

“The Capital of American Jihad”: Fearmongering and Islamophobic Pseudo-journalism in America

Politico Finds ‘Capital of American Jihad’—Based on 2 Cases, 6 Years and 268 Miles Apart

By [Adam Johnson](#)

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Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

Politico ([7/23/15](#)) finds the “capital of American jihad” based on two examples—or maybe one.

Roughly 10 hours after another white, [apparently racist](#) Christian senselessly opened fire in a public place in the American South, Politico ([7/23/15](#)) published what has to be one of the worst pieces of Islamophobic pseudo-journalism this side of [Pam Geller](#).

In his piece “Tennessee Is the Capital of American Jihad,” author and “War on Terror” think-tanker James Kitfield sets out to draw a connection between the the recent Chattanooga shooter Mohammad Youssef Abdulazez and the case of Carlos Bledsoe, who shot up a recruiting station in Arkansas in 2009. The fact that both attacked recruiting stations, both lived in Tennessee and both were Muslim is apparently enough to make Tennessee the “Capital of American Jihad.”

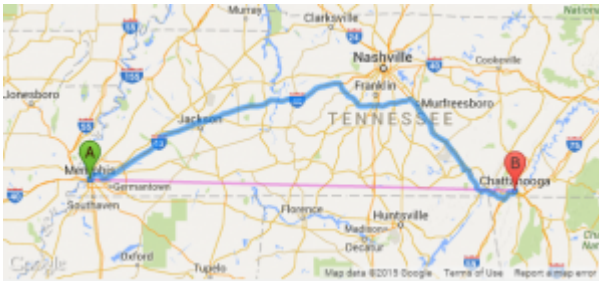
Yes. There is no other evidence provided. That is all.

Three of the worst things in modern journalism—the [bogus trend piece](#), pointlessly sprawling “[writerly](#)” [#longread pretense](#) and anti-Islamic fear-mongering—have combined forces to create an absurd, albeit literate, piece of War on Terror propaganda.

First problem is the rather glaring fact that the FBI [still doesn’t know](#) the Chattanooga’s shooter’s motive. The latest word from the FBI, despite [anonymous leaks](#) suggesting an ideological bent, is that the motives of the shooter are unknown. This isn’t to say it couldn’t be “jihad,” but as of now the author is making an assumption that’s at odds with the official government position. If Kitfield has access to some privileged information about Abdulazez’s motive, by all means he should let us, and presumably the FBI, know.

Alas, the only evidence he can produce to this effect is recent anonymous claims Abdulazez “followed” Anwar al-Awlaki. in 2013. But as it stands now, Kitfield has the dubious honor of being the only journalist to write a trend piece based on *one* example. And it’s one from six years ago.

The actual piece is heavy on substance; the problem is that none of the substance supports its thesis. It’s a fairly involved recapping of Bledsoe’s 2000s journey into jihad, but its tenuous contemporary hook of the recent Chattanooga shootings gives the distinct impression the author dusted off a previously written long-form piece on the radicalization of someone from 2009 and jammed it into a newsy context.



via distance-cities.com

Indeed, in an effort to shoehorn in the Chattanooga shooting, the author gets a fairly material fact wrong right out of the gate by saying the Chattanooga shooter, Abdulazeez, is “another America-born-and-raised young man.” There’s only one problem: Abdulazeez [was born in Kuwait](#) to Jordanian citizenship, and came to the US when he was five or six.

And note that while Chattanooga and Memphis, where Bledsoe was from, are in the same state, they’re not at all close to each other: They’re [268 miles apart](#), about the same distance as [between](#) Boston and Philadelphia.

But never mind: The Politico piece has an ideologically convenient “trend” to sell and fears to stoke. It’s filled with pro-surveillance propaganda and Cheneyesque pre-crime logic. After lamenting that Bledsoe couldn’t be stopped before he attacked the recruiting center in Little Rock, Kitfield writes, “Again the FBI had a problem: It couldn’t arrest anyone before an actual plot was detected.” Yes, the FBI’s “problem,” from Kitfield’s perspective, is that it can’t arrest people who aren’t committing crimes.



Can you imagine Politico running a headline like this one?

The fear-mongering graphic accompanying the piece is really the low point, however. As we’ve [previously reported](#) at FAIR, [60 percent of Americans](#) don’t read past the headline. As such, sensationalistic, bigoted headlines like this actually matter a great deal. Roughly 60 percent of the people who pass by this article are going to come away thinking there’s an

orgy of Islamic extremists lurking in the shadows of Tennessee waiting to strike.

And considering just two weeks ago-three days before the Chattanooga shooting-a Chattanooga man plead guilty to [plotting to kill Muslims](#), this type of paranoia does play into dangerous Islamophobic fears. Fears, it turns out, that are so wildly disproportionate to the actual threat that Kitfield has to assume motives for the most recent attack and reach back to the first year of the Obama administration to populate his "terror capital" of two.

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