

Chief of French anti-narcotics police indicted on drug-trafficking charges

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The indictment on August 25 of France's top anti-drug police officer casts a sharp light on the police forces, who have had virtually unchecked powers since the imposition of the state of emergency by the Socialist Party (PS) government of former President François Hollande in November 2015.

François Thierry—the former head of the Central Office for the Repression of Illicit Drug Trafficking (OCRTIS), already placed in preventive detention this March in the context of an investigation of the General Inspection of the National Police (IGPN)—was indicted on charges of “complicity in the holding, transport, and acquisition of narcotics and complicity in the exportation of narcotics in an organized gang.”

Thierry was nonetheless left at liberty by the investigating magistrates overseeing the case. He will remain in service at the Anti-terrorist Sub-Directorate (SDAT) of the judicial police, where he was sent in May 2016 after one of his former informants accused him of drug trafficking. According to press reports, Thierry still has the confidence and support of his superiors in the anti-terror police. He is, however, facing three different judicial investigations.

The Paris prosecutor's office indicted him after a two-year investigation, triggered when the National Directorate of Customs Intelligence and Investigations (DNRED) seized seven tons of cannabis resin, on October 17, 2015. These were located in several vans parked on Boulevard Exelmans in the wealthy 16th district of Paris, just outside the luxury apartment of Sofiane Hamblia, one of Europe's main drug traffickers.

This shipment was, according to *Libération*, part of a convoy transporting 40 tons of cannabis that was split up between Vénissieux, Mulhouse, Nantes and Paris and traveling under the control of the OCRTIS, which responded by accusing customs officials of torpedoing

one of their operations.

In this matter, Hamblia functioned as one of the principal informants of the anti-narcotics police. According to *Le Figaro*, “At age 42, he is seen as one of the key figures importing drugs to Europe, but also as one of the most important informants ever to have worked with the drugs office.”

In May 2016, in article titled “Revelations on state trafficking,” *Libération* accused the OCRTIS outright of organizing drug trafficking in France itself. The investigation that led to the current indictment is concentrated on the “methods” used by the OCRTIS leadership that are now being denounced by the judicial machine, that is to say the close collaboration between anti-drugs police and the major drug traffickers.

For a long time, such “special methods” were hailed as particularly effective in the struggle against drug abuse, and police and the media presented Thierry as a past master of these methods.

According to an August 23 article in *Libération*, Hamblia helped police with the “identification of several dozen high-level criminals, the arrest of around 100 people, and even the transmission of information regarding radicalized Islamists.”

Thierry is accused of having overseen “deliveries under surveillance” operations, ostensibly aimed at infiltrating drug trafficking circles, that above all allowed Hamblia to eliminate his competitors on the French illegal drug market. This allowed him, according to *Libération*, to “set himself up as France's biggest trafficker thanks to the protection of the former head of French counter-narcotics.”

The judges are not accusing Thierry of having used these methods for personal enrichment, but of not having informed the legal system of the enormous quantities of drugs that were being delivered in these

operations. Thierry insists that the relevant judges were always completely informed.

The Thierry affair is not the only one to have shaken French law enforcement in recent months. In May 2017, the entire national investigation service of the customs office was decapitated, as numerous top officials in this service were fired due to “grave events,” according to the customs office. One official was indicted in April for “complicity in the importing and holding of counterfeit merchandise in an organized gang.”

According to *Médiapart*, the customs office is “hit by a half-dozen investigations that discredit its methods.” One investigation involved among other subjects “the seizure of Kalachnikov rifles at a Reims toll booth in November 2013,” in which the customs office of Le Havre was implicated. Some €800,000 were seized and a customs official committed suicide on January 5, 2017.

In May, another “top cop,” the number two of the Lyon judicial police, Michel Neyret, was accused of protecting and maintaining close relations with high-ranking organized crime figures. He was sentenced to two and a half years in prison without parole.

Independently of the motivations of the rival factions of the judiciary and of the police apparatus, these affairs partially lift the veil on the deep collusion in France between police and a wide variety of traffickers. It underscores the essential hostility to legal and democratic rights of police forces who have extraordinary, virtually unchecked powers under France’s state of emergency.

Whereas in French suburbs, police impose brutal and humiliating searches based only on suspicions that individuals could be drug dealers, the top layers of the same police force are coordinating with gangsters the wholesale supply of drugs to the same suburbs.

The Thierry affair raises many serious questions. If the counter-narcotics police chiefs personally supervised the proper functioning of these “special operations” drug deliveries—Thierry’s top assistant, former anti-terror prosecutor Patrick Laberche, travelled to Morocco—and they did not enrich themselves with the proceeds, what were the profits then used to do?

And why was Thierry, the former chief of OCRTIS (who was previously tasked from 2006 to 2010 with

leading the anti-narcotics section on infiltrations) promoted directly in May to the Anti-Terrorist Sub-Directorate of the judicial police where he is currently the number three official?

Islamist networks responsible for terror attacks are often linked to drug-trafficking, and terrorists are often recruited from those who have served prison time on drugs charges. One example is Moroccan imam Abdelbaki Es-Satty, the alleged leader of the terror cell that carried out the recent Barcelona attack, who was imprisoned on drugs charges from 2010 to 2014. On this basis, it is legitimate to ask whether there was a link between Hambli’s collaboration with the state, whether as a trafficker or an informant on Islamist terror circles, and terrorist acts in France, Spain and beyond.



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