

Two ISIS supporters shot dead after slaying a priest in France

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Two ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) supporters murdered an 86-year-old priest, Father Jacques Hamel, on Tuesday, cutting his throat while shouting “Allah Akbar” in the church at Saint-Étienne-du-Rouvray, near Rouen in northern France. Another victim was critically wounded. Police special force units summarily executed the two as they left the building.

The attackers entered into the church as Mass was ending, at around 9:30 a.m. They held several worshippers and at least one nun hostage, while another nun escaped. One nun, Sister Danielle, said: “Everyone was shouting ‘stop, stop, you don’t know what you’re doing!’ They forced him to his knees and obviously he wanted to defend himself and that’s when the drama began.” She said she had fled the church as the terrorists murdered Hamel.

Sister Danielle said the two men filmed their attack. “They didn’t see me leave,” she told the French channel BFMTV. “They were busy with their knives. They were filming themselves preaching in Arabic in front of the altar. It was a horror. Jacques was an extraordinary priest.”

ISIS reportedly claimed responsibility for the slaying via its Amaq news agency. This was the fourth attack claimed by ISIS in less than two weeks, after a man ploughed a truck into a crowd of people celebrating Bastille Day in Nice, killing 84 people and wounding more than 300; a knife attack on a train in Würzburg, Germany, injuring 5 people; and a suicide bombing at a wine bar in the southern German town of Ansbach last Sunday, wounding 15 people.

Paris prosecutor François Molins said that one of the attackers was identified as 19-year-old Adel Kermiche, who lived in Saint-Étienne-du-Rouvray. According to Molins, Kermiche “had tried to go to Syria in 2015, had been under judicial control since March 18, under

house arrest and under electronic surveillance.” Under the terms of his house arrest, he was only allowed to go out between 8:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.

French intelligence had issued Kermiche an “S file,” which classified him as a threat to French national security, after he was condemned for associating with terrorists and trying to travel to Syria. As of this writing, the second attacker is still being identified.

The incident occurred amid a massive deployment of police and armed forces across France in the wake of recent attacks. Since the foiled terrorist attack on two churches near Paris in April 2015, which was being prepared by a 24-year-old Franco-Algerian IT student, Sid Ahmed Ghulam, churches and other houses of worship, including mosques and synagogues, have been placed on high alert.

The church attack is horrific and reactionary. Its main beneficiary will be the French political establishment, which has exploited such attacks to escalate its military interventions in the Middle East and to tighten the draconian, anti-democratic measures of France’s ongoing state of emergency.

Imposed after the November 13 terror attacks in Paris last year, the state of emergency has been extended for another six months, following the July 14 Nice attack. It gives police extra powers to carry out arbitrary searches and seizures, launch mass arrests and place people under house arrest. After yesterday’s church attack, the Socialist Party (PS) government vowed to further boost law-and-order measures and give even more extraordinary powers to the police and military.

The PS has also intensified the war in the Middle East, supposedly to fight ISIS. Just before the Nice attack, it had already announced that the aircraft carrier Charles De Gaulle would travel to the Middle East. After the events in Nice, President François Hollande

announced that France would send heavy artillery to Iraq from next month, to support the fight against ISIS.

Following the killing in Saint-Étienne-du-Rouvray, Hollande described it as “an ignoble terrorist attack.” He declared, “Daesh has declared war on us. We have to win that war. ... Terrorists will not give up on anything until we stop them. It is our will. The French must know that they are threatened, that we are not the only country—Germany is, as well as others—and that their strength lies in their unity.”

Other heads of state internationally also used the attack to terrorise the public and call for stronger law-and-order measures.

Speaking from Downing Street, British Prime Minister Theresa May said: “We all face a terror threat. If you look at the national threat level here in the United Kingdom, it is at severe. That means that a terrorist attack is highly likely. What is necessary is for us all to work together, and stand shoulder to shoulder with France. We offer them every support we have in dealing with this issue and this threat that they, and the rest of us, are facing.”

In France, Prime Minister Manuel Valls insisted, “We have today all the tools we need to fight terror. ... The French people must understand that we are at war, [and] must change our relationship to security.”

“There may be new attacks. We will do everything we can to avoid them, with the weapons allowed under the rule of law, without placing our democracy in question,” Valls declared.

In fact, the PS has abrogated democratic rights by imposing the state of emergency, and there are escalating calls from within the political establishment for even more drastic law-and-order measures. In June, right-wing French lawmakers called for “retention centres” for radical Islamists after the brutal murder of a policeman and his partner at their home.

After yesterday’s attack, far-right National Front (FN) leader Marine Le Pen called for police state measures. In a statement, she advocated “closing Salafist mosques, expelling imams who spread hate, controlling our national borders, stopping immigration, vetoing the German policy of greeting migrants, expelling immigrants with criminal records, dealing with people with ‘S files’ so they do no harm, reinforcing our security, military, and intelligence forces, reforming the nationality code, reinforcing

judicial punishments and effectively applying penalties, and building more prisons.”

There have been repeated calls from right-wing politicians to allow the state to indefinitely detain individuals targeted for “S files.” Between 10,000 and 11,000 individuals in France have had S files opened on them, but they do not all have jihadist sympathies. Insofar as the intelligence services can open S files on individuals at will, this proposal would amount to giving the state a blank check to indefinitely imprison anyone whose political opinions it dislikes.



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