SPAIN SEES HIGHEST JIHADIST–RELATED TERROR ARRESTS IN 20 YEARS

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A massive increase in the number of arrests came after the Hamas attack on Israel.

Category: NEWS

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In 2023, Spanish authorities arrested 78 people for offenses related to jihadist terrorism, a 66% uptick compared to the previous year.

The figures, compiled and released by the Ministry of Interior, are the highest recorded in nearly two decades. The rising number of jihadist terror-related arrests represents the continuation of an upward trend that began in 2015, the same year Europe witnessed an unprecedented influx of 1.3 million migrants, the vast majority of whom come from Islamic cultures.

The number of operations targeting jihadist terrorists increased as well, with the National Police and Civil Guard carrying out a total of 36 operations across Spain's 50 provinces, nine more than the previous year.

Barcelona led in the number of arrests and operations, with fourteen and seven, respectively. In second was Madrid with eleven and six, while Valencia saw six and four.

Notably, the vast majority of arrests and police operations took place during the final months of the year. Before August, for example, authorities had made 19 arrests from 16 operations. In the months after, leading up to the end of the year, the number of arrests rose precipitously, climbing to 78, while police operations more than doubled.

In November, two minors—one living in the province of Plasencia and the other in the Balearic Islands— were arrested by Civil Guard officers for allegedly using video game communication platforms to spread Islamic State propaganda to recruit would-be jihadists for terrorist attacks.

A month later on December 19th, the Spanish National Police, working alongside Moroccan authorities, conducted one of the largest anti-jihadist terror operations in recent

years, arresting nine individuals who were alleged members of a terror recruitment cell in the North African exclave of Melilla and another in the Moroccan city of Nador.

The same week, Spanish authorities apprehended three radicalized teens in Barcelona and Madrid on jihadist-terror-related charges. The three, allegedly, had sought to obtain instruction manuals on how to synthesize triacetone triperoxide (TATP), a powerful explosive used by Islamic terrorists in the November 2015 Paris attacks, the 2016 Brussels airport attacks, and the Manchester concert bombing.

The explosive is a favorite among jihadists due to the ease with which its components—hydrogen peroxide and acetone—can be obtained.

According to prosecutors, the trio was "highly radicalized and with an ideology entirely compatible with the jihadist viewpoints defended by the terrorist organization [Islamic State]."

Reverberations from the events taking place in Gaza have been felt elsewhere across Europe as well. A little more a month after Hamas' attack on Israel, the French Interior Ministry reported that there had been 1,518 antisemitic incidents, nearly three times the total recorded during the whole of 2022.

Meanwhile in Denmark, the Department for Mapping and Knowledge Sharing of Anti-Semitic Incidents (AKVA), which is part of the Jewish Society in Denmark, reported a sharp uptick in anti-semitic incidents in the month following the October 7th attack. The group noted that the number of cases was 24 times higher than the average from the previous nine months.

Roughly a week after the attack, a Tunisian migrant, allegedly inspired by the ideology of the Islamic State, murdered two Swedish football fans in Brussels. Days earlier, a Chechen Islamist who had been on France's terror watch list went on a stabbing rampage at a local school, killing a teacher and injuring several others.

While it remains unclear whether the incidents were directly related to or inspired by the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas, they both came after former Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal called on Muslims around the world to mobilize for a "Day of Jihad."