

Scandal erupts over Público exposure of state complicity in Barcelona attack

Part II: The Barcelona daily La Vanguardia tries to discredit Público

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After *Público*'s report exposed intelligence foreknowledge of the Barcelona terror attacks, the Barcelona-based daily *La Vanguardia* intervened to attack *Público*. Directly contradicting documents revealed by *Público*, it argued that neither the National Intelligence Center (CNI) nor the police were aware of the terrorists' movements prior to the August 2017 attacks, and that the phones had never been tapped.

The four articles bear all the hallmarks of a damage control operation targeting the *Público* report by the Catalan bourgeoisie, working with the CNI and the state machine in Madrid. Mainstream media and politicians have used them to attack *Público* and the author of the *Público* reports, Carlos Enrique Bayo, and prop up the rapidly-disintegrating official story that the attackers flew under the radar, catching European intelligence agencies totally by surprise when they attacked.

All four *La Vanguardia* articles base themselves on a report leaked to *La Vanguardia* by the Catalan Police, the Mossos d'Esquadra, and dated over a year after the attacks, on October 11, 2018. According to *La Vanguardia*'s account, the Mossos later recovered 13 telephone numbers used by the terrorists on the day of the attack, allowing them to reconstruct the events. It alleges that one of the phones contained information that allowed investigators to map out the attackers' prior actions.

La Vanguardia further claims that more information, including a trip to Paris by two of the attackers, were also reconstructed after the events by taking into receipts, parking and toll tickets, and bank statements, with help from Spanish and French intelligence.

It also asserts that the El Satty file "never disappeared or was deleted from the databases of the security forces", apparently contradicting *Público*'s assertion that the CNI had tried to delete it, presumably to hide the

well-established fact that Es-Satty was a CNI informant. *La Vanguardia* claims that source of these "speculations" were the Mossos, who mistakenly reported on the same day of the attacks that Es-Satty "has no registered arrests from any police force."

The *La Vanguardia* articles are something of a red herring, insofar as the various documents they cite from the Mossos do not affect the credibility of the CNI documents upon which Bayo based the *Público* report. These clearly show that the CNI was intensively monitoring the terror cell, whatever other work the Mossos may have done after the attack to investigate the cell members' movements. Bayo called *La Vanguardia*'s article a "well-planned document leak," and part of a "campaign to discredit" *Público* in general and his own report specifically.

One of the key facts is that the CNI knew the numbers of the French SIM cards that the terror cell members bought in Paris with false identities a few days before the Barcelona attacks.

Both *La Vanguardia* and *Público*, using different sources, quote the same telephone numbers assigned to two of the young attackers. Bayo writes, "We must insist that without prior surveillance it's impossible to know two names of the false identities between the thousands of prepaid SIMs that are acquired each day in Paris, nor to relate these two numbers to the two terrorists afterwards only because of their geolocation ... or discover at what time and where they were activated."

La Vanguardia never refutes another key piece of evidence that *Público* revealed. The CNI report leaked by *Público* reports that one of the attackers "cuts his phrases short to not reveal specific details of his activities." Such a statement reveals that the attackers were being monitored, and not that their trip details were

reconstructed based on bank statements and toll booth receipts.

La Vanguardia also asserts that the CNI never deleted Es-Satty's file or that his file was never hidden for the Catalan regional police. *La Vanguardia* provided a long explanation claiming that the Mossos did not consult the National Database of criminals, where they would have found Es-Satty's background, because they only looked in their local Catalan archives, which had no reference to the Ripoll Imam. This, *La Vanguardia* explains, is why when Belgian police asked the Mossos about Es-Satty in early 2016, they said they had no prior information about him.

Público, however, shows that the hiding of Es-Satty's convictions happened two years earlier, before the attack, when he tried to become the imam of Ripoll. The normal procedure would have involved a background check. As Bayo says, quoting a police source, "imams with these police records are a dozen in Spain, and we monitor each of them." *Público*'s source was referring to the fact that Es-Satty had two jail sentences, one of them for drug trafficking, as well as a history of relations with jihadists before and during his imprisonment. However, the Muslim community in Ripoll was given a clean curriculum vitae for Es-Satty, doctored by the CNI.

Bayo also shows how *La Vanguardia*'s claim based on a report from the Civil Guards that he was radicalized in prison raises the question as to why the police did not inform local authorities. Both the Civil Guards and the National Police had the information, and the National Police even went to visit the Ripoll Mosque twice when Es-Satty was preaching.

Moreover, if, as *La Vanguardia* asserts, the Civil Guards database always had "the information and it was never erased," this raises the question: if they knew his background and went to visit him twice in Ripoll before the attacks, why didn't they warn local Muslims of their preacher's history? As Bayo states, "To exonerate the CNI they [*La Vanguardia*] are leaving the state security forces in a very bad place".

Bayo concludes by quoting his CNI sources, who state that in order for Es-Satty to have become a Imam in Ripoll, "there could be no trace of his long history of proven relations with jihadist groups. Therefore, the police record was hidden in case the local Muslim community requested a review of his past." That does not mean that the criminal and police records were completely eliminated, which, according to Bayo and his intelligence sources, would be impossible, but that they

hid it from the Catalan police at that time to protect Es-Satty, the CNI's informant.

La Vanguardia also fails to seriously deal with the factual material leaked and analysed by *Público*, such as how the CNI worked to prevent the expulsion of Es-Satty and get him appointed as an imam in Ripoll. Nor does the daily explain how he could move around Europe to meet jihadist cells and indoctrinate his own cell, which ceaselessly moved from one end to the other of Catalonia as it amassed a large store of explosives, while Es-Satty preached jihadist sermons in Ripoll.

Readers are apparently supposed to believe that despite intense surveillance and the CNI's own admission that Es-Satty was their informant, he was able to prepare the attacks totally undetected.

La Vanguardia also omits other pre-existing evidence of state foreknowledge of the attack: French intelligence admitted that they followed the terrorists before the attack, and a security firm close to US intelligence agencies had sent a "red alert" notice about the cell to Madrid prior to the attacks.

That is to say that, as opposed to analyzing and recreating the events that led to the attacks in an objective way, dealing with all that is known from different forces involved in the attacks, it made a one-sided presentation that covers up the foreknowledge and complicity of the CNI in the attack.

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