

Eyewitness Debunks Claim of “Attack” on Paris Jews by Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Activists

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Ligue de Defense Juive members near Boulevard Voltaire in Paris on 1 May. The anti-Palestinian Jewish extremists provoked altercations with participants in Paris’ traditional May Day march. ([Patrice Gravoin](#))

An eyewitness account debunks a report disseminated by anti-Palestinian groups and Israeli media that two Jews were attacked by “BDS” – boycott, divestment and sanctions – activists during May Day commemorations in Paris on Friday.

According to the eyewitness, an altercation was provoked by extremists from Ligue de Défense Juive (LDJ), the French counterpart of the [Jewish Defense League](#).

Founded by the ultra-racist rabbi Meir Kahane in [New York in 1968](#), the Jewish Defense League has been [termed by the FBI](#) a violent terrorist organization. Kahane was later elected to the Israeli parliament, founding the [Kach](#) party, which was banned as a terror group even in Israel.

In March, two extremists with the Jewish Defence League UK were [sentenced for assaulting Palestine activists in London](#).

Alleged attack

The French pro-Israel website [JSSNews claims](#) that on Friday at around 3pm, a group of 40 people set upon two men who were “identifiable” as Jews.

JSSNews quotes an unnamed person from “a security service belonging to the Jewish community” stating that “the savages” who allegedly carried out the attack “were linked to the anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist organizations Gaza Firm and BDS.”

The report claims that “police opened an inquiry and it was impossible to learn the condition of the two victims.”

It adds that “this summer it was ‘pro-Palestinian’ youths from Gaza Firm who attacked synagogues in Paris (in Rue de la Roquette in particular).”

In fact, as The Electronic Intifada has reported, Serge Benhaim, the president of the Rue de la Roquette synagogue [categorically denied](#) that any such attack had taken place.

The 13 July incident was another altercation sparked, according to eyewitnesses, when LDJ members armed with sticks and batons stormed away from the synagogue and tried to provoke street fights with members of Palestinian solidarity groups demonstrating peacefully in the Place de la Bastille against Israel's attack on Gaza.

JSSNews also cited as a source the BNCVA – a pro-Israel group that purports to monitor incidents of anti-Semitism in France.

On its website, BNCVA [claims that on 1 May](#), two Jewish men aged around 21 were attacked by around 40 “Brothers” and lightly injured.

The French-language report actually uses the word “brothers” in English, but it is unclear if it is supposed to indicate the Muslim Brotherhood, a slang term for men of color, or something else.

The Paris 11th district police station – which is responsible for the area where the alleged May Day incident took place – refused to provide any comment to The Electronic Intifada and referred the matter to the central media unit that does not answer phones on Sunday.

There have been no reports of arrests related to the alleged incident.

Israeli media, [including Haaretz](#), picked up the dubiously sourced report. The website of the Israeli news channel [i24News](#), citing BNCVA, claimed that “two young men of Jewish extraction were beaten up Friday in Paris by a 40-strong gang.”

Eyewitness

Michael, a 28-year-old activist with [Collective Antifasciste Paris Banlieu](#) (CAPAB – Anti-Fascist Collective of Paris and Suburbs), told The Electronic Intifada what he witnessed.

The Electronic Intifada is not using last names in this post for safety reasons.

On the morning of 1 May, anti-fascist activists met at the Saint-Michel metro station planning to go to a commemoration for [Brahim Bouarram](#), a Moroccan man murdered and thrown into the Seine river by right-wing extremists on May Day 1995.

But according to Michael, dozens of riot police encircled, or kettled, about 50 anti-fascists, preventing them from joining the rally.

Meanwhile, other members of CAPAB had planned to meet up with members of another group, Action Antifasciste, near the Charonne metro station on Boulevard Voltaire in order to take part in the big May Day rally together.

Because they had been kettled near Saint-Michel, Michael and some of his comrades were late getting to the second meeting point.

But police had pushed the Action Antifasciste activists away from the designated meeting point on Boulevard Voltaire after what Michael later heard was an altercation sparked by members of the Ligue de Defense Juive (LDJ) and the right-wing Jewish group Betar.

Spitting and insults

Michael said that he and his group were trying to figure out an alternative meeting point to join up with the other anti-fascists, and headed toward the Rue des Boulets metro station, about 450 meters further down Boulevard Voltaire.

“We were about a dozen people,” Michael said. “As we headed to Rue des Boulets we passed about 50 members of the LDJ and Betar,” who were clearly identifiable by their clothing. Many had their faces covered and some carried sticks.

“As we passed, these people started spitting at us and insulting us,” Michael said. “They hit one of the women who was wearing a keffiyeh” – a traditional Palestinian checkered scarf.

Michael said that this attack provoked “insults” and “punches” between members of CAPAB and LDJ. Up to this point police had just been looking on, but then several officers intervened to push back members of LDJ.

“Some of the police tried to restrain the LDJ, but another police officer aggressed one of our comrades and tried to push us back,” Michael explained. “Police pushed us out of the area but let the LDJ people wearing masks and carrying sticks remain in the area of Rue des Boulets metro. They were allowed to occupy the area and do as they pleased.”

Michael notes that the anti-fascists had originally planned to meet around 1pm, but that was impossible as LDJ and Betar members were already on site. He says the attack described above occurred around 3pm – the same time as the alleged incident reported by *JSSNews*.

Michael, who has detailed knowledge of Paris activist groups, said he recognized no one from Gaza Firm in the vicinity of the incident.

In a [statement](#), the activist collective Génération Palestine says that on 1 May, in the vicinity of Boulevard Voltaire, persons identifiable as belonging to LDJ and Betar “attacked participants in the traditional May Day march.”

“Attacks and provocations are the *modus operandi* of the extreme right Zionist militias,” the statement adds. “During the summer of 2014, during demonstrations in support of the people of Gaza, the LDJ became visible in the media because of its violence, provocations and multiple aggressions.”

LDJ released its own [statement](#) that “following the attack on two young Jews” its members remained in the area all afternoon “protecting Jewish businesses in Boulevard Voltaire from the anti-Jewish thugs participating in the Communist march on 1 May.”

It also posted this image showing its members hoisting their group’s flag, with faces obscured, surrounded by police.



Members of France's Ligue de Defense Juive — the Jewish Defense League — in Paris on 1 May.

The "Art Optic" store allows the [location the image was taken to be precisely identified](#) as a small side street just off Boulevard Voltaire.

LDJ protected by police

Michael also notes that the route of the big May Day march was from Place de la République to Place de la Nation, two major Paris squares linked by the 3.5 kilometer-long Boulevard Voltaire.

He says that when the rally passed by the Rue des Boulets metro station around 4pm, the LDJ activists were still there, protected by riot police who had their backs to the LDJ group: the police were in effect "protecting the LDJ, with whom they collaborate."

According to Michael, the LDJ extremists continued to shout insults, especially when marchers identifiable as Muslim or left-wing went past.

Intimidation



"I support Israel"



LDJ stickers found on the door of Paris cultural center on 28 April, the day before it was scheduled to host a Palestine solidarity event.

Imen, a Palestine solidarity activist in Paris, also told The Electronic Intifada that she and her

comrades had been subject to intimidation by LDJ members in the area days before the 1 May incident.

“On 28 April, one day before a public event organized by BDS France at the Centre International Culture Populaire [very close to the Rue des Boulets metro], members of the LDJ came and put stickers on the doors.”

The LDJ stickers, seen in the photos above, carry the Star of David and fist symbol used by the violent anti-Palestinian racist group [Kach](#), and say “I support Israel” and “Join the Jewish Defense League.”

The [event](#) the next day went off without incident – more than 120 people came to hear Maren Mantavoni from Stop the Wall, Patrice Bouveret of an arms-trade monitoring group and Sivan Halevy from BDS France.

Imen said that police had been informed about the stickers.

Conflating anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism

In the wake of the [murders by French gunmen](#) in January at the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* and at a kosher supermarket in Paris, the French government has stepped up its crackdown on what it calls anti-Semitism.

While the January attacks had no connection whatsoever with any Palestine solidarity groups, French authorities are increasingly [targeting criticism of Israel](#) as an alleged source of anti-Semitism.

Israel has long [sought to exaggerate and exploit](#) reports of anti-Semitism in Europe, particularly in France, both to demonize Palestine solidarity activism and to spark an exodus of Jews.

In this context, accusing activists of anti-Jewish attacks may be seen by anti-Palestinian groups as a good strategy to bring further state repression and sanctions on those seeking to bring Israel to account by lawful and peaceful means.

The fight against racism requires vigilance against all forms of bigotry, including anti-Semitism. It also includes not allowing false claims of bigotry to be used to silence criticism of Israel.

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