



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on March 25, 2016

ISIS Has Trained 400 Fighters to Attack Europe

The terrorist group Islamic State (also referred to as ISIS or ISIL) has trained an estimated 400 fighters and sent them to Europe to carry out attacks like those killing 130 people in Paris on November 13 and 34 people in Brussels on March 22, according to a March 23 Associated Press report.

The reporters listed their source as European and Iraqi intelligence officials and French Senator Nathalie Goulet, who is co-head of a commission tracking jihadi (militant Islamic) networks.



The report stated that the officials it cited as sources had described camps in Syria, Iraq, and possibly nations of the former Soviet bloc, where attackers are trained to target the West.

Since the November Paris attacks, investigators have attempted to piece together the operations of the terrorist network and trace the path of its leaders across Europe.

As we noted in [our article last November](#), Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the individual that French and Belgian officials suspected was the mastermind of the attacks (and who was killed in a police raid in the Paris suburb of St. Denis on November 18) is the child of Moroccan immigrants who grew up in Brussels. Back in October, Abaaoud falsely identified himself as Ahmad al Muhammad and was allowed to enter Greece among the waves of Syrian refugees flooding into Europe. Abaaoud fled Belgium to Syria following a January 15 police raid on a terrorist operation he belonged to. In February, he was quoted by the Islamic State's [ISIS] English-language magazine, Dabiq, as saying that he had secretly returned to Belgium to lead the terror cell. That he reentered the country so easily, despite his picture having been broadcast in the news, is indicative of the very poor border security prevalent in Europe.

While growing up in Brussels, Abaaoud was friends with a Belgian-born French national of Moroccan descent named Salah Abdeslam. After Abaaoud returned to Brussels following a period of terrorist activity in Syria in 2014, he recruited Abdeslam into his terrorist network and both men conspired to carry out the Paris attacks.

AP reported that "the biggest break yet" in the European investigation into the Paris attacks came with the March 18 arrest of Abdeslam, but noted that his arrest "did not thwart the multipronged attack just four days later on the [Brussels] airport and subway system that left 31 people dead and an estimated 270 wounded."

The report noted that Abdeslam fled Paris immediately after the November attacks, and moved back to the Molenbeek neighborhood of Brussels where he and Abaaoud had grown up. AP cited Belgian officials as stating that the neighborhood has long been known as a haven for jihadis. An article in Wikipedia also noted that at least three of the terrorists who plotted the Paris attacks, including Brahim Abdeslam (Salah Abdeslam's brother) Abdeslam, and Abaaoud grew up and lived in Molenbeek.

The AP quoted Senator Goulet as saying, "Not only did [Abdeslam] drop out of sight, but he did so to organize another attack, with accomplices everywhere. With suicide belts. Two attacks organized just



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like in Paris. And his arrest, since they knew he was going to talk, it was a response: ‘So what if he was arrested? We’ll show you that it doesn’t change a thing.’”

Goulet and other European officials have estimated that from 400 to 600 Islamic State fighters have trained specifically for external attacks.

“The reality is that if we knew exactly how many there were, it wouldn’t be happening,” she told AP.

According to an unnamed senior Belgian counter-terrorism official cited by CNN, investigators there believe that the Brussels ISIS cell was composed of two teams who were planning an even larger follow-up attack or series of attacks in Belgium.

CNN reported that Belgian investigators believe the first team was composed of Salah Abdeslam, a still-to-be identified accomplice who was taken into custody along with Abdeslam, and Mohammed Belkaid, the suspected commander of the Paris and Brussels attack cell. Belkaid was shot dead during the firefight at Abdeslam’s hiding place last week.

The report noted that European officials fear that there are dozens of potential and known ISIS terrorists still operating covertly in Europe and some of them may be connected to the Paris and Brussels attackers.

“There’s evidence these guys are floating around in Europe and haven’t been rounded up yet and hope to launch an attack,” one unnamed official told CNN, adding, “there’s a constant drumbeat and fear something else is going to happen.”

The State Department posted “Europe Travel Alert” on its website on March 22 with cautionary information directed at U.S. travelers bound for Europe. It stated, in part:

The State Department alerts U.S. citizens to potential risks of travel to and throughout Europe following several terrorist attacks, including the March 22 attacks in Brussels claimed by ISIL.

Terrorist groups continue to plan near-term attacks throughout Europe, targeting sporting events, tourist sites, restaurants, and transportation. This Travel Alert expires on June 20, 2016.

U.S. citizens should exercise vigilance when in public places or using mass transportation. Be aware of immediate surroundings and avoid crowded places. Exercise particular caution during religious holidays and at large festivals or events.

In light of the ongoing dangers in Europe, it would also serve the interests of Americans if our government took steps to better secure our own borders and better screen aliens entering our country from areas known for terrorist activity. It should be recalled that of the 19 terrorists who hijacked four U.S. planes on September 11, 2001, 15 were natives of Saudi Arabia, two originated in the United Arab Emirates, one in Egypt, and one in Lebanon.

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