

Police crackdown after Charlie Hebdo attack spreads across Europe

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This weekend, police and military forces were deployed across Europe on an unprecedented scale. Security forces in France, Belgium, Germany, Greece and Britain are continuing a crackdown on suspected Islamists, arresting dozens of people, after the January 7 attack on the editorial offices of the weekly *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris.

On Saturday, Belgian authorities, for the first time in three decades, deployed paratroopers to reinforce thousands of police spread out across the country. They are to guard Jewish institutions in the port city of Antwerp, foreign embassies including those of the United States and Israel, and EU and NATO installations. The Belgian government raised the security level from two to three under a four-point security scale, for the first time since the 1980s.

The deployment of military forces came after Belgian police arrested 13 suspects belonging to alleged terrorist jihadist cells, following Thursday's police raid in Verviers in which two suspected Islamists were killed. In the wake of events in Verviers, after 12 separate raids on residences, Belgian authorities claimed that a "concrete plan" to kill members of the Belgian police force had been halted.

"The threats are very serious, more complex than in the past, and action must be taken more quickly and strongly," European Union counterterrorism coordinator Gilles de Kerchove told *Le Soir*.

On Saturday, Greek police said at least four people had been held for questioning in connection with the foiled plot in Belgium.

On Friday night, French police detained 12 suspects including eight men and four women allegedly in connection with the *Charlie Hebdo* attack. The Socialist Party government has deployed over 15,000 troops and police across the country.

German police detained two suspects in Berlin, after searching 11 premises.

Security forces in Spain and in the Netherlands are also increasing the surveillance of suspects, including those who have recently returned from Syria and Iraq, fighting alongside the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

The ruling elite across Europe is exploiting the *Charlie Hebdo* attack to step up police-state measures that have long been in preparation. Last week, French Prime Minister Manuel Valls proposed reviewing a 2013 surveillance law that allows intelligence officials to inspect emails, phone calls, location data and Internet surveillance.

In Britain, Prime Minister David Cameron has called for implementing a "snoopers' charter" Communications Bill, giving British intelligence service the power to access encrypted communications.

European imperialism is exploiting the fallout from its own bloody wars abroad in order to justify police-state measures and accelerate the militarization of society.

As long as Islamist recruits functioned as proxy forces in NATO wars for regime change in Syria and the rest of the Arab world, European governments backed them with arms and financial handouts. These governments allowed their citizens to travel to Syria and learn how to carry out raids and terror bombings against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. European intelligence services closely followed suspects belonging to the various Syrian jihadist groups, as hundreds of people went from each major European country to fight.

According to Belgian officials, up to 350 citizens of Belgium alone have gone to fight in Syria and Iraq, the highest number per capita in Europe. "About 100 have

returned, and are being monitored by the intelligence services,” Belgian Interior Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Jan Jambon told the BBC World Service.

The perpetrators of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack were also under surveillance by French, British and US intelligence prior to the shooting.

As the Islamist forces return to Europe, however, they are carrying out attacks under the noses of the intelligence services; they are then seized upon to escalate the state’s repressive powers amid unprecedented working-class anger and disaffection with EU policies of austerity and war.

The reactionary mood being whipped up by the media and state officials is also bringing racial tensions in Europe to the boiling point. Since the *Charlie Hebdo* attack, violence against the Muslim population has increased significantly in France, as the state and the media whip up anti-Muslim sentiment.

Last Wednesday, a 47-year-old Moroccan man, Mohamed El Makouli, was brutally stabbed to death in front of his wife by his belligerent neighbor in the village of Beaucet, near Avignon. El Makouli was stabbed 17 times. The 28-year-old attacker forced open the front door of his neighbor’s house and shouted, “I am your God, I am your Islam,” before attacking El Makouli.

This is the latest in a series of more than 50 anti-Muslim assaults since the *Charlie Hebdo* attack. Abdallah Zekri, the President of Observatory against Islamophobia of the French Council of the Muslim Religion (CFCM), cited Interior Ministry figures showing that “54 anti-Muslim acts have taken place since Wednesday. These include 21 'actions' (pistol shots in the Aude region, training grenades fired in Le Mans, explosion in a kebab stand next to a mosque in the Rhône region...) and 33 'threats,' especially insults.”

He added, “This tally does not count events in Paris and nearby suburbs, or the fire that began Sunday night on the site of the mosque being built in Poitiers.”

The publication of new racist cartoons mocking the Prophet Muhammad in the latest issue of *Charlie Hebdo* has also triggered outrage and protests in Muslim countries internationally.

Protests against *Charlie Hebdo* took place across northwest Africa, which is already devastated by French imperialist wars in Libya and Mali, and a rising social crisis. The capital cities of Niger, Mali, Senegal,

Mauritania, and Algeria—all former French colonies—saw protests against *Charlie Hebdo*’s latest anti-Muslim cartoons.

At least 10 people have been killed in two days of violent protests over the cartoon depiction of the Prophet Muhammad in Niger. AFP cited Nigerien President Mahamadou Issoufou, who said, “In Niamey, the tally is five dead, all civilians.” He added that the toll from protests in Niger’s second city of Zinder a day earlier had climbed from four to five dead.

According to Al Jazeera, “Police fired teargas at crowds of stone-throwing youths who set fire to at least six churches and looted shops in Niamey on Saturday after authorities banned a meeting called by local Islamic leaders. A police station was attacked and at least two police cars burned.”

In the Algerian capital, Algiers, several police were injured during clashes with protesters outraged by the cartoons.



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