

Rajoy threatens to deploy army inside Spain after Barcelona attack

Alex Lantier, Alejandro López
19 August 2017

Well before the facts of Thursday's horrific terror attack in Barcelona are clearly established, Spain's right wing Popular Party (PP) government is pressing to deploy the army inside the country. This would be the first time that the army was deployed inside Spain since the country was ruled by the fascist regime of Francisco Franco, which took power via a 1936 military rebellion and a bloody three-year civil war.

Yesterday, Interior Minister Ignacio Zoido announced that he would for now keep the terror alert at level four on Spain's five-point scale. However, Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's PP government is summoning a defense council to discuss raising the terror alert to five, indicating a "very high and immediate danger of terrorist attack" and allowing for the domestic deployment of the army.

The Spanish army is already preparing for the move to alert level five. *El Confidencial* reported yesterday that Defense Minister Dolores Maria Cospedal had given the general staff "concrete orders" to "be ready" to deploy troops inside Spain within days. Cospedal had previously said in an interview with COPE radio that if the terror alert level were raised to five, "the army would intervene and it would be totally normal."

The deployment of the army in Spain would not be aimed at preventing future attacks like the latest atrocity in Barcelona. Rather, the PP aims to impose martial law and shift political life in Spain far to the right. It aims to strangle workers struggles and settle its disputes with the pro-austerity Catalan regional government in Barcelona, which erupted in June after Barcelona scheduled a referendum on Catalan independence from Spain for October 1, along right-wing lines.

Less than two full days since the Barcelona attack was claimed by the Islamic State (IS), with many

details of how they unfolded still unknown, the most serious questions are already raised about how the attacks were allowed to proceed. The CIA had sent warnings two months ago to the *Mossos d'Esquadra*, the Catalan regional police, reporting that La Rambla was a terrorist target. On July 30, an IS-linked Twitter account announced an "imminent attack" in Spain.

Nonetheless, security was not apparently raised on La Rambla, even though Catalonia is known to be a center of jihadist activity in Spain. Spain's state-linked think-tank Real Instituto Elcano noted, in a report published last year titled "The Islamic State in Spain," that Spain's National Court and Spanish security forces have an "extremely preventive strategy" involving mass surveillance of the Muslim population in Catalonia. Nonetheless, a large IS terror cell was allowed to prepare a major attack undisturbed.

It now appears that the attack was a botched attempt to prepare an even larger atrocity. Police suspect that a gas explosion late Wednesday at a house in Alcanar, a small town 224km from Barcelona, was in fact an accident during the preparation of bombs that were to be loaded into two vans rented in Santa Perpetua de Mogoda. This forced the terror cell to go into action immediately, before they were discovered. They drove one van into the crowd on La Rambla avenue in Barcelona Thursday at 4:50 p.m., killing 14 and wounding 126, with 17 still in critical condition.

Another car forced a police checkpoint on Diagonal Avenue in Barcelona around 8 p.m., hitting three policemen, and was shot at by police. A man was found dead in the back seat of the car, but with stab wounds, not bullet wounds, according to the *Mossos d'Esquadra*. It remains unclear whether this was related to the La Rambla attack.

After midnight on Friday morning, police shot and

killed five suspected terrorists in Cambrils, as they tried to drive their Audi A3 through a police checkpoint and then assaulted civilians with knives and axes. A woman has since died of injuries sustained during this assault.

The five men killed by police in Cambrils were identified as Moussa Oukabir, 17, believed to be the driver of the van in Barcelona; El Houssaine Abbouyaqoub, 19; Omar and Mohamed Hychami, 21 and 24; and Said Aallaa, 19. All were Moroccans living in Spain. There are reports that Younes Abbouyaqoub, 22, El Houssaine's brother, may have escaped and crossed the border into France, driving a Renault Kangoo van.

It is astonishing that, despite mass state surveillance, such a massive undertaking as the Barcelona-Cambrils attack could be prepared under the noses of Spanish police and the *Mossos d'Esquadra*. It is still unclear how this was possible. However, it appears that a major factor was the growing conflict between Madrid and Barcelona. Amid fears that the Catalan referendum might lead to conflict between the *Mossos* and Spain's *Guardia Civil*, anti-terror collaboration between Catalan and central-Spanish law enforcement largely collapsed.

Catalan police unions are now sharply criticizing Madrid, accusing it of undermining the *Mossos*. Zoido denied them the right to hire 500 new agents, in what union official Imma Viudes told *Público* yesterday she believed was a “clear act of reprisal” for the scheduling of the Catalan independence referendum. Perhaps more significantly, according to police union official Sergi Miquel, Madrid also denies the *Mossos* access to Europol and other international police databases.

These points underscore the fraudulence of the PP's drive now to impose martial law on the pretext that it is waging an all-out “war on terror.” Islamist networks in Europe are in fact trusted tools of European foreign policy, dispatching thousands of fighters to NATO wars for regime change in Syria and across the Middle East under the protection and the watchful eyes of the intelligence services. The so-called “war on terror” overwhelmingly is used as a pretext for the ruling elites to impose unpopular wars and austerity policies despite mass opposition.

Powerful factions of the Spanish ruling elite are seeking to use the attack to settle accounts with the Catalan bourgeois separatists in Barcelona. The pro-

social-democratic daily *El País*, in its editorial titled “Attack in Barcelona,” bluntly demanded that the separatists drop the referendum: “An attack of this magnitude should be a wake-up call that brings back to reality the Catalan political forces that, from the *Govern*, the *Parlement*, or the Catalan independence movements have made the secessionist illusion the sole activity of Catalan political life in recent years.”

Officials in Madrid are doubtless asking themselves whether it would be easier to block the secession of Catalonia if not only the *Guardia Civil*, but also the Spanish army itself could be deployed to Barcelona.

Above all, however, the deployment of the army inside Spain would be aimed at the working class. Amid explosive social tensions in Spain, with unemployment at 18 percent and 40 percent among youth, it would only be a matter of time before the army was turned against the workers, as it was in the 1930s.

The Barcelona attack itself has already been used against workers struggles. The Stalinist *Comisiones Obreras* (Workers Commissions) union bureaucracy reported that due to the terror attack, a security workers strike for better pay and conditions at Barcelona's El Prat airport would be called off. Should the army be deployed amid a hysterical law-and-order atmosphere, it will no doubt play a similar function as the security forces in the French state of emergency, which were used to assault and intimidate protesters against last year's pro-business labor law reform.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact