

# Berlin terror suspect was well known to security forces

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Four days after the terror attack on a Christmas market in Berlin, the authorities released more evidence pointing to the man they have named as the chief suspect, Tunisian-born Anis Amri. A joint press statement issued by Chancellor Angela Merkel, Justice Minister Heiko Maas and Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière stated that Amri's fingerprints were found in the truck that ploughed into the market, killing 12 people and injuring 48 others.

De Maizière said there were "additional indications that the suspect is very likely the culprit." An identity document in Amri's name had been found in the cab of the truck, which provided the security authorities with important information about the suspect, including photos.

Heavily armed security forces are searching for Amri throughout Europe. According to media reports, police stormed an apartment in Dortmund and arrested four persons. On Thursday morning, some 100 police, including heavily armed Special Forces, searched a refugee shelter in Emmerich on the Rhine in which the Tunisian suspect had reportedly stayed.

Also on Thursday, Danish police looking for Amri searched a ferry. They said they had gotten a tip that the suspect was on board a ship sailing from Grenaa in Jutland to Sweden. They came up empty-handed, however.

The identification of the alleged perpetrator and the pan-European manhunt to capture him raise many troubling and unanswered questions.

Why was the wallet containing Amri's identification document discovered in the truck only many hours after the attack took place? According to the official version, investigators initially only sent sniffer dogs into the cab of the truck, with the aim of enabling the dogs to pick up the scent of the perpetrator. There was supposedly

no thorough search until many hours later.

It is clear that the security authorities had Amri in their sights immediately after Monday's attack. *Zeit online* published an article stating: "While the public was still wondering up until Tuesday if a young Pakistani had carried out the attack, investigators had long since followed another trail leading to A."

According to *Die Welt*, the prosecutor general and the BKA (National Crime Agency) were "annoyed" that "photos of suspects were published prematurely."

If Amri is the perpetrator, then the attack in Berlin conforms to the pattern that has emerged in virtually every major terror attack worldwide this century, beginning with the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington. In that case, as with the attacks in Boston and more recently in Paris and Brussels, the perpetrators were known to the secret services and the police.

Prior to Amri's arrival in Germany in the middle of 2015, he had spent four years in prison in Italy for arson, bodily injury and theft. In Germany, he quickly came to the attention of the state, which classified him as an Islamic "threat" and placed him under surveillance.

He was also well known to intelligence agencies across Europe and in the US, where he was put on the government's "no-fly" list.

Bavarian Radio has reported an entry in the so-called "Threat File" from March of this year, according to which Amri sought to recruit other people throughout Germany "to carry out Islamist-motivated attacks together with him." He was planning, according to the entry, "to smuggle large-caliber rapid firearms via contact persons in the French Islamist scene," and it was probable that he would pursue his terror plans "persistently and long-term."

*Spiegel Online* wrote that Amri “apparently came to the attention of the German security authorities some months ago, having made alarming remarks.”

Following “investigations into several hate preachers,” results from telecommunications surveillance revealed that Amri “apparently offered to act as a suicide bomber.” Furthermore, Amri “had asked a contact of the security authorities how he could obtain weapons.”

*Die Welt* reported that Amri was active in the circle around the Salafist preacher Abu Walaa, who has been in prison since November 8. Walaa is accused of leading an Islamic group that recruits young men for the Islamic State (ISIS). The newspaper *Tageszeitung* stated that the police had Amri in their sights because he “allegedly recruited fighters for IS and was looking for weapons.” During this time, he also had contact with “a police undercover agent.”

Amri had also been “categorized as a threat by the authorities in Berlin—as a militant Islamist who is capable of violent acts.” He was “observed from March to September this year.” Information was available that “the Tunisian planned a burglary in order to raise money for the purchase of automatic weapons.” According to the attorney general’s office, the aim was “possibly to commit an attack later with the help of those still to be recruited.”

In the late autumn, proceedings commenced against Amri for preparing a serious state-threatening act, and were later continued by the Berlin prosecutor’s office, according to *Die Zeit*. However, according to the interior minister of North Rhine-Westphalia, Ralf Jäger, the investigation was halted. The minister has given no explanation for the termination of the investigation.

“Despite all the alarm bells,” Amri was “not arrested or deported,” noted *Die Welt*. The newspaper reported that a photo of Amri on his Facebook page portrayed him “in typical jihadist look”. The picture was liked by family members, “two policemen, and an employee of the Tunisian Interior Ministry.” That Amri “links the Libyan terror group Ansar al-Sharia, with their logo on his page,” did “not seem to have disturbed” them.

Ansar al-Sharia is a group with loose links to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State in Libya. In 2011, it was part of the Western-backed Islamic “rebels” who toppled the regime of Muammar al-Gaddafi with the help of NATO bombs and were later classified as

terrorist organizations.

Political circles and the media declare endlessly that the authorities “lost sight of Amri” after he went underground at the beginning of December. “It is not clear yet whether this is a story about the failure of the state, or a story about how difficult it is for the state to keep an eye on the growing scene of danger,” wrote journalists Hans Leyendecker and Georg Mascolo in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

Nobody asks the obvious and decisive question: Are there forces in political circles and the security apparatus who knew about the planned attack and were prepared to allow or even support it in order to advance their extreme right-wing agenda of building up the repressive powers of the state, agitating against refugees and promoting militarism?



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