

Trump demands death penalty in New York City attack

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In a series of tweets and other comments Wednesday night and Thursday, President Trump continued his demagogic law-and-order appeals and demands for immigration restrictions, following Tuesday's truck attack on pedestrians and cyclists in Lower Manhattan that killed eight and seriously wounded another 12.

Trump dropped his earlier insistence that the suspect in the attack, Uzbekistan immigrant Saypullo Saipov, be transferred to the notorious US prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

"Would love to send the NYC terrorist to Guantanamo but statistically that process takes much longer than going through the Federal system," Trump tweeted Thursday morning. A few minutes later, he added, "There is also something appropriate about keeping him in the home of the horrible crime he committed. Should move fast. DEATH PENALTY!"

Just hours earlier, seeking to whip up his ultra-right-wing supporters and speaking in the fashion of Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte—whose praises he has sung in the past—Trump claimed, "We need quick justice and we need strong justice, much quicker and much stronger than we have right now. Because what we have right now is a joke and it's a laughingstock."

Trump sought to use the first significant attack by a Muslim immigrant during his time in office to stoke the endless "war on terror," while claiming vindication for his attacks on immigrants both during his campaign for the presidency and after taking office. The nonstop response from Trump on the latest occasion stands in stark contrast to earlier attacks, including the recent Las Vegas massacre, which killed 58 and seriously injured hundreds more. At that time, Trump said little other than to call the killer a madman. Trump has never called mass murders carried out by American-born killers, including that in Las Vegas, those in the black

church in Charleston, South Carolina in 2015, and many others, acts of terrorism.

At the same time, the president renewed his demand that the Diversity Visa Lottery program, created 27 years ago in the administration of Republican President George H.W. Bush, be eliminated in favor of a "merit" system. The existing system allots some 50,000 visas, about 5 percent of the total of permanent residence permits granted annually, to residents of countries with low immigration levels to the US.

Shortly after meeting with leading Republican senators, Trump issued a statement calling the program "a disaster for our country. ... We know that the program presents significant vulnerabilities to our nation's security. It's a very unsafe program for our country and we're not going to allow it to happen."

The president sought to turn the latest incident against his Democratic rivals. He called the legislation providing for the visa lottery "a Chuck Schumer beauty," adding that the Democrats "don't want to do what's right for our country." In fact there are no fundamental differences in the endless war on terror, as the 16 years since the attacks of September 11, 2001 have amply shown.

The suspect in Tuesday's attack appeared in Federal court on Thursday. Saipov was in a wheelchair, having sustained serious abdominal wounds when shot by a New York City police officer after he exited the Home Depot truck he had rented before the attack.

The federal charges facing Saipov include one count of giving "material support to terrorism" and one count of "violence and destruction by a motor vehicle causing death." The latter charge carries a possible death penalty.

FBI officials said that the Manhattan attack had been planned for about a year, and that Saipov had carried

out a “test run” with a Home Depot truck one week ago. The authorities also said they had found 90 videos and 3,800 images on Saipov’s cellphone, many detailing the program and the actions of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), to which Saipov claimed allegiance. The authorities also questioned Nozima Odilova, Saipov’s wife. They have so far said nothing further about a “person of interest” who had been apprehended on Wednesday, 32-year-old Mukhammadzoi Kadirov.

According to a report in the *New York Times*, the NYPD deputy commissioner for intelligence and counterterrorism claimed that Saipov “appears to have followed to a T the instruction that ISIS has put out” as far as using vehicles for terror attacks.

The suspect in the latest case grew up in the largely Muslim country of Uzbekistan, one of the nations that emerged from the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Saipov, now 29 years old, emigrated to the US in 2010 after he won the lottery for a visa and a green card. He came of age under the brutally repressive regime of Islam Karimov, who ruled the Uzbekistan SSR under Stalinism and then continued his dictatorial administration after the restoration of capitalism. According to those who knew him, Saipov was not particularly religious or political when he left for the US.

Whatever hopes Saipov had for life in the US, however, seem to have met with steady disappointment. He earned his living as a long-haul truck driver. He moved frequently, living for periods of time in Ohio and Florida, most recently in Paterson, New Jersey, with his wife and three children.

As other observers have pointed out, Saipov appears to have been a “lone wolf,” a despairing and disoriented immigrant who turned to the propaganda of ISIS and other Islamic extremists in response both to the pervasive Islamophobia in the US, his inability to find a future for himself and his family, as well as the ongoing suffering in the Middle East and Central Asia. Saipov does not appear to have been consistent in his actions and views. A Florida imam with whom he studied reported that “he did not learn religion properly.”

The ruling elite is neither willing nor able to examine the underlying causes of attacks such as that of last Tuesday. Instead it seeks to use these incidents, for

which it bears major responsibility, to strengthen its own hand politically and clamp down on democratic rights.

Local and federal authorities responded to the October 31 attack with a stepped-up military presence on the streets of New York City. It took place on Halloween, as well as only days before the annual New York City Marathon, which brings tens of thousands of runners to the city from all over the world. In addition, next Tuesday is Election Day, with New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio expected to win reelection easily. The political establishment came together after last Tuesday’s event to repeat the usual phrases about the “American way of life.” De Blasio, standing alongside New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, declared, “This was an attack on our values. We will not change. We will not be cowed.”

Nothing was said, of course, about the “values” represented by the endless wars waged by Washington over the past quarter of a century in the Middle East and Central Asia. These wars have been carried out under both Democratic and Republican administrations. Trump, after implying that he opposed “foreign adventures,” has turned around and escalated imperialist intervention in Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia.

Unprovoked imperialist aggression has already led to literally millions of deaths, along with suffering on such a scale as to produce a record number of refugees from the region, as well as from North Africa. The US has armed and assisted Islamic fundamentalists, including Al Qaeda, for its own political purposes, as in the efforts at regime change in Syria. Imperialist intrigue and oppression, and the wars for the past quarter-century in particular, are the main source of such reactionary forces as ISIS, which point to the imperialist crimes to make their own appeals to disaffected youth.



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