

NYC Attacker Wants to Display ISIS Flag in Hospital

The man charged in the terror attack in Manhattan wants to display an ISIS flag in his hospital room. He picked Halloween for his target date in the belief that more people would be on the street.

These are some of the details emerging as the investigation into this horrific tragedy continues. How should we respond to the deadliest terrorist attack in New York City since 9/11? Let's understand why terrorists are rejoicing today, then examine a secular response and a Christian point of view.

Why Jihadists Are Rejoicing

According to *Newsweek*, ISIS-linked social media accounts "lit up" after the attack in Manhattan. "Trick-or-tweet New York City," wrote one ISIS supporter, adding a happy face image. "Allahu Akbar," wrote another.

Why would anyone rejoice in the deaths of eight innocent people?

ISIS encourages its followers to kill an "infidel" in any way possible: "Smash his head with a rock, or slaughter him with a knife, or run him over with your car, or throw him down from a high place, or choke him or poison him."

So far, ISIS supporters have perpetrated 143 attacks in 29 countries, killing 2,043 people. Tuesday's attack is just the latest in a long line of atrocities. We can expect such attacks to continue; as ISIS loses its geographical caliphate in the Middle East, it seeks to demonstrate its credibility and relevance by encouraging terrorism around the world.

These jihadists are motivated by two beliefs.

First, they claim that the West has been attacking the Muslim world since the Crusades and especially by supporting Israel. Since the Qur'an requires Muslims to defend Islam (Sura 2:190), they believe that they are defending their faith when they attack us.

Second, they claim that there are no innocent civilians in the West. Since our countries are democracies in which we elect our leaders and support our military, jihadist groups see our citizens as complicit in a perceived attack on Islam. They view us as we would view Germans who supported Hitler during the Holocaust. In their minds, killing us is a defense of Islam mandated by the Qur'an.

The vast majority of Muslims reject these assertions. However, for ISIS and similar groups, these claims motivate their continued attacks against the West.

A Secular Response

A secular worldview allows its proponents four responses to the Manhattan attack.

First, secularists view jihadism solely as a military enemy, since they have little or no context for its spiritual agendas and claims. As a result, they hope that destroying ISIS's caliphate and defeating its soldiers will win the "war on terror."

Second, they believe that attacks such as the Manhattan tragedy cannot always be anticipated or prevented, so they trust in the law of averages, hoping that what happened there will not happen where they live.

Third, they believe that they can do little for the victims of the attack except to grieve for them. If this were a natural disaster such as Hurricane Harvey, they could offer financial assistance. As it is, there is little they can do except to feel sorry for those who were attacked and those who love

them.

Fourth, they can learn little from the attack that relates to them spiritually. They believe that life ends at death, so there is nothing they need to do to prepare for it. Or they believe that everyone who is “good” goes to heaven, so they need to do nothing except live good lives while they can.

A Christian Response

The Christian worldview offers four dramatically different responses to the Manhattan attack.

First, we know that jihadism is primarily a spiritual movement. We believe that the ultimate answer is for radicalized Muslims to turn to Christ as their Lord. We rejoice in the spiritual awakening sweeping the Islamic world—as Muslims see visions and dreams of Jesus, more have come to Christ in the last 15 years than in the previous 15 centuries.

And so, we pray daily for Muslims around the world to have supernatural encounters with Jesus and come to faith in him. Remembering Saul of Tarsus, we know that God can change any heart and redeem any soul. We are fighting this battle on our knees.

Second, we know that terrorism cannot always be anticipated or prevented, so we seek God’s protection and direction. We do not believe that our prayers are always answered as we wish, but we do believe that our Father knows us and will direct our paths (Prov. 3:5–6).

Third, we know that the victims of this tragedy need our intercession. We are praying for ministers to comfort and encourage them. We are praying for nonbelievers to turn to Jesus in faith. We are praying for God to redeem this tragedy for his glory and our good. We believe our intercession enables us to serve those who suffer today.

Fourth, we believe we must be ready for eternity today. The Manhattan attack illustrates God's warning: "You do not know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? It is just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away" (James 4:14). We know that we are one day closer to eternity than ever before.

Which worldview do you choose today—the secular or the Christian? If you choose the latter, you will say with C. S. Lewis, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else." {eoa}

This article originally appeared on The Denison Forum.