

Massive police mobilization in France

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In the aftermath of the massacre at the editorial offices of the satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo* on Wednesday, the French state has organized a massive police-military mobilization, deploying tens of thousands of officers and troops throughout Paris and northern France.

French police officials claimed Thursday night they were closing in on two Islamist gunmen who were blamed for the massacre. Masked and heavily-armed units of tactical police, similar to American SWAT teams, have been deployed in the Forêt de Retz, a 51-square-mile forest about 50 miles east of the town of Villers-Cotterêts, near the regional center of Reims.

One of the two suspects, Said Kouachi, 34, lived in Reims. His brother Cherif, 32, lived in Paris, where the attack took place about 10 a.m. Wednesday. The two are French citizens of Algerian ancestry, and the younger man had served a three-year jail term for attempting to go to Iraq to fight US forces there in 2005.

Many questions have quickly emerged about the background of the two suspects. On Thursday, it was reported by US media outlets that they had been placed on “no-fly” lists in the United States, in addition to being monitored by French police. (See: “Gunmen were ‘probably followed’ by French police before Paris massacre”)

Police carried out house-to-house searches in the village of Corcy, a few miles from a service station where the brothers were reportedly seen by an attendant. The nearby village of Longpont was also searched, and residents of both places were told to stay in their homes during the day and overnight.

Police claimed that a third man had participated in the attack as the getaway driver, but did not identify him. Hamyd Mourad, 18, who was initially named as a suspect, surrendered to police in the town of Charleville-Mezieres, about 140 miles north of Paris near the

border with Belgium, but it was unclear whether he is the alleged accomplice. His college friends have launched a Twitter campaign insisting on his innocence, as he was in a class with them at the time of the massacre.

So far nine people are in custody for questioning, according to Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve, most of them friends and acquaintances of the two fugitives. None have been charged with any role in the bloody attack.

The interior ministry gave some details of the enormous mobilization of police-military resources as part of the terror alert declared by the government of President François Hollande and Prime Minister Manuel Valls.

More than 1,000 troops have been deployed on the streets of France, together with more than 35,000 gendarmes and paramilitary police. Ten thousand of these are now on the streets of Paris. Another 50,000 civilian employees of the police and military have been mobilized, bringing the total to nearly 88,000.

The manhunt in the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre is the first time that French authorities have invoked a new surveillance law, passed in late 2013, but only elaborated in an official decree just before Christmas 2014. It gives French police the authority to collect real-time data about telecommunications and Internet traffic without judicial review.

This includes requiring Internet and telecommunications providers to turn over location data on cellphones and Internet addresses, as well as details on what targeted individuals are doing online and who they are communicating with.

Former Prime Minister Alain Juppé, expressing the bellicose sentiments in the top circles of the French ruling elite, declared, “We are engaged in a new kind of war. It spreads from the chaos in the Middle East but it is being waged here by a mix of lone individuals and

organized groups.”

The London *Times* voiced concern that the mounting political crisis in France would benefit the neo-fascist National Front of Marine Le Pen, in a report headlined, “Establishment fears Le Pen will be victor of France’s new war.” The newspaper noted, “Some of the new agents of violent Islamism may have fought in Syria but their roots are in the housing estates around Paris and the big cities where their parents and grandparents arrived in recent decades.”

The attack on *Charlie Hebdo* is the occasion for a shift to the right in bourgeois politics and an enormous intensification of state repression, not only in France but across Europe and the world. This is the significance of the announcement by the French interior minister that he will host an international meeting for his counterparts from Europe and the United States to discuss coordinated action against terrorism.

Cazeneuve claimed, “I have taken the initiative of inviting to Paris on Sunday my counterparts from the most affected European countries ... as well as my American colleague Eric Holder.” While the other countries were “showing their solidarity with France,” the meeting would also be “about exchanging ideas about the common challenge that the terrorists are posing and which can only be resolved within the European Union and beyond.”

A spokesman for Holder—the most public advocate of President Obama’s policy of preemptive assassination of suspected “terrorists”—said the meeting would focus “on addressing terrorist threats, foreign fighters and countering violent extremism.”

Republicans in the US Senate seized on the attack in Paris as a pretext to block any restrictions on mass spying and electronic surveillance in the United States. Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina told the *National Journal*, “I believe our national security infrastructure designed to prevent these types of attacks from occurring is under siege.”

Senator Bob Corker of Tennessee, the new chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, argued that the legislature should not rein in the intelligence agencies. “To me, Congress having oversight certainly is important,” he said, “but what is more important relative to these types of events is ensuring we don’t overly hamstring the NSA’s ability to collect this kind of information in advance and keep these kinds of

activities from occurring.”

Echoing these views, the *Wall Street Journal* declared in an editorial Thursday, headlined “Islamist terror in Paris,” that the attack should be the signal for stepped up domestic police spying in Europe and America.

“There will be many more such attempts at mass murder, and authorities in the U.S. and Europe need broad authority to surveil and interrogate potential plotters to stop them,” the *Journal* wrote. “This offends some liberals and libertarians, but ... better to collect metadata and surveil some people now than deal with public demand for mass Muslim arrests or expulsions after a catastrophe.”

The newspaper argued “violent Islam isn’t a reaction to poverty or Western policies in the Middle East. It is an ideological challenge to Western civilization and principles, including a free press and religious pluralism.”

This is a remarkable falsification, given that the principal suspect in Wednesday’s attack had previously sought to travel to Iraq to join the resistance to the US invasion and occupation of the predominantly Muslim country, and cited the abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib as his motivation.

Moreover, the attack came one day after the French defense ministry announced the country’s only aircraft carrier, the Charles de Gaulle, was being deployed to the Persian Gulf to support the imperialist intervention against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

The author also recommends:

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