

Belgian authorities mount large-scale anti-terror raid

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Belgian authorities charged three suspects allegedly close to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) with preparing a terror attack after a massive police raid on Friday night and early Saturday across Belgium. They were allegedly preparing to attack fans gathering to watch live broadcasts of the Belgian team playing Ireland at the Euro Football championship on Saturday.

Wiretaps of phone conversations discussing imminent attacks in Brussels—of football fans, malls, or train stations—reportedly triggered the raids, judicial sources reported. A federal prosecutor suggested that the state had evidence suggesting that it had to launch the operation instantly to avoid an attack: “Evidence was gathered [and] as part of the investigation, [we] needed to intervene immediately.”

Masked, heavily-armed police special forces carried out massive raids on well over 100 flats, homes and garages. The anti-terror raid was carried out in 16 areas, including Molenbeek-St-Jean, Schaerbeek and Liège. Oddly, according to the Federal prosecutor’s office, there were no major incidents during the raids, and no arms or explosives were found.

After the raid, 40 people were taken for questioning and 12 were arrested. On Saturday, three Belgian citizens, identified as Samir C, 27; Mustafa B, 40; and Jawad B, 29, were charged “as perpetrators or co-perpetrators, for having attempted to commit a terrorist murder and for participation in the activities of a terrorist group.” Nine others were released. All three men had links with the El Bakraoui brothers and Najim Laachraoui, who carried out the March 22 attack in Brussels that killed 32 people.

The arrest of three suspects came after another suspect identified as Youssef E.A, 29, who reportedly worked at Brussels’ Zaventem Airport, was arrested on Friday evening in connection with the March 22 attack.

He was allegedly a childhood friend of Khalid El Bakraoui, one of the March 22 suicide bombers. He was charged on Friday with “participation in a terrorist group, terrorist murders and attempted terrorist murders as a perpetrator, co-perpetrator or accomplice.”

According to local media, the man had access to flight information, and police reportedly found messages on his computer sent to El Bakraoui stating that planes from America, Russia and Israel take off every Tuesday from Zaventem.

Before the police raid, the Belgian Coordinating Body for Threat Analysis, which evaluates intelligence and other terrorism-related information, sent a warning to the police across Belgium and France that Islamist fighters in Syria were headed for Europe via Turkey and Greece.

The arrests come only three months after the Brussels attack, after which the entire Brussels area was put on lockdown and subjected to massive police raids. This raises questions how they escaped police raids at the time, and how many ISIS suspects are still active in Belgium and other European countries. It underscores further the complicity of European intelligence with ISIS elements in advancing the EU reactionary foreign policy in the Middle East.

After placing the country on the highest terror alert since the March 22 attack, Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel’s government announced that the terror level across the country would remain at the second-highest level. After a meeting of the country’s security council, Michel said, “It will be the case in the coming hours that we will take additional and adapted measures.”

“We want to continue living normally... The situation is under control, we are extremely vigilant, we are monitoring the situation hour-by-hour and we will

continue with determination the fight against extremism, radicalization and terrorism,” he said. If there was an imminent terror plot being prepared after the March 22 attack, responsibility again lies primarily with the reactionary policies of the NATO powers, who have promoted Al-Qaeda-linked Islamist militias in a war for regime change in the Middle East.

Michel’s claims that Brussels is fighting terrorism reek of hypocrisy. Recent terror attacks on European soil, including the attacks on November 13 in Paris and March 22 in Brussels are the product of this NATO foreign policy.

Many of the Belgian and French nationals who carried out the attacks on Paris and Brussels were part of networks that worked to funnel Islamist recruits to Syria to fight against the Assad government. These networks were tolerated by police and security officials in the NATO countries, which saw them as an important policy tool.

While the Michel government continues to terrorize the population with warnings of terror attacks and sweeping police raids, it also faces a mounting scandal over revelations of official foreknowledge of the March 22 Brussels bombings. The government failed to take any preemptive measures to prevent the attack, even after the identity of the attackers and their targets were provided by Israeli, Turkish and Russian intelligence officials.

Despite the advanced warning, Belgian security forces and their NATO allies failed to stop the attacks. Nonetheless, seizing on the terror attacks, the governments of French President François Hollande and Belgian Prime Minister Charles announced vast police state measures. After the November 13 attack, France was placed under state of emergency.

As social opposition mounts against the ruling elite across Europe, the recent terror plot will be used as a further pretext to escalate police state measures and suppress opposition by the working class.

The police raid comes amid rising opposition from workers and youth to draconian austerity measures imposed in both France and Belgium by the ruling elite. France has seen rising mass protests against the El Khomri labour law, whereas workers in Belgium recently protested attacks on labor conditions and austerity policies. In both countries, protesting workers were subject to bloody police repression, while the

Hollande government is preparing to use the state of emergency to ban protests.



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