

They Came for the Muslims, but I was Not a Muslim

By Nick Gier

First they came for the communists, and I did not speak out because I was not a communist; . . . Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew; then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak out for me.

—German Pastor Martin Niemoller

I pledge to you that if one day Muslim Americans are forced to register their identities that will be the day that his proud Jew registers as a Muslim.

—Johnathan Greenblatt, Anti-Defamation League

We can smell fascism when it's arising, and it's beginning to arise in the country, and it scares us."

—Rabbi Michael Lerner

In response to the attack on a Berlin Christmas market, in which a Tunisian terrorist killed 12 people with a stolen truck, Donald Trump said: "You know my plans"—presumably barring the entry of Muslims to the U. S. Initially, it was a total ban on all Muslims, but now it is only those coming from countries harboring terrorists.

Are There Plans for a Muslim Registry?

On November 20, 2015, Trump also said that he would "absolutely" support setting up a registry of all resident Muslims. He said that this violation of basic human rights "would just be good management."

Recently Trump adviser Kris Kobach said that the transition team was drawing up plans for a Muslim registry, and in a November 16 interview on Fox News, Trump spokesman Carl Higbie claimed that the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II was a legal precedent.

When Kobach was in George W.'s Justice Department, he helped set up the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System. This policy required non-citizen males over the age of 16 from 22 Muslim countries to register and have their fingerprints taken.

Over 177,000 men dutifully came forward and, many young innocent lives—some hard-working graduate students—were disrupted. Abdulameer Yousef Habeeb, a young Iraqi who had been tortured by Saddam Hussein's thugs and not required to register, was at least given an apology and compensation: "The United States of America acknowledges that, by not registering you did nothing wrong [and] regrets the mistake."

James Ziglar, former immigration service commissioner, admitted that “not one actual terrorist was identified. But what we did get was a lot of bad publicity, litigation and disruption in our relationships with immigrant communities and countries that we needed help from in the war on terror.” It was also costing taxpayers \$10 million per year.

The ACLU charged that this was ethnic discrimination comparable to the shameful Japanese internment, and Homeland Security was forced to suspend the program in 2011. On December 22, 2016, President Obama shut it down completely, but Trump could start it up again with a stroke of a pen. It is reassuring to learn that major tech companies have declared that they will not participate in any digital tracking of Muslim identities.

Trump Cabinet Nominees Equivocate on Muslim Registry

Senator Jeff Sessions, Trump’s attorney general nominee, testified that he would not support a Muslim registry, but he did say that one’s religion could be a factor for entry into the country. Trump’s Chief of Staff Reince Priebus refused to rule out a registry, but John Kelly, Trump’s nominee for Homeland Security, said that it was never “appropriate to focus on something like religion as the only factor” for immigration.

Rex Tillerson, Trump’s nominee for Secretary of State, frequently said that he would have to have “more information” before he could answer questions about a Muslim registry or any nation’s human rights abuses. One would think that respecting basic human rights requires immediate affirmation, and the facts are in about Russian and Saudi violations of their citizens’ rights.

New York City Forced to Shut Down Muslim Surveillance

Early last year New York City settled two lawsuits concerning its illegal surveillance of Muslims and their mosques. Undercover agent Shamiur Rahman said that he was instructed to “create and capture”: “I was to pretend to be a devout Muslim and start an inflammatory conversation about jihad. . . . I never saw anyone I spied on do anything illegal, not even littering.”

Attacks on Muslims and their Mosques in Europe

On the same day as the Berlin attack, a gunman opened fire at a Swiss mosque, injuring three, two seriously. The press has given little attention to anti-Muslim incidents in America and Europe, where Islamophobia fueled by right-wing parties has increased.

In the Netherlands alone there have been 142 cases of verbal and physical assaults in 2016, and 19 Dutch mosques have been attacked, some repeatedly. Last year an additional 147 mosques in Germany, France, Sweden, and Switzerland were vandalized.

Trump Supporters: Cleanse Them like Hitler Did the Jews

Last November three California mosques received a handwritten letter addressed to “The Children of Satan” from “Americans for a Better Way.” The authors warned that there was a new sheriff in town, and that Donald Trump would “cleanse” the country of Muslims the same way “Hitler did to the Jews.” There were 55 attacks on mosques in the first nine months of 2016.

In 2001 the FBI reported 481 hate crimes against American Muslims, and that number, after diminishing over the years, had risen to 257 in 2015, a dramatic increase over the 154 reported in 2014. Overall hate crimes were up 6 percent, but attacks against Muslims rose 89 percent.

The most obvious cause of this dramatic increase is Trump’s anti-Muslim rhetoric. James Nolan, a former FBI crime analyst, argues that “a real spike” in hate crimes against American Muslims was caused in part by candidates’ “raising the specter that radical Islam is at our doorstep.”

More recent data, from March 2015 to March 2016, come from Georgetown University, where researchers report “approximately 180 incidents of anti-Muslim violence, including: 12 murders; 34 physical assaults; 49 verbal assaults or threats against persons and institutions; 56 acts of vandalisms or destruction of property; 9 arsons; and 8 shootings or bombings.”

Here are some of the individual incidents over the past two years:

- Just a week ago, an arsonist set fire to a mosque in Bellevue, Washington. The man had been previously arrested for malicious harassment at the site. The mosque in nearby Redmond has been vandalized several times.
- On December 18, 2016, General Electric employee Glendon Crawford was sentenced to 30 years in prison for threatening to use a “death ray” to kill Muslims and President Obama.
- On December 14, 2016, Bernard Laufer was convicted of first-degree attempted assault, second-degree assault, and criminal possession of a weapon for an attack on Muslims. Prior to the incident, Laufer wrote on his Facebook page that Muslims should be killed in the same way that Hitler killed the Jews.
- On Oct 25, 2016, Mark Feigin was arrested for making threats against the Islamic Center of Southern California and declaring that he would “kill Muslims.”
- On October 14, 2016, the FBI arrested three men, who were members of the militia group called the Crusaders. They were charged with conspiring to bomb a mosque in Garden, City, Kansas.
- On September 10, 2016, the Islamic Center of Fort Pierce, Florida was fire bombed by a man on a motorcycle. This mosque has been particularly proactive in making sure that their youth are not radicalized.

- On August 14, 2016, two Muslims, an imam and his assistant, were shot and killed on a Queens, New York sidewalk.
- On June 29, 2016, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, a man, after making “disparaging remarks” about Islam, shot two Muslims in the legs.
- On April 21, 2016, at a Washington, D. C. Starbucks, a woman called a Muslim woman “a worthless piece of trash” and then poured an unidentified liquid over her head. The attacker yelled that she was a Trump supporter that that Trump would “send you all back where you came from.”
- On February 21, 2016, a St. Louis man, declaring that “you should all die,” threatened a Muslim family house hunting in his neighborhood.
- In November of 2015, after writing “I hate Islam” on his Facebook page, former Marine Ted Kakey, Jr. fired four rounds from his high-powered rifle into a Connecticut mosque. Even though the mosque’s imam pleaded for leniency, a judge sentenced him to six months in federal prison.
- On February 15, 2015, three Muslim university students were murdered by neighbor who was known for his anti-religion sentiments.

More American Muslims Reject Violence than Christians Do

In 2011 a Gallup poll showed that 89 percent of Muslim Americans said that “the targeting and killing of civilians by individuals or small groups” is never justified. (Mormons, the non-religious, Jews, Catholics, and Protestants were at 79, 76, 75, 71, 71 percent respectively.) A full 92 percent of Muslim Americans rejected the actions of Islamic militants.

A 2007 Pew Research survey showed that, compared to European countries, 53 percent of American Muslims (as opposed to 19 percent of British Muslims) see themselves as Americans first and Muslims second. By a margin of 36 percent over Muslims in Britain, Germany, Spain, and France, American Muslim are “very concerned” about Islamic extremism. American Muslims also have higher incomes and more education than their European counterparts.

American Jews and Muslims Join Forces

In the international news one reads about anti-Semitic statements in many Muslim school books and the general population, and also equally strong anti-Muslim sentiments among many Israelis. American Muslim and Jewish leaders, however, have joined forces as the Trump revolution has re-kindled anti-Semitic attacks, 664 hate crimes in 2015 alone.

Steve Bannon, founder of the far-right Breitbart News and now Trump’s chief adviser, is a known anti-Semite. He once called Bill Kristol, a conservative who campaigned against Trump, a “Republican spoiler and a renegade Jew.” In divorce proceedings Bannon’s ex-wife testified that he “did not like Jews” and he objected to his children going to a school where many Jews attended.

This month there were dozens of bomb threats made against Jewish centers in the Eastern U. S.—20 on this past Wednesday alone. A Jewish spokesman said: “We are concerned about the anti-Semitism behind these threats. While the bombs in question are hoaxes, the calls are not.”

American Muslim and Jewish leaders have come together to protest threats to their communities. On February 28, 2016, 250 people gathered at the mosque in Fremont, California, and Rabbi Michael Lerner warned: “We can smell fascism when it’s arising, and it’s beginning to arise in the country, and it scares us.”

Many Christian Germans sewed on the Star of David that the Nazis required Jews to wear, so we can we can put on the Crescent Moon and Star in solidarity with our Muslim brothers and sisters.

MLK: “Injustice Anywhere is a Threat to Justice Everywhere”

As we finish celebrating Martin Luther King this past week, let us remember that the Declaration of Independence promised an “unalienable right” to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” This is a universal human right regardless of citizenship, race, or religion. This applies to those who live here as well as those just coming to our shores. As King once said: “We may have all come on different ships, but we’re in the same boat now.”

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