

# CHRISTMAS RAN

Shoppers were enjoying the Christmas market in Breitscheidplatz, Berlin on 19 December 2016 oblivious to the passing traffic. Tragically they were also oblivious to a large Scania articulated lorry that mounted the pavement until the very moment it was ploughing through them. The stolen lorry was from Poland, but its Polish lorry driver Lukasz Urban had been murdered by the culprit. Those in the lorry's path did not have the chance to escape.

At the wheel was 24-year-old Tunisian national Anis Amri. After killing 12 innocent people and injuring another 49 in the most horrific manner, he slewed the

lorry back out onto the road and fled on foot. Behind him he left a trail of twisted bodies and smashed market stalls. It had all taken a matter of minutes. The death toll would have been higher if he had not turned off so abruptly leaving part of the market unscathed. Amri then vanished for four days until caught purely by chance in Italy. His *modus operandi* had all the chilling hallmarks of the Nice terror attack during the summer. That was also carried out by a Tunisian resident.

Last year was a particularly bad one for Europe's major cities, which suffered a series of brutal terror attacks that racked up an appalling death toll. It did

**Anis Amri killed 12 people when he drove a lorry through the Christmas market**



# RAMPAGE

not start well when Islamist terrorists struck Brussels airport and metro on 22 March killing 32 people. In the summer on 28 June three gunmen went on the rampage at Istanbul airport. Their shooting spree and suicide vests claimed another 45 victims. On 14 July it was Nice's turn when an Islamist extremist drove a truck through the crowds on the Promenade des Anglais killing 86 and injuring hundreds.

Ten days later a suicide bomber injured 15 at an open-air festival at Ansbach. That same day a right-wing psychiatric patient went on a shooting spree in Munich, which left nine dead. He launched his attack on the fifth anniversary of Anders Breivik's murder of 77 people in Oslo. Then on 26 July at Saint-Étienne-du-Rouvray in France two Islamist murderers slit the throat of a Catholic priest. The year before Paris suffered with Islamist attacks on the Charlie Hebdo offices followed by the Bataclan theatre and Stade de France stadium that left 142 dead. This was the same cell that attacked Brussels courtesy of the Schengen zone.

What proved particular embarrassing for Germany and Europe as a whole was the ease with which Amri escaped. Disastrously, the Berlin authorities did not find Amri's wallet and fingerprints foolishly left in the lorry until the day after the attack. In the meantime they spent 20 hours questioning a Pakistani refugee apprehended near the scene. There was no CCTV footage of the attack, as filming public spaces is illegal, just limited cell phone footage caught by startled bystanders.

After escaping from Berlin, Amri fled to Emmerich near the German border with the Netherlands on 20 December. He then may have passed through the Netherlands, Belgium, and France by train. Upon reaching Chambéry in South-Eastern France on 22 December he caught a train to Turin in North-Western Italy where he then took another one to Milan to the North East. When stopped by two local police, outside the railway station in the Sesto San Giovanni district, in the early hours of 23 December he shot and wounded one with a small calibre handgun. He was then shot dead by the second officer. The distance he covered left many flabbergasted. However, he had a 24-hour head start while the German police interrogated the wrong man.

A former Europol director was quick to claim that Amri's escape was not a failure of the Schengen zone free movement. Likewise a British policing expert was adamant that hard borders would not have made any difference and that relative to the size of Europe, Amri had not travelled a great distance. It is hard to agree with either of them considering that he passed through up to five countries crossing four borders. A hard border could have offered eight opportunities to catch him as he passed through the respective document checks.

The problem that Europe has is that freedom of movement is now so ingrained that it is almost impossible to reverse – though some Southern European countries did so in response to the refugee crisis. It is notable that while America is increasing border security Europe remains hamstrung over how best to prevent terrorists and criminals transiting member states borders. The irony is that freedom of movement is the imperative driving the European arrest warrant. It has become the only way to apprehend the criminally inclined and terrorists able to move freely within the EU.

Amri was not a 'cleanskin' he had a criminal record and was known to the Italian, German and Tunisian authorities. After leaving Tunisia in 2011 he pitched up in Sicily where he spent four years in prison for arson and other petty crimes. It is most likely that it was during this period that he was radicalised against the West. The Italians identified him as a threat and sent him to a deportation camp in 2015. Frustratingly the Tunisian Government refused to acknowledge him as a citizen and the Italians were eventually obliged to release him. It was at this point that he travelled to Germany as an asylum seeker.

Once in Western Berlin Amri is believed to have attended the Fussilet 33 mosque a known gathering point for Islamist radicals. In the summer of 2016 German police flagged that he had been photographed with armed radicals posted on the internet. His file was allegedly reviewed seven times, but he was not deemed a threat. Amri's asylum application was rejected, but crucially he was granted temporary permission to remain in Germany.

It was then he slipped into limbo because the Tunisian authorities still refused to recognise him. This meant they would not issue him with travel documents so that he could be deported. Germany reportedly has around 160,000 people in the same sort of position. Anti-immigration supporters want them deported, but that is easier said than done.

German intelligence will have been fuming over the news that Amri was part of a cell operating in Tunisia. This was confirmed on 23 December when the Tunisians arrested Amri's nephew and two other suspects believed to be part of the same extremist network. Amri had sent his nephew money so that he could join him in Europe. The Germans will also want to ascertain whether there is any connection between Amri and Tunisian Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel who was shot after carrying out the Nice attack.

There will have been heated exchanges between German and Tunisian diplomats over why Tunisia did not act sooner over reclaiming Amri.

The cruel irony is that the fallout from the attacks on European cities hurts the Arab world. The Egyptian and Tunisian economies have been hard hit because of the





# CHRISTMAS RAMPAGE

dramatic fall in tourist numbers. The shooting in Sousse in the summer of 2015 has put Tunisia off limits for many travellers. The loss of an airliner over Sinai has had a similar impact on Egypt. After the attacks in Istanbul, Turkey's tourist industry is likely to share the same fate.

In the meantime Berlin needs to step up its intelligence gathering and surveillance efforts. Germany has a list of about 550 suspected terrorists; Berlin is responsible for 150 of them. The city authorities lack the resources to monitor them fulltime. Unless the police and politicians come together, such an atrocity could happen again. The German Government has issued strenuous denials that Amri was an informant working for German intelligence supplying information on Islamist terrorists.

The key question is: did he have help in planning and executing his Berlin attack? Sesto San Giovanni has a migrant Muslim population and it's believed he had contacts there and at the Fussilet 33 mosque. The fact that he was loitering outside the Sesto San Giovanni railway station at 3am suggests that he was waiting to get picked up. The Italian police had purely approached him on a routine ID check. The police will also want to establish where Amri's .22 calibre pistol came from. Photographs of the weapon showed it to be quite old and battered.

A recent Amnesty International report stated that counter-terror efforts across Europe are eroding civil liberties. CCTV laws in Germany are some of the most restrictive and only five of Germany's regions permit CCTV in public spaces and this does not include the capital. After the shootings in Munich and the suicide bombing in Ansbach, German legislators have been looking at new laws to allow CCTV in shopping centres and sports

stadiums and tightening the country's gun control.

The UK adopted CCTV several decades ago and it is now used as a tool against crime and terrorism. For the public it has become a fact of life. While Berlin's police are supportive of such measures, the political coalition that runs the city is not. However, the Munich shooting and a number of criminal arrests in Berlin that came about using private CCTV footage may convince the opposition of its merits. The problem is that while CCTV can deter anti-social behaviour and criminal activity, it does little to deter the most determined of terrorists. What it can do, of course, is assist with their apprehension and subsequent trials.

Some argue that German Chancellor Angela Merkel has brought this latest terror attack upon herself. As part of the process to get Turkey to stem the tide of refugees she agreed to take a million people. To make matters worse, Turkey has threatened to reopen its borders to migrants if the EU does not allow visa-free travel for Turks within the Schengen zone. This means refugees in Turkey, once they have obtained fake or stolen Turkish documents, will also be free to travel anywhere in Europe.

Ironically, although Chancellor Merkel is considered Europe's leading pro-refugee politician with her 'open-door' policy, she has suspended the freedom of movement between Germany and Austria. Merkel's Government has also been moving to implement new legislation to curtail benefits for EU migrants. Nonetheless, she will face a tough campaign in the September 2017 German elections. Once again, the Schengen zone and European intelligence sharing is in the limelight for all the wrong reasons. If Europe was a united states the issue would be irrelevant, but it isn't and the problem remains a fundamental security failing.

**Anthony Tucker-Jones** is *intersec's* Terrorism and Security Correspondent. He is a former defence intelligence officer and is now a widely published defence commentator specialising in regional conflicts and counter terrorism.

**Workers install concrete security barriers on the periphery of the reopened Breitscheidplatz Christmas market**

