

Mounting violence against Muslims in America

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A series of attacks on Muslims in the US have occurred in the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings in France and executions carried out by the Islamic State (ISIS) in Syria. These events have been seized on by governments around the world, including the Obama administration, to promote anti-Islamic sentiment so as to justify expanded military interventions in the Middle East and stepped up domestic repression.

On February 10, three Muslim-American students—Deah Shaddy Barakat, 23, his wife Yusor Mohammad Abu-Salha, 21, and her sister Razan Mohammad Abu-Salha, 19—were found shot in the head, execution-style, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The two young women were wearing traditional hijabs when they were killed.

The man who turned himself in to authorities in connection with the murders had previously brandished guns at the victims and threatened them. Before the shooting, Yusor Abu-Salha told her father, “Daddy, I think he hates us for who we are and how we look.”

On February 12, an Arab-American man was brutally attacked by two white men at a Kroger supermarket in Dearborn, Michigan. The attackers also taunted his daughter, who wears a hijab, making references to ISIS and Muslims. The attackers called the man and his daughter “r--head” and said, “Go back to your country.”

On February 13, the Quba Islamic Institute in southeast Houston, Texas was the target of an arson attack that destroyed a substantial portion of the building and caused an estimated \$100,000 in damage. On February 17, police in Austin, Texas arrested a man for threatening to bomb an Islamic center as well as a Middle Eastern restaurant.

Last month, a “Texas Muslim Capitol Day” event (the declared purpose of which was to “engage American Muslims in the political process”) was attacked and disrupted by anti-Muslim thugs. Another attack was organized on “Muslim Day” in Oklahoma City. The attacking group’s Facebook page screamed, “Get Islam

Out of America.”

The rate of hate crimes against Muslims in the United States stands at five times what it was before September 2001. A recent poll found that out of all religions, Americans harbor the most negative feelings towards Muslims.

The American political and media establishment bears a significant portion of the responsibility for these trends.

A recent report by the Center for American Progress entitled “Fear, Inc. 2.0, The Islamophobia Network’s Efforts to Manufacture Hate in America” exposes a veritable “Islamophobia industry” operating on the periphery of the American state. Tens of millions of dollars have been spent over the past decade to promote anti-Muslim bigotry through a shady network of politicians, journalists, foundations, “activists” and “experts.”

This Islamophobia network enjoys close ties with police departments and the intelligence agencies. Anti-Muslim bigotry, the report indicates, can often be found “masquerading as law-enforcement counterterrorism training.” The training materials and “experts,” according to the report, encourage police and intelligence agents to see “a terrorist plot in every mosque.”

The intentional whipping up of anti-Muslim bigotry has intensified internationally in the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks last month. As the *World Socialist Web Site* has explained, the campaign to vilify Muslims serves definite political ends.

Anti-Muslim hysteria provides a justification for imperialist mayhem abroad as well as a wedge with which to attack democratic rights at home. Policies can be pursued in the climate of such hysteria that would otherwise be unthinkable. And, as with all such campaigns against racial and religious minorities throughout the twentieth century, murderous and fascistic elements are mobilized that, in a crisis, can be unleashed

against the working class as a whole.

In cultivating the conditions for an intensification of anti-Muslim violence within the United States, a particularly reprehensible role has been played by the racist, homicidal film *American Sniper*. The film features an elite US soldier heroically slaughtering Iraqi “savages” for God and country.

Chris Kyle, the real-life sniper behind Clint Eastwood’s pro-war propaganda film, boasted of killing more than 300 people. (He was apparently also a pathological liar who bragged about having shot and killed dozens of “looters” in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and to have participated in other events that are unlikely ever to have happened).

During a military investigation of allegations that Kyle killed an unarmed civilian in Iraq, Kyle said, “I don’t shoot people with Korans. I’d like to, but I don’t.”

In the current toxic social climate, and in the absence of any progressive outlet for social discontent, *American Sniper* has met with a certain and disturbing response. “American sniper makes me wanna go shoot some f---ing Arabs,” wrote one individual on Twitter. “Nice to see a movie where the Arabs are portrayed for who they really are,” wrote another, “vermin scum intent on destroying us.”

Another individual wrote, “Great f---ing movie and now I really want to kill some f---ing r--heads.” And another: “American sniper made me appreciate soldiers 100x more and hate Muslims (sic) 1000000x more.”

The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee described a “drastic increase” in hate speech on social media following the film’s release. It is not difficult to see how these kinds of responses can translate into real violence.

A revealing episode was provided by the “National Prayer Breakfast” on February 5. Bowing to pressure from the right, Obama utilized the occasion (a reactionary spectacle under any circumstances) to denounce “ISIL, a brutal, vicious death cult that, in the name of religion, carries out unspeakable acts of barbarism, terrorizing religious minorities like the Yezidis, subjecting women to rape as a weapon of war, and claiming the mantle of religious authority for such actions.” Obama also mentioned the Crusades and the Inquisition as examples of “terrible deeds” committed in the name of religion.

Obama’s appearance fueled an ongoing campaign by the Republican right denouncing the White House for not going far enough in vilifying Muslims. Obama was criticized on the grounds that his invocation of the

Crusades and the Inquisition “throws Christians under the bus.”

“The words ‘radical Islamic terrorism’ do not come out of the president’s mouth,” declared Republican Senator Ted Cruz. “The word ‘jihad’ does not come out of the president’s mouth. And that is dangerous.”

“The president’s comments... at the prayer breakfast are the most offensive I’ve ever heard a president make in my lifetime,” former Virginia Governor Jim Gilmore told reporters. “He has offended every believing Christian in the United States. This goes further to the point that Mr. Obama does not believe in America or the values we all share.”

The engines of anti-Muslim agitation in the United States do not include only the usual suspects: the Republican Party, the military, AM talk radio, police, the intelligence agencies, Fox News, the Murdoch Press, religious zealots, billionaire reactionaries, the Tea Party and so forth.

Instead, anti-Muslim prejudice has been lent a certain respectable gloss by so-called “liberal” and “left” sections of the political establishment. These layers either endorse the vilification of Muslims, acquiesce to it, or make hand-wringing scholarly inquiries into whether or not Islam is “inherently violent.”

“The rash of horrific attacks in the name of Islam,” read a front-page article in the *New York Times* on January 9, “is spurring an anguished debate among Muslims here in the heart of the Islamic world about why their religion appears cited so often as a cause for violence and bloodshed.” The article then weighs arguments—for and against—the proposition that Islam is “inherently more violent than Judaism or Christianity.”

No significant section of the political establishment in any of the imperialist countries has shown itself capable of taking a principled stand in opposition to the promotion of anti-Muslim sentiment. That task falls to the socialist movement, which stands for the international unity of the working class, defends its democratic achievements, and rejects all attempts to whip up national, ethnic or religious bigotry.



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