

French airstrike on Syria was targeted killing of a French citizen

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This weekend, *Le Monde* reported that the French air raid on Raqqa, Syria, on the night of October 8-9 was indeed an attempt to carry out the targeted assassination of a French citizen, Salim Benghalem.

The newspaper report directly contradicts official accounts after the strike by the Socialist Party (PS) government, which claimed that they were attacking “foreign combatants, including probably Frenchmen and French speakers,” of the Islamic State (IS) militia. In fact, the bombing was an attempt by the French state to carry out the extrajudicial execution of a French citizen. Paris admitted to killing six Frenchmen in the strike, though it has not yet said whether its operation succeeded in killing Benghalem.

“According to our information,” the daily writes, “the entire operation was largely planned around one French citizen, Salim Benghalem, 35, from Cachan in the Val-de-Marne district, which intelligence services say is ‘the official tasked with greeting Frenchmen and French speakers inside the Islamic state’.”

This operation marks a decisive step in the criminalization of the state and the degeneration of bourgeois democracy in France. The PS’s decision to execute a French citizen without any judicial process, carried out in flagrant violation of the French constitution’s ban on the death penalty, has no valid legal foundation.

The PS justified the air strike by citing Article 51 of the UN Charter, which allows for “collective self defence” between states, if requested by a state that is targeted by aggression. In this case, the Iraqi puppet government set up by the American occupation authorities after the illegal US invasion in 2003 petitioned the NATO powers for military assistance in order to fight the spread of the IS militia from Syria into western Iraq.

It is in Syria, however, and not in Iraq, that France murdered six of its citizens, by the PS’s own account, in its attempt to assassinate Benghalem.

Last year, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius blocked the attempts by the French Defence Ministry to extend French airstrikes against IS targets in Iraq to Syria, insisting that there “was no legal basis” for French airstrikes in Syria.

Now, without any other legal foundation, French authorities have extended their airstrikes from Iraq to Syria in order to murder their own citizens.

Le Monde notes that citing “collective self-defence” is an especially dubious legal justification for airstrikes against an organization like the IS. First of all, the PS has presented no proof that Benghalem was organizing an “imminent” act of aggression that would have hit targets inside France.

Furthermore, according to Paul Laborde, director of the UN’s committee against terrorism, “Hiding behind this article to carry out this strike raises unsolved legal issues; it is only sovereign states that can cite this article to invoke collective self-defence when another state attacks them. However, the strike was aimed at a terrorist organization, not a state.”

French President François Hollande’s attempt to assassinate Benghalem takes place amid a broad repudiation by NATO governments of basic democratic rights, including any legal restraint on their right to assassinate their own citizens.

On September 8, the British government announced the extra-judicial murder of two British citizens, Reyaad Khan and Ruhul Amin, by the Royal Air Force on August 21 in Syria.

A few weeks before the October 8-9 attack on Raqqa, French media suddenly published numerous features about Benghalem. On September 25, *Le*

Monde carried several articles about him, describing him as a “French petty criminal who has become a jailer for the Islamic State,” while an October 1 article in *Le Figaro* by Caroline Picquet attacked him as a “French jihadist wanted by the United States.”

The extrajudicial execution of Benghalem was reportedly advocated, or even commissioned, by Washington. Many French media outlets are reporting that US intelligence transmitted details on Benghalem to the French army before the strike; the US State Department had already put him on its “black list” of terrorist organizations and individuals. According to *Le Monde*, Washington feared him as a “rising figure” inside IS.

A military-intelligence cabal is actively conspiring against the democratic rights of the population on both sides of the Atlantic.

Having established a precedent of extrajudicial assassination by killing US citizen Anwar al-Awlaki in a 2011 drone strike—violating the Fifth Amendment of the US Constitution, which says that the state cannot deprive a citizen of his life without due process of law—top US officials are working closely with their French counterparts to regularize and publicly legitimize the resort to murder as a tool of policy.

The link between Benghalem and al-Awlaki is not purely theoretical, as Benghalem reportedly met al-Awlaki in the course of a career that raises far more questions than it answers.

Benghalem first worked odd jobs before fleeing to Algeria, after a fatal street fight in Paris in 2001. Upon his return to France in 2007, the courts gave him an 11-year sentence.

He was released several years early, however, in 2010. He then directly joined the so-called “group of the Buttes-Chaumont,” a Parisian Islamist network which also included those responsible for the January 2015 attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* and the Hyper Cacher grocery store in Paris, Amedy Coulibaly and the Kouachi brothers, Chérif and Saïd.

Benghalem travelled to Yemen for three weeks to obtain military training, during which he was closely monitored by NATO intelligence services. *Le Point* writes that he “doubtless met one of the big fish of French radical Islamism, Peter Chérif, and claimed to have met the leaders of Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), including Anwar al-Awlaki, an

American of Yemeni origins who was killed shortly thereafter by a US drone strike.”

Nevertheless, he returned to France without evoking any apparent response from French authorities. He then travelled to Tunisia in 2012 and then Syria in 2013, to join the Islamist groups serving as foot soldiers in NATO’s proxy war against the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

With such a record, during which Benghalem operated under close surveillance by the intelligence services, it is not credible that the French state would have accidentally targeted the building where he was working without intending to kill him.

This account also refutes official declarations at the beginning of the year that the forces that carried out the *Charlie Hebdo* attack were self-radicalized “lone wolves,” who could not have been stopped because they were unknown to the intelligence services. As shown by the French interior ministry’s decision to use the state secrets privilege to block an investigation into the networks that provided Coulibaly with his weapons, these were operatives closely tied to the state, whose crimes were exploited to justify vast attacks on democratic rights.



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