

Belgian police arrest six suspects in March 22 Brussels attacks

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Two weeks after the Brussels attacks, which claimed 32 victims and wounded hundreds, six suspects were detained, including Mohamed Abrini, Europe's most wanted man after the arrest on March 18 of Salah Abdeslam, wanted for the November 13 attacks in Paris.

The Brussels attacks exposed stunning failures of Belgian and European intelligence. As early as December, a police report in Malines had given Abdeslam's location, but Abdeslam was not arrested. Belgian intelligence had also received intelligence from Turkey and Israel identifying the Islamist forces around Abdeslam who were likely to have been his accomplices on November 13, and in the preparation of attacks in the Brussels airport and subway.

Abrini was known to police for having "contacts in radical Islamist and jihadist circles in Molenbeek-St Jean in Belgium." He was suspected of having played an active role in the Brussels attacks, as his DNA was found in two safe houses in the Schaerbeek neighborhood used by the terrorists, and also of being the third "man in a hat" seen in security camera footage at the Brussels airport—a point he then confirmed to investigators.

In his defense, Abrini said he was forced to get into the taxi with the El Bakraoui brothers, who carried out the bombings, to go to the airport. He claims he fled after hearing two explosions, that he never went to Syria and that he "would not hurt a fly."

According to British press reports, he had pictures of areas of the city of Birmingham on his mobile phone, which has led some to speculate that Islamist networks may now target cities in Britain.

Abrini is suspected of having left to go to Syria in the summer of 2015. Investigators have alleged that he "probably went to Syria in June 2015 and probably did

not spend much time there." According to *Le Monde*, "Abrini reappeared on the intelligence services' radar screen in the days following the November 13 attacks. He is suspected of having made two trips from Brussels to Paris with the Abdeslam brothers in the days before the attacks, to rent rooms at Bobigny and Alfortville that served as safe houses for the terror squads."

The Brussels prosecutor has revealed the identity of two other suspects, Osama K and Hervé B M. Osama K was reportedly wanted under the alias, Naim Al-Hamed, on his false Syrian passport. He allegedly arrived in Europe in the flow of refugees from Syria on the Greek island of Leros on September 20, 2015. He was accompanied during this trip by Ahmed A (Mounir Ahmed Alaaj), who was arrested on March 18 in Molenbeek with Salah Abdeslam.

The sixth person to be arrested had just finished serving a prison sentence in Belgium after returning from Syria, according to Belgian Justice Minister Koen Geens.

Based on the Belgian police report, Mohamed Abrini and Salah Abdeslam were very rapidly identified as having participated in the Paris attacks. Abrini was able to remain hidden in the Brussels area, *Le Monde* claimed, because "he most likely had enough accomplices, while the investigative services had not yet identified him."

These revelations again point to the astonishing failures of the Belgian and NATO intelligence agencies. Abrini's accomplices were known to them, as were their aliases and their locations, yet they did not arrest them—and that, even though refugees fleeing the Syrian war were strictly monitored at European Union borders, often numbered as if they were detainees of Nazi camps, and then subjected to deportation or the confiscation of their savings.

In contrast, Osama K and his associates were able to use their false passports to go to Belgium, even though at least one of them had already been arrested by Turkish authorities.

These intelligence underscore the political significance of the support given by layers of the intelligence services to the Syrian war and the Islamic State (IS) militia. They used Islamist terrorist circles to carry out a war against the Assad regime as a proxy force for the imperialist powers. The terrorists were able to travel to Syria and return to Belgium without trouble from police, establishing a vast network in Europe to send radicalized youth to Syria.

Defeats suffered by IS and Al Qaeda in Syria and Iraq, and Washington's tactical turn closer to Moscow on the Syrian issue have somewhat relieved pressure on the Assad regime, and Islamist elements originally supported by France in Syria are now turning on their imperialist allies.

The reactionary character of the imperialist intervention in Syria and of the forces mobilized in this war emerges clearly in the bloody attacks in France and Belgium. The Islamist forces are inflicting on the European public the type of bloody attack that they initially inflicted, with the aid of US and European intelligence agencies, on Syrian cities. As for the intelligence agencies, they seem overwhelmed by the vast network of Islamist fighters that they helped spawn and in which they are complicit.

All the attacks in Europe were committed by terrorists well known to the intelligence services, who played down or closed their eyes to the danger posed by attacks prepared in Europe.

While the Kouachi brothers and Amedy Coulibaly, the team involved in the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, were well known and considered dangerous by French intelligence, Coulibaly was able to obtain weapons from Claude Hermant. He was a weapons dealer, a member of a far-right paramilitary group associated to the far-right National Front, and also a police informer.



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