

Passengers foil shooting plot in Amsterdam-Paris train

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On Friday, passengers thwarted an attempt to carry out a mass shooting in a high-speed Thalys train from Amsterdam to Paris with more than 550 passengers aboard.

The terror plot was reportedly stopped by a French passenger, three US citizens—airman Spencer Stone, Oregon National Guard member Alek Skarlatos, and their friend Anthony Sadler, a college student—and a fellow British passenger IT consultant Chris Norman. They disarmed and beat unconscious the suspect as he tried to open fire with a Kalashnikov rifle. Afterwards, French President François Hollande and US President Barack Obama hailed the men who stopped the attack as “heroes.”

The gunman reportedly boarded the train in the Belgian capital, Brussels, and began the assault as the train crossed into northern France. He reportedly emerged from the train bathroom, shirtless, with his AK-47 and a box cutter.

French Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve told reporters that “a French passenger who went to use the toilets in car 12 found himself face-to-face with a man armed with a Kalashnikov rifle strapped to his shoulder ... The French passenger courageously attempted to overpower him before the aggressor shot the rifle several times,” Cazeneuve said. One of the rifle shots wounded a French-American passenger seated nearby.

Anthony Sadler told CNN, “My friend Alek [Skarlatos] yells, ‘Get him,’ so my friend Spencer [Stone] immediately gets up to charge the guy, followed by Alek, then myself.”

“The three of us beat up the guy,” Sadler said. “In the process Spencer gets slashed multiple times by the box cutter, and Alek takes the AK away. I begin to tie him up with help from Chris, another passenger. I notice a man had his throat cut at which Spencer begins to apply

pressure to the neck wound before he bled out.”

Several passengers were reportedly injured, including the French actor Jean-Hugues Anglade. “I thought it was the end, we were going to die, he was going to kill us all,” Anglade told *Paris Match*.

The gunman was arrested after the train stopped at the station in the northern French town of Arras. He is reportedly identified as a 26-year-old Moroccan national, Ayoub el Khazzani. As always in recent terrorist attacks in Europe, like the Kouachi brothers’ shooting at *Charlie Hebdo* in January in Paris, the suspect was already known to Western intelligence due to his ties to radical Islam, in particular the Al Qaeda-linked Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

La Voix du Nord newspaper wrote that he “was part of the same jihadist group which attacked Belgian anti-terrorist police in a violent firefight in January 2015, in Verviers, near Liege.”

The suspect arrived in Spain in 2007, living in Madrid and a southern port city, Algeciras. Spanish authorities reportedly arrested him repeatedly for drug trafficking, and the Spanish press stated that his name was inserted into the pan-European database of suspected Islamist radicals in 2012. Since he left Spain in 2014 for France, Spain’s anti-terrorist unit regularly briefed French intelligence officials about him.

“When we became aware that he had left to live in France, we gave all the information to the country’s security authorities and made sure they knew he was a dangerous subject,” an unnamed Spanish official told *El Mundo*. “France had him under control until [he] decided to leave for Syria. From then on, neither they nor we had any news about him.”

French authorities have yet to confirm the identity of the gunman, however. “It is important to be careful about his identity, which is not yet established with

certainty,” Cazeneuve told reporters on Saturday. “If the identity he has declared is confirmed, he is a 26-year-old man of Moroccan nationality identified by the Spanish authorities to French intelligence services in February 2014 because of his connections to the radical Islamist movement.”

France TV Info reported that a DNA sample taken from the suspect after his arrest matched that of Khazzani held on file by Spanish authorities, however.

During the initial police interrogation, the suspect denied being part of an Islamist terror group and told police that he intended to rob passengers at gunpoint. He also claimed that he found the weapons “by chance in a park in Brussels” where he often sleeps with other homeless people.

The suspect’s lawyer Sophie David told BFM-TV, “He is dumbfounded that his act is being linked to terrorism. He says that the Kalashnikov didn’t work and he was subdued immediately without a single shot being fired,” David added.

After the foiled shooting, European Union officials are stepping up border security across Europe. Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel called for urgent talks with France, Germany and the Netherlands on increasing security on major railway hubs. From this weekend, Belgium has intensified patrols on high-speed rail lines, as well as checks and patrols at international train stations.

If the attack was indeed an Islamist terrorist plot carried out under the very noses of the intelligence services, it points to the devastating impact of the wars in Libya and Syria. In these US- and NATO-orchestrated regime change operations the Western powers, including France, armed Al Qaeda-linked militias such as ISIS as the main strike forces against their opponents. Since the wars began four years ago, these groups have carried out hundreds of bombings, shootings and other attacks in Syria.

Now the chickens are coming home to roost. Since the war in Syria began, thousands of European nationals have travelled to Syria to fight alongside such militias. Approximately 850 Frenchmen and 300 Belgians have left to fight in Syria and Iraq, and hundreds have already returned, according to intelligence officials.

The reaction of the imperialist powers is not to change their policies or halt their wars for regime

change and unchallenged domination across the Middle East. Rather, all the while relying on Islamist forces in the Middle East, they use the resulting terror plots and scares in Europe as a justification for unprecedented attacks on democratic rights.

These policies, like France’s recent draconian surveillance law and the announcement that the French president maintains a kill list of targets for extrajudicial assassination, are aimed above all at terrorizing popular opposition.



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