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Inés San Martín

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## Pope's top aide calls ISIS threats to Rome 'worrying'

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ROME BUREAU CHIEF



In this Sunday, April 9, 2017 file photo, two Swiss guards stand in front of St. Peter's Basilica prior to a Mass to be celebrated by Pope Francis, in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican. (Credit: AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino.)

ROME - Pope Francis's top aide acknowledged Saturday that given a recently published video from ISIS threatening Rome and calling on lone wolves to drive cars into the crowds around the Vatican, "one cannot avoid worrying."

"I saw, yes, yesterday that video that was shown on TV: evidently, one cannot avoid worrying. Especially because of this senseless hatred that there is," said Italian Cardinal Pietro Parolin, speaking to reporters during a Catholic gathering in the Italian city of Rimini.

The prelate also said that, to his knowledge, no particular new security

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measures are in place in the Vatican as a direct result of that video, and the alarm level is the same as before.

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Paloma García Ovejero, the pope's deputy spokesperson, had a similar message on Friday, after the video showing a terrorist tearing an image of Francis in half was released.

"We haven't detected any signal in the Vatican that would lead us to raise the level of concern," she said. "We haven't raised the security measures because the controls are already very high. St. Peter's Square, as pilgrims and tourists can ascertain, is always very well protected."

Seeing the rise of terrorist attacks across Europe, the Vatican upped the security in the area surrounding St. Peter's Square, particularly after the terror attacks in Paris, back in Nov. 2015. Soon after, Via della Conciliazione, the main artery leading to the square, was closed to traffic. Heavy pots with palm trees were placed on the side streets, and the military and police presence is evident every day, as is the airport-like controls during the days Pope Francis is there.

"Nothing has changed in recent days nor in recent months," García Ovejero said, noting that the headquarters of the Catholic Church are protected by "heavily qualified men," particularly the Vatican's police force, known as Gendarmerie Vaticana, which is in constant contact with task forces both in Italy and abroad.

It's evident, she said, that safety is very important matter for the Holy See. For this reason, "it's guaranteed for those who work or live here, as well as for those who come from abroad."

Despite the safety concerns, García Ovejero said, "Pope Francis hasn't changed a thing in his agenda, nor is he going to. Furthermore, he'll continue to foment dialogue, creating bridges, defending peace. With Muslims and Christians."

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Regarding a drone that flew over the Vatican's no-fly zone early on Saturday, she said it did not create any new alarm.

Earlier this week, following renewed threats by supporters of ISIS, the head of the Swiss Guards, the pope's personal army, said that the elite corps are ready to confront any terror attacks. Commander Christoph Graf told the Swiss Catholic website *cath.ch* that "perhaps it is only a question of time before an attack like that happens in Rome, but we are ready also for this."

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