

Macron moves to prosecute journalists who revealed French arms sales in Yemen war

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In a far-reaching assault on democratic rights and free speech, the government of Emmanuel Macron is moving to prosecute journalists who have exposed both France's complicity in Saudi Arabia's illegal war in Yemen as well as the Macron government's efforts to cover it up.

The government's actions are a response to the publication of a report on April 15 by the journalistic organization *Disclose*, in partnership with the *Intercept*, *Radio France*, *Mediapart*, *Arte Info* and *Konbini*. The report includes a leaked, classified intelligence report to the president and leading ministers from September last year with precise information on the use of French arms in Yemen. It proves that the Macron government's claims that it had no evidence that French arms were being used in the war, which has killed tens of thousands of civilians, were lies.

Late Wednesday afternoon, *Disclose* and its partners published a joint statement reporting that its co-founders Geoffrey Livolsi and Mathias Destal, as well as Benoit Collombat of Radio France, had been summoned to appear before police yesterday for questioning in relation to the revelations.

"We have learned that a preliminary investigation for 'compromising national defence secrets' has been launched by the Paris prosecutors," it states. The investigation is being conducted by the General Directorate for Internal Security (DGSI), the domestic intelligence agency.

Condemning the Macron government's assault on a free press, the *Disclose* statement notes: "The confidential documents revealed by *Disclose* and its partners presents a major public interest: making citizens and their representatives aware of what the government has sought to conceal. That is, indispensable information for the conduct of a balanced debate on arms contracts tying France to countries accused of war crimes."

"These proceedings against journalists have no other

aim than to reveal our sources. In effect, this summons by the DGSI is an opening to find the principal author of the offense that we were the recipients of: those who allowed the sharing of information in the public interest.

"Let us be clear. This police investigation is an attack on the freedom of the press, which requires the anonymity of a journalist's sources. An attack that is all the more serious given that the executive power is abusing 'defence secrets' to extend the notion of protecting the interests of the nation to include the question of commercial transactions with countries at war...

"To the question: 'Do the French people have the right to be informed about the use of arms sold to countries accused of war crimes?', the government has thus chosen to answer with threats."

The government's actions were also condemned in a statement signed by 36 French press outlets, including *Le Monde* and AFP. It states that "defence secrets cannot be opposed to the right to information, indispensable to a dignified public debate, or serve as a Damocles sword to dissuade journalists from investigating and publishing."

The classified intelligence report leaked to *Disclose* is entitled "Yemen: Security Situation." It was presented to Emmanuel Macron for a defence council meeting on October 3, 2018, at which Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian and Minister of Defence Florence Parly were also present.

It provides detailed information about the locations of arms used in Yemen. It documents that French-supplied CAESAR howitzer artillery were stationed along the Yemen-Saudi Arabian border with their turrets facing towns and villages inhabited by hundreds of thousands of people. *Disclose* states that satellite images confirm that the artillery has been used in Saudi coalition offensives. French tanks and laser-guided missile systems for aerial bombers were also confirmed to have been used.

The war against Yemen, one of the world's poorest

countries, has been waged by the Saudi monarchy since 2014 with the assistance of both the Obama and Trump administrations and the European imperialist powers, including Britain and France. Tens of thousands of civilians have been killed. Up to 14 million people, or half the population, face starvation as a result of the Saudi monarchy's strategy of blockading Yemeni ports to stop supplies of food and humanitarian aid.

The report makes clear that France's actions are in violation of international law, including the 2014 European treaty on arms trade, which outlaws arms sales when the country has "knowledge at the time of authorization that the arms or items would be used in the commission of" war crimes. It strongly suggests that top Macron administration officials have violated European law.

While the government has refused to respond to the revelations, Minister of Defence Parly tried to downplay their significance last week, telling Radio Classique on April 18 that "to my knowledge, these arms are not used in an offensive manner in this war in Yemen and ... in any case I do not have any proof permitting to state that French arms are the source of civilian victims."

These weasel words should be rejected with the contempt they deserve, as an examination of the objective record makes clear. On January 20, two months after the Macron government received the classified report, Parly told France Inter that she had "no knowledge of whether [French] arms are being used in the conflict," and added that "we have not recently sold any arms which could be used in the conflict."

In the wake of *Disclose's* revelations, this line has simply been shifted. At the same time, according to AFP, citing an anonymous juridical source, the government had discovered the leak of the report in December last year, and ordered an internal investigation on December 13, while maintaining its lies. Yet on April 18, Parly grotesquely added that "all our efforts ... are oriented to seeking to end this conflict and find a political solution," denouncing what she called a "dirty war."

The Macron government is responding to an exposure of its own complicity in war crimes by seeking to prosecute those who have made this information available to the French and international working class. Its actions are part of the trampling on democratic rights and turn to authoritarian forms of rule by the capitalist elite in countries across Europe and internationally.

This finds its sharpest expression in the persecution of WikiLeaks and its editor Julian Assange and Chelsea

Manning, whose sole "crime" consists in their courageous actions in exposing documentary evidence of US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the criminal activities of other capitalist governments. Through a conspiracy of the governments of Australia, Britain, the US and Ecuador, Assange is now in prison, threatened with an illegal extraordinary rendition to the United States, where the torturers and war criminals he exposed are seeking to put him in jail for life, or worse. While Manning remains behind bars in the US for refusing to testify at a grand jury established to bring further frame-up charges against the WikiLeaks publisher.

The Macron government's actions confirm the warnings issued by the *World Socialist Web Site*: the persecution of Assange and Manning is aimed at setting a precedent for the criminalization of journalism and prosecution of those who bring government crimes to light. All of the European powers support the rendition of Assange to the United States, because they are no less terrified of the growing social opposition to their own rule at home in the working class, and are determined to utilize the same police-state methods to repress opposition.

The WSWS is utilizing its annual online May Day rally this year to build the opposition to the persecution of Manning and Assange, and connect the fight for their defence to the construction of an international socialist movement of the working class against war, inequality, the growth of the far-right and the capitalist system. Readers who want to fight in defence of democratic rights and oppose imperialist war can register for the rally today.



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