Krakow: Far-right extremist shoots six bystanders and murders his own family

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On Saturday afternoon, Micha? O. drove his car onto the Main Market Square in Kraków and opened fire indiscriminately on civilians from inside the vehicle. According to the latest information, he killed six people, including one British citizen, and injured another 16, some of them critically. Among the injured were two police officers who managed to arrest him after a car chase and a brief exchange of gunfire. The authorities appealed for blood donations.

The 24-year-old Polish attacker was also seriously injured and remains in hospital. He was wearing military camouflage clothing, a helmet and a protective vest and "used a military-style rifle," according to the Krakow police spokesperson. The weapon was apparently a semi-automatic AR-15 assault rifle, for which the perpetrator held an official firearms licence. Additional weapons and ammunition were found in his vehicle. According to Defence Minister W?adys?aw Kosiniak-Kamysz, the attacker was not a member of the Polish armed forces.

At the attacker's home in Ostrowiec ?wi?tokrzyski, approximately two hours' drive to the north, police later discovered the bodies of his parents and sister. According to local authorities, they died on Saturday morning. All three bodies had gunshot wounds. Like his father, the perpetrator was a sport shooter, and the family owned several firearms, a fact known in the neighbourhood. The family had lived in the rented house for more than ten years and was regarded as an ordinary, friendly family. Micha? himself was considered quiet and withdrawn, but nevertheless helpful.

According to Interior Minister Marcin Kierwinski, the perpetrator is believed to have held "very radical views." Investigators found "indications that he espoused a far-right ideology" in the apartment. Whether and how this was connected to the crime remains unclear. What is clear, at the very least, is that his martial combat gear suggests roots in a militaristic, gun-oriented culture. At the same time, contradictory claims are circulating on social media about his alleged sympathies for Russia or Ukraine, for fascists or for the LGBTQ movement.

On Sunday, prosecutor Tomasz Waszczuk, spokesperson for the Krakow District Prosecutor's Office investigating the case, announced that the attack was being classified as an act of terrorism. President Karol Nawrocki has declared two days of national mourning. The attack in Poland's second-largest city took place shortly before Independence Day on November 11.

Although the circumstances surrounding the crime remain unclear, it is certainly the largest attack since the restoration of capitalism in 1990. In recent decades, Poland has experienced neither major mass shootings nor terrorist attacks of the kind that have tragically become commonplace in other countries. Poland's crime rate is comparatively low, and its homicide rate per capita is below the EU average.

Right-wing politicians have repeatedly cited this as evidence of the success of strict laws and restrictive immigration policies. In fact, however, the only attack that caused a shock comparable to the latest incident was the assassination of the liberal mayor of Gda?sk in 2019. Paul Adamowicz was stabbed to death on stage during a charity concert by a 28-year-old supporter of the Law and Justice party (PiS). Adamowicz was one of the fiercest critics of the then PiS government.

Violent attacks in Polish schools have been rare and, due to strict gun laws, have generally involved blunt-force injuries and stabbings. But this appears to be becoming a thing of the past.

One indication is the increase in firearms licences by 50,000 to 411,000 in 2025 alone. Violence is rising particularly in schools. At the beginning of October, a corresponding wave of violence shook Poland's schools. Wi

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thin three days, one person was murdered and around t wo dozen injured. The nervousness of the authorities w as evident in their decision to conduct bag searches at more than 80,000 schools within just a few days and arr est 135 people, particularly over threats made online.

Behind such individual incidents lie more fundamenta l social developments. In 2023, following mass shootin gs in California, the WSWS wrote: “Mass shootings, ho wever, cannot simply be explained by individual motiv es. Mass violence is a social phenomenon and therefore also requires an understanding of social issues.”

In Poland, alongside sharply intensifying class conflic ts, a nationalist hysteria over alleged threats is particula rly prominent. The country plays a leading role in NAT O’s war against Russia, and longstanding anti-Russian resentments have been systematically intensified since t he beginning of the war. They go hand in hand with a military buildup supported across party lines.

Military spending is rising year after year and currentl y stands at 4.8 percent of GDP, or around €48 billion. While Poland now maintains the largest land army in th e EU, the role of the Territorial Defence Forces (WOT), Poland’s National Guard, has also been steadily expan ded. Military education in schools, including firearms tr aining, is intended to indoctrinate children in a militaris tic spirit from an early age.

As the army increasingly assumes police functions—as it does on the EU’s external border with Belarus—ever y soldier is portrayed as a national hero whose actions a re considered beyond reproach, despite regular reports of human rights violations. When acclaimed director A gnieszka Holland denounced conditions at the border in her film Green Border(Zielona Granica), she became t he target of a campaign of vilification.

Recent events have repeatedly demonstrated just how poisoned the political atmosphere has become. For exa mple, Bartosz T. Wieli?ski, deputy editor-in-chief of G azeta Wyborcza, made the absurd suggestion in a com mentary that a “large-scale Russian operation to influen ce young people” was behind the violence in schools.

The conflict over Poland’s Constitutional Tribunal be tween the government of Donald Tusk and PiS-aligned President Karol Nawrocki has also escalated in recent d ays. After Nawrocki refused to swear in newly elected c onstitutional judges chosen by parliament, and the court ’s PiS-appointed president, Bogdan ?wi?czkowski, den ied them access to the court, ?wi?czkowski was suspen ded and a female judge close to Tusk’s camp assumed t emporary leadership of the court.

Far-right extremists besieged the court, while Nawroc ki cut short a foreign trip and gained access to the seale d-off court building after midnight. During the incident, the former amateur boxer became involved in a physic al altercation with one of the newly appointed female ju dges.

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