

## Militancy/Terrorism

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### **Spain Alert: Authorities confirm arrest of IS-member in Pamplona, Navarre, on September 8; reflects sustained threat from Islamist terrorism**

## Current Situation

- On September 8, the Policia Nacional confirmed the September 6 arrest of a 19-year-old of Moroccan origin in Pamplona, Navarre, northern Spain, suspected of terrorism offences, including radicalization and recruitment.
- The arrest was part of a joint operation carried out by Spanish intelligence services, Moroccan intelligence agencies, and Europol, which began in 2022 after authorities were alerted to suspicious behavior.
- The suspect disseminated radical and violent jihadist content through multiple social media channels, as well as online closed jihadist groups. The individual reportedly utilized measures aimed at avoiding police detection.
- During the security operation, police seized hundreds of manuals, including instructions for manufacturing explosives and poisons, as well as the use and handling of weapons. Additionally, authorities seized manuals on how to perform secure financial transactions, guidelines for hiding terrorist activity online, and instructions related to radicalization and recruitment.
- Furthermore, the suspect allegedly pledged an “oath of allegiance” to Islamic State (IS). Moreover, he maintained contact with IS members located in the “conflict zone” and planned to travel abroad to join the organization.

## Assessments & Forecast

1. Given that no weapons were seized, coupled with no attack plot being found, it is unlikely that the individual was plotting an attack in Europe. Rather, the development highlights the continued risk of Islamist radicalization and recruitment in Spain. This is supported by the July 1 arrest of an IS member in Barcelona's El-Prat Airport (BCN) accused of recruiting individuals into the terrorist organization.
2. That the individual was in direct contact with IS members and swore allegiance to the group suggests that he had access to more recruitment and radicalization material than would normally be found on social networks and forums. Furthermore, it highlights the reach of IS and the group's continued active recruitment in Europe, despite a lapse in activity in recent years.
3. The individual's engagement in the consumption and dissemination of Islamist materials through social networks, coupled with his age, reiterates the continued active recruitment of young individuals by extremist groups – both among Islamists and far-right extremists – given their susceptibility to radical content, particularly through online channels. This is supported by the August 9 arrest of two IS-linked individuals in Spain accused of using social media platforms to target youth and bring them into a private group where they disseminated extremist content.
4. 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 evidenced by the September 2 arrest of a foreign national in Spain on charges of Islamist radicalization with an intention to carry out an attack. **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.
5. Additionally, the development reiterates Spain's role as an entry point for jihadists into Europe, given its geographical proximity to Northern Africa, where terrorist organizations continue to have a larger and more entrenched presence. The July 19 arrests of two IS-linked individuals in Spain and Morocco gives further credence to this. Additionally, these migrants are often able to seek support from radicalized individuals within existing communities, with evidence of financial and radicalization networks within the country. Moreover, that the suspect planned to travel abroad is notable, given that the number of foreign fighters from European countries traveling to the Middle East to join IS and other groups has significantly decreased since 2017.
6. Separately, that the suspect was disseminating manuals for making explosives and using poison is in line with a recent uptick in foiled terrorist plots using explosives and other tactics aimed at achieving higher casualties, as opposed to attacks using bladed weapons. **FORECAST:** That said, given the difficulty in carrying out attacks using explosives and poisons, given the required knowledge and higher risk of being foiled by authorities, successful attacks are still more likely to be carried out using rudimentary tactics, such as stabbings and vehicular rammings. Based on precedent, primary targets will continue to include locations with high foot traffic, such as transport stations and tourist hotspots, religious establishments, and locations associated with the LGBTQ+ community.
7. The coordinated nature of the security operation also reflects attempts by authorities regionwide to counter the continued presence of terrorist organizations in Europe, with multiple countries warning of an increased terrorist threat in recent months. This is evidenced by Sweden increasing its terrorism threat level in August, as well as Dutch authorities warning of "increasing signs" of terrorist activity in May. Similarly, in July, the UK issued a warning regarding an increase in attack plots from established terrorist organizations – namely IS and Al-Qaeda. **FORECAST:** Given that the threat of Islamist terrorist will remain elevated in the near-to-medium term, further coordinated operations are expected to continue.

## Recommendations

1. Travel to Spain may continue while maintaining vigilance for the increased threat of potential

attack plots by Islamist terrorist groups.

2. Alert authorities immediately upon witnessing suspicious items or behavior.
3. If a potential stabbing, shooting, or similar incident manifest, leave the area immediately if possible, or take shelter at a secure location.
4. Public, private, and third-sector organizations are advised to increase awareness of threats on social media using threat monitoring services.
5. Increased awareness of an organization's political footprint and perceptions from online fringe groups can help uncover potential violent actors and plots before they occur.