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Lafarge investigation exposes US-French collusion with ISIS in Syria

Investigations of Franco-Swiss cement and construction firm Lafarge on charges of “financing terrorism” over its ties to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militia are bringing to light the political criminality of the French ruling elite and NATO. French government and business circles financed and defended ISIS in a war for regime change targeting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, while denouncing it as terrorist to the population.

The 2015 terror attacks in Paris and similar terror attacks across Europe were thus prepared with the financial and political aid of powerful forces within the ruling class. Its policies of neo-colonialist militarism in the Middle East and deep austerity in Europe are overwhelmingly opposed by working people, so Paris covertly used ISIS to wage a dirty war in Syria and justify police state repression in France. If police did not arrest ISIS members traveling across Europe to wage terror attacks, it was because they enjoyed state protection as useful proxy forces for war in Syria.

French President Emmanuel Macron declared in 2017 that “my enemy is ISIS.” It is ever clearer, however, that officials at the highest summits of the state have made themselves guilty of collaboration with this enemy, which was in fact a tool of their filthy imperialist policy in Syria. The question is raised: what was the role of then-French President François Hollande, his adviser Emmanuel Macron, his defence minister (now foreign minister) Jean-Yves Le Drian, or of Hollande’s foreign minister Laurent Fabius?

Investigations had already established in 2017 that Lafarge, a multibillion-dollar transnational, had made financial deals with terrorist groups including ISIS and the Al Qaeda-linked Al Nusra Front in 2012–2014, handing \$15 million to ISIS in “donations,” “taxes” and “commissions.” Lafarge also brought petrochemicals from ISIS and raw materials for cement from ISIS-held mines.

Eight top Lafarge executives have been charged and two of its directors have resigned. Over the last month, the investigation has been widened to include not only individual executives but the transnational as a whole. Charges of “complicity in crimes against humanity” have been added to the charges of financing terrorism.

To defend themselves, Lafarge executives are now laying blame for this policy on state officials they worked with. Many such statements have now been corroborated. Lafarge was constantly in touch with French intelligence officials in Syria and worked with them so closely that it seems impossible to delineate their cement-making from their intelligence activities.

Lafarge security chief Jean-Claude Veillard, who testified most recently in April 2018, said Lafarge security staff provided information that they sent en bloc to different intelligence agencies. At this time, they were also in touch with Hollande’s military liaison staff. Asked by investigating magistrates whether Lafarge security staff “had to meet leaders of armed groups,” Veillard replied, “Their main mission was to get intelligence. If such meetings could help them to obtain information, they could do it.”

Apparently, various French intelligence services continued to closely follow events at the factory after it was taken over by ISIS on September 19, 2014. Veillard even says that ISIS proposed through an intermediary to reopen the factory under ISIS control.

In the summer of 2013, moreover, as the Hollande administration was preparing a military strike on Syria with the Obama administration, Paris was in continuous contact with Washington.

According to *Le Monde*, “Laurent Fabius had multiple exchanges with his US counterpart, John Kerry, to set up a military intervention against Damascus.” The same day after ISIS seized the Lafarge factory, Lafarge executives Christian Herrault and Jean-Claude Veillard went to the foreign ministry at the Quai d’Orsay and asked them to contact Washington to ensure the factory was not bombed by the US Air Force.

Speaking as a witness in the inquiry, Hollande’s foreign minister in 2012–2016, Laurent Fabius, said he had not received any information on the operations of Lafarge—a

multibillion-euro firm listed on the CAC-40 index of France's 40 largest firms—in Syria while he was in office.

On July 20, he told investigating magistrates that he had never “seen an issue concerning Lafarge raised, I am categorically sure of that.” He insisted, “If the question is to determine whether or not I knew that there was a Lafarge factory in Syria, I have no precise memories.”

These statements of Fabius have no credibility whatsoever. Already in 2014, two years before he left the foreign ministry, the press was reporting on Lafarge's operations in Syria. It is not credible to claim that the foreign minister was unaware of the existence of this factory that was at the heart of US-French intelligence cooperation in Syria, which was a subject of communications between Paris and Washington at the highest levels.

If Fabius claims not to have heard anything about it, moreover, it simply raises the question: Who were the top officials who in fact did know something about Lafarge's operations in Syria? What did Hollande, Macron, Le Drian or other top ministers and advisers know?

Investigators are also examining another devastating aspect of the case: the sale of cement to ISIS. Three months after ISIS seized the factory, Lafarge chiefs were still apparently discussing the prospect of selling cement to the terrorist group.

The lawyer of Sherpa, the NGO that brought the complaint against Lafarge, asked: “Does this mean that in France, a foreign minister was voluntarily kept in the dark about a crucial affair like a French corporation's decision to stay in a war-torn country beset by terrorism, which meant it would have no other choice than to finance ISIS in order to continue its business operations?”

All available information points to official and corporate complicity with groups, like Al Qaeda and ISIS, whose members were preparing terrorist attacks in France and across Europe. The Kouachi brothers, members of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula who organized the attack on *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015, had their four-year surveillance lifted in the summer of 2014. The ISIS members who led the November 13, 2015 attacks in Paris were allowed to freely travel to and from Europe and prepare their attacks, even though they were known to the state.

It is impossible to understand these developments outside of the broader strategic objectives of the PS government: regime change in Syria at all costs and the imposition of bitterly unpopular austerity measures inside France itself.

In the summer of 2013, the military attack on Assad that Hollande was plotting with Washington did not take place, as London and Washington backed down at the last minute. The two best organized enemies of Assad on the ground were Al Nusra and ISIS, which were occupying a large portion of the country, financed from Qatar and Saudi Arabia with US logistical support.

While the PS claimed to the French people it was backing “democratic forces” struggling against “a dictator,” it was in fact waging a neo-colonial war backing spies and terrorists in a violent attempt at regime change targeting a former French colony.

The details emerging in the Lafarge investigation also invalidate the reasons invoked for suspending democratic rights under the November 2015 state of emergency, transformed into the so-called anti-terrorist law by Macron. The state of emergency served to establish the structure and practices of a police state and fight workers’ opposition to the austerity policies of Hollande. Now, this continues in the form of Macron’s labour decrees, moves to privatise the railways and to slash public health care, pensions, unemployment insurance and other essential social services.

This assault on basic social and democratic rights is led by government officials who oversee the organization, behind the backs of the people, of entirely criminal operations whose murderous consequences they used to justify repressing legitimate working-class opposition.