

French trial opens for suspect in 2016 police killings

From the French edition of [The Local](#) and [ABC](#) Court sketch from [France 3 Regions](#)

LYON, France – It wasn't the deadliest attack in Europe linked to the Islamic State group, but it was among the most disturbing: One evening in 2016, an assailant killed two police officers in their family home, in front of their 3-year-old son.

On Monday, a trial opened in a French counterterrorism court over the attack in the Paris suburb of Magnanville.



Mohamed Lamine Aberouz, 30, is accused of complicity in killing a public official, terrorist conspiracy and complicity in illegal detention, with the maximum penalty life in

prison. Wearing a white T-shirt, with long hair tied back and a beard without moustache, he confirmed his name to the packed courtroom before the plaintiffs' statements.

Jean-Baptiste Salvaing, 42, and his partner Jessica Schneider, 36, a police administrative worker, were stabbed to death at their home in Magnanville northwest of Paris.

The defendant has maintained his innocence since he was charged in 2017. He says he was at prayers the night of the attack, France's first-ever killings of off-duty police officers at their home.

According to court documents, The killer, 25-year-old Larossi Abballa broke into the home of police officers Jessica Schneider and Jean-Baptiste Salvaing before they returned from work. When Schneider came home, Abballa slit her throat in the living room, with the child present. The father texted her from the office to say "I'm leaving," the documents say. There was no response. He was stabbed upon arriving home.

Neighbors called police, and the attacker said he was holding the couple's 3-year-old hostage, according to the documents. He told a negotiator from a special police unit that he acted because the French government was preventing the faithful from joining the caliphate, and stressed that he had not targeted civilians but representatives of the French state.

Prosecutors argue that Aberouz was the one who singled out Salvaing and Schneider to Abballa as targets for the attack, visiting the house with the killer to identify them to him in photos stored on their computer. His DNA was found on the wrist rest of their machine, which was also used to announce the couple had been killed.

No other trace of his presence at the scene of the crime has been found, Aberouz's defenders point out. His lawyers say Abballa was a "lone wolf" under police surveillance and with a past conviction for conspiracy to prepare terrorist acts.

But investigators argue that Aberouz and Abballa "were both motivated by the same ideology in favour of armed jihad". They found out that Aberouz had been in contact through Abballa with a young woman, Sarah Hervouet, who has been jailed for 20 years for knifing a plain-clothes police officer in 2016.

After more than five years of investigation and multiple

arrests, only Aberouz is facing trial. Charges were initially brought against two others but later dropped. Aberouz, now 30, was arrested a year after the events,

He maintains that he never went to the police couple's home or helped in preparing the attack. He said the DNA found in the victims' home could have been the result of his shaking hands with Abballa or riding in his car in the days before the attack.

Aberouz was already sentenced to prison in another terrorism case, for his role in a failed gas canister attack near Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris.

Police are hoping that the Magnanville attack trial sheds light on the preparations for the attack and the methods used by those who plot to attack police officers.

A verdict is expected Oct. 10.
