

Madrid prepares to deploy troops in Catalonia

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There are numerous unconfirmed reports of troops being sent to Catalonia and nearby regions ahead of a possible unilateral declaration on independence early next week.

Spain's political establishment is openly talking of invoking Article 116 of the Spanish constitution, laying the basis for the imposition of martial law.

According to military sources cited in the right-wing newspaper *OkDiario*, troops are being mobilised to Aragón and Valencia, regions adjacent to Catalonia. It explains that the Spanish government estimates that it is necessary to deploy around 30,000 security forces to take control of the region and to "establish constitutional order against the insurrection." The newspaper says this is a "number which cannot be presently met by the 8,000 police and civil guards currently deployed in Catalonia."

According to *OkDiario*, the divisions mobilized include the Division Castillejos (formerly the Rapid Action Force), consisting of three brigades totalling 3,000 troops (the airborne, the parachute and the legion brigades), along with the Armored Infantry Alcázar of Toledo, consisting of 300 troops and 44 tanks. In addition, Madrid is reported to be mobilising the Group of Special Operations of the Navy, the Spanish equivalent of the Navy Seals.

The number of troops being cited in other sources ranges between 12,000 and 16,000.

La Tribuna de Cartagena explains that the frigate *Navarra*, escorted by two anti-mine frigates, is going to depart to Barcelona fully equipped with troops, arriving at Barcelona's port on October 8—a day before the previously announced declaration of independence is supposed to be made in the Catalan parliament. According to a statement of the Ministry of Defence, the frigates are participating in the Barcelona International Boat Show.

At the same time, NATO has organised a training exercise under the title "Angel Guard", involving 600

military police from Spain and nine other NATO member countries. According to the website of the Spanish army, these exercises aim to train military police in the management of a command post during operations and raids, escort and protection of authorities, neutralization of hostile armed personnel inside a military compound and crowd control.

Article 116 involves the deployment of the military and allows the suspension of numerous democratic rights including freedom of expression and the right to strike. It also allows for preventive arrests. Suspending these rights would arm the state with vast police powers that the military could use to terrorise the entire working class, as the Franco regime did from 1939 to 1977.

The Association of the Spanish Army (AME) posted a statement defending King Felipe VI's speech, in which the monarch denounced the Catalan independence referendum and demanded that the Spanish state seize control of the region. The statement describes the speech as "impeccable" because Felipe conveyed "clearly, concisely and emphatically what the line to follow amid these difficult and complex times."

AME demanded Popular Party Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy move "to defend without delay the unity of Spain, its territorial integrity and its national sovereignty."

The European Union has declared its support for the military clampdown now being prepared. During Wednesday's debate in the European Parliament, Commission First Vice President Frans Timmermans declared that it is "a duty for any government to uphold the law, and this sometimes does require the proportionate use of force."

He was backed by leading representatives of the Conservative, Social Democratic and Liberal parties.

The implications of such statements were made clear by German EU Commissioner Gunter Oettinger, who warned yesterday that "There is a civil war imaginable now in the

middle of Europe,” before making the pious wish that “One can only hope that a thread of conversation will soon be recorded between Madrid and Barcelona.”

Spain’s media is playing its part in paving the way for the military intervention through a campaign aimed at dehumanizing the Catalan nationalists and, in some cases, the whole Catalan population. Not one day passes where the press does not describe developments in Catalonia as an “insurrection,” a “coup d’état,” “rebellion” or as “treason” which needs to be crushed.

Catalan nationalists are accused of brainwashing children and putting them at the front line of protests to be attacked by police. The national police and civil guards, who savagely injured 800 peaceful protestors last Sunday, are portrayed as defenseless and persecuted by people protesting in front of their hotels and temporary residences. The regional police, the Mossos, are presented as treacherous and disloyal. The separatist Catalan Republican Left and the pseudo-left separatist Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP) are constantly attacked, with articles describing them as “the cancer of Catalonia” (*ABC*), or calling for these parties to be “beheaded and put in the dustbin of history” (*El Español*).

Such fascistic language precedes a provocative demonstration called for Sunday by the Popular Party and the anti-secessionist Catalan Civil Society, an organization with ties to the far-right. Backed by Citizens and the Socialist Party, and widely promoted by the Madrid-based media, right-wing anti-Catalan nationalists from throughout Spain are being bussed into Barcelona.

The far-right character of the demonstration is acknowledged by its organisers.

In an interview to *El Confidencial*, Javier Megino, vice-president of From Spain and Catalonia, accepted that there will be neo-fascists and far-rightist present, as they were during a demonstration against separation in Barcelona two weeks ago. Asked if they might cause violence, Megino replied, “when you put together so many people, it is impossible to control them all.”

The demonstration clearly aims, not to represent the “silent majority” within the Catalan population who oppose separatism as asserted by the media, but rather to provoke a violent confrontation between Catalan separatist and fascist forces which the government will seek to exploit to justify a crackdown.

The grave political danger is that the working class in Spain and internationally is not being mobilized against the repressive measures being prepared by Madrid.

At this critical juncture, Catalan and Spanish workers

must assess the political forces that claim to supposedly defend them.

Catalan regional premier, Carles Puigdemont, continues to call for dialogue, an option rejected by Rajoy who declares him to be a criminal. Catalan vice-premier, Oriol Junqueras, is mainly concerned at the announcements made by major banks and companies like Banco Sabadell, CaixaBank, energy giant Gas Natural, Abertis, biotech firm Oryzon and the telecommunications corporation Eurona that they are moving out of Catalonia—fearing the future of the region amid the separatist drive.

CUP parliamentarian Eulàlia Reguant told the Catalan daily *Nació Digital* that her party is working on a plan of how they will take control of Catalan territory, including ports and airports, by approving a law that will mean that 17,000 regional police, the Mossos, “will stop being part of Spain’s justice system.”

The pseudo-left Podemos continues its call for dialogue, while promoting illusions in a PSOE-Podemos government as an alternative to the PP, even as the PSOE is participating in Sunday’s far-right protest and working directly with Rajoy in preparing a violent intervention.

Spain’s Constitutional Court outlawed Monday’s session of the Catalan regional parliament, at which it was expected that the separatist parties would make their unilateral declaration of Independence—based on a complaint brought by the Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSC), the Catalan wing of the PSOE.

All these political forces are demonstrating their political bankruptcy in the face of a military-police state threat. They are disarming the working class, despite the broad opposition that exists to a return to police-state forms of rule.

The broadly-felt opposition to the brutal attacks on democratic rights in Catalonia and throughout Spain can only find expression on the basis of politically independent, revolutionary and socialist perspective independent of all factions of Spain’s ruling elites and their parties.



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