

Publico reports Spanish intelligence facilitated 2017 Barcelona terror attack

By Alex Lantier
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In an explosive report, the news site *Publico* alleges that Spain's National Intelligence Center (CNI) intensively followed the Islamic State (IS) terror cell that carried out the August 17, 2017 Barcelona attacks, up to the day of the attack itself. Far from arresting the cell before it carried out the attacks, which left 21 dead and 130 wounded, the CNI let them proceed. Officials at CNI headquarters then tried to delete the file on cell leader Abdelbaki Es-Satty as investigations of the attack began.

The *Publico* report constitutes prima facie evidence of criminal behavior at top levels of the Spanish state—abetted by intelligence agencies of other NATO powers that launched the Islamist proxy war in Syria from which IS emerged. NATO governments and major US and European press outlets have reacted with deafening silence.

The *Publico* report, based on documents provided by the CNI to police officials investigating the attack and interviews with the police and CNI, begins by detailing how Es-Satty's links to the CNI became known. The Barcelona attack was triggered unexpectedly, when Es-Satty accidentally blew himself up at a safe house in Alcanar where the cell was building bombs. Their cover blown, the cell's survivors quickly decided to drive a truck over pedestrians on Barcelona's La Rambla avenue. Several died later, in a shoot-out with security forces in Cambrils.

In the ruins of the Alcanar house, investigators found a sheet of paper with an email login, `adamperez27177@gmail.com`, and password, PEREJUAN18. According to *Publico*, "For investigators who discovered this message, there was no doubt that Es-Satty's CNI handler had created an email address to communicate with him."

The Gmail account, of which *Publico* provides screen captures, contained two draft emails "in perfect Spanish." The first, dated May 24, 2017, says: "I see you were able to log in, you just have to leave me a message like this one as a draft and I will read it. You can already start writing things. Thank you my friend." The second says: "Do you have nothing to write or is it that you cannot? Today is Monday, June 19."

Es-Satty was known to the CNI, which confirmed three months after the Barcelona attacks that he was an informant. Born in Morocco in 1973, he had first travelled in 2002 to

Spain, where he was detained on human-trafficking charges. He cooperated with Operation Chacal, an investigation of the 2004 Al Qaeda bombings in Madrid, and was later jailed from 2010 to 2014 for trafficking hashish. In prison, he shared a cell and reportedly established a "special friendship" with 2004 Madrid bomber Rachid Aglif.

NATO intelligence knew Es-Satty was linked with Al Qaeda activity at the highest levels. French intelligence and the CNI had jointly concluded after Operation Chacal that the 2004 Madrid attacks were carried out with explosives paid for with hashish. According to CNI documents provided to police investigators and cited by *Publico*, "Satty was seen by the Penitentiary Institutions (IP) as an Islamist, proving himself to be radical from the beginning of his term in the Castellon prison."

Nonetheless, according to the *Publico* report, the CNI aggressively covered for Es-Satty. When he was brought before a judge for deportation after his prison term, his lawyers had documents that the judge considered proof that he was "firmly based" in Spain—even though much of his time in Spain had been spent in prison on drug trafficking charges. *Publico* states that its intelligence "sources maintain that the CNI fixed up the recommendations and authorizations that opened the doors for Es Satty to be admitted as an imam in Ripoll."

While protecting Es-Satty, the CNI and other agencies on both sides of the Atlantic devoted massive resources to monitoring his cell. Perhaps the most remarkable documents revealed by *Publico* concern the CNI's intensive surveillance of young, inexperienced members of the cell who went to France just before the attacks. French officials confirmed they were involved in this surveillance.

Publico says these documents "emerged due to an editing error of the secret services, revealing that on the eve of the Las Ramblas massacre, Spanish spies were monitoring and transcribing all the conversations (on their mobile phones) of the people who carried out the killings."

Omar Hichamy and Younes Abouyaaquoub, the man who drove a vehicle through the crowds on Las Ramblas, travelled to Paris on August 11-12, 2017. The CNI noted the highways on which they travelled, and the times when they arrived in various Paris neighbourhoods and approached different

monuments, including the Eiffel Tower. It notes that the two bought a camera for €129 at the Fnac-St. Lazare store. The two phone calls they made during the trip were analysed in detail.

A CNI document published by *Publico* reports, “The calls proceeded through the phone numbers linked to Omar and Younes (34600314111 and 34612526378), but they ended up being both times between Mohamed Hichamy and Younes Abouyaaquoub, who shortened his sentences in order not to reveal his concrete activities.”

Claims the CNI was unaware that these youth were involved in a terror plot do not hold water. The CNI devoted an extraordinary level of surveillance to these two youth, who had no criminal record. The CNI, *Publico* writes, was “listening to and transcribing all conversations between those young Muslims, who were not supposedly yet related to any jihadist plot—executing the most exhaustive possible intelligence controls, which require considerable material and human resources.”

A few days before, moreover, US agencies had given Madrid detailed reports that the cell was preparing attacks. On July 31, 2017, agents of Exeintel, a private US agency whose Twitter account says it provides “actionable intelligence” that will “only be accessible to law enforcement,” chatted online with Abouyaaquoub. They then sent a “red alert” notice to Madrid, reporting that he had clumsily bragged that his cell was preparing terrorist attacks.

The daily *El Nacional* posted screen captures of their internet chat with Abouyaaquoub, who wrote: “We must attack several small towns, when all the police come to us to move to another place and to move to another place and to attack it. They won’t be able to defend themselves from us.” Exeintel subsequently pulled the screen capture images from its website.

Nonetheless, the CNI simply kept monitoring the cell, even as it assembled chemicals and metal scrap to make bombs and then, after the Alcanar explosion, decided on a new attack. “The Spanish secret service continued watching and monitoring the terrorists until the very same day of the attacks on Las Ramblas,” *Publico* writes, adding, “It was not until the morning after the massacre that the Es-Satty file was deleted from the CNI’s central register.” Such a deletion, *Publico* reports, can only be done from central CNI headquarters in Madrid,

This account underscores the links between NATO agencies and Islamist terrorists, developed over the now eight-year war in Syria, underlying all the IS attacks in Europe. The *Charlie Hebdo* and November 13 attacks in 2015 in Paris, the March 22, 2016 bombings in Brussels, the Christmas 2016 attack in Berlin and the 2017 bombing in Manchester all were carried out by networks closely monitored by intelligence agencies.

These attacks were then used to justify far-reaching police-state measures. These ranged from the crackdown on the G20 protests in Hamburg and the lockdown of Brussels, to the intensification of police powers around the French state of

emergency, which culminated in the deployment of the army against “yellow vests” protesting social inequality. The Spanish events underscore how these unpopular attacks on basic democratic and social rights proceeded based on state criminality.

The CNI failed to stop the Es-Satty cell’s attacks as Madrid sought a justification to impose martial law before the Catalan independence referendum of October 1, 2017. State officials were dismayed when mass protests erupted in Barcelona, denouncing state complicity in the attack. The brutal police crackdown on the independence referendum was followed by a vast shift to the right in official politics: show trials of Catalan nationalist political prisoners, the rehabilitation of Spain’s 20th century fascist dictator, Francisco Franco, and the promotion of the pro-Francoite Vox party.

No credible explanation has been given until now for the CNI’s failure to act to halt the attacks. Last year, the PSOE and the right-wing Citizens and Popular Party vetoed calls for investigations of the CNI’s role in the attacks in the Spanish Congress. The question that is posed is whether the CNI and allied intelligence agencies allowed these attacks to proceed in order to provide, via criminal means, a pretext for attempts to impose a fascist regime in Spain and across Europe.

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