

Alejandro Omar Elsanafawy Castellanos

1967-2017: Fifty Years of MENA Region Terrorism in Madrid

Abstract

Spain is the nation where terrorism has struck hardest on the continent in recent decades, and within it, that region, the province of Madrid. This article aims to study terrorism originating in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region in Madrid from the 1967 until 2017, analyzing the half-century. The evolution of the phenomenon will be quantitatively demonstrated through case studies. Data will be presented on completed or attempted activities, as well as those arrested for these acts, including the terrorists' nationalities of origin, sex, number, place of detention, and the group to which they belong or with which they are associated. The study's implications will provide a comprehensive view of this phenomenon in Madrid during its first half-century.

Keywords: Madrid, Terrorism, Jihadism, Security, Police

Alejandro Omar Elsanafawy Castellanos, Graduate in Criminology, USAL; Holder of a Master's Degree in Peace, Security and Defense, UNED; and doctoral candidate in Law and Society, UDIMA.

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1. Introduction

It is evident to any critical observer that religious terrorism of an Islamist character currently holds a prominent place on the world stage, due to its increased activity compared to other groups that justify themselves through the supremacy of different confessions, and even above secular terrorism oriented toward other goals.

For some years now, jihadist terrorism has undergone an exponential international increase. Noteworthy is the proliferation of groups, their diversification, the rise in their attacks and activities, the refinement of techniques, and the growth in their membership. Spain, as one of the major Western European powers, is sensitive to this and experiences firsthand the transnational nature of terrorism from the MENA region (that comprising the sum of the Near East and North Africa), which leads to “terrorist actions in a third country to achieve goals in their countries of origin” (Rojas Aravena, 2002:19).

After an extensive review of works, studies, and research of all kinds related to terrorism of any etiology in Spain, a virgin and difficult-to-address gap was observed (likely due to its scope) and this is the lack of monographic studies that cover the entire historical period, from its origins to, in this case, its half-century of history, thoroughly exposing the overall evolution of MENA region terrorism in Madrid.

In addition to the above, the aim is to present a study that addresses this topic from 1967 – the year in which the first attack related to the subject at hand occurred¹ – until the present day. Above all, however, the goal is to contribute a study of the characteristics surrounding it, its evolution, etc., limited to the Madrid region, giving it the political and demographic importance it deserves, while avoiding letting ambition prevent the fulfillment of the objectives and the appropriate length for a publication of this nature.

As mentioned, different analysts have documented police operations against jihadism in specific and very particular periods of Spain’s recent history. However, what is novel is to look back, broaden the temporal focus, and give it continuity over time, in order to gain greater perspective and thus better analyze the fluctuations, in the case at hand, of the number of individuals detained² or investigated for terrorism and their activities.

1 On January 3, 1967, at 26 Paseo de San Francisco de Sales (Madrid), Mohamed Khider, a member of the National Liberation Front (FLN) of Algeria, was assassinated by firearm.

2 It should be noted that many of the arrests that will be analyzed did not result in a conviction, or if they did, not all were for the facts indicated by the Security Forces and Corps. This occurred for a variety of reasons (pardons for diplomatic personnel, extraditions, changes in legislation, death of the terrorists...). It would be considered an error not to include those facts simply because they had multiple different political, legal, or natural outcomes. To approach the criminal repercussions of the phenomenon, the reading of Nuñez Fernández (2022) is recommended.

2. Methodology

The research will, on one hand, provide the nationalities of the perpetrators³, the criminal classification of their acts, the characteristics of the organizations to which they belong or with which they identify their motivations, etc., in an attempt to discover the explanation for the changes the phenomenon undergoes. On the other hand, it will reflect a descriptive historical and comparative data analysis of the extent to which nationals from different countries participated, how many were male and female, what criminal activities they carried out, comparing the results according to the periods into which the study has been divided. This has been carried out through an inductive method, moving from the particular to the general, analyzing case by case to extract previously dormant or unextracted truths and to synthesize them in the tables that will be presented.

In general terms, the data analyzed come from official, non-official, and academic sources, specifically and broadly:

- Infographics such as those from the Ministry of the Interior that map terrorist activity from 2012 to 2016, and official reports that help establish the police and judicial activity that produced the March 11 attacks in Madrid (Ministry of the Interior, 2004).
- Digital compilations of police operations carried out by the Security Forces and Corps through publications in the media from 1995 to the present (Observatorio Internacional de Estudios sobre Terrorismo, 1995-2017) and annual terrorism reports (Centro Memorial de las Víctimas del Terrorismo, 2015-2017).

As secondary sources, different preceding works – at least partially – on case analysis will be taken into account:

- Studies of specific periods such as the one developed by Jiménez Martín (2005).
- Monographs on terrorism and its incidence such as the one carried out by the Centro Superior de Estudios de la Defensa in 2005 but limited to our field of work.

3. Comparative Analysis and Context

The stages into which the study has been divided were established according to motivations and terrorist activity, thus distinguishing six phases.

³ The study will focus on nationalities of origin, thus avoiding errors when assigning Spanish nationality, residence permits, or the diplomatic status of the detainees. It is also believed that, by limiting ourselves to the offender's origin, the data obtained will be much richer.

3.1. Initial Phase 1967-1984:

The activity of foreign groups with nationalist and/or Islamist ideology dates back a little earlier than the 1970s – the first attack is recorded in 1967⁴. At that time, more influenced by the former idea than the latter, their actions were divided into two types: targeted assassinations of people within their orbit who resided in Spain, and attacks against foreign interests located in our country. In general, these were more targeted and selective attacks than indiscriminate ones (Centro Superior de Estudios de la Defensa, 2005: 375).

In short, terrorist activity was fundamentally the externalization of regional conflicts in the Near East, especially the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which also included and affected nationals and interests from Jordan, Egypt, or Kuwait; the Iran-Iraq conflict due to the war in the 1980s; the Lebanon-Libya conflict due to the disappearance of Imam Musa al-Sadr; the Algerian revolution, etc.

3.2. New Targets 1985-2000:

In 1985, MENA-influenced terrorism in Spain continued with attacks against business targets of countries considered enemies of their cause (Egyptian, Jordanian, Israeli airlines; American banks...), as well as the assassination of specific diplomats and adversaries. To this were added attacks with indiscriminate results in which Spanish citizens died (although they were not the intended target), a people that, in general, felt sympathy for the Palestinian cause.

From 1995 onward, in addition to the majority presence in Spain of terrorists of Iranian-Lebanese and Syrian-Palestinian origin, Algerians were added. These primarily belonged to the Armed Islamic Group (hereinafter, GIA)⁵ and its splinter, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (hereinafter, GSPC)⁶, which would eventually become Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb⁷ (Mokeddem, 2010:26). They established themselves in Spain as a bridge between Algeria, other Sahel countries, and France, targets toward which the killers directed their actions⁸.

4 ABC. (1967). Mohamed Jider fue asesinado anoche frente a su domicilio. p. 51. <https://www.abc.es/archivo/periodicos/abc-madrid-19670104-51.html>

5 It was founded in 1992 in Algeria and was composed of veteran jihadists from the Afghan war, members of the Armed Islamic Movement and the Islamic Salvation Front. Of Sunni Islamist ideology, it aimed to establish a theocracy in that country. It actively participated in the Algerian Civil War and carried out attacks mainly in that country and in France. Between 2004 and 2005 the group was dismantled.

6 It was founded in 1998, following a split from the GIA, when part of its members positioned themselves against the indiscriminate attacks against civilians that the group had been carrying out. Of Sunni Islamist ideology, its main objective was to establish an Islamic state in Algeria. It operated in the Maghreb and Sahel region and had ramifications in different European countries, including Spain. It eventually eclipsed the GIA in importance and terror and finally rebranded itself as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb in 2006.

7 It was founded in 2006. Of Sunni Islamist ideology, identical to that of the GSPC, its main leitmotif was to fight against the Arab countries in the operational area of the Maghreb and the Sahel, although with the rebranding under the Al Qaeda name it adopted a more global approach to viewing and waging jihad.

8 Between 1995 and 2005, more than 15 police operations were carried out against these two groups.

3.3. *The West Is the Enemy 2001-2003:*

On September 11, 2001, Al Qaeda carried out the deadliest terrorist attack in history in the United States, with a fatal toll of 3.000 dead and 6.000 wounded. This initiated the “War on Terror” and with it the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, which was possibly what the terrorists sought in order to gain followers for their cause, and, as has been confirmed years later, was a complete success (Avilés Farré, 2017:90-93). Until 9/11, Spanish intelligence services had maintained a low profile in repressing this phenomenon (Forriol Campos, 2013:2); their attitude could be summarized as observe, listen, store, and share information with other intelligence services; they only acted when perpetrators moved to action or it was foreseeable that they would do so. After 9/11, up to forty arrests took place in Spain, thus increasing repression against this phenomenon – a fact that, on the other hand, did not prevent the 11-M attacks. The following years would be marked by the dismantling of the Al Qaeda cell in Spain and its sentencing in 2005⁹.

3.4. *Madrid as a Target 2004-2008:*

March 11 marked a change in the philosophy of jihadists in Spain; for the *mujahideen*, it had ceased to be that refuge and rearguard of the “open front” (Jordán, 2003:2). Spain had become a direct and primary target, not as had occurred in 1985 with *El Descanso*, when the Islamic Jihad organization¹⁰ stated “we wish to clarify immediately that we deeply regret the Spanish victims who were present at the moment of the explosion in this nest of Americans. They were in no way the target of the explosion” (De la Corte, 2025:198. in Crespo, 2025:61), nor even as had happened in the Casablanca attack (Morocco) on May 16, 2003, in which, among four other locations, the Casa de España was attacked with more intent to strike a space where the Western way of life was enjoyed than against Spanish interests. As things stood, it was only a matter of time; after all, Al-Andalus has always been part of their imaginary, as can be seen summarized in (Fundación Centro para la Memoria de las Víctimas del Terrorismo, 2023:46-47). The self-immolation of the cell that followed the attack in the municipality of Leganés “was considered the first suicide attack in Europe” (Herrero Vázquez, 2013:575). The 11-M attacks were sentenced by the National Court in 2007¹¹.

Starting in the third quarter of 2004, in addition to the prolific police activity against those related to the Madrid attacks, dozens of new arrests occurred in operations with specific names such as *Nova* (in its three phases), *Saeta*, *Sello* (two phases), *Tigris*... in which the accused were intermingled,

9 National Court, Criminal Chamber, Third Section, Judgment No. 36/2005 against the Al Qaeda cell in Spain. Central Investigating Court No. 5, Summary No. 35/01. (September 26, 2005).

10 Umbrella grouping of Islamist organizations, founded in 1983 in Lebanon. It is believed to have been used by different actors, but especially by Hezbollah (which would officially emerge two years later). It was a kind of “puppet” to which operations with dubious or compromising results were attributed. It has claimed attacks in Lebanon, France, Argentina, Kuwait, and in Spain, whose four actions between 2004 and 2005 left a toll of twenty killed and 108 wounded. It has not been active since 1992.

11 National Court, Criminal Chamber, Second Section, Judgment No. 65/2007 for the 11-M attacks. Central Investigating Court No. 6, Summary No. 20/04 (October 31, 2007).

being arrested, released, and arrested again in other operations¹². Finally, a decentralization of the groups is observed, already spread throughout the national territory, which enhanced international synergies with different terrorist organizations.

3.5. *The Calm After the Storm 2009-2013:*

The firmness of police and judicial actions, which had dismantled the terrorist cells established or developed in Spain, provided an unprecedented period since the beginning of cases of more than five years without activity or police operations in Madrid against this phenomenon.

This good fortune was extendable to all of Europe, which, coinciding with Spain, also did not have to lament jihadist attacks, beyond the murder of two American soldiers at the Frankfurt airport in March 2011 and that of the British soldier in London in May 2013 (Avilés, 2017:199-200). Therefore, it is not difficult to generalize the success in improving results to the common initiatives taken within the Union, measures such as the Schengen Information System (2001), the European Arrest Warrant (2002), the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2005), the Radicalization Awareness Network, or the European Criminal Records Information System (2012) (Avilés, 2017:205-206).

3.6. *The Reactivation 2014-2017:*

After the power vacuum created on the southern Mediterranean coast and in the countries of the Near East by the Arab Spring revolts and, above all, by the subsequent armed conflicts in countries such as Libya, Syria, Iraq..., the perfect breeding ground was produced for the development of a new jihadist terrorism that, at the hands of Daesh¹³ achieved the long-desired goal of administering its own territory straddling Syria and Iraq, a new “Caliphate”, in June 2014.

This entirely new situation enlivened the jihadist imaginary, which, aided by a magnificent use of new technologies never seen before, rushed to sell the virtues of the new “State” and its power – expressed in terrible and explicit videos of its crimes – in order to continue calling on its followers worldwide to perform the *Hijra* or pilgrimage to the lands of the Levant to wage jihad, and if that is not possible, to bring holy war to the infidels wherever they are found, that is, to attack Westerners in their own land. This call was reflected in the police operations carried out in Spain – significantly in Ceuta and Melilla, which, despite having forty percent Muslim population, had not stood out until

12 By way of example and among many others, the following cases can be noted: Faisal Alluch, arrested on March 21, 2004, for his alleged involvement in 11-M and again on the following November 3 in Operation Nova; Mohamed Boualem Khouni, arrested on September 25, 2001, in Operation Fox and on November 8, 2004, in Operation Nova; Abderraman Tahiri alias Mohamed Achraf, extradited on April 22, 2005, as part of Operation Nova and arrested again on October 1, 2018, in Operation Escribano; Samir Tahtah, arrested on June 15, 2005, in Operation Tigris and arrested again on January 3, 2007, in Operation Sello.

13 It emerged from what was Al Qaeda in Iraq, created after the Second Gulf War (2003). In 2014, the split from Al Qaeda occurred due to differences regarding the violence exercised against the civilian population. Of Sunni Islamist-Salafist ideology. Taking advantage of the Syrian civil war of 2011, its members entered that country from Iraq, and in 2013 they adopted the name Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, proclaiming the “universal Caliphate” (in a vast territory straddling Syria and Iraq, which came to control part of the Libyan coast). Since 2016 it suffered military defeats at the hands of international coalitions and local forces, and in 2019 it lost its last territorial stronghold in Baghouz (Syria).

now for jihadist activity. Also in Madrid, which would see how arrests multiplied for reasons such as: recruitment to carry out attacks in Europe, arrest for attempting to travel to conflict zones or upon their return, glorification of terrorism, preparatory acts for attacks, etc.

4. Presentation and Representation of Results

4.1. *Number of Detainees, Extradited, Wanted, and Deceased, Males and Females*

Among the detainees in the sample, the same individual is not counted more than once for the same facts (even in different police operations); however, they are taken into account if this occurs for differentiated actions, even under the banner of another organization, something that is not unusual, since “police investigations carried out in Spain on this type of networks allow us to verify the existence of frequent communication and coordinated action between them” (Jordán, 2009:7).

After the case study, it can be observed that in the first three stages studied (1967-1984, 1985-2000, and 2001-2003), the data show very similar quantities of detainees; however, although in the third stage¹⁴ it should not be forgotten that the period studied in this case is not fifteen or sixteen years (like the previous ones), but three, therefore it can be seen how the arrests on the occasion of 9/11 quintupled the number of detainees. It was a fact: the jihadists had broken that “security pact” with Europe, which allowed them to take refuge behind its borders as long as they did not carry out attacks on its territory¹⁵.

The attitude of politicians, judges, and police in Spain in particular and the West in general had ceased to be that of “observe, listen, and take note” of the jihadists’ occupations, to move on to detaining and judging them. It is evident that they had also ceased to see Spain as a refuge, to consider it the target to attack. An image of what was happening was the fourth stage (2004-2008), which, in addition to those detained for their relationship with the 11-M attack and other cells, carries the first and last victims to date, among police officers and terrorists in Madrid¹⁶.

After the pause from 2009 to 2013, the activity of jihadists in the region and throughout Spain skyrocketed, although influenced – as has been pointed out – by the Libyan conflict and the Syrian-Iraqi one, which had already been occurring; it is not until 2013 in Spain, 2014 in Madrid, that their influence begins to be seen converted into arrests. A high percentage of the detainees had been radicalized in jihadist Salafism before 2011 or radicalized during that year and the following one. From 2013 onward, under the mobilization strategy developed by Daesh, a wide majority of detainees had already initiated their radicalization process (Reinares and García-Calvo, 2016:35).

In the total data, it is interesting to reflect the low incidence of females in this type of crime, barely 2.21%

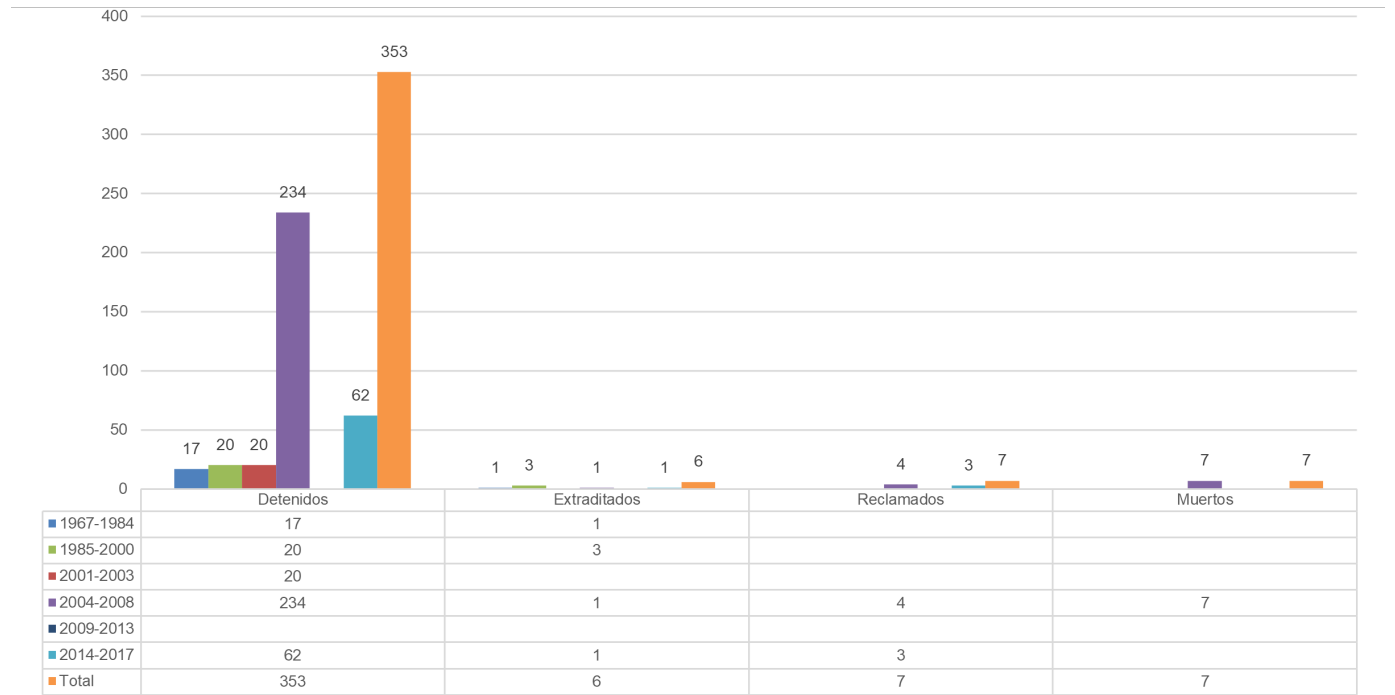
14 There were twenty-two detainees, but twenty are reflected, because two were arrested on two different occasions for the same facts.

15 Words of the leader of Al Muhajiroun, Omar Bakri Muhammad. See: Fielding, N. (July 24, 2005). Terror links of the Tottenham Ayatollah. *The Sunday Times*.

16 In the 17-A attacks these facts have been repeated once again.

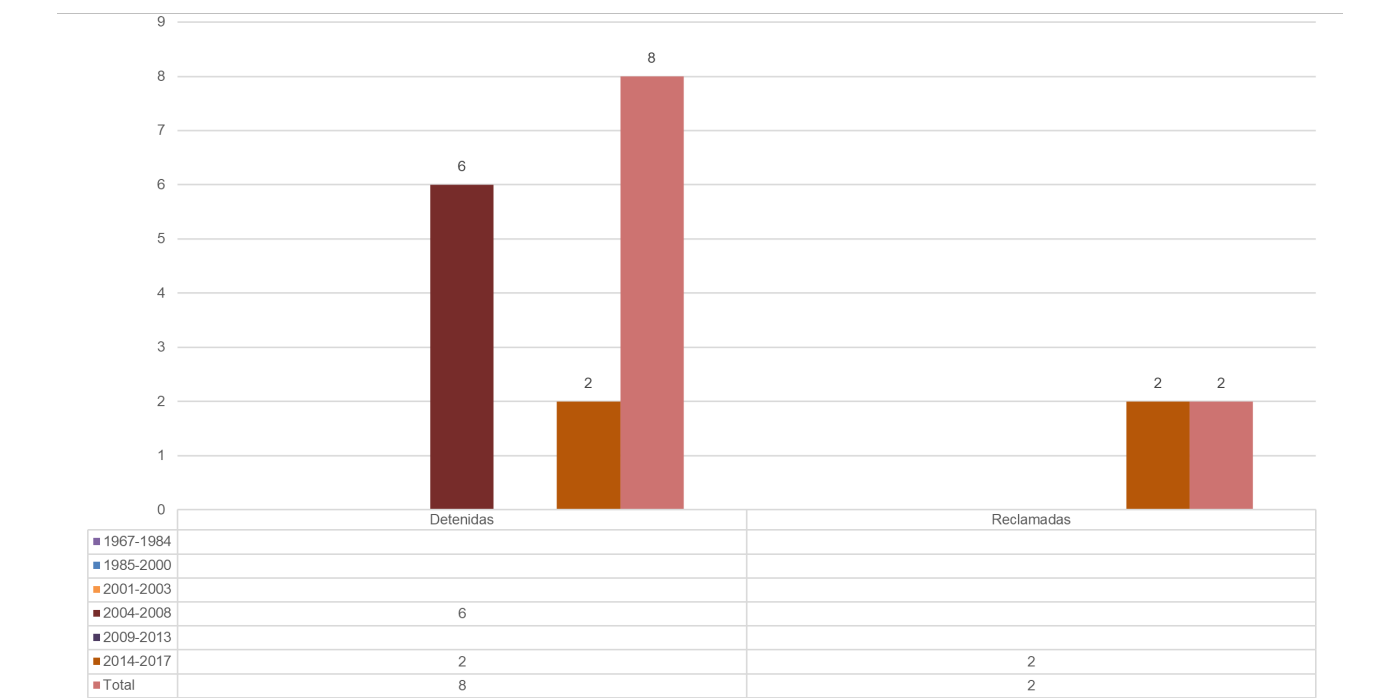
of the total detainees (361), none extradited or deceased, and 22.22% of the total international wanted persons, thus confirming that men feel much more attracted to these activities than women. To facilitate a quick and synthesized vision of the results, the following graphs are provided:

Figure 1. Data on the number of male detainees, extradited, wanted and deceased



Source: Own elaboration based on data extracted from OIET (n.d.), Centro Memorial de las Víctimas del Terrorismo (2015-2017), and Jiménez Martín (2005).

Figure 2. Data on the number of female detainees and wanted persons



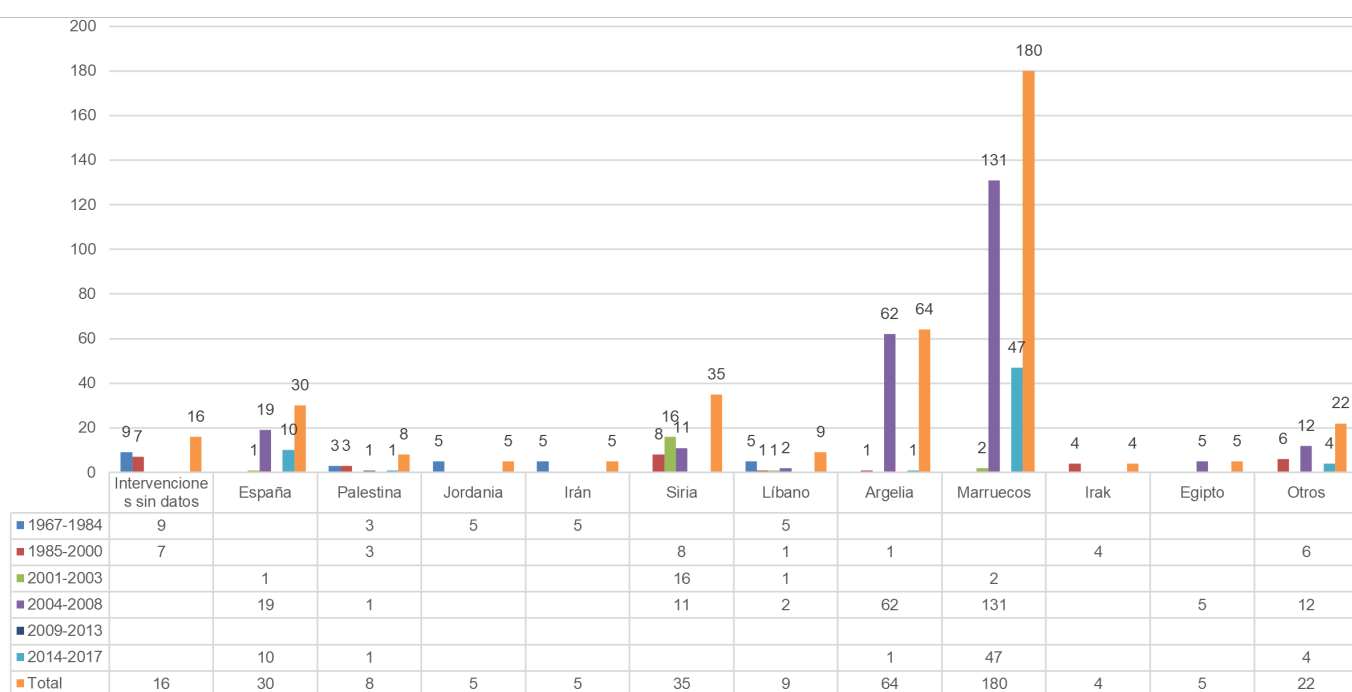
Source: Own elaboration based on data extracted from OIET (n.d.), Centro Memorial de las Víctimas del Terrorismo (2015-2017), and Jiménez Martín (2005).

4.2. Nationality of Origin of the Detained, Extradited, and Repatriated Terrorists

In the first stage (1967-1984), there is similarity among the different nationalities of the terrorists; by contrast, in the second (1985-2000), Syrians, Iraqis, Libyans, and Palestinians already show greater prominence. The aforementioned conflicts influence the terrorism in Madrid of their nationals. The third stage (2001-2003) confirms the Syrian influence in the Al Qaeda cell in Spain (hereinafter, AQE); and shows the arrest of the first Moroccans. In the fourth stage (2004-2008)¹⁷, there is an amalgam of nationalities, with Morocco standing out (with more detainees than the rest of the nationalities combined), Algeria, Spain, and Syria. In the sixth stage (2014-2017), although the variety of countries decreases, Morocco remains the majority, followed at a distance by those of Spanish origin. The global data show that terrorists from 26 nationalities have been detained, extradited, wanted, and deceased (383 total); the majority is Morocco, with 46.99% of the total studied population, Algeria 16.71%, Syria 9.13%, and natives of Spain 7.83% of the total.

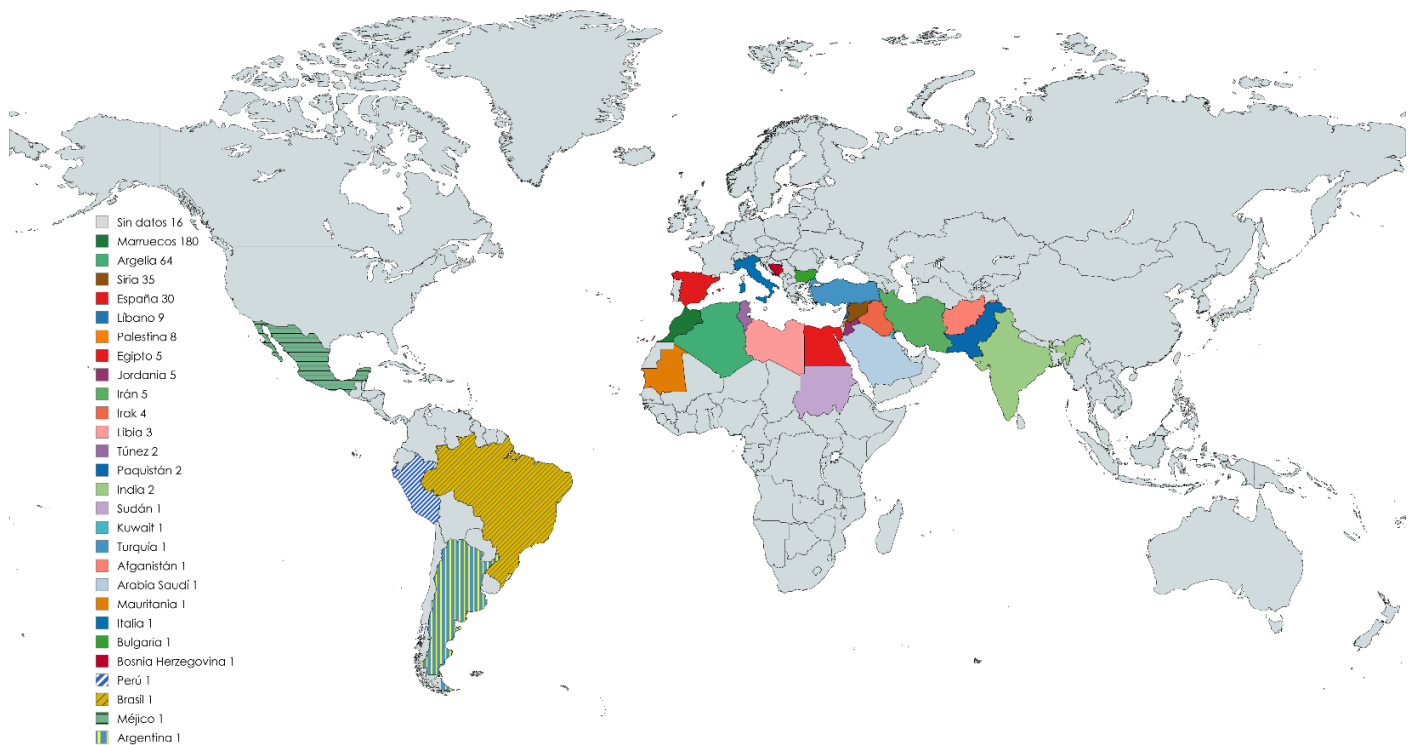
The first two nationalities find a possible explanation in the large number of immigrants from those countries settled in Madrid and in Spain (75.766/747.872 and 1.960/60.282 respectively), and the fourth, due to the increasingly high number of Spanish Muslims (174.550/834.058) (currently the majority Muslim group in Spain), mostly second generation (Unión de Comunidades Islámicas de España, 2018:9). Syrians, on the contrary, are a minority and their incidence may be related to the religious reality of Syrians who arrived in Europe, fleeing persecution against the Muslim Brotherhood by President Hafez al-Assad between the 1970s and 1980s. To facilitate a global view of this studied parameter, in addition to the graph, the following results have been mapped:

Figure 3. Data on the nationality of origin of the detained, extradited, repatriated and deceased terrorists.



Source: Own elaboration based on data extracted from OIET (n.d.), Centro Memorial de las Víctimas del Terrorismo (2015-2017), and Jiménez Martín (2005).

Figure 4. Total data on the nationality of origin of the detained, extradited, repatriated and deceased terrorists.



Source: Own elaboration based on data extracted from OIET (n.d.), Centro Memorial de las Víctimas del Terrorismo (2015-2017), and Jiménez Martín (2005).

4.3. Type of Terrorist Activity

Terrorist activity will be divided into the following groups according to their actions; however, it should be taken into account that the same individual may have been detained for several of these reasons:

- Operative: Those detained for the commission or attempt of a terrorist attack will be included.
- Membership/collaboration (includes recruitment and indoctrination).
- Self-indoctrination.
- Financing.
- Glorification.
- Travel to terrorist-controlled areas to join them.
- Possession of weapons.

In the first stage (1967-1984), the criminal types committed and charged to the terrorists do not go beyond operative actions and membership or collaboration with a terrorist organization. Let us bear in mind that the Criminal Code, over the years and with the prominence of the phenomenon, has been increasing the catalog of reprehensible behaviors to act against terrorists.

In the second stage (1985-2000), the number of completed and attempted operative actions decreases, although, on the other hand, their lethality increases (from six killed and seven wounded, to nineteen and 125,

respectively), largely due to the attack on the El Descanso restaurant¹⁸. In addition, for the first time, charges are brought for possession of weapons, something that had not happened in the previous stage.

The charges in the third stage (2001-2003), for membership or collaboration with a terrorist organization, as well as its financing, have a specific name: Al Qaeda. It was a period in which logistical support for global terrorism was provided from Spain, while at the same time the germ of the cells that would later carry out an attack on a specific occasion, 11-M, and others that would attempt it on numerous occasions, was being prepared.

In the fourth stage (2004-2008), terrorist activity intensified not only because of the 11-M attack, but also because of many other cells that conspired to emulate it – with a total of 193 killed, seven terrorists who committed suicide, and more than 1.800 wounded – increasing with this the police interventions for attacks or actions leading to them, membership/collaboration with a terrorist group, or financing.

On July 1, 2015, the new reform of the Criminal Code¹⁹ came into force, which classified as terrorist offenses activities that were not previously punishable. Specifically, it works on Book II, Chapter VII, on terrorist organizations and groups and terrorist offenses, in articles 571 to 580. This is the reason why arrests for different reasons grow exponentially from 2015 onward²⁰.

Therefore, in the sixth stage (2014-2017), it can be seen how, although arrests for attempted operative actions or for membership or collaboration with a terrorist group decreased, many others were carried out for the new criminal types included in the 2015 reform, that is, the actions of terrorists diversified, but above all, the punishable behaviors grew²¹.

The total data leave no doubt that the most frequent reason for arrest in the studied period has been membership or collaboration with a terrorist group, followed by operative actions and financing.

18 On April 12, 1985, a bomb was detonated at the El Descanso restaurant in Torrejón de Ardoz, killing 18 people and wounding 84 who were having dinner at the time.

19 *Organic Law 2/2015, of March 30, amending Organic Law 10/1995, of November 23, of the Criminal Code, regarding terrorist offenses: Boletín Oficial del Estado No. 77, of March 31, 2015. Sec. I. p. 27177.*

20 These offenses are:

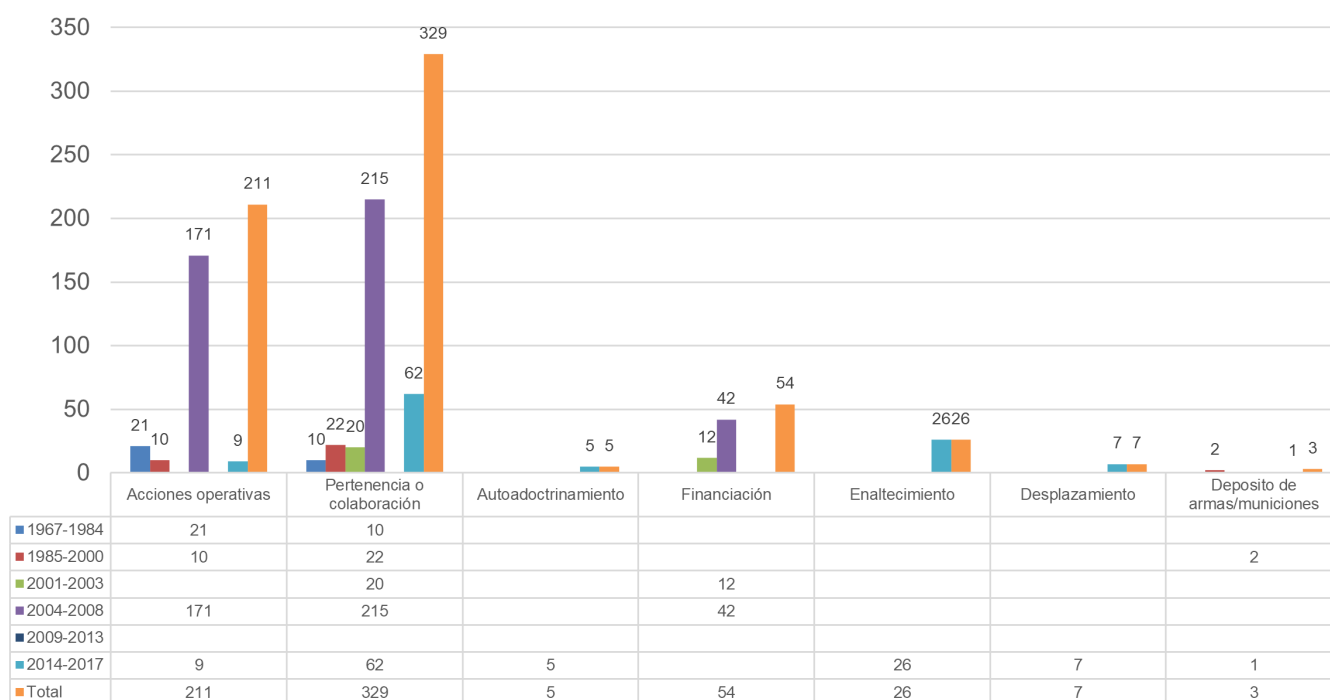
Self-indoctrination: with the “purpose of training to commit any of the offenses typified in this Chapter” (art. 575.1).

Possession of documents: that “are suitable for inciting incorporation into a terrorist organization or group or for collaborating with any of them or in their objectives” (art. 575.2).

Collaboration: which already existed, is expanded in its assumptions, applying both to those who collaborate with terrorist groups and to those who do so with individuals for terrorist purposes. It includes recruitment, indoctrination, or training “to incite incorporation into a terrorist organization or group, or to commit any of the offenses included in this Chapter” (art. 577.2).

Travel to foreign territory: “to collaborate with a terrorist organization or group, or to commit any of the offenses included in this Chapter” (art. 575.3).

21 The offense of traveling to join a terrorist group is not included for the two women arrested in Turkey on July 11, 2017, because when they traveled to Syria (2014), there was still one year left before that action was included as a criminal offense.

Figure 5. Data on the type of terrorist activity

Source: Own elaboration based on data extracted from OIET (n.d.), Centro Memorial de las Víctimas del Terrorismo (2015-2017), and Jiménez Martín (2005).

4.4. Place of the Incident and of the Arrest

Below, ordered by provinces, the incidents that occurred in Madrid, were attempted or planned from there, as well as the arrests for these facts and those that occurred in other regions, due to their direct relationship with the actions and the organizations established in the Madrid province, can be seen.

The first stage (1967-1984) is the only one in which incidents exceed arrests. In the second (1985-2000), as in the first, it is observed that attacks were prepared from Madrid abroad, both in France and in Europe²². The third period (2001-2003) provides only data on arrests of AQE members. The absence of incidents reinforces the previous conclusion about the activities of the same period, in which it was said that, at that time from Spain, logistical support was provided for global terrorism and the base network was prepared from which the cells that would act in the next period would be fed. In the fourth stage (2004-2008), the 11-M and the other intended incidents produced arrests in Madrid and many other provinces, countries, and penitentiary establishments²³. The latter have not been added to the regions where the prisons are located, because they are not, in most cases, their usual place of residence. In the sixth stage (2014-2017), collaboration with other countries in counterterrorism matters is fluid and international arrest warrants facilitate the extradition of people who move to conflict zones to

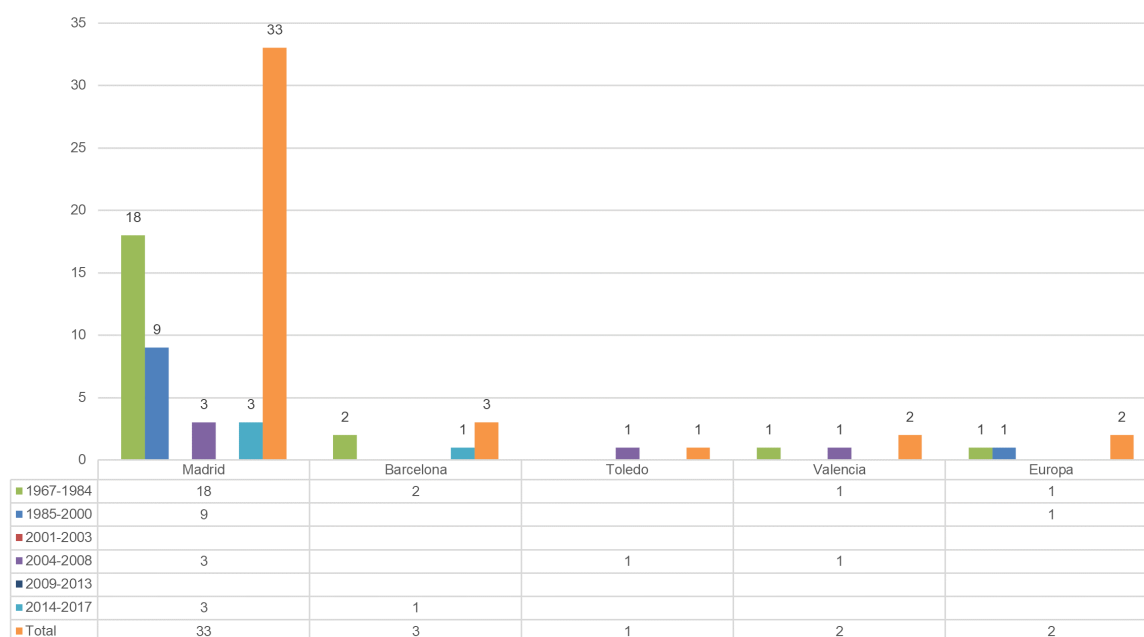
22 With the information published in open sources, it is impossible to specify the exact country.

23 In the “prison” category, data have been included regarding arrests that occurred in the penitentiary facilities of Topas (1), Villabona (1), Puerto de Santa María (5), Córdoba (1), La Lama (5), Texeiro (3), Acebuche (1), Zuera (2), Botafuego (2), Bouxe (1), Pamplona (1), Nanclares de Oca (1), Dueñas (1), and the Foreign Internment Center of Valencia (1).

join terrorist organizations. The diversification of detainees decreases and is more concentrated than in previous years; arrests in penitentiary establishments continue to occur²⁴.

In the following table, the incidents throughout the studied period are shown. Led by Madrid with 80.48% of the total, followed by Barcelona with 7.31%, Valencia with 4.87%, and Toledo with 2.43%. In addition, two attacks were planned from the region abroad.

Figure 6. Place of the incident



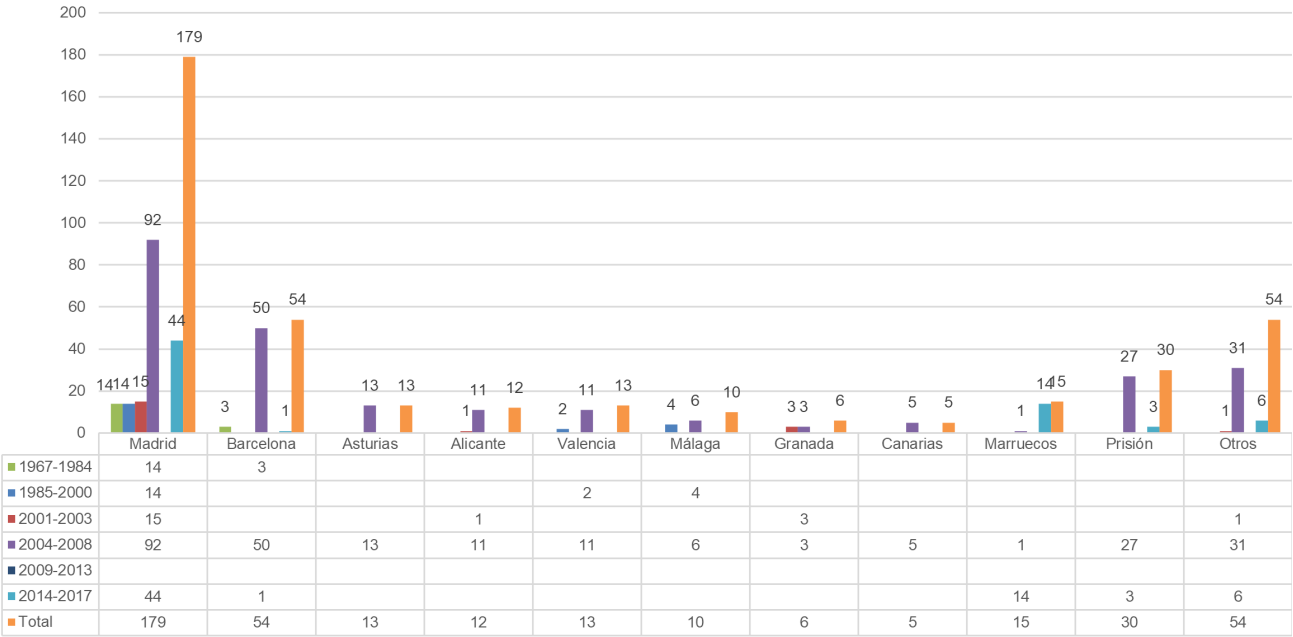
Source: Own elaboration based on data extracted from OIET (n.d.), Centro Memorial de las Víctimas del Terrorismo (2015-2017), and Jiménez Martín (2005).

Regarding arrests in Spain and abroad related to the studied cases, Madrid is the first territory in number, with 47.60% of the total sample (376 people); Barcelona follows with 14.36%; arrests in prisons 7.98%, explainable by the ties of friendship and blood of those detained in Spain and the “deeper personal questionings” that lead them within the prison to radicalization (Reinares, García-Calvo, & Vicente, 2018:2); and in descending order Alicante and Valencia, Asturias (result of the 11-M explosives plot), Málaga, Granada, and the Canary Islands; in addition to another sixteen provinces and nine states with little incidence²⁵. To facilitate a better geographic composition of the places of arrest, the following graph is attached.

²⁴ In the “prison” category, data have been included regarding arrests that occurred in the penitentiary facilities of Puerto de Santa María (1) and Torredondo (2).

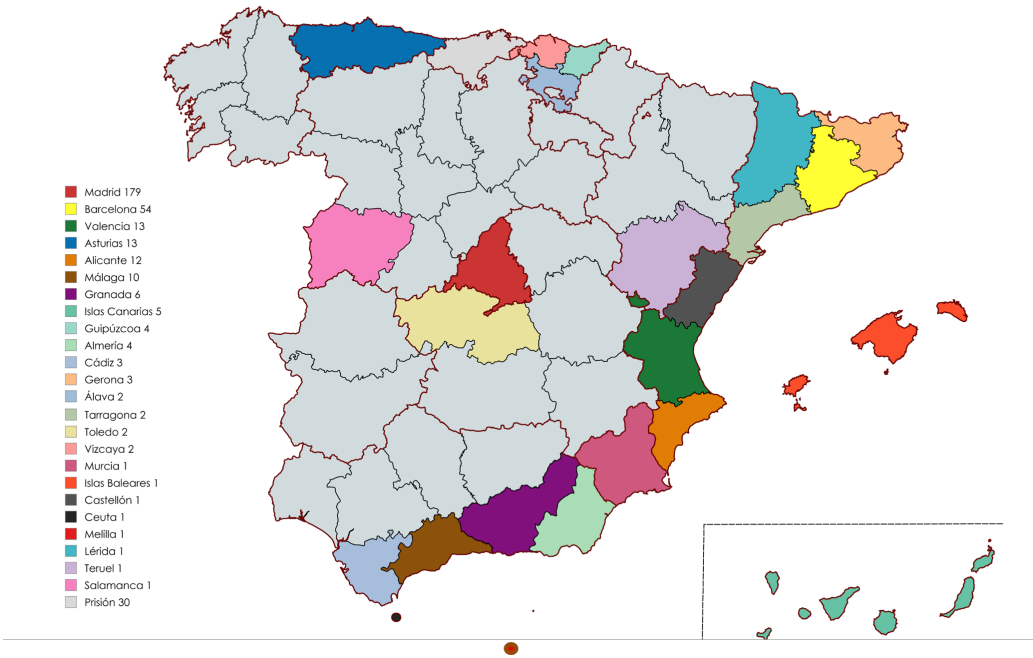
²⁵ To improve the understanding of the graph, provinces with fewer than five detainees and foreign countries have been grouped under the category “others”.

Figure 7. Place of arrest



Source: Own elaboration based on data extracted from (GESI & Herrero de Béthencourt, 1995-2017), (Centro Memorial de las Víctimas del Terrorismo, 2015-2017), and (Jiménez Martín, 2005).

Figure 8. Map of the total data on the place of arrest in Spain



Source: Own elaboration based on data extracted from OIET (n.d.), Centro Memorial de las Víctimas del Terrorismo (2015-2017), and Jiménez Martín (2005).

4.5. Groups Against Which Police Operations Are Carried Out

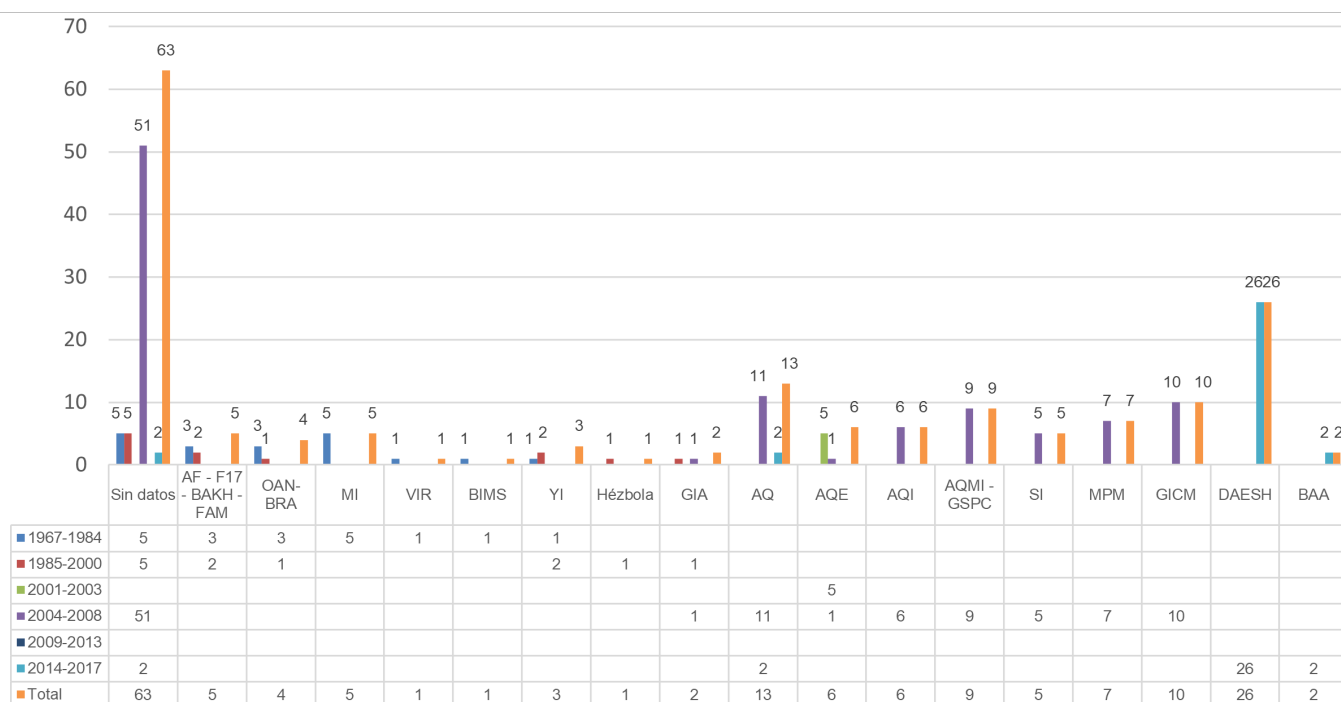
It is very difficult to delimit the role of the terrorist in the organization to which he belongs or with which he collaborates, and to avoid errors when discriminating between the different categories enunciated by Marc Sageman and quoted by (Jordán, 2007: 5)²⁶, the subject is framed under the group with which he relates, without differentiating that link, so difficult after the 2015 penal reform.

In the first stage (1967-1984) and the second (1985-2000), the diversification and low incidence of groups that operated in Madrid can be seen. The prominence is of Martyrs of Islam, followed by Al Fatah and its splinter groups. In the third stage (2001-2003), on the contrary, there is only one hegemonic matrix, Al Qaeda, whose fame caused jihadists settled in Spain to orbit around it, constituting themselves as AQE. In the fourth stage (2004-2008), there are many operations against unidentified groups, due to the fact that the 11-M cell was not related to specific acronyms but was built as a mixture of members or sympathizers, in addition to the prominence of Maghrebi groups.

In the sixth stage (2014-2017), with the exception of one operation against the *Al-Andalus Brigade*, all arrests were against Daesh and its supports in Madrid. Al Qaeda lost the battle against its offspring and in the jihadist entelechy a new model with which to identify itself was erected. The total data show nineteen terrorist groups with incidence in the region²⁷, of which Daesh, Al Qaeda (and its franchises) have had the greatest imprint.

²⁶ A strike team, which would be one dispatched to the country by a terrorist group to carry out an attack; a local cell that, although it develops in the place where it resides, depends on a larger group; a base network that, totally decentralized, heeds the call of a terrorist group to carry out global and individual jihad, and may or may not act in its name.

²⁷ AF: Al Fatah, AQ: Al Qaeda, AQE: Al Qaeda in Spain, AQI: Al Qaeda in Iraq, AQMI: Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, BAA: Al-Andalus Brigade, BAKH: Abdel Kader el Husseini Brigades, BIMS: Imam Musa Sadr Brigades, BRA: Arab Revolutionary Brigades, DAESH: Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, FAM: Abu Mussar Faction, F17: Force 17, GIA: Armed Islamic Group, GICM: Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group, GSPC: Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, MI: Martyrs of Islam, MPM: Martyrs for Morocco, OAN: Abu Nidal Organization, SI: Followers of Islam, VIR: Islamic Revolutionary Vanguard, YI: Islamic Jihad.

Figure 9. Total data on the groups against which police operations are carried out

Source: Own elaboration based on data extracted from OIET (n.d.), Centro Memorial de las Víctimas del Terrorismo (2015-2017), and Jiménez Martín (2005).

5. Conclusions

From the analysis carried out on half a century of terrorist activity linked to elements and organizations from the MENA region in Madrid, a series of conclusions can be established that allow us to understand the evolution of the phenomenon and its main characteristics.

In the first place, participation has been markedly masculine, which constitutes a constant throughout the studied period. Although in recent years a slight increase in female involvement has been observed, motivated by the call to perform the “*Hijra*” toward territories controlled by the self-proclaimed “Caliphate”, this presence remains minority. Such disproportion is explained, on one hand, by the greater attraction that males seem to feel toward violence and, on the other, “the secondary role that radical Islamists attribute to women in public life” (Jordán, Mañas and Trujillo, 2006:3). To this is added that “women constitute a minority within the Muslim communities established in our country” (Reinares, 2006:2), which reinforces the gender gap in terrorist participation.

Secondly, the nationality of those involved reflects demographic and contextual patterns. The majority of detainees have been Moroccans, Algerians, Syrians, and Spaniards. The first two nationalities, together with the Spanish one, are explained by the high presence of Muslims of those origins in Madrid and in the country as a whole. As for individuals of Syrian origin, their participation seems linked to the marked Islamist character of part of the immigrants who arrived in Europe in the 1970s and 1980s, which evidences the influence of historical factors in the configuration of the risk.

Likewise, the most recurrent reason for arrest has been membership or collaboration with terrorist organizations, which is logical if one considers that this type of link is usually accompanied by other crimes, such as financing or the preparation of operative actions. This pattern confirms that belonging to the organizational structure or terrorist signification even without a direct relationship constitutes the core of the phenomenon and that the dismantling of networks is a priority for the Security Forces and Corps.

As regards the geographic distribution, Madrid concentrates the largest number of arrests, a circumstance consistent with the specificity of the study and with the fact that the capital has traditionally been a strategic target for jihadist groups, both for its political symbolism and for its population density.

In relation to the organizations involved, arrests have been mainly associated with two hegemonic actors: Al Qaeda first and Daesh in the most recent stage. Both entities have monopolized global jihad through high-impact attacks and a sophisticated use of propaganda, adapting their strategies to the geopolitical context of the MENA region. It is worth noting that practically all the groups are of foreign origin, and those that emerged in Spain did so with the purpose of influencing the global dynamic, even if through local actions.

The period between 2001 and 2003 marked a turning point in the evolution of jihadist terrorism, driven by the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent War on Terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan. This change translated into a significant increase in the number of detainees, coming from nationalities that until then had barely had incidence, and in a concentration of activity around the two aforementioned organizations. Arrests skyrocketed, reflecting the transition from an expectant attitude to a repressive response by politicians, judges, police, intelligence members, and in general, public powers. Terrorists ceased to perceive the West as a refuge and began to consider it an enemy, which was evidenced in the 11-M attack and in the numerous attacks that were subsequently prevented thanks to the intensification of security measures and international cooperation.

In synthesis, the study shows that the evolution of jihadist terrorism in Madrid cannot be understood without considering the interaction between ideological, demographic, and geopolitical factors, as well as the adaptation of state and community strategies fundamentally, in the face of a threat that has mutated according to global events.

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