

U.S. Attorney's Report to the District

Responding to the Threat of Terrorism

The massacre at the Inland Regional Center in San Bernardino was a tragic reminder that the danger posed by foreign terrorist organizations which seek to radicalize Americans and inspire them to violent acts is real. ISIL is no longer just recruiting people to come to the Middle East; it is encouraging its sympathizers to commit violent acts in their own countries.

The Eastern District of California is not immune to these global influences. Last month, Nicholas Teausant, a young man from San Joaquin County, pleaded guilty to attempting to travel overseas to join ISIL. This month, my office brought charges against a young man who resided in Sacramento, alleging that he lied to immigration officials about his travel to Syria to fight with another terrorist organization. Although neither defendant was charged with planning violent acts within the United States, both cases illustrate the global reach of terrorists into our communities.

No one in this region is more committed to national security than I am. As the U.S. Attorney, protecting the public is my mission, and preventing acts of terrorism is my top priority. The National Security Unit in my office works closely every day with the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force to keep this community safe. But the threat from overseas terrorist organizations is not my only concern. If fear and misunderstanding leads to hostility and violence against our own Muslim American neighbors – or those perceived to be Muslim -- the self-inflicted wounds will result in lasting damage to our community. Such damage will help ISIL accomplish its goals, and it will change who we are as a people.

Foreign terrorist organizations like ISIL thrive on hatred and division. They seek to cleave Muslim Americans from their country by convincing them that America is at war with Islam. This narrative is false, but recent anti-Muslim rhetoric on the campaign trail and in traditional and social media is fraying the sense of security that Muslim Americans have in this country.

During my six years as U.S. Attorney in this region, I have spent a lot of time with members of the Muslim community. They tell me constantly how horrified and repelled they are by terrorists who commit barbaric acts while claiming the mantle of Islam. They reject that distortion of their religion, and are pained by the notion that for too many Americans, their primary exposure to Islam is through media portrayals of foreign purveyors of violence and hatred.

Many Americans continue to harbor prejudices against Muslim Americans, and in the wake of terrorist attacks, ignorance and prejudice can manifest itself in overt hostility. Earlier this month in Tracy, a Molotov cocktail was thrown at a mosque. In other parts of the country there have been instances of vandalism, death threats, and arson. In speaking with Muslim men and women in this area in the last few weeks, they shared stories of being insulted and taunted,

or greeted with cold glares as they go about their daily activities. Muslim children are frequently targets for bullying in school. Women wearing hijab – the Muslim head scarf -- are particular targets, and some are reluctant to venture out in public. Sikhs, often mistaken for Muslims, are also regularly the subjects of harassment.

In many cases, this conduct may be illegal. Numerous federal and state laws protect members of religious minorities in the free exercise of their rights as Americans. Vindictive conduct directed against Muslim Americans also undermines national security. The Muslim community is a critical partner in combatting extremism and radicalization to violence. Harassment and hostility that alienates Muslims not only feeds the ISIL false narrative of division and oppression, it is likely to weaken the bond between Muslim Americans and their partners in law enforcement. Finally, anti-Muslim harassment is un-American. If there is one value which uniquely defines us as a country, it is our commitment to equality and religious liberty.

In these anxious times, in which the threat of terrorism is all too real, we must unite as Americans and resist the forces that seek to divide us. If we allow fear and ignorance to turn neighbor against neighbor, we will lose the struggle against terrorism, and will lose sight of those values that define us as Americans.

If you would like to communicate with our office, contact the main number in Sacramento, or submit a suggestion by clicking on the button below. Thank you.

United States Attorney

Benjamin B. Wagner