

## *Trinidad and Tobago: Extremism and Terrorism*

---

On November 15, 2019, Middle East Eye (MEE) revealed that nearly 100 nationals of Trinidad and Tobago were being held at al-Hol camp in northern Syria. A detailed list compiled by the families and shared with MEE gave insight into the Trinidadian nationals held at al-Hol. These individuals arrived as part of an exodus of people fleeing the capturing of ISIS territory by a U.S.-backed military campaign spearheaded by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) earlier that year. Some 25 women and 71 child nationals of Trinidad and Tobago were at the camp as of the start of November, according to the documents. Although the figures have not been confirmed by government officials, Trinidad and Tobago's National Security Minister Stuart Young acknowledged that given the disturbing evidence, a cross-agency team known as Team Nightingale would be assembled to investigate the claims. Repatriating former ISIS members has become a hotly debated issue as the government of Trinidad and Tobago has not actively undertaken developing programming that would help to rehabilitate former fighters. (Sources: [Middle East Eye](#), [Middle East Eye](#))

### **Overview**

Although Trinidad and Tobago has not experienced on-going or large-scale terrorist acts, the twin island nation has taken on a notorious identity: the small country has one of the highest number of foreign fighters per capita in Syria and Iraq. More than 100 of Trinidad and Tobago's 1.4 million citizens have traveled to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS—which represents one of the highest proportions of recruits of any country in the western hemisphere. Trinidad and Tobago's role as a hub for extremist recruitment was most notably publicized in 2016, when Shane Crawford, also known as Abu Sa'd at-Trinidad, was prominently featured throughout ISIS's magazine, *Dabiq*. In the accompanying interview, Crawford called for attacks on western embassies throughout the islands, hoping to encourage a new wave of radical actors to spread ISIS's violent message both domestically and potentially, internationally. (Sources: [Independent](#), [Loop](#), [New York Times](#), [International Affairs](#))

The country's first brush with Islamic radicalism came when a small group known as Jamaat al-Muslimeen ("Community of Muslims" or JAM) launched a coup attempt in 1990, led by a convert named Yasin Abu Bakr. The coup was ultimately unsuccessful, but it signaled the impact Islamist groups would have throughout the country in the decades to come. Although Islamist groups in Trinidad and Tobago have not carried out significant domestic attacks, they have ushered in a new reality of gang crime and violence for the country's population. (Sources: [New York Times](#), [Al Jazeera](#), [National](#))

According to former U.S. Ambassador John L. Estrada, Trinidad and Tobago's nationals are well-regarded members of ISIS. Because of their English-language skills, they have been known to achieve high ranks within the organization, and have been tasked with spreading ISIS's message throughout the Caribbean. Several experts at the Center for Immigration Studies believe that returning foreign fighters may conduct localized attacks given their acquired skillset from their time in ISIS-controlled territory. Additionally, given the country's proximity to Latin America—a region in which political Islam has yet to become a prominent threat, returning insurgents could infiltrate neighboring Latin American countries that lack the capacity to adequately deter jihadist activity. (Sources: [Stable Seas](#), [New York Times](#), [Independent](#), [Center for Immigration Studies](#))

### **Radicalization and Foreign Fighters**

Although Trinidad and Tobago only has a population of 1.4 million, the two islands have the highest per capita ratio of foreign fighters from the western hemisphere in Iraq and Syria. Over 100 Trinis (the local term to describe citizens of Trinidad and Tobago) left to join ISIS, including men, women, and children. It is uncertain whether all fighters were willing or unwilling companions. Given the territorial collapse of ISIS's caliphate in 2019, many recruits from Trinidad and Tobago remain in internally displaced camps throughout Iraq and Syria, most of which are women and children. According to a local civil rights and activism group in Trinidad called "Concerned Muslims of T&T," there are 40 Trini children and 16 Trini women in the al-Hol camp in northeastern Syria alone. Only recently has the government confirmed that there are Trinidadian and Tobagonian women and children at al-Hol Camp, with overall numbers of Trinidad and Tobago nationals suggested to hover around 100. (Sources: [Guardian](#), [Lawfare](#))

Additionally, the profile of recruits does not abide to consistent demographic patterns. Although there have been recruits who joined according to economic need or community and financial opportunity, those reasons did not primarily factor into joining ISIS's ranks for Trinidadians and Tobagonians. Recruits come from all socioeconomic and educational levels which makes it difficult to discern which push and pull factors directly influence Trinidadian and Tobagonian enlistment into the terrorist group. Although there has been some social tension among the ethnic Indian and the Afro-Trinidadian communities, according to scholar Simon Cottee of Lawfare, Trinidad and Tobago largely features a tolerant culture that

## *Trinidad and Tobago: Extremism and Terrorism*

---

respects Islam. Additionally, Cottee explains that almost all recruits were born and raised in Trinidad and Tobago. This fact, Cottee explains, is a marked difference to the general ISIS recruitment profile in which foreign recruits feel excluded and removed from their society and fall victim to charismatic recruiters promising better livelihoods and economic opportunities in fighting for Islamist groups. The major “pull” for recruits seemed to be based on the premise that joining the jihad would provide a society free from the corruption and violence that is heavily present throughout Trinidad and Tobago. However, Cottee also mentions that given how rampant gang activity is throughout Trinidad and Tobago, some recruits choose to join ISIS instead of joining a local gang, with one recruit revealing, “[One] imam told me that instead of joining a local gang, some see traveling to the Middle East as like joining another gang.” (Sources: [Lawfare](#), [Loop](#))

### *Radicalization and Recruitment*

Nationals of Trinidad and Tobago became “poster boys” for an ISIS recruiting video made in late 2015 which included their children. In the video, one man identified as Abu Zayd al-Muhajir claimed he had brought his three children to Syria in the Raqqa province while another—Abu Khalid, a Christian convert—used the video to proclaim that Muslims in Trinidad were “restricted.” This was echoed by Zayd al-Muhajir and another Trinidadian, Abu Abdullah, who then encouraged Muslims in Trinidad to support ISIS and its ambition of creating an Islamic caliphate. According to scholars at the Oxford Research Group, some recruits believed that Islam in Trinidad was being “restricted” or marginalized which found resonance among the Trinidadian and Tobagonian population who later chose to enlist. (Source: [Oxford Research Group](#))

According to Simon Cottee at Lawfare, about 34 percent of individuals who left Trinidad and Tobago for Syria or Iraq are adult men, 23 percent are adult women and 43 percent are minors. Of the adults, the ratio of males to females is 60:40 which places Trinidad and Tobago at the top of Western countries for female ISIS migrants. The average age of Trinidadian and Tobagonian recruits is also about a decade older than most foreign terrorist fighters from the western hemisphere, with the average age at the time of departure being 40. The average age at time of departure across all 40 of the adults is 34, which is about a decade older than most averages for fighters from the western hemisphere. Based on a leaked police file on over 102 individuals who left Trinidad and Tobago between 2013 and mid-2015, there were 20 families. (Sources: [International Affairs](#), [Lawfare](#))

In terms of socioeconomic status, nearly all the adult men were employed at the time they departed to join ISIS. According to scholar Simon Cottee, over 90 percent can be categorized as middle class, while 10 percent can be categorized as lower class. The majority of foreign fighters from Trinidad and Tobago were unskilled. About 55 percent of Trinidadian and Tobagonian recruits were self-employed through means of farming, driving vehicles for hire, or were homemakers. Additionally, just one ISIS migrant from Trinidad and Tobago was unemployed upon leaving for Syria and Iraq. None of the recruits from Trinidad and Tobago were economically impoverished, and even a few belonged to higher socioeconomic brackets. Due to the results, foreign fighters from Trinidad and Tobago are not likely incentivized due to economic opportunity. In terms of marital status, among the men, nearly 80 percent were married at the time of leaving, while among the women all were married, with the sole exception of an 18-year-old who left with her family. Unlike traditional demographics of single-male recruits, most of those recruits from Trinidad and Tobago who departed to Syria and Iraq left with their families. (Sources: [International Affairs](#), [Lawfare](#))

Many of the foreign fighters attended Salafi mosques, with most of the recruits belonging to mosques in Rio Claro and Enterprise in the southeast of Trinidad and Tobago. Salafi Muslims are a minority in Trinidad and Tobago, with only five Salafi mosques throughout the country. Over 43 percent of Trinidad’s foreign fighters are converts into the Muslim faith. About 30 percent of recruits had a criminal record or had been involved in criminal activities prior to their departure. The majority of those who left come from three areas in Trinidad: Rio Claro in the southeast, Chaguanas in west-central Trinidad, and Diego Martin in the northwest. The majority—nearly 70 percent—lived in Rio Claro on or near the Boos Settlement Muslim community led by Imam Nazim Mohammed. Additionally, in a 2016 *Dabiq* interview with Simon Crawford, he claimed that about 40 percent of the foreign fighters from Trinidad and Tobago were converts to Islam, with the remaining 60 percent having been born into or raised in the Muslim faith. Data compiled from scholar Simon Cottee further showcases that of the adult ISIS migrants from Trinidad and Tobago, about 42.5 percent were converts, with the remaining recruits either born into the religion or were unreported. (Sources: [Oxford Research Group](#), [Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses](#), [Lawfare](#), [Independent](#), [Loop](#), [International Affairs](#))

According to Dr. Sanjay Badri-Maharaj at the Oxford Research Group, the extremist doctrine found most traction with Afro-Trinidadian converts to Islam, as exemplified by the radical Jamaat al-Muslimeen (JAM) and its affiliates. Badri-Maharaj suggests that extremist ideology may largely resonate among Afro-Trinidadian converts due to the strong links between Islam and the 1970s Black Power movement in the United States. Yasin Abu Bakr, the notorious leader of JAM, tapped into the movement and targeted urban Afro-Trinidadian youth in his sermons through a mix of Islamic doctrine and Black Power rhetoric. (Source: [Oxford Research Group](#))

## *Trinidad and Tobago: Extremism and Terrorism*

---

However, studies are still inconclusive in determining the push and pull reasons for why Muslims from Trinidad and Tobago choose to become foreign terrorist fighters. While there have been no local studies on the motivation behind Trinidad and Tobago's Muslims and their eagerness to travel to join ISIS fighters, it is possible that the generally glorified ideal of the caliphate has prompted enlistment. The leader of the Waajihatul Islaamiyyah, Umar Abdullah, who is constantly monitored by an officer of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service Special Branch, identified some characteristics of the Trinidadians and Tobagonians attracted to ISIS. He noted that those who were recruited by ISIS were arrogant, lacked patience, could not live among non-Muslims, had marital problems, and firmly believed they were being marginalized as Muslims. JAM has a number of offshoots which include: Wajihatul Islamiyyah (Islamic Front), Jamaat al-Murabiteen (the Almoravids), and Jammāt al-Islami al-Karibi (Caribbean Islamic Group). Like Jamaat al-Muslimeen, each of the offshoots are distinctly Afro-Trinidadian in character. (Sources: [Oxford Research Group](#), [Jamestown Foundation](#))

### *Jamaat al-Muslimeen*

Jamaat al-Muslimeen (JAM) is a radical Afro-Trinidadian Islamist organization that attempted to overthrow the government in July of 1990. Formed in the mid-1980s, the Jamaat was originally a small criminal group seeking to alleviate rampant social and economic grievances that were overlooked and perpetuated by a corrupt government. The Jamaat's leader, Imam Yasin Abu Bakr (previously known as Lennox Philip), was a former policeman who converted to Islam in 1969 and later spent years in Libya as a guest of dictator Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. On July 27, 1990, Abu Bakr staged an armed insurrection with 100 armed followers. The group held Prime Minister Arthur N.R. Robinson, many political officials, and the staff of the government owned television and radio networks hostage for six days. The violent takeover left 24 people dead. The insurrection ended on August 1, with the surrender of Abu Bakr and his followers. The High Court of Trinidad and Tobago acquitted Abu Bakr and his men of the charges and granted them amnesty in order to secure the lives of the hostages. (Sources: [Oxford Research Group](#), [Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium](#), [BBC News](#), [Huffington Post](#))

Given Abu Bakr's personal relationship with Gaddafi, there are reports that Libya provided funding—routed through Gaddafi's World Islamic Call Society (WICS)—and training to the Jamaat's members. With improved resources and trained insurgents, the jihadist outfit acquired the tools and strategies to challenge Trinidad and Tobago's central government. Furthermore, the Jamaat aligned itself with various mosques and actively recruited among the mosque's ranks. Various splinter groups have emerged from the Jamaat as former members broke away to lead groups such as Jamaat al-Islami al-Karibi, the al-Qaeda supporting Waajihatul Islaamiyyah (the Islamic Front), and the Jamaat al-Murabiteen. (Source: [Oxford Research Group](#))

It is estimated that there are more than 1,000 members in the group. Although JAM upholds revolutionary discourse and disseminates strict Islamic principles, throughout Trinidad and Tobago, JAM is considered more of a criminal gang than a jihadist group. JAM maintains superiority over the country's rampant criminal network with most gangs and criminals deferring to JAM's Abu Bakr. Additionally, although JAM has a number of splinter groups, the primary group has not adopted a transnational agenda like al-Qaeda, but rather has kept its activity within Trinidad and Tobago's borders to serve particularly political and social purposes. (Source: [Jamestown Foundation](#))

Abu Bakr has faced a series of charges that include terrorism and incitement to commit violence. He was charged following statements he made at an Eid al-Fitr sermon at JAM's mosque complex in the St. James section of Port of Spain on November 4, 2005. Abu Bakr called on all of Trinidad and Tobago's Muslims, especially wealthy Muslims, to donate *zakat* (alms) to his mosque or face "bloodshed." From the onset, Abu Bakr's reference to "wealthy Muslims" was widely understood as a threat directed towards Trinidad's East Indian Muslim community, a community that JAM considers to be in direct opposition to the Afro-Trinidadian community. In 2012, his trial at the High Court ended in a hung jury, resulting in a retrial being ordered. The retrial has since then not taken place. (Sources: [Jamestown Foundation](#), [Daily Express](#))

### *Unruly ISIS*

Given that Trinidad and Tobago is located along the drug route between South America and the United States, Europe, and West Africa, feuding drug gangs have intensified the level of crime and violence across the islands. A group known as "Unruly ISIS" is one of the most notorious of these gangs. Although Unruly ISIS is not affiliated with a specific mosque on the islands, their headquarters are across the street from the mosque of Imam Mourland Lynch—a mosque that some of Unruly ISIS's members previously belonged to. It is uncertain if Unruly ISIS espouses the same ideologies as the insurgents in Syria and Iraq, but as of right now, Unruly ISIS along with their rival gang, "the Muslims," have criminalized Islam and rendered it synonymous with gang activity and violence throughout the Islands. (Sources: [Al Jazeera](#), [National](#))

## **Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents**

---

## *Trinidad and Tobago: Extremism and Terrorism*

---

### *Jamaat al-Muslimeen Coup Attempt*

On July 27, 1990, members of Jamaat al-Muslimeen (JAM) staged an armed resurrection against Trinidad and Tobago's Parliament. Led by Imam Yasin Abu Bakr, the group held Prime Minister Arthur N.R. Robinson, many political officials, and the staff of the government owned television and radio networks hostage for six days. The violent takeover left over 24 people dead and instigated large-scale crime and riots throughout the country, leading to almost 30 million dollars in property damage. The insurrection ended on August 1, with the surrender of Abu Bakr and his followers. Trinidad and Tobago's courts acquitted Abu Bakr and his men of the charges and granted them amnesty in order to secure the lives of the hostages. (Sources: [Oxford Research Group](#), [Huffington Post](#))

### *2007 John F. Kennedy International Airport Bomb Attempt*

On June 3, 2007, Trinidad and Tobago federal authorities uncovered a plot by a suspected terrorist cell to blow up John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York. One of the suspects, Russell Defreitas, a U.S. citizen native to Guyana and former JFK air cargo employee, said the airport was targeted because it is a symbol that would put "the whole country in mourning." Law enforcement officials who investigated the case claimed that the plot was only in a preliminary phase and that the suspects had not yet acquired the funding or necessary explosives to carry out the attack. Authorities claimed that the three men had "fundamentalist Islamic beliefs of a violent nature" and that the men were motivated by a hatred for the United States and Israel. Allegedly, Defreitas had been taught to make bombs in Guyana, and "wanted to do something to get those bastards." Authorities became aware of the plot through a convicted drug trafficker who agreed to act as an informant to the U.S. government in exchange for a more lenient sentence and a stipend. (Sources: [NBC News](#), [New York Times](#), [NBC News](#), [New York Times](#))

The three other men, Abdul Kadir of Guyana, Kareem Ibrahim of Trinidad and Tobago, and Abdel Nur of Guyana, were arrested and detained in Trinidad. Nur and Kadir, a former Member of Parliament in Guyana, were later discovered to have been longtime associates of JAM, often traveling back and forth from Trinidad and Guyana to seek the blessing and financial backing of JAM. Defreitas, Kadir, and Ibrahim were all later sentenced to life in prison for conspiring to commit a terrorist act. Kadir was sentenced in December 2010, Defreitas in February of 2011, and Ibrahim in January 2012. On January 2011, Nur was sentenced to 15 years in prison for providing material support for terrorism as it was revealed that he sought to enlist the help of al-Qaeda's explosive expert, Adnan Gulshair el-Shukrijuman. (Sources: [NBC News](#), [New York Times](#), [New York Times](#), [BBC News](#), [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#), [New York Times](#))

### *Carnival Attack Plots*

On February 7, 2018, Trinidad and Tobago police carried out anti-terror raids across the country and detained four "high value targets" suspected of plotting attacks in the country during the upcoming Carnival celebration. Allegedly, all of the thirteen suspects were Muslim. As of March 2020, only two people have been charged with any offense—the possession of components for an unlicensed firearm—and all others have been released. U.S. military personnel from U.S. Southern Command were involved in uncovering the alleged plot. Both the U.S. Embassy in Trinidad and Tobago and the United Kingdom's Foreign Office issued travel warnings following the alleged plot. Although local officials at the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service did not confirm if the threat was terror-related, one of Trinidad and Tobago's news outlet, the Guardian, later released a story stating ISIS had claimed responsibility for the alleged plot. However, Middle East Eye later proved that the Guardian had fabricated the story and had inaccurately attributed a quote to the terrorist group. (Sources: [Oxford Research Group](#), [Garda](#), [CNN](#), [Middle East Eye](#))

- Stuart Young, Trinidad and Tobago's national security minister, confirms that nearly 100 Trinidadian and Tobagonian nationals are held at al-Hol camp in northern Syria.  
In some cases, some families feature up to nine former ISIS members. Source: [Middle East Eye](#)
- - **January 21, 2020:** On March 28, 2019, Washington D.C. police arrest Rondell Henry, a naturalized U.S. citizen from Trinidad and Tobago. Henry allegedly stole a U-Haul van in Virginia and parked it at the National Harbor. Police arrest Henry the next morning after they found the van and saw Henry jump over a security fence. Henry told investigators he planned to carry out an attack similar to one in which a driver ran over and killed dozens of people in Nice, France, in 2016, authorities said. Assistant U.S. Attorney Thomas Windom said during an April 9 detention hearing Henry intended to kill as many "disbelievers" as possible. In a court filing, prosecutors claim Henry watched ISIS propaganda videos of foreign terrorists beheading civilians and fighting overseas. Investigators also said they recovered a phone Henry had discarded on a highway in an attempt to conceal evidence, including images of the ISIS flag, armed ISIS fighters and the man who carried out the 2016 Pulse nightclub massacre in an Orlando, Florida. On September 2, 2019, a federal grand jury indicts Henry on a charge of attempting to provide material support to a foreign terrorist organization. On January 21, 2020, Henry is examined by a court-appointed forensic psychologist and is deemed mentally unfit to stand trial. The lawyers agree Henry should be hospitalized in a Federal Bureau of Prisons facility before determining

## *Trinidad and Tobago: Extremism and Terrorism*

to proceed with his case. Sources: [NBC Washington](#), [Wall Street Journal](#), [NBC Washington](#), [NBC Washington](#)

- Jonathan Anthony Mohammed is arrested by the Terrorism Interdiction Unit of Trinidad and Tobago's Special Branch. He is charged under the country's Anti-Terrorism Act following postings he made on social media. One video from October 2018 featured bombings targeting convoys of armored vehicles, along with posts that called on members of the public to engage in acts of racial violence between Trinians of East Indian descent, and those of African descent. Sources: [West Indian, Loop](#)
- The U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designates U.S. and Trinidad and Tobago national, but Syria-based Emraan Ali and Trinidad and Tobago-based Eddie Aleong under Executive Order 13224, which targets terrorists and those providing support to terrorists or acts of terrorism. Ali has been involved in money transfers from Trinidad and Tobago to Syria where he would receive and provide funds to Trinidadian and Tobagonian ISIS fighters. In the summer of 2015, Ali lived at an ISIS guest house in Syria and had been assigned to Raqqa, Syria. As of March 2018, Aleong facilitated money transfers to ISIS members in ISIS-controlled territory. Source: [U.S. Department of Treasury](#)
- Trinidad and Tobago police carry out raids across the country and detain four "high value targets" suspected of plotting attacks in the country during the upcoming Carnival celebration. As of March 2020, only two people have been charged with any offense—the possession of components for an unlicensed firearm—and all others have been released. U.S. military personnel from U.S. Southern Command were involved in uncovering the alleged plot. Sources: [Oxford Research Group](#), [Garda](#), [CNN](#)
- The U.N. Security Council lists Shane Crawford as being associated with the "financing, planning, facilitating, preparing, or perpetrating of acts or activities by" ISIS. Crawford is believed to be in Syria and serves as an English language propagandist and sniper for ISIS. Crawford is also wanted for several offences in Trinidad and Tobago including firearm related offences and larceny and was once arrested on suspicion of involvement in an alleged plot to assassinate the then prime minister and several cabinet ministers. Source: [United Nations Security Council](#)
- The U.S. Department of State designates Trinidad and Tobago national Shane Crawford as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist under E.O. 13224. Crawford is believed to be a foreign terrorist fighter in Syria carrying out terrorist activity on behalf of ISIS, including acting as an English language propagandist for the group. Crawford first rose to notoriety in Trinidad and Tobago in 2011 when he was implicated in a plot to assassinate then Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar. Crawford was never charged for the plot. He fled to Syria in 2013 after taking part in a revenge killing, but Crawford became a part of the news cycle again in 2016 when, in a lengthy interview in ISIS's Dabiq magazine under the name Abu Sa'ad al-Trinidad, he encouraged sympathizers back home to "attack the interests of the crusader coalition," including embassies, businesses, and civilians. Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#), [Federal Register](#), [Middle East Eye](#)
- **September 9, 2016:** Trinidad and Tobago designates 80 international and local entities as terrorist organizations, including ISIS. Of the 80 listed, only one, Kareem Ibrahim, was local. The government continually works with the Financial Intelligence Unit and the police to add more local subjects to the list. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#)
- **December 12, 2015:** Trinidad and Tobago's Attorney General, under the country's 2005 Anti-Terrorism Act, freezes the assets of Trinidad and Tobago national Kareem Ibrahim. In 2011, Ibrahim was convicted in a United States federal court of conspiring to commit a terrorist attack at the John F. Kennedy Airport. This is the first time that Trinidad and Tobago invokes any portion of its 2005 Anti-Terrorism Act. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#)
- ISIS releases a recruitment video that appears to be filmed in Trinidad and Tobago. One of the men, identified as Abu Zayd al-Muhajir, is surrounded by his three young children, and calls on Trinidad and Tobago Muslims to join in the fight in Syria and Iraq. Sources: [Oxford Research Group](#), [Caribbean Communications Network](#)
- **November 11, 2014:** The Venezuelan government charges eight individuals, including five Trinidad and Tobago nationals, with terrorism and criminal conspiracy. The Venezuelan attorney-general reports that the men were arrested in March when Venezuelan security forces raided a Caracas hotel and found them in possession of computers, sophisticated communications gear, and military apparel to allegedly carry out "pre-jihad training." Source: [U.S. Department of State](#)
- **November 11, 2013:** Shane Crawford and two other men carry out a double murder in a busy town in central Trinidad. Less than a month later all three are in Syria fighting for the ISIS—the first Trinians to do so. It is unconfirmed if the murders were terror related. Source: [Lawfare](#)
- A New York court sentences Kareem Ibrahim, a native of Trinidad and Tobago, to life in prison for conspiring to attack John F. Kennedy Airport in New York. Ibrahim and several co-conspirators sought to explode fuel tanks and fuel pipelines under the airport in order to cause extensive damage to the airport, the New York economy, and to also result in a large number of casualties. Ibrahim was arrested in Trinidad in June 2007 and later extradited to the United States. Ibrahim was convicted of conspiracy to attack a public transportation system, conspiracy to destroy a building by fire or explosive, conspiracy to attack aircraft and aircraft materials, conspiracy to destroy international airport facilities, and conspiracy to attack a mass transportation facility. Source: [CNN](#)
- Federal authorities uncover a plot by a suspected terrorist cell to blow up John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York. One of the suspects, Russell Defreitas, a U.S. citizen native to Guyana and former JFK air cargo employee, is arrested and detained in New York, while three others—Abdul Kadir of Guyana, Kareem Ibrahim of Trinidad and Tobago, and Abdel Nur of Guyana—were arrested and held in custody in Trinidad and Tobago. Authorities became aware of the plot through a convicted drug trafficker who agreed to act as an informant to the U.S. government in exchange for a more lenient sentence and a stipend. Authorities later reveal Kadir and Nur were longtime associates of JAM. Kadir, Defreitas, and Ibrahim were sentenced to life in prison for conspiring to commit a terrorist act in December 2010, February

## *Trinidad and Tobago: Extremism and Terrorism*

2011, and January 13, 2012, respectively. In January 2011, Nur was sentenced to 15 years in prison for providing material support to a terrorist act. Sources: [NBC News](#), [New York Times](#), [BBC News](#), [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#), [New York Times](#)

- A Trinidadian court charges JAM leader, Yasin Abu Bakr, under the new Anti-Terrorism Act. Abu Bakr is the first person to be persecuted under the Act and is charged with knowingly promoting the commission of a terrorist act. He was charged following statements he made at an Eid al-Fitr sermon at JAM's mosque complex in the St. James section of Port of Spain on November 4, 2005. Abu Bakr called on all Muslims of Trinidad and Tobago, especially wealthy Muslims, to donate zakat to his mosque or face "bloodshed." Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [Economist](#), [Trinidad and Tobago News](#)
- A bomb detonates outside the Smokey and Bunty bar in St. James. The attack injures at least 14 people. It is suspected by Trinidad and Tobago security forces that JAM members carried out the attack, given that the JAM compound is near the bar. Police arrest JAM leader Yasin Abu Bakr who denies the allegations. Abu Bakr is released a few days later. Source: [Trinidad and Tobago Guardian](#)
- Trinidadian forces arrest Omar Mohammad at Crown Point International Airport under suspicion of terrorist offences. Mohammad, a Trinidad and Tobago national from South London, planned to board a plane for Britain. Police found two vials of powder in his bag and later charge him with possession of two offensive weapons. Sources: [Times](#), [Trinidad and Tobago Newsday](#)
- An explosive device hidden in a trash can detonates a few blocks from parliament in Port of Spain. The explosion injures 13 people. No group claims responsibility for the attack. Source: [BBC News](#)
- - **August 1, 1990:** JAM led by Imam Yasin Abu Bakr stages an armed insurrection. The group holds Prime Minister Arthur N.R. Robinson, many political officials, and the staff of the government owned television and radio networks hostage for six days. The violent takeover leaves 24 people dead. The insurrection ends on August 1, with the surrender of Abu Bakr and his followers. The Trinidadian courts acquit Abu Bakr and his men of the charges and grant them amnesty in order to secure the lives of the hostages. Sources: [Oxford Research Group](#), [Huffington Post](#)

## **Domestic Counter-Extremism**

In November of 2017, Trinidad and Tobago's government implemented a national counterterrorism strategy which included the establishment of an inter-ministerial implementation committee chaired by the country's chief of defense staff. Additionally, in April of 2018, Trinidad and Tobago and the U.S. hosted Fused Response 18, a training exercise to enhance emergency preparedness for responding to natural disasters and combating transnational challenges, including terrorism, illicit trafficking, and organized crime. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

As of February 2020, Trinidad and Tobago will have to contend with the threat from the possible return of foreign terrorist fighters who traveled or attempted to travel to Syria and Iraq. Repatriating returning fighters poses a variety of concerns as the enhanced individual skill sets of these returning foreign fighters is a cause for concern in the region as Trinidad and Tobago is a member of the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM). Given its membership in CARICOM, people in the Caribbean are allowed visa-free travel throughout the islands. (Sources: [Small Wars Journal](#), [New York Times](#), [Canadian Forces College](#))

### *Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security*

Trinidad and Tobago enacted the Anti-Terrorism Act on September 13, 2005. The Act criminalized terrorism, and provided protocol for the detection, prevention, prosecution, conviction, and punishment of terrorist activities. The act was amended on January 21, 2010 to provide for the criminalization of the financing of terrorism. (Source: [International Labor Organization](#))

In July of 2018, the government of Trinidad and Tobago passed legislation to amend its existing Anti-Terrorism Act. The amendments established several new terrorism-related criminal offenses. The amendments increase the criminal penalties for certain offenses and allow the government to designate certain geographical zones as "conflict areas," which will require giving notice to the government before traveling to specific locations. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

In 2018, the Trinidad and Tobago government passed legislation that would effectively reform the criminal justice system to allow for more timely prosecutions. The country's judiciary was also restructured to better address criminal matters. Since 2018, a variety of initiatives have been underway to enhance police effectiveness, including a broad restructuring of the police service and the establishment of new operational units, which could positively affect counterterrorism efforts. In August of 2018, the country also named a new Minister of National Security. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

Since the thwarted Carnival terror plot of 2018, the United States and other international partners have provided training to increase Trinidad and Tobago's capacity to investigate and prosecute terrorism-related crimes. Additionally, Trinidad and Tobago's international partners have provided

## *Trinidad and Tobago: Extremism and Terrorism*

---

key government officials with knowledge and training in global counterterrorism strategies and trends. Following amendments to the country's Anti-Terrorism Act in November 2015, Trinidad and Tobago has listed over 360 domestic individuals and organizations that have been designated by the U.N. Security Council's ISIL (Da'esh) and al-Qaeda sanctions committee. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

According to Dr. Sanjay Badri-Maharaj at the Oxford Research Group, the greatest challenge facing Trinidad and Tobago officials is the lack of a coherent policy on how to combat radicalization, rehabilitating those that have already been radicalized, and how to repatriate returning fighters, particularly children who were born in Syria and Iraq to Trini nationals. (Source: [Oxford Research Group](#))

### *Countering the Financing of Terrorism*

In October of 2009, Trinidad and Tobago established the Financial Intelligence Unit of Trinidad and Tobago (FIUTT) to strengthen the government's ability to combat, deter, and prosecute organized criminal activity, money laundering, and terrorist financing. The laws and regulations establish a financial intelligence unit, providing greater authority for the government to pursue the proceeds of crime, and enhanced banking regulations to detect suspicious transactions. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [Trinidad and Tobago Parliament](#))

Trinidad and Tobago is a member of the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CFATF), a Financial Action Task Force (FATF) style regional body. In November 2017, FATF placed Trinidad and Tobago on its list of jurisdictions with strategic deficiencies in their Anti-Money Laundering/Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) regimes (the "grey list"). Trinidad and Tobago developed an action plan with FATF to address these deficiencies. Throughout 2018, Trinidad and Tobago passed legislation to better have done much to improve its AML regime, though its work with FATF and CFATF continues. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

### *Countering Violent Extremism*

The government of Trinidad and Tobago is developing a national Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) action plan, and the counterterrorism strategy adopted in November 2017 includes CVE elements. Several members of the Trinidad and Tobago government also form part of the U.S. Embassy-led "SafeCommuniTT," a cross-societal network of nearly 80 stakeholders who have traveled on U.S. exchanges and received training in CVE best practices. The U.S. Embassy's "SafeCommuniTT" network comprises over 100 key influencers and messengers—a group of diverse individuals, ranging from top government officials to former convicts. The Embassy facilitated training and exchanges to the United States for many participants to learn best practices in CVE. Together with representatives of diplomatic missions, they shared their strategies, project ideas and messaging campaigns aimed at educating and changing perspectives regarding terrorism and radicalization. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [U.S. Embassy in Trinidad and Tobago](#))

In March 2017, the city of Chaguanas joined the Strong Cities Network (SCN) and is currently participating in a Strong Cities exchange program with Orlando, Florida. SCN was launched by the United Nations in September 2015 and is a global network of mayors, municipal-level policy makers and practitioners who have undertaken a community-oriented approach in countering violent extremism. With support from the U.S. Embassy, a Sports Caravan Program brought together U.S. and Trinidad and Tobago athletes to engage with at-risk communities, along with members of municipal governments, the Trinidad and Tobago Defense Force, Fire Services, and Police Service. In addition, the U.S. Embassy worked closely with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service to conduct training and exchanges on enhancing police and community relations. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [Strong Cities Network](#))

In February of 2019, the U.S. George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies hosted its first workshop in the Caribbean in Trinidad and Tobago. The two-day-long workshop connected government and non-government actors of Trinidad and Tobago on the same mission, which is to counter young radicalization and focus on solving capability gaps on counterterrorism domain. Dr. Tibor Kozma, Marshall Center's professor of Transnational Security Studies, who co-facilitated the workshop, stated "The recommendations address specific subjects in which government and civil society can work more efficiently to prevent, mitigate and manage counter terrorism related risks." (Source: [U.S. Army](#))

## **International Counter-Extremism**

In September of 2009, Trinidad and Tobago acceded to the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism. In a statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs states that accession obligates the country to take measures to criminalize the funding of terrorist activities and to identify, detect, seize, or freeze funds used or allocated for terrorist purposes. The government further states that it was obligated under the



### *Trinidad and Tobago: Extremism and Terrorism*

---

convention to prosecute or extradite individuals suspected of unlawful involvement in the financing of terrorism and to cooperate with other states that are parties in the investigation. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

Trinidad and Tobago is a member of the Organization of American States/Inter-American Committee against Terrorism, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and the lead country with responsibility for crime and security. Trinidad and Tobago is working with other CARICOM member states to implement a regional counterterrorism strategy adopted by CARICOM in February. [U.S. Department of State](#)

On September 23, 2019, it was announced that Trinidad and Tobago will host a United Nations conference that will focus on combating the threat of terrorism in the region in early 2020. The meeting will support the collaboration between the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) and Caricom for the implementation of a regional Counter-Terrorism Strategy. As of March 2020, the exact date of the conference has yet to be announced. (Source: [Trinidad and Tobago Guardian](#))