

Five dead, eight wounded in Fort Lauderdale, Florida airport shooting

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A gunman opened fire early Friday afternoon at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport in southeastern Florida, killing five people and injuring at least eight others before being detained by Broward County police.

The incident began in the crowded baggage claim area of Terminal 2. The shooter then moved through a corridor until he ran out of bullets, at which point he placed himself on the ground “spread eagle” until apprehended by authorities. No shots were fired by the police.

The shooter has been identified as 26-year-old New Jersey native Esteban Santiago. Reports indicate that Santiago was carrying a concealed carry permit for his gun as well as a military identification for the US Army reserves.

Military officials have confirmed that Santiago served in the Puerto Rico National Guard beginning in 2007 and was deployed to Iraq in 2010 for at least 10 months, earning a combat action badge for his service. In 2014, he moved to Alaska, serving in the Alaska National Guard as a combat engineer. Lt. Col. Candis Olmstead, an official from the Alaska National Guard, reported that Santiago was discharged in August 2016 for unsatisfactory performance.

Law enforcement officials believe Santiago had arrived on a flight from Anchorage, Alaska, catching a connection in Minneapolis-St. Paul before flying on to Fort Lauderdale. Upon arrival, the suspect picked up his firearm at baggage claim, went into the men’s bathroom to unpack and load his weapon with ammunition, and began the shooting spree. Authorities are looking into witness reports that the suspect got into an altercation onboard his flight to Florida, law enforcement officials said.

According to multiple media reports, Santiago fired

openly into the crowd, stopping only to reload his weapon, and did not appear to be targeting anyone specifically. One witness from Minneapolis, who was nearby when the shooting began, described the scene to NBC, “Everyone started screaming and running. The shooter made his way down through baggage claim. He had what looked like a 9mm and emptied his entire clip. People were trying to run.”

Videos on social media show a chaotic scene of large crowds running across the tarmac between terminals, some taking cover behind vehicles. Many who were left unharmed in the wake of the shooting stayed on the scene to help those who had been shot, using items from their luggage to stop the bleeding from gunshot wounds.

Santiago is currently being questioned by the police to determine his motive. However, much information has surfaced regarding his mental state prior to the attack. According to media outlets, Santiago was being treated for mental health problems in Alaska, including hearing voices.

According to law enforcement officials, Santiago entered an FBI office in Anchorage, Alaska in November last year claiming that the CIA, in the form of voices in his head, was forcing him to join ISIS. Officials say local police were promptly called and he went voluntarily to a mental health facility for treatment.

In response to the shooting, Florida Governor Rick Scott told reporters: “The citizens of Florida will not tolerate senseless acts of evil. Whoever is responsible will be held accountable to the fullest extent of the law.”

Scott’s statement is a clear indication that the response of the ruling establishment to the shooting will be no different from the countless others that have

plagued American society. No political figure or media newscaster has broached the subject of the social roots of this “evil.”

While a certain level of personal responsibility for the senseless killing of the five individuals on Friday afternoon lies with Santiago, the more fundamental cause of this act of violence is found not in the personal failings of one deranged individual but in the type of society from which he emerged. One need not delve deep to see that this incident is one of many devastating effects of the United States’ quarter century of bloody imperialist wars abroad, coming home.

While it is not clear whether or not Santiago’s mental health issues were present before serving in the military, it is likely that his experience in training and in combat played a role in providing him with the technical know-how to carry out such an attack, and, more profoundly, inflicting the kind of psychological damage that would compel someone to murder innocent people.

Also significant is that fact that the suspect, who seems to be himself a victim of US imperialism, sought help from the same institution that placed him in the situation that likely caused his disorder, the US military establishment.

The dismal state of health care, particularly psychological care, available to the population at large, let alone veterans, appears to have been inadequate to assist Santiago.

The details of Santiago’s treatment and mental state are still being released and verified. However, if the current facts released are confirmed, it would appear that Santiago was a double victim of the capitalist system, both in suffering the effects of serving as a soldier in its imperialist wars abroad and suffering from the depleted state of social services at home.

As of this writing none of the victims has been identified, but as is the case with all such outbursts of violence, the devastation inflicted on the victims, their families and bystanders will be significant and irrevocable.

As more details emerge, the establishment’s response to this latest shooting will predictably seek to channel the public’s anxiety and anger toward support of a host of reactionary initiatives--intensification of the phony “war on terror,” the militarization of the police, the need to revive “traditional family values,” and more.



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