

Beat: News

UK police: Missing British girls, 16, traveled to Syria

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USPA News - Two 16-year-old twin girls who were reported missing from their home in northwestern England are now believed to have crossed into Syria, British police said on Wednesday, nearly two weeks after the girls secretly boarded a flight to Turkey. The two sisters, whose names have not been released by police, were reported missing from their home in Manchester on June 26. Police later found the girls had secretly taken a flight from Manchester Airport to Turkey, after which the sisters made contact with their family back in England.

Detective Chief Superintendent Tony Mole, the head of Greater Manchester Police's North West Counter Terrorism Unit (NWCTU), said Wednesday that investigators now believe the girls have crossed the Turkish border into neighboring Syria, where hundreds of British Muslims have gone to fight in the country's civil war. "Since this story broke in the media at the weekend there has been a lot of speculation about why the girls left the country. At this stage we don't know for sure why they are there or exactly who they are with," Mole said. "As this is now developing into an investigation, the North West Counter Terrorism Unit is leading on this inquiry." Mole said the "overarching priority" of police is to make sure the teenagers are safe. "They are clearly posing a threat to themselves and potentially the community and their family and friends are concerned for their well-being," the official said, emphasizing the importance of the National Prevent Program to stop those at risk of being radicalized from traveling to a dangerous region. The crisis in Syria began as a pro-democracy protest movement in March 2011, but a violent crackdown by the Syrian government led to an armed conflict which extremist groups have taken advantage of. An al-Qaeda splinter group now controls much of northeastern Syria, as well as parts of Iraq, and recently declared itself a "caliphate" in its efforts to establish an Islamic State.

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