

Terror threat against France 'unprecedented'

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The threat of a jihadist attack in France has reached a level "without precedent" and new attacks are inevitable, according to top counter-terrorism officials.

"The threat is permanent," said one high-level official in the defence ministry, speaking on condition of anonymity. "Not one day goes by without an alert, the discovery of a network trying to send people to Syria or Iraq, or an intervention (by the security services). The number of targets has exploded. There are two or three thousand, maybe four thousand, people identified or suspected of evil intentions."

Nor are they all amateurs, the source added – many are highly educated. "They are pros, not drop-outs," he said.

The biggest concerns relate to the estimated 200 individuals who have returned from training or fighting in areas held by the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria.

"They have lost all inhibitions about violence," said another top counter-terrorism official, also speaking on condition of anonymity.

Officials also fear that competition between militant groups may drive them to ever-more brutal acts. "Al-Qaeda needs to restore its prestige and will try to compete with IS with complex and major actions," said the official.

Unveiling new surveillance laws on Thursday, Prime Minister Manuel Valls said the jihadist threat was "constantly evolving," emanating as much from groups based abroad as from individuals present on French soil. "The problem is not to know if there will be a new attack," said Valls. "It is to know when and where."