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Belgium/France: Raids Show Network Behind the Paris Attacks Was Broader Than Believed

At a joint news conference celebrating the capture of Salah Abdeslam, the lone surviving fugitive from the terrorist attacks in Paris last November, Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel and French President Francois Hollande said that the counterterrorism raids in recent weeks have shown that the network behind the Paris attacks was much broader than previously known, and that there will be additional raids connected to the attacks. After praising the performance of Belgian law enforcement and the information sharing between the Belgian and French security services, President Hollande said there will be more arrests, because the web of accomplices extended across Belgium, France, and other European countries. He also stated that the connections have consistently led back to Syria, where some of the key attackers came from and where the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) organized, planned, and financed the attacks.



Abdeslam was captured on March 18, when Belgian police raided an apartment in Brussels. (Photo shows Abdeslam, in a white hooded sweatshirt, being dragged away by police.) Investigators believe that he played a key logistical role in the attacks – conducting presurveillance, renting cars, arranging accommodations in apartments and hotels, and driving several attackers to their target.

Belgium/France: Paris Attack Suspect Was Planning New Attacks, According to Belgian Foreign Minister

During interrogation, terror suspect Salah Abdeslam said that until he was found in hiding in Brussels last week, he was organizing a new “network of people” to conduct attacks in Europe, according to Belgian Foreign Minister Didier Reynders. Although a French prosecutor has warned that Abdeslam’s statements should not be taken at face value, Reynders told journalists that Belgian investigators believe that Abdeslam was planning new attacks. He said that police found numerous heavy weapons during the raids last week, and investigators have found evidence of a new network of people around Abdeslam in Brussels.

Abdeslam could potentially be a valuable source of intelligence on attack plans in Europe, the role of ISIS senior leadership in the planning of the Paris attacks, the logistic support involved, and the operations of ISIS-connected terrorist networks in Europe. During interrogation, he has told Belgian investigators that he planned to be a suicide bomber at the soccer stadium during the November attacks, but backed out at the last minute.

Turkey: Istanbul Suicide Bomber Reportedly Had Ties to ISIS

Turkish Interior Minister Efkan Ala has identified a Turkish citizen with alleged ties to ISIS as the suicide bomber who killed four tourists in Istanbul on March 19. Ala said the attacker was Mehmet Ozturk, born in 1992, from Gaziantep Province, in southern Turkey on the Syrian border. Ala said that five other people have been detained in connection with the investigation. Turkish officials had initially suspected Kurdish militants of the bombing in Istanbul. There has been no claim of responsibility.

The attack occurred along Istiklal Street, a popular tourist attraction that is lined with shops and cafés (see photo). Four tourists were killed, including two with joint US-Israeli citizenship who were residents of Israel. An additional 36 people were wounded.



Contact Information

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Last weekend's bombing in Istanbul is the latest in a series of six bombings in the past six months, resulting from Turkey's involvement in the fight against ISIS and ongoing counterinsurgency operations against Kurdish militants.