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THE MASSACRE IN BARCELONA: EVOLUTION OF ISIS

By Vanessa Tomassini
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Investigations on terrorist attack in Rambla of Barcelona on August 17th are continuing uninterrupted, trying to rebuild and stop the cell of the massacre. After several confusing and sometimes contradictory news, the material author of the massacre would be the moroccan **Younes Abuyaaqoub**, initially given for death, according to the investigators now would be fleeing, prosecuted by the police of Spain and France.

The leader of the cell seems to be **Abdelbaki El Satty**, a 40-year-old Moroccan in Ripoll, imam of the Cambrils Mosque, who for Spanish intelligence would lose his life in the Alcanar apartment's deflagration on Wednesday night. Death is still to be verified, Spanish intelligence picked up during a search in his apartment traces of DNA to compare with the biological remains of Wednesday's deflagration.

The flat in the air seems to be the cradle of the unlikely jihadists, stuffed with gas cylinders, which the babies-terrorist would like to explode on the Rumbra crowd, or as feared by experts, in the Sagrada Familia, symbol of the catholic Spain.

Just because of the explosion, the bloody gang of young Moroccan terrorists would have to redesign the strategy, renouncing the original plan with much more devastating intentions.

Ripoll is not used to the hostage of journalists, cops and secret services, the first to search for exclusives and others to hunt for evidence and clues. Right from the laughable town on the sea, near the French border, by today known for the impressive Romanesque monastery, comes 10 of the 12 cell members, all originating in Morocco just like the imam El Satty.

The imam has left the mosque by two months and the Spanish police think he is responsible for brainwashing made to Ripoll's Moroccan boys, some of only 17 or 18 years old, described by locals as good boys who shared football pitches with the Spanish peers, actually the next-door Jihadists who have been organizing for months.

The study and the logistic organization of the attacks have mistakenly led some analysts, or such people, to believe that the acts were not attributable to Daesh, but would have been closer to al-Qaeda modus operandi. However, the responsibility of the gesture is unmistakable and there is already someone who is preparing to study and fight the ISIS 3.0 phenomenon.

Is this a unique gesture or new evolution of Daesh's fluctuating and liquid phenomenon?

I talked about it with **Marco Lombardi**, professor at the Faculty of Humanities at the Catholic University and director of the Italian Team for Security, terroristic Issues & Managing Emergencies (ITSTIME).

Professor Lombardi believes credible video of Amaq where two Daesh soldiers claim the facts of Barcelona?

Judging by how the claim was launched and timing, nothing let me think that it's a fake one. If it is an authentic claim, as opposed to the communicative object itself, while in the past there have been cases of reinstatement, now I would say that it is authentic.

I ask it because sources close to computer intelligence have stated that Daesh in the hours after the attack sought information on Driss Oukabir, the one who initially seems to be the author of the massacre in Barcelona, as if Daesh did not even know well who was. Is it correct to think that Daesh is trying to put a hat on any attack without having any direct relationship with the terrorists?

Absolutely yes, this is not surprising to me. Daesh has always tried to put his hat on any definable fact as a terrorist attack, because they are interested in the effects. Do you remember when the Russian plane coming from Sharm (Egypt) was plagued with the explosive? There were many discussions about whether IS was, because there were no claims immediately. Daesh came out with a joke, which in my opinion very well summed up the spirit: "you have to prove that we weren't".

This is the reversal of the burden of proof, strategy used by Daesh right from the beginning, as it is very convenient. Whether it is crazy to invest with the car and kill 13 pedestrians or an Islamist believer, the effect is the same. So, what you are saying is probable, but it's doesn't show that the claim is a fake. I mean when Daesh gets enough information and brings out two soldiers to claim the act, that claim is valid.

What are the main differences between Barcelona and the other attacks in the others European capitals?

I believe that the only element in common with other attacks now is only the use of the vehicle, which is certified as the main weapon of mass destruction of the century. Daesh merely re-affirms this, but for the rest we witness a remarkable organizational evolution. Here we are no longer facing a single person or two subjects, but we are faced with a structure that has at least eight people involved, a double - if not triple - attack, two vans on Barcelona and one intercepted near Tarragona with one base jumped the day before, an apartment filled with gas cylinders...

There were some analysts who argued that the attack from a logistical point of view was not attributable to Daesh, but rather to Al Qaeda. In fact, in 2007, Qaedians used gas cylinders in the attack at Glasgow Airport, do you remember? What do you think?

I think that these underlining leave the time they find, meaning that it is important to understand whether Daesh or al-Qaeda has been clear about the mapping of power relations that are strongly evolving among the terrorist groups. We are in an extremely dynamic situation where Daesh continues to lose territory and al-Qaeda, lurking, trying in any way to reinstate the supremacy of Islamist extremism, albeit declined futuristically.

In terms of effects in the past we already saw collaborations on the organizational level between al-Qaeda and Daesh: people who formed in a field or in the other, then in Paris acted together, because the goal is the same, to hit the Kafir, the infidel. We have to distinguish levels: there is a high level of the two factions that need to be perceived strongly distinct because each one needs to affirm its leadership on the other; **If we go down to the operating level, this distinction is less clear and less recurring with the groups operating together.**

In this context, the training topics pass from one faction to another in their main means of communication. Was 'Inspire', the official magazine of al-Qaeda, to launch first knives and cars as a killing tool, Rumiya has taken these instructions to re-launch it to his audience, just as Daesh probably recovered from the rival the cylinders of gas. The fact would not surprise me and I would not read it like al-Qaeda's trademark.

Since 2015, Spain arrested about 200 people accused of proselytizing, recruiting and flattening in support of Daesh, of them 23% resident in Barcelona. Also from Spain have gone over 190 volunteers to Syria and Iraq, perhaps it is soon to be said, but it is conceivable that the one in Barcelona was one of the first attacks by foreign fighters returning to European territory?

The question is lawful ...

So, Spain strategy is wrong?

No, Spain doesn't have a wrong strategy, or rather all of us have a little wrong strategy. It seems to me that we are still far from understanding the terrorist phenomenon of Daesh as a phenomenon borned and based on the 'stay and expanding' motif, but Daesh has gone beyond territorial consolidation and is now dispersed in over thirty countries.

This spatial dispersion leads ISIS to review the organization, leadership, and communication structure, but not an implosion. Daesh is not dying at all. And the attack on Spain also denies those arguments that Italy is immune because doesn't participate in the bombings in Iraq, or we are not militarily engaged, now some colleagues today are asking "but why Spain? If it has never participated and is not engaged, is it now struck? " That is the narrative used by Daesh telling his militants or recruiting new resources by saying that they are fighting the Kuffar (infidels) who are bombarding them. The liquid and widespread penetration of terrorism is throughout the West and this thesis doesn't hold. Spain is showing it. If Spain, that after Atocha had not suffered much, represents a Daesh evolution or a uniqueness it is difficult to say.

Can we say that Spain has returned to the terrorists, or did not it ever leave?

Spain has never left it as it has never left the whole West. There is one more emphasis that appears in the latest issue of propaganda magazine, pointing to the recovery of places of Islamic culture and tradition. This is a reframe that also appears in Rumiya's #12 of ten days ago. The Alhambra, in Arabic al-Hamra, was one of Daesh's first maps, where the black tide immediately incorporated Spain. So not only Spain never left the terrorist's target, but there is an emphasis in recent months of the idea of re-occupying the areas traditionally belonging to Islam by Daesh.

In this context, are there any risks for Italy too?

Italy is not free from this risk, like other countries. Surely, we can say that Italy, in addition to having an excellent intelligence, succeeds in one thing: learn from what happens and happen to others, first of all from Israel. I find it paradoxical that in a place like Rumbia, the symbol of Spain and the privileged destination of international tourism, there were no anti-breakthrough protections. If you take Milan, for example, who knows, the areas most exposed to risk have already been protected, then it is obvious that terrorists are looking for the opportunity where to hit. It is also necessary to say that for Daesh Rome - therefore, Italy - is also the ultimate goal in propaganda terms. This doesn't mean that we are out of the reach, no less exempt from the danger of individual action or solitary wolves.

If the experts had warned us that Daesh would not die with al-Baghdadi, it's necessary not to lower the guard because there is no safe place and when Daesh disappears, is because it's busy to planning another attack.



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