Five injured in bloody train attack in southern Germany

Marianne Arens
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A 17-year-old refugee from Afghanistan attacked a group of tourists from Hong Kong on a train in the state of Bavaria, in southern Germany, on Monday evening, injuring four people with an axe and a knife. Shortly afterwards, he was shot and killed by SEF special unit police, who were quickly on the scene and pursued him as he fled the train.

Politicians and the media wasted no time in politically exploiting the brutal attack and designated it as an act of Islamist terror. They referred to a video published on the Amaq web site, which is aligned to Islamic State (IS), on Tuesday. It shows a young man with a knife swearing allegiance to IS. He allegedly is the perpetrator. The man also reportedly shouted "Allahu akbar" ("God is great") during his attack in the train.

The ZDF television channel broadcast a special programme headlined "Axe attack in a train: IS terrorism in Germany," and an expert on Islam declared, "We have to anticipate that this form of terrorism will increase here." On the same day, Bavarian interior minister Joachim Hermann (Christian Social Union, CSU) demanded more security measures and a more visible police presence, and passenger checks were stepped up along all rail routes in Bavaria.

The young Afghan arrived as an unaccompanied minor in Germany a little over a year ago. He spent a year in an accommodation centre in Ochsenfurt before moving to a support family. Just days before the attack, he heard the sudden news of the death of a friend in Afghanistan. This was reported by his host family, who stated that he was otherwise a very quiet and pleasant person.

He left the family on Monday evening saying he was going to ride his bike and that he would be away some time. In his room, he left behind a notebook on which he drew an IS flag. There was also a goodbye letter to his father. He wrote in Pashto, "And now pray for me that I can revenge these unbelievers, and pray for me that I make it to heaven."

He subsequently boarded a regional train to Wurzburg, and hid in the toilet. The family from Hong Kong, including a son and daughter, and the boyfriend of the daughter, all adults, were completely taken by surprise by the attack. Four were severely injured, with two suffering life-threatening injuries. As other passengers pulled the emergency brake, the train came to a halt and the young Afghan fled.

The SIC officers were reportedly quickly on the scene because they were conducting a search for drugs in the local area. The officers pursued the attacker, who ran across an industrial site towards the Main River, injuring a fifth person, a local resident, in the process. He was ultimately killed with a shot to the head by two SEK officers, who confronted him in shrubs on the bank of the Main.

Green Party politician Renate Künast queried on Twitter that night, "Why could the attacker not be shot and incapacitated?" This was greeted by a tumultuous response by all media outlets, as if she had said something sacrilegious. But the question is entirely legitimate. Why did the officers of the special operations unit, who are trained for highly dangerous situations, not subdue a youth armed with an axe and knife without killing him?

The hysterical campaign against anyone who raises critical questions about the behaviour of the police is part of the drive to strengthen the state's domestic powers and the development towards a police state. At the same time, the young attacker is referred to as "the Afghan" and his attack is being used as a pretext to promote discrimination against all young refugees.

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While smaller in scale, the attack recalls similar recent incidents: In Nice, 32-year-old Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel drove a truck through a crowd of people celebrating the Bastille Day holiday, killing 84 and injuring hundreds more. In Orlando, the psychologically troubled Omar Mateen carried out a massacre in a gay nightclub. In each case, IS claimed responsibility for the attacks, without having connections to the perpetrators. In each case, the perpetrators died at the hands of the police, preventing them from being questioned about their motives.

In all cases, politicians responded by calling for a strengthening of the state apparatus and a deepening of the war on Islamist terrorism. In reality, the "war on terror" is not the solution, but rather the cause of the problem.

What can provoke a 17-year-old to lash out with an axe and knife at unknown people? What were the traumatic experiences, pressures and lack of hope that brought him to this position?

It was precisely this "war on terror," from which the young Afghan fled. The war destroyed his homeland over the past 15 years and recently caused the death of his friend. He had himself achieved the status of an asylum seeker in Germany, but could not be safe for a single moment from deportation since the government has declared Afghanistan a "safe country of origin." He could also find no job to give him hope for the future. There was no possibility of bringing his family to Germany.

Another terrible incident from recent times illustrates that the motives for such acts of violence need not come from political Islamism: in March 2015, a GermanWings pilot deliberately put a plane in France into a descent, resulting in the deaths of 150 passengers.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote at the time, "What immense social pressures are required to drive a young man—described by all of his acquaintances as unobtrusive, quiet, pleasant and easy to deal with—to murder 149 people? Why had no one seen the warning signs of the coming disaster?

"To probe these questions inevitably necessitates going beyond the "possibly misguided brain" of the culprit and considering a social context that is characterised by increasing occupational stress, economic insecurity, public anxiety, social tensions, state violence and militarism."

This is also the case with the latest bloody attack by a young Afghan in Bavaria. Instead of encouraging hysteria against Islamism and calling for a strengthening of the fight against terrorism, it is necessary to identify the real roots in society and to take up the fight against war and social desperation caused by capitalism.

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