

# Nice, Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray: With each ISIL attack, France nudges rightward on security

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## Spate of terrorism brings 'Israeli model' into the French political debate.

PARIS — The French once again spent the day watching their clench-jawed, sullen-looking leaders call for national unity in the face of “the war” waged on their country by ISIL. Once again an attack seemed to break another taboo — this time the brutal killing of an elderly priest, in his church in bucolic Normandy — signaling that even in the deepest French provinces terror can strike anybody, anytime.

And once again, French voters will likely turn on François Hollande, the president who is in charge, hence responsible, when those attacks reoccur with growing regularity and whose exit from the political stage has never seemed so near.

What's unclear after Tuesday's atrocity in Normandy is how far the current government will go to push new measures to reassure the population, as it did after the January and November attacks last year, and again after Nice less than two weeks ago. Those boiled down to a state of emergency that has already been extended three times, and the use of military troops to help patrol streets or watch sensitive locations. The government has gradually added to its already considerable arsenal of legal clampdowns, for example by making provocation of or apology for terrorist acts a criminal offense, and creating a new category of “crimes of terrorist nature.”

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As before, this terror attack is reopening the debate over the appropriate balance between civil liberties and security with calls to “do something” and allow the police and the courts to impose more severe punishments on the perpetrators or, more often (because the authors of terror acts rarely survive them), the plotters who can be caught beforehand.

## Sarkozy brings the heat

Nicolas Sarkozy, the former French president, was first out of the gate Tuesday with a statement asking the government to “implement without delay the measures [the conservative opposition] has been asking for months.” The government, he said, should put an end to “legalese nitpicking,” but that is precisely what others describe as the rule of law.

In recent months and even after Nice, the Socialist government had been at pains to insist it would respect the constitutional order, not seeing in the current “war” against ISIL (a word Hollande repeated Tuesday) a reason to suspend civil liberties.

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*“We have to move to a life where you can’t carry backpacks in public spaces, where bags are seriously and systematically searched, and not by tired employees who only take a quick look” — François Heisbourg*

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French Prime Minister Manuel Valls was explicit just a week ago in his speech to Parliament in asking for a renewal of the state of emergency. The government, he said, would “turn down the temptation to propose arbitrary measures or steps that would run counter to [France’s] democratic and constitutional principles.”

It has, for example, resisted the conservative Les Républicains party’s calls for clamping down hard on people with “direct or indirect connections” with a terrorist group, either by expelling foreigners, or interning French citizens.

The problem, a government adviser said, is that the line between what the French are ready to accept in the name of security and what they would deem a violation of their civil liberties is moved further back with each new attack.

### **‘Israeli model’**

The model most talked-about in recent weeks in French political and security circles has been that of Israel — based on a deep awareness of the terror risk by the population, armed patrols in public transports, systematic controls at entrance points of public spaces.

“It seems clear to me the Israeli model is the direction we should be moving towards,” said François Heisbourg, special adviser at France’s Strategic Research Foundation, who has co-authored several government papers on terrorism over the years. Heisbourg, a former adviser to Socialist governments, has publicly called Hollande’s response to terror acts “inefficient and laughable” — at least in terms of intelligence and prevention.

“We have to move to a life where you can’t carry backpacks in public spaces, where bags are seriously and systematically searched, and not by tired employees who only take a quick look,” he said.

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*In Nice, a terrorist killed scores of children. On Tuesday, a priest had his throat slashed in front of his flock.*

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The attack in Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray, however, underlines the challenge facing the authorities.

“What’s next? Do we now put two cops or two soldiers in every French church?” the government adviser asked.

The head of a private security firm, who didn’t want to be identified, raised doubts about the Israeli model. “Do we want closed terrestrial borders and to bring back the draft?” he asked.

Heisbourg said the nature of the Normandy attack illustrates what he sees as ISIL’s ultimate goal: triggering a civil war in France.

“They killed a priest, in his church, in front of his flock,” and in another precedent, he noted, “in a small French town.” The emotional impact of the Nice Bastille Day truck rampage was magnified by the fact that children were among the victims. This time, the cultural and religious affront will have “a tremendous impact,” the government adviser said.

Among those feeling the most impact, politically, will of course be Hollande, the president whose chances to win a second term next year — or even to run again — are shrinking with every new attack.

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**P.S.**

\* 7/26/16, 8:35 PM CET:

<http://www.politico.eu/article/with-each-attack-france-nudges-rightward-on-security-killing-priest-francois-hollande-isil-terrorism/>