

# Teenage Jihadists, Car Burnings and Muslim-Only Cemeteries

by [Soeren Kern](#)

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During a press conference on January 14, French President François Hollande revealed that French intelligence services believe more than 700 French nationals and residents have travelled to fight in Syria. This figure is more than double the previous estimates.

One month into 2014, Islam-related controversies continued making headlines in newspapers across Europe. The most salient topic involved the dramatic increase in the numbers of European jihadists participating in the war in Syria.

An ominous foreboding is unfolding over Europe, as counter-terrorism officials intensify their warnings about the negative security implications surrounding the return of hundreds—possibly thousands—of battle-hardened jihadists to towns and cities across the continent.

But Syria is only one of many concerns. What follows is a brief survey of some of the more noteworthy stories involving Islam in Europe during just the month of January 2014.

In **Britain**, a Muslim extremist who [hacked a soldier to death](#) on a London street in May 2013, launched a [taxpayer-funded appeal](#) against his murder conviction. Michael Adebolajo, 29, who tried to behead the British soldier Lee Rigby with a meat cleaver, maintains he should not have been convicted because he is a "soldier of Allah" and therefore Rigby's killing was an act of war rather than premeditated murder.

Adebolajo and his co-defendant, Michael Adebowale, 22, were [found guilty](#) by a jury in December 2013, but have yet to be sentenced. The judge in the case, Nigel Sweeney, is said to be considering a whole-life prison term, but is awaiting legal guidance from the Court of Appeal of England and Wales. That court is currently reviewing a ruling by the Strasbourg-based [European Court of Human Rights](#), which states that whole-life terms violate the rights of prisoners.

Also in London, a Muslim woman was [arrested](#) by counter-terrorism police at Heathrow Airport on January 16 as she was preparing to board a flight to Turkey. Nawal Masaad, 26, is accused of trying to smuggle £16,500 (\$27,000; €20,000) in her underwear to jihadists in Syria. She and her alleged co-conspirator, Amal El-Wahabi, 27—a Moroccan who does not work and claims British social welfare benefits for herself and two young

sons—are the first British women to be charged with terrorism offenses linked to the conflict in Syria.

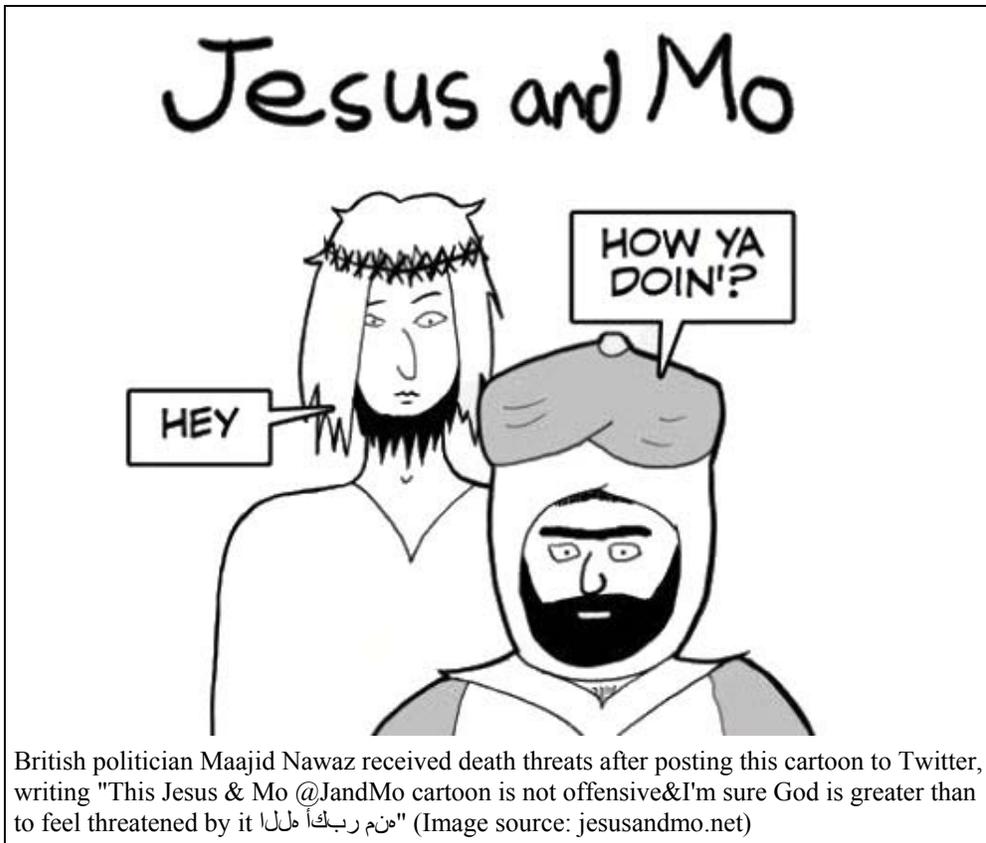
In a separate but related incident, two 17-year-old schoolgirls were [arrested](#) at Heathrow over suspected terrorism offenses. Police say they were "inspired by jihad" and were attempting to fly from Britain to Syria to fight in the civil war there.

The head of Scotland Yard's counter-terrorism unit, Commander Richard Walton, [revealed](#) that 14 British minors were also arrested on charges linked to the Syrian conflict in January, compared to 24 for the whole of 2013. Calling the figures "stark," Walton said it was shocking to see "boys and girls enticed" to join jihadists fighting in Syria. He said he believes it is "almost inevitable" some fighters will try to mount attacks in Britain upon their return.

In a sign of further challenges ahead for Britain, an analysis of [recent census data](#) published by the *Daily Telegraph* on January 10 shows that nearly ten percent of the babies and toddlers in England and Wales are Muslim. The percentage of Muslims among children under five is almost twice as high as in the general population. By way of comparison, fewer than one in 200 people over 85 are Muslim, an indication of the extent to which the birth rate is changing the religious demographic in Britain.

The long-running war on free speech in Britain continued apace in January, when a British Muslim lawmaker was threatened with beheading after he posted an image of Jesus and Mohammed on his Twitter account.

Liberal Democrat Maajid Nawaz (a parliamentary candidate who is also the co-founder of counter-extremism think-tank the Quilliam Foundation) [posted a cartoon](#) on January 12 of Jesus and Mohammed greeting one another with the caption, "This is not offensive and I'm sure God is greater than to feel threatened by it." Furious Muslims [launched a petition](#) to have Nawaz deselected as a candidate.



The leader of the Liberal Democrats, Nick Clegg, said he had no intention of asking Nawaz to step down. "We simply cannot tolerate anyone in a free country—where we have to protect free speech, even if that free speech might cause offense to others—being subject to death threats and them and their family being put under extraordinary pressure to recant what they said," Clegg [said](#).

Muslims eventually retaliated by rescinding Quilliam Foundation's nomination for the annual British Muslim Awards, held in Manchester on January 30. The foundation had been listed in the "Spirit of Britain" award category, but a [statement](#) on the awards Facebook page reads: "In light of recent activity, The British Muslim Awards, after careful consideration, have come to the decision that it can no longer promote the Quilliam Foundation as a finalist, and thus its nomination has been removed with immediate effect."

In Bristol, the city council [approved](#) a controversial plan to convert a former comedy club into a mosque. In Cambridgeshire, a Muslim group [submitted plans](#) to convert a warehouse into a new mosque. In Cambridge, locals are [opposing a plan](#) to build a £17.5 million (\$28.5 million; €21 million) mega-mosque, claiming it could be "a front for terrorism." In Blackburn, home to nearly 100 mosques, city councilors have been urged to [reject a plan](#) to open a mosque in a residential neighborhood.

In Southend, local residents celebrated after a four-year battle finally resulted in the [closing](#) of an illegal mosque. In Newton Mearns, south of Glasgow, [plans were abandoned](#) to build a mosque within the grounds of a school in one of the most affluent suburbs of Scotland, due to local criticism of the move.

In Catherine-de-Barnes, a tiny village in western central England, local residents are [objecting to plans](#) for a large, Muslim-only cemetery, which will include space for 4,000 followers of Islam to be buried, and 75 parking spaces for visitors. The village has a population of just 613, which means the cemetery could eventually hold six-and-a-half times as many people as Catherine-de-Barnes itself.

In **Belgium**, Foreign Minister Didier Reynders [said he believes](#) there are more than 200 Belgian nationals fighting in Syria, 20 of whom have been killed in the fighting there. "We are concerned as much about their leaving as about their returning," he said.

Meanwhile, a Belgian mother [flew to Turkey](#) to try to find her 16-year-old son who is fighting in Syria to convince him to return home. But the woman—who also has a 24-year-old son fighting in Syria—was so upset that she was detained upon arrival at Istanbul Airport and put on the first flight back to Brussels. Her lawyer, Alexis Deswaef, asked: "Why are the Turkish authorities repressing my client when they allow entry to hundreds of youths, including minors, to fight in Syria?"

In **France**, the [first-ever trial](#) of French citizens accused of seeking to become jihadists in Syria concluded on January 31. The three men—all carrying French passports—were arrested at an airport near Saint-Étienne in central France in May 2012 as they were preparing to board a flight to Gaziantep, a city in southern Turkey situated 100 km (60 miles) north of Aleppo, the largest city in Syria.

The three men were indicted under a 2012 French law that makes it a crime to conspire to commit terrorist acts. Under the law, the men could each be sentenced to as many as 10 years in prison. The judge in the trial is expected to render a verdict and sentence the men on March 7.

Separately, two French Muslim teenagers in the southwestern French city of Toulouse were [detained and interrogated](#) by French police on January 28 on suspicion of conspiring to commit terrorist acts. The youths—ages 15 and 16—ran away from home on January 6 to become jihadis in Syria. They were repatriated to France on January 26.

The French intelligence services are seeking to determine how the teenagers—believed to be the youngest-ever European jihadists to join the fighting in Syria—became radicalized, and whether or not they acted on their own or had help from an organized network or specific individuals.

French President François Hollande shed some light on the potential scale of the security problem facing France in the future. During a [press conference](#) on January 14, he revealed that French intelligence services believe that more than 700 French nationals

and residents have traveled to fight in Syria. This figure is more than double the previous estimates.

Meanwhile, a court in Versailles on January 8 [convicted](#) a Muslim woman for wearing a full-face Islamic veil in public, and threw out her bid to have the country's controversial burqa ban declared unconstitutional. Cassandra Belin, 20, a convert to Islam, was also convicted of insulting and threatening three police officers at the time of her arrest, which sparked [three days of rioting](#) in the Parisian suburb of Trappes in July 2013. She was given a one-month suspended prison sentence for the clash with the police and a €150 (\$200) fine for wearing the veil.

In the French city of Pau, a Moroccan imam who admitted to [vandalizing his own mosque](#) was fined €1,000 (\$1,350) and [ordered to leave France](#) by the end of February. Police say the motive for the vandalism was an internal settling of scores and not "Islamophobia" as local Muslims initially claimed.

On January 1, Interior Minister Manuel Valls arranged a press conference to announce the most anticipated statistic of the year: a total of [1,067 cars and trucks were torched](#) across France on New Year's Eve, a "significant reduction" from the 1,193 vehicles that were burned during the annual ritual on the same holiday in 2013.

Car burnings are increasingly commonplace in all French cities and are often attributed to shiftless young Muslims who reside in suburban slums, known as banlieues. Vandals from rival neighborhoods and cities often compete with each other for the media spotlight over who can cause the most destruction. An estimated [40,000 cars](#) are burned in France every year.

Unsurprisingly, an [Ipsos survey](#) published on January 21 indicates that French voters are frustrated with the status quo: 78% of those polled think "the [French] political system does not work well" and "their ideas are not represented" (six points higher than in January 2013).

According to the survey, 65% of French people think most politicians are corrupt (a three-point increase over 2013) and 84% think they are motivated primarily by personal gain (a two-point rise). At the same time, 84% of those polled said they would like "a real leader to restore order."

The poll also found that 66% of French people believe there are too many foreigners in France, and 59% believe "immigrants do not try hard enough to integrate" (four points higher than 2013). According to the poll, 63% of French people think Islam "is not compatible with French values" (compared to 74% in 2013).

In **Germany**, the new left-right coalition government led by Chancellor Angela Merkel has signaled it wants to [defuse escalating tensions](#) between Muslims and non-Muslims there. In a series of newspaper, television and radio interviews, German Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière announced a series of pro-Muslim policy initiatives, including plans

to change German immigration laws to make it easier for Muslim immigrants to obtain dual-citizenship and thus to maintain their religious and cultural links to their countries of origin.

Maizière also says he intends to give Muslims more say in setting the agenda of the government's ongoing dialogue with the Islamic umbrella groups that claim to represent the estimated 4.5 million Muslims now living in the country.

Muslims responded to Maizière's multicultural largesse by issuing a list of demands that include the official recognition of Muslim holidays in Germany, as well as the installation of Muslim clerics in German hospitals, nursing homes, prisons and military units.

In **Ireland**, the largest-selling daily newspaper, *Irish Independent*, published a [feature story](#) about Muslim women in the country, where Islam is the fastest-growing religion. Although much of this growth is due to immigration, at least 500 Irish people convert to Islam every year. Most conversions take place so that Irish women can marry Muslim men.

In anticipation of future business opportunities within the Irish-Muslim demographic, the Sligo-based luxury skincare products company [Voya](#) obtained halal certification, meaning its products are now manufactured in compliance with Islamic sharia law.

Voya co-founder Kira Walton said "it's hard to say if clients were actively seeking [halal certification]; we were striving to be ahead of the curve." She added that the halal certification process "changed our whole outlook on natural living and cleaning. It is a hugely beneficial change for our health, both inside and out."

**Italy** and **Malta** experienced a [Muslim immigration surge](#) in 2013, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said on January 28. Some 45,000 migrants crossed the Mediterranean from the Middle East and North Africa to seek refuge in Europe in 2013. More than 42,900 landed in Italy and 2,800 landed in Malta. Of those who arrived in Italy, over 5,400 were women and 8,300 were minors, some 5,200 of them unaccompanied. Most of the landings took place on the tiny island of Lampedusa (14,700) and along the coast around Syracuse (14,300) in Sicily.

"Most of the migrants came from Syria (11,300), Eritrea (9,800) and Somalia (3,200). All of them were effectively forced to leave their countries and they have the right to receive protection under the Italian law," said José Angel Oropeza, Director of IOM's Coordinating Office for the Mediterranean in Rome.

Landings continued apace in January 2014. The Italian navy and coast guard [rescued](#) more than 1,000 migrants off the island of Lampedusa on January 2-3 alone. Another 200 migrants were rescued on January 11, while 204 were rescued in the Straits of Sicily on January 24.

While immigrants arrive in Italy in droves, native Italians are abandoning the country in record numbers. A [report](#) published by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) on January 27 revealed that the number of Italians leaving the country rose by 36% to 68,000 people in 2012, up from 50,000 in 2011. Italian emigrants—most of whom have college degrees—headed primarily for Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and France.

At the same time, a [new study](#) examining Italy's Moroccan community (the largest non-European immigrant community in the country, second only to the one from Romania) reveals that of the 513,000 Moroccans residing in Italy, 300,000 are employable but only 151,000 are actively employed.

In the **Netherlands**, the [trial of 11 Muslim teenagers](#) accused of perpetrating the biggest exam fraud in Dutch history began on January 27. The students are accused of breaking into the [Ibn Ghaldoun Muslim High School](#) in Rotterdam in June 2013 and stealing at least 27 types of exams from the school's safe. The exams were then copied and sold, sometimes to students in other Dutch towns and cities, for between €20 (\$27) and €250 (\$340). More than 100 pupils are believed to have had access to the stolen papers and the Education Ministry's exam board is seeking €100,000 (\$135,000) in compensation from the suspects for the cost of printing new exams.

Also in Holland, police [confiscated the passports](#) of eight Dutch nationals seeking to become jihadists in Syria. In an [interview](#) with Radio 1 on January 28, Dutch Counter-Terrorism Chief Dick Schoof said it was the first time that passports had been confiscated in an effort to prevent Dutch nationals from becoming jihadists abroad, and he is waiting for a court to decide whether the confiscations are legal.

Dutch intelligence estimates that 120 Dutch nationals are fighting in Syria, including a former Dutch army soldier who is training jihadists and wearing his old military uniform while doing so. A report aired by the television news program [Nieuwsuur](#) on January 27 (a 16-minute report in Dutch with English subtitles) shows the man, a Dutch-Turkish dual national named Yilmaz, teaching masked jihad fighters how to shoot firearms, and using Skype to contact friends and family back in the Netherlands.

In **Norway**, Agriculture Minister Sylvi Listhaug called on the country's prisons, hospitals and nursery schools to [serve more pork](#). She said she believes the meat is being pulled off the menu to avoid offending the country's Muslim minority. "We cannot stop serving pork because Muslims have moved to Norway," Listhaug told the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) on January 30. "Those responsible for food in public institutions should put pork on the menu, and then make sure that those who do not eat pork can get something else," she said.

The man in charge of catering for Oslo's prisons, Willy Haugen, admitted that pork is only on the menu on average once every two weeks. "There are practical reasons why pork has been downgraded," Haugen told NRK.

Also in Norway, the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) on January 26 said a record number of immigrants [were deported](#) from Norway in 2013, when the country's police began stepping up the use of deportation as a way to fight spiraling crime.

Some 5,198 foreign citizens were expelled from the country in 2013, an increase of 31% over 2012, when 3,958 people were deported. Afghans topped the list of those expelled (516), followed by Romanians (499), Nigerians (373), Iraqis (310), Albanians (187), Iranians (160), Somalis (159), Pakistanis (144), Moroccans (120), Algerians (81) and Turks (67).

In **Spain**, an [exposé](#) aired by Catalan Television 3 on January 21 reported that hundreds of Muslim children born in Spain are being sent by their parents to attend madrasas (Koran schools) in Africa to learn Arabic and to study the Koran. Children between the ages of 7 and 17 are often sent away for periods of up to five years. TV3 visited six madrasas in the Gambian cities of Banjul and Serrekunda where more than 120 Spanish boys and girls were found to be studying the Koran by rote for more than 10 hours a day.

Experts interviewed by TV3 say the phenomenon has increased in recent years. They said they believe Spanish children should be attending school in Spain, and that lengthy stays in Africa represent a detrimental break in learning. They also say such children have difficult time integrating into Spanish society upon their return to Spain.

In **Sweden**, a [government report](#) published on January 31 warned of an increase in the risk of violence from Islamic extremists in the country. The report states that Sweden is a "desirable target" for Islamic terrorists, and the main targets are individuals regarded as having offended or insulted Islam.

The findings corroborate the [conclusions](#) of Sweden's intelligence service Säpo, which has warned that Swedes travelling abroad to participate in military activities in Syria pose the greatest potential threat to the country. The Säpo report states that at least 75 Swedish nationals are fighting in Syria, up from 30 in April 2013.

In **Switzerland**, the spokesman for the Swiss intelligence service NDB, Felix Endrich, revealed that at least [ten Swiss nationals](#) have gone to fight in Syria, up from zero a year ago: "Those who return are very dangerous, as well as those who recruit in Switzerland," he said. "We are monitoring the situation."