

French paramilitary police gun down three Islamist gunmen

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The two-day manhunt and military-police mobilization around Paris ended Friday afternoon in twin shootouts in which three Islamist gunmen and four hostages were killed.

Cherif and Said Kouachi, the two brothers who killed 12 people at the editorial offices of the satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo*, died in an exchange of gunfire with heavily armed paramilitary police who stormed a small printing plant in the far northeastern suburbs of Paris.

When the French media reported Friday morning that police had surrounded the Kouachis at a printing company in the town of Dammartin-en-Goële, a third Islamist, Amedy Coulibaly, seized a kosher grocery in an eastern Paris district, taking the customers and staff hostage, threatening to kill his prisoners if police stormed the printing plant.

During the hours-long standoff outside the two locations, both the Kouachis and Coulibaly spoke by telephone with media representatives, boasting of their allegiance to Mideast terrorist groups, although only one of the three, Said Kouachi, had actually traveled to that region.

The Kouachis claimed to be acting on the orders of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which is based in Yemen. Coulibaly claimed to be acting for Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), although there is no evidence of any actual connection, and he reportedly had a previous connection to the Kouachi brothers.

In a telephone interview with BFM-TV, Coulibaly boasted of killing a French policewoman in the southern Paris suburb of Montrouge a few hours after the massacre at *Charlie Hebdo*. He said he and the Kouachi brothers had agreed to coordinate their actions: “We just synchronized the start. When they did *Charlie Hebdo*, I started doing the police.”

There were conflicting reports about the bloody

events that ended the two sieges. Some police eyewitnesses claimed that the Kouachi brothers stormed out of the plant, guns blazing, in what amounted to a suicide attack. Other policemen told the media that they had broken into the plant, taking the gunmen by surprise.

Press accounts during the day claimed that the Kouachis had a hostage, but police said later that there was no hostage, but rather an employee hiding in the plant who provided information to the police.

At the kosher grocery, Hyper Cacher, police stormed the shop almost simultaneously with the gunfire at the printing plant. Afterwards, Coulibaly and four hostages were dead, and five hostages were wounded. Police denied reports that Coulibaly had killed two people in the initial hostage taking, suggesting that most or all the casualties came in the final gun battle.

Explosive devices were found at both locations, but the gunmen either did not set them off or, in the case of Coulibaly, apparently did not know how to detonate them properly.

In the wake of the gun battles, French police put out an alert for Coulibaly’s wife, Hayat Boumeddiene. Again, there were conflicting reports that the 26-year-old woman had been involved with Coulibaly in the killing Thursday of a policewoman in the southern Paris suburb of Montrouge, that she had taken part in the grocery attack and escaped in the confusion by posing as a hostage, or that she had played no role in either action.

While some of the conflicts appear to result from the chaos created by the multiple attacks and the mobilization of tens of thousands of police and troops, there are indications that the contradictory accounts are part of a cover-up by the French authorities of the actual nature of the relationship between the gunmen

and the French security services.

An article posted today on the *New York Times* web site raises numerous questions about how French intelligence and counterterrorism agencies could have failed to identify *Charlie Hebdo* as a likely target of violence by Islamist terrorists, and the Kouachi brothers and Coulibaly as likely perpetrators of such violence. All three had come to the attention of the police and two of them, Cherif Kouachi and Ahmed Coulibaly, had served prison terms for their involvement in terrorist activities.

The WSWS has already noted the multiple contacts between the Kouachi brothers and the French security services.

The case of Coulibaly is even stranger. He served a prison term for a 2002 conviction for armed bank robbery, and then had entered into Islamist circles in Paris. But in July 2009 he was one of ten young workers taken to the Elysée Palace for a face-to-face meeting with then-president Nicolas Sarkozy—a publicity stunt aimed at giving Sarkozy a less racist, anti-working-class image. How Coulibaly passed a security screening on that occasion is unexplained.

Only a few months later, Coulibaly was arrested and charged with conspiring to free convicted subway bomber Smain Ait Ali Belkacem, a member of the Algerian Armed Islamic Group, from a French prison. He was convicted and sent to prison, only released in March 2014. Cherif Kouachi was questioned in the same case, but not prosecuted.

The Paris events thus conform to the larger pattern of the “war on terror.” Nearly all of those involved in or linked to terrorist attacks in the major imperialist countries—the 9/11 attacks, the London subway and Madrid train station bombings, and now Paris—turn out to have frequent, unexplained and dubious relations with the security services of these countries.

These atrocious attacks have gone forward, if not with the active instigation and control, certainly with the passive complicity, of the very same agencies that then cite the threat of terrorism as the reason for scrapping democratic rights, massively increasing security budgets, and arrogating vast and unchallengeable powers to the military-intelligence apparatus.

The same process is now at work in the aftermath of the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre and its bloody

denouement. Andrew Parker, director general of the British MI5, gave an extraordinary public speech at MI5 headquarters late Thursday, warning that attacks like those in Paris were likely in Britain as well.

He warned that the revelations by former NSA contractor Edward Snowden and by other critics of state surveillance had created an atmosphere in which privacy was “so absolute and sacrosanct that terrorists and others who mean us harm can confidently operate from behind those walls without fear of detection.”

“If we are to do our job, MI5 will continue to need to be able to penetrate their communications as we have always done,” he said. “That means having the right tools, legal powers and the assistance of companies which hold relevant data.”

“Currently,” he added, “this picture is patchy.”

This argument is patently absurd, given that what Snowden revealed was comprehensive electronic spying on the Internet and telecommunications activities of the entire population. Nonetheless, the British government leapt to reassure the intelligence services that it would continue boosting the resources available to them to fund their spying.

In response to Parker’s speech, the Chancellor of the Exchequer (finance minister) George Osborne told the BBC, “This is the national priority. We will put the resources in. Whatever the security services want, they will get.”

He revealed that the government had already spent more than 100 million pounds, or \$151 million, to monitor Britons traveling to conflicts in Syria and Iraq. Given the widely cited figure of 600 people with British passports going to the region to fight, that is a staggering \$250,000 per head—a figure that undercuts the claims that it is impossible for the intelligence agencies to keep track of these militants.



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