Germany: Terror plot carried out under police observation

Ulrich Rippert
7 September 2007

All German newspapers on Wednesday carried banner headlines on the arrest of three terror suspects said to be plotting to explode massive bombs that would have killed a large number of people. Typical were headlines and blurbs such as “Dreadful murder attempt” threatening an “enormous number of deaths” (*Spiegel Online*); “a hitherto unknown dimension of terror in Germany” (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*); a plot prevented “at the last minute” by the security forces (*Lausitzer Rundschau*).

At the same time, the reports noted that the three terror suspects had been under round-the-clock observation by 300 police officers for a period of at least six months.

The police monitoring of the suspects in the village of Oberschledorn, with a population of only 900, was so extensive and ostentatious that residents had noted the large number of unidentified delivery vans and caravans going in out of a closed agricultural factory. According to a correspondent from the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the village head had made his concerns known to the local police last Monday. “They told the official that it had something to do with the digitalisation of police radios,” the correspondent wrote.

The only facts so far known are those communicated at a press conference Wednesday by General Federal Attorney Monika Harms and Criminal Investigations (BKA) chief Jörg Ziercke. The media accounts of events are almost entirely dependent on the version put forward by representatives of Germany’s leading security agencies.

On the basis of the information given at Wednesday’s press conference, the following picture emerges: Under dramatic circumstances, in a small forest in Sauerland, in the southeast of North Rhine-Westphalia, police arrested two Germans, aged 21 and 28, who had converted to Islam, and a 28-year-old Turkish man.

On Wednesday, a Federal High Court judge had issued arrest warrants against all three, accusing them of planning “massive bomb attacks” aimed at killing as many victims as possible.

According to the BKA, one of the suspects tried to escape and grabbed the service weapon of a police officer. The policeman was shot and suffered a minor injury, while the suspect received a wound to the head and was subsequently disarmed. Afterwards, 41 premises in a number of states were searched. Altogether, ten persons are under investigation, three of whom are abroad.

The three arrested men are alleged to be members of a cell of the international terror network Islamic Jihad Union. According to Federal Attorney Harms, the Jihad Union is linked to the Uzbekistan Islamic Movement (IMU), which has claimed responsibility for suicide bombings in the Uzbek capital of Tashkent in 2004. The IMU is said to be particularly active in Central Asia and to have a strong base in Pakistan.

In the winter of 2006, a German cell was allegedly established aimed at recruiting members in Germany and preparing attacks. All three men are alleged to have connections to Pakistan, with at least one of them having spent several months in a terrorist training camp.

The three men had already drawn attention to themselves on December 31, when one of them, Fritz Gelowicz, drove a number of times around the US barracks in Hanau. Investigators claim this was an attempt to “stake out a possible target,” and they intensified their observation. In March of this year, the chief federal prosecutor opened up an official investigation.

Since then, police investigators have followed every step made by the group. They observed how the suspects procured 12 barrels containing 730 kilograms of hydrogen peroxide, which can be used to make bombs. According to BKA information, this was enough material for a very high explosive yield equivalent to 550 kilos of TNT. BKA chief Jörg Ziercke declared that the explosive capacity of the bombs would have exceeded that of the devices used in terror bombings in Madrid and London.

Ziercke said that the enormous risk to the population had been prevented only by “daring action” by police. Some weeks ago, the police had acquired access to the garage where the barrels were stored and exchanged the highly explosive liquid for a less concentrated and less dangerous substitute.

According to press reports, the police deployment against the Jihad Union cell was “the biggest police deployment since the Schleyer kidnapping 30 years ago.” In addition to the 300 police officers involved in round-the-clock observation, a further 300 officials were involved in arresting the suspects.

It is not at this point clear whether, in addition to the police

© World Socialist Web Site

surveillance teams, BKA undercover agents were involved in the operation. It is too soon to make any judgement on the existence of the alleged plot, and it would be mistaken to assume that there was no serious danger and the whole affair was simply concocted by security agencies.

However, in view of the facts already known it is clear that, in the words of Harms, the "most serious case to date of planning for a terror attack" took place under the observation of police and Germany's leading security agencies.

The question arises: Why did security forces not intervene at an earlier date to halt such criminal plans? Presumably, the task of the police is to prevent such plans from ripening to the point where they constitute an acute risk to the population.

Why was the plot snuffed out now? Why is something that was known about for a considerable time by security forces now being pushed into the public sphere? Could it be that political issues are at stake?

Was there a decision to reveal the plot at a politically convenient moment, one that would facilitate plans to strengthen the state apparatus and reinforce the campaign long waged by Interior Minister Wolfgang Schaüble (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) for online searches of private computers—a measure which has met with considerable public resistance up to now?

Only days before the spectacular disclosure of the preparation of an "Islamic terrorist attack," the monthly magazine *International Policy*, published by the semi-governmental German Society for Foreign Policy (DGAP), appeared with the prominent headline, "Islam in Europe—Profit or Danger?" The journal's editorial states: "Indeed, since Islamic fundamentalists have been throwing bombs in Europe, blowing up trains, murdering film producers, and frustrated young Muslims have been setting fire to the suburbs of Paris, it is necessary for European majority communities to realise that approximately 15 million Muslims live with them on the continent..."

What is clear is that the disclosure of plans for a terror attack is being exploited for reactionary aims. Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU), who last weekend called for the "strengthening of German culture" at a CDU party congress, expressed her "praise, thanks and acknowledgment" to the investigating authorities for their "recent success in the anti-terror fight." The arrests showed, she declared, that "the dangers of terror for us here are not abstract, but real," and stressed the importance of "preventative measures."

Interior Minister Schaüble was even more blunt. He stressed that "international terrorism" is directed not only against German soldiers and aid workers in Afghanistan, or US institutions in Germany. Schäuble was exploiting the fear of terrorist attacks to justify the deployment of the German Armed Forces in Afghanistan as an "anti-terror mission," and to intimidate opponents of the war, who have called for a large demonstration against the Afghanistan war later this month.

Schäuble also called for a special meeting of state interior ministers later this week. The chairman of this body, Berlin Senator Erhart Körting (Social Democratic Party), reacted immediately and summoned a meeting for Friday.

According to Schäuble, his demand for legal sanction for on-line searches of computers remained on the table and was gaining importance. He did not want to carry out this debate today, he said, but he added it was clear that terrorists were using all modern means of communication for their "highly conspiratorial work," and were communicating to a considerable extent over the Internet.

According to Bavarian Interior Minister Günther Beckstein (Christian Social Union, CSU), one of the suspects came from the city of Munich. The man had lived for several years in the neighbouring state of Baden-Württemberg, but because he maintained contact with his city of birth, the Bavarian security authorities had been involved in monitoring him, Beckstein confirmed.

Beckstein said the suspect had visited acquaintances in Bavaria a few weeks ago, and together they had "called up Islamic web sites on the Internet." This showed, he said, that the power to conduct online searches of private computers demanded by Interior Minister Schäuble was "an extraordinarily important and useful measure" in the anti-terror struggle.

US President George W. Bush congratulated the German authorities on their "success," and his assistant, Gordon Johndroe, declared that the president was very pleased with the outstanding international cooperation between the investigating authorities. The arrests in Germany, he said, underscored the worldwide terror threat.

There is little doubt that the special meeting of interior ministers will strike while the iron is hot and support Schäuble's plans for increasing the police powers of the state and intensifying attacks on democratic rights.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site