

TERRORIST ATTACK OF SAINT-QUENTIN-FALLAVIER:

**THE FIRST ISLAMIC STATE-STYLE BEHEADING IN
WESTERN EUROPE DEMONSTRATES THAT INDUSTRIAL
SITES ARE A NEW TARGET FOR “LONE WOLF” TERRORISTS**

By ESISC Team

The terrorist attack carried out on Friday morning at the entrance of a natural gas factory belonging to the US group Air Products, in Saint-Quentin-Fallavier, demonstrates that industrial sites in Western Europe represent a new target for terrorists. Many messages of support for the attack have been expressed on the Internet by supporters of the Islamic State (IS) and Al-Qaeda. This raises fears of more similar attacks in the near future.

To recall, the terrorist attack took place at 10:07 a.m. local time at the premises of a natural gas factory owned by the US group Air Products, in Saint-Quentin-Fallavier, in the Rhône-Alpes region, in the Isère department, in central-eastern France. Before the attack, at around 9:50, a loud explosion was reported followed by a fire.

A man posing as a delivery man in a van reportedly entered into the industrial site and would have opened several canisters of gas/oxygen, driving the vehicle against them.

One person was killed and two were injured in the attack. A decapitated body was found at the scene and the victim's head was hung on a fence at the entrance of the factory with a message written in Arabic close to it. Near the head there were also two Islamist flags, one white and one black, also with inscriptions in Arabic. The decapitated victim was identified as the manager of a transport firm of Rhône, and the employer of the suspect. Forty people would have been evacuated from the site.

At around 11:23, the main suspect, a 35-year-old man of North African origin, Yassin Salhi, was arrested and reportedly would have shouted "Allahu Akbar" (God is greatest) at the moment of his arrest. He would be a resident of the village of Saint-Priest near Lyon. This man would have been known by the secret services of the General Directorate for Internal Security (DGSI) from 2006 to 2008 under a "record S" (State Security) for radicalization but that it was not renewed in 2008. He would be close to the salafist movement. He is married and a father of three children.

Another person was arrested shortly after the attack as part of the investigation. However, this person was allegedly released later in the day as no formal links had

been established with the attack. Salhi's wife was also arrested during a search of their home and is being interrogated.

It is worth mentioning that the US group Air Products is one of the world leading producers of industrial gases (oxygen, hydrogen, etc). The group employs 400 people and has three plants in France, including in Beauvais in the Oise department, and in Strasbourg in the Bas-Rhin department. The plant is part of the sites under the Seveso classification, i.e. sites with major industrial risks for their use of dangerous substances.

The attack against the company Air Products in Isère marks an important security tendency. First of all **it is the first decapitation perpetrated by Islamist terrorists in Western Europe**. It is also **the first confirmed terrorist attack against an industrial facility in the West**.

The attack demonstrates the fragility and vulnerability of the industrial sites to “lone wolf” terrorist attacks. Indeed, while several attacks against tourist sites and Jewish centers took place in European countries in recent years, industrial sites had never been previously targeted by such attacks.

As we reported earlier in our analysis, online propaganda is playing a more and more important role in the radicalization of local Muslims and inspiration for “lone-wolf” attacks. It should be mentioned that in its audio statement, made on June 23, the spokesman of the Islamic State, Abu Muhammad Al-Adnani, urged to turn the holy month of Ramadan into a time of “calamity for the infidels... Shiites and apostate Muslims”.

While the attack in Saint-Quentin-Fallavier has not been claimed yet, it is clear that its significant media impact risks to trigger new copycats in the nearest future. Indeed, immediately after the attack, numerous messages of support were posted by radical Islamists on social media, suggesting the establishment of the ‘Wilayat Faransa’ (French Province) of Islamic State and wowing other attacks.

FIN

Copyright© ESISC 2015