

Trudeau rushes to declare Edmonton attack a “terrorist” act

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Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau issued a statement early Sunday morning claiming that an incident in which a 30-year-old man attacked a police officer, then hours later struck several pedestrians during a high-speed police chase, constituted a “terrorist attack.”

Police have yet to officially identify the alleged assailant, who was taken into custody after the police-chase culminated in the van he was driving overturning. However, the CBC, based on police sources, is reporting that he is a Somalian refugee claimant named Abdulahi Hasan Sharif.

Public Security Minister Ralph Goodale has said the Edmonton assailant was on a terrorism watch-list, while the RCMP has revealed he was interviewed by the Canadian police and intelligence services’ Integrated National Security Enforcement Team in 2015.

According to the media, authorities are planning to charge the assailant with five counts of attempted murder and terrorism offences. The latter would make him liable to significantly harsher punishment.

Much about what happened on Saturday night remains unclear. Even as police and senior government officials have rushed to label the incident a “terrorist attack,” they admit that all evidence points to this having been the act of a single individual or, to use the words of Edmonton Mayor Don Iveson, a “lone wolf.”

The incident began at around 8:15 p.m., when the assailant rammed his car into a barricade behind which stood a police officer who was providing security for an Edmonton Eskimos football game at which there was to be a ceremony honouring Canada’s military.

The officer was thrown several meters on impact. The assailant reportedly jumped from his car and attacked the cop with a knife but his assault was repelled and he then escaped on foot.

Police claim that they subsequently found an Islamic State flag in the assailant’s abandoned car.

The police officer, Constable Mike Chernyk, was not seriously injured in the attack, and approximately 90 minutes later authorities held a press conference at which they declared that while a manhunt was under way, the public was not at risk.

Two hours later, at around midnight, officers stopped a white U-Haul van at a traffic checkpoint. When an officer recognized the driver’s ID as being that of the man police were looking for and challenged him, the suspect allegedly drove away at high speed. Around 20 police cars then gave chase through downtown Edmonton at speed of 80 miles per hour, sending pedestrians and automobiles scurrying for safety.

Police claim that during the chase the suspect deliberately struck four pedestrians. None suffered serious injury.

One passer-by who witnessed the chase expressed the feelings of many when he commented to CBC, “That high-speed chase should have never, ever, in a million years have happened downtown.”

At a 3 a.m. press conference, Edmonton Police Chief Rob Knecht declared that the assailant was in custody and that the incident was being treated as a terrorism investigation.

The attack, like similar incidents which have targeted innocent people around the world, is deeply reactionary. But the narrative of Saturday night’s events the authorities and media are now developing should be treated with extreme caution and skepticism.

According to Public Safety Minister Goodale the fact the assailant was known to the authorities and on Canada’s terrorism watch list “is a detail of the investigation that the authorities will pursue in the appropriate way.”

Far from being a mere “detail” Sharif’s presence on a watch list raises serious questions about the authorities’ response. If his identity was known, why did police

declare there to be no threat to public safety at 10 p.m. Saturday, almost two hours after the attack on the police officer? And since authorities considered him to be a terrorist threat, why did police engage in a high-speed chase through streets packed with football fans and local residents, giving him added opportunity and motive to strike passers-by with his vehicle?

These issues cannot be brushed aside, especially given the fact that in virtually every other attack of a similar character in recent years, it has later emerged that the perpetrators were well-known to the authorities.

For example, both of the assailants who carried out a similar attack last June on London Bridge and at Burgh market in Britain's capital were known to police as Islamist extremists. One of them had even appeared in a televised documentary about jihadis. In that attack, the assailants rammed pedestrians with a van before exiting the vehicle and attacking them with knives, leaving seven dead.

None of the discrepancies in the official narrative were reflected in the response from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who labelled the incident an act of terrorism before any evidence had been made public.

"The Government of Canada and Canadians stand with the people of Edmonton after the terrorist attack on Saturday," declared Trudeau in his Sunday morning statement.

Echoing the stock-lines governments all over the world have employed in promoting a phony "war on terror" that has been used to justify imperialist war and sweeping attacks on democratic rights, Trudeau continued, "We cannot—and will not—let violent extremism take root in our communities. We know that Canada's strength comes from our diversity, and we will not be cowed by those who seek to divide us or promote fear."

In evaluating Trudeau's statement, it is important to note that in October 2014, he and his Liberals, as well as the New Democratic Party, did not join Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper in claiming that Canada was under terrorist attack, even as they forthrightly condemned the murder of an unarmed soldier in Ottawa and the attack on the Parliament complex carried out by a lone, psychologically disturbed gunman.

Harper exploited the Ottawa attack to ram through his Bill C-51, giving vast new powers to the national security apparatus. These included virtually unlimited access to government information on Canadians and the right of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), the country's premier spy agency, to break virtually any law

in actively "disrupting" vaguely defined "threats" to national security.

Trudeau's response to the Edmonton events underscores his government's sharp shift to the right and should cause workers and youth to beware of Liberal attempts to stoke public fear over terrorism to justify further attacks on democratic rights and closer collaboration with Washington, both in aggression in the Middle East and in "policing" North America, including attacks on the rights of refugees and migrants.

The claims of Trudeau and his Liberals to represent a "progressive" alternative to Harper—claims that were eagerly promoted by the trade union bureaucracy—were always bogus. The Canadian elite's traditional party of government, the Liberals, implemented the greatest social spending cuts in Canadian history when they last held office, as well as joining US-led wars in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan and in the wake of 9/11, dramatically expanding the powers and reach of the national security agencies.

That said, the Trudeau government is more and more openly embracing and expanding the reactionary agenda of its Conservative predecessors.

In June, Trudeau's Foreign Minister, Chrystia Freeland, delivered a bellicose address in which she argues that "hard power," i.e. war, had to be a key part of Canada's foreign policy in the 21st century. This was swiftly followed by the release of a new defence policy that calls for military spending to be hiked by 70 percent to \$33 billion per year over the next decade.

The same month, the Trudeau government unveiled its draconian Bill C-59, which in the name of "reforming" Bill C-51, makes a few cosmetic changes to Harper's police-state law, while enshrining its vast expansion of the powers of the country's intelligence agencies.

The Liberals' bill also mandates Canada's signals intelligence agency, the Communications and Security Establishment (CSE), to conduct offensive cyberwarfare operations. This will be done in conjunction with the military, which under the new defence policy has been given additional possibilities to cooperate with the intelligence agencies in this area thanks to the boosting of the Canadian Armed Forces' cyberwarfare budget.



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