

Were French intelligence forces complicit in the Charlie Hebdo attacks?

Anthony Torres
20 January 2016

New revelations on the intensive surveillance of the Kouachi brothers and of Amedy Coulibaly carried out by French intelligence before they launched terror attacks against *Charlie Hebdo* and the Hyper Cacher grocery in January 2015 raise the most serious questions as to the political origins of the attacks.

Already last year, it was hard to understand how individuals known to the intelligence services could have prepared such attacks without being detected. The revelation that Coulibaly received weapons from Claude Hermant, a police informant tied to the neo-fascist and anti-Muslim National Front (FN), raised further questions as to the possible complicity of political forces in France that could have benefited from them. The attack not only accelerated the normalization of the FN, but reinforced police powers, a key element of the policy of the ruling Socialist Party (PS).

Documents obtained by investigating magistrates probing the January 2015 attacks raise even more questions, however, about possible complicity of forces within the French state.

The Kouachi brothers were closely monitored between 2010 and 2015 due to their direct contact with leaders of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), a branch of al Qaeda often described by NATO security forces, after the killing of Osama bin Laden, as the most dangerous in the world. According to about 40 reports of the General Directorate of Interior Security (DGSI) obtained by *Le Monde*, French intelligence indeed stopped monitoring Chérif and Saïd Kouachi a few months before the attacks.

The decision not to monitor individuals linked to the AQAP leadership is inexplicable. AQAP members in Yemen are routinely targeted by US drone strikes, supposedly because a war on this group is necessary to prevent them from operating in Europe or America.

French intelligence were already investigating Chérif Kouachi and Amedy Coulibaly as far back as March 2010. Starting at that time, according to *Le Monde*, the two regularly visited Djamil Beghal. *Le Monde* observes that Coulibaly was linked to “the hard core of French jihadism, without this prompting anything other than indifference” from the authorities.

On the other hand, at that time, French intelligence was following the Kouachi brothers very closely. Beghal was under

house arrest after a ten-year sentence for planning attacks against US targets in Europe. Beghal was being tapped and monitored by the Central Directorate of Interior Intelligence (later renamed the DGSI) and targeted for an investigation by the Central Directorate of the Judiciary Police (DCPJ).

Between 2011 and 2013, the DGSI's reports show that the Kouachi brothers were close to Peter Cherif, who was also indicted together with Chérif Kouachi for having gone to join the war in Iraq in the early 2000s as part of the “Buttes-Chaumont” Islamist group. Peter Chérif managed to flee before his sentencing in March 2011 and obtain a leadership role inside AQAP. Chérif Kouachi, on the other hand, was arrested before he could take the plane.

Citing judicial sources, *Le Monde* reports, “Starting in January 2012, there was phone contact with Peter Cherif. Saïd Kouachi carefully tried to hide them, using several SIM cards and phone booths. That was what put him also in the DGSI's sights. Then the General Directorate of Exterior Security (DGSE) reinforced concerns by reporting that he had possibly spent time in Yemen in the summer of 2011.”

It continued, “Starting in April 2012, the Kouachi brothers were considered to be so dangerous that they were targeted for joint DGSE-DGSI investigations. A month before, the DGSI even placed Chérif on the list of its 'priority objectives.' Investigators were concerned particularly about his distrustful attitude and his meeting with former members of the “Frankfurt group.” These veterans of the Afghan war had been convicted of plotting attacks in 2000 on the Christmas market in Strasbourg. Saïd Kouachi, for his part, discreetly re-established contact with Farid Benyettou, the leader of the “Buttes-Chaumont” network. The Kouachi brothers' Internet traffic was intercepted and showed their constant, growing interest for AQAP and Yemen.”

As “priority” targets, the Kouachi brothers were targeted for intensive surveillance, which intelligence officials then somehow abandoned. Saïd's communications were tapped for eight months in 2012 and two months in 2014, from February to June. Those of Chérif were followed for two years, from 2011 to 2013.

One can ask what motivated the intelligence services' decision to stop the surveillance of the Kouachi brothers. *Le*

Monde's analysis, describing this decision as a “bad twist of fate” and a “missed rendezvous,” explains nothing at all.

Le Monde claims that, according to the intelligence services, “no physical or technical surveillance allowed to point to the slightest preparation of violent action.” This conclusion is in flagrant contradiction with the contents of the dossiers of the Kouachi brothers and of Coulibaly. The Kouachi brothers were “priority objectives,” considered to be “extremely dangerous” by French intelligence and at the heart of AQAP's network in France.

As for Coulibaly, despite his relations with the Kouachi brothers and a broadly similar background, he was never considered as a priority objective. He was in prison from 2010 to 2014, according to *Le Monde*, “for his role in the planned jailbreak of Smaïn Aït Ali Belkacem, another key terrorist figure, condemned to life in prison for the attack on the Musée d'Orsay regional transit station in 1995 in Paris.”

Remarkably, even after Coulibaly helped plan the jailbreak of a leading Algerian Islamist terrorist in France, the intelligence services did not consider him to be an Islamist. “Amedy Coulibaly was never considered by the DGSI as a member of the radical Islamist tendency. He was therefore never a target. ... To the end, he was seen as a minor player and treated as a delinquent and standard petty criminal,” *Le Monde* writes.

This raises how French intelligence concluded that Coulibaly was not an Islamist. Given that he maintained a romantic relationship with a policewoman (*adjutante gendarme*), who according to *Le Canard Enchaîné* and *Le Figaro* is named Emmanuelle, one can ask whether he might have accepted an offer to work for the French police.

Further questions are raised by revelations in *Le Canard Enchaîné* that in October 2014, months before the attacks, Chérif Kouachi stopped in front of the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* and talked to someone he found smoking there. Kouachi belligerently criticized the magazine for attacking Islam and asked the man, a journalist at the Premières Lignes audiovisual company, whether he worked for *Charlie Hebdo*. The journalist subsequently reported the incident and gave Kouachi's license plate number to one of the policemen on *Charlie Hebdo's* security detail, who filed a report.

This report was missing, however, from the investigating dossier provided by the police to judicial investigators, and there is no sign that any official action was taken on the matter.

This has led Ingrid Brinsolaro, whose husband Frank was killed while on police duty guarding *Charlie Hebdo* on the day of the attack, to file involuntary homicide charges against the DGSI and other intelligence bodies.

The French state's forbearance faced with individuals tied to al Qaeda's most virulent branch, which was known to be targeting France, emerges in the final analysis from the close relations between Islamist terrorism and imperialism.

Since 2011, France, together with the United States and other NATO powers have used al Qaeda and other Islamist groups

like the Islamic State (IS), which took responsibility for the November 13 attacks, in neo-colonial wars in the Middle East. The first such war was the 2011 war in Libya. After the Libyan regime collapsed, NATO used the same forces again in Syria to topple President Bashar al-Assad and isolate Iran. The imperialist powers claimed, at least initially, that their proxy forces fighting in Libya and Syria were democratic and progressive.

NATO countries' intelligence services did not aggressively target the Kouachi brothers and Coulibaly because, in the final analysis, it was not in the interests of the ruling class. These terrorists were part of the same networks being mobilized in the imperialist wars in Libya and Syria.

At the same time, the crimes of the Kouachi brothers and Coulibaly were used to justify a domestic policy that the PS and the entire French financial aristocracy was seeking to implement. At the end of 2014, the PS had its back to the wall, its austerity policies were at 3 percent in the polls, and it feared that it might totally disintegrate in the 2017 presidential election. Prime Minister Manuel Valls had raised the danger of the “death” of the “left” in France.

The January 2015 attacks allowed the PS to somewhat stabilize itself, in the short term, by pushing the political atmosphere even further to the right, putting 10,000 soldiers on the streets, and accelerating attacks on democratic rights and the integration of the FN into the political mainstream.

The November 13 attacks, which claimed 130 lives, allowed the PS to reinforce these police measures by imposing a state of emergency, carrying out mass extra-judicial searches and seizures, and proposing deprivation of nationality for dual nationals—a measure backed by the FN. The terror attacks thus benefited political forces closely tied to the police and to the FN, and served to justify the drive towards an authoritarian state. Hollande was subsequently presented in a new light, as a “war president.”

One can ask whether such anti-democratic considerations played a role in the decision to suspend surveillance of Coulibaly and the Kouachi brothers, thus allowing them to prepare their attacks.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact