



BELGIAN JIHADISTS JAILED AS EUROPE TRIES TO STEM FLOW OF IS FIGHTERS

February 12, 2015 VOA News reported: "A court in Belgium on Wednesday handed jail sentences to 45 members of an Islamist group called Sharia4Belgium, convicted of arranging for young men to travel to Syria to fight for jihadist groups.

The case was the latest in a series of prosecutions of European citizens who have joined terror groups in Syria. Most of those sentenced in Antwerp, however, were absent from court, presumed to be fighting or to have been killed in Syria. The group's leader, Fouad Belkacem, was given a 12-year term.

The son of Dimitri Bontinck was given a suspended sentence after agreeing to be a witness for the prosecution. Bontinck, who traveled to Syria in 2013 to try to bring back his son, Jejoen, criticized the decision to give long jail sentences to young people he described as 'brainwashed.'

He said that the young people were being criminalized and therefore would never return. Such treatment was creating more fertile ground for terrorists and more hatred of the West, he said.

Foreign fighters are often featured in Islamic State propaganda and recruiting videos. Officials said about 350 Belgians have traveled to fight in Syria, the highest number in Europe relative to population. An estimated 4,000 Europeans have joined Islamist militant groups..."



Belgium

SWEDEN CUTS RATES BELOW ZERO AS GLOBAL CURRENCY WARS SPREAD

February 13, 2015 The Telegraph reported: "Morgan Stanley warns that the world is revisiting the "ghosts of the 1930s" as one country after another tries to steal a march on others by devaluing first

Sweden has cut interest rates below zero and launched quantitative easing to fight deflation, becoming the latest Scandinavian state to join Europe's escalating currency wars.

The Riksbank caught markets by surprise, reducing the benchmark lending rate to minus 0.10pc and unveiled its first asset purchases, vowing to take further action at any time to stop the country falling into a deflationary trap. The bank presented the move as precautionary step due to rising risks of a "poorer outcome abroad" and the crisis in Greece.

Janet Henry from HSBC said the measures are clearly a "beggar-thy neighbour" manoeuvre to weaken the krone, the latest such action in a global currency war that does little to tackle the deeper problem of deficient world demand.

The move comes as neighbouring Denmark takes ever more drastic steps to stop a flood of money overwhelming its exchange rate peg to the euro and tightening the deflationary noose.

The Danes have cut rates four times to minus 0.75pc in a month to combat fall-out from the European Central Bank's forthcoming QE. They have even taken the unprecedented step of halting all issuance of government bonds..."

DON'T ARM UKRAINE, RUSSIA TELLS THE WEST

February 10, 2015 Sky News reports: "Moscow has hit out at calls for the West to arm Ukraine in the fight against rebels in the east of the country. A Kremlin spokesman said it would be regarded as an attempt to destabilise the situation - as would the extension of sanctions against Russia.

The warning came ahead of further talks on Wednesday aimed at ending the Ukraine conflict, which has cost more than 5,300 lives since April.

The planned meeting, in the Belarussian capital Minsk, follows last week's discussions between Russian president Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian leader Petro Poroshenko, led by Germany and France.

Representatives of Ukraine, Russia, separatists and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe are meeting later to lay the groundwork for Wednesday's negotiations..."

US CONCERNED BY GROWING EXPERTISE OF CHINA, RUSSIA SPACE CAPABILITIES

February 10, 2015 SpaceDaily.com reported: "Multiple countries, especially China and Russia, pose a grave threat to US space security systems with advanced technologies they have developed that can disrupt satellite communications and operations, the head of US Strategic Command (STRATCOM), Navy Admiral Cecil D. Haney, said on Friday.

"US national security space systems are facing a serious growing threat," Haney said, adding that China and Russia warrant the most attention.

"Both countries have acknowledged they are developing or have developed counter-space capabilities. Both countries have advanced directed energy capabilities that could be used to track or blind satellites, disrupting key operations."

Russia, China and a number of other nations are working to take away America's strategic advantage in space, according to Haney, by using military jamming capabilities to interfere with satellite communications and global positioning systems.

China, for one, has even publicly stated that its goal for the next decade is to outperform all other nations in space, with large investments in increasing the number of platforms in every orbital regime, Haney added. Space is critical to 21st-century deterrence which heavily relies on the precept of knowing thy adversary, Haney explained.

"To effectively deter adversaries - and potential adversaries - from threatening our space capabilities, we must also understand their capabilities and their intent and make it clear that no adversary will gain the advantage they seek by attacking us in space," the admiral said.

Haney also warned that any reductions in the defense budget would, "jeopardize these investments and diminish our asymmetric advantage in space, exposing our nation to significant risk in this foundational area."

The Obama administration has said it wants to eliminate sequestration, which calls for automatic defense budget cuts of 10 percent until 2021, resulting in \$487 billion in cost savings.

The Pentagon is strongly opposed to sequestration, arguing in a 2014 report that defense budget cuts will pose challenges to military readiness and modernization.

On Monday, Obama submitted a \$3.9 trillion budget to Congress with \$560 billion earmarked for national security spending, including investments in space security to help deter and defeat inference with and attacks on US space systems."

SAME-SEX MARRIAGES PROCEED IN PARTS OF ALABAMA, AMID JUDICIAL CHAOS

February 9, 2015 The New York Times reported: "Amid conflicting signals from federal courts and the chief justice of Alabama's Supreme Court, some Alabama counties began granting marriage licenses to same-sex couples on Monday in a legal showdown with echoes of the battles over desegregation in the 1960s.

In major county seats like Birmingham, Montgomery and Huntsville, same-sex couples lined up outside courthouses as they opened and emerged smiling after being wed.

At the Jefferson County Courthouse here, Judge Michael G. Graffeo of Circuit Court officiated, at times tearfully, at the civil wedding of Dinah McCaryer and Olanda Smith, the first to emerge from the crowd of same-sex couples on Monday morning. "I now pronounce Olanda and Dinah are married spouses, entitled to all rights and privileges, as well as all responsibilities, afforded and placed upon them by the State of Alabama," Judge Graffeo said.

But in at least 50 of Alabama's 67 counties, the county Probate Courts, which issue the licenses, were not giving them to gay and lesbian couples, according to the Human Rights Campaign, a gay rights group. Many probate court judges declined to grant any marriage licenses."..."

FBI HAS OPENED ISIS CASES IN 49 U.S. STATES

February 9, 2015 wnd.com reported: "As ISIS spreads its influence and rule not only in its caliphate of portions of Syria and Iraq but also in non-contiguous areas of North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, the FBI is opening up cases of suspects who may be tied to ISIS in 49 states of the United States.

'We are focused keenly on who would be looking to travel to join this band of murderers who will have come back from Iraq and Syria and to the United States,' said FBI Director James Comey in a recent speech to law enforcement officers in Mississippi.

'We have opened cases all over the place focused on this threat, so it is not ... a Washington thing - it is something we focus on throughout the FBI,' Comey said..."

1,500 RUSSIAN TROOPS, MILITARY EQUIPMENT ENTER UKRAINE

February 9, 2015 thetimesofisrael reported: "At least 1,500 Russian troops and convoys of military hardware entered Ukraine over the weekend, the Ukrainian military said on Monday.



'One thousand five hundred Russian soldiers and 300 pieces of military equipment, including Grad missile systems, crossed the Ukraine-Russia border on February 7 and 8,' Ukraine military spokesman Andriy Lysenko told journalists.

Around 170 vehicles, including trucks, petrol tankers and cars, also crossed the border, he said.

Ukraine and the West accuse Moscow of supplying troops and equipment to pro-Russian separatists battling the Kiev military in the east of the country, something Russia denies..."



Ukraine

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