

Spain deploys police as interior minister claims Barcelona terror cell dismantled

Alejandro López
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The Spanish government is preparing a massive deployment of police and security forces, even as questions rise about how last week's horrific terror attack in Barcelona was allowed to proceed. As evidence emerges that the terror cell was well known to intelligence services, Madrid is both downplaying the investigation and demanding more police-state measures.

At a press conference Saturday, Interior Minister Juan Ignacio Zoido claimed that the Islamist cell behind the attack had been "dismantled." Nonetheless, after the press conference, the Interior Ministry distributed a document to state security forces. It instructed them "to intensify police controls at the Franco-Spanish border" and reinforce the "security presence in all places with high concentrations of people, with special emphasis on tourist areas."

Massive police deployments will carry out "random checks of people and vehicles." Special attention will be given to "agglomeration zones," such as squares, promenades, and pedestrian streets. Places designed as "strategic points" will be reinforced with vehicles or police agents.

Zoido's statements raise more questions than they give answers. First, who is giving him assurances that the terror cell has been dismantled? Second, if he in fact believes this, why is he pressing for a massive escalation of police-state measures in Spain?

Minutes after Zoido's statement, Inspector Albert Oliva, a spokesman for the Catalan regional police, the *Mossos d'squadra*, denied that police agencies had "dismantled" the terror cell and reminded Zoido that the *Mossos* are leading the investigation. Catalan regional Interior Minister Joaquim Forn stressed that the *Mossos* do not consider the terror cell to be "completely dismantled."

Catalan police believe that the cell comprised 12 men. Five were killed in a shoot-out in Cambrils: Mousa Oukabir, Said Aallaa, Mohamed Hychami, Omar Hychami and Houssaine Abouyaaqoub. Biological traces of at least three victims have been found in a house at Alcanar, where police think that the cell was planning a large-scale attack using gas cylinders stuffed with explosives. An accidental explosion destroyed the house late Wednesday, however. One man injured in that blast, Mohamed Houli Chemlal, was arrested and is currently in hospital.

Catalan police are still looking for a 22-year-old suspect, Younes Abouyaaqoub, who apparently fled to France. This means that of a 12-man cell, nine have been killed or arrested, and at least one is on the run. Four other people have been arrested in Ripolls, where most of the attackers lived.

The evidence suggesting that the cell has not been fully dismantled also sharply poses the question of how the attack was allowed to proceed. It is not credible to claim that the forces that organized the attack escaped the attention of the intelligence services.

The CIA had warned the *Mossos* that La Rambla avenue in Barcelona was a target, and yesterday US Senator Benjamin Cardin said it was "unacceptable" that the attack occurred despite such warnings.

Abdelbaki Es Satty, the imam considered the "spiritual leader" of the cell, who helped plan the attacks and apparently died in the accidental blast Wednesday, had been condemned for trafficking hashish to two years in the jail of Castellón, Valencia. During his stay in jail, Es Satty befriended Rachid Aglif, a member of the Islamist cell responsible for Al Qaeda's Madrid bombing in 2004, which killed 192 people and wounded around 2,000.

In 2007, an investigation by Spain's National Intelligence Centre and France's *Renseignements Généraux* found that the Islamists behind the 2004 Madrid bombings bought their explosives from former miners in return for blocks of hashish.

Authorities in Vilvoorde, near Brussels, also confirmed that Es Satty lived there for three months last year, looking for work. Vilvorde, along with Molenbeek, is one of the main cities in Belgium from which youth were recruited to Islamist networks fighting in Syria. *El País* writes, "Satty's trips and activities to Belgium are currently covered by a halo of mystery. The religious man had stated his intention to move to Belgium, and the security forces are seeking to clarify his motivations."

It is not credible to claim that someone with such a record could have led a group of attackers, manufactured large loads of TATP explosive stored in 106 butane cylinders, and collected at least five vehicles—all without raising suspicion. Catalonia is known to be a centre of jihadist activity in Spain. Since 2012, of 259 people arrested in Spain in terrorism charges, 77 were in Catalonia, and Spanish officials boast of carrying out mass surveillance of Catalonia's Muslims.

The pretense that the security forces are focusing on Islamist terrorists to prevent further attacks is a fraud. In reality, the Popular Party government's police build-up is part of a broad increase in mass spying, repression and arbitrary detention internationally, aimed above all at the working class.

After the *Charlie Hebdo* attack in France, the PP government passed the National Security Law. As the WSWS, warned, "the PP government is organising the forces of the state to be used, not against jihadists or any other so-called terrorists, but for domestic repression under conditions of social unrest. The new law comes in the wake of other recent anti-working class legislation, passed with the agreement of the PSOE opposition or through the PP parliamentary majority."

Since then, class tensions have only increased, as new layers of workers mounted industrial action. In July, taxi drivers, metro workers, and workers for Bicing (the city's bicycle sharing system), Renfe (the state-owned company which operates freight and passenger trains), Airport security and Deliveroo (the British online food

delivery company) took strike action.

Spain's unpopular minority PP government is therefore all the more determined to stoke up a repressive, law-and-order atmosphere—sending the *Guardia Civil* paramilitary police to break the strike of airport security workers at Barcelona's El Prat airport. They are exploiting the fact that pro-austerity Catalan nationalists that control the regional administration in Barcelona support law-and-order measures and strike-breaking policies, like other parties in Spain, such as Podemos, that similarly will do nothing to oppose them.

After the attack, Zoido called together the National police, *Guardia Civil*, the Intelligence Center against Terrorism and Organized Crime, the National Intelligence Center, the *Mossos* and the *Ertzaintza* (Basque regional police). They ultimately decided not to raise Spain's terror alert level to 5 on the 5-point scale, which would have allowed Madrid to deploy 5,000 soldiers inside Spain.

Zoido stated that even though alert level is to be kept at four, the ministry will continue to "permanently assess" whether alert 5 is required. That is to say, Spain is now permanently one step away from martial law.

Were the army to deploy to Spanish cities, it would be the first time since Spain was ruled by the 1939-1978 military-fascist regime of Francisco Franco. After the Francoite regime fell, governments did not even consider this as an option in the 1980s, when the Basque separatist armed group ETA killed 425 civilians in a spate of bombings. Even after Al-Qaeda's March 2004 bombings in Madrid, there was no public discussion of deploying the army.

Madrid is now considering deploying the army not because it is waging an all-out struggle against terror, but because class tensions in Spain and internationally are far higher than a decade ago. Facing the fall-out from the 2008 economic crisis and the emergence of mass unemployment across southern Europe, including Spain, their only solution is stepped up police-state repression.



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