

Four men linked to neo-Nazi terror plot arrested in Iceland

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Four right-wing extremists were arrested in Iceland last week on suspicion of plotting terrorist attacks targeting public and government institutions. The men, aged in their 30s, had accumulated dozens of firearms, including several semi-automatic weapons, and thousands of rounds of ammunition at the time of their capture.

This development, the first of its kind in the small North Atlantic island nation with a population of just 360,000, is yet another explosive manifestation of the re-emergence of fascist tendencies throughout Europe and internationally. The men are under suspicion of having connections with other Nordic far-right extremist groups. Police found "fanatical propaganda" during their investigation, some of which glorified the neo-Nazi terrorist and child murderer Anders Breivik along with other like-minded extremists. Astonishingly, only two of the men remain in police custody at this time.

The investigation was launched regarding a serious weapons violation involving the "intended production and sale of firearms," leading investigators to suspect the individuals were plotting a terrorist action against "various institutions of society" and "citizens of the state." State Police Superintendent Karl Steinar Valsson stated to the press that there is suspicion the group had plans to target the Parliament or police, although investigators have yet to confirm the fascist operatives' exact targets.

The arrests took place in Kópavogur and Mosfellsbær, nearby suburbs of the nation's capital of Reykjavík. Investigators conducted searches at nine locations, confiscating firearms, ammunition, computers and cell phones. The weapons caches appear to have been domestically obtained, some of them manufactured with 3D printing technology.

While police managed to confiscate most of the weapons, it is unclear if the entire stockpile has been seized. It is also unknown whether or not these individuals had ties to far-right organizations internationally and if other co-plotters remain at large. For its part, the state appears reluctant to probe the serious questions raised by the discovery of the

terror plot and the police have declared it to be an open-and-shut case.

"The Icelandic Police has averted possible acts of terror," stated National Police Communications Director Gunnar Hörður Garðarsson. "The police do not consider the Icelandic public to be at risk and the current level of threat of acts of terrorism in Iceland is not higher as the situation has been secured."

The Icelandic ruling class responded to the arrests with renewed calls for anti-democratic legislation granting the police sweeping powers under the guise of "pre-emptive investigations." Such a law would, were it put into practice, allow police to begin investigations of individuals who are not currently under suspicion of committing or conspiring to commit crimes. It also would lead to the militarization of the Icelandic police force, with the introduction of "experts" and high-grade equipment as well as the organization of a special counterterrorism unit. The law, which has proven controversial within the country, was previously voted down in Parliament.

Minister of Justice Jón Gunnarsson made the case for passing such legislation in a recent television interview, describing it as "exactly what is called for." Gunnarsson is a member of the right-wing, pro-big business Independence Party, the traditional party of the Icelandic financial elite, which has spearheaded the push for the introduction of the "pre-emptive investigation" law since it was first drafted in 2015.

Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir of the Left-Green Movement echoed these sentiments but stopped short of explicitly endorsing such legislation. "I want to emphasise that it makes a tremendous difference that the police have the means to confront this," she said. "They certainly showed that they are capable." She used the opportunity to stress what she saw as the importance of continuing to "strengthen the police."

That a violent neo-Nazi cell could materialize in Iceland, a country which has topped the Global Peace Index since 2008, is an indictment of the so-called "Nordic model,"

which has paved the way for the rise of the far right across Scandinavia under conditions of a deepening global capitalist crisis. Jakobsdóttir's Left-Greens played a decisive role in diffusing the social protests that erupted in the country over the past decade in opposition to the deeply rooted financial parasitism of the Icelandic ruling class.

The Left-Greens first came to power in a "left" government led by the Social Democrats in 2009 following protests that brought down the previous coalition government of the Independence Party and Social Democrats. Independence was deeply unpopular after leading the government prior to and during the 2008 economic crisis, which triggered the collapse of the country's three main banks Kaupthing, Glitnir and Landsbanki.

While in power, the Left-Greens played a role foreshadowing that of the pseudo-left Syriza in Greece. The Social Democrat/Left-Green coalition government loyally implemented a devastating programme of austerity dictated by the IMF, slashing funding for public services. Steingrímur Sigfusson, former leader of the Left Greens, was finance minister for three years during this period and was therefore directly responsible for imposing these attacks.

The government was so unpopular that after one term it lost half of its support and was thrown out of office—paving the way for the right-wing populist and nationalist Progressive Party to take the mantle in 2013.

The Progressive Party-led government collapsed in 2016 following the publication of the Panama Papers, which implicated then-Prime Minister Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson and other high-ranking government officials in a widespread tax avoidance scandal. Fresh elections brought the Left-Greens back into power with Jakobsdóttir as prime minister in 2017. The current government has continued the previous cabinet's policy of austerity, and neither the Left-Greens nor the pseudo-left Pirate Party enjoy any meaningful popular support. As in other countries across Europe and internationally, the political void created by the absence of any genuine left-wing party has emboldened far-right, fascistic elements.

Right-wing populism has become a notable force in the Icelandic political establishment as of late. Following his ouster from government, Gunnlaugsson and his followers split from the Progressive Party in 2017 and founded the Centre Party. While the move undoubtedly was in part intended as an attempt by the tarnished Gunnlaugsson to rebrand himself, the Centre Party had definite programmatic motivations—taking a more hard-line opposition to EU membership and espousing openly xenophobic, anti-immigrant rhetoric. While still a minority party, its influence

has moved official Icelandic political discourse even further to the right.

While the development of neo-Nazi groups is far more advanced in mainland Europe and North America, Iceland is by no means immune from this global phenomenon. Norðurvígi, Iceland's chapter of the white supremacist Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM), has been active in the country's capital since its founding in 2016.

The NRM was founded in Sweden in 1997 and has active chapters in Sweden, Norway, Finland, Iceland and Denmark. It advocates the dissolution of parliamentary institutions and the establishment of an ethnically pure fascist state along Nazi lines. The organization maintains close ties with neo-Nazi groups across Europe, including Ukraine's notorious Azov Battalion. The escalation of the NATO-Russia conflict in Ukraine, which has seen the funneling of arms, money and materiel into the hands of the Azov Battalion and other far-right forces, has fueled the growth of fascist paramilitary and terror groups internationally.

Norðurvígi members have organized demonstrations in downtown Reykjavík and are active on the University of Iceland's campus, where they engage in racist agitation and distribute hate literature. Norðurvígi has taken measures to distance itself from the terror plot, claiming the organization does not advocate violence and that it had no knowledge of any such plans.

A hard-line faction of the NRM has emerged, however, which disavows parliamentarism in favor of preparation for an armed fascist insurrection. This faction has begun to organize separate clandestine paramilitary groups throughout Scandinavia, the most visible of which is Nordisk Styrka (Nordic Strength) in Sweden. The group describes itself as a "fighting organization" with strict standards of physical and military discipline demanded of its membership.

The organization is associated with a litany of criminal charges, with group members convicted of over 100 violent crimes and weapons offenses. Police seized illegal submachine guns and automatic rifles from an NRM hard-liner in Norway in 2014, and another member was arrested in 2019 after hijacking an ambulance, trying to ram a police car and driving into a crowd. Police discovered a shotgun, as well as an Uzi submachine gun, in the stolen ambulance upon inspection.



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