

Boris Johnson's government uses London terror attack to call for indefinite detention

Thomas Scripps
4 February 2020

Sunday's terror attack in Streatham, South London, has been seized upon by the government of Prime Minister Boris Johnson to press for sweeping attacks on democratic rights, beginning with indefinite detention of those charged with terrorist offences and prisoners suspected of radicalization.

Wearing a fake suicide vest, Sudesh Amman stole a large knife from a discount store on Streatham High Street and rushed into the busy highway on Sunday afternoon, stabbing passers-by.

One man who was hospitalised is no longer in a life-threatening condition. A woman with non-life-threatening injuries has been discharged from hospital and another suffered minor injuries following the discharge of a police firearm.

Amman had recently been released from prison after serving half of a three year and four month sentence for possession and distribution of terrorist material. He was under close active surveillance and was, according to sources, shot dead by armed police eight seconds after his first victim was stabbed.

A witness explained, "I thought it must be gangs, but then I could see this guy running towards me and I could see two men wearing balaclavas chasing behind him. All of a sudden I could hear this guy screaming. I think it was the police officer. The guy they were chasing was saying something but it wasn't very audible. He was screaming and the police officers were screaming at the same time. Then I heard two shots very close together. 'Pop pop', just like that. The guy stopped and then he turned around and I noticed he had a massive silver knife in his hands. It was a very big blade. Easily 10 inches. Another shot was fired, and that is when he fell to the ground."

Prior to his imprisonment, Amman had shared an al-Qaeda magazine in a family WhatsApp group. He sent

beheading videos to his girlfriend, advising her to kill her parents, told her he had made a pledge to the Islamic State and said he planned to carry out acid attacks. He wrote in a notebook that his goals in life included dying as a martyr and going to paradise. Amman was arrested when police were told he had posted a video of a frequent pro-gay rights speaker at Hyde Park corner alongside a photo showing an image of a knife with two firearms on a Shahada flag, captioned "Armed and ready April 3."

Yesterday afternoon, the *Guardian* reported, "Sudesh Amman was placed under full surveillance on the day of his release from jail and within days prompted such concern from counter-terrorism officials that those tailing him were ordered to be armed."

The attack in Streatham comes less than three months after a similar incident on London Bridge on November 29. Usman Khan, released from prison on license in 2018 after serving a terror sentence, stabbed Jack Merritt and Saskia Jones to death and seriously injuring two other women. Khan was also wearing a fake suicide vest and was shot dead by police.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's new Conservative government has used the London Bridge attack as a pretext for its authoritarian agenda, announcing a raft of additional anti-terror legislation last month. Now, the events in Streatham are being used to justify a new round of draconian measures.

In a statement yesterday, Johnson said, "Following the awful events at Fishmongers' Hall [where Usman Khan began his attack], we have moved quickly to introduce a package of measures to strengthen every element of our response to terrorism—including longer prison sentences and more money for the police.

"Tomorrow, we will announce further plans for fundamental changes to the system for dealing with

those convicted of terrorism offences.” On government de-radicalization programmes, he said, “the instances of success are really very few and we need to be frank about that.”

Home Secretary Priti Patel has also promised “fundamental changes” to the procedure for releasing convicted terrorists.

Lord Carlile, a prominent defender of MI5 and supporter of the “Snoopers’ Charter” surveillance Act, has called for the reintroduction of “control orders as we had pre-2011.” Introduced under 2005 anti-terror legislation, these orders were scrapped following a campaign by civil liberties groups.

On Monday, Justice Secretary Robert Buckland announced emergency legislation to end the automatic release of terrorist offenders, to apply retrospectively to serving prisoners, saying “given the exceptional nature of the terrorist cohort, exceptional approaches are needed.”

Over the next few days, government ministers and their mouthpieces in the press will seek to generate as much hysteria as possible, exploiting legitimate revulsion at Amman’s actions, to prevent any critical thought about Sunday’s events and what they represent. No one will seriously raise, let alone answer, the question of why a couple of hundred (to use the number of those currently imprisoned on terrorism charges) people, mainly young men, are eager to die in the course of a murderous rampage in the name of a medieval ideology.

Instead, Amman’s sudden attack, carried out under close state surveillance—media reports today have confirmed he was on the UK’s terror watch list—will be used as an example to “prove” that there is no safe point at which those convicted of terrorism charges can be released. The *Daily Telegraph* is already referring to “demands for all terrorists who have been released early to be recalled.”

The logical endpoint of this right-wing law and order response is to lock all terrorist convicts in a deep hole and throw away the key. Nothing positive will come for the masses of the population from demanding strengthened security forces to combat—either through heavier sentencing, state spying or censorship—a tiny, ideologically driven minority in society who increasingly act as “lone wolves.”

The working class must take its own, opposed stand.

The democratic rights of all cannot survive the law-and-order response of the ruling class to symptoms of terrorist violence. Nor will future attacks be averted while its causes are left unaddressed and exacerbated by discriminatory legislation. The only outcome achieved by repressive measures is to divert attention from the real roots of terrorism in imperialist war and occupation, while preparing for the suppression of a mass struggle against capitalism and war.

For all the cries of “shame!” and “apologist!” in the corporate media whenever blowback from the actions of British militarism abroad is mentioned, the roots of terrorist groups and their connection to the predatory intrigues of the major powers, are widely known in the population.

Western imperialism obliterates whole societies in its pursuit of geostrategic domination in the Middle East and Africa. It works with factions of the local elites to savagely suppress any popular opposition and foments sectarian divisions. Its intelligence agencies and special forces fund and organise reactionary jihadist militias to carry out their dirty work, turning them into leading political players. ISIS, emerging from the swamp of US-led regime change operations in Iraq and Syria, like al-Qaeda in Afghanistan before it, is the Frankenstein’s monster of these interventions.

Its reactionary propaganda then finds fertile soil in the minds of disturbed individuals who feel their communities and their religion are targeted by discriminatory, anti-democratic counterterror schemes like Prevent and the Islamophobic rants of sections of the press and political establishment.

So long as this situation persists terror attacks will continue. While its architects are kept safe by state and private security teams, the working class is made to suffer the consequences in the form of both terrorist atrocities and repressive laws. The only way out is not through the lawmakers and enforcers of the ruling class, but through a struggle against British and world imperialism waged by the international working class.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)