

Dawah (Dawa)

- Dawah (dawa) is an Arabic term with a range of meanings, but is generally **understood to signify an invitation**. Oxford Islamic Studies Online states the meanings of Dawah “encompass concepts of summoning, calling on, appealing to, invocation, prayer (for and against something or someone), propaganda, missionary activity, and finally legal proceedings and claims.”
- **Dawah activities include acts of charity and proselytization. The term has been co-opted by anti-Muslim activists to identify a “threat” against “American society and values.”** The Center for Security Policy (CSP) describes “dawa” as the “stealthier practice” in comparison to the “violent form of jihad (holy war),” pursued to implement Sharia, which is incompatible with “American values.” CSP is considered by the Southern Poverty Law Center to be an anti-Muslim hate group and a “conspiracy-oriented mouthpiece for the growing anti-Muslim movement in the United States.”
- **CSP maintains “dawa” is a non-violent activity but identifies it as dangerous nonetheless because, it claims, dawah is a “pre-violent” form of warfare** used to attain the same goal as those who engage in overtly violent acts. CSP directly compares Muslims engaging in proselytization to military reconnaissance: “the seemingly innocuous outreach tactics of dawa are merely part of the initial stages of what the U.S. military would call ‘intelligence preparation of the battlefield.’”
- The **anti-Muslim website, Counter Jihad**, identifies dawah as “the instrument Islamists use to convince others they are just like us, and their god is the same as ours.” The writer **states that “dawa is equal to another dirty deed of society, called drug dealing.** Supply those in need with what makes them feel good, and they become hooked.”
- In 2016, Jihad Watch, run by anti-Muslim speaker and writer Robert Spencer, published an article quoting Stephen Coughlin, author of *Catastrophic Failure: Blindfolding America in the Face of Jihad*. The article states that “da’wah should be thought of not as an invitation to Islam, but as ‘*preparation for jihad*.’” Coughlin’s book was published by CSP, described by the Center for American Progress as one of the “main organizations fueling the Islamophobia network.”
- Anti-Muslim activist Pamela Geller **utilizes the word dawah in numerous entries related to what she considers are threats posed by Muslims.** In a 2013 article, Geller identified a public school’s world history curriculum as “public school dawah.” In a 2015 article, Geller described the White House Summit on Counter Extremism as “Dawa at the most executive level of the US government.”
- A 2011 article on **Front Page Magazine**, run by the “godfather of the anti-Muslim movement” David Horowitz, **claimed that dawah “shares the same goals of jihad- empowering and spreading Islam,”** and that dawah is “often seen as jihad’s nonviolent counterpart.”
- In 2010, lawyer David Yerushalmi, described by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) as having a “record of anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant, and anti-black bigotry,” argued dawah to be an “effort to both convert non-Muslims to

adherence to Shariah and/or the effort to convert all political systems or political orders to Sharia-adherent political systems.”

- In 2004, the **Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations published a report describing “dawa” as a tactic of “radical Islam.”** The report defines dawah as a “not directly violent long-term strategy” of “some forms of radical Islam.” It states that jihad is a “short-term strategy of violence activism,” adopted by other forms of “radical Islam.” The **report claims that an interaction between “dawa” and “jihad” may ultimately result in “terrorism.”**
- The above 2004 report by the Dutch government was cited by anti-Muslim activist and speaker **Ayaan Hirsi Ali** during a 2017 Senate committee [hearing](#). Ali, alongside [Asra Nomani](#), spoke about the growing threat of dawah in the United States. In her [written testimony](#), Ali stated that the “western response to political Islam has been to focus only on ‘terror’ and ‘violent extremism.’” She claims “this approach has failed,” because it only focuses “on acts of violence” while ignoring “the ideology that justifies, promotes, celebrates, and encourages those acts.” **Ali claims that “dawa encompasses all the methods” by which “Islamism” spreads. Ali identifies “dawa” as the “activities carried out by Islamists to win adherents and enlist them in a campaign to impose sharia law on all societies.”**
- Ali’s latest book, *The Challenge of Dawah: Political Islam as Ideology and Movement and How to Counter It*, **describes the dangers of “Dawah,” claiming it to be more dangerous than jihad due to its insidious nature.** Ali states that dawah “is a process of methodical indoctrination, brainwashing, that rejects assimilation and places people in opposition to Western civic ideals. If the indoctrination is severe enough, Dawah activities can place individuals on the path to militant jihad.”
- In her written testimony, Nomani [claims](#) that **“terrorism is fueled by” the ideology of “Islamism,” which is put forward by dawah, or an “invitation” to its “extremist form of Islam.”** Nomani **calls on the U.S. government** to “investigate, expose and **blacklist all state and non-state sponsors of this dawah**, including mosques, nonprofits, schools, think tanks, academic institutions and thought leaders.”

IMPACT: Dawah is an Arabic term largely understood to signify an invitation and dawah activities can include acts of charity and proselytization. Anti-Muslim activists and organizations have co-opted and attempted to redefine this term in an effort to legitimize a narrative about an impending “Islamic/Muslim threat” to the United States and the rest of the world.