

MASS SHOOTING IN LAS VEGAS

Why he did it?

Police hunt for motive; assailant amassed arsenal of 42 weapons

REUTERS, Las Vegas Police yesterday sought clues to explain why a retiree who enjoyed gambling but had no criminal record set up a vantage point in a high-rise Las Vegas hotel and poured gunfire onto a concert below, slaying dozens of people before killing himself.

The Sunday night shooting spree from a 32nd-floor window of the Mandalay Bay hotel, on the Las Vegas Strip, killed at least 59 people before the gunman turned a weapon on himself. More than 500 people were injured, some trampled, in the deadliest mass shooting in modern US history.

The gunman, identified as Stephen Paddock, 64, left no immediate hint of his motive for the arsenal of high-powered weaponry he amassed, including 42 guns, or the carnage he inflicted on a crowd of 22,000 attending an outdoor country music festival.

"He was a sick man, a demented man," US President Donald Trump told reporters. "Lot of problems, I guess, and we're looking into him very, very seriously, but we're dealing with a very, very sick individual."

He declined to answer a question about whether he considered the attack an act of domestic terrorism. US officials also discounted a claim of responsibility by the Islamic State militant group.

Police said they believed Paddock acted alone.



A woman lights candles at a vigil on the Las Vegas strip following a mass shooting at the Route 91 Harvest Country Music Festival in Las Vegas, Nevada, US, on Monday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

The Vegas mass shooter A retired accountant, heavy gambler whose father was on FBI's most wanted list

AFP, Las Vegas

Stephen Craig Paddock, the retired accountant who smuggled an arsenal into a swank Las Vegas hotel and mowed down concertgoers from a 32nd story window, was a high-stakes gambler whose bank-robber father was once on the FBI's most wanted list.

The 64-year-old had a home with his girlfriend in a tranquil golf course retirement community in Mesquite, Nevada, 80 miles northeast of the US gambling capital, and regularly sent cookies to his 90-year-old mother in Florida.

According to his younger brother Eric Paddock, he showed no sign he was poised to commit one of the worst mass murders in American history.

The IS group claimed Paddock was one of its "soldiers," converting to Islam in recent months and carrying out the attack in its name. IS gave him a jihadist nom de guerre, Abu Abdel Bar al-Amriki -- "The American."

But the FBI said they saw "no connection" between Paddock and international

terror groups. "He had nothing to do with any political organization, religious organization, no white supremacists, nothing, as far as I know. And I've only known him for 57 years," Eric Paddock said outside his Orlando, Florida home.

According to Eric, his brother was financially well-off, and had no criminal record. He owned two houses in Mesquite and Reno of Nevada. Neighbors in Mesquite and Reno called him quiet, but mostly keeping to himself.

The brothers grew up in a broken home. Their father, Benjamin Hoskins Paddock, was a violent bank robber jailed in the early 1960s for a series of heists. He escaped prison in 1968, landing on the FBI's "10 most wanted" list. But Eric stressed that his brother gave no signs other than being completely normal, doting on their mother.

"The last time she talked to him, no indication of anything. We're trying to understand what happened," his brother said. "We're lost."



Stephen Paddock



Benjamin Paddock

Palestinians edge closer to unity

Cabinet meets in Gaza; Israel furious

AFP, Gaza City

The Palestinian cabinet met in Gaza for the first time since 2014 yesterday, as Israel warned it would reject any reconciliation deal between the Palestinian factions unless Islamists Hamas disarm.

The meeting comes as part of moves to end a decade-long split between the internationally recognised Palestinian Authority, based in the occupied West Bank, and Hamas, which runs the Gaza Strip.

The return of the PA to Gaza had been cautiously welcomed by the United States and the United Nations, but Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said it could be a "bogus" reconciliation "at the expense of our existence".

Hamas has controlled Gaza since seizing it from the PA in a near civil war in 2007, and since then multiple reconciliation attempts have failed. But following Egyptian pressure the Islamists announced last month they were willing to hand over civilian control to the PA, which is dominated by Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas's Fatah movement.

Tuesday's cabinet meeting was the first in Gaza since November 2014, and comes a day after Palestinian prime minister Rami Hamdallah entered the territory for the first time since a unity government collapsed in June 2015.

Egypt has brokered the rapprochement between the two sides. The sides will hold further talks in Cairo later yesterday.

India's PM is a terrorist

Says Pakistan FM TNN, New Delhi

The war of words between India and Pakistan has taken an ugly turn with the latter's foreign minister calling Prime Minister Narendra Modi a "terrorist".

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Khawaja Asif was responding to Union Minister Sushma Swaraj's recent comment at the UN that his country is a "pre-eminent export factory for terror."

Asif hit back at India in an interview on Monday with Pakistan's Geo TV.

"At the (UN) General Assembly, Sushma Swaraj accused us of exporting terror, while in fact, it is a terrorist who is Prime Minister of her country, his (the PM's) hands have the blood of murdered Muslims in Gujarat," said Asif.

"A terrorist party is ruling India, the RSS rules India," added Asif.

However, just last week, Asif himself admitted that allowing terrorists like Mumbai attacks mastermind Hafiz Saeed operate in the country with impunity is a "liability" for Pakistan.

"Saeed, LeT, they are a liability, I accept it, but give us time to get rid of them, we don't have the assets to deal with these liabilities," said Asif at the Asia Society in New York.

He also laid the blame for the creation of people like Saeed, on the US. "Don't blame us for Saeed, these people were your darlings 20 years ago, they were being dined and wined in the White House. Now you say go to hell, Pakistan," said Asif.

Pakistan has been at the receiving end of a lot of international censure lately. After US President Donald Trump savaged Pakistan in August for providing "safe havens to agents of chaos, violence and terror", several other countries did the same.



(From right, clockwise) People take part in a demonstration two days after the banned independence referendum in Barcelona, yesterday; Catalan regional police officers walk through a street covered with ballots; and Catalan firefighters take part in a regional strike called to protest against police actions during the Sunday's independence referendum.

PHOTO: REUTERS



'Occupation forces' out Striking Catalans rally in fury over independence polls violence as Madrid accuses regional authorities of 'inciting rebellion'

AFP, Barcelona

Several hundred thousand Catalans yesterday rallied in fury at police violence against voters during a banned independence referendum, as Madrid accused regional authorities of "inciting rebellion".

Crowds yelled for national security forces to get out of the region, branding them "occupation forces", as the national government's standoff with the region dragged Spain deeper into its worst political crisis since emerging from dictatorship in 1977.

Demonstrators including students and young families filled the streets in the regional capital Barcelona waving red- and yellow-striped Catalan flags.

"Closed for revolution," read one banner in the crowd. Barcelona football club refused to train as part of an accompanying strike, which officials said slowed down public transport and freight shipments

in the port of Barcelona.

"On October 1 we became an occupied country, and they still have not left," said one protester in Barcelona, 56-year-old schoolteacher Antonia Maria Maura, referring to the police



sent to prevent Sunday's vote.

Pictures of police beating unarmed Catalan voters with batons and dragging some by the hair during Sunday's ballots drew international criticism.

Catalan regional leader Carles Puigdemont said nearly 900 people had received medical attention on Sunday.

But tensions rose further overnight as Catalans defied the Spanish government's vows to keep Catalonia as one of Spain's regions.

The government of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy held emergency talks after Puigdemont declared Sunday that Catalonia had "won the right to an independent state".

European Commission spokesman Margaritis Schinas warned Monday that "violence can never be an instrument in politics".

Spain's national government and courts have ruled the independence referendum illegal and Madrid blames the Catalan authorities for the tensions. "We see how day after day the government of Catalonia is pushing the population to the abyss and inciting rebellion in the streets," Spain's Interior Minister Juan Ignacio Zoido said on Tuesday.

He said his government would take "all measures necessary to stop acts of harassment".

MYSTERIOUS ATTACKS ON DIPLOMATS 15 Cuba diplomats expelled from US

AFP, Washington

The United States yesterday ordered the expulsion of 15 Cuban diplomats, accusing Havana of failing to protect US diplomats following a series of mysterious incidents in which embassy staff were sickened.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said, however, that US would continue to maintain diplomatic relations with Cuba even though the size of the US mission in Havana also would be reduced to a minimum.

"The decision was made due to Cuba's failure to take appropriate steps to protect our diplomats in accordance with its obligations under the Vienna Convention," he said in a statement.

"Until the government of Cuba can ensure the safety of our diplomats in Cuba, our embassy will be reduced to emergency personnel to minimize the number of diplomats at risk of exposure to harm," Tillerson said.

The attacks, initially described as emanating from some sort of automatic device, have affected at least 22 US embassy staff in Havana over the past few months. Those affected have exhibited physical symptoms including ear complaints, hearing loss, dizziness, headache, fatigue, cognitive issues, and difficulty sleeping.



ROHINGYA ATROCITIES Oxford strips Suu Kyi of honour

PTI, London

An honour bestowed on Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi by the city of Oxford has been withdrawn as a reaction to her perceived inadequate response to the plight of Rohingya Muslims in the country.

The 'Freedom of Oxford' had been granted to the de facto leader of Myanmar in 1997 for her "long struggle for democracy" by the Oxford City Council.

A cross-party motion was unanimously passed by the council on October 2 which said it was "no longer appropriate" for her to hold the honour.

Oxford City Council leader Bob Price supported the motion to remove her honour and confirmed it was an "unprecedented step" for the local authority.

The city council will hold a special meeting to confirm that the honour is removed on November 27.

Suu Kyi, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, has close links to the city of Oxford, having lived in Park Town with her family and earlier attended St Hugh's College from 1964 until 1967.

The city council's move comes days after her alma mater, St Hugh's, removed her portrait from the main college entrance.

While the exact reasons for the portrait's removal were attributed to a new replacement, there is a wider view that the allegations of ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya Muslims fleeing their homes to Bangladesh is likely to be behind the move.