

Biographies of assailants undermine claim that Canada is under attack

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27 October 2014

Since a Canadian Armed Forces warrant officer was deliberately run over October 20 in St. Jean-sur-Richelieu, Quebec, Canada's Conservative government has been portraying the country as under assault from organized terrorism.

This campaign was dramatically intensified following the fatal shooting Wednesday of Corporal Nathan Cirillo at the National War Memorial in downtown Ottawa by gunman Michael Zehaf-Bibeau and the subsequent shootout in the main block of Canada's parliament building.

In a nationally televised address Wednesday evening, Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper repeatedly referred to "terrorism" and "terrorist attacks," arguing that Canada and Canadian democracy were under attack. Having presented the country as under siege, he vowed, "We will not be intimidated. Canada will never be intimidated."

Speaking in parliament the next morning, Harper promised to greatly strengthen Canada's draconian anti-terrorism laws. The government has already announced Canada's security agencies will be authorized to work more closely with foreign intelligence agencies in spying on Canadian "terrorist suspects" who travel abroad. It has also said that henceforth those who provide information to the country's premier domestic intelligence agency, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), will have "class privilege" immunity. This means not only that the identities of CSIS informants will have to be kept secret in legal proceedings, but also defence counsel and even judges will be prohibited from examining them.

According to news reports, the government is also preparing to increase the state's power to take people into preventive detention, i.e., to hold them without charge based on mere suspicion, and for periods much longer than the traditional 24 hours. The government is also said to be considering introducing British-style legislation

making it illegal to "praise" an act of terrorism or to "incite" people to terrorism.

The opposition parties have lent credence to the government's attempt to present Canada as under attack. Speaking Wednesday evening after Harper's speech, Thomas Mulcair, the head of the trade union-supported New Democratic Party (NDP), similarly described the shooting at parliament as an attack on "our nation and our values."

The next morning, NDP and Liberal MPs gathered alongside Conservative parliamentarians at the War Memorial in downtown Ottawa in a show of national unity and then marched, with Harper in the lead, the short distance to parliament and into the House of Commons.

After Harper gave a reactionary speech in line with his previous night's attempt to present Canada as under "terrorist attack," Mulcair and Liberal leader Justin Trudeau hugged the prime minister.

Last week's attacks were reactionary acts of violence perpetrated by persons influenced by extreme Islamist ideology. As well as causing two deaths and the killing of both assailants, the attacks played into the government's hands, providing it with ammunition to rally support for Canada's participation in the new US-led war in the Middle East and further expand the national-security apparatus and attack democratic rights at home.

However, the claim that Canada is under terrorist attack is a lie—a false narrative promoted to foster public fear and provide political cover for the government and Canada's ruling elite to press forward with a predetermined, reactionary agenda.

All the information that has come into the public domain about last week's attacks and the assailants refutes the government's narrative.

The attacks were carried out by lone, marginalized, disoriented and psychologically disturbed individuals. Neither Zehaf-Bibeau nor the St. Jean-sur-Richelieu

assailant, Martin Couture-Rouleau, belonged to a “homegrown” group or had ties to a foreign-based terrorist organization.

Neither appears to have written any message explaining the rationale for his actions. Nor did the assailants have any connection to one another.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) has cited a senior source “who has gone over intelligence reports on both men” as describing their common traits. “Both came from broken homes, were adrift in their lives, used drugs and were self-radicalized,” the source reportedly says.

Twenty five-year-old Couture-Rouleau was a recent convert to Islam who apparently quickly adopted radical Islamist views. According to those who knew him, a cleaning business he ran was robbed a year or so ago. He fell into depression after the perpetrators were not pursued.

The police confirmed that Couture-Rouleau was on their terrorism “watch list,” composed of people they believe could pose a risk of traveling abroad to join a terrorist group such as ISIS. His passport had been seized to prevent him from doing so.

Couture-Rouleau set up social network profiles under the alias Ahmed Rouleau. His social network profiles contained pictures, videos and posts indicating support for ISIS and other jihadist groups. Friends commented that he had been angered by Canadian participation in the US-led bombing of ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

Michael Zehaf-Bibeau, whilst expressing devout Muslim views, had a long history of drug abuse and petty criminal acts. He was reportedly a habitual user of crack cocaine, PCP and heroin.

In 2011, he was arrested in Vancouver, British Columbia on a robbery charge. A psychiatric assessment conducted at the time declared that although he did not suffer from mental illness, he was a “deeply troubled man.” Several acquaintances who recently spent time with Zehaf-Bibeau in Vancouver and in Ottawa have said that his erratic behaviour led them to believe he was suffering from mental illness.

In reports in the *National Post* on Friday, it was noted that Zehaf-Bibeau had reached such a state of desperation in 2011 over his inability to control his cocaine habit that he requested to be kept in prison despite being offered bail on the robbery charge.

The *Montreal Gazette* drew attention to the attempts by Zehaf-Bibeau to obtain psychological help, writing, “Both men who attacked soldiers this week seemed to be deeply

troubled, and were reaching out for psychological help that they likely didn’t get because of a shortage of mental health experts working in the public system.”

After spending time in a detox center in Vancouver, Zehaf-Bibeau told acquaintances earlier this month that he was traveling to Ottawa to inquire about delays in a passport application he had made. He said he wished to travel to Libya, where he hoped to have a better opportunity to kick his drug habit.

Police-intelligence officials have said they believe his inability to obtain a passport from either the Canadian government or the Libyan embassy was the trigger for his outburst of violence, providing further proof that it was not a pre-planned terrorist attack.

At the weekend, police acknowledged that earlier claims that Zehaf-Bibeau had wished to travel to Syria were incorrect. In a statement released on Saturday, Zehaf-Bibeau’s mother, Susan Bibeau, said her son had intended to travel to Saudi Arabia.

According to the *National Post*, Bibeau wrote that after his passport application was refused, her son likely felt that he had no way out, “unable to stay in the life he was in, unable to move on to the next one he wanted to go to.” Later in the statement, she added that “at the heart of this tragedy is mental illness.”

Zehaf-Bibeau’s mother lives in Montreal and is the deputy chairwoman of the immigration committee of the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada.

Although the Royal Canadian Mounted Police currently has 93 Canadian citizens on its terrorist watch list, Zehaf Bibeau was not one of them.

His father, Bulgasem Zehaf, formerly a businessman in Montreal, is a Libyan national. There are reports, as of yet unconfirmed, that his father was associated with a Jihadist militia in Zawihya, Libya, which was involved in the NATO regime-change war that toppled Muammar Gaddafi’s regime.

Canada’s military played a leading role in the NATO bombing campaign in Libya, presenting the jihadist militias as “freedom fighters.” Until recently, the Canadian government took much the same line in respect to Syria.



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