

Madrid launches “anti-terror” crackdown in Catalonia

By Alejandro López
26 September 2019

On Monday, Spain’s Civil Guards launched a widely publicized “anti-terror” police operation against Catalan nationalist activists, code-named “Operation Judes”. The arrests come as the verdict in the show trial of Catalan nationalists in the Supreme Court is due in October, and days before the second anniversary of the 1 October 2017 Catalan independence referendum. Mass protests are anticipated.

On Tuesday, acting Spanish Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska ordered the deployment of 200 anti-riot policemen to the region on the eve of the second anniversary of the referendum. Yesterday, the Ministry announced plans to send more than 600 officers there.

During the “anti-terror” raid the Civil Guards deployed 500 heavily armed officers and an explosives team (TEDAX) to arrest nine alleged members of the Committees for the Defence of the Republic (CDR) near Barcelona, in towns like Sabadell, Mollet del Vallès, Cerdanyola del Vallès, and Vicenç de Torelló. The Civil Guards searched 10 properties. The nine persons arrested are accused of terrorism, possessing explosives and rebellion by the High Court—heir to the infamous Court of Public Order under the fascist dictatorship of Francisco Franco.

The Public Prosecutor Office is accusing them of “an advanced degree of preparation in terrorist projects with secessionist aims”. During the operation, according to a Civil Guards statement, “abundant computing material and documentation” was seized, including “material and substances, considered precursors for the preparation of explosives.”

The statement claims the operation was necessary, as the Civil Guards are “certain” that “actions were going to be perpetrated, taking advantage of the period included between the anniversary of the illegal

self-determination referendum on 1 October 2017 and the announcement of the court ruling”. The operation was therefore necessary “to abort the project which could have occasioned irreparable damage due to the advanced state of preparations”.

The case is under seal, but sources within the operation have leaked information to the anti-secessionist press, which has published sensationalized accounts of the operation.

The CDRs are a network of assemblies on a local and regional level in Catalonia formed in 2017, first to defend the Catalan independence referendum and then to call for a Catalan Republic. They are composed mostly of rural, middle class Catalan nationalists linked to political parties of all different colorations—the right-wing Together for Catalonia, the Republican Left of Catalonia, and the pseudo-left Candidatures of Popular Unity—or pro-secessionist associations like the Catalan National Assembly and Òmnium Cultural.

Most of their actions have consisted of non-violent demonstrations, road blocks and tampering with toll plazas throughout Catalonia, raising barriers to let vehicles pass for free. Spain’s main bourgeois parties and media, however, have used the CDRs as a pretext for intensifying police state repression against Catalan nationalists. They have also used the CDRs to justify the fraudulent charges against the Catalan leaders in the show trial.

The whole “anti-terror” operation reeks of a police provocation aimed at demobilising growing opposition to attacks on democratic rights and justifying police repression. The statements of the Civil Guards and the Public Prosecutor’s Office provide no evidence that they have seized explosives.

In a video, heavily-armed Civil Guards storm into a garage containing an old car, pots and pans and a

rubbish bag. With a spoon, one officer casually stirs the contents of one of the pots—an odd decision, given that they are claiming that these substances may be explosives.

According to official accounts, the operation was a preventive arrest. The searches were carried out to “locate and, where appropriate, seize evidence that demonstrates the degree of preparation of violent actions.” Significantly, it thus appears police were searching for evidence that their targets could be preparing violent actions, and not acting to stop violent actions they had evidence were being planned.

Inside a home in Sabadell, the Civil Guards found sulfuric acid, paraffin, aluminium powder, and ammonium nitrate. The latter three can be found in fireworks, used regularly in parties in the region. Describing the alleged “explosives”, the Civil Guards state that “abundant material and substances have been located that are considered to be precursors for the manufacture of explosives, susceptible (pending confirmation by specialists) of being used in the manufacture of artifacts.”

The report on the investigation itself noted these substances could be used to make homemade bombs, “but not Goma 2”. Goma 2 is a powerful industrial explosive that was regularly used by the Basque terror group ETA in the 1980s and 1990s. According to some reports, the basement of the house in Sabadell was used as storage for pyrotechnic material in local celebrations that ended on September 9. The Civil Guards also seized a ballot box allegedly used in the 1 October referendum.

Even more remarkable was the reaction of Pedro Sánchez, the acting prime minister and leader of the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE). Attending the UN General Assembly in New York, he said “I just found out through the media.”

It is hard to believe Sánchez was unaware of a major police raid on an alleged terror cell in Catalonia. Not only has Catalonia been a center of police repression in Spain, but there have been no terror activities by Catalan nationalists for decades—since the activities of Terra Lluire (Free Land) in the early 1990s.

Even PSOE-linked association of judges denounced the operation. Ignacio González Vega, the spokesman for Judges for Democracy group, questioned the public prosecutor’s “bluntness,” which he described as

inappropriate for an initial phase of an investigation. Vega expressed “surprise” over the quantity of information released to the public in an investigation under seal, insisting that the most important thing was the presumption of innocence of the “suspects.”

This anti-terror operation is the latest in a long string of operations that ultimately came to nothing in the courts. In 2018, the High Court closed legal proceedings in the prosecution of anarchists in Operation Piñata and Operation Pandora, due to lack of evidence. This followed 33 arrests, three years of investigation during which hundreds of documents were analysed, and house searches across Spain, hours of phone conversations recorded, bank accounts frozen, and after subjecting some of the accused to months of imprisonment.

Last year, CDR activist Tamara Carrasco was arrested by Spanish police. Adrià Carrasco, another CDR activist escaped and went into self-exile in Belgium before he could be arrested. Both were accused of “rebellion” and “terrorism”. Currently, the case is at a standstill, after Spain’s High Court ruled out initial charges of terrorism and rebellion. Catalan courts are quarreling over their jurisdiction to handle the investigation, but Carrasco remains confined to the Catalan town of Viladecans—a measure restricting her freedom of movement outside the town until a new court focuses on her case.

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