

Canada: Authorities whitewash police killing of terror suspect

Laurent Lafrance
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A joint investigation by the Strathroy-Caradoc police and the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) has determined that the police killing of terror suspect Aaron Driver last August was legally justified. The federal government, which conducted its own independent review of Driver's death, has upheld the police investigation's conclusion.

In fact, the shooting of Driver had the hallmarks of a summary execution, and the police and government reports have done nothing to answer why police shot him multiple times when he was already incapacitated.

On the afternoon of August 10, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and Strathroy-Caradoc police, with the support of Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and Canadian Special Forces operatives, mounted a major operation to prevent Aaron Driver from committing an allegedly "imminent" terrorist attack in a public space.

The RCMP said it was acting on a tip passed to it by the FBI earlier the same day concerning an online video in which a masked Driver pledged allegiance to ISIS and vowed Canadians would pay with their blood for Canada's involvement in the wars in the Middle East.

For hours, heavily armed security personnel clandestinely staked out Aaron Driver's sister's home, where the 24-year-old man was living, and essentially occupied the adjacent Strathroy neighbourhood.

Hours after the police operation began, a taxi arrived at Driver's residence. It waited for about five minutes before Driver left his sister's house and jumped into the car with a backpack. According to the taxi driver, Terry Duffield, Driver asked to go to Citi Plaza, a mall in nearby London.

It was only then that police intervened, blocking the cab from leaving. When police approached the car, Driver detonated a device, of which only a portion actually exploded. Police then rushed the taxi and pumped several bullets into the severely injured Driver.

Initially police refused to say how Driver had died. Only days after the event did they confirm that Driver had been killed by police gunfire and not at his own hand from the bomb blast.

Subsequently, an RCMP bomb analysis showed that if Driver's homemade device, embedded with 139 ball bearings, had entirely exploded, it "would have caused a high risk of death to anyone within 1.5 meters of the explosion and varying risks of injury up to 7.8 meters away."

The police inquiry maintained a veil of secrecy surrounding the circumstances of Driver's death. The main argument to justify the killing, as stated in the report, was that the police believed Driver had more explosives. "Fearing for their safety, and believing that Mr. Driver would detonate a second device, the RCMP shot Mr. Driver fatally wounding him," declares the report.

In fact, all evidence points to Driver having been killed while he was incapacitated. Following the police operation, Duffield, who suffered minor physical injuries from the explosion, gave the media his own account of what happened. "As I'm lying on the ground," he told the *London Free Press*, "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 also explained that although he was himself visibly injured, the police did not arrange for him to have medical care or otherwise assist him. It was the son of the taxi company owner who had to pick him up and drive him home. Duffield, who suffered from anxiety and panic attacks following the incident and as a result was not able to work for weeks, has said he may sue the police for using him as bait in their operation.

The police were clearly not interested in hearing what Duffield had to say. The taxi driver—the only civilian witness at the scene of Driver's death—complained last November that he had not yet been questioned by the police. His account of the event is not even mentioned in the Strathroy-OPP report.

Duffield has strongly criticized the way police handled the whole situation. "I don't know how [the shooting] is justified. If I'm lying on one side of the car and hear somebody yell 'he's still twitching' it means he's not really

mobile. Did you really have to shoot him?” he said, adding, “They could’ve [used a Taser] and he would still be alive to answer questions.”

Duffield and his lawyer, Kevin Egan, have expressed anger and disappointment at the police investigation. “I’m not surprised that the police investigating themselves found that their actions were justified or that the attorney-general did as well,” Duffield said, adding, “They can finalize the justification of killing somebody, but wouldn’t give me a straight answer on who decided to jeopardize my life.”

Duffield reiterated that police had had plenty of opportunity to warn his cab company about Driver or to get him out of harm’s way as he drove to the house and waited for Driver to get into his car. Egan raised the question as to how the RCMP allowed a man who was the subject of a court-ordered “peace-bond” due to his alleged terrorist sympathies build a bomb powerful enough to have caused multiple fatalities.

Driver was a disturbed individual who declared allegiance to ISIS and expressed sympathy for the horrific terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels. His apparent plan—to detonate a bomb with the power to kill in a heavily traveled public space—was deeply reactionary and reprehensible.

But the fact that the police acted as judge, jury and executioner—culminating in what appears to have been Driver’s summary execution—should be seen as a serious warning by workers and young people.

The questions raised by the *World Socialist Web Site* in the wake of the August 10 events remain unanswered. Why did the police not seek to apprehend Driver before he entered the taxi? More fundamentally, why did the highly trained antiterrorism RCMP officers decide to fire multiple times at Driver while he was incapacitated?

Most disturbing of all is the fact that the media and the political establishment have demonstrated almost complete indifference to these questions, revealing the ruling elite’s contempt for democratic rights and endorsement of the most brutal methods of rule at home and abroad, including state-sanctioned killings. Days after the event, Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau congratulated the security services and police for “having managed to prevent any serious incidents related to this particular individual.”

The police’s claim that an “imminent attack” was only narrowly averted thanks to an FBI tip is highly suspect given that Driver was well-known to the Canadian security apparatus and presumably under close surveillance.

In June 2015, police detained Driver for eight days without charge, that is illegally, citing Internet postings he had made expressing sympathy for ISIS. Then in February 2016, they obtained a peace-bond that circumscribed Driver’s rights because of fears he would “participate in or contribute to,

directly or indirectly, the activity of a terrorist group to facilitate or carry out a terrorist activity.”

Yet, last July when a neighbour reported hearing explosions in Driver’s backyard, the authorities inexplicably failed to investigate.

One could justifiably ask whether the RCMP knowingly permitted Driver to proceed with his planned attack to a point where a major police-military deployment could be justified. That such a scenario is far from impossible is exemplified by a recent British Columbia judge’s ruling that the RCMP had encouraged and 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).

It should also be underlined that in the case of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, the 2015 Paris terror attack, and most recently the Berlin Christmas market attack, the suspects were all well-known to the security forces and acted under their noses.

While it is impossible to know to what extent the state was involved in the August 10 events, the ruling elite predictably seized on it to boost their phony “war on terror” narrative. Since 9/11, the Canadian bourgeoisie, like its US counterparts, has systematically used the “fight against terrorism” to justify Canada’s participation in predatory overseas wars and to attack the democratic rights of the population at home.

Police officials were quick to cite the events in Strathroy to bolster their demands for stricter controls on online communications and further attacks on the right to privacy, including the capacity to break encryption.

In a similar fashion, the ruling elite exploited the 2014 Ottawa and St-Jean-sur-Richelieu shootings to expand police powers. Shortly after these events, the then-Conservative federal government, with the support of the Liberals, passed Bill C-51 (the 2015 “Anti-terrorism Act”) which gives the CSIS the power to break virtually any law in the name of countering “public security” threats and otherwise dramatically expands the coercive powers of the state.

Following last August’s events, Public Security Minister Ralph Goodale said stronger anti-terror measures are needed and argued that peace bonds are “tools and instruments with limited capacity” that should be revised as part of the Liberal government’s current review of national security laws and practices.



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