

Analysis: Muslim radicals assassinate Dutch filmmaker

Theo van Gogh made film critical of Muslim customs; first Islamic terrorist attack in Netherlands

Summary

- Muslim man assassinates Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam on 2 November, as he was bicycling on a city street
- Mr. van Gogh filmed the movie “Submission,” which criticizes Muslim treatment of women
- Authorities suggest links between the suspects and the Madrid and Casa Blanca bombings
- Conservative politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who wrote the script, received a death threat stating “you’re next” and conservative MP Geert Wilders received a similar threat
- Police disrupted assassination plans for these politicians and others by arresting several members of the terror group Hofstadgroep (Hofstad Network) in The Hague
- Suspects were under the tutelage of a Syrian named Redouan al-Issar, 43, who preached “violent jihad”
- A Moroccan man named Abdeladim Akoudad is suspected of coordinating the activities of this terror cell. He has coordinated several radical Muslim terrorist groups in the Netherlands, Belgium and Spain
- This was the first Islamic terrorist attack in the Netherlands



Local Response

- Police arrested a 26-year old Amsterdam resident of Moroccan origin, identified as Mohammed Bouyeri (see photo below), after exchanging gunfire with him in a park near the assassination site
- Police also arrested 8 other suspected co-conspirators/Islamic radicals within 24 hours and have since arrested at least 38 in connection with the murder
- Many of the suspects are of Moroccan ancestry who Dutch authorities say are part of a group of 150-200 North African extremists from several terrorist groups (al-Qaeda, GSPC, Salafi Jihad etc)
- European officials believe there are ties to the March 11 train bombings in Madrid, as well as in Casa Blanca in 2003 and planned attacks during the Euro 2004 Championship in Portugal. Abdeladim Akoudad is the Moroccan believed to have coordinated all of these operations
- Bouyeri had contact with Samir Azzouz, an 18 year-old Moroccan immigrant previously accused of plotting terrorist attacks against Dutch targets. Both were part of the Hofstad Network led by Syrian, Redouan al-Issar, known to the group as “Abu Khaled”
- The Dutch security services had been monitoring Bouyeri and Azzouz for years. They dropped surveillance of Bouyeri because they believed he was inactive, even though he was posting up to 220 radical messages on an Islamic message board - 166 of those in the 10 days prior to the attack

Tactics

- Van Gogh was known to bike through the streets, and had refused protection despite receiving threats
- Bouyeri shot van Gogh as he biked down an Amsterdam street, stabbed him repeatedly, cut his throat with one hunting knife, and pinned a five page letter to his chest with another
- The letter contained text from the Quran in Arabic, pledged that Islam would “drive evil back to its dark hole using the sword,” and called for jihad
- A witness who lives in the neighborhood heard six shots and saw Bouyeri concealing a gun. Bouyeri reportedly stayed next to van Gogh and waited to make sure he was dead. He then walked slowly away, spoke to someone at the edge of the park, and then ran. A shootout with police followed
- Police believe Bouyeri worked alone in assassinating Van Gogh, but was also a part of a larger extremist conspiracy to assassinate Dutch government officials. He had a suicide note in his pocket when captured

Ideological and Political Motivations

- Van Gogh’s film “Submission” expressed his belief that Muslim women are oppressed. For emphasis, the film shows naked women with text from the Quran scrawled on their bodies
- Ayaan Hirsi Ali, conservative politician and former Muslim, wrote the script and received death threats for criticizing Islamic customs and the failure of Muslim families to adopt Dutch ways
- Bouyeri’s group planned to assassinate Ms. Hirsi Ali, MP Geert Wilders, Immigration and Integration Minister Rita Verdonk, Amsterdam Mayor Job Cohen, and Deputy Mayor Ahmed Aboutaleb
- This comes two years after the murder of populist anti-immigration politician Pim Fortuyn and has raised concern among Dutch citizens that their traditional openness will be challenged
- After Pim Fortuyn’s murder, the government adopted tough laws against violent crime, commonly associated with immigrants, which runs counter to the Netherlands’ liberal traditions

Implications for local law enforcement

- U.S. has many activists, authors and artists who offer critical views of Muslim extremism
- Politicians and government figures could be targeted for perceived injustices against Muslims
- Radical public discourse may inspire lone jihadists to commit acts of violence against cultural or other targets (e.g., James Elshafay and Shahawar Matin Siraj in New York City)
- Internet site was critical information source in predicting likely terrorist targets; track rates at which individual posters participate, focus on increasingly militant rhetoric
- Awareness of ideology of organized extremist groups critical to law enforcement prevention strategies



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***First full photo released
of Mohammed Bouyeri**