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Europe: Belgium Arrests Spark Concerns Over Further Attacks

A series of raids in Brussels last week resulted in terrorism charges against four suspects, including Mohamed Abrini, a key suspect in both the Paris and Brussels attacks. Abrini's arrest has led to even greater vigilance because of increased concerns that another attack could be conducted in Europe. Investigators believe that when Salah Abdeslam, a fugitive connected to the Paris attacks in November, was arrested last month, terrorist plots were expedited, leading to the attacks in Brussels on March 22. European law enforcement is concerned that with Abrini's arrest, other attack plans could be accelerated as well.

Belgian investigators have confirmed that Abrini, a 31-year-old Belgian-Moroccan, is the so-called "man in the hat" who



was seen in surveillance video with two suicide bombers at the Brussels airport (see photo). His DNA and fingerprints were found in a vehicle used in the Paris attacks, according to spokesmen for the Belgian Federal Prosecutor, and he was seen with Abdeslam at a gas station between Brussels and Paris two nights before the Paris attacks.

Another of the four suspects charged last week – Osama Krayem, a.k.a. Naim al Hamid, a 23-year-old Swedish national – has been identified as the second suspect who was seen on surveillance video with a suicide bomber at a Brussels subway station. Prosecutors also said Krayem was seen on surveillance video buying the pieces of luggage used to conceal the bombs detonated by the two suicide bombers at the airport.

Europe: Terrorists Initially Planned to Attack France Again, but Switched to Brussels

The Belgian Federal Prosecutor's Office has issued a statement saying that "numerous elements of the investigation" have shown that the attackers in Brussels originally planned to conduct a second terrorist attack in France, following up on the attacks in Paris on November 13. However, they were "surprised by the speed of the progress in the ongoing investigation," and they decided to quickly put together an attack in Brussels instead. The statement did not elaborate on the "progress of the investigation," but it appears to be a reference to a series of raids by Belgian police that led to the capture of Salah Abdeslam four days before the Brussels attacks.



The prosecutors' statement did not provide any details on the initial plot in France or its intended targets. However, in late March, French police arrested Reda Kriket in a Paris suburb and found assault rifles, handguns, and explosives – including TATP – in the apartment where he was staying (photo shows an entrance to the building after the raid). At the time of the arrest, French Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve said that Kriket was in the "advanced stages" of planning an attack in conjunction with "a terrorist network."

Syria: Ceasefire Near Collapse as Government and Rebel Forces Fight Near Aleppo

The tenuous "cessation of hostilities" appears to be near the breaking point as pro-government units and opposition forces clashed on April 10 near Aleppo, in northern Syria. Press reports quote Syrian Prime Minister Wael al-Halaki as saying that the Russian air force and the Syrian military are planning a joint operation to retake Aleppo from rebel forces. The al-Nusra Front, the al-Qa'ida affiliate in Syria, is playing a key role in the fighting, according to Syrian activists.

The ceasefire took effect in February, with a goal of setting the stage for broader talks to bring the war in Syria to an end. Violations were sporadic at the beginning of the ceasefire, but they have increased markedly in recent weeks. The UN envoy for Syria plans to convene the next round of talks in Geneva this week, but the prospects for a diplomatic solution are dim.

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