



December 24, 2010

Revenge Cited in Rome Embassy Attacks

By RACHEL DONADIO

ROME — Anarchists who sent letter bombs to the embassies of [Switzerland](#) and [Chile](#) here on Thursday were trying to avenge their comrades in those countries, a top Italian security official said Friday, as the city remained on alert for more potential attacks.

One employee at each embassy was seriously wounded when devices sent in padded envelopes through the Italian mail exploded in their hands. The explosions came amid heightened terror threats in Europe and in a moment of deep political instability in [Italy](#). They also raised fears of a resurgence of political violence, exacerbated by the economic crisis and growing social unrest.

Bomb experts were called in to inspect suspect holiday packages at embassies across Rome, Francesco Tagliente, the police chief of Rome, said in a television interview. No new bombs were found Friday. A bomb threat at the Irish Embassy in Rome turned out to be a false alarm.

The police said a group called the Informal Anarchist Federation, or F.A.I., claimed responsibility for Thursday's attacks and added that the loose collective was in touch with other anarchist groups around Europe, including Greece. Similar letter bombs were sent to diplomatic targets there in November.

In a telephone interview, Alfredo Mantovano, the Interior Ministry under secretary, said the attacks were a form of "criminal promotion," most likely carried out in retaliation for increased collaboration between the Swiss and Italian authorities that led to the arrests earlier this year of three anarchists.

He added that Chile had been a target because of the death last year of Mauricio Morales, a Chilean anarchist who died in Santiago when a bomb he was carrying in his backpack exploded. Anarchists claim that the Chilean authorities were responsible for the death. "These groups know each other through the Internet," Mr. Mantovano said.

"It's not a single structured, hierarchical group; it's more a network, a galaxy," he added. "Some groups fight against the prison system, others for immigrants' rights. Others are concerned with labor market reform."

In April, three anarchists, two Italians and one Swiss, were arrested in [Switzerland](#) following an investigation by the Italian authorities and charged with plotting an attack on an I.B.M. nanotechnology research center in Zurich. The three are now in Swiss jails. The [Swiss ambassador to Italy](#), Bernardino Regazzoni, said a rudimentary explosive device and graffiti expressing solidarity with the three were found outside the embassy in October.

The Chilean connection had previously been seen in Greece. A Greek group suspected of orchestrating the Athens parcel bombs in November, the Conspiracy of the Cells of Fire, had also claimed responsibility for a bomb in front of the Chilean consulate in Salonika, Greece, last year; the police defused it before it could explode. The Italian police said a group celebrating Mr. Morales also claimed responsibility for a letter bomb sent in December 2009 to [Bocconi University](#) in Milan; the authorities intercepted it before it could explode.

The packages that exploded at the embassies on Thursday were nearly identical, according to a police official involved in the investigation

who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not an official spokesman.

He added that both contained explosive powder of the kind found in fireworks, and a battery and an electric circuit that activated when the envelope was opened. The Chilean employee, César Mella, lost two fingers and nearly lost an eye. Doctors extricated pieces of metal from his chest, the director of the emergency room at the Umberto I Polyclinic, where both patients were taken, told Italian state television. The Swiss patient, Andreas Clemens, suffered serious wounds to his hands.

A group called Lambros Fountas, a cell of the F.A.I., claimed responsibility for the attack, the police official said. The group is named for a 35-year-old microbiologist who was suspected of being a member of the Greek guerrilla group Revolutionary Struggle and was killed in a shootout with the Greek police in March. Mr. Fountas is believed to have had contact with members of the Greek anarchist movement, and he had been on the antiterrorist watch list of the police. The police official said the same Lambros Fountas group had sent an explosive device to a Carabinieri police station in Rome in March, but it was intercepted before it exploded. A magistrate involved in the investigations said that no arrests had yet been made in that episode.

He noted that in July 2009, the Italian police arrested two people, both Italians, suspected of being members of an anarchist cell, on charges of attempting an attack on train lines in Italy.

The police said the F.A.I. first emerged over the Christmas holidays in 2003 when it sent explosive devices to several European targets and a former Italian prime minister, [Romano Prodi](#), who was then president of the [European Commission](#).

The police said that both devices could have been detected on Thursday if the mail had been sent through a metal detector.

Mr. Regazzoni, the Swiss ambassador, declined to comment on whether embassy mail was routinely screened. "We are constantly revising our security procedures," he said.

Niki Kitsantonis contributed reporting from London.
