



SAR Consultancy



Special Edition

Terror Attacks in Spain

by SAR Consultancy

Incident Details: On 17th of August 2017, suspected terrorists conducted an attack in Barcelona, Spain. A van drove at pedestrians in Las Ramblas (a highly populated street in Barcelona) killing 13 people and injuring at least 100. The van involved was initially said to have been rented by Driss Oukabir. However, shortly after the incident, this man is said to have presented himself to the police reporting that his documents were stolen. His brother, Moussa Oukabir, became a likely suspect. However, days later, it is believed that a male named Younes Abouyaaqoub was the driver of the vehicle. The driver fled on foot after the incident. It is believed that he hijacked a car to make good his escape, after killing its owner. Initial reports suggested that the driver may have fled to France, but reports are now emerging that security forces shot him after he attempted to carry out another attack in Subirats, Spain. It is suggested that he

was wearing an explosives vest at the time of his death.

Hours after the incident in Barcelona, a second incident occurred in Cambrils, where a car drove at pedestrians. The police, on high alert, responded immediately, shooting and killing five males who got out of the car. These men were reportedly wearing fake bomb vests. One person died after being hit by the car, and six injured. Following these attacks, the police reported that they dismantled a cell, who were likely to have been responsible for the two incidents (between 8 and 12 people) However, it is now emerging that the police are examining the possibility that some of the cell had links with wider networks across Europe. Within hours, ISIS claimed the perpetrators were 'Soldiers of the Caliphate'. Shortly after these incidents, reports of a third incident emerged, which had occurred on Wednesday the 16th of August in Alcanar (100kms southeast of Barcelona). An explosion

was reported in a house, initially thought to be a gas explosion. Later it emerged that there was a bomb making factory in the house. The explosive TATP, a highly volatile cocktail, is thought to have detonated prematurely resulting in the explosion. Two people were said to have been killed in the explosion. One may have been Abdelbaki Essati, the group's suspected leader, an imam is thought to have links with other known terrorists.

KEY FACTORS

Two vehicle related terrorist attacks in different locations in Spain

Explosion on Wednesday is thought to have resulted in an alteration to a more serious planned attack

Nine suspected terrorists killed, all suspected to have been part of a larger cell, with at least four others

The cell or members of it may have links to wider European networks

Fifteen people killed in the attacks and over one hundred injured.

Persons Involved: Essati allegedly moved to Ripoll about a year ago, before setting up a cell. Many of the suspects came from Ripoll. Interestingly, the cell included a number of sets of brothers, potentially cousins.



Family relationships between terrorists is not rare. This was seen in attacks in Brussels and Paris. However, this factor is important, as intelligence opportunities can be reduced where planning and plotting is conducted within families. Such relationships often facilitate clandestine operations.

Another interesting and significant aspect about these individuals, or at least those that have been identified, is that they appear to be unlike those identified in recent cell like attacks, such as Paris and Brussels, in that they were not known to the police. At this stage, only Essati is thought to have been known by the police. Additionally, early indications suggest that many of those involved had only recently turned to extremist ideology. Four suspects are due before the court shortly.

Suspects Reportedly Killed: Said Aallaa, Mohammed Hychami, Omar Hycami, Moussa Oukbirt, Younes Abouyaaquob and Houssaine Abouyaaquob.

Analysis: Many elements of these attacks mirror or highly resemble elements of attacks in Brussels, Berlin, Stockholm, Nice, and London for example. In that, vehicles were driven at the public in high populated areas. The incident in Cambrils was similar to the recent attack in London, where armed men alighted with fake bomb vests. The multi-locational aspect of this

attack, while being a significant development in respect to vehicle attacks, mirrors attacks in Brussels and Paris. The use of TATP is also similar to what was used in Brussels and Paris. This may indicate a potential link to networks and bomb making expertise in Europe.

However, other factors were not similar. Unlike other incidents, this was not conducted by a lone-actor or a small cell. Furthermore, it would appear that the plan may have been far more elaborate than how it played out. The explosion on Wednesday is thought to have played a considerable part in thwarting a more serious incident. If this is correct, then this may indicate that the cell had a higher degree of competence, with regard to logistics and planning than many of the recent attacks. This would mark a significant develop with regard to sophistication and coordination. Additionally, if a more elaborate incident was foiled by the explosion, these secondary attacks may indicate that the group were flexible and adaptive enough to proceed with a less technical but significant impact attack. This may imply both competence and commitment to the cause.

Spanish authorities may have received intelligence about a possible attack a number of weeks ago. However, no confirmation of this is available. Vehicle attacks of this nature are difficult to detect, however a bomb-making factory in combination with a larger cell, is likely to have provided a greater opportunity to security forces to garner intelligence on the plot, or part thereof. This incident would appear to have been significant enough that it would have taken considerable planning and preparation, especially if the alleged incident planned involved three vans filled with explosives, as suggested, providing further opportunities to gather intelligence. As a result, authorities may have known about a possible threat was known. However, the apparent closeness of this cell may have helped provide clandestine cover to their activities

Thinking out loud

- The vehicle used in the incident in Cambrils has reportedly been in France last week; this raises the question, could more than one of the cell members have links to other terrorist networks across Europe? If so, how far does this network reach?
- If the key suspect was found wearing a viable bomb vest, then one would have to ask if a bomb maker is still at large, especially if claims are correct that this suspect only recently turned to extremist ideologies as it would be unlikely he would have had the experience to make such a bomb.
- It is hard to believe that this cell was dismantled, despite the number of arrest and deaths. While all operatives may be dead or arrested, it is highly likely logistically supporters remain at large.
- If reports that many of these cell members only recently turned to extremist ideologies are correct and had not come to the attention of the police before, then how many similar groups are out there?
- A number of incidents were reported after these incidents in Spain, most notably in Finland, such incidents in the relative aftermath of incidents are not rare, which should be a reminder to security forces elsewhere to be on high alerts, especially with the initial 24-48 hours.