

French police detain 19 alleged Islamist militants

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Early Friday morning, French anti-terrorist police and domestic intelligence carried out raids in major cities across France—Paris, Nantes, Toulouse, Marseille, Lyon, Nice, Rouen and Le Mans—arresting 19 alleged Islamist militants, including three women.

Two were released, and the rest remained in custody. The raids reportedly were carried out at the request of anti-terrorist judges, citing alleged preparations for a terrorist attack.

Police claimed that those arrested were the members of a Salafist group, Forsane Alizza, whose leader, Mohammed Achamlane, was arrested in Nantes. According to DCRI chief Bernard Squarcini, “Many computers, SIM cards, weapons, money, 10,000 euros in small bills, four Kalachnikov [rifles], eight guns, seven or eight handguns, a Taser, tear gas, and an impressive batch of Kalachnikovs in Marseille” were seized.

Forsane Alizza, which was disbanded in February, was accused of extremist views, allegedly seeking jihadist recruits. Squarcini said, “The members of this well-formed and truly dangerous group each had continuing physical training and were seeking weapons.” He added, “The idea was to carry out a jihad or holy war in France, and they seemed to be preparing to kidnap someone.”

However, Achamlane’s lawyer, Benoît Poquet, indicated that he “firmly denies any ties to a terrorist enterprise.” On Saturday, *Libération* reported that “Police never really considered Forsane Alizza as a serious threat, estimating that it only has a few dozen members.”

Whatever the truth of the allegations against Forsane Alizza, the raid and its extensive coverage in the media are part of the anti-immigrant, law-and-order campaign

engaged by President Nicolas Sarkozy in a desperate attempt to win re-election in the April 22 elections.

The raid came in a climate of law-and-order hysteria whipped up after an elite police unit killed Mohamed Merah, who was accused of killing seven people between March 11 and 19. Merah was accused of having links with Al Qaeda. However, subsequent reports made clear that Merah was functioning as a French intelligence asset, raising serious questions about state complicity in the Toulouse shootings (see “Reports indicate Toulouse gunman was French intelligence asset”).

Asked whether the raid was a response to revelations of French intelligence’s role in the Merah case, Interior Minister Claude Guéant said: “Intelligence services, as in all previous years, played a completely vital role in the struggle against terrorism and terrorist threats. In this case, the judicial case was based on intelligence work, just as Merah’s guilt was determined by common analyses of the judicial police and interior intelligence.”

Last week, Sarkozy banned four Islamist clerics from attending an April 6-9 conference organised by the Union of Islamic Organisations in France (UOIF). According to the government, “Their positions and statements calling for hatred and violence seriously damage Republican principles and, in the current context, represent a serious threat to public order.” On Monday, France’s Interior Ministry ordered the expulsion of three Muslim imams and two Islamic militants.

After the raid, Marine Le Pen—the leader of the neo-fascist Front National, which is polling around 16 percent in the first round—called for the dissolution of

the UOIF: “We must without delay or weakness take drastic measures against radical Islam.”

After Merah’s killing, Sarkozy ordered police to continue action against suspects. He told *Europe1*: “What happened this morning will continue. There will be other operations, which will continue and allow us to expel from our nation’s territory people who do not belong there.... What must be understood is that the trauma of Montauban and Toulouse is profound for our country, a little—I don’t want to compare the horrors—a little like the trauma that followed in the United States and in New York after the September 11, 2001, attacks.”

Sarkozy’s comparison of the Toulouse shootings to the September 11 attacks is both cynical and revealing. Both terrorist atrocities were carried out by individuals closely watched by intelligence agencies whose surveillance inexplicably evaporated shortly before the attacks. Both atrocities were political godsend for unpopular presidents, who seized on them to push through reactionary agendas.

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While bankrupting the country with trillions of dollars in military spending, US imperialism occupied Afghanistan and Iraq and waged deep attacks on democratic rights in America. With his comments, Sarkozy makes clear that French imperialism—beset by economic crisis in Europe, tensions with Germany, and rising popular opposition—hopes to use similar methods.

As part of Sarkozy’s pro-US policy after he came to power in 2007, France re-integrated itself into the NATO command structure, deployed more troops to Afghanistan, and created a Persian Gulf military base with US help. This has been accompanied by attacks on workers’ social rights and on basic democratic rights, such as the banning of the burqa and harsh measures against immigrants, at home.

Last year, France, together with the US and Britain, launched a war against Libya under the guise of “protecting civilians.” They sought to replace the Gaddafi regime with a pro-Western government, serving as a base to suppress working class struggles in neighbouring Tunisia and Egypt. At the same time, French forces intervened in Ivory Coast to overthrow President Laurent Gbagbo.

There is no opposition to these policies from the bourgeois “left” Socialist Party (PS) and its petty bourgeois adjuncts, like the New-Anti Capitalist Party (NPA). Both parties supported the Libyan war and accepted Sarkozy’s cynical “humanitarian” arguments.

On the atrocity in Toulouse and the recent police raid, the PS and the pseudo-left tendencies have capitulated to Sarkozy’s law-and-order hysteria, ignoring mounting reports suggesting state complicity in the Merah affair. Commenting on the police raid, François Rebsamen, the PS’s point man for internal security policy, told *20 Minutes*: “I have confidence in the DCRI’s men.”



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