

Paris terrorists operated “in plain sight”

Patrick Martin

21 November 2015

Numerous media reports over the past several days have revealed that most of the Islamists who engaged in the suicide attacks in Paris that killed 130 people, as well as the reputed organizer of the attacks, were known to the French and Belgian security services well before November 13. But no intelligence or police agency took action against them to prevent the murderous rampage.

Remarkably, these accounts come from American media outlets that themselves have close ties to the intelligence agencies—the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, CNN—as well as the official Voice of America and the Israeli newspaper Haaretz.

In an accompanying editorial, the *New York Times* noted, “Most of the men who carried out the Paris attacks were already on the radar of intelligence officials in France and Belgium, where several of the attackers lived only hundreds of yards from the main police station, in a neighborhood known as a haven for extremists.”

The *Washington Post* summed up the situation as follows: “Belgian authorities had close contact with some of the men believed to be behind the bloody terrorist attacks in Paris last week, a pattern that raises questions about how the suspects could slip through the fingers of law enforcement officials.”

Senator Dick Durbin of Illinois, the Senate’s second-ranking Democrat, said that several of the Paris attackers were on no-fly lists, indicating they were well-known to US intelligence as well.

Most of the accounts note that the US, Turkey and Iraq all warned France in advance of the November 13 attacks of plots under way, while Turkey actually supplied the name of one of the operatives involved, Ismael Omar Mostefai, who was himself known to the French authorities from 2010. Mostefai traveled to Syria in 2013 despite having a “fiche S,” a police dossier marking him as a security concern, and returned to France the following year. He was one of the gunmen who massacred nearly 100 people at the Bataclan theater before killing himself.

Another gunman at the Bataclan, Samy Amimour, was

detained by French police in October 2012 on charges of terrorist conspiracy. According to the *Times*: “Suspecting he was planning to go to Yemen to fight, the authorities confiscated his passport and placed him under judicial control, meaning he was barred from traveling and had to report regularly to the authorities. Nevertheless, a year later Mr. Amimour managed to make his way to Syria undetected.”

The French daily *Le Monde* reported last December that Amimour was in monthly Skype contact with his family and that his father had traveled to Syria to try to convince him to return home. The police did not interview the father upon his return, and Amimour returned to Paris undisturbed sometime this year.

Bilal Hadfi, a suicide bomber at Le Stade de France, was known to Belgian authorities after a teacher in his class in a Brussels school reported his comments supporting the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre. He then went to Syria, a Justice Ministry spokeswoman told the *Post*, from where he posted comments on Twitter denouncing pro-Western forces as “infidels” and warning that the countries intervening in Syria “should no longer feel safe, not even in their dreams.”

“We knew Hadfi had traveled to Syria and had come back,” a Belgian police spokeswoman told the *Post*. After his return to Belgium, “For two weeks, the security services tapped the phone line of the house where he lived in Molenbeek,” the newspaper reported. Hadfi was well known as an Islamist radical who had fought in Syria, appearing on lists maintained by a police advisory group and by a Belgian journalist. In November he drove to Paris and took part in the assault.

Ibrahim Abdeslam was one of the suicide bombers at a Paris café. He was also Belgian, and known to have attempted to reach Syria in February 2015, although he was reportedly detained and turned back by Turkish authorities. He was known to police as a longtime associate of Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the top ISIS figure in Belgium. His young brother Salah, 26, who is believed to be the only surviving attacker, was stopped three times by

French police while driving back from Paris to Belgium the night of November 13-14. Each time he was let go.

Then there is the case of the alleged principal organizer of the attacks, Abaaoud, who was killed in a shootout with French police in the early morning hours of November 19, along with an as yet unidentified man and a woman, his cousin. Abaaoud was a well-known public voice of ISIS, interviewed in the February issue of its online magazine *Dabiq* under the name Abu Umar al-Baljiki.

In the interview, as described by Voice of America, Abaaoud “boasted about how he could operate in plain sight in Belgium and never get caught.” He added, “My name and picture were all over the news, yet I was able to stay in their homeland, plan operations against them, and leave safely when doing so became necessary.” At one point he was stopped by police, but they let him go, supposedly not recognizing him. Yet he was so notorious that a Belgian court sentenced him to 20 years in prison, *in absentia*, for recruiting Belgian youth to fight for ISIS.

While Abaaoud attributed his seeming invisibility to divine intervention on the side of Islamic fundamentalists, there is a simpler explanation. During much of the time that Abaaoud was active in ISIS, the group was working as part of the anti-Assad campaign in Syria backed by the United States, France, Belgium and the other imperialist powers.

Until June 2014, when ISIS militants crossed the border into Iraq and seized control of Mosul, threatening the US-backed regime in Baghdad, the group’s activities were tolerated, even encouraged. Even after Mosul, the US-backed “coalition” conducted a notably desultory bombing campaign, suggesting that ISIS was still considered a potential imperialist asset, at least in Syria.

This continues the pattern that goes back as far as the terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington DC on September 11, 2001: the Islamic fundamentalist terrorist groups, including Al Qaeda, ISIS, and their innumerable offshoots, have their origins in the covert operations of imperialist intelligence agencies, particularly those of the United States.

Al Qaeda arose from the Arab forces involved in the US intervention to topple the Soviet-backed regime in Afghanistan in the 1980s, while the war in Iraq created the forerunner of ISIS, and the US-backed campaign of subversion in Syria turned the group into a powerful force holding territory on both sides of the Iraq-Syria border.

There is another pattern as well: terrorist attacks undertaken by groups created and armed by the

imperialists become the pretext for a further expansion of the powers of the national security state. In the wake of the Paris attacks, the intelligence services of the imperialist powers, and particularly the American CIA, NSA and FBI, have launched a furious campaign to profit from the atrocity.

Top US security officials have made a series of speeches blaming the latest terrorist outrage on the revelations of Edward Snowden, on built-in encryption provided by the manufacturers of smartphones and other communications equipment, and on the handful of legal restrictions on government spying.

The bogus character of these arguments is shown by examining the actual events in Paris. French police recovered one of the cellphones used by the attackers and found unencrypted text messages and GPS data that enabled them to locate Abaaoud and others who allegedly formed part of the support network for the attacks. There is no evidence that any of the attackers used encrypted communications, or that they needed to, given the effective green light they had for their operations.

It is not possible, with the limited information so far made available, to give a full and definitive account of what took place in Paris on November 13, 2015, let alone its origins in the murky world where intelligence operations intersect with Islamic fundamentalist terrorism.

Two conclusions are inescapable, however: (1) Official propaganda about this and other terrorist attacks, aimed at stampeding public opinion behind the state and the intelligence services, are based on half-truths and lies. (2) The imperialist governments, whose savage wars for oil and geopolitical advantage in the Middle East, Africa and Central Asia have created the conditions for the rise of Islamist terror organizations, with which they have collaborated, are once again using a terrorist atrocity as the pretext to implement longstanding plans for military escalation abroad and the abrogation of democratic rights at home.



To contact the WSWP and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact