

One year after Charlie Hebdo attack

Police gun down youth in poor Paris neighborhood

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On Thursday, the first anniversary of the *Charlie Hebdo* terrorist attack, police gunned down a youth outside a police station in northern Paris. While government officials differed in their accounts of the motivation of the victim and how the police had killed him, witnesses flatly contradicted police accounts of the shooting and said police had shot an unarmed man without warning.

The shooting took place at midday in front of the Commissariat of Police for a poor and heavily immigrant neighborhood, the “Goutte d’Or” in the 18th district of Paris.

The victim was Sallah Ali, a 20-year-old Moroccan born in Casablanca but living homeless in France. He had had a single brush with the police in 2013, where he was arrested for stealing in the town of Sainte-Maxime in the Var region of the south of France. He was positively identified by his fingerprints that were taken at the time, as he had no identity papers.

Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve and the Paris prefect of Police arrived only half an hour after the killing, making clear that the highest levels of the Socialist Party (PS) government of Prime Minister Manuel Valls and President François Hollande were intervening.

They closed down the underground Paris Metro trains in the vicinity, ordered a mass deployment of security forces, and put the entire Goutte d’Or neighborhood on lockdown. Riflemen deployed across Paris under the terms of the PS’s state of emergency were placed on alert.

Only 45 minutes after the shooting, French Interior Ministry spokesman Pierre-Henry Brandet went on BFMTV to report that Ali, armed with a knife and an

explosive belt, had shouted “Allah Akbar” (God is great in Arabic) whilst trying to assault a police officer at the entrance to the Commissariat.

Only 25 minutes later, this account of the shooting started to fall apart. A bomb disposal unit that had arrived at the scene analyzed the belt worn by Ali and said that it contained no explosives. There was no sign of a knife, but a big butcher’s cleaver was found near Ali.

Witnesses to the shooting contradicted Brandet’s account. BFMTV interviewed them and reported, “Many witnesses have assured BFMTV that the assailant of the Commissariat...did not cry out ‘Allah Akbar.’ Many of the witnesses said that he never even pronounced these words: ‘When he arrived, he was acting normally,’ said one of them.”

BFMTV continued, “Witnesses state that the man was not armed. ‘He was not armed at all,’ stated a woman who had seen the assailant. The Police officers told him ‘back-up, back-up, back-up’ then ‘he backed up whilst raising his hands,’ she said. But the man moved forward again towards the Police officers and they shot him three times.”

At about 3 p.m., the State Prosecutor’s office announced that it was charging Sallah Ali with aggressing police officers as representatives of the state. Then at 3:45, it announced that “a portable telephone and a paper that had a Daesh [Islamic State in Iraq and Syria] flag on it with a clearly formulated handwritten demand in Arabic” had been found on Ali’s body.

The Prosecutor’s office then repeated the claim that Ali had cried “Allah Akbar” as he moved toward the Police officers. The case was then transferred to the

Special Anti-Terrorist Prosecutor.

It was later confirmed that the ISIS flag on the paper was amateurishly drawn with a marker. As for the handwritten demand, authorities said it was a pledge of allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the self-proclaimed leader of ISIS, referring to “acts to avenge the deaths in Syria.”

The Interior Ministry’s attempts to present Ali as a terrorist are simply not credible. One policeman speaking to the right-wing daily *Le Figaro* expressed disbelief at PS allegations that Ali was carrying out a terrorist attack. He said, “running at armed policemen wearing bulletproof vests wearing a fake explosive belt, is bizarre. It’s even suicidal.”

The Prosecutor’s office’s account was also contradicted by Justice Minister Christine Taubira, who said, “What is very clear from what is known about this person, [it is that he] has no link to violent radicalization, none at all.”

“A fake suicide belt, shouting, the statement of loyalty in his pocket, these are signs that can indicate belonging to a [terrorist] network, but they can also be signs of instability. The investigation will shed light on all of this,” she added.

The police killing of Sallah Ali points to the vast shift to the right in the French political establishment that has taken place in the year since the Kouachi brothers carried out a terrorist attack killing 11 people at the editorial offices of the satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo*. The PS organized a mass national demonstration after the attack, proclaiming a period of national unity based on a police buildup, supposedly to protect free expression and liberty of the press.

What has unfolded over the last year was not a flowering of democracy in France, however, but an accelerating movement towards police-state rule led by the PS. Law-and-order and anti-Muslim moods have helped the neo-fascist National Front (FN) to consolidate its place in the political establishment, and since the November 13 terrorist attacks, the PS placed France in a state of emergency. This gives the PS wide police powers, including to censor the press.

The PS is proposing a measure to deprive citizens of their nationality if they carry out terrorism-related offenses. This measure was long associated with the FN and, before it, to the deprivation of Jews’ French nationality during the Holocaust in fascist Europe

during World War II.

The division inside the PS over the police killing of Ali reflects the debate that has roiled the government since then, with Taubira criticizing PS support for deprivation of nationality while the bulk of the government supported it.

The killing of Ali emerges directly from this poisonous and reactionary political climate. As the PS promotes law-and-order hysteria to help ram through a constitutional amendment to enshrine a permanent state of emergency in the French constitution, 100,000 soldiers and police are patrolling the streets on full alert. With jittery and heavily armed men deployed across the country, it is likely only a matter of time before another person is gunned down by security forces in the streets of France.



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