

After Levallois attack, French government whips up law-and-order hysteria

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Wednesday morning, a group of soldiers from Operation Sentinel was attacked by a vehicle that reportedly tried to run them over in Levallois-Perret, west of Paris, France, where they are deployed. Of the 10 soldiers, six were wounded, two of them seriously, according to official statements. They were leaving a public residence where they live that has been provided by the city of Levallois.

Operation Sentinel is the anti-terror operation launched by former President François Hollande after the January 2015 attacks against *Charlie Hebdo*. It mobilizes 15,000 soldiers across France.

A suspect was detained a few hours after the event, on the highway between Boulogne and Calais. The man, who was apparently not armed, was nevertheless shot. Aged 37, Hamou B. is reportedly an Algerian living in Sartrouville; the media published his picture. However, as of this writing it was still not formally established that he carried out the attack this morning.

The attack followed another incident Saturday, where an 18-year-old Mauritanian, interned for six months in a psychiatric hospital, tried to force his way through security controls at the Eiffel Tower and threatened soldiers with a knife. He did not resist his arrest by the soldiers, however. His detention was ended Monday after psychological examination found a “lack of discernment,” and he was sent back to a hospital from which he had been released for a first unaccompanied leave.

The anti-terror section of the Paris prosecutor's office is nevertheless accusing him of “attempted assassination of persons endowed with public authority in relation to a terrorist enterprise, and association of wrong-doers in relation to a criminal terrorist enterprise.”

The same juridical entity is opening an investigation

of the Levallois event on the same charges, though the prefecture is still describing it as being “apparently premeditated.”

Right after the Levallois event, however, well before the identity and motivations of the driver or even what had happened were clearly established, politicians, the media, and the government were insisting in chorus that it was a terror attack. All insisted it was “premeditated,” suggesting that it was a planned attack on the French state.

“There is no doubt this is a deliberate act,” Patrick Balkany, the right-wing mayor of Levallois, told BFMTV. “It took place in a dead end in front of the soldiers' barracks. The vehicle clearly waited for them to come out and reach their vehicle and then tried to ram them.” There were allegations in *Le Parisien* that it was a terror attack against the General Directorate of Interior Security, France's internal intelligence service whose headquarters are in Levallois.

Isabelle Balkany, the mayor's wife, tweeted: “Odious, premeditated, and voluntary aggression against soldiers of the Sentinel operation in Levallois.”

“We know it is a deliberate act, it is not an accidental act,” asserted Interior Minister Gérard Collomb (formerly of the Socialist Party). The interior and defense ministers both visited the soldiers in hospital amid extensive media coverage.

Questions are continuing to emerge in the media, however. *Le Parisien* noted that the attack on the soldiers was rapid and “confusing.” The group of soldiers, it wrote, did “not have the time to take down precise details.” Ninety minutes after the attack, the paper reported that “the wounded soldiers were hit by their own car. According to our sources, the driver's BMW rammed a military vehicle that bounced and hit the group of soldiers.”

Another question raised by a witness, which still remains unanswered, is why the soldiers did not shoot.

If ultimately it emerges that it was indeed a terror attack linked to the Islamic State, this would only serve to underscore that France's state of emergency does not prevent terror attacks. These continue despite numerous measures that police mainly use against social protests inside France. The house arrests, bans on protests and strikes, the closure of public and meeting places, the bans on travel, the multiple consecutive detentions for investigation, searches and seizure by day or night, and mass electronic spying on the population do not keep the French people safe.

Increasingly, media pundits on security matters themselves are questioning the wisdom of using the army for anti-terror missions inside France.

Yesterday morning, asked by *France Info* if the Levallois event was a terror attack, Jean-Charles Brisard of the Terrorism Analysis Center replied: “We must wait for details on these events. Since the beginning of the year, we have seen more and more attacks targeting the personnel deployed in Operation Sentinel. This raises the question of whether the operation itself is appropriate, as it has become a real trap. It deploys and exposes these soldiers, who become permanent and visible targets.”

In fact, it is above all the NATO powers' wars in Libya and Syria that are responsible for these attacks. The Islamist networks, that were mobilized to provide foot soldiers to these wars launched by NATO, carry out the attacks even though they are well known to the intelligence services across Europe. They are protected because they play a key role in imperialist policy in the Middle East.

To stop the attacks requires above all stopping the military interventions of French and European imperialism and their aggressive actions in the Middle East.

The particularly hysterical reaction of the French political establishment to the latest attacks reflects the growing crisis of newly-elected President Emmanuel Macron's administration. Macron is plummeting in the polls amid rising social anger over his planned austerity policies. Illusions spread by the press that there would be a “Macron economic miracle” are giving way to the reality that this is a government of the financial aristocracy that plans to dictate deep social cuts to

workers.

For the Macron administration, setting up a police state is a priority. The comments of Balkany, Collomb and Co. are the instinctive reaction of a political establishment whose isolation from the overwhelming majority of the population is ever more evident.

For these forces, any event of this kind must serve to justify maintaining the state of emergency, transferring it into common law, and permanently abolishing civil liberties won through sacrifices of entire generations, including in struggles against the Nazi Occupation and the Vichy regime.

Monday, Defense Minister Florence Parly insisted that Operation Sentinel will remain “in place as long as it remains useful to the protection of the French people” and will soon be adapted “so that it continues in the long term.”

Prime Minister Edouard Philippe stated yesterday afternoon that “our country still faces an elevated threat level, and this remains on the order of the day.”



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