

## At least 57 Paris airport workers on terror watchlist

MATTHEW CAMPBELL, The Times, November 29, 2015 11:00AM



Soldiers stand on the tarmac of the Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris.

France has ordered a review of the security passes of tens of thousands of employees at the country's main airport after the discovery that 57 workers with access to runways and aircraft were on an intelligence watchlist as potential Islamist extremists.

It emerged yesterday that dozens of workers had their security badges blocked or withdrawn after terror attacks in January, but others continued to work at Charles de Gaulle Airport despite appearing in security files.

Philippe Riffault, the police official in charge of airport security, said 86,000 passes for the airport would be "reviewed" in co-ordination with the intelligence services. The process would begin with 5,000 airport security personnel.

"It's a question of verifying what these people might have been doing since they obtained their authorisation," Riffault said.

Police carried out extensive searches of the airport under state of emergency powers following the Paris attacks. Some airport workers suspected of radical ties were placed under house arrest.

The airport alert coincided with complaints this weekend by easyJet that four of its aircraft at French airports had been daubed with Arabic graffiti.

Belgium, where a number of the Paris attackers had lived, has also withdrawn or blocked the security badges of several airport workers after discovering some had links to Islamist militants who had travelled to Syria.

Bernard Cazeneuve, the French interior minister, said yesterday that 1,000 people considered a threat had been prevented from entering his country's territory since the state of emergency was announced two weeks ago.

Anger has grown over the French government's failure to monitor suspected jihadists and its mismanagement of the 20,000 people with so-called "S files", identifying them as "potential threats to the state".

Half are suspected of ties to Islamic radicals, and about 3,000 live and work in and around Paris — some of them at the airport.

There has also been anxiety about "creeping radicalism" among bus, Metro and railway employees. Samy Amimour, one of the gunmen who blew himself up in the Bataclan concert hall in Paris, was able to get a job as a bus driver even while figuring on the intelligence list.

It emerged last week that RATP, the transport company that employed Amimour, is a hotbed of Islamic fundamentalism, with drivers refusing to shake hands with female employees or take over buses previously driven by women.

Meanwhile, the hunt continued yesterday for Salah Abdeslam, the only one of the Paris attackers to have escaped. He was said to have enjoyed a coffee and a leisurely chat with a friend in a cafe in Brussels on the day after the attacks.

It also emerged yesterday he had bought 10 detonators from an explosives company in Saint-Ouen-l'Aumone, a town northwest of Paris. The owner came forward after seeing Abdeslam's picture in the media after the attacks.

Mohamed Abdeslam, the one brother of Salah who was thought to have had a clean record, was reportedly convicted in 2010 of stealing from accident victims while working for the ambulance service. A third brother, Brahim, blew himself up in the Paris attacks.