

Dozens murdered in possible terrorist attack in Nice, France

Oscar Grenfell
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According to initial reports, at least 84 people have been murdered and up to 130 more injured, after a lorry was deliberately ploughed at high speeds into crowds at a Bastille Day celebration in the city of Nice, in southern France, late Thursday night. The death toll from the horrific attack has continued to rise throughout the day. Some children are among the victims.

French President Francois Hollande travelled from the south of France to Paris for crisis talks, while the streets of Nice were flooded with heavily-armed police. Hollande immediately asserted that the atrocity was of a “terrorist nature.” In a press conference in the early hours of Friday morning, he declared: “France as a whole is under the threat of Islamic terrorism.” He said his government would not end the “state of emergency” on July 26, as he had indicated in a speech just hours before the attack. Instead, it would be extended by three months.

According to reports by French broadcaster iTele, police have identified the driver of the vehicle and said that he was known to them. Local media, such as *Nice Matin*, have reported that he was a 31-year-old with dual French-Tunisian nationality.

Christian Estrosi, president of the region, tweeted shortly after the incident that the truck had been filled with explosives, bombs and other arms. As yet, no organisation has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Witnesses said they saw a large white truck speed into crowds that had gathered on the beachside Promenade des Anglais to watch fireworks celebrating the country’s national holiday, at around 10:30 pm. Nice, located on the French Riviera, is a popular destination for tourists and holidaying French nationals.

According to accounts given to the media, the truck veered onto the pavement and appeared to accelerate as

it collided with bystanders. The lorry continued for around 100 metres. One witness said the vehicle “crushed everyone in its path.”

Others described tragic scenes, with bodies strewn around the road. Damien Allemand, a *Nice Matin* reporter who witnessed the incident, said: “People are running. It’s panic. He rode up onto the Prom and piled into the crowd ... There are people covered in blood. There must be many injured.” Local authorities advised residents to remain indoors.

Images on social media showed the nearby Hotel Negresco being used as a makeshift hospital for the wounded. Families with missing relatives published photos on social media, in the hope of news from their loved ones.

There were initially conflicting reports regarding the number of attackers inside the lorry. Some reports stated that a lone driver got out of the vehicle, and began shooting into the crowd. Others indicated there were two attackers, who fired as many as 50 shots. The driver of the truck was shot dead by police.

If the perpetrators’ motives are confirmed, the incident in Nice will be the third mass casualty terrorist attack in France in the past 18 months.

In the two previous attacks, the terrorists were well-known to French intelligence agencies. They were part of a broader jihadist milieu with intimate connections to the Islamist groups that have operated as the chief proxy force of the US-led and French-backed regime-change operations in Libya and Syria.

On January 7, 2015, Saïd and Chérif Kouachi launched an attack on the offices of the *Charlie Hebdo* magazine, killing 11 and wounding 11 more. Their associate, Amedy Coulibaly, was killed in a hostage siege at a Jewish supermarket.

The Kouachi brothers had been under surveillance by

security agencies between 2010 and 2015, because of their direct ties to leaders of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). French intelligence inexplicably stopped monitoring the brothers just months before they carried out the attack. It was also revealed that Coulibaly had received weapons from Claude Hermant, a police informant tied to the fascistic and anti-Muslim National Front.

On November 13, 2015, terrorists affiliated to Islamic State carried out coordinated attacks across Paris, killing 130 people. Like the Kouachi brothers, the attackers were known to French authorities. Salah Abdeslam, one of the perpetrators who escaped, was found four months later in the basement of a house close to his parents' house in the heavily-monitored Molenbeek district of Brussels. Despite being arrested by Turkish authorities in January 2015 for attempting to enter Syria, Abdeslam was able to travel freely across Europe.

In March this year, Islamic State fighters carried out an attack on Brussels airport and other locations in the city, killing 31 and injuring 300. Belgian authorities claimed not to have "connected the dots," despite reports that intelligence agencies had detailed information of the plot, including its location and targets.

Each atrocity has been used to expand police and intelligence powers. Following the Paris attacks, the Hollande government instituted an unprecedented "state of emergency," providing authorities with the power to ban demonstrations and detain suspects without charge. Over recent months, millions of French workers and students have defied the laws, engaging in mass demonstrations and strikes against the Socialist Party's regressive El Khomri labour legislation.

The latest attack comes amid mounting social tensions and escalating French participation in US-led military operations in the Middle East, leading to warnings by security agencies of likely terrorist responses. Last week, comments made in May by Patrick Calvar, head of the French General Directorate for Internal Security (DGSI) were publicly released. He spoke of possible attacks by Islamic State, including car bombings and the use of explosive devices.

In his Bastille Day speech earlier yesterday, Hollande announced that France would step-up its operations against Islamic State, particularly targeting the city of

Mosul. "We have to show great firmness in relation to the actions we are undertaking in Syria and Iraq and I have announced and we are going to reinforce the support we are giving to the Iraqis in order to retake Mosul," he declared.

The French president said the country was not carrying out a ground intervention, but "there will be French military advisors present."

Like the US, the French government has actively backed Islamist groups in a bid to topple the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad. However, Washington viewed Islamic State's advance into Iraq during 2014 as a threat to the US-backed government and its dominance of Iraqi oil and resources. The US and its allies, including France, have waged an air war on the Islamic State, while continuing to back other Islamist forces within Syria.

In his speech, Hollande also pointed to the growth of social tensions within France and a mounting political crisis, declaring: "I must protect France, it's fragile, it can crack at any moment." He said his government would end the "state of emergency" after July 26, and reduce expanded police numbers put in place after the Paris attacks.

"We can't prolong the state of emergency forever," Hollande stated. "That would make no sense. It would mean that we were no longer a republic with laws which can apply in all circumstances."

Hours later, he invoked the Nice atrocity to extend the extraordinary powers for another three months. He invited military volunteers to assist the police, and declared that there would be no reduction in police or military numbers.



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