

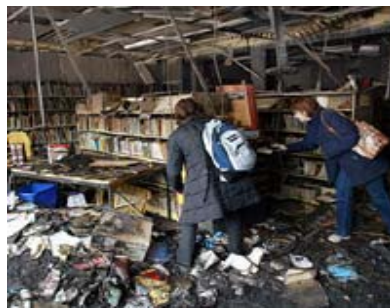
Analysis: Firebombing of Jewish Elementary School in Montreal in 2004
Firebombing of Jewish school in Canada following Israel's assassination of a Hamas leader

Summary

- Library of United Talmud Torah, a Jewish elementary school in Montreal, firebombed April 5, 2004
- Note at the scene called the attack a warning to Jews in response to Israel's targeted assassination of Hamas leader, Sheik Ahmed Yassin, a few weeks earlier
- No one was injured in the nighttime attack; it caused \$500,000 in damage and destroyed 10,000 books
- Police initially detained five suspects
- Sleiman Elmerhebi was the only suspect convicted of participating in the attack
- Elmerhebi's mother, Rouba Elmerhebi Fahd, 36, was charged with being an accessory after the fact
- Prosecutors eventually dropped charges against another man, Simon Zogheib



United Talmud Torah



Library after attack



Law enforcement agents at scene

Suspects

- Elmerhebi and Zogheib, both 18 at the time of the crime, were born in Lebanon. They were described as friends
- Elmerhebi is a Muslim. Zogheib is Christian
- Elmerhebi moved to Canada at age 7 with his family
- After his arrest, Elmerhebi described himself as neither political nor religious. He said he did not closely follow world news; he was often involved in fights at school
- Two other 18 year olds were questioned about the attack and released without charges
- There is no evidence connecting any of the suspects to a terrorist organization



Sleiman Elmerhebi



Rouba Elmerhebi Fahd



Simon Zogheib

Law Enforcement Response

- Police determined that the brand of kerosene used in the attack was only sold at certain stores in Montreal. They then searched store records for suspicious purchases
- Through store surveillance cameras and receipts, police determined that Elmerhebi purchased six tanks of kerosene two days before the incident
- Police put Elmerhebi under surveillance and bugged his phones
- After two weeks, they confronted him. In subsequent phone calls with an acquaintance, Elmerhebi admitted to the crime
- Elmerhebi pled guilty to arson and was sentenced to 40 months in prison in exchange for prosecutors dropping a conspiracy charge
- Police charged Fahd, 36, Elmerhebi's mother, for acting as an accessory after the fact because she contacted a travel agent about tickets to South America for her son
- Fahd pled not guilty on April 5, 2005
- Charges against Zogheib were dropped due to insufficient evidence. A court-ordered reporting ban limits available information on the case against Zogheib

Tactics

- Elmerhebi and another individual purchased kerosene canisters two days prior to the attack, indicating premeditation
- The attack in the school came in the early morning, after Elmerhebi left a party
- A hammer was used to break school windows. Six canisters of kerosene were then thrown inside
- Prosecutors said Elmerhebi probably had accomplices, but did not link him to any terrorist groups



Sheikh Ahmed Yassin



March 22, 2004, scene of assassination



Palestinians react

Ideological and Political Motivation

- A note left at the scene described the attack as retaliation for Israel's assassination of Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin
- The note, signed "Sheik Ahmed Yassin Brigades," said that Jews should be punished for Israeli actions. "Here is the consequence of your crimes and your occupation. Here is the riposte of your assassinations. Here is where terrorist Ariel Sharon has led you."
- The note promised to strike again if Israeli policy did not change
- In a conversation with an acquaintance intercepted by police, Elmerhebi said that his act was not vandalism but terrorism.
- At his trial, Elmerhebi did not clearly explain why he acted

Implications for Law Enforcement

- Attack carried out in North American city, against soft target, by lone wolves inspired by a mixture of radical ideology and world events
- Suspects not connected to terrorist groups, but acted independently out of antagonism toward Israel and the Jews
- Attack took place following a widely reported political event in the Middle East; police should anticipate such “reprisals” against Jewish targets following flare ups in that region of the world
- Points again to need for police to establish/tap into intelligence network that monitors and analyzes national and international events, helping to anticipate problems in local communities
- Montreal has seen a marked increase in radicalizing rhetoric and activities; Millennium Plot was fostered there; fundamentalism in Canada poses unique danger to the U.S. Homeland
- School was a particularly vulnerable target, especially at night; psychological impact of a school attack, as in Beslan, can be severe

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