

Boston mosque says bombing suspect had outbursts but wasn't violent

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CAMBRIDGE, Mass. (RNS) After two troubling outbursts at a local mosque, leaders there told Boston Marathon bombing suspect Tamerlan Tsarnaev he would no longer be welcome if he continued disrupting services.

Leaders at the Islamic Society of Boston's mosque in Cambridge say Tsarnaev, 26, who died early Friday (April 19) after a shootout with police, "disagreed with the moderate American-Islamic theology" of the mosque, but they never had "any hint" the brothers might be violent.

On one occasion in November at weekly prayer, Tsarnaev challenged an imam who said in his sermon that it was appropriate to celebrate U.S. national holidays, such as July 4th and Thanksgiving, the statement said.

Tsarnaev argued that such celebrations are "not allowed in the faith." When the preacher met with Tsarnaev after the prayer, Tsarnaev "repeatedly argued his viewpoint, and then left," the statement said.

On Jan. 18, another preacher called the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., a great person. Tsarnaev "stood up, shouted and called him a 'non-believer' and a hypocrite who was "contaminating" people's minds, the statement said. Several people in the congregation shouted back at him and asked him to leave, the statement said.

Members of the congregation later told him that if he did not stop interrupting the prayer and sermons, he would no longer be welcome, the statement said. Tsarnaev

continued to visit the mosque, but did not cause any other problems, the statement said.

Mosque leaders should have notified authorities when Tsarnaev expressed such radical views so disruptively, said Evan Kohlmann, a terrorism analyst who has served as an expert witness in terrorism trials.

Counter-terrorism experts have noted that pattern of behavior among other terrorists, including al-Qaida spokesman Adam Gadahn, a California-born Muslim convert, who once got in a fistfight with an Orange County, Calif., cleric over religious differences, Kohlmann said.

"The U.S. government has asked clerics to make them aware of people with extremely unorthodox views and expressing violent or extreme beliefs," Kohlmann said. "We've been hoping that in the Muslim community people report to police when they see someone in their community engaging in anti-social conduct and following a violent or extreme religion."

Mosque leaders said they would have called the FBI if they had seen an inclination toward violence.

"The suspects were neither members nor regular attendees of our Cambridge mosque," the statement said. "The older suspect began coming intermittently to our congregational prayers on Friday over a year ago and occasionally to our daily prayers. The younger suspect was rarely seen at the center, coming only occasionally for prayer."

(Oren Dorrell and Donna Leinwand write for USA Today.)