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Spain Ties Attacks to Broad Terror Network

Attack in Cambrils that left one person dead is connected to Las Ramblas crash



Witnesses Recall Terror in Barcelona

A terrorist mowed down pedestrians with a van in the heart of Barcelona, Spain, on Thursday, killing at least 13 people and injuring scores in an attack claimed by Islamic State. Witnesses recalled their panic and shock. Photo: AP.

By [Jeannette Neumann](#) in Madrid, [Pietro Lombardi](#) in Cambrils, Spain, and [Marina Force](#) in London

Updated Aug. 18, 2017 9:12 p.m. ET

Authorities said on Friday they unearthed evidence that a broad network involving a dozen suspects carried out the terror attacks in Spain, raising concerns that Islamic State is still capable of orchestrating coordinated assaults despite major losses in Syria and Iraq.

The deadly spree began with a van attack that killed 13 people in Barcelona and ended when police shot and killed five assailants in the seaside town of Cambrils, about 75 miles away, after they plowed an Audi into a group of civilians and a police patrol, killing one person.

Two Days of Terror
A trail of violence began when a home exploded in a coastal town and culminated in twin attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils



One man dies in an evening explosion at a house in Alcanar. Police later theorize the blast was accidental, and the men were assembling explosives intended to detonate a car bomb in Barcelona.

Police detained four men—three Moroccans and a Spaniard born in Melilla, an enclave surrounded by Morocco—in a series of arrests, and said on Friday at least three men were still at large.

“We are dealing with what seems to be an organized network,” said Jean-Charles Brisard, president of the Center for the Analysis of Terrorism in Paris. “The threat in Europe is here to stay.”

Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack via its official Amaq news agency, but Spanish police haven't revealed any evidence of its involvement. Counterterrorism officials and analysts, however, said the breadth of the Catalan network was a sign of how Islamic State was shifting its focus from holding territory in the Middle East to spreading operatives throughout the West.

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Tragedy on Las Ramblas

A van mowed down pedestrians as it drove for blocks on Barcelona's iconic tree-lined street. Arrests and other suspected connected events, including the discovery of another vehicle and a house explosion, took place outside the city. Early Friday morning in Cambrils seven people were injured and five terror suspects were killed in a second incident.

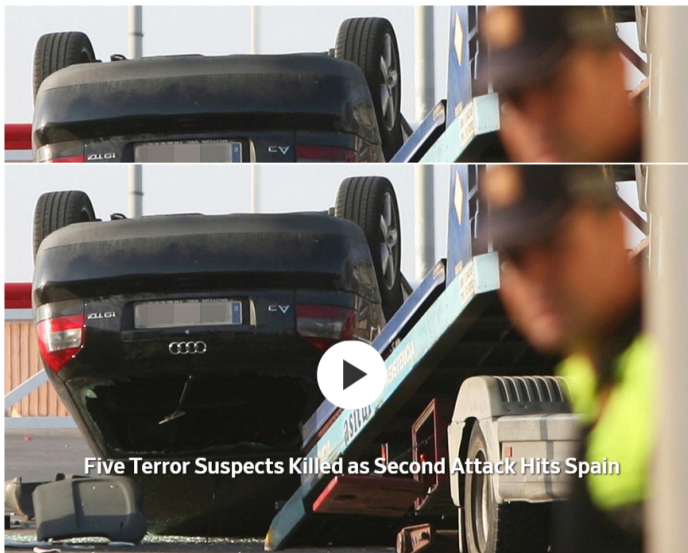


Source: Google Earth (Image)

"This shows that no matter the territory it loses, it will remain a threat," said Colin Clarke, an associate fellow at the International Center for Counterterrorism in The Hague, Netherlands.

Victims of the Barcelona attack came from 34 countries, local emergency services said, reflecting the city's status as a beloved tourist destination. The U.S. State Department said one American was killed and another suffered minor injuries.





Spain hadn't been the site of an Islamist terrorist attack since the 2004 Madrid bombing that killed 191 people and remains the deadliest postwar terrorist attack on European soil. This week it faced sobering evidence that Thursday's attacks could have been far worse than they were.



Just hours after Islamic State claimed responsibility for a terror strike in Barcelona on Thursday, police shot and killed five men in the seaside town of Cambrils, after they plowed a vehicle into a group of civilians and a police patrol. Image: EPA

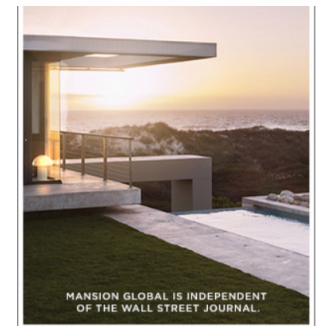
Police detained one of the suspects in Alcanar, a coastal town southwest of Barcelona, on suspicion he was part of a team of bomb-makers assembling explosives inside a house there. An accidental detonation at the house on Wednesday, which killed one suspected bomb-maker, failed to raise suspicion of potential terrorist activity at the time.

Since Thursday's attack in Barcelona, investigators have been probing whether the attackers originally intended to detonate one or more car bombs in Barcelona, according to a police official. Police found 30 gas canisters at the scene in Alcanar, which a local official said the plotters may have intended to load into two vehicles with triggering devices to launch a far more devastating act of terror.

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“We believe they prepared this attack for quite some time in the Alcanar house,” Catalan regional police chief Josep Lluís Trapero said. “They wanted to do one or several bigger attacks, but because it went wrong they lost some of their material and were pushed to do the Barcelona and Cambrils attacks.”

The fast-moving investigation moved on Friday to Ripoll, a tiny hamlet about a 1½-hour drive north of Barcelona, where police began raiding homes and detained two of the men arrested.

Ripoll Mayor Jordi Munell identified one of them as Driss Oukabir, whose name police said appeared in a van rental agreement. Mr. Oukabir said his identification papers had been stolen, according to Mr. Munell. The mayor said police were searching for Mr. Oukabir’s 17-year-old brother, Moussa, who was later identified as one of the five attackers killed in Cambrils, according to a person familiar with the investigation.

Western officials have cheered the recent fall of Islamic State’s stronghold in Mosul and its defeats in Syria as turning points in the U.S.-led campaign to roll back the group’s self-proclaimed “caliphate” and deprive it of a geographical base to organize attacks against the West.

Photos: Barcelona Mourns Victims as Hunt for Driver Intensifies

More than a dozen people were killed in the northern Spanish city in what police said was a terrorist attack



People attend a mass at the Sagrada Família Cathedral in Barcelona in memory of the victims. The cathedral is a short distance away from the location of the attack where a van that plowed into pedestrians in the center of town Thursday. SERGIO BARRENCHEA, PRESS POOL

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As the group sheds territory, thousands of European nationals who traveled to Iraq and Syria to train or fight with Islamic State are now returning home in large numbers, a trend that could lead to attacks that are more sophisticated and lethal, analysts say. The group also maintains robust recruitment operations over the internet and social media that have been used to plan and direct attacks in Europe.

Trail of Terror: Recent Attacks in Europe



U.K.: Military boots are laid in tribute outside the Royal Artillery Barracks at Woolwich in London.

Two British-born Muslim converts drove into off-duty British soldier Lee Rigby in London, then stabbed and hacked him to death. PHOTO: BOGDAN MARAN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

“The uptick in violent jihadi activity in Europe is the result of the dispersing of the caliphate,” said Jonathan Schanzer, senior vice president at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a conservative think tank in Washington.

Barcelona, analysts warn, is especially fertile territory for Islamic State. In Spain’s second-largest city and its surrounding province, “there exists a continued presence of extremists elements in the Muslim community that have no comparison elsewhere in Spain,” said Fernando Reinares, a terrorism analyst at Elcano Royal Institute, a Madrid think tank. About a quarter of the suspected Islamist militants who have been detained in Spain in the past several years live in Barcelona province, according to the institute.



Injured people are treated in the Las Ramblas district of Barcelona on Aug. 17. PHOTO: ASSOCIATED PRESS

“We have been warning for years, years, about what was taking shape in the province of Barcelona and its surroundings,” Mr. Reinares said.

Spain also occupies a special place in the lore of Islamic State because of its history as Al-Andalus, the name given to part of the Iberian Peninsula governed by Muslims at different times for nearly 800 years until the 15th century.

Islamic State “vowed to restore what they call the caliphate,” said Mikel Buesa Blanco, a professor at the Complutense University in Madrid. “For them, it’s recovery their historic past.” Important Islamic monuments from the time, such as the Alhambra in Granada, contribute to the mythology, he added.

On Friday morning, police reopened Barcelona’s central Plaça de Catalunya near the site of the attack, and vendors said people weren’t staying away. At noon at the Plaça, a crowd gathered for a moment of silence attended by Spain’s King Felipe VI and Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy.

Afterward, the crowd marched down the promenade toward the scene of the attack, shouting “No tinc por,” Catalan for “I’m not afraid.”

—Jon Sindreu in Ripoll, Spain, Benoit Faucon and Donato Paolo Mancini in London, and Noemie Bisserbe in Paris contributed to this article.

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