

## Counterterrorism: police break an Islamic cell, three arrests

The police counterterrorism unit (Digos) in Brescia penetrated an Islamic terrorist cell operating in Italy and the Balkans, arresting three: an Albanian resident, his nephew residing in the province of Turin, and a 20-year-old Italian national of Moroccan origin, also residing in the province of Turin.

The two Albanians are suspected of recruiting individuals for terrorism purposes, while the third man was arrested on charges of incitement to terrorism aggravated by the use of the Internet.

Searches are still under way in Lombardy, Piedmont, and Tuscany on several suspected sympathisers of the Caliphate of Abu Bakri Al-Baghdadi.

The counterterrorism operation, coordinated by the Central Counterterrorism Service and carried out by the Digos in Brescia in cooperation with the police in Turin, Como, Massa Carrara and the International Police Cooperation Service, led to the identification of a criminal group involved in recruiting young individuals and inducing them to join the IS militant groups, especially by means of the Internet and the most popular social networks.

Today's operation was the result of a two-year investigation conducted by the Digos police in Brescia. It was code named "Balkan Connection" given the involvement of Islamic extremists residing in Italy and in the Western Balkans. The police began investigating into the contacts of an Italian-Moroccan resident of Vobarno (Brescia), one of the 65 Italian foreign fighters, who left in September 2014 to join the IS.

The three people arrested this morning were actually in touch, both by phone and through the social networks, with the Italian-Moroccan national, who shortly before moving to Syria had made a short trip to Albania.

The two Albanians were allegedly grooming another aspiring fighter to send on to Syria. He was an Italian-Tunisian resident of the province of Como, who was still a minor at the time of the first contacts, always made through the Internet. Although initially reluctant, he was gradually convinced to join the Bakri Al-Baghdadi's Caliphate.

The third Islamic militant arrested today is a 20-year-old Italian resident of the province of Turin, very active on the Internet and the alleged author of a text in Italian language entitled "*Lo Stato Islamico, una realtà che ti vorrebbe comunicare*" ["The Islamic State, a reality that wants to communicate with you"], which appeared on the web since last November. It is a 64-page document that details the activities of the Caliphate in the occupied territories, describing it as a real State that provides welfare and protection to its citizens, while being ruthless with its enemies.

Italian

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