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EUROPE

Ibrahim and Khalid el-Bakraoui: From Bank Robbers to Brussels Bombers

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The two Belgian brothers who blew themselves and 31 other people up in Brussels on Tuesday started out as carjackers and bank robbers before graduating to terrorism.

Investigators are racing to assemble a fuller portrait of Ibrahim and Khalid el-Bakraoui who — along with at least two accomplices — carried out the suicide attacks at Brussels Airport and a subway station.

Here is what is known about each man, based on public records, official announcements, and interviews with neighbors, lawyers and law enforcement officials.

Brussels Born and Raised

Ibrahim, 29, and Khalid, 27, grew up in Laeken, a working-class neighborhood in northwest Brussels, not far from the Royal Palace. Their father, a retired butcher, is a devout Muslim who emigrated from Morocco; their mother is conservative and reclusive. The brothers shared burly features,

and, by their mid-20s, had amassed a formidable record of violent crime.

Violent Criminal Records

Khalid appears to have gotten an earlier start on his criminal career: He participated in at least four carjackings and a bank robbery in the fall of 2009.

On Oct. 27, 2009, armed with a Kalashnikov rifle, he and two accomplices kidnapped a bank employee, forced her to drive to a Brussels branch of the AXA bank and deactivate the alarm. They stole 41,000 euros (\$60,764 at the time).

About two weeks later, Khalid carjacked an Audi S3 and was found later that same night in a Brussels warehouse full of stolen cars. He was detained, but ultimately was not charged.

It was not until September 2011 that a Belgian court convicted him of criminal conspiracy, armed robbery, possession of stolen cars and possession of weapons, and sentenced him to five years in prison, less time served. He was paroled in 2013 or 2014.

His brother, Ibrahim el-Bakraoui, was the lookout for a robbery attempt in January 2010 at a Western Union branch in central Brussels. Surprised by a police patrol, Ibrahim opened fire with a Kalashnikov, hitting a police officer in the leg. As he and his accomplices tried to escape, they crashed their car and were forced to hide in a house in Laeken, the neighborhood where the Bakraoui brothers grew up, before surrendering to police.

Ibrahim was sentenced in August 2010 to nine years in prison for attempted murder and received parole in October 2014. As part of his parole, he was prohibited from leaving the country for longer than a month.

Ties to Terrorists

In June 2015, Ibrahim el-Bakraoui was detained in Gaziantep, Turkey, along the border with Syria. The Turkish authorities said they notified Belgian officials that they had detained him, warned them that he “was a foreign terrorist fighter,” and put him on a plane to the Netherlands, at his request.

An arrest warrant was issued by Interpol for Khalid el-Bakraoui (several months after his brother was detained in Turkey) at the behest of the Belgian authorities, evidently because he had violated the conditions of his own parole.

Perhaps because of that warrant, he used an alias — Ibrahim Maaroufi — to rent an apartment in September 2015 in Charleroi, Belgium, about 40 miles south of Brussels. That apartment was used as a safe house by some of the terrorists who carried out the Nov. 13 Paris attacks.

Evading Capture

The Bakraoui brothers evaded the police officers investigating the Paris attacks.

Earlier this month, the authorities raided the apartment in Forest that Khalid had rented. A suspect, Mohamed Belkaid, 35, was killed and four police officers were injured. Two men escaped; it is not clear if they were the Bakraoui brothers.

The police had been searching for Salah Abdeslam, one of the Paris attackers who had been on the run for four months. A fingerprint belonging to Mr. Abdeslam was found in the apartment. A week later, on March 18, he was arrested at a different apartment in Brussels.

His arrest may have put pressure on Ibrahim, who wrote in his will, found by police after Tuesday’s attacks, that he feared ending up “next to him in a cell” — referring, possibly, to Mr. Abdeslam.

The Brussels Attacks

Ibrahim el-Bakraoui blew himself up at 7:58 a.m. on Tuesday in the departure hall at Brussels Airport, along with a second suicide bomber who has not been identified. At least one accomplice fled.

At 9:11 a.m., Khalid blew himself up inside the second car of a subway train as it was pulling out of the Maelbeek station in Brussels toward the Arts-Loi station, to the west.

Hours later, the authorities found large quantities of explosives and bomb-making equipment in a house in the Schaerbeek section of Brussels, where the brothers had stayed.

Reporting was contributed by Lilia Blaise, Aurelien Breeden, Kimiko de Freytas-Tamura and Alissa Rubin from Brussels, Benoît Morenne from Paris and Ceylan Yeginsu from Istanbul.

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