

Sections of Paris on lockdown after attack on policeman

Our reporter
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Central areas of downtown Paris were put on lockdown yesterday after an attacker armed with a hammer lightly wounded a policeman outside Notre Dame cathedral. Policemen shot the attacker, critically wounding him and causing a panic around the cathedral, the second-most visited tourist site in France after Disneyland-Paris, as thousands of tourists scattered and ran.

Shortly before 4p.m. the attacker shouted, “This is for Syria,” before striking a policeman in the neck with a hammer. Another police officer drew his firearm and repeatedly shot him, wounding him in the chest and in the legs. The attacker, a 40-year-old man from the Kabylie region of Algeria living in the Val d’Oise region near Paris on a student visa, reportedly claimed to be a “soldier of the caliphate.” He also was carrying two kitchen knives, according to press reports.

“I heard two gunshots then a huge sound from the crowd,” said David, a resident of the area whose apartment has a view on the square in front of the cathedral. “People began to run. There were about a hundred people on the square at that time. I could see a man on the ground, but the policemen did not look like they were that interested in him, as if there was something else more important going on. All of a sudden, loads of policemen with helmets and bullet-proof vests arrived.”

The lightly wounded policeman and the attacker were both hospitalized, and the square was surrounded by police vehicles and cordoned off. Subway and regional rapid transit stations around the cathedral were shut down.

Some 900 tourists were trapped inside the cathedral and told to stay with their hands up. They were then made to answer detailed questions to see whether they were accomplices of the attacker, but all were

ultimately released.

Late last night, investigators identified the attacker as Farid I., a doctoral student at the University of Lorraine at Metz, in eastern France. Police searched a studio at university housing in Cergy-Pontoise in the west suburbs of Paris where he had stayed and allegedly found a video with material from the Islamic State (IS) militia. Nevertheless, they concluded that he acted alone.

“He was not an Islamist with a long beard, at all. He was more the coat and tie type, in the style of a schoolteacher. He’s the sort of person you could never suspect,” a resident of university housing in Cergy-Pontoise told *Le Parisien*, adding that Farid I. “looked totally normal.”

Pierre Mutzenhardt, the president of the University of Lorraine, told France Bleu that he was working on a doctoral thesis at the Center for Research on Mediations (CREM) and “exhibited no signs of suspect behavior.” Mutzenhardt added, “His thesis advisor is very surprised and cannot understand what has happened, he was working on journalism, on fairly open subjects, he had never shown signs of radicalization.”

Farid I. was working on a thesis on new media, the Arab spring uprisings of 2011, and public opinion. He had also set up a translation firm whose legal address was at university housing in Cergy-Pontoise.

Well before the motives and connections of the attacker had been clearly established, President Emmanuel Macron’s government seized on an assault in which one policeman was lightly wounded to again call for extending France’s state of emergency, which suspends basic democratic rights.

In an even more drastic attack on democratic rights, the Macron government is planning to end the state of

emergency by passing a bill to permanently inscribe most of the emergency powers granted by the state of emergency into common law. It is also planning to set up an “anti-IS” task force that answers directly to the president.

Interior Minister Gérard Collomb announced that a previously planned Defense Council meeting of top security officials at the Elysée presidential palace today would discuss the Notre Dame attack: “We will study the prolongation of the state of emergency and then the laws that would allow us after the end of the state of emergency to prevent this type of situation.”

The Paris prosecutor’s office has launched an investigation led by the Anti-Terrorist Section (SAT) and the General Directorate of Internal Security (DGSI). They are reportedly investigating whether Farid I.’s statement that he was a “soldier of the caliphate” indicated that he was a member of the Algerian group *Jund al-Khilafah fi Ard al-Jazaïr* (Soldiers of the Caliphate in Algeria), which has sworn allegiance to IS.

The Macron government’s reaction to this attack is a warning of the immense attacks on democratic rights and the clear danger of dictatorship that is emerging in France today.

IS has carried out a series of reactionary terror attacks in France and across Europe targeting innocent individuals. However, the state of emergency and the extraordinary powers it grants to police are not directed primarily at the Islamist terror networks transporting recruits and weapons from Europe to the Middle East, as part of the NATO war for regime change in Syria. These networks, involving thousands of people in France and tens of thousands across Europe, function with state protection, while the state of emergency is aimed at the working class.

Of the over 3,000 arbitrary searches and seizures aimed at Muslim families in working-class suburbs of Paris, only a handful have led to terrorism charges, while the hundreds of people forced into house arrest were largely protesters opposed to the Socialist Party (PS) government’s anti-worker labor law.

Nor has France’s state of emergency, imposed after the 13 November 2015 attacks in Paris, stopped a range of Islamist terror attacks since then. The bloodiest was the 14 July 2016 attack in Nice where a truck was driven through a crowd gathered for Bastille Day

fireworks, killing 86.

There can be little doubt that Macron’s moves to permanently undermine basic democratic rights in France and turn it into a police state will not prevent further attacks by individuals more or less directly connected to IS or other terror groups spawned by NATO wars in the Middle East. Rather, it will be used to target opposition to Macron’s planned agenda to slash social legislation and labor protections, while boosting military spending and re-instating the draft.



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