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Truck attack kills eight in New York City

By Josh Varlin

1 November 2017

In an apparent terrorist attack, a 29-year-old man drove a truck down a bicycle path in Lower Manhattan Tuesday afternoon, killing eight and wounding at least 11 people, as of this writing. Law enforcement identified Sayfullo Habibullaevic Saipov, an Uzbek national who came to the United States in 2010, as the driver of the truck.

According to New York City Police Commissioner James P. O'Neill, Saipov drove a rented Home Depot pickup truck some 20 blocks down a bicycle path along the Hudson River just after 3 p.m., hitting pedestrians and bicyclists. He then crashed the truck into a school bus at the intersection of Chambers Street and the West Side Highway, injuring four additional people, including two children.

According to O'Neill, Saipov then exited the truck with a paintball gun and a pellet gun, prompting a New York Police Department officer to shoot him. Saipov is currently in a local hospital. Federal officials are reportedly taking over the investigation into the incident.

Early reports of the attack indicated that there was an active shooter situation after the collision with the school bus, but only the police officer on the scene had a real gun.

Journalists and eyewitnesses reported seeing mangled bicycles and covered bodies on the scene. The 11 injured people reportedly suffered “injuries that were described as serious but not life-threatening,” according to CBS News.

According to NJ.com, “Police surrounded a mosque and surrounding garden apartments in Paterson [New Jersey] Tuesday evening.”

Beyond Saipov’s status as an immigrant from Uzbekistan, a former Soviet Republic in Central Asia, little is known of the suspected attacker. NJ.com interviewed one of Saipov’s neighbors in Paterson, who said that Saipov had just moved there for a few months. The neighbor said that he saw Saipov occasionally with the latter’s wife and children around town, including at the local mosque.

It is not clear how religious Saipov was. “Omar Khan, a 17-year-old who said he prays at the mosque five times a day, said he did not remember seeing Saipov,” reports NJ.com.

Saipov seems to have moved extensively since arriving in the United States in 2010. His van carried Florida plates, and ABC News said that multiple law enforcement officials identified him as hailing from Tampa, Florida.

The *Cincinnati Enquirer* reports that in 2011 Saipov incorporated a business in a suburb of Cincinnati, Ohio and also listed Stow, Ohio as a previous address. When stopped by police in 2012 and 2015 (both times in Pennsylvania), he gave a Paterson, New Jersey address.

According to anonymous statements from law enforcement, Saipov shouted “Allahu ackbar,” which means “God is great” in Arabic, during the attack. The phrase is often shouted during acts of Islamist-inspired terror. Before the mechanism of the attack was clear, the reported phrase and Saipov’s immigration status were made the center of media coverage and politicians’ responses.

Two hours after the attack, and before any investigation had taken place, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio labeled it an “act of terror” and encouraged vigilance. “Be vigilant and know that there will be extensive additional employments of NYPD officers this evening and throughout the days ahead.”

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo echoed de Blasio’s remarks, calling the attack an example of “lone wolves who commit an act of terror” and saying that there is currently “no evidence to suggest a wider plot or a wider scheme.”

Cuomo then struck a particularly law-and-order tone: “We will be vigilant—more police everywhere, you’ll see them in the airports, you’ll see them in the tunnels. It’s not because there’s any evidence of any ongoing threat or any additional threat, it is just out of vigilance and out of caution.”

He then said that “New York is an international symbol of freedom and democracy,” which “makes us a target for those people who oppose those concepts.” Cuomo’s answer to this is the further militarization of the city.

President Donald Trump, who used every alleged Islamist terrorist act during the 2016 election campaign to demonize Muslims and stoke his far-right base, continued this pattern after Tuesday's events. "We must not allow ISIS to return, or enter, our country after defeating them in the Middle East and elsewhere. Enough!" the president tweeted a few hours after the attack. Trump subsequently tweeted that he had ordered the Department of Homeland Security to "step up our already Extreme Vetting Program. Being politically correct is fine, but not for this!"

While police reportedly found a note in the truck claiming that the attack had been carried out in the name of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), no direct link between Tuesday's events and ISIS has been established.

The president's response appears to put Uzbekistan and its population on notice that they could be the next target of US intervention or "assistance" as in Niger, while also dovetailing with Trump's reactionary efforts to ban Muslims from entering the US.

New York City's annual Halloween parade Tuesday night was the scene of additional militarization, with the attack serving as a pretext for a massive police deployment. NYPD Chief of Department Carlos Gomez told a news conference: "We will proceed with the parade and certainly we've added more resources, more police officers, heavy weapons teams, blocker vehicles on the street leading to the route as well as more sand truck[s]. There's also heavy weapons teams being deployed throughout the city at key, iconic locations."

Eric Philips, de Blasio's press secretary, tweeted, "The Halloween Parade will go on, with NYPD dramatically increasing presence (personnel, blocker trucks, long guns etc)."

Tuesday's attack was similar to previous attacks using trucks, including one in Nice, France in July 2016 and one on a Berlin Christmas market in December 2016, which have been used to justify the deportation of refugees and the curtailment of democratic rights. Recent investigations indicate that the latter may have been instigated by an undercover agent for the North Rhine-Westphalia State Criminal Bureau.