

French police arrest four youths, citing terror plot against military base

Kanda Gabriel, Kumaran Ira
24 July 2015

On Wednesday July 15, the French government announced that security forces prevented a terror attack on a military base in southern France, and arrested four terror suspects aged between 16 and 23, allegedly linked to jihadists.

The news of a planned terror plot was leaked only two days later, after four individuals were arrested on July 13 in separate locations in France, including near Paris, and in the Rhône and Bouches-du-Rhône regions. The youngest was released without charges on Thursday. The detained suspects include Ismaël (17), Antoine (19) and Djebriil (23), a former Navy sailor discharged for disciplinary reasons at the beginning of the year.

During his visit to the southern coastal city of Marseille on July 15, French President François Hollande announced, “This week, we stopped terrorist attacks which could have taken place.”

Hollande’s announcement stunned the Interior Ministry, which had planned to announce it the next day. Following the presidential leak, however, the Interior Ministry was compelled to announce the foiled terror attack the same night. Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve told reporters that suspects had been arrested who were planning a terrorist act against French military facilities.

During the police investigation the three individuals admitted that they had planned to target the Fort Béar national commando training base at Port-Vendres, in the Pyrenees. This is one of the training centers where French special forces are trained before participating in overseas operations such as the French interventions in Mali and the Central African Republic. The attack on the base was reportedly planned for late 2015 or early 2016.

Le Parisien cited a source investigating the case as

saying, “The three suspects were planning to kill military men on duty at this semaphore and to decapitate the squad leader. They would then have filmed the scene and broadcast it on the Internet.”

In detention, the suspects confessed to being self-radicalised jihadists, who had watched videos of the extremist group Islamic State (IS) on the Internet.

As with Mohamed Merah’s shooting spree in Toulouse in 2012 and the Kouachi brothers’ shooting at Charlie Hebdo in January, the suspects had been under close intelligence surveillance.

According to Cazeneuve, Ismaël was identified as the “main instigator” of the terror plot, having been spotted in late 2014 for his “activism on social networks and relations with French jihadists currently in prison.” He reportedly came under intelligence surveillance after indicating that he wanted to fight in Syria.

Cazeneuve said that authorities halt similar plots every week in France, where more than 300 people have been implicated in jihadi activities since 2012. He added that 1,850 French citizens or residents are linked to jihadist networks, including close to 500 currently in Syria or Iraq.

Political responsibility for the decision of hundreds of French nationals to participate in the jihadist war in Syria lies primarily with French imperialism and its allies, including Washington, who have organised reactionary proxy wars across the Middle East. The NATO powers, including Paris and their regional allies, have armed Al Qaeda-linked militias as the main striking force against the Assad regime.

Government warnings about terror plots and youth participation in jihadist wars is a cynical attempt to cover up its role in these reactionary wars. These warnings are then used to step up attacks on democratic rights at home.

Seizing upon the foiled terror plot, the Hollande administration is seeking to justify giving the intelligence agencies even greater powers to spy on the entire population.

The revelation of the alleged terror plot comes as the French Constitutional Council is set to rule this week on a controversial surveillance law that legalises mass spying and data retention practices, creating the intelligence infrastructure for police-state rule in France. The obvious political motivations involved in the Hollande administration's decision to publicise the foiled plot were commented upon even in the media.

On July 16, *Le Monde* wrote, "The date was convenient. The government wants to show that it is effective, just as its controversial intelligence law is before the Constitutional Council. On July 15 as well, Brussels gave the green light for another highly criticised project supported by France: the creation of a database of airline passenger data (PNR) that the European Parliament had blocked since 2011 in the name of protecting civil liberties."

Conservative politicians, themselves implicated in pursuing austerity and anti-democratic measures, cynically pointed out that Hollande is exploiting the anti-terror campaign in order to justify his own unpopular domestic policies.

Hervé Morin, a former Defense Minister under the conservative government of President Nicolas Sarkozy, said this "intolerable propaganda" allows the president to exploit a subject on which "one knows there will be unanimity."

"Faced with his incapacity to solve the real problems of the French people [economic growth and unemployment], François Hollande regularly turns to the new [terrorist] menace to show what he is doing," Morin said.

Significantly, even the PS government did not bother to deny it was manipulating the issue of terrorism to boost the prestige of the state for domestic advantage at home.

Ecology Minister Segolène Royal told BFM-TV, "It is important for the government to be able to spread the word that the intelligence services are effective, that police are effective, that the *gendarmes* are effective. ... I think [François Hollande] concluded that at this time, it was important to show that the French people are protected. The French people had to know this based on

an example."



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact