

French Terror Suspects in Phone Contact, Want 'Martyr' Death

09/01/2015



The two brothers suspected in a deadly terror attack Wednesday were cornered by police Friday inside a printing house in the small industrial town of Dammartin-en-Goele. One lawmaker said they told negotiators they "want to die as martyrs."

Hours later, a gunman seized an unknown number of hostages at a kosher market in eastern Paris, France's anti-terrorism prosecutor said. A police official, who was not authorized to speak to the media about the events, told The Associated Press there were several hostages and wounded in the kosher market.

Police SWAT squads descended on the area near Paris' Porte de Vincennes neighborhood and France's top security official rushed to the scene. The attack came before sundown when the market would have been crowded with shoppers.

France has been high alert for other attacks since the country's worst terror attack in decades - the massacre Wednesday in Paris that left 12 people dead at the satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo. But French officials could not confirm reports of a link between the hostage-taker at the kosher market Friday and the two suspects holed up at the printing house.

French security forces had poured into Dammartin-en-Goele near Charles de Gaulle airport after the two terror suspects hijacked a car early Friday in a nearby town.

One of the men had been convicted of terrorism charges in 2008, the other had visited Yemen.

A U.S. official said both brothers - 32-year-old Cherif Kouachi and 34-year-old Said Kouachi - were on the American no-fly list.

"They said they want to die as martyrs," Yves Albarello, a local lawmaker who said he was inside the command post, told French television station i-Tele.

At least three helicopters hovered over the town, and authorities appealed for residents to stay inside. Charles de Gaulle closed two runways to arrivals to avoid interfering in the standoff, an airport spokesman said.

Authorities evacuated a school near the CTF Creation Tendance Decouverte printing plant around midday Friday after the suspects agreed by phone to allow the children safe passage, town spokeswoman Audrey Taupenas told The Associated Press. About an hour later, an AP reporter counted nine large, empty buses headed toward the area, apparently to evacuate the children.

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Taupenas said there appeared to be one hostage, a number confirmed by a police official on the scene who was not allowed to discuss the operation.

A man who said he had his car stolen early Friday told Europe 1 the first man who approached him was armed with machine gun and the second man had a gun "with a kind of grenade at the end."

Tens of thousands of French security forces have mobilized to prevent a new terror attack since the assault on Charlie Hebdo, which decimated its editorial staff, including the chief editor who had been under armed guard after receiving death threats for publishing caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad. He and his police bodyguard were the first to die, witnesses said.

Cherif and Said Kouachi were named as the chief suspects after Said's identity card was left behind in their abandoned getaway car. Prime Minister Manuel Valls has said both suspects had been known to intelligence services before the attack.

Louis Zenon, a 14-year-old who lives close to siege site, watched as helicopters hovered over closed-off industrial area.

"There is a lot of fear," he said, adding everyone he knew was staying home with their doors and shutters closed. "We're scared. The schools are being evacuated."

A senior U.S. official said Thursday the elder Kouachi had traveled to Yemen, although it was

unclear whether he was there to join extremist groups like al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, which is based there. Witnesses said he claimed allegiance to the group during the attack.

The younger brother, Cherif, was convicted of terrorism charges in 2008 for his links to a network sending jihadis to fight American forces in Iraq.

Both were also on the U.S. no-fly list, a senior U.S. counterterrorism official said. The American officials also spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss foreign intelligence publicly.

Nine people, members of the brothers' entourage, have been detained for questioning in several regions. In all, 90 people, many of them witnesses to the grisly assault on the satirical weekly, were questioned for information on the attackers, Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve said.

A third suspect, 18-year-old Mourad Hamyd, surrendered at a police station Wednesday evening after hearing his name linked to the attacks. His relationship to the Kouachi brothers was unclear.

The Kouachi brothers, born in Paris to Algerian parents, were well-known to French counterterrorism authorities. Cherif Kouachi, a former pizza deliveryman, had appeared in a 2005 French TV documentary on Islamic extremism and was sentenced to 18 months in prison in 2008 for trying to join up with fighters battling in Iraq.

Charlie Hebdo had long drawn threats for its depictions of Islam, although it also satirized other religions and political figures. The weekly paper had caricatured the Prophet Muhammad, and a sketch of Islamic State's leader was the last tweet sent out by the irreverent newspaper, minutes before the attack. Nothing has been tweeted since.

Eight journalists, two police officers, a maintenance worker and a visitor were killed in the attack.

Charlie Hebdo planned a special edition next week, produced in the offices of another paper.

Authorities around Europe have warned of the threat posed by the return of Western jihadis trained in warfare. France counts at least 1,200 citizens in the war zone in Syria - headed there, returned or dead. Both the Islamic State group and al-Qaida have threatened France, home to Western Europe's largest Muslim population.
