

France's Merah affair: New questions emerge on Toulouse killings

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French intelligence officials' comments about the murders committed by Mohamed Merah last March in Montauban and Toulouse, during the French presidential election campaign, raise new questions about the involvement of the political establishment.

Between March 11 and March 19, seven people were killed in southwest France: three army parachutists of North African origin from regiments deployed in Afghanistan, and three children and a teacher at a Jewish school. A special police unit finally killed the chief suspect, identified by the police as Mohamed Merah, who was riddled with bullets during the assault on his apartment led by then-Interior Minister Claude Guéant.

Public statements reported in *Libération* on October 31 confirm that the DCRI (Central Directorate of Internal Intelligence) systematically “looked aside” as Merah prepared and committed the murders.

Libération quotes officials of the Toulouse DCRI branch, who were questioned by Judge Christophe Tessier. According to them, the DCRI national command in Paris opposed both their assessment of Merah's “threat level” and the decisions they took before and after the murders.

The DCRI reportedly failed to follow up on a request for a judicial enquiry on Merah by the Toulouse branch in June 2011 and on an alert transmitted to the anti-terrorist prosecutor, even though Merah was considered to be a potential “jihadist”. A few months later, the Paris DCRI headquarters proposed recruiting him as an informer, something the Toulouse agents considered “surreal”.

This report discredits the arguments of Bernard Squarcini, the head of the DCRI during the killings. His account portrayed Merah as a “lone wolf” terrorist,

without contact with anyone, thus justifying the DCRI's inability to “detect” and arrest Merah. As the WSWWS remarked at the time, Squarcini's comments ultimately showed that Merah had functioned as an informer for the DCRI. (see: Reports indicate Toulouse gunman was a French intelligence asset)

The facts that presently have come to light make it difficult not to conclude that a part of the French internal intelligence services facilitated Merah's actions or even knowingly allowed them to proceed, before and after the murders.

Merah had travelled with relative ease to countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan, though he was banned from entry to the USA.

Surveillance of Merah was dropped just before he began preparing the murders. In November 2011, “just as Mohamed Merah started the preparations for his terrorist acts, his threat level was ‘reviewed and lowered by the Paris specialists,’” *Libération* notes.

The head of the Toulouse DCRI said he wanted to participate in the enquiry after the first murders at Montauban, but he was told that it was unnecessary. Paris insisted that the inquiry concentrate exclusively on the far-right milieu, against the better judgment of the Toulouse DCRI branch.

The latter provided a list on which Merah's name appeared at the top. There was a strong possibility, according to *Libération*, that Merah could have been “detected” earlier, thanks to a list of IP addresses on which Merah's mother was listed.

The widow and brother of one of Merah's victims in March, Corporal Abel Chennouf, have brought charges against the DCRI and its former director, Bernard Squarcini, for “deliberately endangering the life of others” and “not preventing a crime or law

infringement prejudicial to the bodily integrity of a person.” Chennouf’s father had already brought charges in May.

The lawyer of Chennouf’s widow said, “If these Toulouse police officers are right and the decision was actually taken in Paris, then who took that decision in Paris?” She continued: “Whatever the reason, given the facts as we know them, we consider that Bernard Squarcini and Claude Guéant are taking us for fools by claiming that Merah was a lone wolf and that no information existed which permitted his threat level to be assessed!”

The DCRI’s behaviour resembles in many ways the repeated “dysfunction” of US intelligence services before the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. These served as a pretext for the invasion of Afghanistan and then of Iraq. Since then, they have served as a justification for the so-called “war on terror”, one of the pillars of US imperialism’s foreign policy.

In this case, the terrorist attacks at Montauban and Toulouse benefited the election campaign of the outgoing president, Nicolas Sarkozy, with whom Squarcini has a close relationship.

The country was taken hostage, as day after day the state and the press fell silent on any other political theme besides national security, terrorism, and anti-Islamism. President Sarkozy rose rapidly in the opinion polls. He took advantage of the situation to introduce new laws criminalizing access to certain Internet sites or travel to certain Muslim countries.

The Socialist Party (PS) reacted in the same vein, burying any criticism of the conservatives; its presidential candidate appeared alongside Sarkozy and neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen during commemorative ceremonies for the victims. The petit-bourgeois “left”, such as the New Anti-Capitalist Party and the French Communist Party, took no initiative to expose the profound anti-democratic character of these events. They followed in the PS’ wake.

The current government of President François Hollande has reacted by stressing the supposed need to reinforce the intelligence services, instead of seeking to establish the responsibility of those involved. Cynically claiming to work for “transparency,” Interior Minister Manuel Valls published the report of the National Police Inspectorate (IGPN) and sent it to parliament.

This underlines the reactionary character of the French political elite, which responds to an affair that exposes the anti-democratic manoeuvres of the intelligence service by handing them greater powers.

The Europe Ecology Party (EELV an ally of the PS) has asked for the constitution of a parliamentary commission of enquiry, with the lawyers of the victims’ families.

The PS deputy Jean-Jacques Urvoas, who is leading a “parliamentary mission” destined to prepare “a reform of the intelligence services”, immediately gave a negative reply. He said that, “parliament could not investigate an affair as long as a judicial enquiry was ongoing.” He used a decree of November 17, 1958—that is, at the height of the Algerian War—to forbid the organizing of such a commission.



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