work, and why local activism is important, especially in programs that are—that feel national in spread and implementation. Ramah, or Linda would either of you like to give us some hope in, in continuing for the next 20 years.

**Ramah Kudaimi:** Yeah, I can add to that. I will plus one the local organizing. Definitely. Well, I would also add in terms of like thinking about organizing wherever, you know, your workplace is...so like...so I'll bring up the tech worker thing. So something we definitely were inspired by when we were doing you know, this research project related to Big Tech Sells War is one other kind of similar projects and calls. So No Tech for ICE that, you know, demands led by groups like Mijente, in terms of ensuring that companies, corporations, are not supporting ICE, and the horrific policies it is pursuing against immigrant communities. Campaigns like Tech Is Not Neutral that really push on this idea of that there is no neutrality in tech. Like that's just a false statement that makes it seem like tech is more humane. Like we've been discussing. And, you know, we've also been seeing like tech workers, you know, raising the alarm on the abuses and complicity of their industry. And a growing number are refusing to kind of think—you know, create products for U.S. military and border patrol.

So like one of the biggest examples is back in 2018, Google was forced not to renew a contract with the Pentagon for the AI work that they had been doing, the artificial intelligence work they had been doing. And I think we, you know, we brought up, you know, what tech has been doing around Palestine particularly in these last few months. But you know, back in May, in the midst of Israel, you know, doing yet another attack on Gaza, Amazon on Google workers, you know, wrote letters demanding their companies take action in support of the Palestinian people in face of this continuing assault. So I think more and more people are understanding that they have responsibility, as tech workers, to make this.

And I'll plug in tomorrow morning at 11:00 AM Eastern, we're kind of having an Instagram chat on ACRE's Instagram, which I just dropped the link, that we'll talk more about kind of the Big Tech Sells War, but also think through this, kind of, idea of what responsibility do technologists have and to really push back on this idea of like, "well, all we need is kind of to make tech more acceptable and kind of reform it." Versus like, "no, actually you should not be engaged in this anymore."

And the last point: I think in this moment in time, like, you know, where people are reckoning with what the last 20 years have meant, and in this

moment of like growing discussions around defund and abolition, and how do we kind of take those concepts and think through these ideas in terms of the War on Terror themselves. And there's amazing work happening on this issue. I'll drop another link in terms of like a policy agenda that came out when Biden was sworn into office around this idea of abolishing the War on Terror. And so I think, like, you know, figuring out how folks can support these types of efforts, and particularly efforts that are led by impacted communities is very important. And I think there is definitely more openings in this moment to talk about this. And that's, I think thanks to like, you know, more and more folks who are demanding abolition, and defund, particularly obviously Black activists, who then allow us to have these discussions more in terms of what those concepts then mean for these other forms of oppression happening across the globe.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you Ramah. I think, you know, underlining solidarity here, too, in this moment is extremely important. And as we've heard, a lot of the technologies and rhetoric being deployed against Muslim communities absolutely impacts non Muslim, Black and Brown communities, and Indigenous communities. And so just underlining that not only is the violence perpetuated by the state intersectional, but so can the resistance to it.

Linda or Fatema on wins. Or I'm also interested in hearing similarly what we heard from Ramah, and sort of, what this moment means for possibility. What's next? Where can our audience focus their efforts, and any other resources you want to point our audience to in these last moments?

**Linda Sarsour:** I'll just say even if we don't want to consider ourselves to be optimistic, we absolutely are optimistic people. And the reason why I say that is that we're still here, is because we believe in something, we believe in a vision. We believe that there are—there's something different out there. And so that's what wakes me up every day. I know that we could be better. I know that we could win freedom and liberation. It's kind of like when Dr. King, you know, said you know, I see the promised land. I may not get there with you, but I see the promised land. And I do see the promised land. And I believe that what we've built over the last 20 years, specifically amongst immigrant Muslim communities, is something to be really proud of. I've traveled to 46 states in the United States, specifically in Muslim communities.

I've watched young people—kind of what they call the post 9/11 generation. We are the 9/11 generation. There's a post 9/11 generation. They're bold. They're brave. I watched them on college campuses across the country, watching more young people get engaged in politics, the kind of fearlessness we've seen

amongst young people. And that doesn't mean to say that our young people aren't being targeted and, you know, being, you know, some cases harassed for their political views on college campuses, but it has often not silenced them. It's actually made them more bold, and more brave. The solidarity that we have seen, and that we have built over the last 20 years with, you know, Black folks within our community and outside our community. And what's beautiful about the Muslim community is we have every community in our community. And being able to build within and outside of our community.

And also knowing that we also, you know, experienced the same things that any communities experience. We still have ways to go on eradicating sexism, and racism within our own communities, but I'm not going to ignore the power we've built, the influence we've built, the young people that we've raised in our communities who are leading social justice movements across the country. Not just on Palestine, but watching young Muslims in environmental justice, or watching young Muslims as part of the anti-gun violence movement in the United States, economic justice in the Medicare For All realm, and seeing more young people going into nonprofit, and working for advocacy organizations. It, it really has...it's, it's something that I've been reflecting on. Just looking at all the different organizations that I've worked with over the years and watching them integrate our people, our issues, in ways that they hadn't before. So very optimistic.

And you know, for me, I think all the organizations who are, you know, here today, I think are all organizations that you should definitely sign up to, kind of, you know, read our emails, you know. Stay up to date because when people say knowledge is power, it sounds like cliché, but it's actually true. You are not going to be able to advocate, you're not going to be able to know what's going on, if you're not actually, you know, engaging with these marginalized organizations... or marginalized people-led organizations doing this kind of really important work. So stay connected, and stay optimistic, but also stay outreached.

**Koki Mendis:** Fatema, go ahead.

**Fatema Ahmad:** Yeah. Yeah. I'll just add on that. I think, you know, the importance of these grassroots organizations is that, you know, it's not just that it's led by impacted people, but in terms of strategy, and in terms of hope, like we see change happening at that level first, right? It happens within our communities first. It happens at a local level first. You know, that fusion center campaign that I just shared, if we win, that will be a model for other folks to replicate, right? We've done that with CVE where, you know, we're a very small

Boston based organization. We're not national. But because we have so much experience fighting CVE at the local level, and have learned from that, we now have a national campaign around that.

And so I think, you know...I think we see this all the time where people put energy towards big national organizations, or legal organizations, rather than focusing on who is in your neighborhood? Like who is local? Who is grassroots? Who's actually doing some local campaign work that you can engage in, and support, right? Like that's where that solidarity starts.

I would also be remiss if I didn't mention the campaign that almost all of our organizations PRA, MJL, and ACRE are part of. So I'll drop the link in the chat. So, you know, beyond the government agencies who are, you know, running all of this policing and surveillance, and the war globally, you also actually have a lot of nonprofits that support this. Linda mentioned the ADL, which quite literally surveilled Arab activists. Like historically and now claims to be progressive. But you also have, actually, a lot of like really just overtly White supremacist institutions that exist, and have tax exempt status, and get a lot of funding as, you know, donations. And those organizations lobby for, and promote the kind of policies that we're all fighting. Like the Muslim ban, like so much of what we've been talking about.

So one campaign that our organizations have, is actually going after that funding, right? To try to cut off, you know, these institutions from receiving massive amounts of anonymous donations. So we're going after Fidelity in particular, they're the largest charity in the country. You might be surprised by that. They are larger than the Gates Foundation.

And so there's just tons of money in Islamophobia, unfortunately. It's not just those tech companies that profit from it. There are a lot of institutions that are making money off of this. So you can learn more about that from the link that I'm going to drop now.

**Koki Mendis:** Thank you Fatema. Thank you, Linda. Thank you, Ramah. I think I want us to conclude on this note of optimism, on strategy of local organizing, and the strategy of changing the field of complicit philanthropy, and the opportunities that are presented in this moment of heightened discussion and heightened organizing. Especially as we think about, and talk to Generation Z and the work that they have ahead of them.

I want to thank all of you out there for joining us for the first webinar in the Subverting State Violence series. I hope you, like me, feel like we really can subvert state violence in all forms. We will be distributing the recording, and transcript of today's webinar by email and on our website next week, including all the links that our panelists, and audience have shared with us today.

And please stay tuned for the next webinar in our series, looking at right-wing sheriffs and the movements working to unseat them. In the meantime, visit [politicalresearch.org](http://politicalresearch.org) for the latest in-depth analysis of trends and actors on the Right, including some recently published pieces, as of today, on this history of the last 20 years since 9/11, including a counterfactual on what if there was no 9/11. What kind of world would we be living in?

So I want to say thank you again, Fatema, Linda, Ramah. This has been a fabulous conversation. And just being able to end on optimism, and in solidarity, really, is a wonderful place, I think, going into this anniversary that we have ahead of us. So I want to say thank you to all three of you.