



NY Mourns, Tightened Security, After Bike Path Rampage

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Authorities in New York are trying to determine what led the driver of a rented pickup truck to mow down people on a busy bike path Tuesday in the deadliest terrorist incident in the city since the World Trade Center attacks on September 11, 2001.

At least eight people were killed and 11 others injured in what New York Mayor Bill de Blasio called "a particularly cowardly act of terror aimed at innocent civilians."

New York Police Commissioner James O'Neill said around 3:05 p.m. local time, a man driving a rented commercial pickup truck entered the bike path, striking riders and pedestrians. The truck also struck a school bus, injuring two adults and two children.

The man then "exited the vehicle brandishing two handguns," O'Neill said. A paintball gun and a pellet gun were later found at the scene. The suspect was shot in the abdomen by police and taken into custody.

Law enforcement officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, told media outlets the suspect was a 29-year-old immigrant from Uzbekistan named Sayfullo Saipov, who entered the United States in 2010. He underwent surgery and is expected to survive.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo told CNN he believes the suspect was "radicalized domestically." News reports indicate a note was found at the scene referencing Islamic State.

In a tweet Wednesday morning, President Donald Trump said, "The terrorist came into our country through what is called the 'Diversity Visa Lottery Program,' a Chuck Schumer beauty. I want merit based."

Tuesday night, Trump said he ordered "Homeland Security to step up our already Extreme Vetting Program. Being politically correct is fine, but not for this!"

There has been no official claim of responsibility from IS, but Greg Barton, a professor of global Islamic politics at Deakin University in Australia, said it seems as if the attacker was inspired by the terror group.

"Islamic State doesn't claim attacks when the attacker is held in custody and so they probably won't claim this one," Barton told VOA. "But there's no question that we've seen many attempted attacks in New York and there will be more attempts in the future."

Uzbek reaction

Uzbekistan's president, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, said Wednesday the attack was ruthless and cruel, and that his government stood ready to use all means to assist in the investigation.

"We express our feelings of full solidarity to the people of the United States of America," Mirziyoyev said in a statement posted on the Uzbekistan Foreign Ministry website.

"We strongly condemn the terror truck attack on the innocent civilians in New York City. Our deepest sympathy and condolences to the families who lost their loved ones," said the Turkistanian American Association of New York and New Jersey, on behalf of the Uzbek community, in a statement sent by email to the Voice of America.

The Cato Institute told VOA only about 40,000 Uzbeks have entered the United States as migrants in the last 20 years, and that of those, only 2 percent arrived as refugees.

David Bier, a policy analyst at the Washington-based research institution, said he believed this is the first time an Uzbek national has killed anyone on U.S. soil in a terrorist attack.

Witnesses describe chaos

For some witnesses, the chaos was reminiscent of images of deadly attacks from across Europe.

"It always seems really distant but then when it's right next to you, obviously it's really shocking and disturbing, and you don't want it to happen to anybody," said Elizabeth Chernobelsky, who witnessed the crime scene.

This undated photo provided by St. Charles County Department of Corrections via KMOV shows Sayfullo Saipov.

Others were left in disbelief. College student Jake Saunders, who barely missed a train at a crucial moment, told VOA he considers himself lucky.

"If I had made that train, I would be right where the shooting is, right there, because that was my destination," Saunders said.

Police said the driver shouted "Allahu Akbar," Arabic for "God is great," when he got out of the truck. But when O'Neill was asked whether the suspect shouted the phrase, he replied: "Yeah. He did make a statement when he exited the vehicle," though he declined to elaborate.

The New York Police Department said they will increase the number of officers throughout the city "out of an abundance of caution."