

Mass shooting in Strasbourg kills 3, wounds 12 before “yellow vest” protest

Alex Lantier

13 December 2018

A horrific, bloody mass shooting in Strasbourg Tuesday night killed two people, left a third brain-dead and wounded 12, including six in critical condition. The reaction to this event underscores yet again the utterly reactionary character of the attacks, often related to Islamist terrorism, that have hit France and countries across Europe since 2015.

The French ruling elite is already seizing upon the attack to trample democratic rights with demands that “yellow vest” protesters abandon their protests against Macron.

It is too soon to establish clearly what took place in Strasbourg Tuesday night. A suspect, identified by police as Chérif Chekatt, a 29-year-old from Strasbourg with multiple convictions for violent crime, is still on the run. Nevertheless, the political establishment and the media are launching an aggressive campaign to demand that the “yellow vests” end their protests, and to denounce those who are asking about possible state involvement in the attacks as conspiracy theorists.

This attempt to exploit a bloody massacre and the resulting grief of the victims to end protests against the widely unpopular policy of Macron is antidemocratic and illegitimate. If it turns out that Chekatt indeed carried out the attack as a sympathizer of a terrorist network like the Islamic State (IS), this would also implicate the links established between the French state and IS in the context of the “war on terror.”

On Tuesday night, shortly before 8 p.m., an apparently lone individual opened fire on passersby near a Christmas market in downtown Strasbourg. He overcame attempted citizens’ arrests, took a taxi driver hostage and forced him to drive to the Neudorf neighborhood. Trapped in a building on Tuesday night by a heavy police deployment, remarkably, he was nevertheless able to escape.

On Wednesday morning, the press confirmed the identity of a suspect identified Tuesday night: Chekatt, aged 29 and convicted 27 times in France, Germany and Switzerland “for common crimes” according to the Paris prosecutor’s office. He did time in prison from 2013 to 2015, when French intelligence identified him as a suspect due to violence and religious radicalization and opened an “S” file on him, and in Germany from 2015 to 2017. He was followed “pretty seriously” since then, said Laurent Nuñez, an assistant of French Interior Minister Christophe Castaner.

Nevertheless, Nuñez, on Wednesday morning, told France Inter that we “must be very prudent, it has not been established that he acted on terror calculations.”

Police searched Chekatt’s apartment on Tuesday morning, hours before the shooting, in relation to an August armed robbery and attempted homicide. They reportedly found a stun grenade, a 22 “long rifle,” and knives. It was because of the discovery of the grenade at Chekatt’s apartment, and the fact that the shooter told the taxi driver that he had a grenade at home, that police accused Chekatt of responsibility for the attack.

On Europe1, former anti-terrorist judge Marc Trévidic said that Chérif had launched his shooting spree out of desperation at the police controls on his activity. “It was not an organized attack, with men who wanted something at a Christmas market, otherwise they would have done it when the market was open,” he said. “This was someone who was trapped and desperate, given what had happened that morning, who knew he was hunted. He did not stay on the square to die, either, so we’re not dealing with the usual terror suspects.”

For now, no terrorist organization has taken responsibility for the attack.

The initial account given of this attack raises the

most serious questions as to the involvement of the French state. Like all the attacks carried out in Europe since those of the Kouachi brothers against *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015, the shooter was allegedly closely watched by the state. It is inexplicable then that such a person accumulated a vast arsenal of firearms and combat knives to organize such a massacre, execute it and escape from the security forces.

If Chekatt in fact organized this attack due to his sympathies for the IS or other Islamist forces or networks, this would implicate top officials of the French state. In the run-up to the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, as the investigations of the Lafarge construction company have revealed, France funneled tens of millions of euros to the IS network through Lafarge plants in Syria, as part of French operations for regime change in Syria.

For now, however, what is clear is that the French political establishment is seizing on the attack to demand that the “yellow vests” end their protests. Damien Abad of the right wing The Republicans (LR) party told Sud radio, “we need a call for calm, a truce must be imposed because we need also to protect our police forces, to ensure security ... The French people would not understand if our police forces were not fully mobilized in the struggle against terrorism.”

Neo-fascist spokesman Sébastien Chenu warned that it would be “difficult” if there were “French people in the streets and squares.” He added, “If we enter into an emergency situation, that is very tense, with a terrorist manhunt, I think it would not be good to mix things up ... now that the terrorist menace is becoming extremely open and menacing.”

There have been calls for a return to the state of emergency since the beginning of the “yellow vest” protests against Macron, and Castaner has indicated that the government is prepared to return to the state of emergency imposed by the government between 2015 and 2017, if necessary. This would allow the government to again indefinitely suspend basic democratic rights and grant it wide powers to ban and crack down on social protest.

At the same time, the French political establishment has unleashed a torrent of denunciations of “yellow vest” protesters for issuing “conspiracy theories” about the attack. The purpose of such attacks is not difficult to understand. It is an attempt to undermine the

overwhelming popular support enjoyed by the protests, and pave the way for even more brutal repression of the demonstrations against Macron.

Online polls show that 55 percent of “yellow vest” protesters in some Facebook groups believe the Strasbourg attack was deliberately organized by the state against them. One wrote: “Don’t you think that yesterday’s attack in Strasbourg was a provocation? At least Macron will have a good excuse to forbid us from protesting, I don’t understand, the guy went to a Christmas market and killed lots of people but not a single policeman? It’s a coup d’état.” Such remarks are being subjected to endless vilification in the media.

It remains unclear what took place in Strasbourg. However, political responsibility for the terror attacks and the political function of the state of emergency are clear. The imperialist war in Syria has bred terror networks that served as pretexts for wide-ranging attacks on democratic rights, whose principal target is domestic social and political opposition in the working class.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)