

Republicans exploit Old Dominion University shooting to intensify anti-Muslim campaign

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On Thursday, Mohamed Bailor Jalloh, 36, a former member of the Virginia National Guard, carried out an attack against members of the US military on the Old Dominion University campus in Norfolk, Virginia.

According to reports, Jalloh entered a Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) class, yelled “Allahu Akbar,” and began firing. Lt. Col. Brandon Shah, professor of military science and chair of the Army’s ROTC program at the university, was killed in the shooting, while two other student military officers were hospitalized with injuries. Jalloh was killed during the attack after ROTC cadets rushed him, with multiple outlets reporting that he was stabbed by a cadet as others tackled and subdued him.

Jalloh was attending online classes at the university. It remains unclear as of this writing whether he deliberately targeted Shah, who joined the Army in 2003 and deployed multiple times to Iraq and Afghanistan as part of the US invasions. Shah logged more than 1,200 flight hours, including over 600 combat hours in Iraq as a helicopter pilot.

The shooting prompted a massive police response. Classes for the university’s roughly 24,000 students, nearly 30 percent of whom are affiliated with the US military, were canceled for the remainder of Thursday and Friday.

Many questions remain following the shooting, including the role of the FBI in Jalloh’s earlier case. Prior to Thursday’s attack, Jalloh served time in federal prison after pleading guilty in October 2016 to attempting to provide material support to ISIS. The plea resulted from a roughly five-month FBI sting operation. According to court documents, Jalloh made contact with someone “connected” to ISIS in early 2016, who then introduced him to a person who turned out to be an FBI informant.

The informant later claimed that during discussions Jalloh spoke about purchasing a weapon that he said he would use in an attack similar to the 2009 Ford Hood shooting. The informant encouraged Jalloh to send \$500 to an FBI-linked account, which he did.

During the proceedings, Jalloh’s attorney, Joseph T. Flood, argued that his client was not “an initiator” and that it was the informant who repeatedly pressed him into actions he had declined. “There are points throughout this where [Jalloh] says no. He gets off the truck. I’m not going to do that,” Flood said. “CHS1 (Confidential Human Source 1) is pressing him to take part in an operation. He says no.”

After pleading guilty, Jalloh was sentenced in February 2017 to 11 years in federal prison. Despite the terrorism conviction, he was released in December 2024, more than two years early, after completing a drug-treatment program while incarcerated. Following his release, Jalloh was placed on supervised release requiring regular

reporting to a US probation officer, restrictions on travel, and a prohibition on possessing firearms.

Despite being under federal supervision, Jalloh was able to acquire the rifle used in Thursday’s attack. On Friday, the FBI, which has already opened a “terrorism” investigation into the shooting, announced charges against Kenya Chapman for dealing firearms without a license. Authorities allege that Chapman stole the rifle and later sold it to Jalloh.

Even as authorities have yet to explain how a man previously convicted in a terrorism case, released early from federal prison and placed under supervision, was able to obtain a firearm and carry out the attack, leading Republican officials have already seized upon the shooting to promote anti-Muslim agitation and advance legislation targeting Muslim organizations and broader democratic rights.

One of the more fascist statements came from Senator Tommy Tuberville, who wrote on social media:

I don’t give a rip about being politically correct. Innocent Americans are being gunned down in the streets almost daily by Radical Islamists whose “religion” teaches them it’s righteous to kill Christians. I won’t be silenced about this.

Prior to the shooting, Tuberville reposted an image from a far-right account juxtaposing photographs of the September 11 attacks with a Ramadan gathering hosted by New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, declaring that “the enemy is inside the gates.”

Republican Congressman Andy Ogles (Tennessee) issued a series of posts portraying Muslims as enemies of the United States. He followed that up with tweets declaring, “Islam is conquering America. They HATE our country and want to erase every trace of Christianity in it.”

In another post he declared: “Two Muslim terrorist attacks yesterday! Michigan and Virginia. Name? Mohammed. I TOLD YOU SO!!!”

Republican Florida Congressman Randy Fine, an ardent Zionist and supporter of the Gaza genocide, went further, posting: “We need more Islamophobia, not less. Fear of Islam is rational.”

Fine has a long record of fascist and genocidal statements, particularly targeting Palestinians. He has previously said there are “no innocent Palestinian civilians,” and last May he called for using atomic weapons in Gaza: “The Palestinian cause is an evil one... We nuked the Japanese twice in order to get unconditional surrender. That needs to be the same here.”

These overtly racist and genocidal comments have not drawn any rebuke from Republican leadership in Congress. When asked repeatedly by reporters whether he would denounce the remarks, House Majority Leader Tom Emmer declined to answer. Speaker Mike Johnson has likewise remained silent. *Politico* reported Friday that attempts to solicit comments from Senate Republican leadership on Tuberville's post, including Majority Leader John Thune, Majority Whip John Barrasso and Republican Conference Chair Tom Cotton, likewise went unanswered.

The Republican reaction to the Old Dominion shooting follows a series of similar episodes in recent weeks in which Republican officials and right-wing commentators have attempted to attribute acts of violence to "radical Islam" or foreign adversaries, without evidence. After a mass shooting in Austin, Texas on March 1 that killed several people, Republicans and conservative commentators immediately suggested the attack was linked to Islamic extremism or retaliation connected to the war with Iran. Similar claims were advanced following an attempted bombing case in New York City this past Saturday, which Representative Ogles used to post a series of statements declaring that "Muslims don't belong in America."

The anti-Muslim agitation is not limited to incendiary rhetoric on social media. Sections of the Republican Party are advancing concrete measures aimed at criminalizing Muslim organizations and restricting basic democratic rights.

In Texas, Governor Greg Abbott has moved to block public funding for Muslim schools while allowing other religious institutions to receive state-backed vouchers. Earlier this month Abbott declared on social media:

There's no school choice for schools with ties to organizations that have connections to terrorism. I designated the Muslim Brotherhood and CAIR as foreign terrorist organizations. Texas will not fund schools with ties to terrorism.

The policy has already been challenged in court. A Houston-area father, Mehdi Cherkaoui, filed what is believed to be the first lawsuit against the state's \$1 billion voucher program after the Houston Quran Academy Spring, where his children attend school, was excluded from the program. Reporting by Hearst Newspapers found that not a single Muslim school had been approved for the statewide voucher system, even as other religious schools were included.

According to the lawsuit, the exclusion was not based on any evidence of unlawful activity by specific institutions, but rather on "categorical presumptions that Islamic schools are suspect and potentially linked to terrorism by virtue of their religious identity and community associations."

Socialists oppose the diversion of public funds to private and religious schools through voucher programs, which undermine public education and funnel the wealth created by the working class to the elite and connected institutions.

That principled opposition, however, does not diminish the discriminatory character of Abbott's policy. The exclusion of Muslim schools while Christian and other religious institutions continue receiving state subsidies demonstrates that the program is being used to target a specific religious minority. Even within the framework of a voucher system, the selective treatment of Muslim institutions

represents a blatant attack on freedom of religion and the First Amendment.

Similar measures are being advanced in Florida. State lawmakers recently approved legislation granting Governor Ron DeSantis sweeping authority to designate organizations as "domestic terrorist groups."

Under the legislation, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement will be empowered to label groups as terrorist organizations without requiring criminal charges. The bill also targets college students who "promote" such groups, a category broadly defined to include statements or actions that "support, approve or encourage" an organization's activities.

Students accused of such conduct could be expelled from public universities and required to pay out-of-state tuition.

Civil liberties advocates have warned that the measure creates a mechanism for political repression and could be used against Muslim organizations, pro-Palestinian groups and political activists more broadly. A federal judge previously blocked an executive order by DeSantis attempting to designate the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) as a terrorist organization, ruling that the action likely violated constitutional protections of free speech.

The combination of inflammatory rhetoric and legislative initiatives reveals a coordinated effort within sections of the ruling class to revive forms of political repression that target religious minorities while establishing precedents that threaten the democratic rights of the entire working class.

The campaign to exploit the Old Dominion shooting to demonize Muslims and expand state repression is part of the ongoing effort of the Trump administration, backed by the financial oligarchy, to establish dictatorial forms of rule.

The politicians whipping up anti-Muslim hysteria domestically are the same forces backing genocidal wars that have devastated millions across the Middle East and threaten nuclear catastrophe. Both of the big business parties in the United States continue to support Israel's genocide in Gaza, ethnic cleansing in Lebanon, the war against Russia in Ukraine and the illegal war on Iran.

While some Democratic leaders have begun to issue occasional criticisms of the most openly racist statements, they continue to collaborate with Republicans in funding the military and intelligence apparatus and expanding the powers of the police state. The defense of democratic rights cannot be entrusted to either of the two parties of American capitalism. Both defend a system increasingly reliant on war abroad and repression at home.

The fight against religious persecution, censorship and state repression must be taken up independently by the working class. Workers of all backgrounds and beliefs have a common interest in defending democratic rights and opposing attempts by the ruling class to divide the population along religious and national lines.



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