

Thirteen dead, over 80 injured in Islamic State attack in Barcelona, Spain

Alejandro López, Alex Lantier
18 August 2017

At least 13 people have been killed and over 80 injured, 15 seriously, after a van ploughed through crowds of people on La Rambla, Barcelona's busiest pedestrian street, Thursday afternoon. According to the Catalan regional interior minister, Joaquim Forn, it "is very possible" that the death toll will rise.

The Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for the attack. "The perpetrators of the Barcelona attack are soldiers of the Islamic State and carried out the operation in response to calls for targeting coalition states," the IS militia's Amaq news agency declared.

La Rambla is one of the most popular parts of the city, with newsagents, flower sellers, street performers, cafés, restaurants, shops, painters and artists making it a major tourist destination. At the time of the rampage, in high tourist season, La Rambla was very crowded.

According to police, the van drove 530 meters of the 1.2 kilometer-long street, which stretches from Barcelona's main square, Plaça de Catalunya, to the Christopher Columbus Monument at the port. Minutes later, adjoining streets were evacuated by police, as hundreds of people sheltered in doorways while others ran in terror.

A witness, Ellen Vercamm, told *El País*, "We were going to La Rambla when we saw a white van crashing against people. We saw how people were flying out because of the crash. We also saw three cyclists flying as the van ran them over."

Another eyewitness, Rebeca, who works at a hotel, told *La Vanguardia*, "It's tragic. I've seen several people on the ground run over and people were running and crying... The van went through the middle, razing everything." At around six in the evening yesterday, she added, "Now we cannot go out and our guests are nervous and crying because they do not know where some of their relatives are."

La Rambla was turned into an emergency field hospital yesterday, with the wounded being treated and local authorities appealing to people in the city to donate blood.

Thursday's attack in Barcelona is the sixth such attack in Europe in the last 13 months. Attacks where a person driving a vehicle ploughs through crowds in high-density areas have also taken place in Nice (France), Stockholm, Berlin, Paris and London. In several of these previous attacks, the terrorists were well known to the intelligence agencies. They were part of a broader milieu that has operated as a proxy force for the US and European powers' regime-change operations in Libya and Syria.

The identity of the attackers in Spain remains unclear, however, though it appears that a coordinated attack has taken place. As of this writing, large-scale operations by police special forces are unfolding across Catalonia.

Just after the attack took place, the attacker was alleged to be Driss Oukabir, a Moroccan born in Aghbala, legally residing in Spain. He has a police record but was released from Figueres prison, which he left in 2012. However, Oukabir, after seeing his photographs in the media, came to the police station in the town of Ripoll, where he lives, to report the theft of his documents.

Oukabir is still under interrogation to clarify why he did not report the robbery earlier, but his brother Moussa, 18, has now been named as a suspect in the theft of his documents.

According to the *Guardia Civil* paramilitary police, the van used in the attack was rented by Driss Oukabir in the town of Santa Perpetua de la Mogoda. Local police in another town, Vic, 70 kilometers from Barcelona, said they found a second vehicle that

attackers might have planned to use as a getaway vehicle. Early this morning, the bomb squad was seeking to open the van with remote-controlled robots, fearing that the vehicle was rigged to explode.

Two men were detained, apparently after a standoff with police in a restaurant in La Rambla. However, Josep Lluís Traperó, the top official of the *Mossos d'Esquadra*, the Catalan regional police, said that neither man was the driver of the van, who was still on the run this morning.

Another incident occurred when a white car skipped one of the police controls in Barcelona, running down three policemen; shots were reportedly fired as the driver fled the scene.

There are also reports that a gas explosion in the village of Alcanar, killing one person and wounding 13 yesterday morning, before the Barcelona attack, may have been linked to the ongoing terror attacks.

Sometime after 1 a.m. Spanish time today, police announced that they had launched an antiterror operation in the town of Cambrils. The Catalan regional government published Twitter messages calling for inhabitants of the town to stay inside and not to report anything on social media.

Police in Cambrils later said five suspects were shot and killed. Police claimed some of the dead were wearing explosive vests that could be used in suicide bomb attacks. Six civilians were reported wounded by the “alleged terrorists” before the police attack.



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