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Knife attack on soldier in Paris treated as terrorism

French anti-terrorist investigators are handling the case of a soldier stabbed while on duty near Paris on Saturday evening, prosecutors have confirmed.

The soldier was wounded while on patrol in La Defense, a business district west of the French capital.

Private First Class Cedric Cordier was approached from behind and stabbed in the neck with a small-bladed knife.

Defence Minister Jean Yves Le Drian told reporters that he had been targeted because of his profession.

His attacker, said to be a bearded man of North African origin, escaped and a police hunt is under way.

President Francois Hollande said there was no sign so far of a direct link with the killing of a soldier in London on Wednesday, for which two suspected Islamists were arrested.

France was rocked in March of last year by a string of killings by Islamist militant Mohamed Merah in the Toulouse area. He shot dead both French soldiers and Jewish schoolchildren before being killed in a police siege.

'Exploring all options'

In Saturday's attack, the soldier was on patrol with two other soldiers and police officers at La Defense's metro and train station, when he was approached from behind and stabbed in the neck with a knife or a box-cutter.

The attacker fled into a crowded shopping area before the other soldier and police officers were able to react.

A senior police officer said the 23-year-old victim had lost a considerable amount of blood but would survive.

French reports said the man had been wearing a light-coloured robe called a djellaba.

The attacker was monitored on security cameras and was seen taking off his robe and running away wearing European clothes, police officers said.

Nanterre prosecutor Robert Gelli told AFP news agency that anti-terrorist investigators were handling the case.

Interior Minister Manuel Valls told France 2 television: "There are elements - the sudden violence of the attack - that could lead one to believe there might be a comparison with what happened in London.

"But at this point, honestly, let us be prudent."

President Hollande also responded cautiously while on a visit to Ethiopia, telling reporters: "I do not think at this point that there may be a link."

"We still don't know the exact circumstances of the attack or the identity of the attacker, but we are exploring all options."

France is on high alert following a threat from the North African wing of al-Qaeda, related to the country's military intervention in Mali, reports the BBC's Christian Fraser in Paris.

The higher state of alert is one of the reasons why some 450 soldiers are on patrol at metro and train stations and other vulnerable locations in Paris.

London arrests

The two men suspected of the London attack, Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale, were shot and injured by police and remain in custody in hospital.

On Saturday British police arrested three other men on suspicion of conspiracy to murder the off-duty soldier, Drummer Lee Rigby. A sixth man was arrested on Thursday.

Meanwhile, the Kenyan government denied reports that Mr Adebolajo had been arrested there while seeking training from the Islamist militant group, al-Shabab, in Somalia.

Referring to allegations made by a friend of Mr Adebolajo that he was abused by security forces during a visit to Kenya last year, government spokesman Muthui Kariuki denied to the BBC that he had visited the country.

"I have been in touch with our security people, and I have been assured by all the relevant departments that 'Michael' has never been to this country."

Despite this denial, the Independent on Sunday [is one of a number of papers to feature a picture it says is of Mr Adebolajo appearing in court in Kenya](#) in 2010 accused "of being at the centre of an al-Qaeda-inspired plot"

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