

Six people stabbed in New Zealand terror attack

Tom Peters
3 September 2021

A man was shot dead by police yesterday after carrying out a horrific stabbing attack in a Countdown supermarket in LynnMall in Auckland, New Zealand's biggest city. Six people were hospitalised with stab wounds and three are in critical condition.

Auckland is currently under a strict lockdown, following an outbreak of the Delta variant of COVID-19, but many people were reportedly shopping at the supermarket or waiting for vaccinations at the nearby pharmacy.

The attack began without warning around 2:40 p.m. and unfolded in the space of about 2–3 minutes, before the man was shot. Videos posted to social media showed terrified groups of people running out of the mall and screaming. Others shut themselves in a room inside the pharmacy.

“People were panicking, everyone was calling their families, calling the police,” one witness told Radio NZ. A woman told Newshub the man yelled “Allahu Akbar” before stabbing two women in front of her. “I just realised, ‘Oh my god, I have to run.’ It was chaos, people started screaming,” she said.

In a press conference, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern described what happened as a “terrorist attack” by a man with “ISIS-inspired” extremist views. He was a 32-year-old Sri Lankan national, who arrived in New Zealand in October 2011 and “became a person of national security interest from 2016,” she said.

Police Commissioner Andrew Coster said they were concerned about the man's ideology and he was under 24-hour surveillance. The man obtained a knife inside the supermarket, he said. When the attack started, armed police officers, who had followed him into the supermarket, intervened. “When he approached them with the knife, he was shot and killed,” Coster said. The man had acted alone.

Many questions remain about the attack. Ardern said she was limited in what she could say by previous court orders relating to the perpetrator. A court last night ruled that the man's name could be published, which is likely to happen later today.

Coster told the media he expected there would be “questions about whether police could have done more” to prevent the attack. He said officers had “intervened as quickly as they could.”

The *New Zealand Herald* reported that the man had been “previously arrested for allegedly planning a ‘lone wolf’ knife attack.” He “was considered a threat to public safety after twice buying large hunting knives and possessing Islamic State videos.” He had also searched online for instructions about bomb-making.

He first came to police attention in 2016 after making Facebook comments showing “support for ISIS terrorists involved in the Paris attacks in November 2015 and the Brussels bombing in March 2016.” He was arrested after attempting to leave the country in May 2017, allegedly to join ISIS fighters in Syria. He was held in custody for more than a year, and denied bail, before pleading guilty to charges of restricted material. He was released in August 2018 on a supervision order.

In July this year, the man was again sentenced for possession of objectionable ISIS propaganda materials, this time to 12 months' supervision in the community. He was also facing charges for an alleged attack on a prison guard, while he was held on remand in Mount Eden Prison last year.

The fact that the attacker was under constant monitoring, follows an established pattern. Individuals who took part in the Paris and Brussels terror attacks, and numerous others in Europe and the United States, were already known to intelligence agencies and the

police, which failed to stop them. Invariably, these attacks have been used by governments to justify increased funding and more sweeping powers for these agencies.

Islamic State (ISIS) is itself the product of US and European imperialist interventions, which were supported by New Zealand and Australia. In the Libyan war in 2011, NATO relied on jihadist militias to overthrow the government of Muammar Gaddafi; similar forces were then funded and armed by the US and its allies for the disastrous war against the Assad regime in Syria. Many militia members subsequently joined ISIS, which invaded large parts of Iraq and Syria, and has spread into Afghanistan and elsewhere.

The LynnMall attack comes two-and-a-half years after NZ's worst mass shooting, in which fascist terrorist Brenton Tarrant massacred 51 people at two mosques in Christchurch. That massacre was followed by a royal commission of inquiry, which whitewashed the role of successive Labour Party and National Party governments in whipping up anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments—including through their participation in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The royal commission claimed that Tarrant acted alone and could not have been stopped. In fact, Tarrant was active in far-right forums online, and had links with such groups internationally. He had previously been reported to police in Australia, after sending a death threat on social media. A member of the gun club where he trained in New Zealand said he had informed police about violent and anti-Muslim language used by members of the club. Yet police in both countries claimed to have no prior knowledge of the gunman.

Since the March 15, 2019 attack, the Labour government has poured more resources into the spy agencies and introduced legislation to expand the state's powers to censor material posted online. New "anti-terror" laws were passed to expand the ability to spy on individuals, including those who have not been charged with anything.

The Auckland attack, like the Christchurch attack, is already being used to demand tougher laws. Ardern said the authorities had not been able to imprison the attacker because "we haven't succeeded in using the law to the extent we would have liked."

Commentators have pointed to a "loophole" in the existing law, which means someone cannot be charged

under the Terrorism Suppression Act for planning an attack. The Counter Terrorism Legislation Bill currently before parliament would expand the offences that can be categorised as a terrorist act, but Ardern said it was "speculative" to say whether the proposed law would have made a difference in this case.

Auckland's Labour Party mayor Phil Goff complained to Newstalk ZB yesterday that "there was an absence of ability under the law" to imprison the perpetrator "for what he might have been thinking about doing but hadn't done." He also declared that the man "undoubtedly would have expressed the sort of views that might be encompassed by hate speech laws, but at the moment you can't do anything about that." The government is seeking to introduce hate speech legislation, which could easily be used to attack basic rights to freedom of speech, including left-wing and socialist voices.



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