

Two men dead in Belgium counter-terror raids

Raids were carried out against a group suspected of preparing attacks on a grand scale, federal prosecutor says

Amateur footage purports to show scenes from a police counter-terrorism raid in the Belgian city of Verviers.

[Alexandra Topping](#) in London and [Julian Borger](#) in Paris
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Belgian police have killed two men in Verviers, eastern [Belgium](#), during one of about a dozen counter-terrorism raids against a group suspected of preparing to launch attacks on a grand scale, a federal prosecutor told a news conference.

A third man was arrested during the operation in the town of Verviers, Eric Van Der Sypt said, adding that there was, for the time being, no direct connection to last week's attacks in Paris. No police were injured in the operation, he said.

"The suspects immediately and for several minutes opened fire with military weaponry and handguns on the special units of the federal police before they were neutralised," he said.

The [Belga news agency](#) quoted officials as saying the targets of the raid had been under surveillance since recently returning from Syria. It said there were several casualties and that police activity was continuing.

[The Standaard news site](#), quoting police sources, reported: "The three men had been under long-term surveillance. They had come back from conflict zones, undoubtedly Syria, and they had planned an attack against a police station. They had Kalashnikovs."



Riot police block the Rue de la Colline in Verviers, Belgium, during an anti-terrorist operation. Photograph: Olivier Hoslet/EPA

There were also unconfirmed reports of other police counter-terrorist operations in other parts of Belgium. [La Libre news website](#) reported that police search operations, linked to the Verviers raid, were underway in at least three other places in Belgium: in Brussels, Molenbeek and Vilvorde.

Explosions and detonations reverberated in Verviers, near the train station, a witness told [RTBF](#). Named only as Marie-Laure, she said a helmeted police officer told her to leave the crossroads, where there was a small blue van and a car.

Police vehicles were at the scene, along with an anti-explosive unit and ambulances. Three or four explosions and tens of gunshots were heard.

There appeared to be police activity continuing at the scene in Verviers, some 70 miles from Brussels. A [video post on YouTube](#) by a man who said he was a local resident purported to show the police operation in Verviers. In video, which has not been independently verified, several gunshots can be heard and

flames appear to be coming from a building.

Mark Eeckhaut, crime reporter at the Standaard in Belgium, said police sources confirmed that the two men who had been killed were jihadis, while it was unclear who the third man was.

French police had reported they were looking for accomplices of the three Paris gunmen – Coulibaly, Saïd and Chérif Kouachi.

Belgium has seen significant radical Islamist activity. Authorities and studies by Britain's International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation have previously estimated that around 300 Belgians have travelled to Syria, a disproportionate number for a nation of 11 million. This compares to around 600 so-called foreign fighters who have left the UK for the war-torn country.

One of Belgium's best-known jihadist organisations – Sharia4Belgium – is at the heart of a huge, ongoing trial in Antwerp in which 46 members of the group have been accused of belonging to a terrorist organisation and brainwashing young men in Belgium into fighting a holy war in Syria.

And last year, a gunman killed four people [in a shooting at the Jewish museum in Brussels](#). Belgian authorities say the suspect in that case, French national Mehdi Nemmouche, spent most of 2013 fighting in Syria.