

Militancy/Terrorism

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Belgium Alert: Three arrested in Antwerp for a UAV-based attack plot targeting PM De Wever on October 9; highlighting growing use of accessible technologies by young jihadist actors

Current Situation

- On October 9, police in Antwerp arrested three youths suspected of planning a “jihadist-inspired” attack targeting Belgian politicians, including PM Bart De Wever, using explosives mounted on an UAV.
- According to Flemish media, officers searched a residence located just a few hundred meters from De Wever’s Antwerp home.
- During the search, police found an improvised explosive device (IED) that was not yet operational, along with a bag of steel balls.
- A 3D printer was also discovered at another suspect’s home, believed to have been used to produce parts for the planned attack. Investigators suspect the group intended to build a UAV capable of carrying an explosive charge.
- One of the suspects has since been released, while the other two remain in custody and will appear before an investigating judge on October 10.

Source: [Brussels Times](#)

Assessments & Forecast

1. Although one suspect was released following initial questioning and the IED was not yet operational, the discovery of its components, along with a 3D printer producing necessary weapons and UAV parts, indicates that the suspects posed a highly credible threat and were in advanced stages of planning the attack. The use of a 3D printer is particularly notable, as jihadist plots involving 3D-printed weaponry have been relatively rare in Europe, compared to its more common usage by the far-right extremist groups.
2. The suspects' plan to use a UAV to deliver explosives, against the backdrop of the March 21 arrest of a 22-year-old in France's Seine-et-Marne department for a similar plot, reflects growing interest in UAV-based attack methods, particularly among younger jihadist actors. While this does not yet indicate a widespread shift toward UAV-based tactics, the incidents highlight a potential evolution in jihadist methodologies, suggesting an increased interest in leveraging more accessible but sophisticated technologies, such as 3D printing and UAVs, to enhance attack capabilities and evade detection. This evolution is particularly noteworthy given that most jihadist attacks and foiled plots across Europe in recent years have primarily involved rudimentary methods such as stabbings, followed by vehicular rammings and the infrequent use of firearms.
3. Indeed, the emerging threat of UAV-based jihadist attacks is also evidenced by the [uncovering of a Hezbollah-operated network used to manufacture UAVs in Spain and Germany](#) in April. Although the network's primary objective appeared to be transferring equipment to Lebanon, its presence highlights the potential for such infrastructure to be repurposed to facilitate attacks within Europe at relatively short notice.
4. Additionally, the involvement of three suspects in planning the plot is notable, as most jihadist-inspired attack plans in Western Europe since 2022 have involved self-radicalized lone actors rather than organized cells. Coordinated plots with multiple perpetrators typically indicate a higher degree of premeditation, operational capacity, and sophistication.
5. **FORECAST:** That said, the emergence of technologically driven attack planning means jihadist groups no longer need to form traditional cells with defined roles for financing, radicalization, and logistics. Instead, it is plausible that this case indicates the emergence of small, tight-knit networks of young extremists who coalesce around shared ideological narratives online and attempt to translate virtual radicalization into coordinated real-world action. This potential shift is reinforced by propaganda from transnational jihadist networks such as the Islamic State (IS), which increasingly emphasizes low-cost, easily accessible technology-based tactics such as UAVs and improvised explosive devices for attacks, online radicalization for recruitment, and the use of cryptocurrencies for funding. This lowers technical and logistical barriers to attack planning and reduces reliance on the more visible, resource-heavy cell structures that are easier to detect and disrupt.
6. **FORECAST:** Despite attempts to adopt more sophisticated attack methods, such as UAV-mounted explosives or 3D-printed weaponry and form loosely organized cells, multi-actor plots involving advanced weaponry remain particularly vulnerable to detection. This is due to the overall difficulty of acquiring advanced weapons in Europe, combined with the high effectiveness of security agencies, as evidenced by the increasing number of plots foiled through online investigations and surveillance. Nevertheless, a latent risk of such a plot potentially evading surveillance and succeeding remains. That said, in the near-to-medium term, the primary threat is likely to continue coming from lone actors using easily accessible methods, such as stabbings or vehicular rammings.
7. Meanwhile, the targeting of De Wever highlights the ongoing risk of attacks against him as he was previously the focus of a jihadist plot in March 2023 while serving as Mayor of Antwerp. The heightened threat likely stems from his perceived anti-Islamic policies, including the ban on visible religious symbols, such as headscarves, for public servants in Antwerp. De Wever remains a polarizing figure in Belgian politics and has faced a range of threats and attempted attacks since 2012, both from Islamist extremists and organized crime networks. Broadly, the plot, coupled with October 5 raids targeting a suspect threatening the leader of the Francophone liberal Mouvement Reformateur (MR) party, underscores the sustained risk of threats and intimidation against Belgian

politicians, Indeed the March 4 assessment by the Coordination Unit for Threat Analysis (CUTA), an independent Belgian government body, which highlighted a growing risk to political figures, particularly those involved in security reforms

8. Additionally, the plot underscores the sustained heightened risk of terrorism in Belgium, also evidenced by the fact that CUTA has maintained the national threat level at 3, the second highest on a four-tier scale, denoting “serious.” Based on precedent, the primary threats come from homegrown self-radicalized jihadist actors, with minors remaining especially vulnerable to extremist radicalizations and recruitment per CUTA’s assessment. In addition to political figures, vulnerable targets include areas with high footfall, such as shopping centers, public transport hubs, and cultural events, as well as places of worship, especially linked to the Jewish community.

Recommendations

1. Travel to Belgium may continue while maintaining heightened vigilance for potential jihadist terrorist threats.
2. Travelers are advised to remain cognizant of their surroundings, including any suspicious behavior of individuals. Alert authorities immediately upon witnessing suspicious items or behavior.
3. If a potential stabbing, shooting, explosion, or vehicle ramming manifests, leave the area immediately if possible, or take shelter at a secure location.
4. Move away from large groups to mitigate the risks of a stampede.
5. Remain cognizant of authorities’ updates regarding evolving security protocols at public events.
6. For further questions, please contact intel@max-security.com