

In wake of Detroit airplane bomb plot, new security measures in Europe

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European governments have reacted to the airplane bombing attempt over Detroit and the attack on a Danish cartoonist with a raft of new security measures. Taken as a whole, these measures represent a fundamental attack on democratic rights.

What criticism there is in the press has focused on privacy concerns related to the introduction of full body scanners at airports, but more far-reaching moves are being planned by European governments.

Predictably, in response to the failed attempt to blow up Northwest Flight 253 over Detroit, the lead was given by the US's closest ally in Europe. Immediately after the attempted bombing, the office of British Prime Minister Gordon Brown announced that it had agreed "US-UK funding for a special counter-terrorism police unit in Yemen." Brown went on to call for an international meeting on January 28 in London to discuss the struggle against "extremism in Yemen."

The fact that the "anti-terrorism" conference in London takes place on the same day and in the same locale as a previously scheduled conference to discuss new strategies in Afghanistan indicates that the US-British axis will use the US bomb scare and the terror attack in Denmark to press for increased military engagement by nations such as France and Germany in the US-led war in Afghanistan. At the same time, European countries will be called upon to support new US-British provocations and military adventures in Africa.

Following the Detroit incident, Brown declared that he and President Barack Obama had agreed to "intensify joint US-UK work to tackle the emerging terrorist threat from both Yemen and Somalia." Somalia is the country of birth of the 28-year-old assailant of Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard.

The Italian foreign minister, right-winger Franco Frattini, immediately welcomed Brown's call for an anti-terrorism conference at the London meeting. The Italian government of Silvio Berlusconi has been one of the firmest supporters of the US anti-terror campaign despite massive popular opposition to the intervention of Italian troops in Afghanistan.

Frattini declared that the London conference on Afghanistan would provide a good opportunity to "develop a strategy of prevention to deal with the terrorist threat in Yemen." Noting that the terrorist threat had "reappeared," he added, "The presence of foreign ministers will allow us also to discuss terrorism. I think this will be right moment."

On Monday, Frattini told RAI state television that Italy had requested an urgent European Union meeting for Friday to discuss a joint European strategy.

In the run-up to the London conference, a series of European countries have announced plans to strengthen their security forces and extend the remit for their "anti-terrorist" activities. France, the Czech Republic and Spain followed the lead of the US and Britain and temporarily closed their embassies in the Yemeni capital following the Detroit bomb plot, and this week French Interior Minister Brice Hortefeux announced that he planned to expand the list of countries allegedly constituting a risk to French security.

Hortefeux told Europe 1 radio on Wednesday: "It's obvious that we must now expand the list of countries that pose a risk. Currently, we have seven countries, and we undoubtedly need to go up to 20 or 30 countries."

According to Spanish press reports, the new European Union presidency, chaired for the next half-year by Spain, plans to set up a special unit to share intelligence reports between member states. *El Pais*

reports that the new body will facilitate the direct exchange of intelligence in close cooperation with the existing EU counter-terrorism coordinator, Gilles de Kerchove.

Sources within the Spanish Interior Ministry say the plan for a new European security unit already has the support of leading European nations such as Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy and Denmark. The formation of the new agency has been facilitated by the EU's Lisbon Treaty, which extends the legal framework for such cooperation between the counter-intelligence agencies of diverse European nations.

Europol, the main police agency and criminal data exchange body in Europe, has also been given enhanced powers from January 1 to combat cybercrime, weapons of mass destruction threats and Islamist extremism.

In addition to increased powers for European police agencies, a number of European governments are seeking to use the most recent terror attacks to encourage racism and pass xenophobic legislation. In Denmark, the leader of the anti-immigrant Danish People's Party, Pia Kjaersgaard, cited the January 1 assault on cartoonist Kurt Westergaard to call for even more stringent immigration laws.

Kjaersgaard declared, "It must be crystal clear to everyone that we cannot accept having Islamists who associate with terror being more or less tolerated in this country." Denmark already has one of the most repressive anti-immigration legal frameworks in Europe, largely dictated in recent years by the Danish People's Party.

The attacks in Detroit and Denmark have also been used to fuel the campaign in European countries for new legislation to ban the Islamic burqa. The Danish spokesman on foreign affairs and immigration, Naser Khader (People's Party), recently called for a ban on burqas, and in France, the Gaullist deputy Jean-François Copé has proposed a law to criminalize the wearing of the Islamic full body garment. Already last summer, French President Nicholas Sarkozy declared in a State of the Nation address that the burqa was "not welcome in France."

A climate of hysteria is being whipped up by sections of the media and the political elite aimed at diverting attention from the growing social crisis in Europe and creating conditions for a further build-up of the

continent's police, military and intelligence agencies.

Both the attempted Detroit bombing and the attack on Kurt Westergaard throw up a host of questions about the role played by US and foreign intelligence agencies. In both cases, the official account of the attacks is highly implausible. Nevertheless, the populations of the US and Europe are being subjected to ever more draconian restrictions on their democratic rights in the name of a renewed "war" against terrorists.

At the same time, European governments are intent on using the latest terror incidents as a pretext for implementing their militarist agendas.



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