

## Turkey: Ankara, Istanbul, Brussels attacks have similar motives, different methods

Hurriyet Daily News, 18.03.2016



Turkey's top security board has concluded that the motives of recent terrorist attacks in Ankara, Istanbul and Brussels were all similar, though carried out with different methods. The MGK, made the country's top civilian leaders and military brass, also urged the international community not to regard terrorism as a legitimate "fight for freedom and rights."

"It is of vital importance that the international community agrees that terrorism is not a struggle for freedom and rights in order to jointly cooperate against it. The attacks had different aims but similar methodologies and show that terrorism is a threat to all," the MGK stated.

After scores of people were killed and wounded in these terror attacks carried out by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the MGK said Turkey called on European countries to jointly address the terror problem "without distinguishing between terrorist groups."

The MGK vowed Turkey's commitment to continue its struggle against terrorism until all terror groups are defeated, adding that additional security measures to be taken were discussed at the meeting.

In an indirect reference to the Syria's Democratic Union Party (PYD), which is linked to the PKK in Turkey, the statement said Turkey will not accept any move that takes such terrorist organizations into consideration as part of ongoing Syria peace negotiations.

The MGK also discussed the recent deal between Ankara and Brussels aiming to stem the flow of refugees from Turkish territories to Greek islands, welcoming NATO's support for efforts to stop human smuggling in the Aegean Sea.

The council also discussed developments inside Syria, again stressing Turkey's demand for a safe zone across the border and saying "the U.N. and the international community should take more responsibility for the stabilization of the region."

"Turkey's insistent proposals for the implementation of safe zone and no-fly zone have been proven right and important, as a result of recent developments," it stated. The MGK also reportedly evaluated the Iraqi army's planned operation to liberate Mosul from ISIL, as well as ISIL's use of chemical weapons against Turkmens inside Syria.

# Israeli PM 'hopes to normalize ties' with Turkey in upcoming meet

Hurriyet Daily News, 11.03.2016



Israeli PM Netanyahu said he was hopeful upcoming negotiations between Israel and Turkey “will produce positive results” and enable the renewal of relations.

“We have always wanted correct relations with Turkey and it wasn’t us who changed the direction of the relations,” Israeli daily Haaretz quoted Netanyahu as telling a press conference. “If possible, we would like to normalize the ties.” Netanyahu spoke after President Rivlin held a telephone conversation with President Erdoğan, during which the former thanked the latter for the repatriation of the three Israeli citizens who died in an attack on Istanbul.

The relationship between Turkey and Israel was severely strained after the Gaza-bound Mavi Marmara vessel was raided by Israeli commandos in 2010, killing nine Turkish and one Turkish-American citizen on board. The two countries have stepped up efforts in recent months to restore the relationship between the two countries, for which efforts at the undersecretary-level have taken place. Teams from the two countries are due to resume negotiations in early April.

Three Israeli citizens, identified as 60-year-old Simha Simon Demri, 40-year-old Yonathan Suher and 70-year-old Avaham Godman, along with an Iranian, 31-year-old Ali Rıza Khalman, were killed in a suicide bomb attack. Turkish police identified the perpetrator as 24-year-old Mehmet Öztürk, who had links with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

The director-general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, Dore Gold, came to Turkey to hold talks with Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioğlu and Istanbul Gov. Vasip Şahin about the terrorist attack. During his visit, Gold thanked the Turkish government for its efforts in the aftermath of the Istanbul attack and underlined the need for an alliance in the fight against terror.

During the press conference, Netanyahu drew a comparison between the ISIL terror attacks in Istanbul and Brussels and Palestinian attacks in Israel. He stated that he had told Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel and European Union Foreign Minister Federica Mogherini that terror must be denounced and fought wherever it occurs, and that terrorists must be deprived of hope.

# We owe it to Turkish people to end visa requirement, EU minister says

Anadolu Agency, 24.03.2016



Turkey's government owes the lifting of visas to Schengen Zone members to its people, Turkish EU Minister Volkan Bozkır has said.

“The AK Party [Justice and Development Party] government will ensure the lifting of the visa [requirement]. This is our debt to our people, and we really want to make this happen,” he said in an interview with Anadolu Agency in Helsinki. Volkan Bozkır also said that although opposition parties promised to support legislative changes needed to secure the visa-free travel goal, the government has not “yet seen that support.”

The prospective visa-free travel deal is part of a deal with the European Union to prevent the continued flow of refugees to the European Union via Turkey. “We started keeping track of those [refugees] who reached [the Greek islands]. Our colleagues in the Turkey Migration Authority are there and they are registering them. We will receive migrants according to that registry,” Bozkır said.

Under the deal, all refugees and migrants arriving in Europe via Greece after March 20 will be returned to Turkey after individual assessments that are conducted in full compliance with international law. In return, the EU will be expected to resettle an equal number of Syrian refugees already in Turkish camps starting on April 4.

On the conditions of refugees staying in Turkey, Bozkır said Turkey had not heard any criticism. “On the contrary, they said the conditions are extremely good and they always say that humanity owes Turkey its gratitude.” The EU has also agreed to accelerate Turkey's accession process by opening Chapter 33 on Financial and Budgetary provisions by June 30.

Turkey is hosting the largest number of Syrian refugees in the world and has spent more than 7 billion euros (US\$7.7 billion) meeting their needs, according to European Commission figures released last year. Ankara has also requested visa-free travel for its citizens by the end of June, accelerated accession talks, and an additional 3 billion euros (\$3.3 billion) to meet the needs of Syrian refugees in Turkey.

The EU has agreed to accelerate the disbursement of the 3 billion euros already pledged to meet the needs of Syrian refugees in Turkey and identify a list of concrete projects for the funds. Over the past year, hundreds of thousands of refugees have crossed the Aegean Sea to reach Greece. This has placed a huge strain on the austerity-hit EU member and threatened the EU's internal open-border system, as countries to the north of Greece impose frontier restrictions. While in Helsinki, Bozkır also met with the Union of European Turkish Democrats' (UETD) Finnish branch to brief them on the recent Turkey-EU deal and learn about their activities.

# F-35 fighter program delayed due to software shortcomings

Anadolu Agency, 24.03.2016



A F-35 stealth fighter jet program that involves the United States, Turkey and others will be delayed for one year due to several technical shortfalls, including problems with radar software, a Pentagon tester said.

“My estimate is the program won’t be ready to begin IOT&E [Initial Operational Test and Evaluation] until mid-2018 at the earliest,” Michael Gilmore, the Pentagon’s chief weapons tester, told the House Armed Services Committee. More than 300 planes would have been produced by the end of the 2017 fiscal year if the testing that is now due had started on time, according to Gilmore.

The senior official told lawmakers that “mission system stability including the radar” is still a significant problem, as is the fusion of information from sensors on the same aircraft or among different aircraft. “There are shortfalls in electronic warfare, electronic attack, shortfalls in the performance of distributed aperture system and other issues that are classified,” he added.

The F-35 Lightning II, with its fifth-generation advanced stealth and firepower technology, is one of the costliest military projects of the U.S. Defense Department, alongside 12 partner countries including Turkey, Israel, the United Kingdom, Italy, South Korea, Canada, Australia, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and Japan.

The projected cost is about \$380 billion, according to Michael Sullivan, director of acquisition and sourcing management issues at the Governmental Accountability Office, who spoke at the same panel. Partner countries will share the costs proportionate to their aircraft order.

# Erdođan: Turkey informed Belgium over attacker's terrorist links

Hurriyet Daily News, 23.03.2016



Turkey formerly informed Belgium authorities about the terrorist links of one of the attackers in the March 22 Brussels bombings, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said.

Erdoğan said Turkish authorities informed the Belgian Embassy in Ankara in a note on July 14, 2015, that one of the Brussels' attackers was a foreign fighter, but that Belgian authorities had released him after Turkey deported him. "One of the perpetrators of the Brussels attack is a person whom we detained in June 2015 in [the southeastern province of] Gaziantep and deported," Erdoğan said at a joint press conference with his Romanian counterpart in Ankara.

"We informed the Brussels Embassy of the deportation process of the attacker with a note on July 14, 2015. However, the Belgians released the attacker despite his deportation," Erdoğan said. Despite this information, the Belgians could not determine any ties with terrorism, he said.

Erdoğan also referred to the Netherlands, saying Turkey deported the attacker there in June 2015 and informed the Netherlands via a note. The president also said the world has to "redefine terror, terrorism and terrorists."

Meanwhile, a Belgian prosecutor said that two of the bombers, who blew themselves up in the deadly train and airport attacks in Brussels, during which 31 people were killed and 270 others were injured, were brothers and were known by police for serious crimes. Links to last November's Paris massacre were also determined. Khalid and Ibrahim El Bakraoui are Belgian nationals with major convictions "not linked to terrorism," federal prosecutor Frederic Van Leeuw said at a dramatic news briefing.

# Ankara hosts task force meet aimed at building trust among EU, Russia, Turkey

Hurriyet Daily News, 21.03.2016



Officials from a number of countries have noted the need to build trust among the EU, Russia and Turkey amid the conflict in Syria following a conference in Syria last week.

The timeliness of the European Leadership Network meeting was not totally “coincidence” even though it had been scheduled for a long time, according to participant Lord Des Browne, a former U.K. defense secretary. A Pan-European Task Force on Cooperation in Greater Europe is supported by analytical work by the ELN, the Russian International Affairs Council, the Polish Institute of International Affairs and the International Strategic Research Organization.

Based in Ankara, USAK hosted last week’s meeting with the participation of Director Özdem Sanberk, the former permanent undersecretary at the Foreign Ministry and former chief foreign policy adviser to the prime minister.

“The whole practice of partnership for the task force focuses on generating a forum in which people that are knowledgeable on these issues and are influential can discuss relevant, complex and challenging issues that are a manifestation of the lack of trust that we have in each other,” Browne told the Hürriyet Daily News on the sidelines of the meeting, adding that part of building trust involves addressing difficult issues.

“Although we did not plan to be here at this very precise time in terms of the geopolitics of the regional politics, it is more than a coincidence that addressing issues that are relevant today,” he said. The meeting coincided with the partial Russian withdrawal from Syria, U.N.-led Syrian talks in Geneva and a shaky cessation of hostilities in Syria as well as a special Brussels summit between Turkey and the EU on the growing migration crisis.

Browne also described the Turkey-EU summit as the “beginning of the end of the migration crisis.” “We try to keep things relevant to today and from our point of view; we face a challenge to maintain relevance in a changing environment. We hope to make a contribution,” he said, noting that they would come up with a common position paper that would be presented to the capitals of the participants in upcoming weeks.

Browne said the world had become a better place compared to the post-World War II era of his childhood, while admitting that today “in this part of the world, we have our own arc of crisis.” “We have to recognize that we all have a shared interest in dealing with it,” he said, recalling that countries managed to build several mechanisms which have been useful in the post-Cold War era such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).



“We should understand that we absorb a lot of resources in order to address this lack of trust collectively, by being honest with each other. But if we are to do that, we need to share information and we need to be conscious that these things can escalate,” he said, citing the Turkish downing of a Russian military aircraft in November 2015 as an example when asked about prior elements of rebuilding that trust. “People need to back off these things in order to prevent conflict.”

Alexey Gromyko, director of the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IE RAS), also referred to Turkey’s downing of the jet. Recalling that before the plane was shot down, bilateral relations between Ankara and Moscow were defined as “strategic” by many politicians and specialists despite their differences on a number of issues, Gromyko told the Daily News that this definition was “the true reflection of affairs between the two countries.”

“Of course we know from history that mistakes which are not a result of some fundamental matters but which are made because of tactical politics or just because of human error can have disastrous consequences.

In history, some wars happened not because states were enemies from the point of their national interest but because their political classes were not wise or reasonable to prevent this cause of events.

That is why I hope very much and strongly believe that due to the fact that our cultures share much more strategic goals and they share a lot of similarities, I am sure that a period for repairing this will start, but it is impossible to repair the damage overnight; it is going to be quite a long process of rapprochement,” Gromyko said, recalling a famous quote from Winston Churchill, and separately echoing the same approach as Browne from a different point of view.

“Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning,” Gromyko quoted Churchill as saying in 1942 at a time of British victories in North Africa. Another participant from Russia, Ivan Timofeev, program director at the Russian International Affairs Council, used “a chicken and the egg” metaphor to describe the course of events in Russian-Turkish bilateral relations.

“One of key problems on lack of trust is to hold a discussion on what goes first, the chicken or the egg,” Timofeev told the Daily News. “They often say we don’t cooperate because of a lack of trust, but trust does not emerge from nothing. Trust emerges from the results of common interests and from the results of joint actions,” said Timofeev.

“An example between Russia and Turkey is very illustrative; they have been partners for more than two decades and this partnership was very dynamic. There were also disagreements but we respected these disagreements, but the plane crash ruined almost all of these. This is a very non-linear process when one action may have very big consequences – bigger than we expect.

The only remedy to this lack of trust is the cooperation in spheres where we have common interest,” Timofeev said, while referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin’s swift offer of condolences to the people of Turkey following a March 13 suicide bomb attack in Ankara as a positive beginning. “I must say that the experience of partnership we had in the past is an asset for the future.

Because it will help to overcome the negative legacy ease and help to revive trust; we do not have to need to start from a blank sheet, not a tabula rasa," he said. Yet, he admitted: "The situation on Syria-Turkey border and everything is very fragile so we are very vulnerable. In fact, Russia, Turkey and Western countries are the hostages of this fragility. We are limited by this chaos."

## Turkey stands by Belgium, Erdoğan says

Hurriyet Daily News, 22.03.2016



President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has strongly condemned the deadly attacks in Brussels, adding Turkey stood by Belgium in its bad times. "I strongly condemn and curse the inhumane attacks which occurred today in Brussels' Zaventem Airport and Maalbeek metro station.

I send my warmest condolences to the relatives of the dead and the Belgian people [killed] in those abominable attacks and wishes for a quick recovery to the wounded," President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Erdoğan said. The president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Erdoğan also said Turkey stood by Belgium in its hard days.

"Turkey stands with Belgium in its hard days. Our people, who have been exposed to flagrant attacks by different terror organizations, deeply feel the pain of the Belgian people and share this pain," Erdoğan said, recalling recent terror attacks in Turkey. Erdoğan also said the Brussels attack proved there was no difference between terrorists.

"The terrorists who are now targeting Brussels after attacks in Ankara not too long ago by the [outlawed] Kurdistan Workers' Party [PKK] and Daesh [the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant – ISIL] in Istanbul which claimed tens of lives, showed once again that they know no humanitarian or moral values or boundaries and have no difference between them in terms of the flagrant methods they use," Erdoğan said.

# Turkish FM meets senior US officials to discuss Syria, anti-ISIL fight

Hurriyet Daily News, 23.03.2016



Turkey's FM Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu met with two senior United States diplomats to discuss ongoing efforts to defeat the ISIL and to resolve the Syrian problem through peaceful means.

U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Blinken and U.S. President Obama's Special Envoy for the region Brett McGurk were in Ankara to hold talks with Turkish officials, including FM Çavuşoğlu and Undersecretary Sinirlioğlu. The visit comes amid reports that the anti-ISIL coalition is readying for an offensive against the jihadists' positions in Raqqa, an operation seen as preparation for a comprehensive military move to liberate Iraq's third largest city, Mosul from the ISIL.

Turkish and American officials have also exchanged views on the ongoing U.N.-led efforts to provide a political transition period in Syria. Earlier in the day, Blinken visited Ankara's central Kızılay Square, the site of a deadly suicide car bomb attack earlier this month. Accompanied by U.S. Ankara Ambassador John Bass and Defense Attaché Brig. Gen. Marc Sasseville, Blinken commemorated the victims of the attack by leaving flowers at the scene.

The March 13 car bomb attack hit a major Ankara public transportation hub, killing 36 and injuring dozens of civilians. The outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)-affiliated Kurdistan Freedom Hawks (TAK) claimed responsibility for the attack. Turkey's Interior Ministry identified the bomber as 24-year-old Seher Çağla Demir, who was recruited by the PKK and also received training with the People's Protection Units (YPG), the military wing of Syria's Democratic Union Party (PYD), in Syria, according to state intel.

# UN rights chief expresses serious concerns over EU-Turkey agreement

AFP, 10.03.2016



The U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Al Hussein expressed concerns about the recent agreement between the EU and Turkey, pointing to what he termed “a contradiction at the heart of the agreement,” as well as raising concerns regarding arbitrary detention of refugees and migrants.

“The declared aim to return all refugees and migrants contrasts with the assurances about individual assessments,” the High Commissioner said. “If the safeguards are to be considered real, then the individual assessments must allow for the possibility that the persons in question will not in fact be returned.

Otherwise it could still qualify as a collective expulsion.” The EU-Turkey agreement calls for cases to be processed under the EU’s Asylum Procedures Directive, and goes on to state that “Migrants not applying for asylum or whose application has been found unfounded or inadmissible in accordance with the said directive will be returned to Turkey.”

Zeid expressed concern that this language presents a real risk of overlooking human rights law obligations, which require States to examine arguments against return beyond those found in refugee law. Such needs could arise, for example, in the case of children; victims of violence, rape, trauma and torture; individuals with specific sexual orientation; persons with disabilities; and a range of others with legitimate individual protection needs. The UN Human Rights Chief urged Greece to handle all individual cases with genuine attention to all protection grounds required under international human rights law, including at the appeals stage.

# Syrian opposition vows to show ‘patience’ in peace bid

AFP, 22.03.2016



Syria’s main opposition said that it would not be deterred by Damascus’ refusal to discuss the fate of Syrian President al-Assad, and vowed to be patient in the ongoing peace talks.

A member of the High Negotiations Committee opposition umbrella group criticized the regime’s lead negotiator in Geneva, al-Jaafari, for using inflammatory rhetoric and blocking progress towards agreement on a political transition in the war-ravaged country. But Hisham Marwa, who serves as a consultant in the HNC, told the regime position “will not affect our decision to be engaged in a political process, and to show a higher degree of responsibility and patience.”

His comments came after Jaafari once again branded the opposition as foreign-backed terrorists and reiterated that any discussion of Assad’s fate was “excluded.” He also stressed though that Damascus was committed to the peace process, and that his delegation had “clear instructions from our leadership to engage seriously in these talks.”

Assad’s fate has been a key obstacle in the latest talks aimed at ending Syria’s devastating five-year war, which has killed more than 270,000 people and displaced millions. The U.N.’s Syria envoy, Staffan de Mistura, said he had pressured Damascus to outline its approach to the crucial issue of a political transition, as negotiations in Geneva entered their second week.

De Mistura said the regime’s lead negotiator Bashar al-Jaafari told him “it was... premature to talk about it. My message was [that] premature [for him] means imminent as far as we are concerned.” Lebanon’s Hezbollah vowed to stay in Syria until the Islamic State –of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and al-Qaeda’s Syria branch are beaten.

“All that has been said about our withdrawal from Syria is false,” Hezbollah’s leader Hassan Nasrallah told Lebanese channel Al-Mayadeen. “We went to Syria to help keep the country from falling into the hands of Daesh [ISIL] and al-Nusra Front... So long as we have a responsibility to be there, we will be there.”

# ISIL trains 400 fighters to attack Europe in wave of bloodshed

AP, 24.03.2016



The ISIL group has trained at least 400 fighters to target Europe in attacks, deploying interlocking terror cells like the ones that struck Brussels and Paris with orders to choose the time, place and method for maximum chaos, officials told.

The network of cells shows the reach of the extremist group in Europe even as it loses ground in Syria and Iraq. The officials described camps in Syria, Iraq and possibly the former Soviet bloc where attackers are trained. Before being killed in a police raid, the ringleader of the Paris attacks claimed he had entered Europe in a multinational group, who scattered “more or less everywhere.”

But the biggest break yet in the Paris attacks investigation - the arrest on Friday of fugitive Salah Abdeslam - did not thwart the multipronged attack just four days later on the Belgian capital's airport and subway system that left 31 people dead and an estimated 270 wounded. Three suicide bombers also died.

Just as in Paris, Belgian authorities were searching for at least one fugitive in Tuesday's attacks - this time for a man wearing a white jacket who was seen on airport security footage with the two suicide attackers. The fear is that the man, whose identity Belgian officials say is not known, will follow Abdeslam's path.

After fleeing Paris immediately after the November attacks, Abdeslam forged a new network back in his childhood neighborhood of Molenbeek, long known as a haven for jihadis, and renewed plotting, according to Belgian officials.

“Not only did he drop out of sight, but he did so to organize another attack, with accomplices everywhere. With suicide belts. Two attacks organized just 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,’” said French Senator Nathalie Goulet, co-head of a commission tracking jihadi networks.

Estimates range from 400 to 600 ISIL fighters trained specifically for external attacks, according to the officials, including Goulet. Some 5,000 Europeans have gone to Syria. “The reality is that if we knew exactly how many there were, it wouldn't be happening,” she said.

More than four sources with access to tallies of fighters tasked with Europe attacks independently corroborated the numbers of fighters who trained for specific attacks in Europe, including some who have spoken to fighters directly. Others have cross checked information regarding fighters leaving or returning.



Two of the suicide bombers in Tuesday's attacks, Belgian-born brothers Ibrahim and Khalid El Bakraoui, were known to authorities as common criminals, not anti-Western radicals until an apartment one of them rented was traced to Abdeslam last week, according to Belgian state broadcaster RTBF.

Similarly, an Algerian killed inside that apartment had nothing but a petty theft record in Sweden - but he'd signed up as an ISIL suicide bomber for the group in 2014 and returned to Europe as part of the Nov. 13 plot.

In claiming responsibility for Tuesday's attack, the ISIL group described a "secret cell of soldiers" dispatched to Brussels for the purpose. The shadowy cells were confirmed by the EU police agency, Europol, which said in a late January report that intelligence officials believed the group had "developed an external action command trained for special forces-style attacks."

French speakers with links to North Africa, France and Belgium appear to be leading the units and are responsible for developing attack strategies in Europe, said a European security official who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss briefing material.

He is also familiar with interrogations of former fighters who have returned to Europe. Some were jailed after leaving ISIL while others were kicked out of the terror group, and they include Muslims and Muslim converts from all across Europe.

Fighters in the units are trained in battleground strategies, explosives, surveillance techniques and counter surveillance, the security official said. "The difference is that in 2014, some of these ISIL fighters were only being given a couple weeks of training," he said. "Now the strategy has changed. Special units have been set up.

The training is longer. And the objective appears to no longer be killing as many people as possible but rather to have as many terror operations as possible, so the enemy is forced to spend more money or more in manpower."

Similar methods had been developed by al-Qaida but IS has taken it to a new level, he said. Another difference is that fighters are being trained to be their own operators - not necessarily to be beholden to orders from the ISIL stronghold in Raqqa, Syria, or elsewhere. Several security officials have said there is growing evidence to suggest the bulk of the training is taking place in Syria, Libya and elsewhere in North Africa.

In the case of Tuesday's attacks, Abdeslam's arrest may have been a trigger for a plot that was already far along. "To pull off an attack of this sophistication, you need training, planning, materials and a landscape," said Shiraz Maher, a senior research fellow at the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation at Kings College in London, which has one of the largest databases of fighters and their networks.

"Even if they worked flat out, the attackers in Brussels would have needed at least four days," said Maher, who has conducted extensive interviews with foreign fighters. The question for many intelligence and security officials is now turning to just how many more fighters have been trained and are ready for more attacks.

A senior Iraqi intelligence official who was not authorized to speak publicly said people from the cell that carried out the Paris attacks are scattered across Germany, Britain, Italy, Denmark and Sweden. Recently, a new group crossed in from Turkey, the official said.

Turkish authorities said one of the Brussels suicide attackers, Ibrahim El Bakraoui, was caught last June near the Syrian border and deported to the Netherlands, with Ankara warning Dutch and Belgian officials that he was a “foreign terrorist fighter.” But he was released from Dutch custody due to lack of evidence of involvement in extremism.

Belgian Justice Minister Koen Geens said that authorities had no reason to detain El Bakraoui because he was “not known for terrorist acts but as a common law criminal who was on conditional release.” The latest new name to surface this week, Najim Laachraoui, turned out to be the bombmaker who made the suicide vests used in the Paris attacks, according to French and Belgian officials.

Attackers used an explosive known as Triacetone Triperoxide, or TATP, made from common household chemicals. DNA evidence indicates he died on Tuesday in the suicide attack on the airport, two officials briefed on the investigation told AP. Fifteen kilos of TATP were found in an apartment linked to the Brussels attackers, along with other explosive material. The unidentified man seen on security footage wearing a white jacket and black hat at the Brussels airport on Tuesday remains at large, a fugitive link in a chain still being forged.

## Pentagon assigns new marine group to Iraq to fight ISIL

Anadolu Agency, 21.03.2016



The Pentagon has assigned a detachment of U.S. marines on the ground in Iraq to support international coalition efforts against the ISIL, it announced, one day after one U.S. marine was killed in an ISIL attack in northern Iraq.

The group of marines from the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit will provide additional support to Iraqi security forces and the U.S.-led coalition, which is already on the ground, to defeat ISIL, according to a statement by the Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve. The assignment was carried out after consultation with the Iraqi government, the statement added.

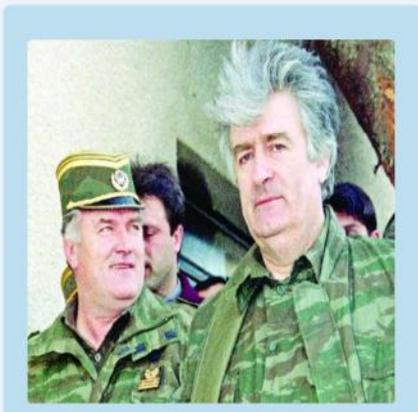
How this new additional group will support efforts against ISIL on the ground was however not clarified in the statement. The 26th Marine Unit is currently deployed to maintain regional security in the U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations, including the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea and parts of the Indian Ocean.

The announcement came one day after a U.S. marine was killed and several others were wounded in a rocket attack coming from ISIL on an Iraqi base. “Earlier today a U.S. marine providing force protection fire support at a recently established coalition fire base near Makhmur in northern Iraq was killed after coming under ISIL rocket fire,” a statement said, according to AFP.

Makhmur is a district around 70 kilometers southeast of the main ISIL hub of Mosul and 280 kilometers north of Baghdad. It lies within territory controlled by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq, but Baghdad has recently been deploying federal forces there to prepare for an offensive against Mosul. “Several other marines were wounded and they are being treated for their varying injuries,” the Pentagon said.

## Karadzic guilty of Bosnia genocide, jailed for 40 years

Reuters, 24.03.2016



Former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic has been sentenced to 40 years in jail by U.N. judges who found him found guilty of genocide for the 1995 Srebrenica massacre, as well as on nine other war crimes charges.

Karadzic, 70, the most senior political figure to be convicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague, was found guilty of 10 of 11 war charges. He was acquitted on a second count of genocide in Bosnia during the 1990s. The judges said Karadzic was criminally responsible for the siege of Sarajevo and had committed crimes against humanity in Bosnian towns.

According to judges, Karadzic intended to eliminate the Bosnian Muslim males in the town of Srebrenica, where 8,000 Muslims died in Europe’s worst war crime since World War II. Presiding judge O-Gon Kwon said the three-year Sarajevo siege, during which the city was shelled and sniped at by besieging Bosnian Serb forces, could not have happened without Karadzic’s support.

His sentence will be reduced by slightly more than seven years for time already spent in detention. It will be served in an as yet undetermined state prison. One of Karadzic’s legal advisers, Lawyer Peter Robinson, said he will file an appeal to the court’s decision. Robinson said Karadzic was shocked to have been found guilty of orchestrating Serb atrocities throughout Bosnia’s 1992-95 war. The appeal process could take several more years. As the judges described the siege of Sarajevo, Karadzic looked pained and his face tightened into a grimace.

Victims’ families in the courtroom, some of them elderly, listened intently when the genocide at Srebrenica was discussed. One wiped away tears as the judge described men and boys being separated from their families. After that, Karadzic stared ahead vacantly.

When he was ordered to stand for sentencing, he listened with eyes mostly downcast. After the sentence was read and judges departed, he sat back heavily in his chair. After the hearing was closed, several victims' families embraced before quietly leaving the courtroom. Karadzic was arrested in 2008 after 11 years on the run, following a war in which 100,000 people were killed as rival armies carved Bosnia up along ethnic lines that largely survive today.

He headed the self-styled Bosnian Serb Republic and was supreme commander of its armed forces. He said in an interview ahead of the verdict that he had worked to uphold peace and deserved praise, not punishment. My permanent fight to preserve the peace, prevent the war and decrease the sufferings of everyone regardless of religion was an exemplary effort deserving respect rather than persecution," he told news portal Balkan Insight.

Chief U.N. war crimes prosecutor Serge Brammertz welcomed the guilty verdict against Karadzic, saying "justice has been done." "Thousands came here to tell their stories and courageously confront their tormentors. Today with this conviction that trust has been honored," Brammertz said in a statement.

## EU pledges to better share information on terrorism after Brussels attacks

AFP, 25.03.2016



EU interior and justice ministers pledged to better share intelligence on terrorism, during an extraordinary meeting to support Belgium following the deadly Brussels attacks.

The European Commission, the executive of the 28-nation EU, in January already set up a counter-terrorism centre at Europol headquarters in The Hague in a bid to improve information sharing and break down the mistrust that hinders it. "Today we put pressure on everybody to cooperate better," Dimitris Avramopoulos, the commissioner responsible for security issues and migration, told journalists following the ministerial meeting.

"If we were sharing information, we might dissuade their actions," Avramopoulos said, referring to a string of jihadist attacks in Paris, Copenhagen and Brussels since 2015. He complained there was "sometimes still a lack of trust" but called for more resources for the counter-terrorism centre and for member states to make full use of it.

In a joint statement, the ministers called to "increase as a matter of urgency the systematic feeding, consistent use and interoperability of European and international databases in the fields of security, travel and migration." They also called for "making full use of technological developments and including privacy safeguards from the outset." An EU diplomat said that despite improvements, still only five member states provide 90 percent of the information.

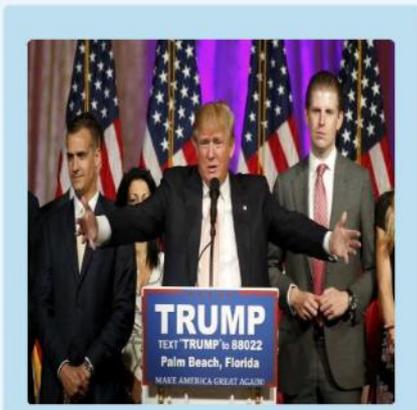
The ministers decided on no new measures during the hastily arranged meeting held hundreds of metres from the underground train station which was hit by a suicide bomber. The attacks at the metro station and the airport killed at least 31 people and wounded 270 others. The ministers agreed to speed up the implementation of previous measures, such as against the financing of terrorism and against forged identity cards used by Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) militants.

They also urged the European Parliament to adopt plans to track airline passenger names under the Passenger Name Record (PNR) system. The PNR was supposed to be adopted in March but some members of parliament postponed it in order to allow a simultaneous vote on protecting personal information.

The EU began discussions on introducing a PNR system in 2010 but misgivings about the security of personal data held up progress, with many MEPs doubly suspicious after revelations about mass US intelligence snooping. “We are taking too long to carry out the decisions that we have taken,” French interior minister Bernard Cazeneuve said.

## Obama thrills Cubans with call for change

AFP, 18.03.2016



US President Barack Obama told Cubans he wants to “bury” decades of Cold War conflict and then joined his counterpart Raul Castro for some baseball diplomacy to wrap up his historic visit to the communist island. Speaking from Havana’s ornate Gran Teatro, Obama -- the first US president to visit Cuba in 88 years -- thrilled Cubans with a call for democracy and greater freedom of expression.

“I have come here to bury the last remnant of the Cold War in the Americas,” Obama said to cheers during his unprecedented speech, carried live on Cuba’s tightly controlled state television.

There were extraordinary scenes of clapping and cheering as Obama laid out his vision for change in the one-party state and close US-Cuban relations. “Creo en el pueblo cubano,” he said, repeating himself in English: “I believe in the Cuban people.”

But Castro, sitting in a theater box with other high-ranking officials, sat stone-faced as Obama said: “Voters should be able to choose their governments in free and democratic elections.” Cubans watching at home or in bars were enthusiastic. “I think Obama touched the soul of the Cubans,” said dockyard worker Lazaro Bosch, 62. “Obama is a man of ideas, with very clear thoughts, and I think he really wants to push for a new relationship.” Immediately after the speech, Obama left to meet with dissidents who have been harassed and sometimes arrested under Castro’s rule including Berta Soler, the leader of the Ladies in White, and veteran activist Elizardo Sanchez. Obama praised their “extraordinary courage.”



Obama drew some of the loudest applause of his speech when he called on the US Congress to lift a decades-old economic embargo. The sanctions were imposed in a failed attempt to break the communist regime that came to power after Raul's brother Fidel Castro overthrew a widely hated, US-backed government in 1959, and then made Cuba a fierce Soviet ally.

"It is an outdated burden on the Cuban people. It's a burden on the Americans who want to work and do business or invest here in Cuba," Obama said. "It's time to lift the embargo." Rebuking domestic critics who say that the opening to Cuba has given away too much while doing little to force Castro to change, Obama said the embargo simply "was not working."

"We have to have the courage to acknowledge that truth," he said. "The embargo was only hurting the Cuban people instead of helping them." But despite the charm offensive, which included references to the countries' shared enthusiasm for baseball and Cuban singers, Obama's speech was laced with stinging critiques of Castro's control over the Caribbean island of about 11 million people.

"I believe citizens should be free to speak their minds without fear, to organize and to criticize their government," Obama said. The repeated references to human rights and free elections may not have pleased Castro, who at one point simply turned away and began chatting to his foreign minister, but they created a sensation in much of the rest of the cheering audience.

Castro's only visible applause during the speech came when Obama referred to lifting the embargo and when he praised the late South African president Nelson Mandela. Obama and Castro have been careful to highlight their rapprochement during the US president's three-day trip, which ended with a bit of baseball diplomacy -- a friendly game between the Cuban national team and Major League's Tampa Bay Rays, symbolizing the countries' shared passion for the sport.

Obama and Castro sat side by side, tieless and wearing sunglasses, for the game, which began with a spine-tingling rendition of both national anthems. Obama then left on Air Force One for a visit to Argentina. Castro, who had not been there to greet Obama when he arrived Sunday, saw the US president off at the airport, with a warm farewell.

However, tension over the human rights issue illustrated that what Castro called "profound" differences remain. At a joint press conference, Castro angrily denied that Cuba holds any political prisoners. He attacked the United States, saying rights there were also violated when it came to health care, social security, and "double standards."

Castro also said that Washington needs to return sovereignty over Guantanamo, a corner of Cuba under US control and the location for a controversial US military prison housing foreigners allegedly involved in terrorism. Republican critics back home accuse Obama of playing too soft a hand. After his meeting with opposition members Tuesday, the party's national committee called the Havana visit "an embarrassing display of weakness and lack of moral clarity."



# Announcements & Reports

## ► *Key Trends in the Uncertain Metrics of Terrorism*

**Source** : CSIS  
**Weblink** : <http://csis.org/publication/key-trends-metrics-terrorism>

## ► *The United States Dominates Global Investment Banking: Does it matter for Europe?*

**Source** : Bruegel  
**Weblink** : <http://bruegel.org/2016/03/the-united-states-dominates-global-investment-banking-does-it-matter-for-europe/>

## ► *As Ethiopia Moves toward Tuberculosis Elimination, Success Requires Higher Investment*

**Source** : CSIS  
**Weblink** : <http://csis.org/publication/ethiopia-moves-toward-tuberculosis-elimination-success-requires-higher-investment>

# Upcoming Events

## ► *Governing for Infrastructure Delivery in Sub-Saharan Africa*

**Date** : 26 March 2015  
**Place** : London - UK  
**Website** : <https://www.chathamhouse.org/event/governing-infrastructure-delivery-sub-saharan-africa>

## ► *The UK and the EU: Managing the Euro and the Single Market*

**Date** : 26 March 2015  
**Place** : London - UK  
**Website** : <https://www.chathamhouse.org/event/uk-and-eu-managing-euro-and-single-market>

## ► *Competitive Gains in the Economic and Monetary Union*

**Date** : 27 March 2015  
**Place** : Brussels - Belgium  
**Website** : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/534-competitive-gains-in-the-economic-and-monetary-union/>



### ► *The Future of Capitalist Democracy: UK-Japan Perspectives*

**Date** : 27 March 2015  
**Place** : London - UK  
**Website** : <http://www.chathamhouse.org/event/future-capitalist-democracy-uk-japan-perspectives>

### ► *Emerging Markets and Europe: Time for Different Relationships?*

**Date** : 28 March 2015  
**Place** : Brussels - Belgium  
**Website** : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/524-emerging-markets-and-europe-time-for-different-relationships/>

### ► *What future for Europe's Social Models?*

**Date** : 29 March 2015  
**Place** : Brussels - Belgium  
**Website** : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/526-what-future-for-europes-social-models/>

### ► *Challenges for Growth in Europe*

**Date** : 29 March 2015  
**Place** : Brussels - Belgium  
**Website** : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/521-challenges-for-growth-in-europe/>

### ► *Global Governance of Public Goods: Asian and European Perspectives*

**Date** : 30 March 2015  
**Place** : Paris - France  
**Website** : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/529-global-governance-of-public-goods-asian-and-european-perspectives/>

### ► *The Future of the Welfare State*

**Date** : 31 March 2015  
**Place** : Berlin - Germany  
**Website** : <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/events/event-detail/event/541-the-future-of-the-welfare-state/>