

French government exploits Islamist murder of Hervé Gourdel to expand Iraq war

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The barbaric assassination on September 24 of 55-year-old French alpinist Hervé Gourdel in Algeria by group loyal to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) was the occasion for the French government and media to step up its campaign for war in the Middle East.

Gourdel was trekking in the Kabylie region of Algeria and taken hostage by the ISIS-linked Jund Al-Khalifa group. The gruesome murder is now being used to fan a media campaign of hysterical calls for war and law-and-order, as the Socialist Party (PS) government seeks to step up its military intervention in Iraq. French Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian declared that bombing Syria was now “the question that is posed.”

The government ordered flags on all public buildings to be flown at half-staff for three days. Leaders of France’s five million-strong Muslim community organized rallies in front of mosques in French cities on Friday to denounce the murder. The rector of the Grand Mosque in Paris, Dalil Boubakeur, denounced “the barbaric and bloodthirsty horror of the terrorists who in the name of a humiliating ideology pervert Islam and its values.”

This is accompanied by an unrelenting campaign to terrorize the public. The government defense committee met on Thursday to reinforce its anti-terror procedures and alert French nationals abroad to be “vigilant.” The military presence at transport terminals and shopping malls is to be extended, and tourist sites, religious buildings, and public buildings will have extra security. Spontaneous identity checks are to be carried out.

The foreign ministry declared that “no zone can any longer be considered as totally safe.” The alert for “vigilance” to French nationals abroad is extended from 31 to 40 countries, updated to include Indonesia,

Malaysia, Philippines, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, the Comoros, Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda and Somalia.

On September 18, the government introduced new anti-terrorist legislation attacking the basic democratic rights of freedom of speech and movement, supposedly in an effort to stem the flow of young French nationals who have joined ISIS forces in Iraq and Syria.

Passports can be withdrawn for a period of six months to prevent travel. The law was voted through the National Assembly with full support from all parties, from the far-right National Front to the Left Front, with the Greens abstaining. Although the government estimates the number of French ISIS fighters at 900, the new law brands anyone a terrorist who consults Internet sites or possesses documents deemed to be related to ISIS.

Underlying all these wars and attacks on democratic rights is a monumental political fraud. It is well known that French imperialism and its NATO allies oversaw the massive arming of various Al Qaeda-linked militias as part of their proxy wars for regime change first in Libya and then in Syria. In Syria, the Islamic Front group and other “moderate rebels” that NATO promoted last year did not hide that it worked with various Al Qaeda-linked forces, such as the Al Nusra Front and the ISIS.

Olivier Besancenot, a spokesman for the pseudo-left New Anti-capitalist Party, even publicly called for the French government to “graciously” arm the Syrian opposition militias. As Hollande later made clear, French intelligence took Besancenot’s advice and directly armed Islamist groups in Syria. (See: “France admits it directly supplied arms to Syrian ‘rebels’”)

Paris is now hypocritically using the blow-back from these reactionary operations as a pretext to wage more

wars in the face of widespread popular opposition.

The state's mourning of Hervé Gourdel in this context is deeply sinister. Gourdel was murdered by an Islamist fighter in Algeria. However, the main authors of his death are officials in Washington, Paris, and other NATO capitals who over the last several years have backed the large-scale arming of Islamist militias across the Middle East and North Africa.

At the UN General Assembly in New York on Thursday, the new Iraqi Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi told reporters that he had received "credible" information from Baghdad that the Islamic state was preparing terrorist attacks on the New York and Paris metro systems. The French prime minister's office said there was no confirmation of such a planned attack.

In any event, this will not stop French President François Hollande from pursuing his military escalation in Iraq and Syria, in alliance with Washington. Hollande was in the forefront of the temporarily-aborted drive to war against Syria to oust Syrian President Bashar al-Assad a year ago. Currently, he is reluctant to attack ISIS forces in Syria, where France has supported all manner of far-right Islamist militias in its war against Assad.

The government now is trying to manipulate public horror and anger at the barbaric murder of Gourdel to pursue the war it could not launch a year ago.



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