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France whitewashes December 23 assassination of Kurdish nationalists in Paris

Just before 11 a.m. on December 23, a man identified by police only as William M. shot dead three Kurds and injured five more on d'Enghien street in central Paris. The attack began outside the Ahmet Kaya Kurdish cultural center, before the gunman moved into a hair salon and a restaurant nearby.



Fire brigade medics evacuating on a stretcher a wounded demonstrator during a protest against the recent shooting at the Kurdish culture center in Paris, Saturday, December 24, 2022. [AP Photo/Lewis Joly]

Those killed in the attack were Emine Kara, Mîr Perwer and Abdurrahman Kızıll. All three were well known Kurdish activists. Kara, age 48, was a longtime member of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and of the Kurdish Women's Movement of France. She fought in

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northern Syria between 2014 and 2018 before being wounded in the battle of Raqqa, which led her to move to Europe for surgery.

Perwer was a 29-year-old Kurdish singer from Eastern Anatolia who was arrested in Turkey in 2015 and served several years in prison. He fled Turkey in 2021, just before being sentenced to 28 years in prison for being a PKK member. Kızıl was a pensioner who had been a “lifelong activist for the Kurdish cause,” according to the Kurdish Democratic Center of France.

The shooting took place almost exactly 10 years after the murder of three other PKK activists in Paris, including PKK co-founder Sakine Cansız, in January 2013.

Hours after Friday’s attack, French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin denied that the attacker targeted Kurds, stating it was “not certain [that] the gunman was specifically targeting the Kurdish community,” but more likely “foreigners in general.” French police have denied any links between the attacker and far-right movements in France or internationally. Official accounts present the gunman as an isolated racist lunatic with an unexplained hatred of foreigners who repeatedly slipped through the fingers of police.

The individual workings of the mind of a racist murderer do not suffice, however, to identify the political causes of such a mass killing. The PKK is engaged not only in an ongoing conflict with the Turkish state, but in the Kurdish nationalists’ collaboration with US and NATO imperialism in the proxy war in Syria. These wars, and the relentless stoking of xenophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment by the French political establishment, are what created the conditions for the attack to go ahead.

The perpetrator, William M., was well-known to police and had just been released from pretrial detention after a botched attack against refugees just one year ago. On December 8, 2021, he attacked a refugee encampment in Paris’s Bercy Park, wielding a sword and shouting “death to migrants.” Before being restrained by four adult refugees, he slashed a minor and an adult, who both survived. Due to his injuries, however, the adult victim has been unable to work since the attack.

Despite a clear racist motivation for the 2021 attack, William M. was not charged with any terror offense. He was only charged for violence with a weapon, which can carry up to 10 years in prison. He was released on December 12, without having been put on trial.

In the 11 days between his release and the attack, William M. was allowed to acquire the gun used in Friday’s attack. French police have so far provided no information on how and where he acquired a firearm, the trading of which is heavily regulated in France.

French authorities appear determined to prevent the details of how William M. came to commit this murder from ever becoming known to the public. In a preliminary hearing on December 27, William M. was offered a closed-door trial on account of his fragile mental health. His lawyers accepted.

French prosecutors said that after being taken into custody, William M. declared that his own hatred of foreigners was “totally pathological,” and that he aimed to kill as many “non-Europeans” as possible.

This only raises the question, however, of what forces created a political atmosphere in which a pathological hatred of foreigners and people of Middle Eastern origins could flourish. Indeed, while French President Emmanuel Macron denounced the “heinous attack on the heart of Paris,” it is his own government’s promotion of anti-Muslim sentiment and passage of the discriminatory anti-separatism law that has stoked far-right xenophobia and Islamophobia.

Macron’s record is well known. His government—which twice campaigned for and won the presidency as a “republican” alternative to far-right candidate Marine Le Pen—passed an anti-separatism bill with her support in 2021 which encodes discrimination against France’s 8 million Muslims into law. Macron has also continuously worked with the EU to enforce a vicious anti-immigrant policy which has led to over 25,000 drownings in the Mediterranean since 2014.

After the shooting, anger against the French political establishment’s constant promotion of xenophobia boiled over into large demonstrations by Kurds and other immigrant groups in central Paris, denouncing the government for failing to protect them from far-right attacks. On Friday evening, protesters were violently attacked by French riot police using tear gas and batons, who tried to block them from reaching the Kurdish cultural center where the attack took place.

Protesters accused the Turkish government of playing an active role in the attacks. Both Kara and Perwer were well-known PKK activists actively sought by the Turkish government, and Kurdish nationalists have long accused Turkey of involvement in the 2013 murders of PKK activists in Paris.

Unsubmissive France leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon appeared to endorse such allegations on December 24, saying: “We believe that there is no coincidence and that what happened was a terrorist act which targeted political activists.” Mélenchon did not, however, pose the obvious question this raises: why would French police play a central role in carrying out the targeted assassination of individuals wanted by Turkey?

The Turkish government has not acknowledged any direct role in the murder. By its response, however, Ankara has made it clear that it was not angry at the mass killing in Paris. Instead of denouncing the Macron government for failing to protect the victims of Friday's attack and for attacking protesters, Ankara summoned the French ambassador to Turkey on Monday to complain that PKK flags had been present at the protests after the shooting.

Imperialist-backed Kurdish nationalist politicians made an essentially similar response, supporting French police and denouncing protesters while disregarding the role of Macron's police in the attack and Macron's broader policies of imperialist war in Syria and anti-Muslim hysteria at home.

Speaking to the Kurdish-nationalist website Rudaw, Kurdistan Region President Nechirvan Barzani thanked Macron for his response to the attack and called on Kurdish protesters to "exercise restraint." He absurdly said: "I trust our French partners will spare no effort to protect the Kurdish communities."

Other Kurdish nationalists cynically used the attack to call for closer coordination with French or NATO imperialism. Mazloum Abdi, general commander of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), told Rudaw the attack showed that "Support for us in the fight against terror should be expanded."

These comments expose the hypocrisy of the bourgeois nationalists, who thrust aside the well-being of the Kurdish diaspora in France or of Kurds in the Middle East in order to obtain imperialist financial and military support in the wars now devastating the Middle East.

The deadly attack on the Paris Kurdish community once again underlines the massive tension that permeates French society and the growing threat of far-right attacks worldwide. The prostration before imperialism of the Kurdish nationalist forces targeted by the attacks underscores a critical political point. Opposition to imperialist wars in the Middle East and to police-state rule in imperialist countries such as France can only be waged independently of capitalist parties and governments, based on rallying workers internationally in a struggle against imperialist war and police-state repression.

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