

After failed Thalys attack, Europe prepares further security clampdown

By Francis Dubois
31 August 2015

The August 29 conference at the interior ministry in Paris, gathering interior and transport ministers from nine European countries, was the preparation for a massive escalation of law-and-order measures across Europe, particularly on train.

The conference followed a failed attack on passengers of a Thalys high-speed train between Amsterdam and Paris on August 21, mounted by an alleged Islamist fighter who, according to reports from the French state and media, was heavily armed. The attacker now faces charges of carrying out an assassination attempt of a terrorist character.

Media reports have given extensive details on the political trajectory of the attacker, who was radicalized in Europe, fought with an Islamist group in Syria, and returned to Europe to wage “jihad” in Europe. French President François Hollande has given three American citizens who stopped the attacker on board the train the Legion of Honor decoration.

Certain countries including Belgium, the Netherlands, and France immediately reinforced security measures on board Thalys trains and in major train stations. The French government also stepped up random baggage checks that are already being conducted.

The goal of the Paris conference was to prepare another security conference, to be held symbolically on September 11. The measures discussed in Paris were in preparation since the January shootings against *Charlie Hebdo*. They include intensified ID checks on board trains, by various police forces, so as to follow and monitor individuals being followed by the intelligence services, and granting stepped-up powers to the train networks’ existing security forces.

Also discussed was the installation of similar security measures to those currently used in airports, with body

scanners, metal detectors, and searches both of travelers and their luggage.

A central theme at the conference was to reinforce and accelerate coordination between the intelligence services of the different European countries, updating of intelligence databases, and the active surveillance and arrest of individuals under surveillance. “We must,” the French interior ministry declared, “act on the conclusions that can be drawn from the profiles drawn up” by the intelligence services.

Another point in the discussion was definitively setting up a European Passenger Name Record (PNR), a centralized database of all information—identity, destination, hotel reservations, etc.—on people traveling by plane or by train in Europe. This project, which has been stalled for four years in the European Parliament, was adopted on July 15 by the Commission on Civil Liberties. The ultimate objective is to definitively adopt the PNR by the end of the year.

Prior to the conference, French Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve said: “We must see if we can put in place a surveillance system that allows us to monitor and control in airports and other transportation systems, in a more systematic and coordinated fashion, all those who are using them.”

The failed attack on the Thalys is being used as a pretext for generalized surveillance of the entire population of Europe. Luc Carnouvas, a senator of France’s ruling Socialist Party (PS) close to Prime Minister Manuel Valls, told *Le Monde*: “After the attack, we must protect travelers on every train as we do on airplane flights, no matter the cost.”

The Thalys attack is the latest in a series of similar actions, which have been systematically used to limit or eliminate democratic rights. Individuals involved in these attacks inevitably present a similar profile, and

are all known to the intelligence services prior to mounting their attacks.

Before the conference, the French police trade union, Alliance—which contains a large number of top police officials—demanded that off-duty police officers be allowed to travel for free on mass transit and carry at all times their police firearms and other weapons. This same trade union had already demanded in 2012 that police enjoy an automatic presumption of legitimate self-defense. This demand, inscribed in the program of the neo-fascist National Front, was dismissed by legal experts at the time as a “license to kill.”

Significantly, in a comment on the sidelines of the conference, German Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière criticized Cazeneuve’s plans for stepped-up security checks in the train system. “We cannot and we do not want to have omnipresent security checks of people and of luggage on trains in Germany and in Europe,” he said.

During imperialist wars for regime change carried out in recent years in North Africa and the Middle East, notably in Libya and Syria, the European imperialist powers have systematically backed and financed Islamist fighters, using them as proxy forces to topple targeted regimes. When these fighters return and continue their “jihad” in their home countries, ruling circles seize on this to reinforce controls and political spying of the population and to attack civil liberties.

The reaction of the PS government of Hollande-Valls is not to halt its support for Islamist guerrilla forces in the Middle East and Africa, but rather to organize an enormous security build-up at home.

The omnipresence of soldiers and heavily armed policemen disposing of exorbitant powers in mass transit systems used daily by millions of people is used to accelerate the broader militarization of society. The creation of this atmosphere of hysteria and permanent tension also favors the shift of the political axis in France and across Europe towards the far right.

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