

Six killed in terror attack on Quebec City mosque

Keith Jones
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Six Muslim Canadians, all of North or West African origin, were killed and another 19 persons wounded, five of them gravely, by a masked gunman who assaulted a Quebec City mosque during evening prayers Sunday.

Yesterday afternoon, Alexandre Bissonnette, a 27-year-old Laval University student, was charged with six counts of first-degree murder and five of attempted murder during a brief court appearance.

Shortly after the mosque slaughter, Bissonnette contacted police and subsequently surrendered to them on a Quebec City bridge. An AK-47 and two handguns were found in his car.

Initially, police took a second person into custody in the vicinity of the Islamic Cultural Center of Quebec, the scene of the shooting. But later they conceded this was a case of mistaken identity and said they now believe Bissonnette acted alone.

Sunday's attack was a heinous crime. The target of the attack and the profile of the presumed killer leave little doubt it was a political attack, motivated by Islamophobia and other extreme right-wing views.

Shortly after media began posting a photo of Bissonnette, a leader of a Quebec City group dedicated to helping Syrian refugees told reporters he was known to them for spouting anti-immigrant views. François Deschamps of "Bienvenue aux réfugiés" (Welcome to Refugees) said Bissonnette also routinely railed against feminists in his online posts.

According to the Montreal daily *La Presse*, Bissonnette's Facebook page, which has now been taken off line, had hyperlinks to the National Front, the French neo-fascist party led by Marine Le Pen.

Global News said Bissonnette's Facebook "likes" also included US President Donald Trump, the Israeli Defense Forces, and Christopher Hitchens, the British writer who became a propagandist for the illegal 2003 US invasion of Iraq and Washington's phony "war on terror."

Witnesses say that when Bissonnette opened fire on them, he screamed "*Allahu Akbar!*" in a thick French-Québécois accent.

Soon after the media reported the attack, Canadian authorities, beginning with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Quebec Premier Philippe Couillard, denounced it as an act of terrorism.

Quebec City media reports suggest Bissonnette is a psychologically troubled individual. Even if, as is likely, this is true, Sunday's mass killing cannot be separated from the noxious political and social environment that has been created by North America's governments and capitalist elite through their wars of aggression, gutting of democratic rights, and promotion of reaction, including anti-Muslim bigotry.

Since Friday, news reports around the world have been dominated by the fallout from and reaction to US President Donald Trump's antidemocratic and patently discriminatory executive order barring refugees, visitors, and US permanent residents from seven predominantly Muslim countries from entering the US. All these countries—Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen—have been the target of US aggression, either in the form of "regime change" wars, drone strikes or punishing economic sanctions.

Trump has systematically stoked anti-Muslim prejudice since he launched his bid for the Republican Party presidential nomination. This is exemplified by his naming of Stephen Bannon, the former Goldman-Sachs executive who made Breitbart News into a sounding board for the fascistic alt-right, as his "chief strategist."

On Monday, White House spokesman Sean Spicer made a show of condemning the Quebec City attack "in the strongest possible terms." But he did not mention that its target was a mosque or that its victims were Muslims. Without losing a beat, Spicer then brazenly sought to invoke the murders perpetrated by a sympathizer of the ultra-right as an argument for the Trump administration's persecution of Muslims and immigrants. "It's a terrible reminder," said Spicer, "of why we must remain vigilant and why the president is taking steps to be proactive and not reactive on issues of national security."

Like the Democratic Party in the US, Canada's elite claims to be appalled by Trump's anti-Muslim bigotry. But since 2001 it has promoted the false "war on terror" narrative, joining both parties of US big business in exploiting the atrocities committed by Islamist terrorists—often thanks to unexplained intelligence lapses—to legitimize militarism and war and sweeping attacks on democratic rights, while feeding anti-Muslim prejudice.

Stephen Harper and his Conservatives sought re-election as

Canada's government in the fall of 2015 with crude Islamophobic appeals, claiming Canada was at war with "Islamist terror" and promising to set up a snitch line so Canadians could denounce the "barbaric cultural practices" of their immigrant neighbours.

This was the culmination of a year-long campaign in which Canada's ruling elite had rallied round the Harper Conservative government in using the deaths of two military personnel at the hands of psychologically troubled, recent Canadian-born converts to Islam to promote reaction at home and abroad. This included expanding Canada's participation in the US war in Iraq and Syria—a war that arises directly from Washington's previous ruinous Mideast wars, and like them is aimed at strengthening US hegemony over the world's most important oil-exporting region. It also involved the ramming through, with the support of the opposition Liberals, legislation giving the national-security apparatus police-state powers (Bill C-51).

As for Trudeau—the politician who is being touted by the *New York Times* and the British *Guardian* as the new poster boy for international liberalism—he has been assiduously courting Trump ever since his election last November.

Trudeau's Liberal government is in talks with top Trump officials to expand Canada's already extensive participation in America's military-strategic offenses in the Mideast and against Russia and China. It has also signalled that it is ready to throw Mexico to the wolves and support Trump in scuttling NAFTA, so long as Canadian big business keeps it privileged access to US markets.

Apart from one tweet Saturday declaring "Canadians will welcome" refugees, Trudeau has refrained from criticizing Trump's trampling on democratic rights and steps to militarize the Mexican border, let alone his aggressive America First protectionist policies and plans to massively hike US military spending.

This is because Canada's ruling elite views it as essential to asserting its own predatory imperialist interests that Canada be, as the *Globe and Mail* put it recently, behind Trump's "walls"—that is, a partner in a "Fortress North America."

Canada's liberal media, like that in the US, systematically lies about the extreme right-wing forces, including Islamist terrorists, that Washington and its Canadian allies use on the world stage.

How many Canadians, for example, know that Canadian Armed Forces personnel who participated in NATO's regime war in Libya referred to themselves as "Al Qaeda's air force"?

While the entire Canadian ruling elite is complicit in the promotion of anti-Muslim bigotry and reaction, it is not mere chance that Quebec was the site of Canada's first lethal attack on a mosque.

All sections of Quebec's political establishment, including the pseudo-left Québec Solidaire, have legitimized a reactionary campaign gotten up by the right-wing tabloid press that claims immigrants and religious minorities are threatening

Quebec's values.

Muslims have been the principal target of this campaign.

Currently, the Quebec Liberal government has legislation before the provincial legislature that would ban Muslim women wearing religious face coverings from receiving public services, including education and health care, except in emergencies.

When it held office for 18 months in 2012-14, the trade union-supported, pro-Quebec independence Parti Québécois sought to enact a Charter of Quebec Values under which public sector workers would have been threatened with the loss of their jobs if their wore a Muslim hijab, Sikh turban, Jewish kippah, or other "ostentatious" religious symbols. Underscoring the chauvinist character of this legislation, an exception was provided for "discreet" crucifixes.

The PQ's new leader, Jean-François Lisée, has suggested it should be illegal for Muslim women to wear the niqab or burqa in public in Quebec because an AK-47 could be hidden under it.

As for the right-wing mayor of Quebec City, Régis Labeaume, he has at most issued pro forma condemnations, despite repeated acts of vandalisms at the city's four mosques, while repeatedly suggesting refugees could constitute a terrorist threat.

In Quebec and Canada, as around the world, the ruling class is promoting anti-immigrant and anti-minority chauvinism so as to split the working class.

There is mass revulsion in Quebec and across Canada at Sunday's horrific events. Trudeau, Couillard and the entire establishment are trying to manipulate these sentiments through hypocritical calls for unity and solidarity. These are aimed at suppressing any discussion of the real causes of the tragedy at the Islamic Cultural Center of Quebec.

A crisis-ridden, ever-more socially polarized and militarized capitalist society is dredging up all manner of reaction.

The defence of democratic rights requires the development of an independent movement of the working class against war and social inequality based on an unequivocally anti-capitalist and internationalist program.



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