

Militancy/Terrorism



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NOV
10:11 UTC

Spain Alert: Moroccan national arrested on terrorism charges in Terrassa, Barcelona, per November 3 reports; posed credible, if not imminent threat

Current Situation

- According to November 3 reports, a 25-year-old Moroccan national was arrested on terrorism charges on October 31 by the Policia Nacional, the Spanish National Police, in Terrassa, Barcelona. The individual is suspected of participating in indoctrination, glorification, and making terrorist threats, as well as hate crimes. In recent days, the suspect reportedly began attempting to acquire knives and bulletproof vests and had increasingly made threats on social media against the LGBTQ+ and Jewish communities. Authorities seized multiple computers from his home.
- The operation, which began in late 2022, was coordinated between Moroccan and Spanish authorities and initially focused on the suspect's radical online content. The individual reportedly had some 400,000 followers on social media and had used his page to incite terrorist attacks in Europe, particularly in Spain, with the aim "of imposing Sharia or Islamic Law".
- Additionally, it was found that he had praised the [January 25 terror attack in Algeciras, Spain](#), and had made specific threats against social media users who were critical of his postings, including messages where he "threatened to cut the throats of the enemies of Islam".
- The arrest follows Spanish authorities stating an increase in national security following the [October 13 terrorist attack in Arras, France](#), and the October 16 [killing of two Swedish nationals in Brussels](#) both attributed to Islamist terrorism. Currently, Spain has maintained its terror alert level at four, the second highest on a five-point scale.

Assessments & Forecast

1. The suspect's recent attempts to procure weapons, coupled with him being monitored since late 2022, indicates he posed a credible, if not imminent threat. The fact that the suspect had been posting highly radical and violent content in recent months, including calls for attacks, further suggests he was increasingly radicalized and more likely to act violently.
2. Moreover, considering that he only attempted to procure weapons in recent days, it is possible that he was incited by [calls from terrorist organizations](#), including Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State (IS), Hamas, and Hezbollah, for attacks on Jewish and Israeli individuals and institutions amid the ongoing hostilities between Israel and Hamas. Indeed, his threat towards the Jewish community online is supportive of this.
3. As such, the development reiterates the elevated threat of Islamist attacks in Europe, especially targeting Jewish and Israeli individuals and entities, in response to the hostilities in Israel and the Palestinian Territories. This is further supported by the [October 24 arrest of a 29-year-old Islamic State \(IS\)](#) associated individual in Germany who planned to carry out a vehicular ramming attack against a pro-Israeli protest in Duisburg.
4. That the suspect was attempting to procure knives is in line with regionwide trends, with Islamist lone actors in recent years utilizing bladed weapons due to their availability, low detectability, and moderate planning and training needed to perpetrate such attacks. That the suspect praised the January 25 machete attack in Algeciras suggests he was influenced by these Islamist attacks.
5. Furthermore, that the individual is of Moroccan origin is also notable, as it reflects the continued targeting and radicalization of both migrants and members of established Muslim communities in Spain and regionwide. This is supported by the [September 8 arrest of a 19-year-old Moroccan](#) in Pamplona, Navarre, northern Spain, on suspected terrorism offenses, including radicalization and recruitment. **FORECAST:** With that, authorities are liable to continue increased monitoring of social networks and online communication of individuals at risk of radicalization – especially youths from migrant communities, as well as low-socioeconomic areas.
6. Separately, the suspect's online presence reflects the continued threat of Islamist radicalization and recruitment on social media platforms– especially considering that he had a reach of 400,000 followers and four million “likes” on his posts. Moreover, the suspect's age is also notable, given that young adults are key in youth recruitment, especially through online channels. This is further supported by the August arrests of two IS-associated individuals from Valencia and Zamora, on charges of active indoctrination and recruitment of youth, specifically through social media platforms.
7. **FORECAST:** Considering the current security landscape in Spain, and throughout Europe, the Islamist terrorist threat is expected to remain high in the coming weeks. As Israel intensifies its operation in Gaza, further calls for attacks and “Days of Rage” by terrorist groups are likely. This, in turn, significantly increases the risk of lone actors that are already in radical milieus being incited to violence. As such, the predominant threat will continue to emanate from lone actors, who are likely to attempt attacks using rudimentary tactics, especially stabbing attacks. That said, the potential for mass-casualty attacks using tactics such as vehicular rammings or assault rifles remains – as evidenced by the October 16 attack in Brussels, Belgium. While attempts at coordinated attacks are liable to increase, such plots are more likely to be foiled by authorities, making it less likely for them to come to fruition.
8. **FORECAST:** As evidenced by recent attempted attacks and foiled plots, Jewish and Israeli individuals and establishments will remain primary targets in the immediate term. This includes Jewish community centers, Jewish schools, Kosher restaurants and shops, synagogues, as well as Israeli businesses. As such, authorities are expected to maintain heightened security measures near such locations in the near term, particularly in countries like Belgium, France, Germany, and the UK, which have larger Jewish populations. Such security measures are likely to include increased police presence at vulnerable targets, as well as the advisement against specific events with Jewish or Israeli ties.
9. **FORECAST:** In addition to Jewish and Israeli targets, other groups such as the LGBTQ+ community remain vulnerable to attacks. Moreover, locations and events that are symbolic in nature are also

at high risk – including churches, major national and Christian holidays and related events, key monuments, and locations with high footfall.

Recommendations

1. Those operating or residing in Spain and throughout Europe on November 7 and in the coming weeks are advised to maintain heightened vigilance for the increased threat of potential attacks by Islamist terrorists.
2. Avoid nonessential travel in the vicinity of protests related to the ongoing hostilities in Israel and the Palestinian territories due to the elevated threat of unrest and attacks.
3. Maintain heightened vigilance near Jewish and Christian establishments, Israeli, Scandinavian, and US embassies and establishments, major public spaces, transportation hubs, and festive events with large crowds due to the potential for attacks.
4. Consider keeping a low profile and limiting the wearing or presenting of overt signs or symbols associated with Judaism or Israel. Those that wear the traditional Jewish head covering (kippah), are advised to consider wearing an additional head covering, such as a baseball cap.
5. Alert authorities immediately upon witnessing suspicious items or behavior. Public, private, and third-sector organizations are advised to increase their awareness of threats on social media through the use of threat monitoring services.
6. Increased awareness of an organization's political footprint and perceptions from fringe online groups can help uncover potential violent actors and plots before they occur.
7. For further questions and risk assessments, please contact intel@max-security.com.