

ISIS claims responsibility for Barcelona terror attack that killed at least 13 people

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At 4.50pm on Thursday, a white Fiat van travelling rapidly crashed into hundreds of people on La Rambla promenade, a busy downtown street in the capital of the northeastern region of Catalonia popular with tourists. Catalonia's Mossos d'Esquadra regional police force confirmed that this was deliberate. The driver fled the scene and has yet to be found.

Police have detained three people. One of those is Driss Oukabir, who allegedly rented the van used in the attack. The second, whose identity is unknown, was arrested in Alcanar in Catalonia's Tarragona province where regional police believe the suspect, along with other people, was preparing an explosive device. A third suspect was detained in this morning in Ripoll in Catalonia's Girona province.

ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack on La Rambla late on Thursday, which caused panic in the center of the city. The main roads of Barcelona were evacuated while police hunted for those responsible.

Barcelona attack

Police clear central Barcelona on Thursday afternoon. Joan Sánchez

MORE INFORMATION

Photos: Barcelona terrorist attack (Spanish captions)

Spanish police kill five suspected terrorists in resort town of Cambrils

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Video of the moments after the van plowed into pedestrians.

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Hours after the terrorist attack in Barcelona, police killed five terror suspects in the Catalan resort town of Cambrils

The van involved traveled some 500 meters in a manner similar to other recent attacks in Germany, Nice and Stockholm. The absence of bollards on La Rambla meant the vehicle could mount the pedestrian area located in the center of the boulevard.

"What I saw was a disaster area."

Albert Tort, a 47-year-old nurse who lives on la Rambla said: “The police wouldn’t let me through, but I identified myself as a health worker and went in. What I saw was a disaster area. I counted at least six dead, I tried to revive a young man, but it was impossible.”

“We were in the doorway of the Hard Rock Café. We were heading to la Rambla when we heard the crash of the white van as it ran into people. We saw people flying through the air after they were hit. And three cyclists as well,” said Ellen Vercamm, who is on holiday in Barcelona and witnessed the attack.

She added: “We missed it by two minutes. It was terrible. We are a big group and we still don’t know if everybody is okay.”

When the van stopped, the driver fled. “There is no evidence that this person was armed, according to what witnesses have told us,” said Mossos d'Esquadra head Josep Lluís Trapero after a flood of contradictory news stories circulated during the evening.

The latest casualty toll from the regional government of Catalonia, known as the Generalitat, is at least 13 deaths, including three Germans and one Belgian. At least 100 people were injured. Authorities asked people to stay in their homes, but many went outside to try to help those affected or to give blood: hospitals had to issue a statement saying they had sufficient supplies of plasma.

Catalan interior minister Joaquim Forn last night refused to rule out the possibility that the number of people injured might increase.

Two hours after the incident, the Mossos d'Esquadra confirmed it was a terrorist attack and launched special counter-terrorist operations to find the driver of the vehicle, although these have been unsuccessful as yet.

Two arrests

A victim of the attack is attended to by passersby.

A victim of the attack is attended to by passersby. JOAN SÁNCHEZ

Police have now detained two people. The first, Driss Oukabir, was arrested in Ripoll (Girona). Oukabir arrived in Barcelona from Morocco on Sunday August 13. He allegedly hired the van used in the attack in Santa Perpètua de Mogoda, near Barcelona. Police sources say a Spanish passport was found in the van.

The second person arrested in relation to the attack in La Rambla was detained in Alcanar, in Catalonia’s Tarragona province. The detainee is a man born in the Spanish North African enclave of Melilla. His identity has not been made public. He has been linked to an explosion on Wednesday night in Alcanar. One person died and seven other were injured after a gas build-up. The building was

completely destroyed.

Trapero said yesterday there was a “clear link” between the explosion in Alcanar and the attack in Barcelona: Catalan police are working on the hypothesis that the terrorists could have been preparing an explosive device.

A total of 20 butane and propane gas canisters were found inside the building.

However, Trapero ruled out a link between Thursday’s van attack and an incident which saw a driver ignore a police control on Barcelona’s Diagonal avenue. One officer was driven into and suffered a broken femur. His companion shot at the driver, a Spanish national, who died.

In the confusion in the hours following the attack, a rumor spread that a terrorist was holed up in a bar near the site of the attack. This was later ruled out by police. However, some establishments near La Rambla closed their shutters, with people staying inside.

Crisis cabinet

In the wake of the attack, Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy spoke with Catalan regional premier Carles Puigdemont, as well as with leaders of the Catalan opposition.

A crisis cabinet formed of regional Catalan authorities, the central government’s delegation to Catalonia, the Guardia Civil and the National Police has been formed to assess the situation.

Rajoy and Deputy Prime Minister Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría traveled to Barcelona on Thursday night while Catalan politicians issued a message of unity in the face of terrorism.

The US State Department issued a tweet telling US citizens in Barcelona to let family and friends know they were safe through social media.

Spain’s High Court, the Audiencia Nacional, has launched official investigations.

Hours after the terrorist attack in Barcelona, police killed five terror suspects in the Catalan resort town of Cambrils.

The Catalan regional police are working on the hypothesis that the suspects killed in Cambrils were planning an attack following up on the events that took place in Barcelona on Thursday afternoon

A second suspect vehicle thought to be linked to Thursday’s Barcelona attack was also found in the town of Vic, some 60 kilometers north of the Catalan capital.

