

Abdelkader Merah's conviction stokes anti-Muslim hysteria in France

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Abdelkader Merah, the brother of the gunman in the Toulouse and Montauban shootings during the 2012 French presidential election campaign, was found guilty of criminal conspiracy and sentenced to 20 years in jail last week, despite not having been found guilty of complicity in murder.

The extraordinary sentence, given the outcome of the trial, aims to stoke anti-Muslim sentiment in France. It also serves to hide the role of French intelligence in the Syrian wars and the Islamist networks to which Abdelkader's brother, Mohamed Merah, belonged at the time.

Mohamed Merah killed seven people in March 2012 in southwestern France. His victims included three parachutists of North African origin and three students and a teacher at a Jewish school. Merah was shot and killed in an assault by police special forces.

Abdelkader Merah was arrested shortly after the attack and has been imprisoned ever since, awaiting trial on charges that he was complicit in the murders.

After a five-week trial, the court concluded that Mohamed Merah “was always alone” during the seven killings on March 11, 15 and 19.

The court ruled that “the incriminating elements existing against the accused are insufficient, and he should receive the benefit of the doubt.” It added that simple participation in a conspiracy of criminals is “insufficient” to make a defendant guilty of complicity in murder and noted that there was no proof that Abdelkader Merah had provided “aid or assistance” to his brother.

Nonetheless, Abdelkader Merah was found guilty of “criminal conspiracy” and given the maximum sentence for such a crime, for having helped his brother steal a scooter that he later used in the murders. This is a very heavy sentence for such an offense. However,

the prosecutor's office, which had asked for a life sentence, announced it would appeal.

Reactionary journalists cynically denounced the ruling. In a *L'Express* editorial, Christophe Barbier wrote, “Decreeing that Abdelkader Merah is not complicit in murder means that his brother Mohamed was a lone wolf. But we know that is false. The trial did not shed light on all Merah's connections. Then, the court ruling suggests that there is no complicity if one arms a killer mentally, intellectually and religiously. But it is clear that Abdelkader's influence over Mohamed was decisive.”

Barbier made clear he thought that an even more extraordinary sentence was needed to strike fear into the hearts of the Islamists: “Finally, France sent the jihadists a political message. The different groupings will say the French Republic is weak, it pulls its punches. France should show it knows how to fight its enemies.”

The reactions of the media are a political fraud. By blaming the murders on the “ideological hold” Abdelkader Merah reportedly had over his brother, they are covering up the reactionary role of the French state and intelligence services, who knew Mohamed Merah well before the shootings. These lies have vast political consequences. By falsely claiming the state faces a virtually unstoppable Islamist threat and needs draconian police powers to fight it, a false pretext is created for imposing a state of emergency and far reaching attacks on social and democratic rights.

Mohamed Merah's links to intelligence are well known. A few weeks after the shootings, *Les Inrockuptibles* magazine cited Italian sources: “According to intelligence sources that spoke to *Il Foglio*, the [French] General Directorate of External Security obtained for him [Merah] entry into Israel in

September 2010 via a border post with Jordan, presenting him as an informant. His entry into Israel, covered by the French aimed to show the jihadist networks his capacity to cross borders with a European passport.”

According to former domestic intelligence chief Bernard Squarcini, Merah repeatedly visited his agency's headquarters after trips to Afghanistan and Pakistan in October-November 2011 to report what he had seen. Squarcini called it “a non-coercive administrative interview, we were not in the framework of a juridical process.” Merah was thus freely giving French intelligence the information it wanted; that is, he was functioning as an informant, officially or otherwise.

In *La Dépêche du Midi*, Yves Bonnet, another high-ranking domestic intelligence official, asked if Merah was an informant of Squarcini's Central Directorate of Domestic Intelligence (DCRI): “What is remarkable, really, is that he was known to the DCRI not because he was an Islamist, but because he had a handler in domestic intelligence. That is not banal. ... I do not know how far these relations, or the 'collaboration' with this agency, went, but one can indeed ask questions about this.”

Abdelkader Merah's trial confirmed these relations.

Under questioning from the court, Christian Balle-Andui, the former intelligence chief for the Toulouse area, said that on June 15 and 29, 2011, he had asked for judicial proceedings over Mohamed Merah's “worrying” attitude. According to Balle-Andui, Merah was the subject of an intelligence file. On March 15, 2012, Balle-Andui was denied access to video surveillance footage of the attacks, and claimed he was “60 percent sure he could have identified the killer based on his silhouette.”

Balle-Andui reported that Merah was on the short list of “most important” terrorists in the Toulouse area, including “the white emir Olivier Corel, the Clain brothers, who promoted the 13 November attacks, or the Islamic State jihadist Sabri Essid.”

These revelations vindicate the analyses of the WSWS on the role played by the involvement of the state and intelligence services in Middle East wars in the Islamist terror attacks in France over the last five years.

These attacks are the product in particular of NATO

wars for regime change, starting in 2011 in Libya and in Syria, based on collaboration with Al Qaeda-linked Islamists serving as proxy forces. Intelligence services were in contact with individuals like Merah, helping them to travel internationally to gather intelligence and build up networks that could be used to send Islamist recruits from France and Europe to fight in Middle East wars.

This also provided the ruling class with political ammunition to wage war against workers at home. Merah has been presented as a “lone wolf” to hide the fact that the networks in which he was active, which were being used before and during his attacks in the Libyan and Syrian wars, included the individuals who carried out the Islamic State attacks of 13 November 2015 in Paris. This was the pretext the French ruling class used to impose a state of emergency that allowed it to ram through the 2016 labor law, violently repressing mass protests by workers and youth.



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