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Feds charge Texan with bomb threat to Tenn. mosque

By ERIK SCHELZIG, Associated Press

Published June 22nd, 2012 3:37 am

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MURFREESBORO, Tenn. (AP) — Federal prosecutors filed charges Thursday accusing a Texas man of making a bomb threat timed to the 10th anniversary of 9/11 against a mosque being built in Tennessee.

Javier Alan Correa, 24, of Corpus Christi was indicted by a grand jury in Nashville over a call made Sept. 5 to the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro. Officials said that Correa isn't yet in custody but that they have been in contact with his attorney. Efforts to locate him for comment were unsuccessful.

Authorities said in a release that Correa is charged with leaving an expletive-riddled message that said there would be a bomb in the building on Sept. 11. U.S. Attorney Jerry Martin described the recording as "classic hate speech."

Correa also is charged with violating the civil rights of the members of the mosque by using a threat of force to interfere with the free exercise of religious belief.

Construction of the Islamic Center has stirred heated debate since it was approved in 2010.



U.S. Attorney Jerry Martin holds a press conference on Thursday, June 21, 2012, to announce a federal indictment of Javier Alan Correa, 24, of Corpus Christi, Texas on charges of making a bomb threat timed to the 10th anniversary of 9/11 against a mosque being built in Murfreesboro, Tenn. Correa also is charged with violating the civil rights of the members of the mosque by using a threat of force to interfere with the free exercise of religious belief. The mosque has been at the center of a fierce debate since 2010. (AP Photo/Erik Schelzig)

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Authorities have previously investigated an arson that destroyed some construction equipment and vandalism to a sign at the building site about 30 miles southeast of Nashville.

Martin said federal agencies are committed to protecting the rights of members of the center to practice their faith.

"The Department of Justice will not tolerate violence — or the threat of violence — against the Muslim community here in Murfreesboro," he said. "If you engage in this type of illegal conduct, we will come after you."

A local judge recently voided Rutherford County's approval for construction, ruling there wasn't sufficient public notice of the meeting that took up an issue of "significant public interest."

The ruling came after mosque opponents claimed in court that Islam isn't a recognized religion deserving First Amendment protection and that the center was part of a wider plot to supplant U.S. law with the Islamic code called Shariah. The judge dismissed those claims as irrelevant.

County officials are appealing the decision, but in the meantime the court has prohibited them from issuing the occupancy permit that would allow the center to be used. After 1 1/2 years of construction, mosque leaders had hoped to move into the 12,000-square foot multipurpose building before the Muslim holy month of Ramadan begins at the end of July.

The religious liberty charge carries a maximum sentence of 20 years and the threat charge maximum sentence is 10 years.

Supporters and opponents of the mosque attended Thursday's press conference.

"I don't like hearing that there are threats going on, but I'm very proud to see the Department of Justice backing the Muslims in Middle Tennessee and backing civil rights for everyone," said Drost Kokoye, a student at nearby Middle Tennessee State University and an organizer with the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition.

Mosque opponent Elizabeth Coker questioned why federal authorities haven't done more to investigate allegations of radical activities by members of the mosque. She also raised questions about the acts of vandalism at the construction site.

"This is a very peaceful community. This is not a community known for hate speech or anything like that," she said. "The people who oppose the mosque have done so through a legal process, through the courts.

"And that's what we will continue to do," she said.

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