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Europe: Uniquely Vulnerable to Islamic Terrorism

Europe is—and will remain—a highly attractive terrorist target because Islamic extremists can travel freely around the continent with EU documents, and they can leverage established Muslim diaspora communities for support. An OHSP review of terrorist attacks and propaganda since 2013 indicates al-Qa'ida and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria view the European continent as a “softer” target compared to the more “hardened” United States.

- EU law allows unrestricted travel for EU citizens throughout the 28-country Eurozone, which has a population of roughly 500 million, 44 million of which are Muslim. According to a UK think tank, since the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011, about 1,300 EU citizens have returned to Europe after fighting in Iraq and Syria; many transited Turkey, which is scheduled to implement a visa waiver program with the EU next year.
- London and Paris have the largest Muslim diaspora communities in Europe, mostly from South Asia and North Africa, respectively. The perpetrators of the attack in Paris this month were of Algerian descent and received direct support from sympathizers that share their national heritage. Historically, Muslim communities in France and the UK have faced social exclusion, poor economic opportunity, and a lack of civic engagement—which has fueled their resentment, radicalization, and support for anti-Western narratives.
- Islamic extremists have not been able to conduct an attack in the United States since 9/11, largely because of improved security measures in the US and the lack of robust support networks here. The most recent issue of al-Qa'ida's online English magazine *Inspire*, released in December, states “[T]he first priority and the main focus should be on America, then the United Kingdom, then France and so on.”

Contact Information

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