

Militancy/Terrorism

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Austria & Germany Alert: Austrian police seize weapons destined for far-right militia in Bavaria, Germany on December 12; indicates upscaling of future far-right threat in Europe

Please be advised

- According to official sources, Austrian authorities seized dozens of weapons and ammunition that were intended to be used to set up an armed far-right extremist militia in the southern Germany state of Bavaria on December 12.
- Multiple raids conducted in Lower Austria in recent days reportedly led to the seizure of 90 firearms, including semi- and fully-automatic weapons, more than 100,000 rounds of ammunition, and explosives. Reports indicate that some of the seized weapons had been packed for transport.
- Five suspects have been arrested in Austria, including an individual already known to authorities for his far-right activities. Separately, two people have been arrested in Bavaria.
- The raids were carried out as part of an investigation launched in October initially targeting drug smuggling from Germany to Austria. However, officers subsequently found that the suspects were also linked to alleged weapons trading. The firearms were allegedly bought with the profits from the sale of drugs.
- According to the findings of a November 20 study by the Counter Extremism Project (CEP) in Germany, far-right individuals and groups are increasingly forming global links, while capitalizing on the COVID-19 pandemic to spread their cause. On November 12, German prosecutors charged 12 members of the far-right "Gruppe S" with "terrorism" and weapons law violations. The group reportedly planned "a civil-war-like situation" by attacking politicians, asylum seekers, and Muslims.
- On November 10, Austrian authorities conducted 11 raids across seven federal states as part of a large-scale operation targeting 40 right-wing extremist suspects on November 10.

Assessments & Forecast

1. The extensiveness of the operation, coupled with the large amount of weapons seized during the raids highlights the heightened threat of far-right militant groups across Western Europe, with Austria and Germany being focal hubs for the emergence of far-right radicalized individuals and groups. Further, that the militant activities were conducted in both countries underscores the transnational nature of emerging far-right militias across Europe, likely attributable to online far-right propaganda amid increasing internet usage during the lockdown periods. This is supported by the findings contained in CEP's report, claiming that the new far-right movement is leaderless, transnational, and oriented towards violence.
2. That the individuals were in possession of such a large amount of weapons, including firearms and explosives, indicates that the suspects posed a credible threat and were likely in the planning stage of conducting a large-scale coordinated attack or series of attacks in Germany in the

medium term. This reflects similar groups in the USA, who aim to incite widespread ethnic and racial tensions and violence, with Muslim and Jewish sites liable to be primary targets, along with centrist and left-wing politically-related groups and individuals. **FORECAST:** While the scale of this incident is unprecedented in recent years, given the modus operandi of previous far-right attacks being shootings and car-rammings, the threat of lone-wolf attacks being staged in western Europe remains elevated going forward.

3. Moreover, the aforementioned developments reflect the wider scope of these network's militant activities, revealing how these are successfully connected to organized crime. As such, this incident draws attention to the potential links established between organized criminal groups involved in the sale of drugs and far-right militias. **FORECAST:** As a result of this operation, authorities are likely to tighten cross-border surveillance to disrupt smuggling activities and prevent the potential cooperation between criminal groups and far-right extremist militias in bordering areas.
4. The timing of this operation, along with the series of arrests and crackdown operations targeting far-right groups in both Austria and Germany is likely due to far-right radicalization gaining traction across western Europe amid the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, the recent surge of radicalized far-right groups illustrates how far-right extremists have capitalized on the public's existing discontent against their government's lockdown restrictions and recent Islamist militancy in Europe to radicalize and recruit individuals for their cause. This is evidenced by the recent spread of conspiracy theories and disinformation on social media, as well as the infiltration of far-right groups in anti-lockdown protests. **FORECAST:** While a majority of violence-focused discussions have taken place online, forums as hubs for radicalization are liable to result in the further radicalization and recruitment of individuals, resulting in militant attacks being planned in the near-to-medium term as lockdown restrictions continue to be extended.

Recommendations

1. Travel to Austria and Germany can continue while remaining cognizant of the increased threat of militancy regionwide over the coming months as lockdown restrictions continue to remain in place.
2. Maintained heightened vigilance at all protests and other political gatherings due to the potential for unrest and militant attacks.
3. Public, private, and third sector organizations are advised to increase their awareness of threats on social media through the use of threat monitoring services. Increased awareness of an organization's political footprint and perceptions from fringe online groups can help uncover potential violent actors and plots before they occur.
4. Alert authorities immediately upon witnessing suspicious items or behavior.