

# Belgian Police Kill Two In Anti-Terror Raid

BY RAF CASERT AND LORNE COOK  
Associated Press

VERVIERS, Belgium — With Europe dreading more terror, Belgian authorities moved swiftly to pre-empt what they called a major attack by as little as hours Thursday, killing two suspects in a firefight and arresting a third in a vast anti-terrorism sweep that stretched into the night.

The police raid on a former bakery in this provincial rust-belt town was another palpable sign that terror had seeped deep into Europe's heartland as security forces struck against returnees from Islamic holy war in Syria.

"As soon as I opened the window, you could smell the gunpowder," said neighbor Alexandre Massaux following a minutes-long firefight with automatic weapons and Kalashnikovs that was also punctuated by explosions.

Two suspects were killed and a third arrested and charged with belonging to a terrorist organization.

"As soon as they thought special forces were there, they opened fire," federal magistrate Eric Van der Sypt said.

After the gun smoke lifted, police continued with searches in Verviers and the greater Brussels area, seeking more clues in a weeks-long investigation that started well before the terrorism spree last week that led to 17 deaths in the Paris area. The Belgian operations had no apparent link to the terrorist acts committed in France.

And, unlike the Paris terrorists, who attacked the office of a satirical newspaper and a kosher grocery store, the suspects in Belgium were reportedly aiming at hard targets: police installations.

"They were on the verge of committing important terror attacks," Van der Sypt told a



Source: AP  
Graphic: Tribune News Service

news conference in Brussels.

Across Europe, anxiety has grown as the manhunt continues for potential accomplices of the three Paris terrorists, all of whom were shot dead by French police. Authorities in Belgium signaled they were ready for more trouble by raising the national terror alert level from 2 to 3, the second-highest level.

"It shows we have to be extremely careful," Van der Sypt said. The Verviers suspects "were extremely well-armed men" equipped with automatic weapons, he said. Authorities have previously said 300 Belgian residents have gone to fight with extremist Islamic formations in Syria; it is unclear how many have returned.

"It sent shivers down my spine to think about it" that the suspects could have been trained in Syria, Massaux said.

Prime Minister Charles Michel said the increase in the threat level was "a choice for prudence."

"There is no concrete or specific knowledge of new elements of threat," he said.

The suspects in Verviers opened fire on police when they closed in on them near the city's train station, the magistrate told reporters. There was an intense firefight for several minutes. Video posted online showed a dark view of a building amid blasts,

gunshots and sirens, and a fire with smoke billowing up.

No police were wounded or killed in the clash, which occurred at the height of rush hour in a crowded neighborhood of this former industrial town of 56,000 about 80 miles (125 kilometers) southeast of the capital, Brussels.

Earlier Thursday, Belgian authorities said they were looking into possible links between a man they arrested in the southern city of Charleroi for illegal trade in weapons and Amedy Coulibaly, who killed four people in a Paris kosher market last week.

The man arrested in Belgium "claims that he wanted to buy a car from the wife of Coulibaly," Van der Sypt said. "At this moment this is the only link between what happened in Paris."

Van der Sypt said that "of course, naturally" we are continuing the investigation.

At first, the man came to police himself claiming there had been contact with Coulibaly's common-law wife regarding the car, but he was arrested following a search of his premises when indications of illegal weapons trading were found.

A Belgian connection figured in a 2010 French criminal investigation into a foiled terrorist plot in which Coulibaly was one of the convicted co-conspirators. The plotters included a Brussels-area contact who was supposed to furnish both weapons and ammunition, according to French judicial documents obtained by The Associated Press.

Several other countries are also involved in the hunt for possible accomplices to Coulibaly and the other gunmen in the French attacks, brothers Cherif and Said Kouachi.

In Spain, authorities said Coulibaly drove his common-law wife from France to

Madrid on Dec. 31 and was with her until she took a Jan. 2 flight to Istanbul.

Spain's National Court said in a statement it was investigating what Coulibaly did in the country's capital with his wife, Hayat Boumeddiene, and a third person who wasn't identified but is suspected of helping Boumeddiene get from Turkey to Syria.

France is on edge since last week's attacks, which began at the satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo. The paper, repeatedly threatened for its caricatures of the Muslim Prophet Muhammad, buried several of its slain staff members Thursday even as it reprinted another weekly issue with Muhammad on its cover.

Also, defense officials said France was under an unprecedented cyber assault with 19,000 cyberattacks launched after the country's bloodiest terrorist attacks in decades, frustrating authorities as they try to thwart repeat violence.

Around 120,000 security forces are deployed to prevent future attacks. Calling it an unprecedented surge, Adm. Arnaud Coustiller, head of cyberdefense for the French military, said about 19,000 French websites had faced cyberattacks in recent days, some carried out by well-known Islamic hacker groups.

The attacks, mostly relatively minor denial-of-service attacks, hit sites as varied as military regiments to pizza shops but none appeared to have caused serious damage, he said. Military authorities launched round-the-clock surveillance to protect the government sites still coming under attack.

The Kouachi brothers claimed allegiance to al-Qaida in Yemen, and Coulibaly to the Islamic State group.

## Parents Saw Change In Terror Defendant

CINCINNATI (AP) — Christopher Lee Cornell showed little direction in his life, spending hours playing video games in his bedroom in his parents' apartment, rarely going out or working, and voicing distrust of the government and the media. But in recent weeks, his parents say, they noticed a change in him.

They thought it was a change for the better: The 20-year-old suburban Cincinnati man was helping his mother around the house, cooking meals, sitting with his parents to watch movies, and talking about having become a Muslim.

"He said, 'I'm at peace with myself,'" his father, John Cornell, recalled Thursday — a day after his son was arrested in an FBI sting and charged with plotting to attack the U.S. Capitol with pipe bombs and guns and kill government officials.

The arrest came with U.S. counterterrorism authorities on high alert against homegrown extremists and "lone wolves" — disaffected or disturbed individuals who hold radical beliefs but have no direct connection to a terrorist organization.

The bearded, long-haired Cornell was taken into custody outside a gun range and store west of Cincinnati after, the FBI said, he bought two M-15 semi-automatic rifles and 600 rounds of ammunition as part of a plan to go to Washington.

## Flu Vaccine Didn't Include Right Virus

NEW YORK (AP) — As predicted, this year's flu vaccine is doing a pretty crummy job. It's only 23 percent effective, primarily because it doesn't include the bug that is making most people sick, according to a government study released Thursday.

That's one of the worst performances in the last decade, since U.S. health officials started routinely tracking how well vaccines work. In the best flu seasons, the vaccines were 50 to 60 percent effective.

"This is an uncommon year," said Dr. Alicia Fry, a flu vaccine expert at the Atlanta-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, who was involved in the study.

The findings are not surprising. In early December, CDC officials warned the vaccine probably wouldn't work very well because it isn't well matched to a strain that's been spreading widely.

Each year, the flu vaccine is reformulated, based on experts' best guess at which three or four strains will be the biggest problem. Those decisions are usually made in February, months before the flu season, to give companies that make flu shots and nasal spray vaccine enough time to make enough doses.

## Duke Cancels Call-To-Prayer Plans

DURHAM, N.C. (AP) — Duke University canceled its plan to use a chapel tower for a weekly call to prayer for Muslims after getting bombarded with calls and emails from alumni and others, officials said Thursday.

Instead, Muslims will gather for their call to prayer in a grassy area in front of the chapel before heading into a room in the chapel for their weekly prayer service. The university had initially said a moderately amplified call to prayer would be read by members of the Muslim Students Association from the tower for about three minutes each Friday.

Schoenfeld said it would up to the students if they want to use some sort of speaker or megaphone.

"There was considerable traffic and conversation and even a little bit of confusion, both within the campus and certainly outside, about what Duke was doing," said Michael Schoenfeld, vice president for public affairs and government relations. "The purposes and goals and even the facts had been so mischaracterized as to turn it into a divisive situation, not a unifying situation."

The plan drew the ire of evangelist Franklin Graham, the son of the Rev. Billy Graham, who urged Duke alumni to withhold support because of violence against Christians that he attributed to Muslims. He wrote on Facebook that the decision is playing out as "Christianity is being excluded from the public square."

# U.S. Eases Travel And Trade Rules On Cuba

BY BRADLEY KLAPPER AND MICHAEL WEISSENSTEIN  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Swiftly expanding trade ties with Cuba, the Obama administration opened the door to easier travel and a wide range of new export opportunities with the communist island starting Friday, punching the biggest hole to date in America's half-century-old embargo.

Less than a month after the Cold War foes agreed to end their enmity, the Commerce and Treasury departments unveiled new rules Thursday permitting U.S. citizens to visit Cuba without special permits. Most U.S. travelers still will be required to go on supervised group trips, but now virtually any U.S. company or organization can offer such trips without the paperwork and inspections that discouraged past expansion of travel to Cuba. Some tour operators, already seeing unprecedented interest in legal travel to Cuba, expect some tourists to simply ignore the restrictions.

American companies also now will be permitted to export telephones, computers and Internet technology, and to send supplies to private Cuban firms. However, Cuban authorities have said nothing about the restrictions they might impose on U.S. products entering a country that has long frustrated foreign investors with red tape and tapped-out infrastructure.

The changes are the latest step in President Barack Obama's plan to rebuild relations with Cuba after a history marred by suspicion, espionage and conflict. The new regulations come three days after U.S. officials confirmed the release of 53 political prisoners Cuba had promised to free.

The U.S. is now "one step closer to replacing out-of-date policies," Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew said Thursday. White House spokesman Josh Earnest said the new rules "immediately enable the American people to provide more resources to empower the Cuban population to become less dependent upon the state-driven economy."

They also allow U.S. citizens to start bringing home small amounts of Cuban cigars, long adored by aficionados but banned under U.S. law. The limit is \$100 for alcohol and tobacco products and \$400 in total goods.

Only Congress can fully end the 54-year embargo. Obama announced last month he would soften the restrictions, arguing that "these 50 years have shown that isolation has not worked." The new spirit of cooperation emerged after 18 months of secret talks that culminated in the exchange of imprisoned spies and the release of Alan Gross, a U.S. government contractor who had been imprisoned in Cuba for five years.

The few U.S. companies facilitating travel to Cuba say inquiries have exploded since

December and American visits are expected to surge this year from about 90,000 annually. "We're hiring more people. We've secured more hotel rooms and assets in Cuba to provide additional travel," said Tom Popper, president of New York-based insightCuba.

Commercial flights between the two nations are still some time away. Before airlines offer routine service from one country to another, the two governments must agree on the terms in a treaty.

Such an agreement did exist between the U.S. and Cuba in the 1950s. However, Thursday afternoon the U.S. Transportation Department posted a notice saying the two nations need to start fresh. The U.S. airlines with 1950s permission to fly to Cuba will not suddenly regain that right and are not favored in the government's new deliberations.

"The U.S. government will engage with the government of Cuba to assess our aviation relations and establish a bilateral basis for further expansion of air services," Susan L. Kurland, the department's assistant secretary for aviation and international affairs, wrote in the notice.

United Airlines, Delta Air Lines and JetBlue Airways have all expressed an interest in flying to the island nation.

Hotels in Havana and elsewhere generally fall short of international standards, and those with better food and service are almost always fully booked during the winter high season. So the tourism surge could be challenging.

"American tourists are really demanding," said Maikel Gonzalez, a 34-year-old hotel receptionist in Havana. "How do I explain to one that the taxi didn't come because it doesn't have tires or that there's no water in the rooms?"

Cubans also can legally rent out their homes or apartments, which could mean money outside of state control going to private citizens — something American officials say they want.

Most of the other possible changes now depend on Cuban President Raul Castro's government.

U.S. officials say American companies will have to weigh for themselves the risks of their exports colliding with Cuban bans.

Profitability is another issue. Foreign companies operating in Cuba currently deal almost entirely with state-owned firms that are notoriously slow, inefficient and short on cash.

Also casting a shadow on potential deals is the possibility of litigation by Cuban-Americans and U.S. firms whose property was confiscated in Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution. Some may sue companies entering into business with the Cuban government. In Washington, Congress may also seek to erect barriers to new investment. The sudden rapprochement

between Cold War foes has divided U.S. lawmakers. Republican Marco Rubio of Florida and Democrat Bob Menendez of New Jersey, both Cuban-Americans, have been particularly opposed.

But some business groups have welcomed the opportunity to open a new export market in a country 90 miles from Florida. Thomas Donohue, head of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, said Wednesday it was better for the U.S. to sell computers, smartphones and cars to Cuba than to cede such business to countries like Russia and China.

Cuba is already awash in American products brought in people's luggage, including

iPhones and flat-screen TVs. The main barriers to Internet access are high prices and restrictions imposed by a government desperate for hard currency and worried about allowing citizens unrestricted communications. It's unclear if Cuba's government has grown more comfortable providing such access.

Cuban officials are keen on greater travel by American tourists and the hundreds of thousands of Cuban-Americans who currently visit the island each year under a general license.

American officials stress that a general travel prohibition for Americans remains in force.

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