

New data on police foreknowledge of terrorists raise questions on Paris attack

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Since the November 13 terrorist attacks in Paris, new revelations have provided more evidence that Islamist elements who launched the attack were well known to the intelligence services before the attack that killed 130 people.

These details are of the greatest political significance. They contradict official claims that the attackers evaded the attention of French and European intelligence, and that the only way to prevent new attacks is to accept a permanent state of emergency and police-state measures. If the terrorists were able to plan and execute such a massive, coordinated attack, it was because intelligence agencies did not use the powers they already have to prevent attacks that were carried out by Islamist terrorist forces with which they have close political ties.

On November 25, the *New York Times* reported that Belgian authorities had a list of suspected Islamists that included the Belgian residents who were involved in the Paris attacks. It wrote, “a month before the Paris terrorist attacks, Mayor Françoise Schepmans of Molenbeek, a Brussels district long notorious as a haven for jihadists, received a list with the names and addresses of more than 80 people suspected as Islamic militants living in her area.”

Citing sources inside Belgium’s security services, the *Times* wrote, “the list included two brothers who would take part in the bloodshed in France on Nov. 13, as well as the man suspected of being the architect of the terrorist plot, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, a Molenbeek resident who had left for Syria to fight for the Islamic State in early 2014.”

Schepmans said, “What was I supposed to do about them? It is not my job to track possible terrorists.” She noted that this is “the responsibility of the federal police.”

Abaaoud, who died in the massive police raid in Saint-Denis last week and was believed to have orchestrated the attacks, lived in Molenbeek. Known to police since 2002, he received multiple prison sentences between 2006 and 2012. He came to the attention of the intelligence services in February 2014, when he appeared in an Islamist video driving a truck dragging the corpses of nonbelievers. Six months later, international arrest warrants were issued for him.

The two brothers cited by the *Times*, Brahim and Salah Abdeslam, also lived in Molenbeek. Brahim blew himself up on the boulevard Voltaire and his brother, Salah Abdeslam, is currently on the run.

Police also had a file on Omar Ismail Mostefai, a suicide bomber at Bataclan theater, even before he travelled to Syria in 2013, while Sami Amimour, a gunman at the Bataclan, had been detained in 2012 due to suspected terrorist links.

Already before the *Times* report, numerous media outlets had revealed that most Islamists involved in the November 13 attack were known to security forces. Since the Paris attacks, a growing number of experts on French Islamism have expressed amazement that such figures were allowed to operate in France and prepare the attacks.

When Abaaoud was identified as a possible orchestrator of the attack, David Thomson, a journalist specializing in jihad in France and author of *French Jihadists*, wrote: “if this report is substantiated, what would be involved would be far more than astonishment at a meltdown of the security services.”

Thomson explained, “One must understand who this man is. He is the public face of the French-speaking jihadi world. His face was displayed for several days last year round-the-clock on all France’s major news channels. In 2013 and 2014, on his own Facebook

page, under his true identity, he posted videos of himself on the Syrian front, grenade launcher in hand, calling for people to join him.”

Abaaoud’s ability to travel in Europe and plan and obtain supplies for a major terrorist attack can only be explained by the close ties between Islamist terrorist circles and French intelligence, who uses them to go fight in the imperialist war for regime change in Syria. Under these conditions, the Paris attackers were able to exploit what amounted to official protection for their operations from sections of the French state.

The Socialist Party (PS) government’s claims about the attacks are rapidly being discredited, among rising disputes inside the state apparatus and the security services. Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve had claimed, “A zero-risk situation faced with such actors, who have declared war on our country and on Europe ... that doesn’t exist.”

In fact, amid deep divisions inside French imperialist circles over how to proceed, sections of French intelligence are criticizing the PS’ all-out support for regime change in Syria for blocking police operations in France. “Since the arrival of [PS Foreign Minister] Laurent Fabius at the Quai d’Orsay, all contacts with Damascus have been cut, because Paris is betting on the fall of the regime. ... All the French jihadists are going there,” said Bernard Squarcini, a top intelligence official under conservative President Nicolas Sarkozy.

Squarcini told *Valeurs actuelles* that Prime Minister Manuel Valls refused an offer from Syrian intelligence, passed through Squarcini, to provide more details on French jihadists fighting in Syria. Valls’ refusal was motivated by “ideological reasons,” Squarcini said.

This policy is rooted not only in the aggressive foreign policy of French imperialism and its NATO allies, including the United States, but the escalating social and economic crisis of European capitalism. The ruling elites are happy to rely on Islamist terrorist groups as instruments of their foreign policy overseas, while using their operations to justify massive assaults on democratic rights at home. This makes a mockery of the so-called “war on terror.”

The PS, whose austerity policies obtained a 3 percent approval rating in one poll last year, is handing over sweeping powers to police in a 3-month state of emergency, and planning to write a permanent state of emergency into the French constitution.

After the Paris attacks, the right-wing Belgian government of Prime Minister Charles Michel declared a security emergency last weekend citing an imminent terrorist threat, ordered the shutdown of entire neighbourhoods, and launched vast police-military operations, ostensibly to arrest Islamist suspects. In fact, only one individual was detained.

This led to broad charges, including within sections of the political establishment, that the government was manipulating events for its own political purposes. (See: “Official justifications for Brussels lockdown unravel”)



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