

French Police Play Down Terrorism Fears After 5 Russians Detained

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French soldiers patrol in Paris.

News that five Chechens were detained in France with explosives stoked fears on Tuesday of an impending attack, but French police later downplayed any such threat, saying the suspects were sought in connection with organized crime, not terrorism.

"There is no information about planned attacks," French prosecutor Yvon Calvet was cited as saying Tuesday by the *Le Figaro* newspaper, adding that there was "no religious undertone" to the men's alleged crime.

Earlier, French media reports said five Chechen men had been detained in southern France on suspicion of plotting an attack and were found to be in possession of explosive devices.

French newspaper *Le Monde* cited Gilles Soulier, the head of the Montpellier police department, as saying none of the men taken into custody were on the country's counter-terrorism watch list.

Russia's Interior Ministry confirmed the detentions late Tuesday, after its embassy in Paris had initially refused to comment on the reports.

The ministry said in an online statement that one of the men detained, Zelimkhan Ismailov, had been accused of "affiliating with lawbreakers with the aims of preparing a terrorist act."

France remains on high alert after a brutal attack on the Paris offices of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo claimed 12 lives on Jan. 7. The attack, launched by Islamists, was said to be punishment for the newspaper's publication of cartoons mocking the prophet Muhammad.

In the days that followed, five more people were killed while police hunted down the suspects.

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