

## Militancy/Terrorism



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## Spain Alert: Police confirm arrest of 17-year-old Syrian national on Islamist terrorism charges in Montellano, Seville on January 23; likely posed imminent threat

### Current Situation

- On January 23, Policia Nacional confirmed the arrest of a 17-year-old student of Syrian nationality residing in Montellano city, Seville province, for alleged involvement in Islamist terrorist activities. The suspect and his mother arrived in Spain in 2022 as refugees.
- The suspect, who has been under surveillance for suspicious online activity for weeks, was arrested after authorities confirmed his intention to attack his school. Authorities were alerted to the suspect reportedly moving explosives to an open field near the school, where they suspect he was planning a test run of the attack. The individual had also posted his intention to attack the school on online messaging platforms.
- Authorities seized large amounts of explosives, chemicals, as well as Islamic State (IS) propaganda materials from his residence. Details of an attack plot were also discovered by police during the raid.
- Officials added that the suspect was progressively radicalized via social media platforms and held strong anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-Semitic sentiments. Additionally, authorities confirmed that the suspect had previously been involved in violent incidents at school, although none of these were jihadist in nature.
- Authorities have also detained the suspect's mother for complicity in the plot, citing the explosives and chemicals were unlikely to go unnoticed within the residence.

## Assessments & Forecast

1. The seizure of the explosives and chemicals, coupled with authorities' suspicions he was planning a trial run for the attack, indicates he posed a credible, likely imminent, threat. This is also supported by the confirmed attack plot and his posts regarding his intent to carry out an attack online.
2. The suspect's anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-Semitic sentiments, as well as his profile, are consistent with Islamist trends, with multiple attack plots regionwide involving individuals with immigrant backgrounds, including asylum seekers. This is supported by the [October 2023 arrest of a Moroccan youth](#) on terrorism charges in Terrassa, Barcelona, and the [September 2023 arrest of a 19-year-old Moroccan](#) in Pamplona, Navarre, on suspected terrorism offenses, including radicalization and recruitment. The suspect's age also reflects the continued targeting of youths in radicalization and recruitment efforts, both among Islamist and far-right extremist actors.
3. While details on the timeline of radicalization are not confirmed as of writing, the fact that authorities began surveilling him in recent weeks suggests he was likely catalyzed to violence by calls for attacks
4. Furthermore, the reports suggesting that the suspect had been planning the attack since October further indicate that he was likely catalyzed to violence by the calls for attack by multiple Islamist groups, including Al-Qaeda, Hamas, and IS, since the beginning of the Israel-Hamas conflict on October 7. Indeed, that the suspect possessed IS propaganda material also supports this.
5. Further, the suspect's target is notable, as this is the first recorded attempted Islamist terrorist attack of this scale targeting an educational institution in Spain. This could suggest he may have also been partially motivated by personal grievances, given that perpetrators of previous school attacks often cited personal disputes as one motive. That said, considering previous attacks targeting educational faculty in Europe, especially in France, the decision to target the school was also likely influenced by a rejection of institutions that do not align with radical Islamist ideologies.
6. The attack plot also reiterates the regionwide uptick in [attempts by Islamists to carry out attacks using explosives](#). This is supported by the [January 16 arrest of an Islamist terrorist cell](#) that was finalizing an arms deal, including explosives, in the Spanish provinces of Catalonia and Extremadura. **FORECAST:** While such attacks are more likely to be foiled, as seen with the recent arrests, any successful attack involving explosives, firearms, or other incendiary devices, would be significantly more lethal than those involving rudimentary tactics, such as bladed weapons, and thereby, result in significantly higher casualties.
7. That the suspect was already under surveillance reflects heightened counterterrorism measures adopted by Spanish authorities amid the elevated terrorist threat level regionwide – especially due to the Israel-Hamas conflict – with Spain maintaining its terrorism level at Level 4, the second highest on a five-point scale. **FORECAST:** With that, authorities are expected to sustain heightened security and surveillance measures to deter militant activities, including monitoring social media and online forums associated with radical actors. Authorities are also expected to maintain a lower threshold for arrests, which includes preventive detentions. With that, the likelihood of similar arrests and foiled plots to be uncovered remains elevated in the near term.

## 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.
6. For further questions and risk assessments, please contact [intel@max-security.com](mailto:intel@max-security.com).