Beat: Miscellaneous

Dutch police arrest three Syria-bound

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USPA News - Dutch police have arrested three men who were about to leave the Netherlands to participate in `violent international jihad` in Syria, where rebels are attempting to overthrow the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, prosecutors said on Friday. The three men, aged 22, 23 and 33, were arrested on Thursday morning in the port city of Rotterdam, about 55 kilometers (35 miles) southwest of Amsterdam.

The investigation into the group began in October on the basis of a report from the country`s General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), The men had earlier bought tickets for a flight to Turkey with a connecting flight to the border with Syria, but the flight was canceled and eventually postponed. Two of the suspects were planning to take another flight from the Belgian capital of Brussels to Turkey on Thursday afternoon. "One of the men last week married a Muslim who he had never met. He recently met her on the Internet," the country`s prosecutor`s office said in a statement. "The man planned to travel to Syria with his wife to fight for the jihad. In a photo for his bride the man posed with an AK-47 assault rifle." In one online message to his wife, the suspect allegedly said: "I hope we will die together and go to paradise." While few details about the plot were released, police searched the homes of the suspects and seized multiple knives, a sword and a cross-bow. "Additionally, police also came across farewell letters, packed backpacks with travel equipment, and a large quantity of jihadist literature," prosecutors said, adding that two homes of relatives in Doesburg and Utrecht were also searched. The men, described as radicalized Muslims by prosecutors, are believed to have collected funds to finance their journey. The crisis in Syria began as a pro-democracy protest movement in March 2011, similar to those across the Middle East and North Africa. The Syrian government violently cracked down on the protests, setting off an armed conflict between pro-Assad forces and anti-government forces. A number of jihadist groups have joined the fight against Assad`s regime, and as many as 1,500 foreigners are believed to be in Syria to fight alongside rebels. Dutch photographer Jeroen Oerlemans was kidnapped in Syria in September and held for a week, but he later reported that none of his captors were of Syrian origin. The United Nations estimates that more than 30,000 people, mostly civilians, have been killed and more than 1.2 million have been displaced since the uprising against President al-Assad began 1.5 year ago. The opposition believes the number of deaths has already surpassed 40,000.

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