

Suspected shooter arrested on attempted murder charges in shooting of three Palestinian college students in Vermont

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27 November 2023

On Monday, Jason J. Eaton, 48, was arraigned on multiple charges of attempted murder in the shooting of three Palestinian college students in Burlington, Vermont, on Saturday evening. Eaton is currently being held without bond after entering three not guilty pleas Monday. If convicted on any of the three second-degree murder charges Eaton faces, he could be sentenced anywhere from 20 years to life in prison.

As of Monday, all three victims of Saturday's shooting—Hisham Awartani, Kinnan Abdalhamid and Tahseen Aliahmad—are recovering from gunshot wounds at the Vermont Medical Center.

Awartani is an undergraduate at Brown University, Abdalhamid, Haverford College, and Aliahmad is a student at Trinity College. Two of the three students are American citizens, while the other is a legal resident. All of them went to a Quaker high school together in Ramallah, Palestine, in the occupied West Bank, and spent many years living and visiting family in the United States.

At a press conference Monday morning, Burlington Police Chief Jon Murad confirmed that Awartani, Abdalhamid and Aliahmad were simply walking down the sidewalk at around 6:30 p.m. Saturday night in Burlington.

According to police and statements from the victims' families, the three 20 year olds were talking among themselves in a mix of Arabic and English while on their way to a family dinner when the suspected shooter, without saying a word, began firing a .380 Ruger semi-automatic pistol at them. Two of the three students, who were visiting family for the Thanksgiving holiday, were wearing black and white keffiyehs when they were shot.

After being shot, one of the victims was able to call police, as did neighbors who heard the gunfire. Several

residents tended to the wounded students, providing blankets and first aid, before emergency services arrived, according to police.

Rich Price, the uncle of Awartani, confirmed in Monday's press conference that his nephew suffered a spinal injury after being shot in the back and faces a "long recovery." Price confirmed that Abdalhamid will make a "full and speedy recovery" while Aliahmad remained in "a lot of pain."

Chief Murad said the .380 Ruger semi-automatic pistol used in the shooting was legally purchased earlier this year by Eaton. Murad added that shell casings found at the scene of the shooting matched the same type of bullets police recovered in Eaton's apartment, along with the pistol. Murad reported that federal Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) agents also recovered a shotgun inside Eaton's apartment, which is located across the street from where the shooting took place.

According to Murad, police arrested Eaton following a Sunday afternoon sweep of the apartment complex by ATF agents. Murad said that when agents knocked on Eaton's door he quickly gave himself up, telling the police, "I've been waiting for you," and "I would like a lawyer."

In addition to recovering a shotgun, pistol and ammunition at Eaton's apartment, Murad said police are combing through computers and hard drives seized during the search. Murad said police have yet to confirm a motive and whether or not Saturday's shooting was a "hate crime" or motivated based on the identity of students. He added that he was "confident the physical evidence" confirming Eaton was the shooter "is very strong."

Murad said that Eaton was a recent arrival to Burlington and had previously lived in Syracuse, New York.

According to his LinkedIn account, Eaton most recently worked as a “sales assistant” at CUSO Financial Services in Williston, Vermont. CUSO is headquartered in San Diego, California, but has offices throughout the country.

“Jason Eaton worked less than a year at CUSO Financial and his employment had been terminated on November 8, 2023. We are horrified by the shooting and are cooperating with law enforcement as they investigate. We have no further comment,” a spokeswoman for CUSO told NBC News.

Eaton listed previous employments at major financial firms such as TD Ameritrade (April 2019–March 2021) and Edward Jones (June 2018–February 2019). Among topics the former financial consultant liked to discuss were “social entrepreneur[ship]” and “organic agriculture.” A web page maintained by Eaton uses similar phrases, including “radical citizen” repeatedly, and features podcasts of Eaton giving investment advice.

On his LinkedIn account, two of Eaton’s four public posts express skepticism towards the danger of COVID-19 while urging non-compliance with the Moderna vaccine, comparing the latter to a large-scale Milgram experiment.

A review of his locked X/Twitter account by *Vice News* reporter Tess Owens uncovered more of Eaton’s right-wing and libertarian politics. On the account, Eaton’s banner image features an AR-15 rifle and marijuana leaves with the phrase, “Libertarians want trans furrys to be able to protect their cannabis farms with unregistered machine guns.”

In his X biography, Eaton describes himself as a “Radical citizen pa-trolling democracy and crapitalism for oathcreepers. #wildtype.” It is unclear as of this writing if Eaton had any relationship with the Oath Keepers militia group. Several members of the fascist militia, including its founder Stewart Rhodes, have been convicted of seditious conspiracy as part of former President Donald Trump’s failed coup.

Owens noted that in an archived Twitter account Eaton described himself as a “Libertarian” and that his posts “are mainly filled with criticisms of the IRS.”

While police have yet to establish a motive, the conditions for such an attack have been stoked by Democratic and Republican politicians, starting with President Joe Biden. While fully backing Israel militarily, politically and economically, as it commits its ongoing ethnic cleansing campaign in Gaza, Biden and virtually every other politician from both big business parties have spent the last month and half demonizing anti-genocide

protesters as “antisemitic” and supporters of Hamas.

Biden himself has downplayed the civilian death toll in Gaza while at the same time stoking hatred against the Palestinian people by spreading lurid Israeli war propaganda. In an article published this past Sunday in the *Washington Post*, titled “White House grapples with internal divisions on Israel-Gaza,” the *Post* revealed that prior to giving an October 10 press conference, in which Biden falsely claimed to have “seen pictures” of babies beheaded by Hamas, Biden had rejected demands from his staff that he excise those claims because “those reports were unverified.”

Pointing to the central role of the Biden and the US government in Saturday’s shooting, a joint statement released by the victims’ families following Eaton’s arrest read in part: “As parents of Palestinian children, we fear for the safety of our families as US media and even elected officials from the highest levels of the government have repeated racist and dehumanizing language in recent weeks, contributing to an environment of heightened racism and violence towards Palestinians and Arabs. This hateful rhetoric emboldens people to act with violence.”

Responding to Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, who has refused to publicly endorse a ceasefire and issued a pathetic statement on the shooting this past weekend, a relative of Awartani wrote to Sanders on X:

“You are the instigator of the hate that murdered my husband’s family in Gaza and the hate that tried to murder my cousin’s cousin in the state that you represent. Hisham may never walk again and his mom can’t be with him till later this week. Blood is on your hands.”



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