

France: Investigation of 2002 Karachi bombing implicates Sarkozy

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After a spate of scandals last year around the Clearstream and Angola arms sales affairs, France's conservative establishment is again roiled by allegations of political corruption. Mounting evidence supports allegations that the killing of 11 French submarine engineers and 3 Pakistanis in a bomb attack in Karachi, Pakistan, in May 2002 was linked to the non-payment of kickbacks in French submarine sales to Pakistan. This evidence implicates current President Nicolas Sarkozy, who was budget minister at the time of the sale, in 1994.

At the time, the conservative government of Prime Minister Edouard Balladur sold three Agosta submarines in a deal for €800 million to Pakistan. As part of the deal, Pakistani senior officials would receive some €80 million as "sweeteners". It has been alleged that Pakistani officials then gave a portion of the money back, to finance Balladur's 1995 presidential campaign.

Seven years later, 11 French engineers, who were employed by the DCNS (state-owned French naval defence company), and 3 Pakistanis were killed in a bomb attack in Karachi in May 2002. In the aftermath of the attack, both the French and Pakistani authorities claimed that the attack was the work of al-Qaeda.

The original investigation of the 2002 bombing led to the 2003 trial of two Pakistani men, Asif Zaheer and Mohammad Rizwan. However, the high court in Pakistan's southern province of Sindh threw out their conviction in May 2009 and ordered their release. The court noted that the prosecution's evidence consisted of one man's testimony, who claimed only that he had seen the two men together eight months before the bombing. Moreover, the initial Pakistani investigation claimed the men had used ammonium nitrate in the bombing, whereas French labs concluded the attack was carried out with RDX, a military explosive.

Since 2008, anti-terrorist investigating magistrates leading an inquiry into the 2002 attack have focused on allegations of a link to a corrupt 1994 submarine deal with Pakistan. Last June, they told the victims' families there is a "cruel

logic" to suspicions the attack was ordered in retaliation for the failure to pay the commissions to Pakistani officials.

This suspicion emerged in 2008 as part of an investigation regarding alleged corruption and arms sales. Police seized during a search of the headquarters of the DCNS documents relating to companies Heine and Eurolux, through which commissions were transferred in connection with arms sales.

One of these documents, called Nautilus, was written in 2002 by a former member of the French internal intelligence service (DST, Direction for the Surveillance of Territory), Claude Thévenet. He wrote: "The Karachi bombing was carried out thanks to the complicity of sections of the [Pakistani] army and of the agencies within the Pakistani secret services tasked with supporting Islamist guerillas."

The document continues: "Those who used this Islamist group who carried out the action had a financial goal.... It was a question of obtaining the payment of unpaid commissions" that had been agreed upon as part of a purchase of French submarines for Pakistan in 1994.

On June 2, further details emerged strengthening allegations of a connection between the 2002 Karachi bombing and the submarine sales.

French news website Mediapart cited a January 2010 report prepared by the Luxembourg police, alleging that Sarkozy approved the creation of the company Heine. Heine, located in Luxembourg, has received tens of millions of euros stemming from Franco-Pakistani submarine sales. The daily *Libération* commented: "This offshore company served to evade anti-corruption legislation, at least until 2005. Moreover, at least until 2009 it maintained direct relations with the highest French political authorities—including the current President of the Republic."

The Luxembourg police report says: "One document details the history and functioning of the Heine and Eurolux corporations. According to this document, the agreements to create this society seemed to come directly from the Prime Minister Edouard Balladur and Finance Minister (in fact,

Budget Minister) Nicolas Sarkozy.”

In addition, the report notes, “References suggest a type of kickback used to fund political campaigns in France. We stress that Edouard Balladur was then a candidate in the 1995 presidential elections in France...and was supported by sections of the RPR, including Nicolas Sarkozy and Charles Pasqua.”

Jacques Chirac defeated his rival Balladur in the 1995 presidential election. After taking the office, Chirac suspended the payment of a portion of these commissions. Last June, Chirac’s defence minister Charles Millon (1995-1997) confirmed this in an interview to *Paris Match* magazine.

Millon said: “Shortly after my nomination as Defence Minister in 1995, Jacques Chirac asked me to review the different arms sales currently underway and to stop payments of commissions that could then lead to kickbacks [to figures in France]. This was done: each one was the subject of a specially dedicated investigation.”

Socialist deputy Bernard Cazeneuve, rapporteur of a French parliamentary mission charged with investigating the causes of the attack in Karachi, said that he was not surprised by the Luxembourg police report. He said that “parliamentary work” on the inquiry had been “scandalously interfered with,” since the documents that had made possible the Luxembourg report had not been available to his investigation.

French government officials have dismissed claims of a connection between the Karachi bombing and the submarine contracts out of hand. Spokesman Luc Chatel said, “I confirm absolutely nothing,” adding that the bombing came “after the signature of the contracts on this market, as these contracts were signed at the beginning of the 1990s. The government of Edouard Balladur was not in power at the time.”

Last year, during a press conference in Brussels, Sarkozy said any suggestion that the Karachi attack was a Pakistani retaliation for non-payment of French commissions was a “fable.”

In an interview this May with *L’Express*, investigating magistrate Jean-Louis Bruguière (who led the investigation into the Karachi attack in 2002-2008) said: “The 2002 Karachi bombing, which killed 11 Frenchmen, was an operation led by organisations affiliated to al-Qaida. In fact, they were terrorists belonging to the second circle of the Osama bin Laden network. These groups shared al-Qaida’s objectives, and have the same strategy of opposition to technical and military cooperation between France and Pakistan.”

Government denials are at best unconvincing, given the long history of relations between Pakistani intelligence and

Islamist circles around al-Qaida and the evidence already presented about Franco-Pakistani tensions over the contracts.

Last May, Claude Thevenet told the anti-terrorist investigating magistrates that France’s DGSE (General Directorate of External Security) carried out a retaliatory attack against Pakistani military officials suspected of being behind the Karachi attack. According to Thevenet, “this mission consisted in ‘breaking some knees’ and not in killing people, as specialised DGSE commandos sometimes do.” He added, “The French secret services’ target were Pakistani military men.”

He said, “Of course the operation might have been carried out after the attack, which came 3 days before the re-election of Jacques Chirac as President. But it might have come before the attack, as France had already received a ‘warning,’ in February 2002, from Pakistani authorities.”

Details unearthed by the investigations of the Karachi bombing show the contempt in which French and Pakistani authorities held the victims of the fatal bombings, as well as the liberty of Asif Zaheer and Mohammad Rizwan. More broadly, they highlight the boundless cynicism with which ruling circles treat public opinion.

Examined from the standpoint of the widely accepted facts revealed by the investigations, the pretexts given for France’s participation in NATO’s “war on terror” in Afghanistan as grotesque lies. Far from being principled opponents of terrorists or of the Taliban, French politicians and defence contractors happily sold submarines to Pakistan starting in the mid-1990s, when Pakistan and its NATO allies were backing the Taliban to open up trade routes into Central Asia. Bombings and other covert attacks were used by the governments of both countries.

Then as now, considerations of the impact on lives of working people in Europe and Asia were subordinate to the profit interests of leading politicians and defence contractors.



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