

Leader of Barcelona terror attack was Spanish intelligence informant

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Spanish media have confirmed that Abdelbaki es-Satty, the mastermind of the August 17 Islamic State (IS) terror attacks in Barcelona, was a police informant.

A convicted drug dealer directly linked to the Al Qaeda operatives who carried out the March 11, 2004 Madrid train bombings, Satty was reportedly providing information and receiving payment from Spanish intelligence until shortly before the attack. He was reportedly the political or religious leader of the youth who carried out the Barcelona attacks, in which 16 people died and 152 were injured. Satty himself died shortly before the attacks, when large home-made bombs they were preparing at a house in Alcanar accidentally exploded.

This remarkable revelation underscores the utterly deceitful character of the European bourgeoisie's insistence that deep attacks on democratic rights are needed to wage a "war on terror." In Barcelona, as in the *Charlie Hebdo* and November 13 attacks in Paris in 2015, the Berlin Christmas attack, and the May 22 Manchester terror attack, the terrorists were known to law enforcement. They served as tools for the intelligence services and instruments of European imperialist wars in Syria and Iraq, and operated under official protection.

The exposure of Satty as a Spanish intelligence asset is particularly significant given the explosive situation in Catalonia, where Madrid suspended the regional elected government and imposed direct police rule after the October 1 Catalan independence referendum. These revelations raise questions of whether forces in Madrid or Barcelona allowed the attack to proceed in order to win political advantage in the bitter battle that escalated in the run-up to the referendum.

On November 16, the right-wing populist site *OkDiario* first reported that Satty, who served as an

imam in the town of Ripoll, was an informant for Spain's National Intelligence Center (CNI). "At the same time as he provided information to the secret services and received special funding for this work, the imam was setting up the terror cell that perpetrated the second-bloodiest attack in the history of terrorism in Catalonia," *OkDiario* wrote, citing documents held by investigating magistrates in the Spanish judiciary.

OkDiario said Spanish officials were desperate to cover up this report. "The obsession for weeks has been that the status of the imam as an agent should not get out and become known to public opinion," it wrote.

OkDiario also alleged that the *Mossos d'Esquadra*, the Catalan regional police headquartered in Barcelona, were in close contact with Satty. It reported that "an agent of the *Mossos* spoke for four minutes from his office in Barcelona with the perpetrator of the Barcelona massacre only two hours before the attack."

On November 17, *El País*, Spain's main pro-social-democratic paper, published a terse article in which intelligence officials confirmed several of *OkDiario*'s revelations. Sources in the CNI told *El País* the CNI "maintained contact" with Satty while he was in Castellón prison for drug dealing, from 2010 to 2014. This relationship, they added, was in line with the usual "established protocols for handling convicts."

It appears Satty was in contact with the security services well before and well after the 2010-2014 period, however. *El País* continues, "New evidence emerging from the investigation of the attacks, which the National Court is keeping secret, shows that Es Satty was almost an old acquaintance of the security forces from when he arrived in Spain in 2002. His name already appeared in the contact list of telephones of some of those detained for the March 11 attacks, according to sources in the anti-terrorism agencies."

In 2006, Satty was detained as a member of a terrorist cell based in Vilanova. It appears his status as an “old acquaintance” of the intelligence services served him well, however; he was released and his case was shelved. Later, however, he was arrested for trying to bring 121 kilograms of hashish into Spain in his car from Morocco and jailed for four years in 2010.

After leaving prison in 2014, he traveled to the Brussels area, where many of the individuals involved in the 2015 attacks in Paris were based. He was rejected for an imam position there due to his criminal record, however, and returned to take a job as an imam in Ripoll, in Catalonia. *El País* did not confirm *OkDiario*’s report of contacts between Satty and the *Mossos*. However, it wrote that it was unusual that he served as an imam in Ripoll, as he had “a criminal record, which in principle makes him ineligible for such a position.”

These reports show how decades-long, criminal foreign policy operations of NATO continue to claim lives and facilitate attacks on democratic rights in Europe itself. Since the eruption of the 2011 war in Syria, networks like Al Qaeda, which emerged from the 1979-1989 CIA war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, and IS, whose origins lie in the US-led imperialist wars in Iraq and Syria since 1991, send thousands of fighters to carry out attacks in the Middle East.

After the March 22, 2016 Brussels bombing, the WSWS wrote, “[It] is clear that the individuals who carried out the March 22 bombings and the November 13 and *Charlie Hebdo* attacks in Paris are part of a broader group of people who have been allowed to freely travel to and from the Middle East. The only conclusion that can be drawn from the ease with which these forces permeate national borders and conduct operations is that there are protocols in place to ease their passage and lower any red flags. They operate under a veil of official protection.”

The latest revelations about Satty vindicate yet again this analysis of the rotten foundations of the “war on terror” in Europe. The imperialist interventions, the promotion of anti-Muslim hatreds, and the drive to police-state rule and states of emergency across Europe are based on political lies. The Islamists are not intransigent and undetectable opponents of imperialism, but its somewhat wayward tools.

When they carry out attacks in Europe, instead of

against targets chosen by the NATO powers in the Middle East, imperialist governments simply use this as a pretext for more police-state measures. These are aimed not so much at the Islamists, which have deep ties to the state apparatus, but at opposition to austerity and war in the working class.

Many unanswered questions remain based on the revelations about Satty so far. Firstly, if Satty was indeed a police informant who was “deceiving” the CNI, as the Spanish edition of *Vanity Fair* writes, what did he tell the police he was doing? As his cell amassed a vast collection of bomb-making chemicals that ultimately exploded accidentally and took Satty’s own life, who did the CNI think Satty was going to blow up?

Secondly, did the conflict between Madrid and Barcelona over the October 1 Catalan independence referendum, which had been announced on June 29, play a role in the CNI’s shielding of Satty?

Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy’s government responded to the August 17 attack by discussing the imposition of martial law, although Rajoy ultimately decided against it. After Rajoy launched the savage police crackdown on the peaceful vote on October 1, however, he suspended Catalonia’s elected government, placing it directly under police rule, amid mass protests in Barcelona and across Catalonia.

Might sections of the security apparatus, seeking a different pretext for the move toward police-state rule that was being prepared and discussed inside the state machine, have been willing to sanction some type of attack in order to justify the imposition of martial law?



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