

**DENMARK: COPENHAGEN SHOOTINGS PROVE
EFFICIENCY OF “INDIVIDUAL JIHAD”
PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGNS, LAUNCHED BY IS AND
AL-QAEDA**

By Evgenia Gvozdeva

The deadly shooting attacks in Copenhagen this weekend once again demonstrated the efficiency of individual jihad propaganda campaigns in Western Europe, that were launched by the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda.

On Saturday, February 14, at about 3.30 p.m. local time, a man opened fire on the Krudttonden café in the central Osterbro district of Copenhagen, killing film director Finn Norgaard, 55, and injuring 3 police officers. At the moment of the attack the café was hosting a debate on Islamism that was attended by the Swedish controversial cartoonist Lars Vilks, who is considered by the investigation as the intended target of the attack. The gunman reportedly stayed for a short time outside the café and left the scene on foot.

At about 1 a.m. on Sunday the same assailant opened fire outside the synagogue situated in central Copenhagen, killing a Jewish volunteer guard and injuring 2 police officers and fled the scene. At the moment of the attack the synagogue was holding a Bat Mitzvah celebration and the ceremony was attended by nearly 80 people.

At 4.50 a.m. the suspect came back to his apartment situated in Mjølnerparken area near Norrebro train station and by that time the building was already placed under police surveillance. The man offered armed resistance and was shot dead.

The identity of the shooter was revealed by media on Sunday, February 15, but officially confirmed by police only two days later, on February 17. Meanwhile Danish security authorities claim that they identified the assailant just hours after the attack and his personality was not made public in the interests of investigation.

Today the available information over the personality and background of the attacker so far perfectly match the 'lone wolf terrorist profile', i.e. a young immigrant or a member of immigrant's family, with previous criminal records, who served prison terms in the past. The new case once again underscores links between criminal gangs and Islamist extremism.

Danish-born Omar Abdel Hamid El-Hussein, 22, was released from jail just two weeks before the shooting after serving a term for aggravated assault. In November 2013 he attacked with a knife a 19-year-old man in a train in Copenhagen. He was also a member of the notorious gang The Brothas and was implicated in a series of gang-related activities and possession of weapons.

Danish intelligence services confirmed that el-Hussein was known to Danish intelligence services but claimed that they were unable to prevent the attack as it was not possible to monitor all the suspects.

Publications on the Facebook page of El-Hussein allowed to allege his support to the Islamic State and its leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi. Meanwhile credibility of this information can not be ascertained so far, providing a fertile ground for various media speculations.

It should be mentioned that Denmark in recent years dramatically intensified its efforts to prevent the radicalization of Muslim population and to tackle the increasing threat of homegrown terrorism.

In December 2014 the Danish intelligence service (PET) announced that Denmark faces a "significant" threat from radicalized Muslim jihadists returning to the country from Syria and Iraq. According to PET, at least 110 people, including a small number of women, had gone to Syria and Iraq from Denmark to fight alongside the jihadist groups like Islamic State and at least 16 of those had been killed in fighting.

Among the Islamist organizations that largely increased their activities in recent years in Denmark there is Hizb ut-Tahrir Skandinavia, which has organized a series of Muslim rallies, namely in Norrebro neighborhood of Copenhagen. The group is also suspected of carrying out recruiting activities for jihad in Syria. It should be mentioned that on November 13 last year the spokesman for Hizb ut-Tahrir Skandinavia, Junes Kock, posted a video where he claimed that 'the entire world has allied itself against the Muslims' and urged jihadists fighting in Syria to 'join ranks' and 'to unite in the fight against tyranny and oppression'.

Meanwhile it should be mentioned that before the beginning of transformation of Syria into the zone of international jihad, Denmark also faced an important threat of Islamist terrorism, particularly following the publication by the Danish newspaper

Jyllands-Posten of 12 editorial cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad in an article entitled "*Muhammeds ansigt*" ("The face of Muhammad") in 2005.

To recall, the publication triggered protests worldwide and in Lebanon and Syria Danish embassies were severely damaged by protests. Middle Eastern countries also announced a consumer boycott to Denmark and on 6 March 2006 Al-Qaeda urged Muslims to boycott not only Denmark, but also Norway, France, Germany and other countries that have 'insulted the Prophet' by printing cartoons depicting him.

Since early 2006 several plots, that intended to target newspaper's staff, namely the editor Flemming Rose and cartoonist Kurt Westergaard were thwarted by security authorities, leading to arrest of several terrorist suspects. In December 2010 the most serious terrorist plot against Jullands-Posten was thwarted due to the cooperation of Danish and Swedish security services. 5 suspects aged between 26 and 44 were arrested by police. 4 of them were Swedish nationals and the 5th one was Iraqi asylum seeker in Denmark. The men were charged with terrorism and unlawful weapons possession and 4 of them were sentenced to 12 years in prison.

A series of other terrorist attacks and foiled plots targeted Denmark over the last years. Most of attacks were also interpreted as a revenge for the Jullands-Posten publication:

- April 27, 2012: 3 suspects were arrested in Copenhagen on suspicion of plotting a terror attack after police found them with automatic weapons and ammunition. the suspect were identified as a 22-year-old citizen of Jordan, a 23-year-old Turkish man living in Denmark and a 21-year-old Danish national who lives in Egypt.
- 10 September 2010: 25-year-old resident of Belgium, Chechen-born Lors Doukayev was lightly wounded when preparing a letter bomb that exploded in a Copenhagen hotel.
- 2 June, 2008: the Danish Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan was targeted by a suicide car bombing. The vehicle went off at the parking lot of the embassy, leaving 6 people dead. Responsibility for the attack has been claimed by Al-Qaeda.
- 3-4 September 2007: PET carried out a large-scale operation in the Copenhagen area and arrested a number of people who were suspected of preparing an act of terrorism using the unstable explosive TATP. In March 2008 two of the arrested suspects were sentenced to 12 and 7 years respectively.
- 5 September, 2006: 9 suspects were detained for alleged plotting of a terror attack in Vollsmose, a mostly immigrant suburb west of Odense.
- 28 October 2005: 4 Muslim youths aged between 16 and 20 were arrested in Copenhagen for allegedly plotting to launch a bomb attack against an

unidentified target in Europe. The four were suspected of being linked to two men who were arrested in the Bosnian capital Sarajevo. The attack was aimed at forcing foreign troops to pull out of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Last year Denmark substantially intensified its efforts to tackle increasing risk of radicalization and extremism among Muslim population and possible involvement in fighting in Syrian and other international jihad zones.

Authorities put the main focus on the preventive work, direct contacts with Muslim community representatives and soft 'deradicalisation' policy. At the national level, the government announced the launch of a national "exit centre" for jihadists and others keen to leave their extremist groups. So far the country launched probably the most developed and advanced program of rehabilitation of jihadists, while its efficiency is still largely discussed.

Returning back to the Copenhagen shootings, we should say that the attacks, even if they could not be predicted, have not appeared out of the blue as series of threats were issued in recent months on jihadist accounts against Scandinavian countries, and namely Denmark and Norway.

In January this year ESISC already warned about the increasing number of calls to attack Denmark and Norway, diffused on social networks and internet-forums. The calls particularly intensified following Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris.

Similarly terrorist attacks in Copenhagen have triggered an active support from jihadists on social media, who praised the shooter and called for 'lions of Ummah' to carry out further attacks in Western Europe.

Despite numerous speculations that appear in social media over the possible allegiance of Omar El-Husseini to the Islamic State and his possible travels to the international jihad zones, none of these suspicions have been confirmed by official sources yet.

Meanwhile it is clear that the man was inspired by the recent lone wolf attacks in Paris and numerous calls for individual jihad in Western Europe, issued by both Islamic State and by Al-Qaeda.

It is worth mentioning that despite important ideological disagreements between Al Qaeda and the Islamic State today, security forces, Western media and Jewish facilities remain the priority targets for both organizations. Being actively commented in social medias and internet-forums, such attacks gain large support among jihadists worldwide, no matter their affiliation, creating a chain reaction and inspiring other lone-wolf terrorists for attacks in their countries.

