

The Virgin Islands Consortium

From Jamaica To Trinidad, Caribbean Nationals Joining ISIS

Caribbean / **Published On November 24, 2015 10:56 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **November 24, 2015**



ST. CROIX -- Caribbean nationals from multiple islands have left their native lands to join the terror group called the Islamic State, according to Marine Gen. John Kelly, the top U.S. general in South America. While Mr. Kelly spoke in March of this year, the barbaric attacks on Paris, France on November 13, which was preceded by the downing of a Russian jet leaving Egypt for Russia, and a blast that killed dozens in Beirut, the group's recruiting efforts in the Caribbean have been under more scrutiny.

Mr. Kelly, who heads the U.S. Southern Command, said the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, has been doing a "fair amount" of recruiting in the Caribbean region, revealing that some have become radicalized through radical mosques and others

through the Internet.

He listed Trinidad, Suriname, Jamaica and Venezuela as countries where officials believe recruits have departed for Syria. And while the U.S. continues to work on disrupting ISIS's methods of recruitment, the amount of movement across the Syrian border and the sophistication of the networks overwhelm "our ability to stop everything," Kelly told reporters during a Pentagon briefing earlier this year.

"Everyone is concerned, of course, if they come home," said Mr. Kelly, adding that while in Syria the recruits would "get good at killing and pick up some real job skills in terms of explosives and beheadings and things like that."

The U.S. Virgin Islands has a wide demographic of Middle-Eastern people; the majority of them Arabs. They contribute greatly to the islands' economy in multiple ways by starting and successfully operating businesses in various sectors, the most prominent being gas, furniture and grocery. And while most of the older generation Arabs are Middle-Eastern, their children are U.S. citizens and have adopted the American way of life. And Arabs that The Consortium has spoken to here have decried the terror group's actions as far from the Muslim religion; even though ISIS uses the Quran to recruit fighters.

Yet, even as chances for an ISIS attack in the territory remains unlikely, other Caribbean nations do not share the same confidence; being fully aware of their weaknesses and lacking the defense mechanisms deeply embedded in the American way of life -- including the U.S. Virgin Islands -- that were implemented after the 9/11 attacks.

Mr. Kelly said trepidation exists in Caribbean nations that are concerned about the extremists returning home to conduct terror operations, because they don't have any real ability to deal with the problem.

And ISIS is continuing its propaganda at an alarming rate to recruit Caribbean fighters, with the most recent being video footage that shows a man sitting beside his three children, issuing a call for Muslims in Trinidad and Tobago to rise up.

In the video, a man, identified as Abu Zayd al-Muhajir, claimed he had fled his homeland because Muslims in Trinidad and Tobago were restricted in what they could do. He said people were free to wear the hijab or other Islamic clothing but that in reality, Muslims were only allowed to practice what they were told.

Another fighter named Abu Khalid, who was interviewed in the 11 minute film, said he had converted to Islam because of "the way the Muslims care about themselves, how they care about themselves, their family structure". He said he felt that he did not belong in Trinidad and that after reading sections of the Koran, he "started to understand that fighting is something that has been prescribed upon Muslims".

Reports of Trinidadians traveling to Syria to fight for ISIS first emerged in 2014 when the island republic's former national security minister, Gary Griffith, claimed around 30 citizens were now terrorist fighters.

The United Nations has also warned that the country is being used as a recruiting ground for the terror group.

Mr. Kelly said the CIA, FBI and law enforcement all do a good job tracking the networks, but "there's a lot of people coming and going. It only takes one to cause a problem."

Feature Image: From left to upper right: Trinidadian Abu Khalid, who converted from Christianity to Islam. And militants filmed in the video at a shooting range.

Image Credit: Trinidad Express.

Sources: CBS News and Express UK.

© Viconsortium 2026