

After Nice attack, French government calls up military reserves

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As contradictory reports continue to emerge on Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel, the Franco-Tunisian driver of the truck that plowed through a crowd in Nice on the evening of Bastille Day, killing 84 and wounding 100, the French government is pressing for a broad military escalation.

Many reports suggest that the horrific attack, like those in Paris last year and in Brussels this March, was somehow tied to Islamist terror networks that were initially backed by Washington, Paris, and their allies in the Syrian war. These ties remain extremely murky, however. Well before Bouhlel's motives and ties have been identified, and the issues of political responsibility for the attacks and how to prevent future atrocities has been discussed, the public is being bombarded with urgent proposals for large-scale military action inside and outside France.

After President François Hollande called for stepped-up bombings in Iraq and Syria on Friday, Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve called for mass recruitment into the military and paramilitary police reserves. This is one step in a broader process of recruiting a large volunteer paramilitary force that works closely with the army for operations inside France.

On Saturday, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militia issued a statement claiming responsibility for Bouhlel's attack. "The perpetrator of the operation ... carried out in Nice is a soldier of the Islamic State. He executed the operation in response to calls to target citizens of the countries of the alliance that is fighting ISIS," declared an online communiqué published by ISIS' Amaq news agency. Nevertheless, the precise ties between ISIS and Bouhlel have not been clearly established.

Bouhlel was unknown to French intelligence and was

known to police only for petty theft and street fighting, though reports in France have also emerged that he had ties to Islamist networks active in the Syrian war. "There are 'bearded people' in his entourage, that's undeniable," a source involved in the investigation told *Metro News*, which added, however: "The only thing is that police do not know how close Mohamed Lahouaiej was to these Islamist networks."

Other accounts tend to contradict this account. Bouhlel's neighbors in France and his family in Tunisia presented Bouhlel as an irreligious, psychologically troubled individual unlikely to be a dedicated Islamist. "From 2002 to 2004, he had problems that caused a nervous depression," his father Mohamed Mondher Lahouaiej Bouhlel told AFP from Msaken, in eastern Tunisia. "He did not pray, he did not fast, he drank alcohol, he even took drugs. ... We are also shocked," he added, by the Nice attack.

Some reports suggest that in the days before the attack, Bouhlel, who was divorced and helping support three children, became deeply depressed and angry because he could not get out of debt.

While Prime Minister Manuel Valls called Bouhlel a "terrorist who is doubtless linked to radical Islamism" almost immediately after the attack, over the weekend, the interior minister sounded a more cautious note about the extent of ties between Bouhlel and ISIS.

Bouhlel "seems to have been radicalized very quickly," Cazeneuve declared, adding that it was a "new kind of attack [carried out by] individuals who react to ISIS' message and carry out extremely violent actions without necessarily having participated in combat, or having been trained."

Under these conditions, it is virtually impossible to determine the character of the Nice attack. Was Bouhlel's attack calculated mass murder by ISIS, now

that France and its other backers are turning on it and attacking its positions in the Middle East? Or was it the act of a deeply troubled individual, whose escalating personal and financial difficulties—all too common amid the broader social crisis in Europe—pushed him over the edge and into carrying out a horrific crime, perhaps after having seen some ISIS propaganda?

What is clear, however, is that the tragedy in Nice is being exploited by the Socialist Party (PS) government to justify escalating the Middle East war and its austerity and police-state measures in France—all of which apparently played some role in triggering the attack.

Cazeneuve made a nationalist appeal for 12,000 people to join the police and paramilitary police reserve, calling for “all patriotic Frenchmen who wish to do so” to join the operational reserves.

Cazeneuve made clear that this was an initial step towards forming more irregular and reserve units amid a broader militarization of French society. “Concretely, we are discussing a rapid-reaction force, under the authority of prefects [regional police chiefs], trained to carry out missions like security or support for police and paramilitary police,” he declared. Press sources explained that it would work closely with the Defense Ministry and the paramilitary police.

In pressing ahead with these proposals, the PS is acting on plans previously formulated by the French army, whose latest White Book called for an expansion of the reserves. “Without them, defense and security forces are unable to fulfill all their missions, particularly if there is a crisis on the national soil,” the White Book states.

The recent paper published by German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault in the aftermath of Britain’s vote to exit the European Union also called for a joint reinforcement of external military and internal security operations.

While the ongoing state of emergency has proven unable to prevent terror attacks, it has given a legal framework for brutal police repression of youth and workers protesting the PS’ anti-working class labor law this spring.

Workers must be warned that what is emerging is a coordinated program of militarization across Europe. While German imperialism is casting aside the policy

of military restraint that it pursued after the defeat and collapse of the Nazi regime, France is following right-wing regimes in Ukraine and Poland in setting up nationalist militias rivaling the army and police forces.

As the recent struggle against the PS labor law has made clear, whatever the initial target of these measures, they will ultimately be used to target opposition in the working class.



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