

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Donald Trump Concerned About High Rate Of Trinidadians Joining ISIS

Caribbean / **Published On February 22, 2017 12:44 PM /**

Staff **February 22, 2017**



U.S. President Donald Trump called Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago Keith Rowley over the weekend to discuss terrorism and other security challenges, including foreign fighters, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, a White House spokeswoman told the New York Times.

Mr. Trump's concern stems from the high rate of Trinidadian nationals who have left their country to fight alongside the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, as made known by a Times story on the problem.

According to The Times, law enforcement officials in Trinidad and Tobago, a small Caribbean island nation off the coast of Venezuela, are scrambling to close a pipeline that has sent a steady stream of young Muslims to Syria, where they have taken up arms for ISIS.

The article says American officials worry about having a breeding ground for extremists so close to the United States, fearing that Trinidadian fighters could return from the Middle East and attack American diplomatic and oil installations in Trinidad, or even take a three-and-a-half-hour flight to Miami.

It is not illegal in Trinidad to join the so-called caliphate, which is in contrast to many other countries, though the government wants to change that. One hundred to 130 people have made the trip to Syria from Trinidad, which has a population of 1.3 million, according to a former United States ambassador, John L. Estrada, and Trinidad's minister of national security, Edmund Dillon, the Times article states.

By comparison, about 250 citizens of the United States, a country with 240 times the population, had joined the extremists or attempted to travel to Syria by late 2015, according to a House Homeland Security Committee report.

In November 2015, John Kelly, a former marine general and top U.S. general in South America, who now serves as President Trump's Secretary of Homeland Security, said [Caribbean nationals from multiple islands had left their native lands to join ISIS](#). At the time, Mr. Kelly said ISIS was doing a "fair amount" of recruiting in the Caribbean region, revealing that some had become radicalized through radical mosques, and others through the Internet.

He listed Trinidad, Suriname, Jamaica and Venezuela as countries where officials believed recruits had 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," Mr. Kelly told reporters during a Pentagon briefing in 2015.

"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."

According to the [Times piece](#), Trinidad has a history of Islamist extremism — a radical Muslim group was responsible for a failed coup in 1990 that lasted six days, and in 2012 a Trinidadian man was sentenced to life in prison for his role in a plot to blow up Kennedy International Airport. Muslims make up only about 6 percent of the population, and the combatants often come from the margins of society, some of them on the run from criminal charges, according to The Times.

The article, citing experts, says the extremists saw few opportunities in an oil-rich nation whose economy has declined with the price of petroleum. Some were gang members who either converted or were radicalized in prison, while others have been swayed by local imams who studied in the Middle East, according to Muslim leaders and American officials. The young men found solace in radical Islamist websites and social media. And in the call to jihad, according to the Times article.

