Beat: News

French hostage crises end with deaths of 3 suspects, 4 hostages

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USPA News - Two hostage crises in the Paris area came to a dramatic conclusion Friday when French security forces moved in, resulting in firefights in which three suspects were killed, including two brothers suspected in the attack on Charlie Hebdo earlier this week. Four hostages were also killed.

The events began at around 7 a.m. local time when the two brothers, Cherif and Said Kouachi, hijacked a car in Montagny-Sainte-FÃƒÂ©licitÃƒÂ©, north of Paris, leading to a police chase during which shots were fired. The gunmen then stopped at an industrial estate in Dammartin-en-GoÃƒÂ«le, northeast of Paris, where they entered a printing shop and took a hostage who was eventually released. Hours later, just after noon, as the siege in Dammartin-en-GoÃƒÂ«le continued, a man identified as Amedy Coulibaly entered a kosher supermarket near Porte de Vincennes in eastern Paris and took more than a dozen hostages. It happened as French police identified Coulibaly as a suspect in Thursday`s killing of police officer Clarissa Jean-Philippe in Paris. The two crises continued for hours as thousands of law enforcement officers were called in to help deal with the situation, which closed some of the area`s busiest roads, prompted a number of schools to go on lockdown and led to several security scares and evacuations elsewhere in Paris. Just before 5 p.m., gunfire and explosions erupted at the business in Dammartin-en-GoÃƒÂ«le, resulting in the deaths of both brothers. Minutes later, security forces moved in on the supermarket in east Paris, prompting a brief gun battle in which Coulibaly was killed and four hostages were seriously injured. Fifteen other hostages escaped unhurt. French media initially reported that all hostages had been rescued safely, which was backed up by several officials, including the French ambassador to the United States. But the seemingly good news later took an unexpected turn when authorities confirmed that the bodies of four hostages had been recovered. Prosecutors believe the four hostages were killed before security forces intervened, possibly at the beginning of the siege. French President FranÃƒÂ§ois Hollande addressed the nation just before 8 p.m. and described Friday`s events as a tragedy. "I express my solidarity with the families of the victims and the wounded," he said. "I want to salute the effectiveness of gendarmes, police officers and all those who participated in this operation. They did it to save human lives, those of the hostages." Meanwhile, French police are continuing their search for a 26-year-old woman, identified as Hayat Boumeddiene, who is thought to have been Coulibaly`s girlfriend. Police have named Boumeddiene a suspect in Thursday`s killing of Officer Clarissa Jean-Philippe, but her exact role remains unclear. French TV channel BFMTV revealed after the end of the crises that it had spoken earlier in the day with Cherif Kouachi, who told a reporter that he was acting on behalf of and had been financed by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Coulibaly claimed in a separate interview that he was a member of the Islamic State (ISIS) and explained that he had "aligned" his actions with the Kouachi brothers. Amid the claims from the attackers themselves, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula released an audio statement on Friday night, praising "the blessed raid in Paris" and explaining that the attackers sought to teach "the limit of the freedom of expression" after "some of the sons of France were disrespectful to the prophets of Allah." The 5-minute audio recording, entitled "The Faces Succeeded," was posted to YouTube and threatened further attacks if France does not halt its military operations. The audio recording did not literally claim responsibility for the Paris attacks, though the language used suggests the group was directly involved. "Some of the sons of France were disrespectful to the prophets of Allah, so a group from among the believing soldiers of Allah marched unto them, then they taught them respect and the limit of the freedom of expression," said Harith bin Ghazi al-Nadhari, a senior religious leader of al-Qaeda`s Yemen branch, according to a translation by the SITE Intelligence Group. The leader added: "Soldiers who love Allah and His messengers have come unto you, and they do not fear death but adore martyrdom in the cause of Allah." Mohammed Albasha, a spokesman for the Yemeni Embassy in Washington, D.C., said the Yemeni government has launched a full investigation into the possible links of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula to the attacks in Paris, but provided no further details.

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