

Family of San Diego man killed by police disputes official story of his death

By Kevin Martinez
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Fridoon Rawshan Nehad was a 42-year-old man originally from Afghanistan who struggled with post-traumatic stress from fighting in the civil war during the 1980s. He struggled with bipolar disorder and was having difficulty living with his family in California.

On April 30, San Diego police officer Neal Browder shot and killed Nehad after receiving complaints from an adult bookstore. A *Voice of San Diego* investigative report by Liam Dillon recently profiled Nehad's story and spoke with family members about the circumstances surrounding his death and its aftermath.

As with so many other cases of police brutality, officials claimed that Browder feared for his life and that Nehad was holding a knife, which later turned out to be a pen. Nehad's family sued the city of San Diego for \$20 million, saying Browder had used excessive and unreasonable force.

A man who saw surveillance video of the shooting from a near-by business says it was "unprovoked" and "shocking" in a signed statement as part of the family's legal complaint. Officer Browder failed to turn on his body camera and has since been put back to work.

The San Diego Police Department (SDPD) refused to hand over the footage to Nehad's family until they filed a federal lawsuit and even then ordered that the footage could not be made public. San Diego District Attorney Bonnie Dumanis recently declined to press charges against officer Browder, saying the case did not meet the high bar needed to convict an officer. Dumanis downplayed the existence of the video and said if anything it helped Browder's case.

Nehad's family, including his mother and sisters, and the family's attorney, have broken their silence and recently spoke to *Voice of San Diego* (VOSD) to

share their experiences and their efforts to get the truth from the San Diego police regarding Nehad's death. At the time of his death, Nehad was legally allowed to work in the United States and was applying for a green card.

Benazeer Roshan, Nehad's sister, told VOSD that her greatest fear was that he would be deported back to Afghanistan and killed because of his mental illness. "But never in America," she said.

Nehad was drafted into the Afghan army during the Soviet occupation of the 1980s. He was captured by one of the rebel mujahedeen groups and remarkably let go after his mother pleaded for his life. Although he never spoke of it, Nehad suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, presumably brought on by torture during his two months of captivity.

At age 18, Nehad made an escape to Pakistan before settling in Germany and eventually the United States in 2003. In recent times, Nehad suffered from paranoid outbursts directed at his family and threatened them on occasion. He would have manic episodes that would last for months and wander around the streets of San Diego.

Nehad had been jailed for burglary and convicted of battery and petty theft. His family put a restraining order on him in the days prior to the shooting but believed this would allow him access to a shelter.

When Nehad was killed by SDPD, the family was not given any explanation. Roshan told VOSD, "The one thing that they kept saying all along was, 'Well, with everything that's going on around the country we want to avoid a protest, we want to avoid a protest.' And we were like, 'Why are you worried about a protest? Tell us. You were the ones that took our brother's life. Tell us what's going on.' I remember saying, 'We need to know what happened. Was he holding a weapon?' And

they wouldn't tell me.”

She added, “Then the press release came out and it said that he was unarmed. Then the officer called me and he was apologetic. He said, ‘I’m really sorry.’ He used the F word. He said, ‘We completely F-ed up. I told you that I was going to give you the information before going to the media and unfortunately the people above my pay grade just went over and told the media that your brother wasn’t armed. That shouldn’t have happened.’ So I found out from the press release or the media coverage that he never had a weapon.”

On viewing the footage, Roshan said, “When you see the video, he’s just walking. He stops. And then all of a sudden, he gets hit. The only reason why you know he gets hit is because instantly he just is in so much pain that he flips over. His legs and his arms are flailing and he knows he’s dying and he’s in so much pain. It’s just haunts me. Every day. I just see that image.”

Roshan told VOSD, “I think that no person in the world, in the entire universe, can see that video and come to the conclusion that my brother was attacking a police officer. That’s the bottom line. You have to basically have a really good imagination to think that my brother was going to fly at you when he’s walking at a normal pace and he just gets shot down.”

As of this writing, SDPD has refused to release the video of the shooting, citing an “ongoing investigation.” Such moves reek of a cover-up and given the police violence across America, the last thing authorities want is San Diego to be spoken of in the same sentence as Ferguson or Baltimore.

Wesley Doyle, the employee of the business that owned the surveillance footage, also had a telling encounter with the SDPD. In a sworn statement filed in federal court, Doyle said that officer Browder “did not make any physical movement in an attempt to communicate with Fridoon, i.e., raise his hand indicating to stop. And Officer Browder did not use any other measures, such as a Taser, against Fridoon. He did not even get into a shooting stance. The shooting appeared to be unprovoked; Officer Browder appeared to shoot Fridoon hastily.”

Doyle told *Voice of San Diego*, “When you see the video, it’s obvious he was not doing anything threatening.” He added, “There’s a good reason why they don’t want this video to come out. It makes them

look really bad.”

After viewing the footage, Doyle contacted the offices of San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer, City Councilwoman Marti Emerald of the public safety committee, and Representative Scott Peters to tell them about the video. Not one city official called back, but Doyle was visited by two detectives from the SDPD at his work, unannounced.

Doyle told VOSD that the detectives were aggressive and threatening, saying, “Why are they interviewing a guy who saw a video when they themselves have the video?”

Nehad’s story is especially tragic given his painful odyssey from the killing fields in Afghanistan, a country that has been devastated by US imperialism, to America where police are given a license to kill.

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