

California mosque firebombed amid record spike in anti-Muslim violence

Tom Carter
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As they gathered for a 1 p.m. prayer service on Friday, worshippers at the Islamic Center of Palm Springs heard a loud explosion and saw flames coming from the lobby of the building. Witnesses inside the mosque, located in Coachella, California, described a “fire bomb” and a huge plume of smoke. Some media reports have identified the device as a Molotov cocktail.

While the attack was potentially deadly and there were people inside the mosque at the time, there were fortunately no fatalities and the fire was contained to the front of the building. The mosque suffered smoke damage throughout.

The Riverside County Sheriff’s Department confirmed that the attack was intentional, and the police have arrested Carl James Dial Jr., of Palm Desert. He faces hate crime charges, as well as arson and burglary. Based on the information available thus far, there is no reason why he could not be charged with attempted murder.

Threats and violence against Muslims in the US have reached record levels. The firebombing of the Coachella mosque Friday represents the 63rd attack on a mosque in America so far this year, with 17 of those attacks taking place in November. This total represents roughly three times the number of such attacks in the year 2014. The previous record was 53 attacks on mosques in 2010.

The Islamic Center of Palm Springs was also the target of a hate crime last year. During morning prayers on November 4, 2014, five shots were fired into the building. The perpetrator was never identified and the case is still unsolved.

The Coachella mosque that was targeted Friday is located approximately one hour east by car from San Bernardino, the site of the mass killing on December 2, about which details are still emerging. (See: “The mass killing in San Bernardino, California”).

The impoverished City of San Bernardino has been mired in a prolonged bankruptcy since 2012, and the city

is proposing savage cuts to public employee jobs, wages, and benefits.

The Coachella mosque attack came two days after the December 9 murder of Hamza Warsame, a 16-year-old boy of Somali heritage. The teenager was beaten and thrown to his death from a sixth floor window in Seattle, Washington. His family claims that the perpetrators were fellow students at Seattle Central College and that the killing was an anti-Muslim hate crime.

“My name is Hamza. I was 16 years old,” reads a statement from the boy’s family. “What is my fault? Am I the wrong color? Do I worship the wrong God? Do I look different? Why is the world not mourning for me? Does my blood not matter?”

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) issued a statement in the wake of the recent Paris attacks indicating that it has “received more reports about acts of Islamophobic discrimination, intimidation, threats, and violence targeting American Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslim) and Islamic institutions in the past week-and-a-half than during any other limited period of time since the 9/11 terror attacks.”

“CAIR attributes this spike in anti-Muslim incidents to the Paris attacks and to the mainstreaming of Islamophobia by political candidates and lawmakers in the run-up to the 2016 general election,” the organization wrote. “Of particular concern is the extreme anti-Muslim rhetoric and falsehoods being espoused by leading Republican presidential candidates Donald Trump and Ben Carson.”

On December 10, the CAIR offices in Washington, D.C. were evacuated after the organization received a hate message in a package containing a suspicious white powder. The message said, “Die, Muslims, Die.”

Indeed, the spike in anti-Muslim violence by right-wing extremists over the past week coincides directly with the announcement by Republican presidential candidate

Donald Trump that as president he would close the country's borders to all Muslims. The billionaire demagogue, who thereafter received the endorsement of a New England police union, has openly cultivated and appealed to anti-Muslim hatred, anti-Hispanic hatred, hatred against African Americans, misogyny, and other backward prejudices.

Reporter Zach Cartwright chronicled at least 19 hate crimes against Muslims in the week following Donald Trump's remarks.

But it is not just a question of Trump and the Republican presidential candidates, as disgusting and as culpable as they are. Primary responsibility for the spike in anti-Muslim violence rests with the entire American political establishment, including the Democratic Party, the Obama administration and the corporate media. For 15 years, fear and hatred of Muslims has been deliberately stoked by imperialist governments around the world as part of the phony "war on terror."

Under the framework of the "war on terror," anti-Muslim bigotry has been intentionally promoted by the political establishment in order to justify the abrogation of democratic rights at home and military aggression in the Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa.

While the *New York Times* now seeks to distance itself from Trump's openly racist rhetoric, the newspaper has been a consistent supporter of the "war on terror" through both the Bush and Obama administrations. A front-page article on January 9 of this year, for example, examined the question of whether or not Islam is inherently violent.

The recent string of anti-Muslim incidents includes the following:

- On December 7 in Palm Beach, Florida, right-wing extremist Joshua Killets vandalized the Islamic Center of Palm Beach by destroying windows and furniture. He posted a picture of himself posing with an assault rifle online, along with other anti-Muslim rants. He bragged about the attack to an acquaintance, who reported him to the police.

- Also on December 7, in Manhattan, New York, Robert Murino attacked a restaurant while spewing anti-Muslim hatred. He punched an employee who attempted to intervene, and threw a chair through a glass partition.

- On December 7 in Twin Falls, Idaho, a vandal painted "Hunt Camp?" on the building of The Islamic Center of Twin Falls. This is a reference to internment camps for Japanese Americans that were established during the Second World War.

- On December 8 in Grand Forks, North Dakota, the

Muslim-owned Juba Coffee House and Restaurant was attacked with a Molotov cocktail. The perpetrator has been identified as 25-year-old Matthew William Gust. The building was also vandalized with Nazi "SS" runes and the words "Go Home."

- On December 8 in Seattle, Washington, passengers in a ride-share car attacked the driver and accused him of being a terrorist. The incident is being investigated as a hate crime.

- On December 9, a Ku Klux Klan recruiting campaign was reported in Cullman and Decatur, Alabama. KKK leaflets urged potential followers to help "fight the spread of Islam in our country."

- On December 9, a bloody pig's head was thrown at the door of the Philadelphia Al-Aqsa Islamic Society.

- On December 10 in Sacramento, California, prison employee Denise Slader was videotaped attacking two Muslim men who were praying in a public park. She punched them and threw hot coffee on them while screaming, "Allah is Satan" and "the Quran is evil."

- On December 10, a deli owner in Queens, New York was attacked by a racist thug screaming, "I kill Muslims."

- On December 11, in two separate incidents, two Muslim women wearing hijabs were attacked in the Tampa Bay area as they were leaving places of worship. One woman was fired upon; another was nearly forced off the road by a man throwing stones at her.

- On December 12 in Dallas, Texas, armed right-wing vigilantes held an anti-Muslim demonstration, during which they brandished firearms at a mosque. These "Three Percenter" vigilantes, who include soldiers and police officers, are a militant wing of the Tea Party. The group has held similar demonstrations at other mosques around the country.



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