

French intelligence

2013-2020

Some articles from the website
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Intelligence agencies

Internal intelligence hiring - 26/06/2013

The fledgling Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure (DGSI) is to benefit from a 13% increase in personnel over the next three years, up from its current staff of 3,200, France's interior ministry announced last week. According to our sources 80 people will be recruited in 2014, of a total 430 new recruits by 2017. More than 60% of the newcomers, who will be under contract to the department, will be geopolitical analysts, translators and linguists, legal experts, engineers and technicians.

The transformation of the Direction Centrale du Renseignement Interieur (DCRI) into the DGSI, a plan that the intelligence service's management has been working on for several years, makes such recruitment easier because the agency is no longer under the responsibility of the Direction Générale de la Police Nationale, and therefore has control over its own hiring policies. The reform, called for by experts including prefect Remy Pautrat, formerly of the DST, was taken up by the working groups set up by President François Hollande before his election in May 2012 (IOL 634).

Tech boost for internal agency - 07/05/2014

The agency's technical service, which used to be the poor relation of other departments, is being enhanced with the DCRI's transformation into the Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure (DGSI).

The DGSI, France's new internal intelligence service which comes into being on May 12, will have a fully-fledged technical department, much like its external counterpart, the DGSE. The interior ministry is in the throes of recruiting a new department number two who will work under a DGSI technical chief, a position that does not yet exist under the current staffing structure.

The DCRI's technical missions, particularly the management of the terrestrial interception centre in Boullay Les Trous, south-west of Paris, are currently the responsibility of the service's R division, which is also in charge of surveillance operations, installing covert microphones and video cameras.

The shift from the old DCRI to the new DGSI will also involve the reinforcement of the informations systems division, which manages the internal intelligence agency's computer systems and data bases as well as

carrying out digital forensics missions. A division chief and assistant division chief are currently being recruited, along with more than a dozen additional technicians including a technical sensors supervisor and a head of information systems security, who may be recruited from the private sector.

DGSE, DGSi expand premises - 12/11/2014

France's internal and external intelligence services are to occupy new premises to cope with growing staff numbers.

The DGSE is too confined in its Boulevard Mortier headquarters in Paris. The intelligence service headed by Bernard Bajolet is planning to transfer some of its departments to the Noisy-le-Sec Fort, to the east of Paris. To date, Noisy-le-Sec has essentially housed the DGSE's Service Action (SA). The fort's canteen has already made provision to double the number of meals it serves. The headquarters of the DGSE, which is already considered to be too small for the number of agents it employs, will be unable to make room for another 800 new hires. But Mortier will remain the service's central hub, and, although the idea has been mooted several times in the past, there are presently no moves afoot to move the DGSE in its entirety to Noisy.

Meanwhile, in 2015 the DGSi, France's internal intelligence service, will also take delivery of a building to house some of its 400 new recruits. The building located at Quai du Docteur Dervaux in the Paris suburb of Asnieres-sur-Seine will take the overflow from the DGSi's main headquarters in Levallois-Perret. It is currently occupied by the Direction Générale de la Sécurité Civile et de la Gestion Civile (DGSCGC) and the Direction Centrale des CRS (DCCRS). In the 2015 budgetary bill currently being debated in parliament, the French government boasts of obtaining a 28% discount on the rent, some €22 million for the next nine years. Renewal of the rental agreement also avoids a costly refurbishment. Agents have been forewarned: they won't be moving into a gleaming new building.

DGSi balks at intelligence-sharing plan - 27/05/2015

According to information obtained by Intelligence Online, the French internal intelligence service, the DGSi (Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure) is in a stand-off with the US intelligence services, particularly with the FBI and the CIA. The French are opposed to the establishment of a new jihadist tracking partnership which would involve pooling intelligence from both sides of the Atlantic on lists of jihadists or suspected jihadists. The DGSi's culture does not predispose it to massive and automatic intelligence-sharing with the

US. The US intelligence services, which have proposed the same arrangement to their counterparts in other European countries, have been pushing strongly for greater integration of intelligence files with US allies, in particular via the Terrorist finance Tracking Program (TFTP, IOL 731), since the emergence of the Islamic State (IS) jihadist threat.

The SCRT - 26/08/2015

The SCRT (Service Central de Renseignement Territorial), which reports to the Direction Centrale de la Sécurité Publique (DSCP), is getting involved in anti terrorism. At the end of July, the service headed by Jerome Leonnet had its powers extended by decree. Critics of the move say the SCRT risks treading on the turf of an array of other French agencies already engaged in this area, including the DGSI, the SDAT and UCLAT. The broadening of its prerogatives should enable the SCRT to gain access to a greater quantity of data, including EASP (administrative investigations into public security) files.

Row erupts over 'S' files - 09/09/2015

Tension is mounting between the DGSI, which has been accused of withholding information, and other services of the French intelligence community.

The DGSI (Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure), France's internal intelligence service, continues to be reticent about sharing information with the wider French intelligence community, most notably its 'S' - national security - files. In view of the heightened threat of a terrorist attack in France, a number of other intelligence services have complained that the DGSI should be more willing to release information that could prove vital. As Intelligence Online revealed, a number of French intelligence services only found out the names of people suspected of helping the Kouachi brothers carry out their deadly attack at the office of Charlie Hebdo via the media... or from information-sharing by their US counterparts (IOL 733).

The DRPP (Direction du Renseignement de la prefecture de police de Paris), the French police intelligence service, the Judicial Police via the anti-terrorist division SDAT and the finance ministry's intelligence services - the DNRED (Direction Nationale du Renseignement et des Enquêtes Douanieres) and TRACFIN - have voiced growing concern since the attacks on the satirical newspaper and the Hyper Casher supermarket in January. The DGSE, the French external intelligence service, is also affected by the DGSI's information

retention, even though a DGSE unit is actually based at the DGSI's headquarters in the Paris suburb of Levallois-Perret (IOL 728).

Aware of the problem, Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve set up the "super UCLAT", an anti-terrorist coordination unit directly attached to the interior ministry, earlier this year. Alexandre Jevakhoff was also asked to compile a report on the subject to improve each service's access to the others' files (IOL 741). Although the top brass at the DGSI, including director Patrick Calvar, are trying to bring about change, operationally old habits and attitudes die hard.

Interior ministry sets up its networks - 04/11/2015

As part of the deployment of the secure inter-ministerial network, the general internal security directorate, the DGSI, is to have two fibre-optic links between the data centre at its headquarters in the Paris suburb of Levallois-Perret and its new annex on Quai du Docteur Dervaux in neighbouring Asnieres-sur-Seine, which will thus have substantial on-site storage capacity. The DGSI will move in to the annex in the fourth quarter of 2015, replacing the general civil security and crisis management directorate, the DGSCGC (IOL 723). The DGSI has stringent requirements. It wants a 99.99% guarantee of the system's reliability, which means no more than six minutes down time each year!

DGSI trains counter-terrorism judges - 06/01/2016

The relationship between the two is usually rather tense but the French internal intelligence service DGSI has recently started sending anti-terrorism experts to the Ecole Nationale de la Magistrature (ENM) to help educate future judges and prosecutors on the subject. The service is also providing regular week-long training sessions for magistrates who are already practicing. The internal intelligence service and the legal system were criticised for not working closely enough together after the Paris terror attacks in November.

DGSI may be soon weaned off NSA - 03/02/2016

French presidential directives on intelligence-sharing mean that the internal intelligence service will have to review its relationship with the US National Security Agency.

France's National Intelligence Council, chaired by President François Hollande, decided on January 13 to increase anti-terrorist intelligence sharing between government intelligence services. The DGSI (Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure) is to be given more access to the technical department, or DT (which stands for NSA in France), of the external intelligence service DGSE (Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure), most notably its intelligence and cryptanalysis services. The DGSE will also help the DGSI develop its own technical tools.

If these measures become a reality, it will bring about a sea change in how French government intelligence functions. The DGSI has long turned to the US for interception assistance, rather than going to the DGSE's technical department, with whom it has always had a conflictual relationship. Didier le Bret, France's national intelligence coordinator, acknowledged this penchant for US intelligence during a hearing before the French parliament's national defence and armed forces commission in December when he pointed out that "the DGSI's files are fed daily by the US intelligence services".

This places the DGSI in a position of dependence vis-a-vis the National security Agency (NSA) and obliges it to provide intelligence in exchange, since all intelligence services expect something back for what they share. The legal framework for these exchanges remains essentially informal.

Calvar settles scores with Europartners - 02/03/2016

Patrick Calvar, the DGSI chief whose alarming remarks about jihadist cells in Europe were widely reported in the press recently, defended the French internal intelligence agency's cooperation with other European intelligence services in an address to the French parliamentary intelligence delegation (DPR) on February 17. Calvar maintained that the DGSI was one of the European intelligence agencies that shared the most with its counterparts, pointing out that some 8,000 'S' files on individuals who pose a security risk had been incorporated into a common Schengen database, making the agency "very popular" with its European intelligence partners. However, for reasons to do with national laws, countries including Spain and Belgium do not share their equivalent of 'S' files, meaning that there are gaps in the tracking of suspect individuals. And when an attack happens, the French intelligence services are blamed for doing a poor job. Calvar said his service was also cooperating more closely with Russia's FSB and SVR. According to the DGSI's estimates, "some 7-8% of people wishing to leave France for Syria are of Chechen origin", Calvar said, and some of them have been directly implicated in planned attacks.

The BRP - 18/05/2016

The BRP (Bureau du Renseignement Penitentiaire) the French prisons intelligence service, is being substantially beefed up in the government's action plan against radicalisation and terrorism and in accordance with the bill currently before the Senate reinforcing the crackdown on organised crime and terrorism finance. According to a number of well-informed sources, the BRP is being transformed into a satellite of the DGSI (Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure), the French internal intelligence service, in prisons. The materiel and the agents placed at the disposal of the prison system will almost all come from the internal intelligence service. The BRP's shortcomings were discussed before the January 2015 attacks (IOL 727, IOL 730).

DGSI lacks big data tools - 01/06/2016

Most of the DGSI's staff are working on the fight against terrorism and the French internal intelligence service is looking to improve its information processing capacities. French expertise is apparently not part of the equation.

After addressing the French parliament on May 10, Patrick Calvar, the director of the DGSI (Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure), told MPs that the service had not found a software-processing contractor to handle its big data. Masses of data gathered as part of the counter-terrorism effort - including the content of telephones, computer files and intercepted communications - was not processed as effectively as it should be, Calvar, said, due to the DGSI not having found a French contractor with the right processing and visualisation tools.

The DGSI would ideally like to acquire the technology from a French company but to date no suitable solutions have been forthcoming because the companies are not big enough or competent enough to handle the quantity of work. The engineers of the DGSI's new technical department are in the meantime receiving help from their colleagues at the DGSE. A small team of technicians from the DGSE's headquarters has even been sent to help find temporary solutions and avoid both agencies doing the same job twice.

The US intelligence services, in marked contrast, have plenty of big data capacity at their disposal. At the GEOINT trade fair in Orlando on May 15-18, a number of companies were touting data processing and visualisation software based on the feedback the November 13 terror attacks in Paris has permitted. People who saw the technology say it was very impressive.

DGSI and the police get spycameras with European cash - 04/10/2017

After placing a €1.2 million order for spy cameras that can be hidden in rear-view mirrors and baby car seats last year (IOL 756), the French interior ministry's internal security procurement office has placed a €8.5 million order for another 2,695 spy cameras for the DGSI, the police and the Gendarmerie. Some 1,353 "discreet cameras" will be available for "contact monitoring" - of a target within a range of ten metres. Some 275 of these will be installed in everyday objects such as car keys, smartphones, cigarette lighters, pens, glasses, packets of tissues, headphones and so on while 521 others will be "pinhole" cameras measuring 12mm³. The new cameras will be partly financed by the European Union's Internal Security Fund, which was increased in September.

French intelligence set to play real estate musical chairs in 2018 - 15/11/2017

Boosted by additional cash that has been pumped into French intelligence since 2015, plans are afoot to bring French agencies together in a new "Intelligence City".

The French interior ministry and the Secretariat General de la Defense et de la Sécurité Nationale (SGDSN), which is attached to the prime minister's office, are going to start extending their Paris premises in 2018 to give the intelligence services room to grow.

The main internal intelligence service, the DGSI (Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure) will move into a third site in the Paris suburb of Neuilly-sur-Seine, where renovations costing some €15 million are planned. As well as its headquarters in the neighbouring suburb of Levallois-Perret, the service gained new premises in 2015 and installed some of its agents in a building in Asnières sur-Seine. The French riot police, the Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité (CRS), and the Direction Générale de la Sécurité Civile et de la Gestion des Crises (DGSCGC), the previous inhabitants of the building, were quickly moved out to make room for the DGSI (IOL 723).

In time, the DGSI intends to move all of its Paris staff into a single site, an "Intelligence City", which is currently under preliminary study. By 2022, other departments that come under the French interior ministry and are currently located in the Garance building in the 20th arrondissement and the Lumière building in the 12th arrondissement could also be moved to the "Intelligence City", which is expected to be built near the Nanterre Prefecture further out

from the city. The interior ministry also no longer wants to lease the DGSI's building in Levallois-Perret.

The Groupement Interministeriel de Contrôle (GIC), which is attached to the SGDSN for budget purposes, and is in charge of interceptions for the intelligence services from the basement of the Invalides in Paris, is also set to increase the size of its own data centre. Because of its extended prerogatives under the 2015 intelligence law, the GIC will have a bigger volume of work to handle and will have to take responsibility for new intelligence gathering techniques and establish innovative new departments for this purpose. The GIC has continued to distance itself from the DGSE, in terms of human resources and budget.

Like the GIC, the Commission Nationale de Contrôle des Techniques de Renseignement (CNCTR) is also increasingly busy because of the new intelligence law. It is poised to move out of the Hotel de Broglie, in the rue Saint Dominique on Paris' Left Bank. But it will not move in with the other Independent Administrative Authorities (IAA) such as the CNIL in Segur-Fontenoy.

Meanwhile, although the Agence Nationale de la Sécurité des Systèmes d'Information's (ANSSI) rate of recruitment will slow down in 2018, it will soon reach full capacity at its offices in Invalides and the Tour Mercure. The agency, which is due to reach its full complement of 570 staff in 2018, is expected to move and is currently looking at two options: the opening of a third site or bringing all of its staff together at a single site. The ANSSI will also strengthen its IT capacities with the construction of a new secure data centre (IOL 792).

State Security lifts lid on Belgian intelligence weaknesses - 29/11/2017

The recently published annual report from the R Permanent Committee sheds new light on some of the criticisms leveled by its European counterparts against the Belgian intelligence services.

Belgium's State Security Service (VSSE) is regularly criticised by its counterparts in other European countries for not being up to the fight against terrorism. France's DGSI, for instance, has long complained about the VSSE not sharing its 'S' files on suspected terrorists (IOL 754). As a consequence, for years, British and other intelligence services present in Belgium had tended to look down on it or completely ignore it as they went about their business (IOL 760).

The report from the R Permanent Committee, which oversees the Belgian intelligence services, gives the VSSE's side of the story. According to the document, the VSSE long tried to establish closer cooperation with its French partners but the latter did not respond. Only after the terror attacks in Paris did the French finally agree to increase intelligence cooperation and appoint permanent liaison officers to work directly alongside their counterparts in Belgium and vice versa.

However the report flags up weaknesses at Belgian military intelligence, the SGRS (Service General du Renseignement et de la Sécurité). The SGRS and the VSSE do not work together at all and nor do either of them cooperate with the Belgian police. As was the case between France's DGSI and DGSE for many years (IOL 742), they communicate better with their foreign counterparts than with each other. 27 partner services took part in the hunt for Paris attacker Salah Abdeslam. In the period between the Paris and Brussels attacks, November 2015 and March 2016, the SGRS only provided seven memos to the VSSE, essentially concerning interceptions (SIGINT). Moreover, the SGRS's data processing system proved totally inadequate and did not provide investigators with data that existed but could not be located. Perhaps they should call in Palantir (IOL 769)...

Despite these glaring shortcomings, in its report the R Permanent Committee expresses concern that there are no plans to recruit more SIGINT staff. Intelligence does not appear to be a priority for the Belgian government. The R Permanent Committee, which oversees the intelligence services, had its budget cut by €3.8 million in 2016, down 2.48% on the previous year and also down on 2015. In 2017 its budget looks set to be down further again, despite the committee having additional responsibilities due to the establishment of the Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF) data base and the introduction of new "special intelligence methods" such as the use of IMSI-catchers to intercept and gather data from mobile telephones.

Collomb makes it official between DGSI and OFPRA - 16/05/2018

A bill on immigration and the right to asylum that will be examined by the Senate in June will formalise the relationship between the internal intelligence service, the DGSI, and the French office for the protection of refugees and the stateless, OFPRA. Article 4 of the bill, which was defended in April by interior minister Gerard Collomb, will strengthen the sharing of information between the two entities, which to date has been limited. The OFPRA will be able to ask the DGSI for administrative investigations and have certain files checked, including the FSPRT (Fichier des Signalements pour la Prévention de la

Radicalisation à Caractère Terroriste) which lists individuals who are suspected of involvement in radicalisation for terrorism purposes. Collaboration between the OFPRA and the DGSI goes back a long way, particularly in the handling of defectors. DGSI officers are also present abroad in refugee hotspots, alongside OFPRA officials, to check the status of asylum seekers.

Gendarmerie scrambles to retain internal intelligence role - 20/06/2018

While the DGSI is reviewing its territorial presence and its coordination with the SCRT, the Gendarmerie is struggling to integrate itself into the internal intelligence apparatus.

Addressing a parliamentary fact-finding mission on June 13, senior Gendarmerie Nationale officials complained about the lack of interconnection between files on suspects, including documents held for intelligence purposes. According to Intelligence Online's sources, the main database of French territorial intelligence, the SCRT (Service Central du Renseignement Territorial) is managed independently of the gendarmerie's much bigger data base. Therefore fresh information has to be incorporated into the two existing sets of data, generating multiple calls between intelligence officials.

This rather tortuous way of doing things is a symptom of the deeper marginalisation of the Gendarmerie in internal intelligence since the departure of its director general Denis Favier, who left to join Total's security department in 2016 (IOL n°767). Favier, a former GIGN commander who is close to the former interior minister Manuel Valls, had previously ensured that the Gendarmerie continued to play a central role in the context of the terrorism threat. While the Gendarmerie's operational planning division, the SDAO (Sous direction a l'Anticipation Opérationnelle) has been officially given a role in preventing terrorism, its operational weight remains very limited. The reporting unit, which only has 75 officers, no longer liaises regularly with the headquarters of the DGSI, the nerve centre of the fight against terrorism, located in the Paris suburb of Levallois Perret.

The last Gendarmes were removed from coordination bodies, including the Allat unit, and more recently the UCLAT (Unite de Coordination de la Lutte Antiterroriste), when Loic Garnier left suddenly earlier this year (IOL n°802). The Gendarmerie has also become isolated in the judicial phase of the fight against terrorism since Basque and Corsican separatism stopped being the focus of this work.

The SCRT remains the last bastion of the gendarmes in domestic intelligence, with some 300 officers working alongside 2,400 police officers. But despite

the 2015 creation of some 73 territorial intelligence offices, known as ART (Antenne de Renseignement Territorial), manned by the Gendarmerie Nationale's general directorate, the DGGN (Direction Générale de la Gendarmerie Nationale), territorial intelligence tends to concentrate its efforts in police zones. The SCRT's missions in a given area are defined by local public security departments, or DDS (Directions Départementales de la Sécurité Publique), which are not in areas that fall under the responsibility of the Gendarmerie.

While Laurent Nunez, the head of the DGSI (Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure), is studying the redeployment of the territorial intelligence local offices (IOL n°804), the Gendarmerie is trying to increase its own visibility so that it can also have a bigger role. Under previous DGSI chief Patrick Calvar, a number of local departments were restructured. Nunez is currently working on a global reform that will imply new task-sharing with territorial intelligence. As part of its efforts to remain in the game, the Gendarmerie is making sure that it continues to provide invaluable assistance to prefects, along with the SCRT, on the monitoring of radicalisation.

Gendarmes' powers and their knowledge of national security also come to the fore in their role as liaison officers. There are a growing number of Gendarmes seconded to the French military intelligence service, the DRM, (Direction du renseignement militaire), the DGSE and the French computer security agency ANSSI (Agence Nationale de la Sécurité des Systèmes d'Information). The Gendarmerie officials overwhelmingly dominate the internal security's technology and IT service, the ST(SI)², (Service des Technologies et des Systèmes d'information de la Sécurité intérieure), where their digital expertise is greatly valued.

France GIC expands its Paris footprint - 17/10/2018

The GIC, which carries out government interceptions on French soil, is expanding beyond its headquarters in the basement of Les Invalides.

The GIC (Groupement Interministeriel de Contrôle) a service that reports to the French prime minister's office and whose budget is attached to the defence and national security secretariat, the SGDSN (Secretariat Général à la Défense et à la Sécurité Nationale), is poised to acquire a new building before the end of the year. The building will house a data centre that will centralise the interception of communications on behalf of the French intelligence services. The GIC will also take delivery of new equipment and software including a development and testing platform for the configuration of metadata monitoring algorithms.

The GIC, which is headed by Pascal Chauve (IOL 752), has expanded over the past two years, with its staff set to grow from 150 during the presidency of François Hollande to a target number of more than 250 by 2020. New recruits will not work at the GIC's headquarters in the Hotel des Invalides, which is also home to the SGDSN as well as providing some 2,000 square meters of office space to the national computer security agency ANSSI (Agence Nationale de Sécurité des Systèmes d'Information). Instead new staff will move into the new GIC building next year, once the necessary equipment has been installed.

The GIC's additional manpower and materiel is intended to enable the service in Paris and its outposts in other parts of France to respond more effectively to a growing number of surveillance requests. Since the publication of decrees in 2016 specifying which agencies could order interceptions, the GIC's circle of clients has expanded beyond the DGSE and DGSI and now includes dozens of police and Gendarmerie special units as well (IOL 794).

Requests for real-time geolocation leapt 55% from 2016 to 2017 while there was a 23% increase in requests for communications metadata such as call detail records (CDR). To meet the growing demand, the GIC has deployed new computer networks and has hired additional staff to liaise with the services it deals with as well as with telecoms companies, which are also increasingly being asked to provide data.

DGSI and Gendarmerie eye tougher cyber tools - 24/10/2018

According to our sources, France's internal intelligence service, the DGSI, is thinking of acquiring 3G and 4G real time remote interception tools. A tender may soon be launched, with consultations underway to find suitable French contractors. Patrick Guyonneau, the head of the DGSI's technical department, or DT, is in charge of the tender in concert with the DGSI's new cyber department (IOL 814). As well as its focus on the Darknet (IOL 800), the Gendarmerie Nationale is also considering acquiring similar tools in the near future.

DGSI and BKA get into big data - 24/10/2018

The German and French internal intelligence services are keen to get on with mining the masses of data they possess. After voicing its needs to a French parliamentary committee, which issued a report on the subject on October 18, the DGSI (Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure) is soon expected to

have access to nationwide records on the prison population. This will mean the internal intelligence service no longer has to submit requests for information to the prison intelligence service, the BCRP (Bureau Central du Renseignement Penitentiaire). The DGSI has spent months trying to get restrictions lifted on the simultaneous consultation of records, a prerequisite to using data mining tools such as those supplied by Palantir (IOL 771).

Facial recognition records, which both German and French intelligence services are impatient to deploy at scale on multiple databases, are also being studied by the French interior ministry computer technology service ST(SI)2 (Service des Technologies et des Systèmes d'Information de la Sécurité Intérieure). The technique is already used by the German criminal police, the BKA, which uses software from Cogitech. The German government told the Bundestag earlier this month that a new version of the system would be supplied to the BKA next year. Paris and Berlin also hope to benefit from the European Commission's efforts to develop interoperable biometric data throughout the European Union (EU).

DGSI's €450 million intelligence new HQ - 07/11/2018

Formally appointed in a ceremony that, unusually, was relayed by TV cameras, flanked for the occasion by interior minister Christophe Castaner and minister of state Laurent Nunez, Nicolas Lerner, the new head of the DGSI, has a weighty task ahead in making the service's "Intelligence City" a reality. The ambitious project is intended to bring all of the DGSI's staff under one roof. On October 25, Castaner told the French parliamentary law committee that the ministry had earmarked €450 million for the project. The site has not yet been chosen. Feasibility studies were launched late last year, as Intelligence Online revealed at the time (IOL 794).

SDAT cyber unit gets active - 05/12/2018

The SDAT (Sous-Direction Anti-Terroriste), the anti-terrorism division of the French judicial police department, or DCPJ (Direction Centrale de la Police Judiciaire) is pursuing the development of its own SIGINT unit. Increasingly in demand, the BATCIAC (Brigade d'Assistance en Telephonie, Cyber-Investigation et Analyse Criminelle) is helping the SDAT with some 200 terrorist cases it is handling. The judicial service is also working with the cyber department of the DGSI (IOL 814, IOL 804) and, on decryption capacities, with the Centre Technique d'Assistance (CTA, IOL 712).

DGSI expands Neuilly facility - 19/12/2018

The DGSI (Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure), France's internal intelligence service, is expecting a sizeable intake of new staff in 2019 and has created new office space for them at its third Paris site in the suburb of Neuilly-sur-Seine (IOL 794). The service is spending some €20 million to create 400 new work stations and move some staff from the DGSI's other annex in the suburb of Asnieres-sur-Seine. Eventually they will all move to a planned "intelligence city" that will bring everyone under one roof ((IOL 817).

DGSI protects its bastions - 09/01/2019

The DGSI (Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure), France's internal intelligence service, took care to ensure that two discreet facilities it uses in the Paris region will be duly protected. The establishment of an annexe in the vicinity of the DGSI's headquarters, as previously reported in Intelligence Online (IOL 820, IOL 794), was made official by a decree published on December 20. The DGSI also restricted access to the disused fort of Bièvres, in the Essonne region, which it uses for training purposes.

DGSI's intelligence city may be in close Paris suburb - 20/02/2019

The French internal intelligence service, the DGSI (Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure) is thinking of moving all of its staff into the Fort de Charenton, in the Paris suburb of Maisons Alfort. The 10 hectare military site, which already houses the command headquarters of the Ile de France gendarmerie, would have room for staff currently spread over three sites in Paris (IOL n°820). Interior minister Christophe Castaner has earmarked some €450 million for a new HQ for the DGSI (IOL 817).

Interior ministry to track cryptocurrencies - 05/06/2019

The French interior ministry issued a tender on May 23 for a crypto-currency transaction analysis solution. The software will equip the information and communication crime office OCLCTIC (Office Central de Lutte Contre la Criminalite Liee aux Technologies de l'Information et de la Communication) and the digital crime centre C3N (Centre de Lutte Contre les Criminalites Numeriques) and may also be used by the customs service and the internal intelligence service, the DGSI (Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure).

One of the key requirements is that the software be able to identify the users of crypto currencies by collecting centralised data from sharing platforms or shared with agencies such as Europol (IOL 809). Investigators want to be able to retrace transactions from an IP address, an email address or a PGP encryption key. The interior ministry wants to focus its monitoring on four cryptocurrencies - Bitcoin, Litecoin, Ethereum and Tether.

Prison intelligence service wants to its own training school - 26/06/2019

Highly solicited for its monitoring of radicalised inmates, France's national prison intelligence unit, the SNRP, would like to see correctional staff contribute to the task from day one of their training.

The French prison intelligence unit, Service national du renseignement pénitentiaire (SNRP), whose scope was extended to a national level on June 15, is preparing to create a surveillance and analysis training faculty within France's national correctional staff academy, Ecole nationale de l'administration pénitentiaire (ENAP). From its protected location, this training unit will be used to help fresh recruits access classified information and tools used by the service as they train. While the main aim of the new faculty is to train recruits to be dispatched among the SNRP's dozen interregional units, it will also help all correctional staff, from wardens to directors, become more aware about its intelligence databases. The SNRP is counting on this initial training to improve how prisons report and flag incidents.

Centralised data collection

The SNRP, headed by magistrate Charlotte Hemmerdinger, now reports directly to the director of the French prison administration Stéphane Bredin, and has also tightened its control on intelligence gathering in prisons. Local intelligence delegates no longer report to the prison directors but directly to the SNRP. Prison directors, used to being directly fed information and acting as the interface with the interior ministry's intelligences services, including the internal intelligence agency (the DGSI), and the territorial intelligence service (the SCRT), will now have to refer to the SNRP. However, they will still be responsible for initiating legal investigations into the most sensitive cases, thereby clearing data gathered by prison intelligence.

Technical cooperation with Beauvau

In charge of monitoring nearly 2,500 inmates, more than 500 of which were sentenced with Islamist terrorism, the SNRP is essentially fed information

from incarcerated informers, and has been increasingly using technical intelligence with help from the French prime minister's interceptions service, the GIC. Authorised to conduct interception missions and place microphones, the prison service draws heavily on the expertise of the DGSI's technical department in this area.

The DGSI, which fully intends to stay one rung above the SNRP when it comes to anti-terrorism, is still the main consumer of end-of-incarceration reports produced by prison intelligence. The internal intelligence agency uses these reports to conduct its own surveillance of individuals flagged as high-risk. The two services also share numerous technical selectors used to intercept communications between suspects and their entourages.

International copycats

Prison intelligence is being a key issue in most European countries dealing with a Jihadist threat. London has taken from Paris' lead in the matter with the creation of its own National Intelligence Unit within Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service. Israel, however, was the first country to set up this kind of service. Belgium is currently exploring the idea of using a similar model with a unit that take over from State Security Service (VSSE) staff posted throughout the country's prisons.

Paris police clean up Bievres battery before shooting range opens - 18/09/2019

The Paris Police force is to clean up the former battery in Bievres, an outer suburb of the French capital, in readiness for its conversion into a shooting range. The new facility will be used by the French internal intelligence service, the DGSI (Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure, IOL 821), and other agencies. The police have launched a tender worth an estimated €800,000 to remove bottles of toxic gas still stored at the site, which is close to the headquarters of the RAID elite police intervention unit. The new facility will have the space for 50 shooters a day.

DGSI in rush to obtain spysoftware - 16/10/2019

The cyber-offensive service of the DGSI (Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure), the French internal intelligence service, is planning to create its own digital monitoring tools. At the beginning of this month, the STNCJ (Service Technique National de Captation Judiciaire) launched the recruitment of developers specialised in computer and iOS and Android smartphone

intrusion. The DGSJ wants to be able to insert backdoors in target terminals and to check the authenticity of the digital data it obtains (IOL 829). Thales has been contracted to develop these programs but there have been delays due to compatibility issues with the interior and justice ministries' computer systems. The pressure is on because the STNCJ is in a hurry to deal with the ever growing mass of encrypted communications causing similar concerns to the intelligence services in other European countries (IOL 830).

DGSJ investigators' task is not made easier by the new guidelines that have been issued by its economic intelligence unit, or "K" department, which recommended earlier this year that companies systematically protect their internet communications and encrypt the content of their emails using the free software PGP.

DGSJ moves ahead with its intelligence city - 11/12/2019

France's internal intelligence service, the DGSJ (Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure), is recruiting a project director to oversee the construction of the service's centralized headquarters. The facility, which is intended to be built by 2025, will bring together staff currently spread out over three locations, at the service's main headquarters in Levallois-Perret and at two annexes (IOL 820). There had been talk of the service taking over the now disused Val de Grace Hospital in Paris but the former site of the newspaper Le Parisien in the suburb of Saint Ouen has been chosen instead.

Justice ministry shrugs off CNCTR advice on IMSI catchers in prisons - 15/01/2020

France's prison intelligence service, the SNRP (Service National du Renseignement Pénitentiaire), formerly BCRP, must expand its operations, particularly those related to interceptions, according to a decree published in the Journal Officiel on December 30. In making this move, the ministry of justice ignored the opinion of the CNCTR (Commission Nationale de Contrôle des Techniques de Renseignement), which reiterated that it did not want the SNRP to deploy IMSI catchers to intercept prisoners' communications. The CNCTR had already expressed concern in 2017, saying that the SNRP lacked the equipment and expertise necessary for the task and that the DGSJ (Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure) could install the devices instead. But the justice ministry, following the approval of the Council of State, nevertheless deployed IMSI catchers in prisons. Two years later, the

CNCTR, in its opinion, noted that its "analysis was not proved wrong " of IMSI catchers but the ministry paid no heed to its position.

Using ISMI catchers in prisons has limited advantages, as inmates' movements are restricted and there can be too much echo in prison cells. The CNCTR did not mention the possibility of monitoring individuals who are not inmates, such as visitors and prison suppliers, which was proposed last March as a solution to potential prison breaks. The DGSJ is responsible for monitoring individuals released from prison and radicalised prison officers. The new decree will also allow the prison intelligence service to more easily track "collective violence that threatens public order".

Private companies

Elektron, Specialist in Legal Interception - 15/10/2009

The French police used equipment from the Elektron company to monitor conversations of certain protagonists of the Clearstream affair.

Up until the mid-2000s, investigators who wanted to eavesdrop on a fixed or mobile telephone line had to have France Télécom install a temporarily line and then rent a dedicated voice recorder from a specialized company. Elektron suggested to the police authorities that the system be replaced by permanent digital infrastructure leased by the year.

Having its own digital server that diverts calls, Elektron can begin eavesdropping once it gets clearance from the authorities. Thanks to the digital system, no longer need to sit in a room with earphones. They can monitor interceptions by computer or have the calls relayed to their mobile phones. A virtual private network (VPN) also gives police stations in provincial France, as well as roving investigators with a computer equipped with a 3G key, access to the system.

Nagra's credit-card recording device - 10/11/2011

Designed for use by the French police, Nagra's latest sound recording device looks just like a credit card.

France's interior ministry services have been using it for the past two years, but it is only in recent months that the CCR digital sound recorder from Swiss manufacturer Nagra has been available on the government market. The miniature device, which is destined for use by government intelligence services, is hidden in a standard size 8.5cms x 5.4cm x 1.5mm credit card that weighs less than 5g. Equipped with a silicon microphone, it has a battery that enables it to record continually for eleven-and-a-half hours, and 2GB of memory. Activated and de activated by a simple press of the thumb, the device can be left on a table or worn around the neck like an identity badge.

World famous for the manufacture of sound recording equipment used by filmmakers and journalists, Nagra also supplies camouflaged recording devices to the police and intelligence services. The manufacturer's board members include aeronautics group Dassault Aviation's vice chairman Laurent Dassault. Nagra keeps this side of its business as low key as possible, and does not distribute copies of its catalogue of products for the security

services. The JBR, one of the first Nagra recorders intended for use by undercover police officers, was designed in the early 1980s for the FBI. Equipped with specially designed mini-cassettes, the tape recorder measured a mere 4.5cm x 2.5 cm.

Police sign surveillance deal - 15/11/2012

The special services of the Police Nationale and the Gendarmerie signed a framework agreement on November 1 with suppliers of "Discreet recording and monitoring/surveillance devices" according to the tender specifications. The contract is for the supply of covert microphones and hidden cameras that will be used to carry out monitoring of terrorists and organized crime figures. Six companies have been selected. They are LJM Tech Support, founded by Alexandre Mourier, which is a distributor of products made by Italy's BEA; Nathalie Gerard's FGH Security, which distributes Spectronic materiel; Syans, a company founded a year ago by Jerome Souverain to distribute equipment developed by the British firm Covidence; Nicolas Jean's GTS Services; hidden video camera specialist Opto Vision, founded by Bernard Baroghel; and Eric Joubert's General Security Service. These highly specialised companies also supply the DCRI and DGSE, France's internal and external intelligence services, and several French special forces (COS) units. However the police force and the gendarmerie are the first to have signed a framework agreement with them.

Tracip exports French-style forensics - 04/06/2014

The French computer forensics specialist Tracip is priming its international development. A contractor to the French police and judiciary as well as the Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure (DGSI, the former DCRI), the small company based in the eastern French city of Nancy has recently won its first major export contract. As Intelligence Online's sister publication Maghreb Confidentiel recently revealed, Tracip will provide a turn-key laboratory and field investigation kits to Morocco's Direction Générale de la Sécurité du territoire (DGST), enabling the intelligence service to examine computers, mobile telephones, USB keys and the like. Headed by Philippe Joliot and his son Clement, Tracip is also prospecting in markets including Mexico and Kazakhstan. Tracip's flagship technology is its cutting edge digital forensic mobile laboratory Mobil'it, which even contains a clean room.

Vale v Rio Tinto: Aeneas in witness box - 29/04/2015

Aeneas, the French private investigation and private security firm headed by former GIGN officer Laurent Le Quilliec, is the latest entity to face a grilling in court in New York as law firm Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton pursues its defence of Brazil's Vale. The Brazilian company and Guernsey-registered Beny Steinmetz Group Resources (BSGR) are being sued by Rio Tinto over their part in an alleged conspiracy to steal Rio Tinto's rights to massive iron ore deposits in Simandou, Guinea. In a hearing at the end of March, at Vale's request, the court addressed a request for international judicial assistance to France's justice minister Christiane Taubira.

Tidiane Toure, another former GIGN officer who heads Aeneas in Ivory Coast, will have to provide Vale's lawyers with details of the firm's investigations for Rio Tinto. All documents pertaining to the firm's probe carried out for the mining major between April 2010 and April 2014 will also have to be produced. Toure is not the only Rio Tinto investigator who will be required to take the witness stand. Mark Huband, of Livingstone & Co, Tara O'Connor, of Africa Risk Consulting, and John Humphrey, of BTG Intelligence, will also have to give evidence (IOL 733).

Aeneas, which tends to keep a low profile most of the time, also provides private security services. It is one of only a small number of firms, along with LJM Tech Support, which has official accreditation from the French General Secretariat for Defence and National Security (SGDSN), which reports to the French prime minister's office, to carry out bug sweeping operations.

Interior ministry shops for digital investigation tools - 27/05/2015

The French interior ministry has recently struck a framework deal with a group of companies accredited to supply cyber-criminality security equipment to its services including the police force, the DGSI, and the DNRED (Direction Nationale du Renseignement et des Enquêtes Douanieres), the custom and excise intelligence service. The small firm Recoveo will supply the various services with computer systems and PCs for forensic analysis under the terms of a €3 million contract, while Elexo will supply telephone data extraction systems under a contract worth €4 million. Tracip, which already equips the Direction du Renseignement Militaire (DRM), will equip the interior ministry with forensic investigation software. Lastly, the Swedish company Micro-Systemation AD will extract data from fixed-line telephones. Tracfin, the French ministry of finance's financial investigations unit, meanwhile, has acquired the text mining software program Luxid, developed by Temis.

Internal agencies buy nano drones - 23/09/2015

The DGSI, the police and the Gendarmerie are to share two Black Hornet nano observation drones, worth €315,000. The devices, which are built by Norway's Prox Dynamics AS, were sold to the interior ministry by SYANS, a small surveillance solutions outfit headed by Jerome Souverain. The Black Hornet is already used by British and Norwegian military intelligence units. In France its first user was the national rail company SNCF.

DGSI courts Palantir - 26/10/2016

The French internal intelligence service, which is completely overwhelmed by the fight against terrorism in France, has turned to the US data mining specialist for help.

There have been a series of meetings at the headquarters of the DGSI (Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure) in the Paris suburb of Levallois-Perret between the heads of the technical department, or DT, and executives from the US intelligence processing giant Palantir. The company headed by Alex Karp is understood to be already training DGSI analysts to use its tools with a view to becoming its preferred provider. While many wonder about the wisdom of involving a foreign company in matters so close to the French state, there is no French company big enough to take on the task in terms of intelligence gathering, data mining and visualisation, as the DGSI concluded after its recent efforts to find one (IOL 760).

The DGSI's recourse to Palantir comes at a time when it is already very dependent on information provided by US intelligence services, the NSA in particular (IOL 752). These provide a lot of data to the French service. The involvement of Palantir, which has worked for the NSA for a number of years, could increase the synergies between the two US and French services if they end up using the same software.

Palantir has been prospecting in the French marketplace for more than a year. The group created a French subsidiary shortly after the Charlie Hebdo attacks in January 2015 (IOL 742). Karp met Patrick Calvar, the head of the DGSI, during the Bilderberg conference a few months later (IOL 737). In-Q-Tel, the investment arm of the US intelligence community, is one of the main shareholders of Palantir. Peter Thiel, the founder of Paypal and an unconditional supporter of Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, also has a stake in the company.

Blue Coat lands encryption deal - 29/06/2016

The US cryptanalysis firm Blue Coat, reputed for its work in Syria and Burma, is now eyeing the French market. The company which was acquired at the beginning of June by the computer security giant Symantec has recently begun marketing its government interception tools to the DGSI, France's internal intelligence service, and other French government bodies.

Blue Coat has been touting most notably the efficacy of its anti-terrorism tools that can unencrypt the content of the main email services and SSL/TLS secure message applications. The company has recently relaunched its encrypted SSL/TL monitoring service for the private sector in France. The company's sales people have been to see a number of insurance groups in France and some of them are understood to be very interested in Blue Coat's products. The "SSL Visibility Appliance" solution, based on technology acquired from Netronome in 2013, offers companies a way to unencrypt SSL and TLS flows on their networks for flows of up to 9 GB a second.

The system centralises the decryption to enable compatible security applications to analyse the traffic in real time. The company's engineers promise that their teams will react rapidly to counter security updates on major navigators and web services to prevent interruptions in the service.

Dataiku, French firm, seeks to rival Palantir - 24/05/2017

Specializing in processing huge amounts of data and predictive algorithms, the French firm Dataiku is increasingly positioning itself to vie with the American giant Palantir for custom from French institutions and private companies. Its newly-appointed business developer, Remi Meunier, has been multiplying meetings in recent weeks with state-run institutions. He has a lot of excellent connections that make it easy for him to open doors. He previously served as a legal adviser on the French president's staff under Nicolas Sarkozy and was then deputy director and political adviser to Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet on the Paris municipal council. She served as a junior minister in charge of the digital economy.

Founded by a former executive of Exalead, Florian Douetteau in 2013, Dataiku already has high profile clients in France such as L'Oreal, AXA, Capgemini and Accor. Since a recent move to raise finance it has been partly owned by the American equity fund FirstMark Capital, but its main shareholders still remain French.

Its rival Palantir, a start-up financed by Peter Thiel (see above) and In-Q-Tel (IOL 769), has already managed to get a foothold in DGSI, as Intelligence

Online reported (IOL 771). But Dataiku is continuing to hire staff for its Paris offices.

Gendarmerie improves its cybertools against Telegram - 24/05/2017

Two recent reports by the France's Gendarmerie Nationale show that it has been busy developing forensic investigation tools. A report entitled "State of the threat linked to digital technology in 2017", published by the ministerial security and cyber-threat department Delegation Ministerielle aux Industries de Sécurité et à la lutte contre les Cybermenaces (DMISC) reveals that the computer electronics department of the Gendarmerie's criminal research institute, the Institut de Recherche Criminelle, supplied its software program GendExtract to the DGSI, France's internal intelligence service. The software can be used to rapidly extract and process data from a computer. The annual report also reveals that, with the support of private companies, the department has also developed a program called Telegram Decoder, which, as its name suggests, can unencrypt Telegram messages on mobile phones.

The French police have also been busy in the same vein. With the help of private contractors, the Police Nationale's (PN) cybercrime division has recently developed Darwin, a software programme that can be placed inside a USB key, plugged into a computer, and analyse its hard drive without leaving any traces of its passage. The interior ministry works principally with the companies Tracip, Recoveo and Elexo in the area of forensic investigation (IOL 736).

French government intervenes to lower geolocation costs - 31/01/2018

Thanks to the increasingly widespread use of the HI-2 interface, the French authorities are lowering the amount paid to operators and geolocation service providers.

In mid-January the fees that telecommunications companies in France receive for geolocation services they provide to the Groupement Interministeriel de Contrôle (GIC), which handles interceptions on behalf of the prime minister's office, were cut by 20%. They also stopped receiving a daily fee from the French authorities. This change underscores a trend across the legal geolocation market brought about by the growing use of HI2 (Handover Interface Port 2).

Defined by a European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI) norm, this communications channel between electronic communications operators and the security forces enables intercepted meta-data, including geolocation information, to be transmitted in real time. The technique offers more flexibility to operators than previous geolocation methods, which have been based on numerous silent requests or 'hits' being sent to a targeted mobile phone, prompting the phone to signal its presence. It also has the advantage of adding no additional cost when it is carried out as part of an interception operation. While geolocation has yet to be integrated into the French judicial police's new national interceptions platform, the justice ministry may be tempted to follow the example of the GIC to reduce what it spends on judicial interceptions (IOL 797). Among the external firms working for the judicial police until the platform becomes operational, only those qualified to carry out interception have access to HI-2. Deveryware, the French geolocation leader, does not have access to it and continues to provide its services thanks to the soon to be obsolescent 'hits' method.

Deveryware

Paris. Founded in 2003 by Jacques Salognon, Deveryware enjoyed rapid development in the geolocation market. Under the impetus of Stephane Schmoll, its assistant managing director from 2006 to 2017, Deveryware established solid relationships with MPs and mobile phone companies. Although it has had a quasi monopoly in this area to date, Deveryware's comfortable position will be challenged by the coming internalisation of geolocation by the French judicial police's national platform (PNIJ).

Elektron

Neuilly-sur-Seine. Elektron, which was acquired by Michel Besnier in 2003, is one of the last traditional legal interception outfits that has remained active since the creation of the PNIJ. It continues to provide individual interceptions, IP flow interceptions and geolocation information via HI-2 interface to the French police investigators from its computer servers in the offices of the DCPJ in the Paris suburb of Neuilly-sur-Seine.

Interior ministry invests in jamming-resistant GPS tracker - 28/03/2018

The French interior ministry awarded a record contract for new geolocation beacons earlier this month.

Counter-measures

After backing the development of miniature transmitters that have longer autonomy and contain no markers that could compromise their security (IOL 756), the French interior ministry is now looking to resolve the issue of scrambling. Criminals or terrorists may deploy counter-measures to disable GPS signals and the transmission of data to investigators, most often via GSM networks. The spread of jammers has grown in France since their sale was only banned in 2012 and they are easy to build.

Redundancy

To counter such sabotage, three French companies - Track Cars, Photospace and Point Core - have been awarded a contract totaling \$1.5 million to develop beacons that will resist scrambling. To ensure that geolocation can be conducted under any circumstance, the beacons contain additional transmitters that operate on different frequencies. Photospace's geolocation beacon contains a long-wave radio transmitter that can take over if the GSM transmission is scrambled. Photospace is also known for its Silex beacons, some of which can transmit a signal over a period of several months. Point Core, which supplies the Paris police, builds beacons that can transmit data via the Iridium satellite communications network. This solution facilitates the tracking of suspects internationally without the involvement of local telecommunications operators. A similar solution is proposed by Track Cars and Stancom, which supplied the interior ministry in 2015.

Track cars

Valbonne, Alpes Maritimes. Track Cars trained Afghanistan's anti-drug police unit in 2017. Founded in 2007, the firm, headed by Sebastien Salmi, supplies the Paris elite police unit BRI.

Photospace

Dammarie-les-Lys, Seine et Marne. The firm fine-tuned its beacons under a programme co-financed by the French interior and defence ministries. Headed by Antoine Guenin, it also makes miniature thermal cameras.

Point Core

Fontenay-sous-Bois, Val de Marne. Point Core makes the Geopisteur beacon. The company was founded in 2008 by Christian Falissard and Nicholas Bouquet, two former Ipricot engineers.

Interior minister notes further delays with PNIJ - 30/05/2018

French interior minister Gerard Collomb issued a decree on May 22 creating a new register to store mobile telephone geolocation data obtained by investigators. The decree legalises the geolocation of suspects in real time by police services via lawful interception (LI) firms such as Deveryware and Elektron (IOL 797). For the moment, this data is still unavailable on the national interceptions platform, or PNIJ (Plateforme Nationale des Interceptions Judiciares) operated by Thales.

Interior ministry to add data mining to interceptions platform - 03/04/2019

The French interior ministry launched a tender on March 29 to equip the National Gendarmerie with a tool to analyse big data from the national legal interceptions platform, the PNIJ (Plateforme Nationale des Interceptions Judiciares). Currently absent from the platform, which is fed with data from the justice ministry, analysis functions are not due to be added until the next iteration of the platform, the PNIJ NG (PNIJ Nouvelle Generation) becomes operational in around 2024 (IOL 797). Given the time delay, the interior ministry has agreed to an investment that has been put off a number of times before, to equip 30,000 Gendarmes. While the DGSI has entrusted Palantir (IOL 771) with the task of mining its data, the ministry may go with the Mercure software program from Ockham Solutions, which is already used by the French police. The tender will be closely watched by Thales, which recently acquired Ercom and Amecs (IOL 822, IOL 814), as well as by the geolocation specialists Elektron and Deveryware.

Justice ministry watches its back with new lawful interception project - 10/04/2019

After the flak it received over the shortcomings of its national interceptions platform, the PNIJ, the justice ministry is proceeding with caution on the modernisation of the system. The ANTENJ (Agence Nationale des Techniques d'Enquêtes Numeriques Judiciares), national agency that handles legal interceptions, launched a request for information (Rfi) on April 4 to sound out industry about the equipment that is slated to replace the PNIJ by 2024. The SITENJ (Système d'Information des Techniques d'Enquêtes Numériques Judiciares), the next iteration of the PNIJ, is set to contain functions that are eagerly awaited by its users and be ready for the switch to 5G.

To ensure the parameters of the new platform respond to needs, the ANTENJ has put together a 30-odd page questionnaire to survey the capacity that interceptions companies already have. The agency headed by Damien Martinelli wants to avoid a repeat of the flurry of complaints both from industry and the police about the specifications that Thales drew up under contract to the ministry in 2010 (IOL 797).

The primary objective is to improve the reliability of new system's data-gathering from phone calls, text messages and IP traffic, as well as meta-data such as timing and geolocation, by allowing real-time transmission of data from operators via the HI2 protocol (IOL 799). Another major aspect of the modernisation programme concerns the integration of data mining functions including a mapping system and visualisation using social network graphs. The current PNIJ cannot perform these functions so investigation services have to use off-the-shelf software such as Ockham Solutions' Mercure program. Ockham's contract with the interior ministry is currently being extended (IOL 827). In the future, examining judges and judicial police offices will also be able to track interceptions and geolocation directly from a smartphone.

Having learned its lesson from the first PNIJ, which has been continually under development since its launch in 2015, the ministry will also be looking to ensure that the solutions proposed are modifiable and can be connected with other systems as well as able to export their data. According to our sources, while the ANTENJ is continuing to develop improvements to the PNIJ with Thales, which is the sole contractor on the programme, it is also talking to outside service providers to resolve technical difficulties such as access to voice over LTE (VoLTE) communications. The agency has also struck informal agreements with interception and geolocation service companies such as Deveryware and Elektron, to which it continues to turn to complement its centralised platform (IOL 807, La Lettre A 13/06/2018).

Although its reputation suffered from the difficult birth of the PNIJ, Thales, which now owns the interception specialists Ercom and Amecs (IOL 822, IOL 821, IOL 814), is going all out to win the upcoming tender. The same goes for France's Nexa Technologies (the former Amesys), a frequent partner of Elektron, and now part of the cyber-intelligence industry alliance Intellexa (IOL 823).

Justice ministry seeks sovereign solution for interceptions - 22/05/2019

To avoid the problems that plagued the PNIJ, its first interceptions platform, France's justice ministry is preparing detailed specifications for a hand-picked selection of French tender candidates.

With the initial industry consultation period ending in June (IOL 828), the French lawful interceptions agency ANTENJ (Agence Nationale des Techniques d'Enquêtes Numeriques Judiciaires), which is attached to the justice ministry, is drafting detailed technical specifications for the system that will succeed the trouble-beset PNIJ (Plateforme Nationale des Interceptions Judiciaires) . The classified document will only be sent out to a handful of suppliers that have been shortlisted by the agency under the terms of a tender for the future SITENJ (Système d'information des Techniques d'Enquêtes Numeriques Judiciaires), the contract for which is due to be awarded in 2020. The ANTENJ also looked into solutions involving foreign suppliers such as Italy's RCS and Innova. But the security clearance needed to take part in the tender, plus the dealings the contractor will need to have with the R226 committee, which authorises interception solutions, mean that a foreign company would need to work with a French contractor.

According to our sources, the agency is planning to base the SITENJ on a platform integrating essential surveillance functions such as communications interception, geolocation and mapping as proposed by both the French market leader Suneris Solution, a subsidiary of Ercom, which was acquired by Thales (IOL 822), and duo Nexa Technologies and Elektron (IOL 823). Complementary technology modules including for the management of digital seals, could be supplied by other companies or developed internally. The aim is to avoid having to depend on a single supplier, an issue that was flagged up by investigators into the first iteration of the PNIJ (IOL 797). Another major change is that interceptions data will not be hosted by the contractor. Thales currently stores PNIJ data at its site in Elancourt in the Paris region but in the future both PNIJ and SITENJ data will be stored at two sites, one run by the justice ministry and the other by the interior ministry.

Telegram and Whatsapp under scrutiny

Investigators are becoming concerned that a growing number of their targets are abandoning phonecalls and text messages in favour of encrypted instant messaging services such as Telegram, WhatsApp and Signal. The justice ministry's new interceptions platform, or PNIJ, will not integrate interception of these communications.

The electronic and postal communication watchdog ARCEP, (Autorite de Regulation des Communications Electroniques et des Postes) and the SGDSN (Secretariat General a la Defense et a la Sécurité Nationale) looked into making OTT, or over-the-top, messaging services provided by third parties subject to the same legal obligations as traditional telecoms communications, but the ANTENJ prefers to take more indirect approach.

Magistrate Damien Martinelli, the head of the agency, and Philippe Brandt, his deputy, a defence general engineer (IGA), have partnered with the STNCJ (Service Technique National de Captation Judiciaire, IOL 829), which is attached to the technical department of the DGSI, the internal intelligence service. The service, which deploys mobile interception payloads, will capture communications from encrypted message services. Meanwhile, the ANTENJ, in conjunction with operators, will focus on gathering and analysing metadata generated by these applications.

Interior ministry's data mining plans back to drawing board - 09/10/2019

The French interior ministry recently issued a revised tender for data mining software to enhance the national judicial interceptions platform, the PNIJ. Some 30,000 gendarmes eagerly awaiting a new system are going to have to bide their time.

According to our sources, no suitable candidates have been found for the French Gendarmerie's tender for the study phase of a reasonably-priced data mining system, in a process being led by the internal security technology and information systems department, the STSI2 (Service des Technologies et des Systèmes d'Information de la Sécurité Intérieure). The tender, which was launched in April, is for the development of a data mining system to improve the exploitation of data held by the national judicial interceptions platform, the PNIJ (IOL 827). Over the summer months the project was entrusted to a new team at the STSI2 and a new, less restrictive tender was launched early in September.

Ambitious specs

The tender that was published earlier this year went out to the main suppliers in the sector, including Thales, Deveryware, Elektron and Ockham Solutions. The criteria that bidding companies had to meet were particularly exacting, containing more than a hundred points they had to meet in order to qualify to bid. The software had to take into account numerous specifics of the interior and justice ministries' computer systems but also be useable on Linux, the operating system used by the Gendarmerie.

Since the tender contained no scope to develop the technology after the contract was awarded, candidate companies would have to foot the bill for development themselves before bidding, and with the exception of the Gendarmerie part of the contract, there was little prospect of selling the materiel they developed to other clients at a later stage.

Blacklisted by US, Hikvision a favourite with French ministry of interior - 04/11/2019

The inclusion of the Chinese surveillance and security giant Hikvision on the US commerce department's sanctions list on October 7 could hamstring the company's activities in France.

Now blacklisted by the American Commerce Department over accusations of human rights violations in the Chinese province of Xinjiang, Hikvision video surveillance products are prevalent through Europe, especially France, where there are always sold through local distributors.

Hikvision, which is currently investing heavily in China in machine learning and face recognition technology, is also the main supplier to France's ministry of the interior for cameras used by police and the gendarmerie. The €2.4 million supply contract was awarded to Angers-based firm Allwan Security in 2018 but the 10,400 body-worn cameras ordered were none other than a customised version of Hikvision's star MH-2211 model.

The ministry of the interior has acknowledged the fact, stating that all of the call for tender proposals offered cameras made in China... Hikvision's French operations are headed by the discreet Hong He, while Jean-Marie de Troy, a former project manager in France for American Defense group Honeywell, oversees sales.

Hikvision at the Pentagon

With these sanctions against the Chinese firm, Washington is trying to stop the Asian powerhouse from gaining further ground in the electronic surveillance and artificial intelligence sector. But American is not immune to contradictions: Hikvision was quietly hired to provide 2,700 surveillance cameras to the American army and government offices. For the moment, the US government does seem to have any intention of replacing these expensive devices.

Séché to decontaminate site of DGSI's new firing range - 27/05/2020

The DGSI, the French internal intelligence service, has contracted the firm Tredi to decontaminate a former munitions depot in Bièvres, in the Paris region, removing bottles of toxic gas, before it is turned into a firing range for the service (IOL 837). A subsidiary of Séché Environnement, Tredi has worked on a number of major decontamination operations, including the clean-up operation after toxic waste from the Trafigura-chartered tanker Probo Koala was dumped in Ivory Coast in 2007.