

Lafarge affair exposes French ruling elite's funding of Islamic State terrorists

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The investigation into the financing of the Islamic State (IS) terrorist militia by construction firm Lafarge-Holcim exposes the fraud of the so-called “war on terror” waged by France and its NATO allies. In fact, over five years, a multi-billion-dollar firm that leads the CAC-40 French stock exchange deliberately funded a terrorist militia that carried out attacks across Europe and in France.

This directly raises the role of the state and the Socialist Party (PS) government of former President François Hollande. It reacted to the deadly terror attacks of January and November 2015 in France by imposing a state of emergency and promoting the neo-fascist National Front (FN), inviting its leader Marine Le Pen to the Elysée Palace. It also used the state of emergency as a pretext to brutally repress protests against its anti-worker labor law—claiming that protests undermined the police work of the “war on terror” and the unification of France in a struggle against Islamism.

At that time—according to investigations of six Lafarge executives in the last two weeks, including ex-CEO Bruno Lafont and general manager Eric Olsen—Lafarge was financing the very terror militias in Syria whose attacks were cited as a reason to impose the state of emergency.

Le Monde called the investigation of Lafarge executives “a political thunderbolt,” adding: “This is the first time a CAC-40 CEO has been implicated in terrorist activity.”

Moreover, Lafarge resorted to lies and the production of false documents to justify its financing of terror groups. The National Service of Judiciary Customs (SNDJ), who carried out the questioning of Lafarge executives that led to their indictment, concluded that the company’s French management “allowed for these financial transfers by creating false accounting

documents.”

The evidence provided by Lafarge itself refutes its alibi—the claim that it paid off the terror groups only because IS was threatening a Lafarge cement factory located near Raqqa, the IS stronghold in Syria. A report by London-based auditor PriceWaterhouseCoopers, commissioned by Lafarge, found that Lafarge paid \$13 million to various Islamist militias in Syria from 2011 to 2015. This financing went on into 2015, well after Lafarge closed its Raqqa cement factory in September 2014.

According to lawyers for Sherpa—the NGO that first brought a suit in 2016 over this issue for “endangerment of human life,” and thus triggered an investigation for “financing a terrorist entity” by three anti-terror or financial judges in the Paris prosecutor’s office—most of this money went directly or indirectly to IS.

Another report by US law firm Baker McKenzie, also commissioned by Lafarge, found that Lafarge’s Syrian subsidiary alone paid nearly \$5.6 million to various terror militias, including \$500,000 to IS. The son of former Syrian Defense Minister Firas Tlass reportedly served as the intermediary for the payments.

Thus, while the French political establishment was debating in 2014 or 2015 whether to bomb IS in Syria, Lafarge was still financing the terror group. Hollande ultimately gave the order to bomb IS positions in Syria after the 13 November 2015 attacks. Until then, France only bombed IS positions in Iraq, leaving open the possibility of profiting from IS actions in Syria as part of its war for regime change in that country.

What emerges from this inquiry is not the image of a company that stayed in Syria, as its executives claimed, to represent France or to extract profits from France’s largest non-oil-related investment in the Middle East,

and therefore had to pay protection money to IS. Rather, a deliberate decision was taken to finance organizations that the PS government was at the time presenting as legitimate allies of convenience in its war, carried out with the aid of Washington and the other NATO powers, to topple the Syrian government.

A bitter battle is proceeding inside official circles in France over this scandal, which financial and judicial circles in the US and UK are also clearly following closely.

This week, Sherpa asked the prosecutor's office to launch an inquiry for obstruction of justice, accusing Lafarge of having aimed to "buy the silence" of its six indicted executives and to "get ahead of the interrogations that they might be subjected to."

The NGO repeated its demand that the investigation not concentrate only on Lafarge, but also reveal the role of French state authorities at the time. Its spokesmen criticized "the nervousness, the complacency, or even the complicity" of these authorities. Its lawyer, Marie Dosé, asked: "Who can guarantee that in the meantime, part of the money paid to IS did not ultimately go to finance a terror attack in France?"

In fact, the Lafarge affair raises not only the role of France but of all the major NATO imperialist powers, including the United States. Starting in 2011, these powers set up with the Persian Gulf oil sheikdoms networks to arm and finance the Syrian terror groups to the tune, ultimately, of billions of dollars. This has devastated Syria, claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, and forced over 10 million Syrians to flee their homes.

The media and political authorities in the NATO countries tried to downplay as much as possible the politically criminal character of this war—and in particular the fact, admitted by US officials in 2012, that NATO's allies in Syria were terror militias tied to Al Qaeda.

The Lafarge affair also highlights the reactionary and lying role of petty-bourgeois pseudo-left groups like France's New Anti-capitalist Party, who were supporters and accomplices of the war. They shamelessly presented Islamist militias in Syria as products of a mass popular uprising. As the CAC-40 financed various Islamist militias on the ground in Syria, a former French colony, these groups took up the task of promoting the lie that this was a Syrian

democratic revolution.

Under these conditions, the question must be asked: why are PS officials not on trial, starting with former President Hollande himself? Hollande took the extraordinary step in 2012 to recognize the Islamist militias in Syria as that country's legitimate government. A document issued by Sherpa this October has in fact demanded that French ambassadors to Syria and former PS Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius be investigated. However, French media are largely downplaying this central aspect of the affair.

Lafarge's actions in Syria also underscore the politically illegitimate and fraudulent character of the state of emergency, whose anti-democratic provisions President Emmanuel Macron has now adopted permanently as law by passing his anti-terror legislation. While imperialism financed IS terrorists, it used their crimes in Europe to justify repressing constitutionally-protected protests by workers and youth against attempts to suppress their social and democratic rights, acquired over generations of struggle by the working class.



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