

Mounting evidence Canadian police summarily executed terror suspect

Roger Jordan
20 August 2016

The account of the last moments of terrorist suspect Aaron Driver's life given by the taxi driver caught up in the joint police-military antiterrorism operation strongly suggests that the 24-year-old was summarily executed.

Driver died August 10 in what authorities described as an emergency intervention led by the RCMP's elite counterterrorism force to thwart an imminent attack. They claimed to be acting on a tip the FBI had passed on earlier the same day concerning an online video in which a masked Driver vowed Canadians would pay with their blood for Ottawa's involvement in the wars in the Middle East and pledged allegiance to ISIS.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) provided scant details on its operation in Strathroy, Ontario, including how Driver died; whether it was at his own hands from setting off a crude explosive device he had made or whether he had been killed by police bullets. More than a week later, the RCMP has continued to shroud its actions on August 10 and Driver's death in secrecy.

Speaking to the *London Free Press*, taxi driver Terry Duffield has provided his recollection of the final moments of Aaron Driver's life—an account that indicates an incapacitated Driver was killed by police “As I'm laying on the ground,” said Duffield, “I hear an officer say, loud, ‘He's still twitching.’ Then I hear pop, pop, pop, pop, like four or five shots, and then it was complete silence.”

Duffield's account is supported by an autopsy on Driver, whose conclusions were made public by his estranged father earlier this week. It confirmed that he died from one of two gunshot wounds that hit vital organs, rather than as a result of the explosion caused by his homemade device.

Duffield has accused the RCMP of recklessly endangering his life. In his *Free Press* interview he noted that the police did not warn either the taxi company or himself that a police operation targeting Driver was underway, after the terror suspect phoned for a cab. Nor did they try to stop or warn Duffield while he was on his way to Driver's house, although hundreds of security personnel had taken up positions in Strathroy; or try to communicate with him during the approximately five minutes he waited outside Driver's residence. Only when the 24-year-old got into the cab and Duffield began backing out of the driveway did heavily armed officers emerge.

A surrounded Driver then apparently exploded his incendiary device. The blast left him wounded and Duffield, who had ducked for cover, with minor injuries.

Although the taxi driver was visibly injured, the police, according to Duffield's account, did not arrange for him to have medical care or otherwise assist him. The son of the taxi company owner subsequently picked him up and drove him home.

The mounting evidence that the police acted as judge, jury and executioner in Strathroy should give workers and youth pause. All the more so, given that the media and politicians have done nothing but shower the RCMP with praise.

Even if the authorities' version of events is taken at face value, it still raises troubling questions: Why did they not seek to apprehend Driver before he entered the taxi, and, more fundamentally, why, when he was incapacitated, did the highly trained antiterrorism officers decide to fire multiple times at him?

The indifference to these questions within the political and media establishment reveals their contempt for basic democratic rights and slavish support for the use of the most violent methods, up to and including state-sanctioned killings, at home and abroad.

Boosting the ruling elite's phony “war on terror” narrative

This is further illustrated by the combined efforts of the media and political establishment to use the claim that an attack causing mass casualties was only narrowly averted to stoke the phony “war on terror” narrative. This is part of the ruling elite's desperate efforts to provide the vast expansion of Canadian militarism abroad and sweeping attacks on democratic rights at home with a veneer of legitimacy.

Earlier this year, the Liberals unveiled a major expansion of Canada's participation in the US-led war in Syria and Iraq, which is a regime-change operation against the Russian- and Iranian-supported Bashar al-Assad government in Damascus dressed up as a fight against “terrorism.” Justin Trudeau's government is also expected to soon announce a deployment of up to 1,000 troops and warplanes to Africa. Although the precise location of these forces is yet to be announced, politicians are already justifying the deployment as necessary to stop the spread of *jihadi* terrorism in West Africa. In truth, the coming Canadian Armed Forces intervention is aimed at securing Canadian imperialism's significant and growing economic and geopolitical interests in Africa, including multibillion-dollar mining investments spread

across several unstable countries.

The Liberals' use of an alleged terrorist threat to stampede an overwhelmingly hostile population behind a dramatic expansion of Canadian imperialist violence makes clear how the Canadian ruling elite's traditional preferred party of government has picked up seamlessly from where its Conservative predecessor left off. While Trudeau has replaced Stephen Harper's bellicose rhetoric about Canada being a "warrior nation" with "progressive" posturing about Canada's support for refugees and UN peacekeeping, the end result is the same: a deepening of Canada's involvement in imperialist wars around the globe.

This was underscored in Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's response to the Strathroy events. Speaking in Nova Scotia Tuesday, Trudeau fuelled the war-on-terror narrative by stating that the main challenge is "balancing" civil liberties against the security measures required to meet the terrorist threat.

Driver was clearly a troubled individual. He had voiced support for the brutal terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels and declared allegiance to ISIS. But the claim that a serious attack was only narrowly averted is increasingly being undermined. The *Globe and Mail* acknowledged in an article Thursday that the device Driver had manufactured was so crude as to pose no threat to anyone's life. Driver's estranged father, a former Canadian Armed Forces officer commented, "It would not have killed a number of people."

According to Driver's father, the coroner informed him that, had it not been for the police gunshots, Driver would have been left with nonpermanent injuries.

The claim that the authorities knew nothing of Driver's activities until the FBI informed them of the appearance of his online video on the morning of the RCMP operation is also highly suspect. Driver was placed under a "peace bond" as a terrorist suspect last February after having been illegally detained for eight days in June 2015 and questioned about his support for ISIS. Only eleven people in Canada have ever been subject to peace bonds for alleged terrorist activity, and at the time of Driver's death, only one other of these bonds remained active. Even more inexplicably, a neighbour reported hearing explosions in Driver's backyard July 31, but the authorities did not deem it necessary to investigate.

The public is thus being asked to believe that the Canadian intelligence apparatus, with the vast array of surveillance and spying powers at its disposal that were partially revealed thanks to the whistleblowing of Edward Snowden, were incapable of keeping track of Driver's activities and communications, even though his use of cell phones and the internet was heavily regulated.

It cannot be excluded that the authorities knowingly permitted Driver to proceed with his planned attack to a point where a major police-military deployment could be justified. That this is not mere speculation was illustrated by a recent ruling by a British Columbia judge that the RCMP had encouraged, even pressured, a couple to prepare and carry out a terrorist attack on the province's legislature on Canada Day in 2013. (See: Canadian police "manufactured" terror plot to ensnare couple)

None of this has stopped the professional apologists for militarist violence and state surveillance in the bourgeois press from coming forward to defend the authorities. *Globe* columnist Margaret

Wente entitled a comment "I'm very glad the Mounties got their man in Strathroy." The RCMP," she enthused, "deserve a lot of credit for getting this one right." After dismissing concerns raised by members of the public about the authorities' behaviour and Driver's ability to take his plan to such an advanced stage allegedly without detection, she concluded, "Like it or not, sometimes the only solution is the violent one."

The purpose of such comments is to inure the population to the use of lethal force by a militarized police force that acts with total disregard to basic democratic rights and legal principles.

The Canadian state already has unprecedented powers at its disposal to compel individuals to testify against "terrorist" suspects, detain individuals without charge, actively disrupt vaguely defined "threats" to national security" and conduct mass surveillance of the entire population. These powers were significantly augmented with the passage last year of Bill C-51, which was authored by the then governing Conservatives and supported by the Liberal opposition.

Police officials are seizing upon last week's events in Strathroy to demand even stricter controls on online communication and further attacks on the right to privacy. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police passed a resolution this week calling for a new law compelling individuals to hand over electronic passwords at the order of a judge. RCMP Deputy Commissioner Joe Oliver pointed to the lack of such a provision in Canadian law, before claiming without any evidence that large numbers of criminals are using encrypted communications to avoid being traced by the authorities.

David Christopher of OpenMedia, which works to keep the Internet free from state surveillance, warned of the implications of adopting such a law, noting that it would violate Canadians' constitutional rights. In the case of a laptop computer, handing over a password would, said Christopher, be like providing the "key to your whole personal life."



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