

A Plot to Level a Village Is Neither Terrorism Nor News-When Targets Are Muslim and Plotter Is Christian

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Robert Doggart in a photo from his congressional campaign website.

No crime fascinates US media like terrorism—provided it’s the right sort of terrorism, that is.

The media-approved sort of terrorist is motivated by some fanatic strain of Islam. Terrorists motivated by other ideologies are often forgotten by corporate media (Extra!, [6/13](#))—sometimes to the point where pundits deny that non-Muslim terrorists exist (FAIR Blog, [12/16/14](#))—even though the vast majority of terrorist attacks in the United States are carried out by people with agendas unrelated to Islam (Extra!, [8/13](#))

Sensational acts of or schemes for political violence are ignored because they don’t fit Islamophobic stereotypes (FAIR Blog, [1/11/13](#), [1/25/14](#))—or, if the violence is too dramatic to overlook, journalists decline to affix the “terrorism” label to it (FAIR Media Advisory, [4/15/14](#); FAIR Blog, [6/13/14](#)).

The latest example of the sort of crime story that would be huge news if the perpetrator were Muslim—rather than, in this instance, someone who hates Muslims—is the case of Robert Rankin Doggart, a former [congressional candidate](#) from Signal Mountain, Tennessee, who was caught on tape and on social media talking about wiping out a Muslim community in upstate New York.



Fox’s O’Reilly Factor (1/14/15) counted Hancock, N.Y., among “cities with radical Muslim organizations.”

According to a [plea agreement](#) reached in US District Court in the Eastern District of Tennessee, Doggart told an FBI informant that he was planning to attack the residents of a

Muslim community known as Islamberg near Hancock, New York. (Doggart, an ordained Christian minister, apparently became fixated on the hamlet as a result of [alarmist reporting](#) on right-wing media.) In a call recorded by the informant, Doggart said:

Those guys [have] to be killed. Their buildings need to be burnt down. If we can get in there and do that not losing a man, even the better.

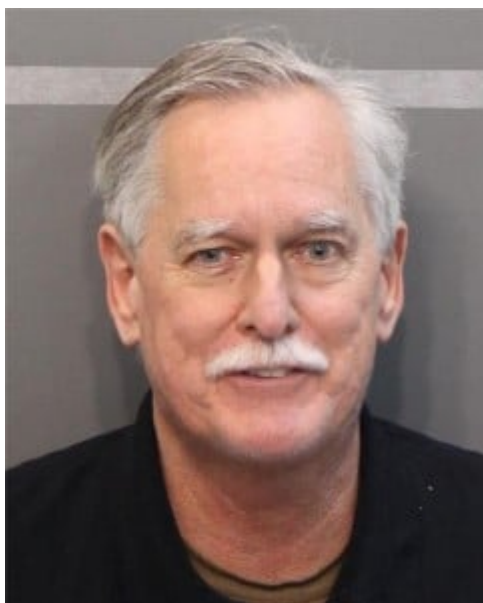
The buildings Doggart planned to destroy included a mosque, a school and a cafeteria.

In another conversation, Doggart elaborated:

When we meet in this state, the people we seek will know who we are. We will be cruel to them. And we will burn down their buildings [and] if anyone attempts to, uh, harm us in any way, our standoff gunner will take them down from 350 yards away.

“The standoff gunner would be me,” he added.

On Facebook, Doggart declared that “Target 3 [Islamberg] is vulnerable from many approaches and must be utterly destroyed.”



Mugshot for Robert Doggart after his arrest for threatening to destroy a Muslim community.

The plea agreement, filed April 29, notes that Doggart took substantive steps to carry out his plan, including traveling to recruit gunners and “battle test[ing]” his M4 rifle. Despite this, Doggart was allowed to plead guilty only to interstate communication of threats and faces a maximum of five years in jail.

There has been little coverage of Doggart’s case in national media, as a broad Nexis search reveals. One of the first reports was in the Chattanooga ([5/16/15](#)), a local online news outlet. The article reports that Doggart

is on federal bond awaiting sentencing in the case.... Doggart was first ordered detained; however, Federal Magistrate Susan Lee later allowed his release on certain conditions after attorneys said he had weaned himself from pain medication and had stopped abusing alcohol. The government opposed his release, saying he remains a danger.

Later other local outlets picked up on the story, with a modest article appearing in the Chattanooga Times Free Press ([5/18/15](#)) that quoted Doggart's Facebook boast: "We shall be Warriors who will inflict horrible numbers of casualties upon the enemies of our Nation and World Peace." Stories appeared a couple of days earlier in the Arizona Republic ([5/16/15](#)), as well as the Rock Hill, S.C., Herald ([5/16/15](#)), which ran an article focusing on the reaction of a similar Muslim community in northern South Carolina.

Nexis also turns up brief reports in the London Independent ([5/18/15](#)) and Sky News ([5/18/95](#)), as well as a handful of Pakistani papers. But nothing in major US papers like the New York Times, Washington Post, USA Today or LA Times. While Nexis' broadcast transcripts are not exhaustive, there was no indication that the story had been picked up by any US TV outlet, or by National Public Radio.

There were a handful of online news outlets that carried the story, often making reference to the lack of coverage in other media ("Guess Why This Christian Terrorist Plot Against Muslims Isn't Getting Any Press," Daily Beast, [5/18/15](#)) or the evident double standard in the criminal justice system ("Would This Man Be Charged With Terrorism if He Were Muslim?," Think Progress, [5/18/15](#)). Wonkette ([5/18/15](#)) highlighted the sensationalized Fox News [coverage](#) that may have motivated Doggart's terror scheme. One of the most substantive articles appeared on the web publication Heavy ([5/18/15](#)), with a report that cited Muslim reactions to the plot and examined Doggart's 2014 independent congressional bid, which garnered 6 percent of Tennessee's 4th District vote.

The Daily Beast report, noting that "it goes without saying that if Doggart had been Muslim and had planned to kill Christians in America, we would have seen wall-to-wall media coverage," pointed to a major reason that the case has not gotten more attention: the tendency for journalists to rely on official sources to tell them what stories are important. Beast contributor Dean Obeidallah wrote:

One big reason for the lack of media coverage was that neither the FBI nor the US Attorney's office put out a press release about Doggart's arrest. In contrast, the FBI office in Knoxville, the one that handled this investigation, has posted press releases for numerous [other recent arrests](#), such as for drug crimes and robbery charges. (My calls to the FBI about this issue have not been returned.)

However, when a Muslim is arrested in a sting-type operation, as we saw recently in Brooklyn, the FBI touts that arrest to the media [with a detailed press release](#). We have also seen US attorneys hold press conferences to announce the arrest of Muslims, as we witnessed recently with the six Minnesota men charged with [planning to join ISIS](#). But not here.

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