

Terror suspect killed in Canadian police-military operation

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Canadian authorities are claiming that a security operation involving the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), a Canadian military Special Forces unit and a bomb squad thwarted an imminent ISIS-inspired terrorist attack Wednesday.

The alleged terrorist, 24-year-old Aaron Driver, was killed in the operation, either from a gunshot fired by a police officer or army sniper, or by an explosive device that he reportedly set off in the back of a taxi just outside his home. Under court order, Driver was living at his sister's house in Strathroy, a small southwestern Ontario town.

Driver was well known to the authorities. In June 2015 he was illegally detained for eight days without charge. He was subsequently placed under a peace bond, a measure the state can use to restrict an individual's movements and activities under conditions where they cannot lay criminal charges due to lack of evidence.

According to the RCMP's version of events, a tipoff from the FBI alerted them to the imminent prospect of a terrorist attack after a video featuring a masked man appeared online. Within three hours, Canadian authorities had identified Driver as the person in question and dispatched personnel from Canada's national anti-terrorism force to Strathroy. Shortly after 4:30 p.m., as Driver got into the back of a taxi, police opened fire and an explosion was heard, in the course of which Driver died and the taxi driver suffered light injuries.

The RCMP and Canada's domestic spy agency, the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS), say they had concluded Driver's alleged attack was planned to take place within 72 hours and that it would target a transit system or shopping center in a major urban area with the aim of causing mass casualties.

They concede that there is no evidence he had any accomplices, let alone assistance from ISIS or another terrorist organization. The explosives Driver planned to use were reportedly homemade.

Driver was clearly a troubled individual. A recent convert to Islam, he had repeatedly expressed support for the Islamic State in online postings. In the video released by the police, he vowed to make Canadians pay with their blood for Ottawa's involvement in the wars in the Middle East, lauded the reactionary terrorist atrocities in Paris and Brussels, and pledged allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

Driver had a difficult childhood, with his mother dying when he was seven. Both his father and stepmother were Canadian military personnel, and as a consequence, the family moved frequently. He

converted to Islam in his late teens after discovering it online. He first came to the attention of intelligence officials in October 2014, when he began posting on Twitter about his support for the twin attacks on Canadian Armed Forces personnel in Ottawa and St. Jean-sur-Richelieu, Quebec.

Extremely restrictive conditions were imposed on Driver when he was released following his 2015 arrest. He was ordered to attend religious counselling, provide the counselor's name to the RCMP, and wear an electronic tag. These conditions were lifted when Driver agreed to abide by the peace bond in court last February.

Wednesday's events remain shrouded in secrecy

It is impossible, with the information currently available, to determine whether the authorities' account is truthful. But Driver's death and the circumstances surrounding it raise a host of questions, including whether the police summarily executed an injured Driver.

First, the claim that Driver was hours away from conducting a terrorist attack without the authorities having any knowledge begs interrogation. The peace bond subjected him to a number of onerous conditions, including a ban on owning a computer or cell phone unless it was reported to the police, a stipulation that he reside with his sister, a prohibition on accessing social media sites, and regular meetings with a bail officer.

At the very least, Driver's ability to bring his alleged plan to such an advanced stage points to a major blunder on the part of the security forces, given that they would have been able to monitor his communications at will and otherwise track his movements.

The mass spying operations run by the Canadian government, which came to light thanks to whistleblower Edward Snowden, stand in stark contrast to the repeated claims by senior police officials that they lacked the resources to subject Driver along with all the other Canadian supporters of jihadi terrorism to constant surveillance.

In fact, Driver had been singled out for special treatment, no doubt because the authorities deemed him especially dangerous. According to Elizabeth Armitage of the Public Prosecution Service of Canada, only 11 people have been subjected to anti-terrorism

peace bonds. With Driver's death, only one peace bond remains active.

This makes it all the more damning that the authorities failed to investigate a July 31 complaint from a neighbor about explosions, which they thought sounded like fireworks, coming from Driver's backyard.

Another possibility that cannot be excluded is that Driver was allowed to proceed with his preparations so as to create conditions for the RCMP and armed forces to conduct a "real-life" anti-terrorism exercise.

That such a scenario is far from impossible is demonstrated by the recent court ruling that more than 240 RCMP officers were involved in an entrapment operation, which actively encouraged an isolated couple from British Columbia who had recently converted to Islam, to plan an attack on the province's legislature. (See: "Canadian police "manufactured" terror plot to ensnare couple")

Even more troubling questions arise from the manner in which the authorities chose to stop Driver from proceeding with his plans. Having surrounded his house, why did they not demand he surrender or at the very least seek to apprehend him before he called and got into a local taxi? And why, almost two days after Driver's death, have the authorities yet to clarify how he died? Was it from his having set off his crudely-constructed bomb or, as appears more likely, was he felled by police bullets after the bomb blast had left him injured, if not incapacitated?

None of these issues have been raised in the media coverage, nor in the response from the political establishment, which has assumed a predictably right-wing character.

Canada and the phony "war on terror" narrative

Driver's death is being seized upon to perpetuate the narrative of Canada being under attack from terrorists, an attack that must be countered through a continuation of the Mideast war and a strengthening of the already repressive state apparatus.

The alleged terrorist threat has been used by successive governments to legitimize Canadian imperialist operations in the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa. The Liberal government is currently preparing to announce yet another deployment of up to 1,000 troops and warplanes to an as yet unidentified African country or countries. The fraudulent claims that such a military intervention will be aimed at promoting peace and combatting the emergence of terrorist groups in West Africa are designed to cover up the real motivations for such an intervention—Canadian imperialism's significant economic and geopolitical interests in Africa.

Liberal Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale released a statement Wednesday night praising the operation against Driver, saying the RCMP had acted "to ensure public safety." Goodale added that he had conferred with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and had reassured him that public security "continues to be properly protected."

Goodale went on to boast that the Liberals had allotted an additional half billion dollars in their first budget to the police, national security and border control, and that this was proof of the government's determination to fight terrorism. He added rather ominously, "We've made our first investments in that direction and there will be more to follow."

The Conservatives exploited Wednesday's events to attack the Liberals for their plans to make minor alterations to the draconian Bill C-51 "anti-terror" law passed by the Harper Conservative government in spring 2015. The legislation, which the Liberals voted for, gives CSIS the power to actively "disrupt" vaguely defined "threats" to public security and to break virtually any law when doing so. It also created a new offence of promoting terrorism in general, established provisions for the prohibition of terrorist "propaganda" and granted police the power to detain suspects without charge for up to seven days.

The Liberals' planned amendments include the creation of a parliamentary oversight committee, ensuring that all court-issued warrants comply with the law, and a redefinition of the terrorist propaganda clause.

"I think it's time, sooner than later, that Mr. Trudeau put to rest what it is his plans are with Bill C-51," said interim Conservative leader Rona Ambrose. "It's important that the Liberal government reassure all Canadians that ... our security and intelligence services are going to be able to keep the tools that they need to do their job."

Some media coverage has suggested that even more draconian measures are now required. The *Globe and Mail* noted in a report Thursday, "The episode also underlined the limits of the authorities' ability to control wannabe terrorists with judicial tools such as peace bonds."

The RCMP's former deputy commissioner, P.Y. Bourdas, singled out encrypted communication as a concern in comments to CBC. Driver allegedly communicated via an encrypted messaging service with two British men who travelled to Syria to join ISIS. Citing the threat of terrorist attacks, elements within the national security apparatus in both the US and Canada have been demanding sweeping restrictions be placed on the public's use of encryption software.



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