German Court Calls Synagogue Torching an Act to 'Criticize Israel'

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A German regional court in the city of Wuppertal affirmed a lower court decision last Friday stating that a violent attempt to burn the city's synagogue by three men in 2014 was a justified expression of criticism of Israel’s policies.

Johannes Pinnel, a spokesman for the regional court in Wuppertal, outlined the court’s decision in a statement.

Three German Palestinians sought to torch the Wuppertal synagogue with Molotov cocktails in July, 2014.  The local Wuppertal court panel said in its 2015 decision that the three men wanted to draw “attention to the Gaza conflict” with Israel. The court deemed the attack not to be motivated by antisemitism.

Israel launched Operation Protective Edge in the summer of 2014 to stop Hamas rocket attacks into Israeli territory.

The court sentenced the three men – the 31-year-old Mohamad E., the 26 year-old Ismail A. and the 20-year-old Mohammad A.—to suspended sentences. The men tossed self-made Molotov cocktails at the synagogue.  German courts frequently decline to release the last names of criminals to protect privacy.

The attack caused €800 damage to the synagogue. The original synagogue in Wuppertal was burned by Germans during the Kristallnacht pogroms in 1938. Wuppertal has a population of nearly 344,000 and is located in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia.

The court said the men had consumed alcohol and there were no injuries to members of the synagogue.

A 13-year-old who lived near the synagogue and noticed the flames informed the police. Several days before the fire, a person sprayed “Free Palestine” on a wall of the synagogue.

After the local Wuppertal court decision in 2015, Volker Beck, a leading Green Party MP,  said the “attack on the synagogue was motivated by antisemitism” and blasted the court for issuing a decision stating that the goal of the attack was to highlight the war in Gaza.

“This is a mistaken decision as far as the motives of the perpetrators are concerned,” he said, adding that the burning of a synagogue in Germany because of the Middle East conflict can be attributed only to antisemitism.

“What do Jews in Germany have to do with the Middle East conflict? Every bit as much as Christians, non-religious people or Muslims in Germany, namely, absolutely nothing. The ignorance of the judiciary toward anti-Semitism is for many Jews in Germany especially alarming, ” said Beck.