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World

Belgian authorities arrest a third suspect in foiled terrorist attack on France

By **James McAuley** April 2

PARIS — Belgian federal prosecutors confirmed Saturday that a third suspect in Belgium has been charged in connection with plotting what officials are calling a major terrorist attack on France.

The suspect, identified only as “Y.A.,” was taken into custody Friday. Prosecutors said that Y. A. is a Belgian citizen born May 4, 1982, making the suspect 33, but declined to provide further information “in the interest of the investigation.”

The arrest comes as part of the same investigation that led to the March 24 arrest of Reda Kriket, 34, in the Paris suburb of Argenteuil, and another suspect in the Netherlands a few days later.

Two other suspects have been arrested in Belgium for colluding with Kriket: a man authorities have identified only as Rabah M., 34, and Abderrahmane Ameroud, 38. Both were arrested in Brussels on March 25 and both are Algerian citizens.

In the apartment Kriket occupied in Argenteuil, police discovered assault rifles, handguns and explosives — including TATP, the type of explosive that has become a trademark of Islamic State jihadists. The substance was used in the November attacks on Paris and in the Brussels attacks.

At the time of Kriket’s arrest, French Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve said the apprehended suspect was in the “advanced stages” of planning an attack in conjunction with “a terrorist network.”

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Dutch authorities, at the insistence of their French counterparts, arrested a French citizen, Amis Bahri, 32, in Rotterdam on March 27. Authorities say Bahri was involved in plotting the France attack.

Although the extent of Kriket's network remains unclear, he was sentenced in Belgium in absentia in July 2015 to 10 years in prison for being part of a jihadist channel stemming from Syria. Also sentenced in absentia was Abdelhamid Abaaoud, a ringleader of the November terrorist attacks in Paris who was killed five days later in a police raid in a Paris suburb.

After the March 22 attacks on the Brussels airport and the city's metro line, Belgium remains on the highest level of alert. The climate of palpable anxiety has resulted in increased security throughout the capital, where on Saturday police detained protesters for attempting to break an imposed ban on demonstrations.

According to Brussels media, two far-right protesters were arrested after "prohibited weapons" and molotov cocktails were found in their vehicle. They were trying to take part in a planned anti-immigration rally in Molenbeek, a heavily Muslim neighborhood of Brussels, where Salah Abdeslam, a suspect in the Paris attacks of last November, was arrested on March 18, after four months in hiding.

Molenbeek's mayor, Françoise Schepmans, quickly banned Saturday's protest because of the potential "public order disturbances" it posed.

Meanwhile, at least 10 counterprotesters were detained at a rally on the Place de la Bourse, where the city has largely come to grieve since the attacks. The event was organized by the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme (Human Rights League) to combat Islamophobia.

Still, the city continues to try to return to normal order. On Saturday, officials announced that a limited number of passenger flights would resume from Brussels Airport on Sunday. Security at the airport will be tighter.

James McAuley is a reporter based in Paris.
