

European Union cites Boston attack to justify major anti-terrorist operation

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The growing threat to democratic rights internationally was underscored by the fact that, just two days after the Boston bombing, the latter was being cited in a press release of the European Union (EU) Commission to justify a massive continent-wide anti-terrorism operation.

On April 17 and 18, anti-terrorist units of numerous EU member states organised in the ATLAS [Army Tactical Level Advanced Simulation] Network carried out what was described as “the most complex preparation and crises response simulation so far at European level.”

The operation involves simulated and simultaneous terrorist attacks in nine different EU member states—Austria, Belgium, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and Romania.

Justifying the operation, an EU Commission press release said, “The 2008 Mumbai coordinated attacks, the Al Qaeda 2012 attacks on the Algerian gas production plant, as well as the recent Boston marathon bombings highlight the need to increase protection against attacks on both critical infrastructures and other public areas in a national and cross-border context.”

The exercise, code-named “Common Challenge,” simulated attacks on targets including power plants, schools, shops, busses and trains.

EU Counter Terrorism coordinator, Gilles de Kerchove, said of the April 17-18 operation, “This initiative is the largest anti-terrorism simulation exercise to take place in Europe, and is being carried out by the special intervention units of several Member States.

The scale of the operation was indicated by the best reported exercise, which took place in Kolarovo, Slovakia, involving police counter-terrorism units from Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, the Slovak Lynx commando and 5th Special Force Regiment.

The scenario for this particular exercise was inspired by the Beslan school hostage crisis in 2004. According to *Military Photos*, “The siege was going on for around 3

hours and there were 335 students and teachers taken as hostages. Several of students were psychically traumatised and had to be medically dismissed from [the] exercise.”

The small report, together with an extensive and important collection of photos, can be seen here.

In Norway, more than 100 officers from Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark trained to enter one of the Color Line ferries from police boats and helicopters, according to *Aftenposten*. Two Swedish police helicopters with snipers escorted during the operation, based on the potential hijacking of the ferry with 210 passengers and a crew of 40.

In Ireland, the Gardaí staged a simulated hostage rescue scenario on the River Liffey and at a decommissioned power station in Dublin, comprised of sea-based, land-based and airborne elements.

According to the *Irish Independent*, “Heavily armed members of the gardai’s special intervention squad, the Emergency Response Unit (ERU), are gearing up for a key role in preventing a cross-Border terrorist attack during the G8 world leaders’ summit in June.

“The ERU will be deployed in patrolling Border routes into Northern Ireland, including the network of waterways that could be used to launch attacks on politicians and top economists.”

The article explained, “The overall scenario, central to all exercises, deals with the threats posed by a fictional terrorist organisation, the Global Liberation and Revenge Army.”

ERU officers “are equipped with Heckler and Koch MP7 machine guns and Sig Sauer semi-automatic pistols and they also have access to Benelli 12-gauge shotguns and Heckler and Koch 33 rifles.”

The ATLAS Network was created in 2001, consisting of special police units of the 27 EU member states. The ATLAS presidency is held by the German Police Special

units (GSG9). Germany played the leading role in the formation of ATLAS after September 11, 2001, but the organisation includes two French units, GIGN for airplane raids and RAID for raids on trains and busses, and Britain's CO19 for raids in subways.

The implications of the type of operations undertaken under the ATLAS framework are indicated by the presence of Britain's CO19 unit. Also in 2001, Britain launched Operation Kratos, setting a shoot-to-kill policy for the Metropolitan Police when dealing with suspected suicide bombers.

On July 22, 2005, in the aftermath of the July 7 London bombing, innocent Brazilian Jean Charles de Menezes was shot dead by plainclothes officers without warning while he was seated on a train at Stockwell tube station. Officers wrestled him to the ground and fired seven bullets into his head at point blank range.

There is a profound connection between the response of the US police and security services to the Boston bombing and an operation on the scale of that which took place throughout Europe two days later.

For over a decade now, every country has witnessed an assault on democratic rights and the passage of legislation in many cases providing the framework for a police-state regime. What that looks like was shown in Boston as an entire city was placed under lockdown. It was on display in Europe April 17-18 in the form of muscle-flexing by state forces in nine countries.

The choice of Ireland, Italy and Spain, three of the EU countries targeted for savage austerity measures, and impoverished eastern European countries such as Latvia, Slovakia and Romania, indicates the broader considerations animating the ruling class. All legal measures passed in the name of combating terrorism that strengthen the repressive powers of the state are available for use against the rising wave of social and political discontent among millions of workers as a result of the wholesale destruction of jobs and vital welfare provisions now underway.



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