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LATEST

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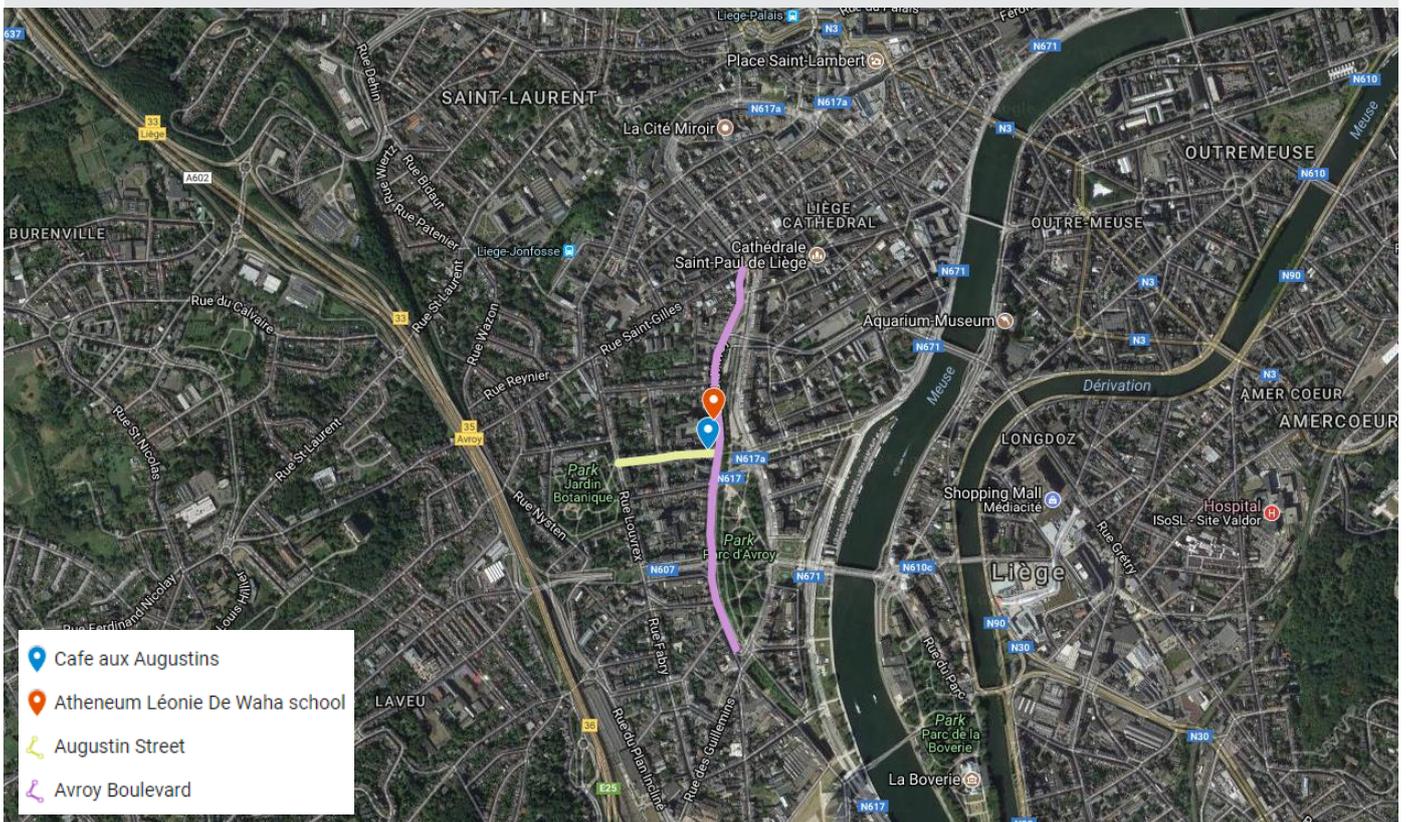


TRAVEL ADVISORY • 29 MAY 2018

Three Killed in Suspected Terror Attack in Liege, Belgium

KEY POINTS

- Two police officers and a civilian have been killed in what is being treated as a terror attack.
- The attack took place in the Belgian city of Liege.
- This is the first deadly terror attack in Belgium since bombings in March 2016 which killed 35 people (including the three perpetrators).



SITUATIONAL SUMMARY

Terrorism: Three people have been killed after a suspected terror attack in the city of Liege in Belgium on 29 May 2018. The three fatalities, a civilian and two police officers, were killed on Avroy Boulevard, near the Cafe aux Augustins at the junction with Augustin Street. The attack unfolded at 1030hrs local time as the perpetrator attacked two police officers with a knife before stealing a gun from them and opening fire. The civilian was shot dead during the attack as he sat in the passenger seat of a passing car. The gunman subsequently took a female cleaner at Atheneum Leonie de Waha school hostage, before being shot and killed by Belgian police. Two police officers were also injured in the incident. Local media is reporting that the man was heard



TRAVEL ADVISORY • 29 MAY 2018

shouting “Allahu Akbar” or “God is greatest” in Arabic.

SOLACE GLOBAL COMMENT

Despite reports, the attacker's links to a terror group are unclear at this stage. It is possible that he was inspired by a terror group rather than having any specific direct links. Even if a terror group such as Islamic State later claims responsibility for the attack, it is of note that the caliphate regularly takes responsibility for attacks which are undertaken in its name or inspired by its ideology. Attacks of this kind are expected to continue as Islamic State territory in the Middle East deteriorates. European nations fear the impact of returning fighters as well as those inspired by the terror group. Belgium is an active partner in the anti-Islamic State coalition, making it a legitimate target in the eyes of the caliphate.

Belgium has faced a significant threat from terrorism in recent years. Nevertheless, this marks the first deadly terror attack in Belgium since the March 2016 bombings in Brussels in which 32 and the three perpetrators were killed. However, a Brussels-based terror cell was involved in the 2015 Paris attacks which left 130 people dead. Also, in October 2016 three police officers were injured after a being attacked by a man with a knife in the Schaerbeek neighbourhood of Brussels, and an attempted bomb attack took place at the Brussels Central attack in June 2017; the attacker was shot dead by police. An attack in August 2017 in Brussels, bears similarities with the attack in Liege, as two police officers were wounded after being attacked by a knife-wielding assailant. Liege was the site of a similar attack in 2011 when a gunman killed four people and wounded many more before committing suicide.

This attack coincides with the Islamic holy month of Ramadan when terror attacks are often more likely. In 2017, both Al Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS) terror groups called on their supporters to conduct terror attacks during Ramadan, with IS vowing ‘all-out war’. This led to notable attacks against a convoy of Coptic Christians in Egypt, Philippine security forces fought militants in the city of Marawi, an Islamic State truck bombing in Kabul killed 150 people, and eight were killed and more than 50 injured in the London Bridge attack in the UK. After Ramadan in 2016, the Islamic State claimed that it had been responsible for the deaths of over five thousand people during the holy month. This figure is disputed, but there was certainly a significant increase in terror activity during the Ramadan of 2016.

Reports from Belgian media suggest that the perpetrator was let out from prison on temporary release on 28 May 2018. He was reportedly incarcerated for drug offences and was subsequently radicalised while in prison. This demonstrates a continuing and worrying trend. Indeed, UK intelligence officials opened an operation to understand whether or not the perpetrator of the 2017 Westminster attacks in London was radicalised in prison. Moreover, a UK Muslim community group warned of reports of attempts by Jihadist leaders to recruit criminals in prison for acts of violence once they are released.

This attack also follows a similar modus operandi to other recent terror attacks in Europe. An attack along these lines remains easy to carry out due to its low-tech nature, and the relative ease of access to knives, given that they are household items. The attack is reminiscent of recent Islamist attacks in locations of Paris and Normandy in France, London in the United Kingdom, and Hurgada in Egypt, where attacks were carried out in the name of the Islamic State.



TRAVEL ADVISORY • 29 MAY 2018

SECURITY ADVICE

LOW TERRORISM RISK



Heightened security has been implemented in Liege and is also expected at key infrastructure locations across the country. Travellers should be prepared for a tense atmosphere in the city and across Belgium in the short-term. There is likely to be an increase in the frequency of evacuations and cordons due to suspicious packages and events. All police instructions should be followed immediately to avoid any misunderstanding which could lead to a forceful police response.

If caught in a potential terrorist incident, travellers are advised to RUN – HIDE – TELL – FIGHT. RUN – If in a location where gunfire or explosions are heard, leave the area or building by any safe and available exit immediately. HIDE – If unable to run away, find suitable cover or barricade yourself in a room. Remember to silence your phone and turn vibrate off. TELL – Inform emergency services or alert someone who is able to do it for you. Once police arrive, comply with their instructions and do not make any sudden movements. FIGHT – As a last resort, if confronted with a gunman, it is recommended to fight back by using the element of surprise by shouting, screaming and running fast at the attacker. If sheltered with others, convince them to do the same and rush the attacker all at once. Ensure the person entering the shelter is the attacker and not law enforcement.

For most travel to Belgium, Solace Global would not advise clients of the need for enhanced security or medical measures, depending on traveller profile. Travellers are advised to use travel-tracking technology with an intelligence feed for all travel in the continent. This should enable a traveller to be alerted of any security updates within their vicinity and to update others of their movements in case of an emergency.



Solace Global remains available to provide the full range of Travel Risk Management services to clients. Solace Global is also able to provide comprehensive crisis management, in-country journey management, tracking, response, and evacuation services.

For further details please contact +44 (0)1202 795 801 or email sg@solaceglobal.com