

Suicide vest found in Paris raises possible link to suspect

By **RAF CASERT** and **ELAINE GANLEY**
Associated Press

BRUSSELS — A street cleaner found an explosive vest similar to those used in the Paris attacks on Monday near the place where a suspect’s mobile phone had been found, raising the possibility that he aborted his mission, either ditching a malfunctioning vest — or fleeing in fear.

The discovery of the vest came as Belgium’s prime minister cited a “serious and imminent” threat justifying keeping the highest alert level operational for at least another week. The security measures, already in place for three days, have severely disrupted normal life in the capital.

In France, police said an explosive vest — without a detonator — was found by a street cleaner in a pile of rubble in Chatillon-Montrouge, on the southern edge of Paris and a considerable distance from the sites of the attacks on the Right Bank of the Seine to the north. A police official later said the vest contained bolts and the same type of explosives — TATP — as those used in the Nov. 13 Paris attacks that claimed 130 lives and left hundreds wounded.

The device was found Monday in the same area where a cellphone belonging to fugitive suspect Salah Abdeslam was located on the day of the Paris attacks but the vest has not been formally linked to him, said two police officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the investigation.

Belgium-based terrorism expert Claude Moniquet, who has been in contact with both Belgian and French investigators since the attacks, laid out two possibilities: that Abdeslam became afraid of carrying out a suicide mission or, more likely he says, that he simply ditched a defective explosive vest.

Nervousness could have played a role in concocting a defective vest, but he said he doubted fear played a role for among Islamic State followers, “it is rare not to go to the end.”



Angelo Carconi/ANSA via AP
A soldier patrols outside Rome’s Termini main train station, Monday. Italy and the Vatican beefed up security with some 700 soldiers deployed following the Paris attacks and before Pope Francis’ big Jubilee Year starting Dec. 8.

Moniquet said this was only theory since he had not yet spoken to investigators about the explosive vest find.

A manhunt is underway for Abdeslam, whose brother Brahim was among attackers who blew themselves up. He crossed the border into Belgium after the attacks, with French police stopping and interviewing him, before letting him go.

Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel said Brussels, which houses the headquarters of the European Union and NATO, faced a “serious and imminent” threat that requires keeping the city at the highest alert level, while the rest of the country would stay at the second-highest level. Belgium’s crisis center said the alert level would only change if a significant breakthrough warranted it.

The increased security measures in the wake of the massacre in Paris have virtually shut down the Belgian capital, with the subway system, many shops and schools remaining shut on Monday. Michel said that despite the continued high-alert level, schools would reopen Wednesday, with parts of the subway system beginning to operate. He did not say when the system would be completely online again.

“We are very alert and call for caution,” Michel said.

“The potential targets remain the same: shopping centers and shopping streets and public transport.”

“We want to return to a normal way of life as quickly as possible,” he added.

Belgian authorities have not announced any details of their investigation into potential attacks nor have they released information about four suspects who have been arrested and charged with terrorism-related offenses. These include one suspect who was arrested as part of a sweep that saw 21 people detained since Sunday night. Fifteen of those detainees have since been released.

Frank Foley, a terrorism expert and lecturer in war studies at King’s College London, said it was difficult to know if the Belgian operations were justified because authorities have provided few details. The measures could even be counterproductive if they last too long, he said.

“If these dramatic measures continue in Brussels, we will be doing the terrorists’ job for them,” Foley said. “The government may be unintentionally contributing to the atmosphere of fear.”

Henry Willis, director of RAND Homeland Security and Defense Center, likened the clampdown to the reaction of U.S. authorities after the Boston Marathon bombing.

“They did shut down the city for a couple of days and when they lifted those restrictions, that’s when they caught the terrorist,” he said.

Several of the Paris attackers had lived in Brussels, including Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the man who authorities say orchestrated the plot. He was killed Wednesday in a standoff with French police.

French authorities issued a new appeal for help in identifying one of the three attackers who was killed in the assault near the national stadium. They posted a photo of the man on Twitter Sunday asking the public for information.

Greek police confirmed the man posed as an asylum seeker before the carnage. Public Order Minister Nikos Toskas said the man traveled to the island of Leros on Oct. 3, but he gave no further details.

Two senior Greek law enforcement officials told The Associated Press that the man traveled with another attacker, identified as Ahmad Al Mohammad. Both men were rescued by the Greek coast guard while traveling from Turkey on a boat carrying nearly 200 migrants and refugees that sank before reaching Greece. The officials requested anonymity because they weren’t authorized to speak to the media.

White House asks allies to step up in campaign against IS

By **KATHLEEN HENNESSEY**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The White House urged allies on Monday to do more in the campaign against the Islamic State, while President Barack Obama faced pressure in return to show the U.S.-led coalition will intensify efforts in response to the Paris attacks, even without a major shift in strategy.

Requests for more counterintelligence, military and humanitarian assistance came a day before French President Francois Hollande was to arrive at the White House to discuss the fight against the extremists believed to be behind the Nov. 13 attacks that killed 130 people. Hollande, who next visits Russian President Vladimir Putin, is expected to seek more coordinated military operations that would include both the U.S. and Moscow.

Obama has shown no inclination to rethink the U.S. strategy or significantly expand America’s commitment, despite pressure from Hollande, Republican critics and some members of his own Democratic Party. However, Secretary of State John Kerry said in Abu Dhabi that both he and the president would like to see progress against the Islamic State “go faster.”

At the White House, spokesman Josh Earnest said the U.S. may step up efforts supporting strategies believed to be working

— airstrikes and train-and-assist missions in Syria and Iraq — but he played down the possibility of any surge of new American resources into the fight.

The U.S. is “pulling more than our weight” in the coalition, Earnest said. “And we believe that there is more that can be done if countries are willing to contribute additional resources.”

Vice President Joe Biden sought those resources from allies at a meeting with ambassadors from 59 of the 65 countries in the coalition. The discussion focused on what more the countries could do to cut off financing for the Islamic State’s global network and how to stem the flow of fighters crossing into Syria and Iraq to join the group, the State Department said.

Biden spoke separately Monday with Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi. The White House said Biden highlighted “ongoing U.S. efforts to mobilize increased support for Iraq among the 65-member counter-ISIL coalition.”

Separately, the U.S. military said it had destroyed 283 tanker trucks used by IS militants to transport oil from producing fields in eastern Syria to smuggling points, an acceleration of attacks aimed at crippling the group’s oil revenues. The attack by four A-10 attack planes and two AC-130 gunships was carried out Saturday at a site near Deir el-Zour and al-Hasakah but not made public until Monday.

Mali releases photos of slain gunmen in hotel attack

BAMAKO, Mali (AP) — State media broadcast photos Monday of the two slain attackers of a luxury hotel in Mali’s capital, appealing for anyone who knew them to come forward with information about the gunmen.

The photos of the two young men were taken after Friday’s rampage at the Radisson Blu hotel in which 19 people were killed, said Capt. Baba Cisse at the Interior Ministry.

The gunmen, who shouted “God is great!” in Arabic as they attacked, were shot to death by security forces following a more than seven-hour siege in the capital of the West African country.

Officials also put out phone numbers, urging people who might have known them to call with information.

The decision to release the photos came a day after the Islamic extremist group that first claimed responsibility for the attack purported to identify the gunmen in an audio recording, according to Al-Akhbar, a Mauritanian news site that often receives messages from Malian extremists.

The group known as Al-Mourabitoun — or The Sentinels — identified the gunmen as Abdel Hakim Al-Ansari and Moadh

Al-Ansari, a report posted Sunday by Al-Akhbar said. No nationalities were given, though the name “Al-Ansari” suggests they were Malian.

But Cisse said Malian authorities had not confirmed the men’s identities.

Al-Mourabitoun’s claims could not be independently verified.

Malian officials have said they are searching for more than three suspects who may have been involved in the attack, though they gave no other details.

The extremist group said the two men were the only attackers. Initial reports from witnesses and officials suggested there could have been as many as 10 gunmen involved in the attack on the hotel in the former French colony.

Authorities released a detailed list of the 138 people from more than 20 countries evacuated from the hotel during the attack, including 18 from France, 17 from India and five from the United States. There also were guests from Spain, Russia, Germany, Algeria, Turkey and a half-dozen countries in Africa.

The dead included six Russians, three Chinese, and one American, as well as victims from Belgium, Israel, Senegal and Mali.

U.S. issues travel warning in wake of terror attacks

WASHINGTON (AP) — Americans should be alert to the possible travel risks, especially during the holidays, following increased terrorist threats around the world, the State Department warned on Monday.

A travel alert, which is to be in effect until Feb. 24, said current information suggests that militants with the Islamic State, al-Qaida, Boko Haram and other terrorist groups continue to plan attacks in multiple regions. U.S. authorities said the likelihood of terror attacks will continue as members of IS return from Syria and Iraq, and other individuals not affiliated with terror groups engage in violence on their own.

Extremists have targeted sporting events, theaters, open markets and aviation targets. In the past year, there have been multiple attacks in France, Nigeria, Denmark, Lebanon, Turkey and Mali. IS has claimed responsibility for the Oct. 31 bombing of a Russian airliner in Egypt, killing 224 people.

“U.S. citizens should exercise vigilance when in public places or using transportation,” the alert said. “Be aware of immediate surroundings and avoid large crowds or crowded places. Exercise particular caution during the holiday season and at holiday festivals or events.”

The State Department said the U.S. is exchanging information with allies about threats of international terrorism.

Social media helps drive Cuban exodus to U.S.

PENAS BLANCAS, Costa Rica (AP) — As summer began to bake the central Cuban city of Sancti Spiritus, Elio Alvarez and Lideisy Hernandez sold their tiny apartment and everything in it for \$5,000 and joined the largest migration from their homeland in decades.

Buying two smartphones for \$160 apiece on a layover on their way to Ecuador, they plugged themselves into a highly organized, well-funded and increasingly successful homebrewed effort to make human traffickers

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obsolete by using smartphones and messaging apps on much of the 3,400-mile overland journey that’s become Cubans’ main route to the U.S.

Some 45,000 Cubans are expected to move by bus, boat, taxi and on foot from Ecuador and other South and Central American countries to the Texas and California borders this year, afraid that the normalization of relations between the U.S. and Cuba will mean an imminent end to special immigration privileges that date to the opening of the Cold War. With thousands more taking rafts across the Florida Straits, 2015 may witness the biggest outflow of Cubans since the 1980 Mariel boatlift that hauled 125,000 people across the Florida Straits.

The overland exodus has caused a border crisis in Central America, set off tensions in the newly friendly U.S.-Cuban relationship and sparked rising calls in the U.S. to end Cubans’ automatic right to legal residency once they touch U.S. soil.

At the heart of it all is Cubans’ ability to cross some of the world’s most dangerous territory relatively unscathed by the corrupt border guards, criminal gangs and human traffickers known as coyotes who make life hell for so many other Latin American migrants. Key to that ability is the constant flow of information between migrants starting the journey and those who have just completed it.

2 men charged with murder in killing of pastor’s wife

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Authorities charged two young men with murder on Monday in the fatal shooting of a pastor’s pregnant wife during a home invasion that happened after the minister left the couple’s Indianapolis home without locking the front door.

Amanda Blackburn, 28, was found partially nude, with her underwear nearby and her shirt pulled up, lying in a pool of blood on her living room floor. She died one day after the Nov. 10 attack on Indianapolis’ northwest side.

Her husband, Pastor Davey

Blackburn, told police he had left the home’s front door unlocked when he departed about 6 a.m. that morning to go to the gym and work out and returned home about 8:20 a.m. to find his wounded wife. The couple’s 15-month-old son, Weston, was at home upstairs in a crib but was not harmed in the attack.

Marion County Prosecutor Terry Curry identified the two men charged with murder as Larry Jo Taylor Jr., 18, and Jalen E. Watson, 21, both of Indianapolis, who face murder, burglary, theft and several other charges. A probable cause affidavit says that Taylor shot Blackburn three times, including once in the back of the head.

Watson also faces a murder charge because Blackburn was killed during a burglary in which prosecutors allege that he was involved.

Police hunt suspects in New Orleans park

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Police on Monday sought to determine what touched off a wild shootout in a crowd of hundreds of people at a New Orleans playground, where an evening of fun at a block party swiftly turned into a nightmare.

The shootout, combined with the recent shooting of a good Samaritan who tried to help a woman who was being dragged toward a vehicle, put a city that has long struggled with violence on edge.

“No one feels safe,” said Peter Scharf, a Louisiana State University professor who studies crime.

The Sunday night shootout happened as hundreds of people — possibly as many as 500 — gathered at the Bunny Friend Playground in what police described as a block party. A music video was also being filmed there. Police said neither event had a permit.

Officers were nearby overseeing a neighborhood parade when they received reports of a large crowd at the park. The shooting happened while they were on their way over to disperse the gathering. Two groups pulled out weapons and started firing, police said.

2015 Christmas Spirit Award

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The Good Shepherd Community Health Foundation invites you to nominate that person for our twentieth annual “Christmas Spirit Award”.

Nominations may be made by calling the Foundation at 667-3419 to receive a nomination form, or online at gshealth.org/foundation. Please send completed nomination forms by December 7, 2015 to Good Shepherd Community Health Foundation, 610 NW 11th St, Hermiston, OR 97838. Nominations may also be submitted via email to carstein@gshealth.org.



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