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EDITORIAL

As has become customary during the first months of the year, various research centers publish reports analyzing the impact of terrorism over the previous year. In this context, the *Global Terrorism Index*, produced by the Institute for Economics and Peace, has recently released its latest edition, which examines the evolution of the terrorist phenomenon throughout 2025. The report concludes that terrorism remains a persistent global threat, although there has been a decline both in the number of fatalities (around 5.500) and in the number of incidents, which stood at nearly 3.000. On the other hand, West Africa has once again consolidated its position as the region most affected by terrorism worldwide. This conclusion aligns with that of the *Yihadist Terrorism Yearbook 2025*, published by the Observatorio Internacional de Estudios sobre Terrorismo (OIET) at the end of February. Likewise, both studies highlight the growing challenge posed by youth radicalization. In this regard, the *Global Terrorism Index* warns that radicalization processes among minors can develop in a matter of weeks. For its part, the OIET report notes an increase in the number of minors and young adults arrested in Spain for involvement in jihadist activities. As an illustrative figure from the research published by this center, 48% of those arrested in Spain in 2025 for terrorism-related offenses were under 25 years of age.

This seventeenth issue of the *Revista Internacional de Estudios sobre Terrorismo* can be understood as a reflection of the complexity of the terrorist phenomenon – a phenomenon that lends itself to analysis from multiple perspectives and realities. This is clearly evidenced by the five articles and the outreach sections that make up this publication.

Regarding the academic content, the first article is the work of Aaron Ferrando, who analyzes the propaganda disseminated by the magazine *Voice of Khurasan* with the aim of identifying and studying references to Spain. Next, Alejandro Omar Elsanafawy presents a quantitative and qualitative study on the impact of terrorism originating from the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa) in the

province of Madrid over the half-century period between 1967 and 2017. In third place, researchers from Tecnológico de Monterrey offer a co-authored paper by four scholars with a gender perspective that proposes a critical review of the role of women within the jihadist organization Islamic State. The fourth article, also co-authored, brings together three researchers who analyze the geopolitical and discursive impact in Russia of the 2024 attack at Crocus City Hall. Finally, Roberto Lagos of the Universidad de las Américas in Chile examines the convergence between organized crime and terrorist-style insurgency in that country.

With regard to the outreach sections, this issue maintains a notable thematic diversity. The event covered is the 2008 Mumbai attacks, in which a series of coordinated attacks carried out by ten militants from the terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba resulted in the deaths of 166 people and left more than 300 injured. The terrorist organization analyzed is Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Likewise, the sections on recent anniversaries and “Did You Know...?” present, in the form of informational capsules, various facts of interest, such as the attempts to poison dairy products carried out by the Japanese group Aum Shinrikyo in the 1990s.

Following the usual closing of each issue of RIET, the final section, presented in collaboration with the Centro Memorial, is dedicated to honoring and remembering the victims of terrorism. On this occasion, Inés Gaviria focuses on those victims whose bodies have never been recovered, with special remembrance for José Humberto Fouz Escobero, Fernando Quiroga Veiga, Jorge García Carneiro, and Publio Cerdón.

Having briefly presented the content of this seventeenth issue of RIET, we invite readers to continue with their reading, while thanking all those who have made the publication of this new edition possible.

Aarón Ferrando-Mkarbel

From Spain to Al-Andalus: Discursive Uses of The Spanish Referent in *Voice of Khurasan*

Abstract

This study analyzes how Spain appears in *Voice of Khurasan* (VoK), the English-language magazine associated with Islamic State in the Khorasan Province, throughout the complete series of 46 issues published between January 2022 and June 2025. Based on approaches that treat the country as an object in jihadist publications and on the tradition of research on Spain as a propaganda reference point, a mixed design combining quantitative content analysis with qualitative classification is applied. Using a dictionary organized into three levels, 17 textual mentions are identified across 11 issues, covering 23.9% of the series. Although the mentions are episodic, a progressive concentration is observed in 2024. Typologically, the historical-territorial inscription predominates, followed by contemporary Spain, while references to Gibraltar are residual. In discursive terms, the framework of scope or expansion stands out, followed by the cultural context, and only one mention frames contemporary Spain in terms of retaliation or threat.

Keywords: Islamic State, Voice of Khurasan, Spain, Al-Andalus and digital magazine

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1. Introduction

Terrorist propaganda should not be understood merely as a vehicle for recruitment, coercion, or subjugation, but rather as a sophisticated form of strategic communication aimed at shaping recipients' perceptions (Reed & Ingram, 2017). Within this ecosystem, digital magazines constitute a set of serialized products that function as a mirror of the ideological priorities, tactical shifts, and narrative evolution of terrorist organizations over time (Glausch, 2019; Droogan & Peattie, 2018). These publications not only seek to mobilize but also to impose an alternative symbolic universe that redefines followers' reality and provides them with identity stability in the face of environmental uncertainty (Ingram, 2017).

In the communicative landscape, the Islamic State in the Khorasan Province¹ - ISKP has consolidated a propaganda apparatus of considerable technical sophistication under the Al-Azaim Foundation label (Krause, 2025). Its flagship English-language publication, Voice of Khurasan (VoK)², launched in early 2022, has become the only large-format³ magazine published uninterruptedly by an Islamic State affiliate following the loss of territorial control in Iraq and Syria (Krause, 2025). Precisely because of its native digital dissemination, the organization has adapted to blocks by strategically migrating to Rocket.Chat to ensure the continuity of its communicative infrastructure in the face of increasing censorship on Telegram. It has also shielded its financing, as documented by Tulga (2024) regarding the use of the Monero cryptocurrency.

Within this discursive framework, not exclusive to the Islamic State, Spain is treated as an object of constant interest that operates simultaneously on two levels: as a modern nation that is a pillar of the "crusader coalition" and as the mythologized Al-Andalus, a land that jihadist doctrine considers legally non-renounceable. This symbolic weight is reinforced by the claim over enclaves such as Ceuta, Melilla, and even Gibraltar, which link the glory of past conquests to a future expansion presented as inevitable (Stearns, 2009; Torralba-Rodríguez, 2019; Torres-Soriano, 2020).

Despite the relevance of this province, academia has primarily focused its efforts on analyzing now-defunct titles such as *Inspire* (Droogan & Peattie, 2016; Ingram, 2017), linked to Al-Qaeda, and *Dabiq*, *Rumiyah*, or *Konstantiniyye* (Glausch, 2019; Jacoby, 2023; Kaczkowski, 2019; Lakomy, 2021; Marone & Olimpio, 2020; Reed & Ingram, 2017; Van Der Krogt, 2021; Ubayasiri, 2019; Wignell, Tan, O'Halloran & Lange, 2017), linked to the Islamic State.

Although incipient studies focusing specifically on Voice of Khurasan have emerged in the last three years, such as those conducted by Hautaniemi-Forsberg (2024), Parale (2023), Rath &

1 The group originated from various dissident factions, mostly from Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which swore allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in January 2015. Its name refers to the historical region of Khorasan, which encompasses territories in northeastern Iran, southern Turkmenistan, and northern Afghanistan (Hautaniemi-Forsberg, 2024; Krause, 2025).

2 Published in Pashto as *Khurasan Ghag*

3 Although *Voice of Khurasan* has been the most prominent and active magazine of the organization in the post-caliphate phase for an international audience, the weekly *Al-Naba*, whose first issue dates back to 2010 (Kadivar, 2021), stands as the most consistent and longest-running editorial effort of the organization (Europol, 2023).

Tollersrud⁴ (2025), Tulga (2024), or Krause (2025), a critical gap remains regarding longitudinal and census-style analyzes that examine the complete magazine series with a focus on a specific geographic object, particularly Spain.

Thus, this research aims to systematically examine the discursive presence of Spain in the complete series of Voice of Khurasan. The objective is to analyze the direct and indirect references in the issues published by the magazine by identifying their frequency, typology, and discursive frame. The specific objectives are:

SO1. To determine the distribution of references to Spain across the published issues.

SO2. To classify the mentions by their nature, distinguishing between references to the contemporary Spanish state, historical-territorial references, and geostrategic references.

SO3. To identify the recurrent discursive frames associated with these mentions based on seven defined categories.

Based on these objectives, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1. References to Spain will be minority in absolute terms but will be concentrated in a limited number of issues.

H2. Historical-territorial references will predominate over direct mentions of the contemporary Spanish state.

H3. When the mention is in contemporary terms, it will be integrated into frames of retaliation or threat, while when it is historical-territorial, it will appear associated with a grievance and a promise of the caliphate's return.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Magazines as a Strategic Communicative Artifact

Jihadist digital magazines are considered highly sophisticated communicative artifacts that function as serialized products, delivered through a professional-level editorial design (Droogan & Peattie, 2018; Winter, 2015). These publications are not mere newsletters but strategic communication devices designed to establish a “competitive system of meaning” (Ingram, 2017, p. 10) that shapes the reader's perception of reality (Ubayasiri, 2019). Moreover, their periodicity allows for constant exposure that seeks to saturate the individual's informational environment to facilitate the normalization of discursive frames previously considered abstract (Winter, 2015). As products with usually stable production routines, these media operate as cognitive bridges that close the distance

4 They extend their analysis to the Arabic version *Sawt al-Khorasan*.

between the reader, transformed into a potential sympathizer, and the action represented (Droogan & Peattie, 2018).

From a functional perspective, the magazines seek to legitimize their signatories, disseminate their identity, mobilize, and intimidate (Ubayasiri, 2019; Hautaniemi-Forsberg, 2024). Indeed, the analysis of titles such as *Dabiq* – linked to the Islamic State – or *Inspire* – linked to Al-Qaeda – shows how a group identity is constructed based on an absolute dichotomy between “us” and “the enemy” (Ingram, 2017; Hautaniemi-Forsberg, 2024). This legitimizing narrative draws on various historical and religious frames to present the organization as the sole legitimate representative of the Muslim community in the face of “Western grievances” (Ubayasiri, 2019; Kaczkowski, 2019). Likewise, the magazines act as a powerful mobilization engine that seeks to transform passive support into violent actions by using a victimization narrative to present terrorism as an urgent necessity (Winter, 2015; Kaczkowski, 2019).

The operational dimension represents another distinctive feature, visible through technical sections that provide, for example, detailed manuals for carrying out attacks (Reed & Ingram, 2017; Lakomy, 2021; El-Nashar & Nayef, 2022). Spaces such as “Open Source Jihad” in Al-Qaeda’s *Inspire* magazine or “Just Terror Tactics” in the Islamic State’s *Rumiyah* offer practical knowledge on the manufacture of explosives or the use of vehicles as weapons (Reed & Ingram, 2017; Wignell et al., 2017). Some previous studies note that the emphasis of these contents has evolved significantly in response to the military and territorial conflicts of the issuing groups (Lakomy, 2021; Wignell et al., 2017). While expansion phases prioritized physical migration (*hijrah*) and the building of a caliphate, stages of greater military pressure have shifted the focus toward individual jihad⁵ on Western soil (Lakomy, 2021).

Within the methodological debate, the systematic analysis of these pieces allows for the inference of communicative patterns and the study of reference frames without resorting to overinterpretation (Torres-Soriano, 2020; Rath & Tollersrud, 2025). Thus, through content and discourse analysis, it is possible to map the ideological evolution and quantify the weight of different reference objects in the group’s worldview (Torres-Soriano, 2009; Rath & Tollersrud, 2025). This scientific approach enables the identification of how the strategic interaction between text and image reinforces central messages and adapts propaganda to different contexts (Kaczkowski, 2019; Wignell et al., 2017). In this way, the study of these magazines provides fundamental empirical knowledge about the structure, strategy, and real priorities of terrorist organizations (Torres-Soriano, 2009; Torres-Soriano, 2020).

5 In this context, the term “individual jihad” refers to the propagandistic appeal for decentralized violent action undertaken on one’s own initiative – without the need for travel, organizational affiliation, or direct tactical direction – which can materialize through low-complexity attacks known as “do-it-yourself” (Wignell et al., 2017; Reed & Ingram, 2017).

2.2. The Khorasan Province

The self-proclaimed Khorasan Province of the Islamic State has been recognized as one of the most dynamic and active branches of the Islamic State worldwide (Hautaniemi-Forsberg, 2024; Zelin, 2024). Its external communication⁶ is centralized under the Al-Azaim Foundation, which has expanded its production into multiple languages to reach audiences far beyond its regional environment (Europol, 2023; Rath & Tollersrud, 2025). Within this ecosystem, the magazines *Voice of Khorasan* (VoK), published in English, and *Sawt al-Khorasan* (SaK), published in Arabic⁷ are the key editorial communicative artifacts (Rath & Tollersrud, 2025). These publications not only seek public legitimization of the group (Webber, 2022) but also serve to challenge the authority of their rivals and project an image of invulnerability in the face of military setbacks (Europol, 2023; Tulga, 2024).

In academia, key recent contributions include the studies conducted by Rath and Tollersrud (2025), which suggest that ISKP employs a differentiated communication strategy depending on the language and audience. While SaK tends to include more explicit threats and strategic advice directed at regional actors, VoK maintains a predominantly ideological and political critique aimed at an international audience (Rath & Tollersrud, 2025). Alongside this, Parale's (2023) research stands out, analyzing how VoK's rhetoric uses an interested interpretation of Quranic texts to construct a group identity based on the fulfillment of duty and martyrdom. Overall, both studies agree that the perception of the enemy is strongly conditioned by geographic proximity and the doctrinal positioning of its adversaries.

Beyond the communicative aspect, ISKP's external operations have acquired a pan-provincial and integrated character thanks to a digital infrastructure that has adapted to blocks (Zelin, 2024), allowing the group to leverage encrypted applications both to obtain financing and to instruct its sympathizers (Europol, 2023). Likewise, research on decentralized technologies has highlighted how "swarmcast"⁸ (Fisher, 2015) facilitate the persistence of these messages in the face of content moderation efforts (Macdonald & McCafferty, 2024). These dimensions reflect an internationalization of the message that seeks to polarize Western societies and mobilize support in South and Central Asia (Europol, 2023; Rath & Tollersrud, 2025).

6 By external communication – outside the organization itself – we refer to a strategic information ecosystem designed to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct the behavior of specific audiences through the legitimization of one's own cause, the construction of the enemy's identity, and the recruitment of followers for operational purposes (Ingram, 2017; Ubayasiri, 2019; Winter, 2015).

7 Although both outlets operate under the media umbrella of the ISKP's Al-Azaim Foundation, there is a clear strategic differentiation based on language and audience profile. While *Voice of Khorasan* (VoK) is aimed at an international and Western audience, focusing on ideological condemnation and theological instruction to consolidate the group's dogma, *Sawt al-Khorasan* (SaK) adopts a much more regional and operational perspective.

8 The term, coined by Fisher (2015), refers to a model of dissemination and organization on networks designed to ensure a continuous and persistent online presence. The concept is metaphorically linked to a swarm of bees, which constantly disperses and regroups during flight; that is, the communicative infrastructure persists even if one or several accounts are removed.

2.3. *Spain as a Privileged Object of Jihadist Propaganda*

Beyond the analysis of the Islamic State as a communicative emitter, Spain occupies a singular position in the global jihadist imaginary, becoming established in the literature as a “structural target” of perennial threat (Torres-Soriano, 2009; Torres-Soriano, 2020). Unlike other Western countries, whose relevance is purely reactive to their foreign policies, Spain is perceived as a land under illegitimate occupation (Torres-Soriano, 2009; Van Der Krogt, 2021). Such is the consideration that the 11-M attacks established an “archetypal attack” (Torres-Soriano, 2020, p. 11) in the global jihadist narrative, interpreted by the organization – Al-Qaeda – as a strategic victory that demonstrated its capacity to force profound political changes, specifically the withdrawal of troops from Iraq following an unexpected electoral shift (Reinares, 2017). This precedent is recurrently used to coerce other Western societies, suggesting that terrorism can break a state’s political will. In the contemporary sphere, the Spanish state has habitually been identified as an active member of the “crusader coalition”, which justifies violence, in the eyes of the organization, in terms of retaliation (Marone & Olimpio, 2023; Torres-Soriano, 2009).

Within this conception, the Al-Andalus resource functions as a symbolic repertoire that articulates narratives of grievance, obligation, and the promise of return (Stearns, 2009). Propaganda constructs this territory as a “lost paradise” that must be reintegrated into the caliphate through jihad (Torres-Soriano, 2009; Van Der Krogt, 2021). This claim is not mere rhetorical ornament; it is an “individual obligation” that links current Muslims to a mythic past of splendor (Torres-Soriano, 2009; Ubayasiri, 2019). In this way, Spain appears bifurcated: as the current aggressor state and as the usurped sacred land that demands an Islamic “reconquest” (Torrallba-Rodríguez, 2019).

A concrete and relatively recent example of this symbolic repertoire, outside the editorial field, is the video that the Islamic State dedicated to the Barcelona attacks of August 17, 2017. In a message published by the Central Media Office⁹ under the signature of *Wilāyah al-Khayr*¹⁰ and titled *The First Rain: The Raid of Barcelona*, a continuous sequence of scenes is shown in just under three minutes. Dynamic images of the moments following the attack are combined with static images of bodies and security forces, as well as a close-up of two organization fighters acting as spokespersons. While the first appears with his face covered, the second – later identified as Muhammad Yasin Ahram Pérez, alias “El Cordobés” – in polished Spanish and with his face uncovered, threatens verbatim: “With the permission of Allah, Al-Andalus will become what it once was: land of the caliphate”.

9 Until the fall of the last strongholds in Baguz, in eastern Syria, it was the highest body of the Islamic State responsible for the creation, coordination, and distribution of all official propaganda of the group, tasked with dictating the organization’s narrative strategy. Its precise role today is unknown.

10 Literal translation: “Province of Goodness/Kindness.” It is the name by which the Islamic State referred to the Deir ez-Zor region in Syria, which it controlled until 2018 (Fishman, 2021).

Returning to the editorial plane, countries are treated as “objects” that allow the delimitation of the enemy’s identity and the reaffirmation of the emitter group’s identity (Marone & Olimpio, 2023; Stempień, 2022). Although the presence of Spain in titles such as *Dabiq* or *Rumiyah* is often episodic, its symbolic charge is maximal when linked to the “extinction of the gray zone”¹¹ (Al-Ghazzi, 2018; Torres-Soriano, 2020). Methodological precedents in the study of other countries, such as Stempień (2022) on Turkey or Marone and Olimpio (2023) on Italy and the Vatican, underscore the utility of these mentions for inferring and situating the strategic priorities of the organizations. Another precise example of this symbolic repertoire is observed in issue 13 of *Rumiyah*¹², where the communicative exploitation of attacks on Spanish soil has served to feed the frame of the “inevitable victory” (Glausch, 2019).

3. Methodology

This study examines textual references to Spain in Voice of Khurasan through a mixed-methods design based on quantitative content analysis, intended to count the presence and distribution of these references across the examined issues, and qualitative analysis, aimed at interpreting the discursive frames associated with said references. As suggested by classical approaches to content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018; Neuendorf, 2017), this combination of methods allows for the counting of manifest patterns in a stable set of texts and the attribution of meaning to these patterns through conceptual categories previously defined in a codebook. In addition, this methodological approach aligns with previous studies examining jihadist terrorist editorial products described earlier and, more specifically, with analyzes that study the image of a country as a propaganda object through the localization of these mentions, their typological classification, and the conceptualization of their frames (Marone & Olimpio, 2023; Stempień, 2022; Torres-Soriano, 2009, 2020).

The sample consists of all 46 issues of the English-language magazine Voice of Khurasan, published between January 2022 and June 2025. The issues are available in .pdf format with recognizable text and were obtained from Jihadology.net (Zelin, 2021). Each issue constitutes a sampling unit, whose pages have been examined in full without omitting any section. Meanwhile, the recording unit consists of each mention within its fragment, where the recognition of discursive frames is exclusive according to the interpretation of the context. Although it is acknowledged that jihadist magazines are multisemiotic products in which text and image mutually reinforce each other,

11 This theoretical-strategic concept was originally formulated in the article “The Extinction of the Grayzone,” published in issue 7 of *Dabiq* magazine. It defines the “gray zone” as the space of coexistence and neutrality occupied by Muslims residing in the West who have not joined the caliphate. The strategy of groups such as the Islamic State consists of using terrorist attacks as catalysts for polarization; the goal is not only to cause physical harm but also to provoke a reaction of intolerance and suspicion in Western societies that forces the “crusaders” themselves to destroy that intermediate space (Gartenstein-Ross, Barr & Moreng, 2016; Ingram, 2017; Marone & Olimpio, 2023).

12 The Spain Attacks. (August–September 2017). *Rumiyah*, (13), 41.

this study prioritizes the specificity of the strategic and doctrinal narrative. This is recognized as a limitation, and it is suggested as a future line of research.

The analysis process was developed in two phases. First, a systematic keyword search organized into three levels was applied with the aim of locating explicit mentions, which were expanded, where appropriate, through iterative expansion of the dictionary to other related terms. Level 1 was oriented toward identifying direct mentions of the contemporary state and its demonyms – “Spain”, “Spanish”, and possible toponymic variants; Level 2 toward signaling historical-territorial repertoires – “al-Andalus”, “Andalusia”, “Andalus”; and Level 3 was based on geostrategic references – “Gibraltar”, “Strait of Gibraltar”.

Within those issues in which at least one reference was detected and confirmed, an expanded contextual search was conducted; that is, the paragraph of appearance was reviewed, as well as the remaining paragraphs that make up the article. The goal was to identify implicit references that are not always captured in concrete terms, such as geographic enumerations, allusions to those “occupied lands”, or fragments where toponyms function as territorial metonymies. If during this review new terms linked to Spain emerged, they were added to the dictionary. Irrelevant coincidences or those that could not be verified were excluded.

Second, each of the detected references was coded using a codebook structured around: type of reference – according to the level – and the associated discursive frame¹³. After locating and cataloging the country’s mentions, their nature was classified and the frame interpreted.

The analysis model (Table 1) is based on the proposal developed by Marone & Olimpio (2023) and Stempień (2022), insofar as it directly follows the logic of the “country as an object”: the central variable is Spain and it is measured whether it appears, how it appears – in its context – and for what purpose it is used in that discourse; it also draws on the studies developed by Torres-Soriano (2009, 2020) by incorporating the dual inscription of the Spain referent – Level 1 and Level 2. Level 3 is included due to its strategic importance within the jihadist imaginary (Stearns, 2009).

Regarding the development of the interpretation of the discursive frame of these mentions, the study is based on seven discursive frames: the “Retaliation or Threat” frame, which presents violence as a legitimate defensive response to the interference of Western states in Muslim lands, using a “topos of revenge” to justify attacks against civilian populations labeled as “crusaders” (Ubayasiri, 2019; Van Der Krogt, 2021); the “Historical Grievance” frame, which employs the so-called “takfiri anachronism” (Al-Ghazzi, 2018) to project the “traumas” of the past – such as the loss of Al-Andalus in 1492 – onto the current geopolitical context, endowing present conflicts with a trans-temporal

¹³ In the context of this study, the discursive frame is conceptualized as the dominant strategic function through which the text activates a textual reference to Spain in its immediate context. It is specified as an interpretive pattern, defined in the codebook, that organizes the meaning of these references by giving them an argumentative function. In the classical terms of framing theory, it is the interpretive principle that gives meaning to certain aspects of the referent and orients its understanding toward a specific reading (Entman, 1993).

religious meaning (Hautaniemi-Forsberg, 2024); closely linked, the “Occupied Lands or Obligation” frame, which defines the peninsular territory as *dar al-islam* [land of Islam] under infidel usurpation, turning the struggle for its recovery into an irrenounceable individual duty – *fard ‘ayn* – for every Muslim (Ingram, 2017; Torres-Soriano, 2009, 2020); the “Return or Restoration” frame, which proposes the utopia of the caliphate as the only political system with divine sanction against the “decadence” of modern nation-states, promising a return to the prophetic methodology and religious authenticity (Gartenstein-Ross, Barr & Moreng, 2016); the “Scope or Expansion” frame, which relies on the logic of the slogan *baqiya wa tatamaddad* [remaining and expanding], projecting an image of victory and constant growth to generate a “momentum” effect that attracts new followers and conceals operational weaknesses (Winter, 2015); the “Geostrategy” frame, which defines the enemy according to its role in the international system, framing the struggle as a bipolar clash between the “camp of faith” and coalitions perceived as members of the UN or NATO (Ubayasiri, 2019); and finally, the “Cultural Context” frame, which aims to provide ontological security to followers through the extensive and selective use of doctrinal sources – Quran and hadiths – offering a stable social identity and simplified responses to complex existential crises (Hautaniemi-Forsberg, 2024; Jacoby, 2023).

Table 1. Analysis model for coding references to Spain in *Voice of Khurasan*

Dimension	Category	Definition
Type of reference (TR)	Contemporary Spain (TR1)	Explicit mention of Spain as a current state/actor or its demonym/language (“Spain”, “Spanish”).
	Al-Andalus/Andalusia (TR2)	Explicit mention of “al-Andalus”, “Andalusia” or “Andalus”.
	Gibraltar/Strait (TR3)	Explicit mention of “Gibraltar” or “Strait of Gibraltar”.
Discursive frame (MD)	Retaliation or Threat (MD1)	The mention is integrated into a logic of retaliation, punishment or direct threat (attack target, “revenge”, persecution, intimidation) attributed to actions of the West or coalitions fighting the organization.
	Historical Grievance (MD2)	The mention activates a historical trauma or injustice (loss, expulsion, cultural destruction, “atrocities”) and projects it onto the present as a moral foundation.
	Occupied Lands or Obligation (MD3)	The mention defines the territory as “occupied Islamic land” and/or links its recovery to a religious duty (e.g., individual obligation, “liberate”, fard ‘ayn).
	Return or Restoration (MD4)	The mention articulates a promise or future vision of return, territorial restoration or renewed rule/governance over the referred space.
	Scope or Expansion (MD5)	The mention functions as an extreme geographic marker to project range of action, victory or transnational unity.
	Geostrategy (MD6)	The mention is used in material-strategic terms (routes, checkpoints, blockade, maritime control, economic collapse, route security).
	Cultural Context (MD7)	The mention fulfills a didactic/explanatory function (history, science, culture, general doctrinal argumentation).

Source: Own elaboration based on the contributions of Marone & Olimpio (2023), Stempień (2022) and the dual inscription of the Spain referent proposed by Torres-Soriano (2009, 2020).

The coding was carried out in Atlas.ti 25 (version 25.0.1.32924), while the statistical processing was performed in IBM SPSS Statistics (version 31.0.0.0) using the counts exported from the qualitative analysis software. To avoid false positives, generic metonymic expressions –“coalition”, “the West, crusaders”, “kuffar”, etc. – were excluded due to their low specificity. Thus, attribution was based exclusively on the explicit markers defined in the three levels of the dictionary.

4. Results

Following the analysis, 17 textual occurrences referring to Spain were identified throughout the sample, distributed across 11 different issues, which equates to coverage of 23.9% of the total series. This distribution is not homogeneous and shows a progressive concentration of mentions in the most recent issues.

When references are observed by year (Table 2), in 2022 there were 3 occurrences in 3 of the 19 total issues of this period – 15.8% - while in 2023, 4 occurrences were observed in 3 of 12 issues – 25%. The greatest concentration occurs in 2024, with 10 occurrences distributed across 5 of 12 issues – 41.7% - confirming an increase in both coverage and intensity. In the 2025 segment, no references were detected using the applied dictionary.

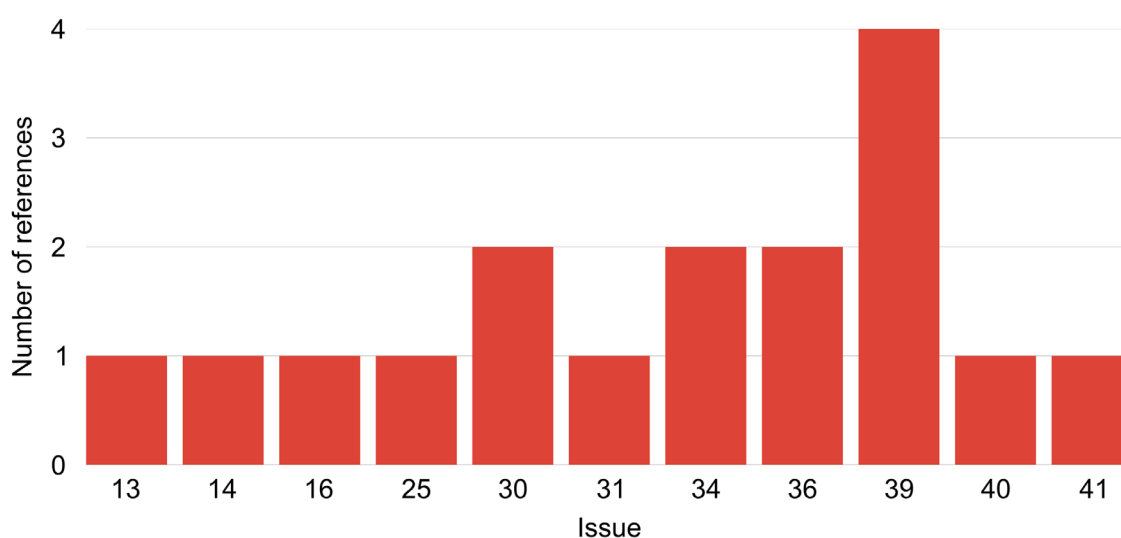
Table 2. Annual distribution of references (Coverage and intensity)

Year	Published issues	Numbered items	Coverage (%)	Total occurrences
2022	19	3	6,5%	3
2023	12	3	6,5%	4
2024	12	5	10,9%	10
2025	3	0	0,0%	0
Totals	46	11	23,9%	17

Source: Own elaboration.

In the issues that do contain references (Figure 1), the intensity ranges from 1 to 4 mentions, with issue 39 containing the most with 4 references, followed by issues 30, 34, and 36 with 2 mentions each, while issues 13, 14, 16, 25, 40, and 41 each contain a single reference.

Figure 1. Number of references in issues with presence (N=11)



Source: Own elaboration.

The typological classification of the 17 identified occurrences confirms that the dominant repertoire is not the mention of the contemporary Spanish state but rather the symbolic inscription of Spain as a historical-religious repertoire. In aggregate terms (Table 3), historical-territorial references to Al-Andalus/Andalusia account for 12 of the 17 occurrences – 70.6% – while mentions of contemporary Spain total 4 occurrences – 23.5%. Direct allusions to the Strait of Gibraltar are reduced to a single occurrence – 5.9% – indicating that this vector does not constitute a stable axis in the discourse but rather a punctual resource within a broader strategic argument.

Table 3. Distribution of occurrences by type of reference (TR).

	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Scope/Expansion	5	29,4%	29,4%
Cultural context	3	17,6%	47,1%
Retaliation/Threat	2	11,8%	58,8%
Historical injustice	2	11,8%	70,6%
Occupied territories/Obligation	2	11,8%	82,4%
Geostrategy	2	11,8%	94,1%
Return/Restoration	1	5,9%	100%
Total	17	100%	

Source: Own elaboration.

This pattern is reinforced by the distribution by year (Table 4). In 2022, the mentions are divided between contemporary Spain and Al-Andalus/Andalusia, with no presence of Strait mentions. In 2023, a relative balance is observed between the previously mentioned types, while in 2024 a dominant presence of Al-Andalus/Andalusia references is identified, with 8 mentions out of the 10 detected in the entire period.

Table 4. Annual distribution of occurrences by type of reference to Spain (N=17).

			Contemporary Spain	Al-Andalus/Andalusia	Gibraltar/Strait of Gibraltar	Total
Year	2022	Count	1	2	0	3
		% within the year	33,0%	66,7%	0,0%	100%
		% within the TA	25,0%	16,7%	0,0%	17,6%
	2023	Count	2	2	0	4
		% within the year	50,0%	50,0%	0,0%	100%
		% within the TA	50,0%	16,7%	0,0%	23,5%
	2024	Count	1	8	1	10
		% within the year	10,0%	80,0%	10,0%	100%
		% within the TA	25,0%	66,7%	100%	58,8%
Total	Count		4	12	1	17
	% within the year		23,5%	70,6%	5,9%	100%
	% within the TA		100%	100%	100,0%	100%

Source: Own elaboration.

Continuing with the identification of discursive frames (Table 5), the analysis reveals that the most frequent is the Scope or Expansion frame, with 5 occurrences (29.4%), used to project an imaginary of transregional presence and continuity of the group's expansionist aspirations. In second place appears the Cultural Context frame with 3 occurrences – 17.6% – where the terms “Spain” and “Spanish” are incorporated as cultural, historical, and linguistic references within doctrinal-type arguments, without Spain being positioned as a direct territorial objective in these contexts. The remaining frames show a secondary presence of 2 occurrences each – 11.8% – while the Return or Restoration frame appears punctually with a single occurrence – 5.9%.

Table 5. Distribution of discursive frames (MD) in the total of occurrences.

	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Scope/Expansion	5	29,4%	29,4%
Cultural context	3	17,6%	47,1%
Retaliation/Threat	2	11,8%	58,8%
Historical injustice	2	11,8%	70,6%
Occupied territories/Obligation	2	11,8%	82,4%
Geostrategy	2	11,8%	94,1%
Return/Restoration	1	5,9%	100%
Total	17	100%	

Source: Own elaboration.

Advancing to the interaction between the type of reference and the discursive frame (Table 6), it is observed that the latter are not distributed randomly. References to contemporary Spain are associated with the Cultural Context frame – 3 of 4 total occurrences; 75% – while the Retaliation/Threat frame appears exceptionally – 1 of 4; 25% – linked to the inclusion of Spain among the countries of the global coalition fighting the Islamic State and presented as a target. In contrast, references to Al-Andalus/Andalusia are primarily linked to the Scope/Expansion frame – 5 of 12; 41.7% – followed by Occupied Lands/Obligation and Historical Grievance – 2 occurrences each; 16.7% – indicating that the toponym functions as a flexible marker: on the one hand, as a western limit to reinforce the narrative of global territorial aspiration, as a “usurped” land that activates the duty to recover it, and on the other, as a memory of grievances linked to episodes of military defeat and cultural destruction. Finally, the geostrategic reference is concentrated in the Geostrategy frame, where Gibraltar/Strait is integrated into an argument about maritime routes and checkpoints, without sufficient continuity to constitute a thematic axis manifested throughout the series.

Table 6. Discursive frames by type of reference (TR x MD).

		Retaliation/Threat	Historical injustice	Occupied territories/Obligation	Return/Restoration	Scope/Expansion	Geostrategy	Cultural context	Total
Contemporary Spain	Count	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	4
	% within the TA	25,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	75,0%	100%
Al-Ándalus/Andalusia	Count	1	2	2	1	5	1	0	12
	% within the TA	8,3%	16,7%	16,7%	8,3%	41,7%	8,3%	0,0%	100%
Gibraltar/Strait of Gibraltar	Count	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
	% within the TA	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	100%	0,0%	100%
Total	Count	2	2	2	1	5	2	3	17
	% within the TA	11,8%	11,8%	11,8%	5,9%	29,4%	11,8%	17,5%	100%

Source: Own elaboration.

To illustrate the traceability of the interpretive process, Table 7 presents an illustrative quote for each discursive frame, showing the assignment of each occurrence to its corresponding frame, evidencing the heterogeneity of references to Spain in the located issues of the magazine.

Table 7. Illustrative quotes by discursive frame (MD) and type of reference (TR).

Discursive framework	Type of reference	Issue (Year)	Page	Direct quote
Retaliation/Threat	Contemporary Spain	34 (2024)	76	"The soldiers of the Islamic State targeted the citizens of the member countries of this coalition in [...] Brussels, Spain , London [...] They leapt and took revenge".
Historical Injustice	Al-Ándalus/Andalusia	31 (2023)	19	"[...] Crusaders burned library of Palestine and that of Tripoli. And did the same in Andalusia , where Ferdinand and Isabella put all Muslims works to flames [...]"
Occupied territories/Obligation	Al-Ándalus/Andalusia	30 (2023)	47	"The first wall of the Islamic territory spreads from Andalusia to southern part of Africa, and the second wall is from western part of Africa to Indonesia [...]"
Return/Restoration	Al-Ándalus/Andalusia	36 (2024)	26	"[...] you will see the armies of Islam roaming inside the palaces and great forts of Andalusia [...]"
Scope/Expansion	Al-Ándalus/Andalusia	14 (2022)	43	"[...] the history of the Islamic conquest [...] and the conquest of Andalusia testify the impotency of the then ruling powers [...]"
Geostrategy	Gibraltar/Strait of Gibraltar	39 (2024)	36	"Consider the strategic locations [...] the Red Sea, and even the Strait of Gibraltar . The security of these maritime routes directly benefits countries like [...]"
Cultural context	Contemporary Spain	30 (2023)	19	"[...] At the time when the scientific method came about in Spain , it was seen that what the church was teaching was not true. This led to a silent revolution".

Source: Own elaboration.

In terms of symbolic selection, references to Spain concentrate on a limited and explicit repertoire. The analysis reveals the clear prevalence of the historical-territorial referent Al-Andalus/Andalusia – 12 of 17 occurrences – over mentions of the contemporary Spanish state – 4 of 17 – and geostrategic allusions – 1 of 17. The presence of Spain as a direct operational target is minority: within the set, only one occurrence places the term “Spain” in a statement of retaliation or threat associated with the coalition, while the rest of the mentions of this type are integrated into a cultural, historical, or linguistic context, without presenting the country as a primary territorial vector.

On the other hand, it is noted that the applied dictionary does not retrieve implicit references to Spain, although neither do unambiguous synonyms or metonymies appear that would allow attribution of the referent to Spain without these precise markers. Finally, the studied series also presents some relevant absences for the descriptive characterization of the object, as no mentions of cities, enclaves, or contemporary landmarks associated with Spain were detected. In fact, particularly in the 2025

segment, no occurrences were recorded under the operationalized terms, such that the presence of Spain is delimited to a limited set of issues and discursive uses.

5. Conclusions

This research set out with the objective of identifying and characterizing the textual references to Spain in the complete set of Voice of Khurasan, consisting of 46 issues published between January 2022 and June 2025. The analysis model drew inspiration from works that treat the country as an object within jihadist editorial products (Marone & Olimpio, 2023; Stempień, 2022) and from the tradition of studying Spain as a propaganda referent (Torres-Soriano, 2009; 2020).

The results describe a clear pattern: the mentions are infrequent in sample terms – the 23.9% that contain at least one reference – but in annual terms, they show an increase in coverage and intensity throughout 2024, along with a typological and discursive composition that clearly privileges the historical-territorial repertoire.

First, the temporal distribution suggests that Spain does not constitute a constant axis throughout the series but rather a referent that emerges episodically and concentrated in certain issues. The noted jump in 2024 – with 10 occurrences in 5 issues, an annual coverage of 41.7% – contrasts with the lower values of 2022 and 2023 and with the absence of references in the 2025 segment according to the applied dictionary. Without inferring causality, this evolution is consistent with the logic of magazines as serialized products with content sensitive to conjunctures, where certain geographic objects gain visibility when they prove useful for reinforcing narrative priorities and legitimizing doctrinal frames.

Second, the classification by type of reference confirms that, in this outlet, Spain is presented predominantly as a historical-religious repertoire. The majority of occurrences are inscribed in Al-Andalus/Andalusia – 70.6% – while contemporary Spain represents 23.5% of cases and references to Gibraltar a residual 5.9%. This distribution suggests that the focus shifts from an operational reading with Spain as a current priority target toward a more symbolic reading to articulate promises, grievances, or imagined borders. This idea aligns with previous literature on the value of Al-Andalus as a repertoire with high symbolic density and mobilizing capacity, especially when linked to concrete ideas of “usurped” lands, religious duty, or historical continuity (Stearns, 2009; Torres-Soriano, 2009; 2020; Van Der Krogt, 2021).

The Al-Andalus/Andalusia reference often functions as a rhetorical geographic limit through the discursive frame of scope or expansion – 29.4% – useful for reproducing an effect of continuity and aspirational projection. At the same time, the secondary presence of occupied lands or obligation and historical grievance – 11.8% each – shows that the referent is also activated as a “due land” or as a memory of defeat. That is, the same toponym does not always push toward the same function, as it

can operate as a promise of expansion, a duty, or a grievance depending on the rhetorical context of the article.

Third, the interaction between the type of reference and the discursive frame clarifies the status of contemporary Spain within the corpus. Mentions of “Spain/Spanish” are primarily associated with a cultural context; that is, they are integrated into doctrinal or cultural arguments without presenting Spain as a territory to be recovered or as a priority target. Only one occurrence frames the country in a retaliation or threat frame as part of a list of countries whose citizens would be objects of violence. This distribution suggests that, in Voice of Khurasan, the contemporary Spanish state operates more as an auxiliary referent than as a sustained primary enemy. However, this does not mean that Spain is irrelevant in the jihadist imaginary, but rather that, in this examined corpus, its explicit presence mostly adopts non-direct territorial forms, which are indirectly captured under the direct occurrences of Al-Andalus/Andalusia.

Finally, these results provide a useful methodological observation for the state of the question: the search for implicit references to Spain, beyond explicit terms, does not yield verifiable findings. This absence is interpreted cautiously: either the corpus uses the Spain referent mostly implicitly when activated, or the implicit forms remain diluted in metonymies that are too broad to allow specific meaning attribution without overinterpretation. In short, Spain appears in Voice of Khurasan primarily through a historical-territorial repertoire and as a resource of expansion or scope, rather than as a sustained contemporary priority target.

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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

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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%

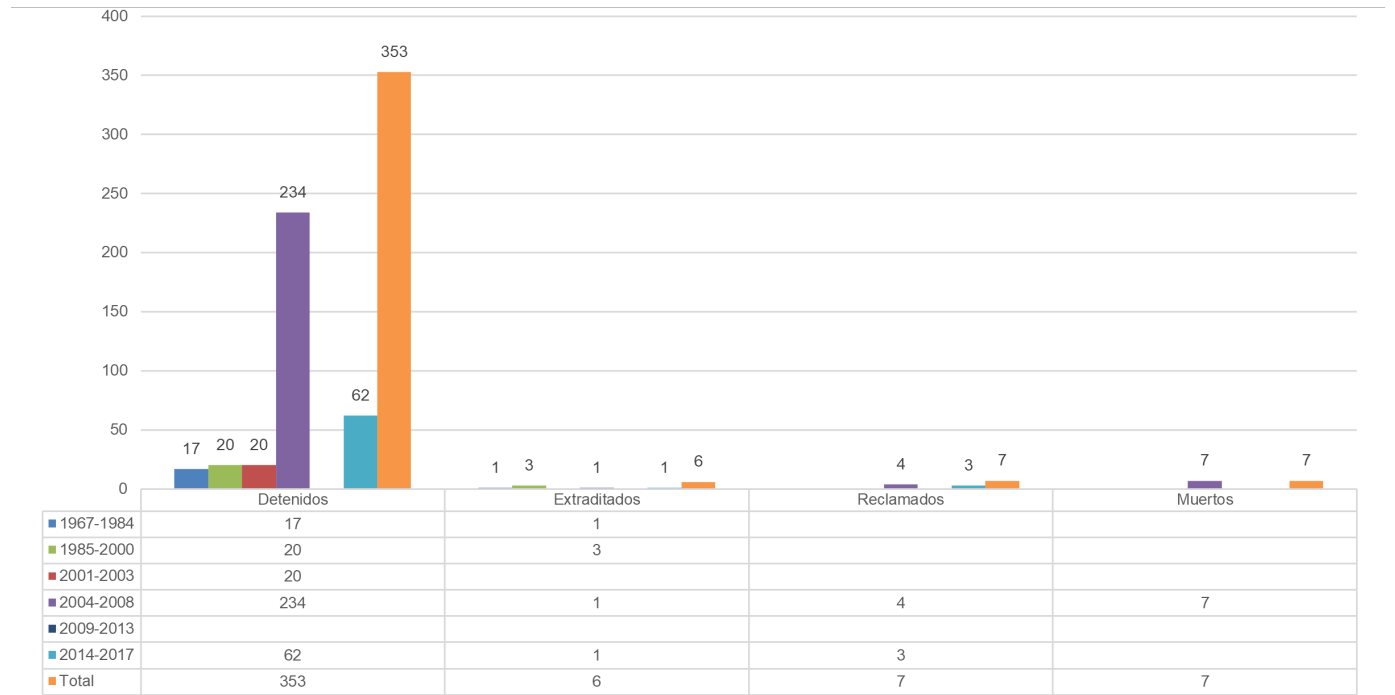
14 There were twenty-two detainees, but twenty are reflected, because two were arrested on two different occasions for the same facts.

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.

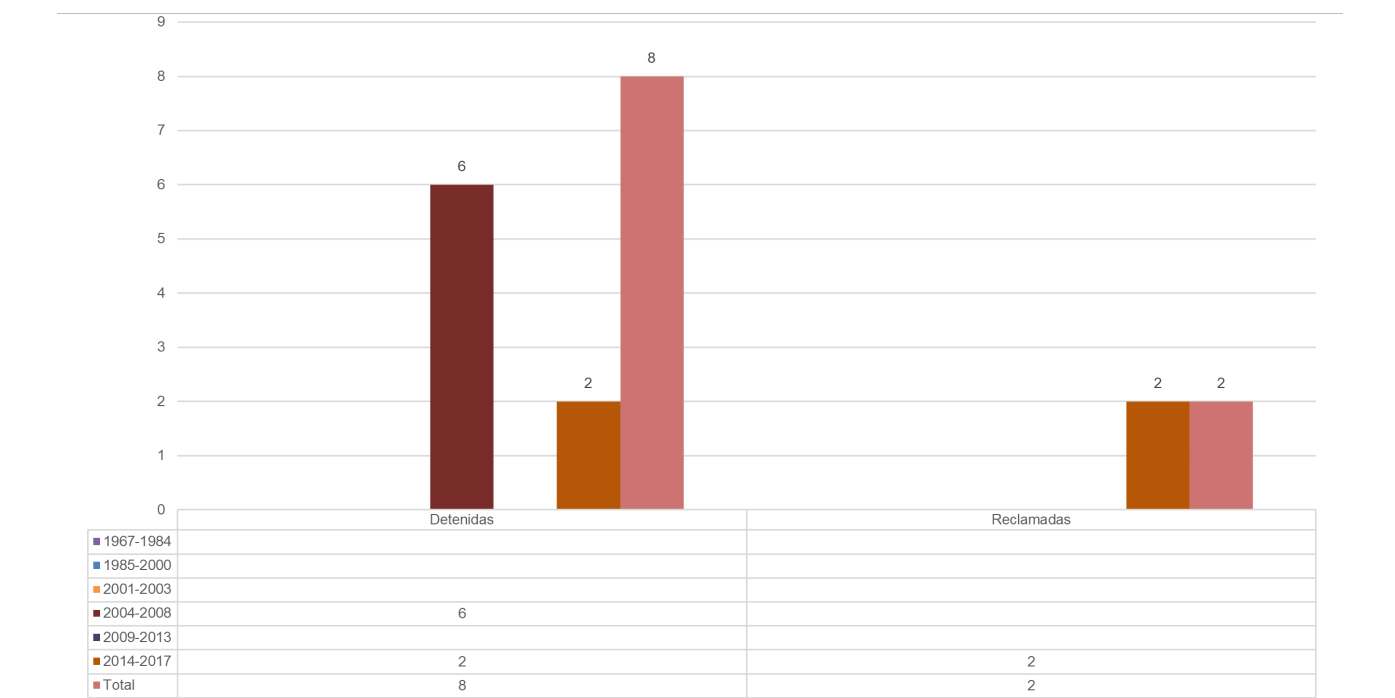
of the total detainees (361), none extradited or deceased, and 22.22% of the total international wanted persons, thus confirming that men feel much more attracted to these activities than women. To facilitate a quick and synthesized vision of the results, the following graphs are provided:

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



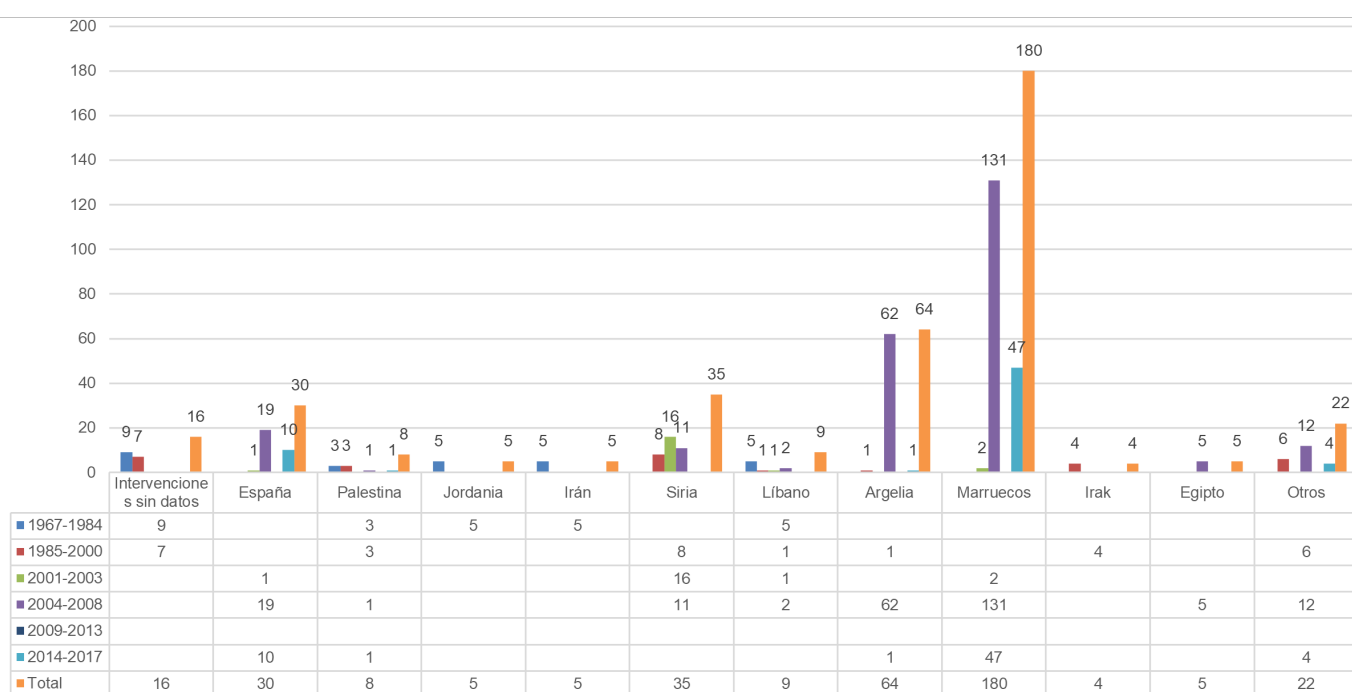
Source: Own elaboration based on data extracted from OIET (n.d.), Centro Memorial de las Víctimas del Terrorismo (2015-2017), and Jiménez Martín (2005).

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.

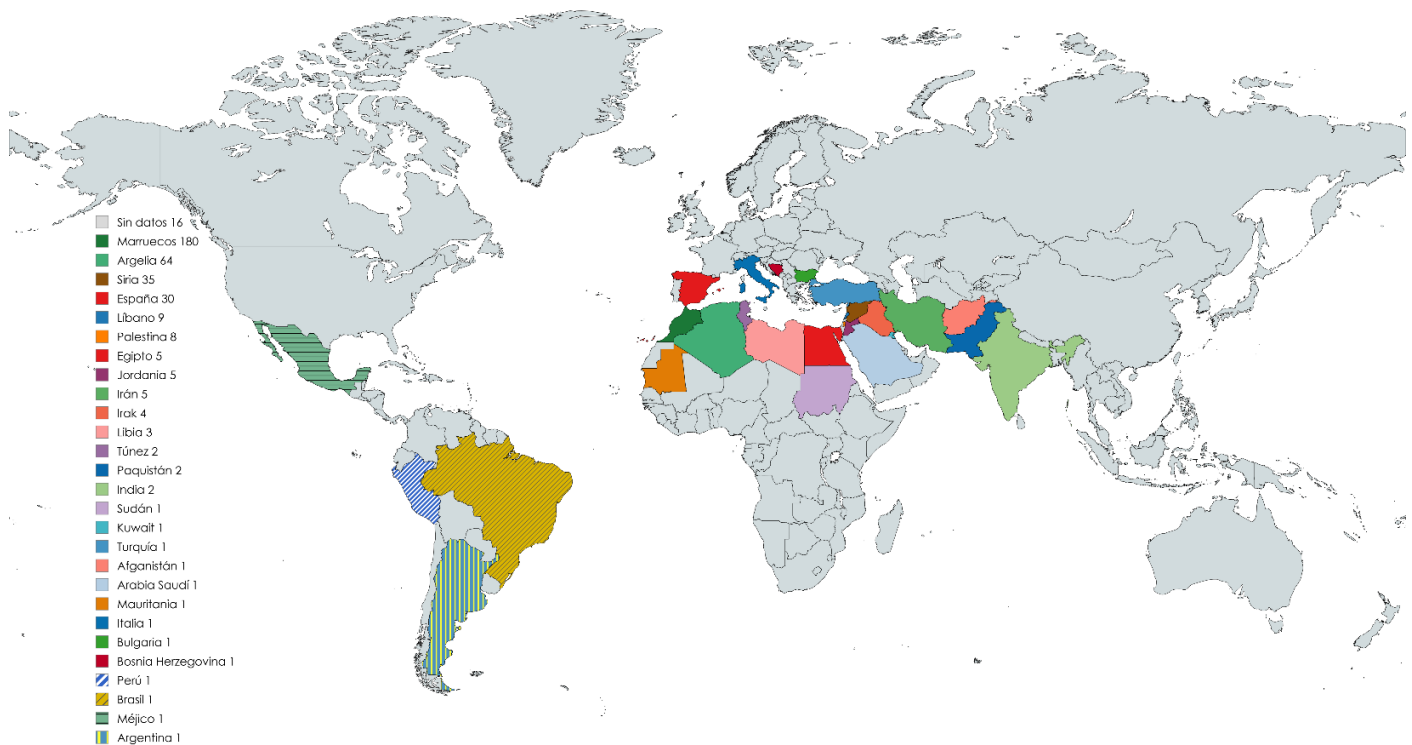
The first two nationalities find a possible explanation in the large number of immigrants from those countries settled in Madrid and in Spain (75.766/747.872 and 1.960/60.282 respectively), and the fourth, due to the increasingly high number of Spanish Muslims (174.550/834.058) (currently the majority 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:

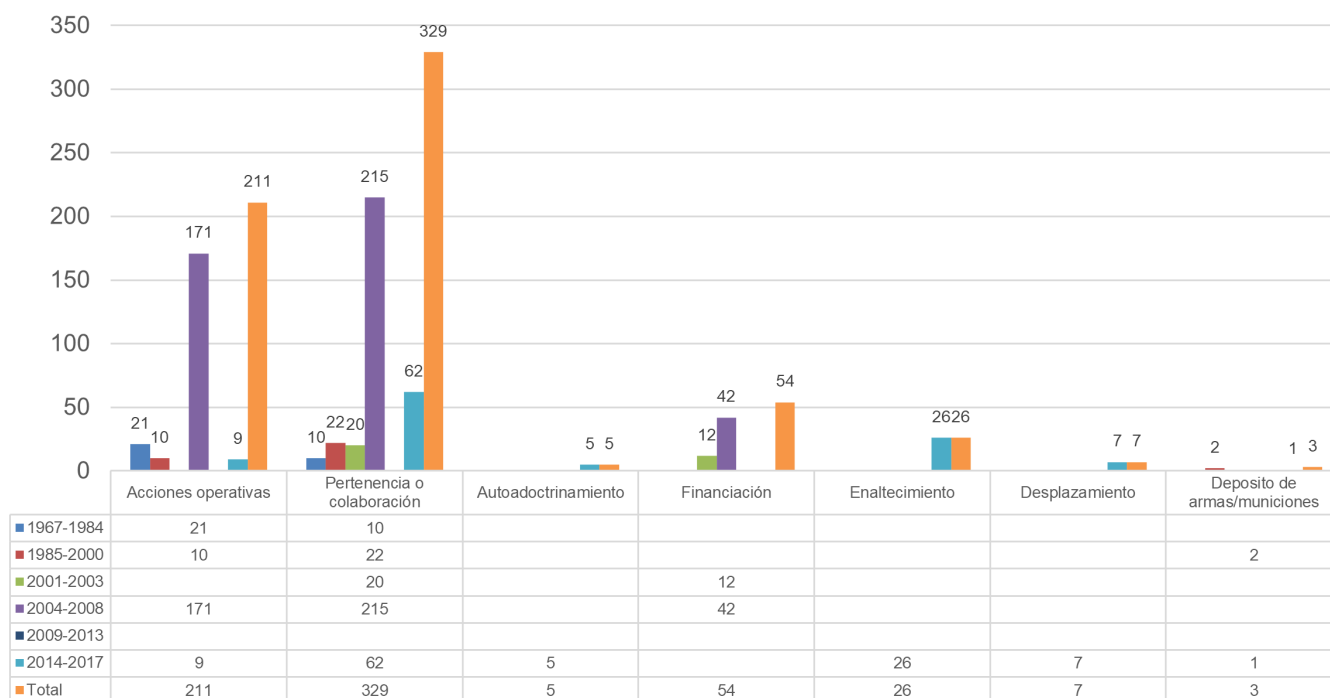
Self-indoctrination: with the “purpose of training to commit any of the offenses typified in this Chapter” (art. 575.1).

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

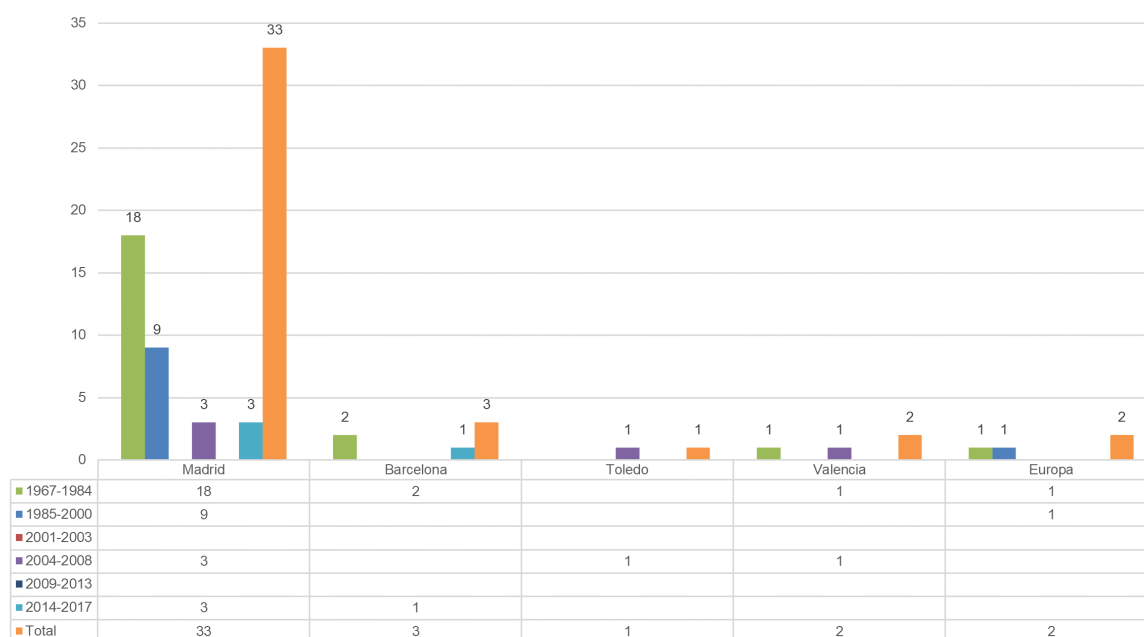
22 With the information published in open sources, it is impossible to specify the exact country.

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



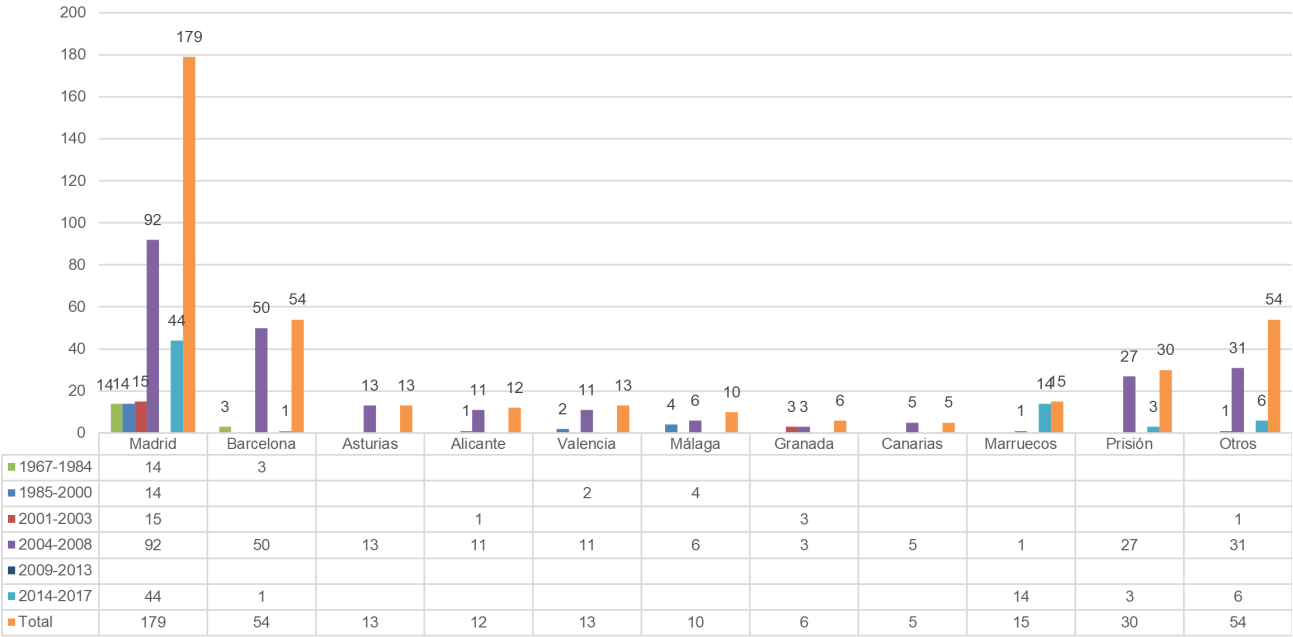
Source: Own elaboration based on data extracted from OIET (n.d.), Centro Memorial de las Víctimas del Terrorismo (2015-2017), and Jiménez Martín (2005).

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).

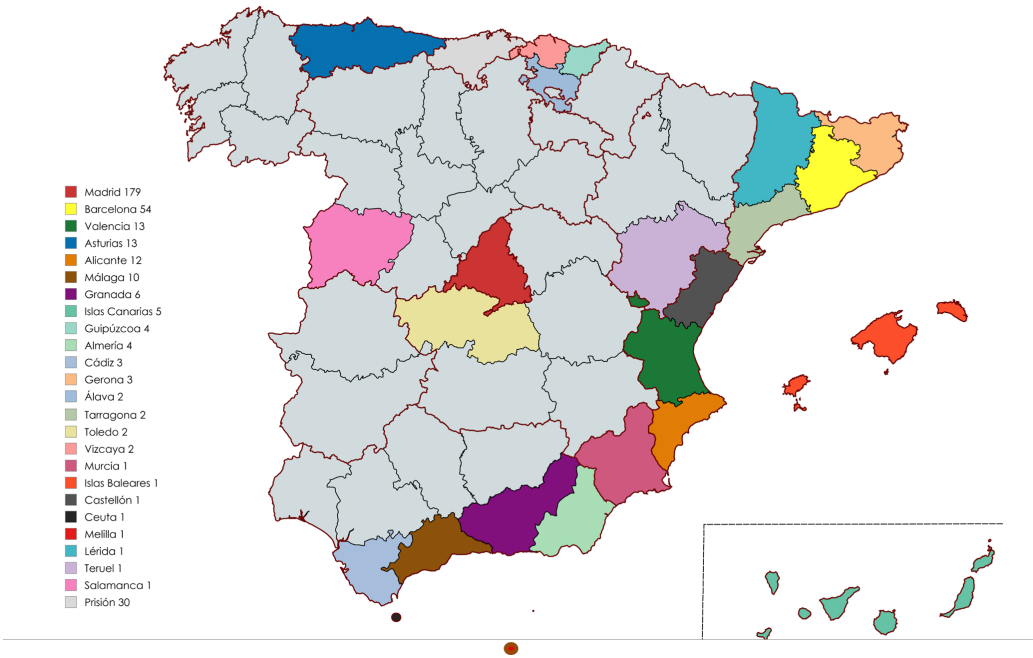
²⁵ To improve the understanding of the graph, provinces with fewer than five detainees and foreign countries have been grouped under the category “others”.

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

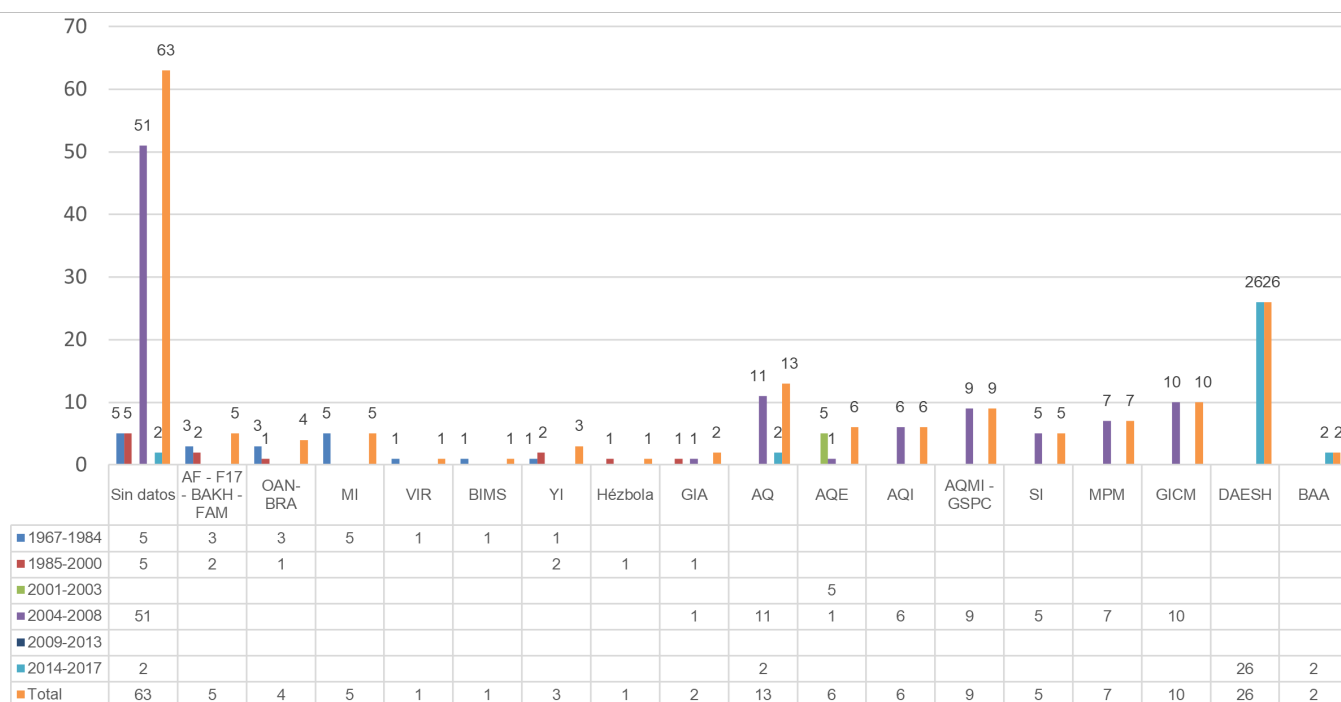
It is very difficult to delimit the role of the terrorist in the organization to which he belongs or with which he collaborates, and to avoid errors when discriminating between the different categories enunciated by Marc Sageman and quoted by (Jordán, 2007: 5)²⁶, the subject is framed under the group 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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América Yaneli Torres, Claudia Valeria Ramírez, Daniela Pérez y Kenya Clara Hernández

Female Identity Policies in the Islamic State: An Introspective Look at Women

Abstract

The role of women in terrorist organizations has traditionally been reduced to that of a victim. However, these extremist networks provoke profound transformations in global social dynamics, generating constant evolution in their structures and tactics. Although their participation has been fundamental to the operations of these terrorist groups, the role of women remains insufficiently documented, especially in extremist contexts.

This research focuses on the role of women within the Islamic State terrorist organization, whose current political and social impact leads us to analyze the functions they perform in both the ideological and strategic spheres. The aim is to question the established gender roles within the terrorist organization and how it integrates or motivates women's participation despite the gender roles traditionally assigned to them in their sociocultural context.

Keywords: Women, radicalization, Islamic State, gender roles, gender-based violence

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the Islamic State (IS) has gained significant media relevance on the global stage. The radicalization of violence, along with its methods of mobilization and geographic expansion, among many other factors, has become a subject of worldwide study because these elements result in aggressions and extremist violent acts perpetrated by IS. Its impact has been on a large scale, managing to establish territorial control over large parts of Iraq and Syria between 2013 and 2019 (Mohamedou, 2022).

At the same time that the role of the organization itself has evolved over time, the position of women within the organization has also undergone transformation. Women have gradually developed an important role inside IS, carrying out various tasks for different purposes. Some participate by their own decision, while many others are victims of the mechanisms designed for female recruitment. It is currently estimated that there are between “1.500 and 2.000 IS women trained for combat” (Gardner, 2015). Therefore, it is of social interest to identify and understand the growing participation of women in the terrorist activities of this organization, as they are regarded as valuable active agents to ensure its operability¹. It is important to analyze the gender roles and the degree of participation these women play within the organization, since their context can lead to other dynamics and forms of violence that affect them, such as gender-based violence.

The participation of women in extremist organizations has traditionally been underestimated due to gender stereotypes² that associate the “role of women” with a generalized voluntary or imposed distancing from violence (Burman, 2004:39; Siegel, 2014:56).

This analytical category facilitates the examination of how roles and relationships among women, men, and other identities are created and maintained. In this way, gender theory situates individuals within their historical and social context and considers relations of social production and reproduction as critical aspects in the formation of gender (Lagarde, 1996:31). Thus, it is possible to identify social organizations, such as the Islamic State, where gender is crucial for structuring hierarchies, functions, and forms of violence.

This research is based on a comparative study model conducted with information obtained from secondary sources. It proposes a comparison between two profiles of women who have been part of IS: on the one hand, those who joined under conditions of coercion, manipulation, or victimization, and on the other, those who joined voluntarily through individual processes of radicalization and personal decision.

1 This adds the concept of *jihad feminism* to the study, which is a propagandistic construct that promotes the idea that every Muslim woman must join ISIS and support men in the jihad, thereby legitimizing patriarchal roles and female subordination.

2 In this sense, gender is understood as “a sociocultural construction that assigns different roles to women and men for living life” (Fernández, 2011:5).

This distinction is essential to determine whether the processes of integration into IS directly influence the roles these women perform within the organization and their vulnerability to certain forms of violence.

1.1. The Process of Female Radicalization

When discussing radicalization, it is important to note that there is no global consensus regarding its definition. However, for the purposes of this study, we adopt the definition provided by Horgan (2004:27), who describes radicalization as a psychosocial process in which there is a gradual increase in the commitment to join an extremist ideology. Likewise, during this process, a person may transform their thoughts and behaviors, adopting an aggressive and violent attitude. Due to the individual's bond with the cause, they begin to assume that any action necessary to sustain and validate their radical ideas and thoughts is justified (Pearson & Winterbotham, 2017:7-14).

Traditionally, women have been viewed as alien to violence and as having a certain incapacity to participate in these radicalization processes because of their femininity (Pearson & Winterbotham, 2017:1).

On the other hand, radicalization is also linked to the search for identity in a society that dictates what women can and cannot do, as well as to the social discrimination that pushes them toward these organizations in search of power (Pearson & Winterbotham, 2017:7).

Finally, the various narratives that idealize gender roles are clear: while men are promised roles of power that allow them to become "real men", women are offered roles as builders of the Ummah and guardians of the Caliphate (Van Leuven et al., 2015:110; Termeer & Duyvesteyn, 2022:475).

2. Women as Victims of the Islamic State (IS).

One of the fundamental pillars of IS's recruitment of women lies in its strong ideological and religious foundation. The justification for women's participation in the group's structure has been made through the concept of *hijrah* (Aasgaard, 2017:101). This narrative legitimizes the displacement of women to territories controlled by IS and contributes to their role in the territorial reconstruction of the Islamic Caliphate.

Some estimates indicate that at least ten percent of the people who traveled to Syria and Iraq to join IS were Western women (Aasgaard, 2017:103). Their presence is perceived as key to the group's ideological and territorial project, representing an instrumentalized use of women for the symbolic reproduction of the Islamic State (Aasgaard, 2017:101).

The training and recruitment methods, carefully structured and adapted to the conditions of contemporary life³ originate in the group's ideology and in a vision based on gender roles. The existence of specific roles for women within the Caliphate plays a primordial role in the dissemination and reinforcement of IS. These roles reinforce the group's social order, in which practices of submission, control, manipulation, and gender-based violence are normalized as part of an already established social structure.

It is important to note that, in many cases, the roles women perform within IS are not chosen but are the direct result of human trafficking practices⁴ carried out by the organization. The narrative of being "wives of jihadists", as will be discussed below, serves as a cover to conceal the fact that many of them are forced into marriage, reduced to domestic servitude, or sexually exploited.

2. 1. Forced Wives

In a large number of cases, women who traveled to conflict zones to join Daesh ended up being married to jihadists, often as a reward for the combat service these men provided to the organization. Thus, the primary function of the woman is to marry an IS fighter, learn Arabic, migrate, and interact with other women who follow the same behavioral pattern (Aasgaard, 2017:105). In this context, women do not freely choose their partners; instead, they are placed at the service of a matchmaker responsible for assigning them a "suitable" husband (Spencer, 2016:80).

Afterward, and in the words of the group's own ideology, "the main task of the woman is to stay at home, get married, give birth to a child, and raise him to fight in the name of God" (Aasgaard, 2017:105). This is achieved through elements contained in the ideological literature consumed by women, which also generates a negative perception of non-Muslim women (Aasgaard, 2017:99).

From the perspective of "jihad feminism", the Islamic State used forced marriage as a multifaceted tool to subject women to the oppressive lifestyles within the Caliphate. These unions do not respond to an affective or traditional religious logic but instead instrumentalize women as mechanisms of control and sources of income. Many times, these marriages, far from representing a legitimate union, became a formalized business for the commercialization of women and girls (Mncibi, 2021:109).

3 Methods that in recent years have evolved to reach the digital environment and have in turn reflected a movement of digital radicalization, based on tactics of emotional seduction, identification with larger causes and problems, as well as affective manipulation.

4 In this sense, the functions assigned to them form part of a system of exploitation that fits the international definition of human trafficking established in the Palermo Protocol, whether in the form of slavery, servitude, or sexual exploitation. Therefore, rather than a voluntary role, the experience of these women should be understood as the result of a systematic process of trafficking and subjugation.

An example of forced marriage is that of Umi Delima, a 16-year-old girl who was forced to marry Santoso, the leader of the East Indonesia Mujahideen group (EIM), in an unregistered Islamic marriage without the minor's consent⁵. Although Umi initially perceived this union as an opportunity to escape her environment and improve her lifestyle, the reality was extremely different. Umi was rejected by her husband's family, received no economic support, and was forced to move constantly. As a result, she lived in conditions of marginalization, dependence, and both psychological and economic violence (Taskarina, 2020:9-11).

In this sense, IS discourse imposes a model of femininity based on obedience, motherhood, and confinement to the domestic sphere, in which the woman is responsible for motivating and supporting her husband, thereby disabling the possibility of creating female autonomy and limiting her opportunities for personal and professional development.

2.2. *Housewives*

Another of the most relevant roles assigned to women within IS, closely related to the previous section, is that of housewife. In this role, the woman is confined to the domestic sphere and assigned the responsibility of motivating and supporting her husband, which prevents the creation of female autonomy.

The organization justifies this labor through religious and cultural arguments that position the woman as an indispensable pillar in the transmission of values and in the consolidation of the Islamic Caliphate (Spencer, 2016:80-82).

The housewife function acquires a strategic character for IS, as it not only guarantees biological reproduction, by giving birth to children who will be raised to become future fighters, but also ideological reproduction, by educating them under the extremist principles of the group (Makanda, 2019:143). In this way, the domestic sphere becomes a space for indoctrination in which the woman acts as a transmitter of the group's vision.

2.3. *Slavery (Comfort Women)*

Another role that women perform, against their will in the vast majority of cases, is that of "comfort women", as various cases have been recorded of women traveling to Syria to engage in this activity (Buner, 2016:445) through what is known as *sexual jihad*, where women "offer themselves as comfort women to boost the morale of the warriors" (Buner, 2016:435). There is considerable debate regarding the degree of voluntariness in women's participation, which could suggest that this role

⁵ The young woman's childhood was marked by her parents' divorce, a fact that contributed to the development of patterns of social isolation that increased even further during her marriage.

continues to be performed; however, the information obtained to date has made it clear that this act is not voluntary, although it is prosecuted as complicity in terrorism (Buner, 2016:435-449).

In this logic, it is emphasized that regardless of the degree of agency and impact women may have within the structures of the Islamic State, they were conceived above all as disposable sexual objects, with the possibility of being commercialized within the organization's sex slave market (Mncibi, 2021:114). Although extremist interpretations of the religious texts used by the organization explicitly prohibited a man from selling his wife, in practice these distinctions were ignored and reinterpreted with the aim of maintaining control over women. For this reason, many were indoctrinated through teleological discourses that justified sexual slavery as a religious mandate that reinforced the structural violence exercised against them (Mncibi, 2021:114).

2.4. Manipulation of Discourse

It is necessary to emphasize the Islamic State's skill in manipulating discourse regarding gender roles. Both recruitment techniques and the roles women perform are sustained by women's ability to access different spaces of power and to incite, promote, and care for the group's objectives through militarization and violence.

In contrast, while women are promoted a false sense of empowerment, in the case of men, "pejorative and submissive notations of women are used to reinforce ideas about masculinity" (CTED, 2019:14). Furthermore, there is growing research on gender discourses currently directed at men, in which denigrating stereotypes about women are used to reaffirm dominant masculine roles. This dynamic generates a paradoxical cycle in which women, in an attempt to obtain power and recognition within these groups, end up performing functions that keep them subordinated and exposed to various forms of violence exercised by men.

3. Women Who Join the Islamic State Voluntarily

As noted earlier, studies on terrorism have primarily focused on the roles of men in these types of organizations. In contrast, when analyses focus on the roles of women, they tend to portray them solely as victims. Although it is true that many women are coerced or forced to join groups such as IS, it is also important to recognize that many others make the decision to join voluntarily. "It is crucial to understand that, for the most part, women are not victims or passive instruments in the hands of men" (García-Calvo & Driessen, 2024:13). This leads us to underscore the importance of recognizing the radicalization process as a crucial factor contributing to the voluntary involvement of these women, since through it "there is a gradual increase in commitment to an extremist ideology. This commitment can reach the point of legitimizing the use of violence and even carrying it out" (Moyano, 2020). From

this, we can also understand the active and conscious role that women play within IS, performing an essential function in the development of the organization. On many occasions, they assume leadership roles within the group and seek to develop themselves in various areas; for example, through the recruitment of other women, their participation as fighters, or their work as officials.

3.1. *Recruiters and Propagandists*

Women who take an active role in terrorist groups through recruitment and propaganda do so both online and offline. The Islamic State “mainly had Western recruiters leading social media campaigns” (García-Calvo & Driessen, 2024:12), which is particularly important because these women can more easily approach others from the same sociocultural environment. Likewise, women already belonging to IS use digital platforms as a means of transmitting messages to promote female participation within the group. The *hijrah* is idealized through personal experience narratives and by providing advice on how to carry it out (Aasgaard, 2017:102). Undoubtedly, this medium has been a key ally for women in IS, taking advantage of women on the internet who feel discontent with their lives and disconnected from society. These efforts are directed at them, with “recruitment efforts taking place exclusively online, primarily through Telegram, Tumblr, and Twitter” (Aasgaard, 2017).

In the case of propaganda, it is evident that “local women in the Islamic State territories in Syria and Iraq have been, after the operational years of IS, instructed to traffic women and girls from conflict zones to IS” (Mncibi, 2021:37).

3.2. *Fighters*

The active role of women “has expanded to significantly include roles such as recruiter, propagandist, organizer, security enforcer, and even combat” (García-Calvo & Driessen, 2024:13). This fighter role includes military presence on the front lines, where “Muslim women are called upon to become fighters when there is a shortage of their male counterparts as a result of their imprisonment by opposing forces” (Makanda, 2019:141). This emerged mainly from 2017 onward, when IS began to adopt a new discourse, as seen in articles disseminated by the organization, in which “they called on women to take up arms not to compensate for the limited number of men, but out of their love for jihad” (García & Driessen, 2024:13).

One of the main reasons for the increase in women’s participation in terrorist actions is undoubtedly the fact that they are less frequently associated with this type of activity, primarily due to gender stereotypes. That is, when carrying out a terrorist operation with a woman, “they are less likely to be checked at control points and can easily hide weapons under their loose clothing. They

can even pretend to be pregnant and hide explosives where the belly should be”⁶ (Gaub & Lisiecka, 2016).

3.3. *Officials*

Despite the structure of the Quran and the restrictions imposed by IS, women can also assume roles as officials, since “Daesh women are not only housewives; they also act as recruiters and work as teachers, doctors, and officials. The role assigned to a woman upon her arrival in the Caliphate depends largely on her origin” (Rodríguez, 2023).

Another way in which women seek to obtain status within the organization is through marriage to fighters. The idea has been promoted that marrying a soldier represents an elevated position within Caliphate society. Such was the case of two young British women who traveled to Syria because “they wanted to marry jihadists, since being wives of fighters would give them status” (Gardner, 2015).

Many of these women are recruited through social media, where the Islamic State has allowed its female members to play an active role. One of the best-known cases is that of Aqsa Mahmood, a 20-year-old who fled Glasgow, Scotland, and joined the Islamic State in 2013. Since then, “Mahmood has maintained an active presence on social media, using the alias Umm Layth. She has supported IS, recruited terrorists for the group online, justified terrorist attacks carried out in Europe and elsewhere, and encouraged the commission of new attacks” (Aqsa Mahmood, n.d.). She has been identified as one of the most active women in terrorist recruitment, using social media as a platform to spread IS ideals, disseminate messages of hate, justify attacks, and offer advice on how to travel to the Syrian Arab Republic.

Additionally, the idea of marrying a jihadist has been promoted as a romantic and tragic element: a love story filled with conviction and sacrifice, which makes it even more attractive to some women.

4. **Conclusions**

The participation of women in the Islamic State reveals how extremist structures manage to instrumentalize both gender and emotions to strengthen their ideological and operational objectives. Although there is a duality in the way of entering these organizations, it is important to highlight that the two forms are not mutually exclusive; many women join IS seeking identity, purpose, or status, while still being subject to structures and roles that limit their autonomy.

6 The jihadist terrorist group Boko Haram is a good example of this, as it has historically frequently used women in Nigeria to carry out its suicidal terrorist actions.

When analyzing different cases of both women who join under coercion and those who do so voluntarily, fundamental differences are observed, beginning with the motivation for joining. While some are forced to join through dynamics involving human trafficking, others actively seek to become involved in the organization as a result of a radicalization process and the expectation of gaining prestige or recognition within IS.

In the case of victims, the level of autonomy is reduced and their role tends to be more passive, while those women who join by their own decision usually show greater participation, along with a clear interest in assuming a more active role within the organization. However, in practice, both dimensions can coexist: a woman who was initially forced into marriage may transform into a recruiter of new members, while another who joined voluntarily may end up reduced to conditions of domestic servitude or sexual exploitation.

When analyzing the specific roles they perform, it is evident that while some have greater presence in the private sphere, facing situations such as sexual slavery, forced marriages, and domestic subordination, women who decide to join voluntarily tend to develop more in the public sphere. This is manifested in their participation in recruitment activities, the visibility of the attacks they carry out, and the leadership that some exercise within the group's structure.

In this sense, the distinction between forced and voluntary women should not be interpreted as an opposition, but as two sides of the same coin that reveals the Islamic State's capacity to manipulate and configure gender functions according to its strategic needs. It allows the organization to use the vulnerability of victims as well as the initiative of volunteers, generating an environment within the organization where subordination and agency coexist.

Recognizing this duality means that the roles within the organization, although they may differ slightly, are not an absolute reality for all women, who retain the freedom to decide whether or not to be part of the organization.

Furthermore, understanding these nuances is crucial for the academic study of terrorism and radicalization; only by accepting that women can be conscious actors as well as subjects of coercion will it be possible to design strategies that are more humane, effective, and comprehensive for the prevention of violent extremism that also directly involves them.

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Mónica Román González, Paula M. Núñez-Guerra y Manuel Torres Lajo

The Crocus City Hall Attack Two Years On: Geopolitical Framing in Russian Discourse

Abstract

For decades, Jihadist terrorism has struck Russia, largely stemming from military interventions in the North Caucasus, Afghanistan, and Syria. The 22 March 2024 ISIS-K attack on Moscow's Crocus City Hall, the deadliest since Beslan's siege, resulted in almost 150 fatalities. Marking the tragedy's second anniversary, this article analyses the "geopoliticisation" of the official Russian narrative. Despite the ISIS-K claim of responsibility, the Kremlin instrumentalised the event to implicate Ukraine and its Western allies. Through qualitative content analysis, the research identifies the construction of these confrontational frameworks. The findings show that the Kremlin redefines domestic crises to integrate them into pre-existing international conflicts, consolidating an external existential threat to legitimise its current geopolitical stance.

Keywords: Terrorism, geopolitics, Russia, ISIS-K, narrative

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1. Introduction

On 22 March 2024, Russia suffered its worst terrorist attack since the 2004 Beslan school siege. Armed attackers linked to the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISIS-K) stormed Moscow's Crocus City Hall, killing and injuring hundreds of civilians. Now, two years after the massacre, the legal process has concluded. On 17 February 2026, the Russian General Prosecutor's Office requested life imprisonment for 15 of the 19 defendants, including the four primary suspects of Tajik nationality¹. The trial, held largely behind closed doors since August 2025, concluded in March 2026 with the conviction of all 19 defendants, including life imprisonment for the four primary perpetrators and eleven of their accomplices.

However, this attack was not an isolated security failure. While the Russian Federation has long been a target for Islamist groups, their activities have resurfaced as they exploit vulnerabilities resulting from the conflict in Ukraine. A clear example of this resurgent threat is the FSB operation in Karabulak, Ingushetia, just days before the Moscow attack (National Antiterrorism Committee, 2024). Despite ISIS-K claiming responsibility and the evidence of this jihadist resurgence, the Russian Investigative Committee officially concluded the assault was planned "in the interests of the Ukrainian leadership".

Rather than recognising these internal security failures, the Kremlin instrumentalised the tragedy to demonise Kyiv and reinforce its narrative of an existential threat from "unfriendly" foreign powers. This strategy aligns with the Doctrine of Information Security of the Russian Federation (2016), which states that "the information sphere has a crucial role to play in implementing strategic national priorities". Consequently, since the early 2000s, Russian strategic documents like National Security Strategies and Military Doctrines have treated information as a weapon linked to national interests. For instance, the Russian Military Doctrine (2014) connects the "information space" directly to military threats and political purposes.

As Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss (2014:12) explain, Moscow's weaponisation of information stems from a military establishment that believes "Russia is itself under mass information and influence attack from the West". This explains the Kremlin's efforts to strengthen state media and social media tools, viewed as "gamechangers" in informational warfare (Pomerantsev & Weiss, 2014:17). This *modus operandi* has been consistent across the Chechen Wars (1994-2009), the invasion of Georgia (2008), and the war in Ukraine since 2014.

Currently, the full-scale war against Ukraine has made this weaponisation essential, as Moscow frames the conflict as an existential struggle. Despite a 40-year history of Islamic terrorism in the country, the Crocus City Hall attack serves as a new vehicle for these narratives. By suggesting

1 The four main suspects were identified as Dalerdzhon Mirzoyev, Saidakrami Rachabalizoda, Shamsidin Fariduni, and Mukhammadsobir Fayzov, aged between 19 and 32. According to investigative reports, they were recruited via a Telegram and had been working in Russia in low-skilled jobs (Baker & Greenall, 2024)

Western complicity, the Kremlin constructs a message for both local and foreign audiences to shift public opinion. This aligns with Brzezinski's (1994:80) warning that "with Ukraine suborned and then subordinated, Russia automatically becomes an empire". This article analyses the official Russian narrative regarding the Crocus attack through the lens of these defining geopolitical factors.

2. Methodology

The research question asks how geopolitical notions appeared in the Russian official narrative regarding the ISIS-K terrorist attack at Moscow's Crocus City Hall in March 2024. The central hypothesis of the research is that geopolitics played a leading role in the elaboration and development of the mentioned narrative on such terrorist crime.

Accordingly, the main goal of this research is to expose the narrative disseminated by the Government of the Russian Federation about the terrorist attack at the Crocus City Hall and analyse it in geopolitical terms. Simultaneously, the following secondary objectives are framed: (1) establish a contextual framework about the Crocus City Hall attack to explain the role of jihadist terrorism in Russia; (2) describe the evolution of the Russian official narrative about the terrorist attack; (3) analyse the geopolitical aspect of the Russian official narrative about the attack.

To address the research question, this study employed qualitative methods using archival and internet-based data. The analysis focused on primary and secondary sources, including official government documents, local media, and social media. Governmental data comprised policy statements and speech transcripts from official websites, such as those of the President, the Government, and the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation. Additionally, media information was gathered from major national agencies like TASS, alongside social media content from relevant platforms like Telegram and X.

To analyse the gathered data, the study employed qualitative content analysis, defined as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2004:18). Guided by the research aim, this method was applied to the Russian official narrative and media coverage of the Crocus City Hall terrorist attack in Moscow on 22 March 2024. The analysis identified the Shatterbelt theory and subsequent geopolitical narratives as the most prominent elements in the Russian discourse, which will be explored in the following sections.

3. The Crocus City Hall Attack (I): Jihadist Terrorism and ISIS-K in Russia

The jihadist threat in Russia and ISIS-K's role dates back to the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. As David Charles Rapoport (2004:61-65) explains, this period launched the "fourth wave" of "religious terrorism". The global mobilisation of Muslim fighters against the USSR contributed to the 1989 Soviet defeat, after which radicalisation evolved into terrorism (Rapoport, 2004). Consequently, jihad became a worldview for followers, transforming Afghanistan into a training ground and sanctuary for Al Qaeda prior to the 9/11 attacks (Laborie, 2014:137).

Afghanistan's current complexity stems from foreign terrorist groups like Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan and ISIS-K. The latter, responsible for the Crocus City Hall attack in Moscow in 2024, is a regional branch of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) that is primarily active in South-Central Asia. It targets schools, mosques, markets, and hospitals unpredictably (Requena, 2023:24-28). The terrorist group has been operating in Afghanistan since its foundation in 2015 with the main objective of defeating the Taliban. Rivalry intensified following the 2020 Doha Agreements, as ISIS-K accused the Taliban of abandoning global jihad (Calvillo, 2023:16-17).

This friction explains the surge in attacks since 15 August 2021, when the Taliban took power following the collapse of the Afghan National Security Forces. While 2022 saw the highest volume of incidents, the group has sustained its campaign through 2025 with lower-cost but high-impact tactics (United Nations Security Council, 2025:15-17). To sustain these operations, ISIS-K comprises not only Afghan militants disaffected with the Taliban, but also members from Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, and various Central Asian countries (Calvillo, 2023:17).

While Afghanistan remains its primary target, the group operates within the historical "Greater Khorasan", illustrated in Figure 1. Furthermore, ISIS-K maintains access to the black market, enabling the acquisition of small arms, light weapons, and advanced equipment, such as night vision goggles and fertilisers for explosive devices (Requena, 2023:29).

Figure 1. Map of Greater Khorasan Region

Source: RightQuark (2024)

Russia is a persistent target for ISIS-K due to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, historical repression of Muslim communities particularly in the North Caucasus, and Putin's support for Bashar Al-Assad and the Taliban. Ideologically, ISIS-K's roots of hostility date back to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's fight against the USSR in the 1980s, now particularly rooted in the Khorasan branch (Smith et al., 2024).

Since Russia's 2015 intervention in Syria, ISIS has labelled Moscow the leader of the "Crusader East", while framing Russian and Taliban interests as intertwined since 2021. These factors, alongside Kremlin measures against domestic Muslim communities, prompt ISIS and ISIS-K to urge attacks against Russia. Consequently, Daesh propaganda portrays Putin as a primary oppressor of Muslims. As Smith, Webber, and Clarke (2024) note, ISIS-K "has rolled out Russian, Tajik, and Uzbek media wings to extend its reach and influence throughout the region and within Central Asian diaspora communities".

The predominance of Tajik nationals among the Crocus City Hall attackers reflects a recurring operational pattern in which ISIS-K leverages Central Asian networks to project violence beyond the Khorasan theatre. This approach is based on the systematic targeting of Central Asian populations, particularly Tajik and Uzbek nationals, to build transnational militant networks and expand the organisation's strategic horizon². Crucially, this model operates across multiple layers,

² Analysts have also identified the Crocus City Hall attack as a warning for Western Europe, suggesting a new phase in ISIS-K's external operations (Iguallada, 2024).

including regional populations, returnees from Syria and Iraq, and migrant diasporas, especially in Russia (Lemon et al., 2018:22-26). It is further sustained through multilingual propaganda and digital outreach (Wahlang, 2023:7).

4. The Crocus City Hall Attack (II): Chronology of Russian narrative

Since adopting its first Doctrine of Information Security of the Russian Federation (2000), Russia has weaponised information for political ends. The Islamist attack on Crocus City Hall not only undermined security guarantees but contradicted the Kremlin's narrative, which portrays Ukraine as a "terrorist state" while framing the conflict as an existential war for Russia against "the collective West". Moscow used the attack to launch a disinformation campaign, baselessly blaming Kyiv and Western nations to further its strategic interests.

Days before the attack, US intelligence and several Western embassies warned Russian authorities and their citizens of an imminent terrorist threat (U.S. Embassy & Consulates in Russia, 2024; Khimiak, 2024). When no immediate strike followed, Vladimir Putin (2024a) dismissed these warnings as provocations designed to destabilise Russia before the presidential election:

At one time, the West actively used all sorts of cross-border radical terrorist groups to its advantage, including encouraging their aggression against Russia [...] I would also like to recall the recent provocative statements by a number of official Western structures regarding potential terrorist attacks in Russia. All these actions resemble outright blackmail and the intention to intimidate and destabilise our society. You are well aware of them, so I will not go into details at this point.

On 22 March, post-attack uncertainty triggered the spread of pro-Russian disinformation. Journalist Enzo Panizio (2024) noted these unfounded accusations primarily targeted Ukraine. Viral examples included: (1) a Belarusian truck misidentified as Ukrainian; (2) a photoshopped Ukrainian ID purportedly belonging to a perpetrator; and (3) a deepfake of the secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council, Oleksiy Danilov, claiming responsibility. This video circulated on social media and Kremlin-controlled channels like NTV (Robinson et al., 2024).

Despite being debunked, Moscow persisted in blaming Kyiv. After four suspects were arrested in Bryansk, Vladimir Putin (2024b) said in his address to the nation the day after the attack that the terrorists "attempted to escape and were heading towards Ukraine, where, according to preliminary information, a window was prepared for them on the Ukrainian side to cross the state border". However, the Russian narrative suffered a further setback when ISIS-K claimed responsibility, releasing bodycam footage via the ISIS-linked Amaq News Agency (Robinson et al., 2024).

Although the first reaction of foremost Russian propagandists such as Margarita Simonyan (2024) was to doubt the veracity of its content on popular social media platforms like X, Vladimir Putin (2024c) publicly recognised the group as the perpetrators on 25 March. This initiated a new phase in Moscow's strategy: accusing Ukraine of masterminding the attack:

We know that the crime was perpetrated by radical Islamists. The Islamic World itself has been fighting this ideology for centuries. But we are also seeing how the United States is using different channels to try and convince its satellites and other countries of the world that, according to its intelligence, there is supposedly no sign of Kyiv's involvement in the Moscow terrorist attack, that the deadly terrorist attack was perpetrated by followers of Islam, members of ISIS, an organisation banned in Russia. We know whose hands were used to commit this atrocity against Russia and its people. We want to know who ordered it.

Russian authorities have since maintained this narrative. FSB Director, Alexander Bortnikov, exemplified this, claiming radical Islamists prepared the attack with Western facilitation and a "Ukrainian trace" (Zarubin Reporter, 2024). However, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko (2024) partially contradicted this, telling BELTA that the terrorists first failed to flee across the Belarusian border.

Even though the statements of Putin's counterpart contradicted Russian claims of the existence of an escape window ready on the Ukrainian side to help the terrorists, Moscow remained firm in its position. At the 19th Meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Security Council Secretaries, Nikolai Patrushev pointed out that "the perpetrators of this mass shooting and also their accomplices were arrested upon their attempt to cross the Russian state border where the Ukrainian side prepared a window for their escape". Patrushev further held Ukraine and the West responsible for the attack:

They are trying to impose it on us that the terrorist act was committed not by the Kyiv regime but by supporters of the radical Islamic ideology, possibly, by members of the Afghan branch of ISIL [...] However, it is far more important to promptly establish who is the mastermind and the sponsor of this horrific crime. Its traces lead to Ukrainian intelligence services. However, everyone is well aware that the Kyiv regime is not independent and is fully controlled by the United States. It has to be borne in mind that ISIL and Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups were created by Washington (TASS, 2024)

Subsequently, the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation carried out an investigation focused on the funding of terrorist activities by the US and NATO. According to the final investigation report, a criminal case was opened against these countries for terrorist financing offences in accordance with Article 205.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. Also, the investigators put the spotlight on Burisma Holdings, a Ukrainian oil and gas company which is well

known for being closely linked to Hunter Biden and the allegations of corruption levelled against Joe Biden's son (Sledstvennyy Komitet RF, 2024).

In 2025, the Russian Investigative Committee finalised its criminal proceedings against 19 individuals implicated in the attack. According to investigators, although the perpetrators were identified as members or affiliates of the proscribed "Vilayat Khorasan" organisation, the killing was orchestrated "to serve the interests of the Ukrainian leadership with the intent of destabilising Russia's internal political situation". The investigation also established that preparations for the assault began months in advance, involving suspects who "received training abroad", with weapons being transported from Dagestan to the Moscow region immediately prior to the attack. Following the massacre, the perpetrators were apprehended in the Bryansk region whilst attempting to allegedly flee towards the Ukrainian border (Sledstvennyy Komitet RF, 2025).

This prosecutorial narrative was subsequently judicially reinforced. In March 2026, the Second Western District Military Court convicted all 19 defendants in the case, imposing sentences ranging from 19 years and 11 months to life imprisonment. The four direct perpetrators received life sentences and financial penalties, while eleven accomplices were likewise sentenced to life imprisonment. Crucially for the broader political framing, both the Investigative Committee and the Prosecutor General's Office reiterated after the verdict that the attack had been planned and carried out "in the interests of the current Ukrainian leadership" and with the aim of destabilising Russia, while simultaneously linking the perpetrators to ISIS-K (TASS, 2026).

Following the conclusion of the trial, the Russian narrative continued to follow two main tracks: (1) Ukraine was behind the attack with Western cover, and (2) ISIS-K acted in partnership with Kyiv using Western funding. Despite this evolving rhetoric, actions on the ground suggested the Islamist connection was taken seriously. As the suspects were Tajik citizens, Moscow paired its anti-Western strategy with a large-scale anti-migrant crackdown. Vladimir Putin (2024d) stated that illegal migration fosters extremism and that "internal and external threats are often interconnected today [...] aimed at containing Russia and undermining its sovereignty". Consequently, while using the attack to suggest an international conspiracy, authorities launched an extensive campaign against Central Asian labour migrants to bolster the security apparatus's image of effectiveness (Rogov et al., 2024:5-8).

5. Geopolitical Element in the Russian narrative

Following the official Russian narrative on the Crocus City Hall attack, two geopolitical elements emerge: the shatterbelt theory and geopolitical narratives from the aftermath.

5.1. *Ukraine and Central Asia as a shatterbelt*

Samuel Cohen defined a “shatterbelt” as a “geographic area subject to internal divisions and major power competition” (Cohen, 1973; Khan & Begum, 2022:296). Recent iterations of the term now include non-state actors. Phil Kelly (1986:164) identified a two-tiered structure in these territories: a local layer “characterised by political turmoil, social and economic depression and fragmentation, and strategic minerals and passageways”, and an international one where great powers compete for the territory.

Several parts of the world have been considered as shatterbelts, including the Middle East (Simons, 2023b:282), Central and Eastern Europe (Cohen, 2005:1-22), and Southeast Asia. These are all territories in which several religious and ethnic nationalities live, and where natural resources such as oil, gas, or fertile grounds could be found. When these characteristics coincide in an area, there are grounds for conflict to happen. The Middle East, for example, is a territory where the United States, Russia, China and even Iran have interests (Simons, 2023b:282), arguably making it the prime example of a present shatterbelt, at least until the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

5.1.1. A brief geopolitical view of the Russia-Ukraine war

The Russian narrative blames Ukraine and the West for the Crocus City Hall attack as part of its full-scale war. Starting in 2014 after the Euromaidan and the ouster of President Viktor Yanukovich (Kutcher, 2024), Moscow viewed these events as a pro-Western shift contrary to its interests (Simons, 2023b:263). The Russian invasion’s rationale lies in historical roots, as Moscow considers Ukraine an inseparable part of its history, dating to the Kyivan Rus (Sánchez Herráez, 2015:17-19; Kutcher, 2024; Plokhly, 2021). Francisco Ruiz González (2012:8) notes the Tsarist saying, “Petersburg is the head, Moscow the heart, and Kyiv the soul of Russia”, highlighting Ukraine’s importance in the Russian collective imagination.

Consequently, Ukraine’s rapprochement with the West and a potential NATO membership concerns the Russian regime (Manboah-Rockson et al., 2024:23). Thus, Ukraine fits the shatterbelt definition: despite its sovereignty, Russia and Western powers compete “for footholds” in a resource-rich territory (Kelly, 1986:164; Simons, 2023b:281). Following Mackinder’s (1919) Heartland thesis, controlling Ukraine is essential for Putin’s expansionist aims to increase manpower and resources (Beal, 2023:9). Annexing Crimea provided a base to the Donbas, and controlling Ukraine’s Black Sea shore would threaten NATO’s southern flank (Kutcher, 2024).

This reticence about any Ukrainian rapprochement with NATO is also analogous to how the USSR envisioned the country during World War II: a territory that Germany could not control or defend because it should be controlled by them, the USSR (Plokhly, 2021:261; Ortiz Delgado, 2024:322). In

that line, it is possible to argue that the territory of today's Ukraine has played a crucial geopolitical role for centuries. Serhii Plokhy (2021) describes Ukraine as a "wall" protecting Europe from Eastern invasions, explaining EU support (Ortiz Delgado, 2024:319). European nations, especially Poland and the Baltic states, fear a domino effect where a fallen Ukraine leads to Russian attacks on them (Rainsford & Kirby, 2024).

5.1.2. A brief geopolitical view of Russia on the former Central Asian Soviet Republics and Afghanistan

The territories of the five former Central Asian Soviet Republics (namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) could also be considered a shatterbelt, following the definition provided in the previous section. These five countries share similar cultures and a whole range of issues, particularly of economic and security nature. Furthermore, given their past as part of the USSR, the Russian Federation considers them as part of its area of influence (Sánchez Herráez, 2015:66) and consequently Moscow is usually recognised as a "hard security guarantees" provider in the region (Khan & Begum, 2022:297). Historically, Russia remains a major destination for these citizens. As such, it is estimated that around 1 million Tajiks currently live in Russia (Putz, 2024).

Located south to those five former USSR territories, Afghanistan is another country that shares several cultural aspects with them, including Islam as their religion. Given its strategic position that links Central and South Asia, the Middle East and Western China, it has long been considered a key territory for global powers (Khan & Begum, 2022:295). Hence, it can also be considered a shatterbelt. For instance, in 1979 during the Cold War, the USSR invaded Afghanistan, arguably in line with the Brezhnev doctrine which stated that no socialist country will be allowed by Moscow to move to capitalism (Sánchez Herráez, 2015:53; Tripathi, 1992:10-11).

The goal was to avoid having an Afghan government contrary to their interests. The war was a disaster and, ten years after, they had to withdraw. Among the consequences of the Soviet invasion was the exacerbation of the cultural problem, both in Afghanistan and in the Central Asian Soviet territories (Reuveny & Prakash, 1999:700-704). Furthermore, the United States supported the *Mujahidin*, who were fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan to contain the USSR advancements (Brown, 2013:70-71). According to Julie Lowenstein (2016:13), this help paved the way for global jihad groups, such as al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and, later, the Islamic State.

5.2. *Geopolitical Narratives in the aftermath of the attack*

A geopolitical narrative attempts to put across a message through clear arguments that could easily, almost visually, resonate with an intended target population in such a way that it can mobilise them (Postel-Vinay, 2005). While originally focused on nations, these narratives now include non-state actors, such as ISIS-K, whose interests often diverge from traditional states (Simons, 2023a:349). For example, ISIS-K pursues objectives distinct from the countries it attacks.

No geopolitical narrative is unitary: it has different levels and sublevels that highlight a different attribute that is consistent with the geopolitical interests aimed at a particular group (Cap, 2023:134). What and how something will be said plays a crucial role in the effort of controlling the narrative (Simons, 2023a:247-249), as stated by Freedman, Hoogensen and Tahinjanahary (2021) when describing hybrid threats such as the ones being used in the Ukrainian conflict (Celso, 2018:99-101). For instance, Russia utilises Telegram, Russia Today, and allied governments to disseminate its message. Key terms include “special military operation” to avoid the word “war”, “denazification” and “demilitarisation” to portray the Ukrainian government as a Nazi regime, and “Russophobia” (Kutcher, 2024; Montero Moncada et al., 2023:209; Simons, 2023a:269).

Piotr Cap (2023: 135-137) identifies two frameworks: Global Conflict Reality (GCR) and Local Conflict Reality (LCR). Arguably the first kind of narrative, GCR, is used mostly by Ukraine given their interest in framing the war as a “black-or-white” conflict, full of “alternative futures”, in which creating the idea of proximity of the conflict to the target audience (i.e. NATO, other Western countries) is key. This narrative warns that failing to support Ukraine would have dire consequences for the democratic world.

Contrariwise, LCR, is the most relevant for the analysis of this article, given that it is the one used by the Russian Federation. An LCR narrative allows to explain and analyse the different approaches that country takes depending on who is the intended target population of its narrative, while keeping the main conductor line, which is the Russia-Ukraine war. Unlike GCR, the Kremlin frames the conflict as local, denying NATO a ground to intervene. Messaging varies by audience: domestic communications focus on the context of war, while international messages differ. For the West, Russia aims to erode support for Ukraine by mentioning potential terrorist attacks, while for the Global South, it portrays the West as returning to imperialism (Cap, 2023:140-142).

These layers can be seen in the Russian responses in the aftermath of the attack. The Kremlin’s LCR narrative focused on three points: blaming Ukraine and the West, dismissing opposition as Russophobia, and highlighting ethnic minorities. Each point targeted a specific audience through various adapted versions.

5.2.1. Ukraine and the West

Previous sections have highlighted the way Russian authorities have repeatedly put the blame on Ukraine and Western countries in the aftermath of the 2024 terrorist attack, a strategy persistent since the invasion's start through Kremlin-backed fake news. This aims to cast doubt on events in Ukraine and Russia, eroding Western support (Cap, 2023:141) while bolstering domestic backing for Putin's imperialist regime (Manboah-Rockson et al., 2024:19).

Despite dismissing Western warnings before the Crocus City Hall attack, the Kremlin later accused Western intelligence of withholding information and blackmailing Russia (Bacon, 2024; Khimiak, 2024). This reinforces the perceived existential threat to local and international audiences. Putin directly accused Ukraine of facilitating the terrorists' escape (Putin, 2024b). Aligned with the LCR framework, other actors amplify this narrative (Cap, 2023:141), in Russia's case through viral fake news on Telegram (Sussex, 2024).

Although ISIS-K claimed responsibility with compelling evidence, Russia continued blaming Ukraine and the West (Ahmadzai, 2024; Sussex, 2024). Patrushev, Bortnikov, and Lukashenko all accused Ukraine of financing or aiding the terrorists. While these discourses targeted the Russian public, the Kremlin linked the attack to American support for the Mujahidin in Afghanistan to influence Western audiences. Putin (2024c) insinuated U.S. involvement in destabilising Russia, while Patrushev accused the Americans of creating ISIS (TASS, 2024). This narrative resonates in the Global South (Cap, 2023:141), fostering support for a Russian-backed resolution to the war. Involving the Biden family via Burisma Holdings exemplifies an LCR narrative targeting the 2024 U.S. election (Stoll, 2024).

Locally, the Russian Investigative Committee probed NATO officials for "terrorism financing" to solidify domestic backing for the "special military operation". Sociologist Elena Koneva (2024a; 2024b) concludes, based on independent surveys, that these efforts were successful in the attack's aftermath.

5.2.2. Russophobia

Closely linked to the previous point is the concept of Russophobia. Although the origins of this concept date back to the 19th century, "the Russophobia card" has been increasingly used by the Kremlin since the 2014 annexation of Crimea. Simultaneously, Konstantin Pakhalyuk (2024) adds that "after February 24th, 2022, the definition of Russophobia blossomed to include everyone who speaks out against Russian aggression in any way" and, simultaneously, "it created the narrative that Russians are criticised for who they are, not what they do". In the Strategy for Countering Extremism in the Russian Federation (2024), the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs defined Russophobia as:

An unfriendly, biased, hostile attitude towards Russian citizens, towards the Russian language and culture, expressed, among other things, in aggressive sentiments and actions on the part of individual representatives and political forces, as well as discriminatory actions on the part of the authorities of states unfriendly to Russia.

This manifests through various Western policies, which the Kremlin frames as an “official Western ideology” (Kutcher, 2024). Moscow labels all dissenting opinions, especially concerns over Russian expansion, as “Russophobia”. On 27 March 2024, Maria Zakharova blamed the West for not cooperating in anti-terrorist efforts on this perceived prejudice:

The collective West –guided by its own selfish considerations, driven into a dead end by its unrestrained Russophobia and too busy trying to preserve its slipping geopolitical dominance– has in fact distanced itself from any real and constructive international antiterrorist cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2024).

Through the LCR narrative, Russia presents itself to international audiences as a victim of Western destabilisation. Scholars have labelled this recurring strategy “imperial innocence” (Kassymbekova & Marat, 2022). However, this stance could undermine counterterrorism intelligence coordination, creating opportunities for ISIS and its affiliates to expand and attack (Ahmadzai, 2024; Bacon, 2024; Taneja, 2024). This is related to the third key point: the ethnic minorities.

5.2.3. Ethnic minorities

Muslims, primarily of Caucasian or Central Asian origin, are Russia’s fastest-growing minority following post-Soviet migration (Simons et al., 2023:4-5; Berman, 2023). Despite their growth, they are often treated as second-class citizens, continuing a USSR legacy (Kutcher, 2024). Notably, they are disproportionately conscripted for the Ukraine war, frequently serving as “cannon fodder” (Berman, 2023).

This historical context explains why Caucasian and Central Asian minorities were quickly blamed for the Crocus City Hall attack. Fake news alleged they were trying to destroy Russia through “Islamisation” (Khimiak, 2024). The aftermath saw a surge in anti-immigrant sentiment, increased police controls, and public harassment, particularly towards Tajiks (Stuart & Tesfaye, 2024). By identifying four Tajiks as main suspects, the government fuelled further violence, creating a local narrative that poses significant internal security risks (Sussex, 2024).

6. Conclusions

The 2024 Crocus City Hall attack underscores ISIS-K's growth and Russia's vulnerability to Islamist fundamentalism. While this has been a threat since the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the war in Ukraine has increased Russia's permeability to such risks. To maintain its "special military operation" narrative, the Kremlin incriminated Ukraine and the West despite proven ISIS-K responsibility. Geopolitical narratives played a key role in how Russia constructed and maintained its official account of the attacks. By framing its response as LCR, it is feasible to understand the different layers of this narrative.

For the Russian government, blaming external actors mattered more than admitting it ignored warnings, as doing so would damage its internal perception. By blaming Ukraine and the West, the regime pursued two related goals. The first targeted the domestic audience to increase support for actions in Ukrainian territory. Vladimir Putin's dismissal of early Western warnings as "destabilisation" is central to this framing; it reassures the public that Russia faces an existential threat from foreign agents, be it Ukraine, NATO, or the West. Thus, information from these sources was dismissed as having ulterior motives.

Post-attack, the LCR narrative merged ISIS-K with the Western threat. Putin and Patrushev highlighted ISIS-K's outlaw status to imply the attack served their usual enemies. By labelling Western criticism as "Russophobia", the regime deflected blame for its negligence and prompted local audiences to link terrorists with Western interests. To reinforce this, they opened a criminal case against NATO for "terrorist financing", signalling opposition to losing its sphere of influence.

In conclusion, the Kremlin's narrative was partially successful in gaining domestic support. The idea of Western responsibility penetrated Russian society, avoiding self-criticism while targeting ethnic minorities like Tajiks. Internationally, the narrative's success is harder to determine, though posing as a victim of Western encirclement resonated in some Global South countries.

However, the future internal security threat remains significant. Targeting ethnic minorities from Central Asia to prime public opinion risks exacerbating nationality conflicts present since Soviet times. These migrants may leave Russia, causing economic fallout and intensifying long-standing tensions within the former Soviet territories.

This research paves the way for future lines of inquiry into ISIS-K as a significant threat to international security, particularly through an analysis of its recruitment mechanisms and the processes underpinning its geographical expansion. Furthermore, it contributes to future research on Russian disinformation beyond the Ukrainian context.

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Roberto Lagos Flores

Convergence between organized crime and insurgency in Chile

Abstract

This study examines the convergence between organized crime and insurgency in Chile, a synergistic phenomenon of growing significance in the southern part of the country. Using a qualitative historical approach that combines specialized literature, official data, and case studies, it analyzes the dynamics of this convergence and its effects on the State and society. The findings indicate that, although insurgent and criminal groups pursue different objectives – some political and protest-driven, others profit-driven and economic – they have evolved by integrating tactics and establishing points of convergence that strengthen their operational capabilities and expand their reach. The article concludes that this convergence represents a hybrid threat to state stability and demands innovative institutional responses.

Keywords: organized crime, insurgency, terrorism

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1. Introduction

In recent years, Chile has experienced a relatively recent phenomenon in its national sociopolitical context: the connection between insurgency and organized crime. This article argues that this connection is characterized by the confluence of non-state actors that establish relations of cooperation, hybridization, or overlap, as they share resources, activities (essentially illicit), and, in certain cases, organizational structures. In Latin America, this occurs when cartels or gangs acquire military capabilities and local political functions. In Chile, although nuanced and ambivalent, this phenomenon is predominant in the southern macrozone (the regions of La Araucanía, Biobío, Los Ríos, and Los Lagos). There, radical politico-criminal organizations combine an ethnonationalist discourse with typical criminal actions such as drug trafficking, robberies, land seizures, and extortion.

Under this premise, this paper examines the characteristics, expressions, and consequences of this convergence, with the aim of assessing its impact on state management and national security. Methodologically, it employs a historical-qualitative study based on case studies and documentary analysis, using methods drawn from political science, criminology, and sociology. The sources include public documents, official reports, academic texts, and media testimonies (2021–2024). This material allows for the triangulation of information and the contrasting of narratives, with the purpose of prioritizing those events that simultaneously represent both insurgent and criminal dimensions. The objective is to identify common patterns that support the thesis of insurgent-criminal convergence, as well as its specific singularities that allow these actors to be defined as an internal hybrid threat, by combining criminal governance, illicit economies, irregular guerrilla tactics, and proto-terrorist activities. The study is geographically and historically limited to Chile, though it is not without repercussions for the Southern Cone due to its cross-border significance.

Analytically, the term insurgency refers to the politico-military movement that challenges state authority, which in turn resists it; irregular guerrilla warfare refers to the asymmetric combat tactics employed by said movement (Guindo, 2013); while the concept of terrorism constitutes one of the methods of action within that general and deliberate strategy:

“Criminal acts with political purposes conceived or planned to provoke a state of terror in the general population, in a group of persons, or in particular individuals are unjustifiable in all circumstances, whatever the political considerations” (United Nations General Assembly, 1994: para. 3, art. I).

These three concepts coexist in the phenomenon under study, but in a relationship of subordination: insurgency acts as the general framework, guerrilla warfare as the predominant method of these groups, and terrorism functions as the most extreme resource, though not for that reason irrelevant. The following five subchapters detail the magnitude of the phenomenon, the actors involved, the evidence supporting the thesis of convergence, a discussion on hybridity, and a concluding chapter on the implications of the problem.

2. Magnitude of the Phenomenon

Chile has recorded a significant growth in organized crime, evidenced by the increase in drug trafficking, smuggling, homicides, the presence of international criminal actors, and local gangs (GI-TOC, 2024). Lethal violence and criminality “would be linked to territorial disputes between criminal organizations. Undoubtedly, the growing use of firearms, associated with conflicts related to drug trafficking and territorial control, contributes to this increase” (Ministerio Público Chile, 2024: 7). Local gangs connect with transnational networks, learning from and generating dynamics of cooperation (and conflict), which has intensified violence and public sector corruption. Drug trafficking dominates as the illicit market, accompanied by arms trafficking and money laundering (GI-TOC, 2024). Although the country maintains certain institutional strength, its response capacity has been limited by problems of state coordination in the face of the new dynamics of crime and a growing perception of insecurity. In fact, this perception is reflected in comparative indicators: only 36% of Chileans reported feeling safe walking alone at night, one of the lowest rates worldwide (Gallup, 2024).

This diagnosis is further complicated by the terrorist dimension, particularly in the south of the country – a zone of enormous natural resources – where radicalized groups have generated a binomial between insurgency and organized crime. The Global Terrorism Index (2024) placed Chile among the countries with the greatest global impact on this issue, ranking it 17th worldwide. However, the recorded incidents were concentrated in internal territorial conflicts and targeted attacks in zones of ethnonationalist tension. Despite their low lethality, these internal security dynamics and related sociopolitical conflicts require greater attention from authorities in order to prevent escalation (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024). Chile ranked second in the region behind Colombia, showing a worsening compared to 2012 and reaching its peak in 2022. It is also the worst-ranked country without a regular armed conflict, with a score of 5.679, and more than 78% of terrorist attacks were perpetrated by militants of Mapuche affiliation (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024).

These organizations use illicit activities (illegal logging, land seizures, drug trafficking) to finance their “struggles” for territorial autonomy. Despite legislative updates, police efforts, and the continued declaration of “constitutional states of emergency” (regulated by the Constitution and Law No. 18.415), which incorporate military forces into internal security tasks, institutional weaknesses persist that facilitate the continuation of these terrorist actions and their coexistence with criminal acts.

Between 2015 and 2023, organized crime underwent a significant transformation (Ministerio Público Chile, 2024). Drug trafficking became consolidated as the main driver, generating high profits and driving associated crimes such as money laundering and homicides, while diversifying into synthetic drugs (MDMA, ketamine) and fentanyl, a substance present in the local illicit market. In

parallel, crimes against property (vehicle theft, timber theft, and copper theft) increased with greater operational sophistication, especially in the southern macrozone (Rodríguez Jiménez, 2024).

Reports of illegal logging grew from 2017 (201 reports) to 2020 (2.531 reports), an increase of over 200%. The damage to the industry reached US\$98 million in 2023, and over three years the total stolen amounted to 167 billion Chilean pesos (SOFOFA, 2024). This crime has fostered insurgent activity, being concentrated “in the southern macrozone of the country, specifically in sectors marked by territorial conflicts and high levels of violence (...) The groups dedicated to timber theft operate with a high degree of coordination” (Ministerio Público Chile, 2024: 12). In 2024 this crime stagnated due to stricter legislation and was replaced by salmon theft, concentrated in Biobío with 58% of the cases. The value of the stolen cargo exceeded US\$21 million, while theft from salmon farming centers was around US\$2 million, not counting unreported crimes (Avendaño, 2024). Available indications suggest that the same organized crime networks that operated in the illicit timber market redirected their activities toward salmon theft, replicating the *modus operandi* (hijacking the driver and appropriating the entire transport), which would reveal their tactical adaptability in the face of legislative changes¹.

An indisputable phenomenon is the increase in violence originating from organized crime (GI-TOC, 2024). Territorial disputes between criminal organizations have increased homicides in major cities, urban centers, and in the far north and south: “organized crime in Chile has evolved significantly over the last decade, showing alarming diversification and sophistication” (Ministerio Público Chile, 2024: 6). According to Urquizar (2023: 29-39), regarding victims of violence in the southern macrozone, more than 7.000 violent incidents were recorded between 2014 and 2022, primarily arson, public disorder, and land seizures, with 1.861, 1.246, and 974 cases respectively.

3. Radical Actors

The magnitude described cannot be understood without identifying its main actors. At least eight insurgent groups in the southern macrozone are publicly identified as linked to organized crime – that is, as architects of this convergence. The Coordinadora Arauco Malleco (CAM), an old autonomist entity designated a “terrorist organization” by the State, exerts violence through its territorial resistance organs (ORT) to carry out sabotage and direct attacks; its leader was sentenced to 23 years in prison for serious crimes. It is considered the “mother” of all Chilean politico-military organizations (Urquizar, 2023: 59). The Comunidad Autónoma de Temucucui (CAT) carries out land occupations (usurpations), and its main leader, awaiting formal charges for marijuana trafficking and illegal possession of weapons and ammunition. The Weichan Auka Mapu (WAM) is a particularly violent structure that forms alliances with the CAM, claims the territorial struggle, and has members

1

This type of theft is, for the time being, an activity carried out by mafias and gangs concentrated in the southern macrozone. Therefore, it is not possible to assert the involvement of radical Mapuche organizations in this offense, despite its nature as organized crime and the lucrative business it represents.

convicted of serious crimes such as the murder of an elderly couple. It is the organization that has perpetrated violent acts in the four regions of the macrozone and has claimed sabotage outside its area of influence (Ñuble and O'Higgins regions).

The Resistencia Mapuche Lavkenche (RML) and the Resistencia Mapuche Malleco (RMM) carry out numerous attacks and sabotage actions in Biobío and La Araucanía. The Wiñotauñ Taiñ Malon (WTM), presumably a splinter of the CAM, carries out attacks and sabotage against estates and forestry operations in Alto Biobío. The Lof en Resistencia Territorial Kütral Mahuidara (LRTKM) carries out attacks and controls rural and semi-rural roads and paths. The Movimiento Liberación Nacional Mapuche (LNM) is an emerging organization with high public impact that directly confronts state agents, claims "autonomy," and, given its radicalism, competes with the CAM for political-operational leadership, claiming incendiary attacks in La Araucanía and Biobío. It also maintains alliances for territorial recovery with organizations in Argentina (Díaz, 2022).

In addition to these visible actors, responsible for armed assaults, sabotage, incendiary attacks, train derailments, and land occupations, other organizations exist in a second link of the operational chain, such as Resistencia Mapuche Cautín, Resistencia Mapuche Pehuenche, Resistencia Kunko Williche, or Resistencia Mapuche Autónoma, among others. All have carried out violent acts and openly advocate armed struggle, although they can be classified as evolving belligerent bodies; at times they integrate into larger, consolidated entities, and at others they fragment or break away from them. Their dynamic resembles the operation of narco-cartels or South American insurgent groups, inserted in a pyramidal logic or detached from the main commands to carry out specific actions, confuse intelligence agencies, mutate into parallel businesses, provide support, or simply achieve spaces of independence. In some cases, they operate as secretive, hermetic guerrilla cells, arising from politico-social conjunctures and guided by two logics: insurgent armed struggle and assimilation with organized crime, necessary to plan, finance, and operationalize their theater of operations.

These groups operate independently or in conflict with other armed bodies, compete for markets and illicit resources, generating internal tensions, but they share a reivindicative discourse, similar political ends, and techniques of subversion and irregular guerrilla warfare. Not all organizations are robust and solid entities; many experience friction, periods of retreat and incubation, suffer police and prosecutorial persecution, withdraw in the face of military forces, and bear the tensions inherent to operating outside the law. They present differences in their politico-military behavior, internal dissidences, and disputes over survival strategies; yet they still coordinate from a geopolitical perspective, dividing up territories and markets. Their anchor remains La Araucanía and Biobío, with expansion into Los Ríos and Los Lagos, cohabiting in four vast regions with abundant natural resources and dominating the geography like no state agent, emulating narco-cartels and regional guerrillas.

A testimony following the destruction and burning of the historic Molino Grollmus in Contulmo, attributed to the Resistencia Mapuche Lafkenche, illustrates this convergence: “I am convinced that we are facing terrorist groups of a very professional level (...) this is not a Mapuche cause, it is the cause of narcoterrorists and organized criminal groups” (Carvajal, 2024: 28). This quote, with the limitations inherent to a subjective primary source, exposes three elements: avoiding the stigmatization of affected/victim communities and identifying the true perpetrators; the urgency of professionalizing law enforcement work to confront and adapt to these organizations; and reinforcing a counter-narrative that adopts an educational and public awareness perspective to curb recruitment by these groups and delegitimize their insurgent discourse.

4. Empirical Evidence of Convergence

Between 2021 and 2024, insurgent-criminal activity escalated with attacks on critical infrastructure, heritage sites, symbolic locations, murders, and the consolidation of illicit economies that sustain these organizations. In 2022, just four days after the new administration of Gabriel Boric (2022–2026) took office, the entourage of the Minister of the Interior and Public Security was attacked in La Araucanía with shots fired into the air, road blockades, barricades, and intimidation messages. On her first visit to the region, as a representative of a political collective that, in contemporary political codes, was positioned in a zone of sympathy or support for the autonomy demands of these groups, she was met with a message written on a banner, similar to the “narco-banners” of drug cartels: “As long as there are political prisoners there will be no dialogue (...) we will not accept any bribe from a murderous State. No more militarization. Mapuche Resistance” (Del Pino, 2022: para. 7). The RMM group claimed responsibility for the terrorist attack and carried out other parallel actions such as the burning of churches, a community center, a school, and private vehicles (Poblete, 2022; Toro, 2023).

Following that show of force, more than 100 events associated with violence were recorded in April 2022 alone. This increase was not limited to insurgent-type violence; it also encompassed high-impact crimes typical of common delinquency, which rose 58% compared to 2021. In Ercilla, an armed group attacked truck drivers and left one driver seriously wounded by a gunshot to the face; in Lumaco, an attack by radical organizations against Mapuche forestry workers resulted in two wounded and one dead from a gunshot to the head (Stuardo, 2022). In 2023, high levels of violence were recorded with incendiary attacks, barricades, extortion of farmers, death threats against parliamentarians, burning of homes, attempted homicides, and arrests for timber theft (El Líbero, 2023).

Another case that reveals the terrorist character of these insurgent groups occurred in 2024 in the southern macrozone, a “red zone” of conflict, precisely in areas under the special regime of a state of exception that had the presence of the Armed Forces providing logistical and operational support to the Carabineros police. On April 27 of that year, on the institutional anniversary, three

police officers were ambushed, executed with shots to the head (kneeling and recorded on video), and their bodies burned along with the police vehicle. The incident occurred during a routine police check on a route known primarily for forestry activities and whose traffic is limited due to its danger. Prior violence on that route includes ambushes on journalists and attacks on civilian vehicles mistaken for forestry transports. A case prior to the murder of the three Carabineros occurred in January of the same year, when unknown individuals fired on police personnel and threw explosives (Cruzat, 2024; De la Fuente, 2024).

Beyond these emblematic events, crimes such as murders, burning of estates, extortion, drug trafficking, territorial control actions, and systematic attacks on symbolic entities of the state (churches, parishes, temples, cemeteries, schools, kindergartens, municipalities) persist, along with large-scale forest fires in these four regions of the country. These attacks appear linked to terrorist motivations because they occur in the same communes that concentrate the highest rates of intentional fires, coinciding with sectors of greater insurgent activity (Plaza, 2025).

On this basis, it can be stated that social destabilization and the intensification of violence continue to escalate, revealing the State's inability to contain this violence of dual nature – criminal and seditious – even under “constitutional exception” rules and with the presence of the Armed Forces. This calls into question the effectiveness of governmental strategies and the institutional capacity to provide comprehensive responses; additionally, it highlights the need to focus symbolic messages, state intelligence and counterintelligence efforts, and the tactics of these groups. The historical evolution of insurgent groups provides valuable comparative background for anticipating possible trajectories. In this sense, Torres Preciado (2024:19) illustrates this dynamic: “In 1966 the FARC had 6 fronts and about 300 men (...) In 1991 the balance showed sustained growth, with 48 fronts comprising 5.800 guerrillas”. This author also noted that in 2002 the FARC consisted of more than 20.000 men and a single bloc (the eastern one) came to control 55% of Colombian territory.

From this case, the historical fact of overwhelming growth of an insurgent group and its impact on national security can be drawn, focused not only on the increase in the number of combatants and fronts, but on the advance of an offensive posture that expanded territorial control and challenged the State more effectively. In Chile, significant parallels emerge with the FARC case, without ignoring the structural differences between the Colombian and Chilean contexts. Chilean insurgent groups, which learned from and formally related to Colombian guerrilla leaders, demonstrate operational capabilities and consolidated strategies for carrying out coordinated attacks, ambushes, and operating in territories they know exhaustively (Aburto, 2015; Policía Nacional de Colombia, 2020; Porto, 2021). It could be argued that, despite lacking their magnitude and strategic achievements, some indications of significance are observed: growth in their force capabilities (organization and coordination of attacks), the consolidation of areas of influence, and the development of propaganda (publication of books and testimonies in sympathetic media); thus accentuating their territorial control and the State's inability to guarantee full security in these regions. Their offensive strategies, without reaching

direct combat against the military, employ maneuvers that fulfill their tactical objectives: obtaining resources, repelling police forces, interrupting routes, and challenging the State, as evidenced by the murders of police officers and unusual terrorist attacks (Zamorano and Navarrete, 2023; Strigunov, 2025).

This Chilean phenomenon could be classified as an internal, irregular armed conflict, territorially limited at the national level – although extensive in the number of communes and provinces – of low to medium intensity, with tactics typical of insurgent guerrilla warfare and the use of weapons and military elements that, for now, prevent direct confrontation with the military (Toro, 2022). From this derives the possibility of designating them as dual-faced groups: insurgent and organized crime associations that employ terrorism and criminality for their political ends, but without full consolidation.

Thus, the intersection between insurgent action, terrorist practices, and organized crime is evident, confirming the role of large-scale timber theft as a profitable activity in the conflict zone, carried out by these same structures or their occasional associates. In timber theft, operational sophistication was observed through the creation of front companies, control of the production chain (theft, transport, and sale in licit markets), and the systematic use of violence, with intimidating methods, threats, or direct attacks carried out by self-proclaimed reivindicative groups, although their main practical aim was profit. In fact, they seize estates to illegally harvest forests. This enrichment occurs in zones presented as a historical aspiration, but which conceal the need for illicit revenue (Ministerio Público Chile, 2024). The 2022 legislative reform classified this timber theft offense, included money laundering, and allowed for their prosecution, achieving an 82% reduction (Ministerio Público Chile, 2024). According to Rodríguez Jiménez (2024:21): “this phenomenon, beyond the political and armed cause, is also associated with Organized Crime, that is, through the theft of timber from private companies and its subsequent illicit sale, in order to finance that armed struggle”.

Another demonstrative fact in this connection is the indiscriminate use of violence to perpetrate various types of robberies with intimidation and to carry out terrorist attacks. This convergence has violent but lucrative manifestations: incendiary attacks and road blockades allow for the execution of robberies of various kinds and the clearing of roads for their exclusive use in drug transport and contraband merchandise; actions that, presented as reivindicative acts, conceal criminal maneuvers (Ministerio Público Chile, 2024).

5. Insurgent-Criminal Hybridity

The concept of insurgency in Latin America has evolved from rural and peasant rebellions toward a more complex phenomenon that combines traditional actions, modern revolutionary ideologies, and new guerrilla warfare tactics (Desai & Eckstein, 1990). This phenomenon can be

confused with other forms of political violence; therefore, a clearer theoretical framework is needed for its proper identification. According to Guindo (2013:213), insurgencies “employ guerrilla and terrorism tactics, espouse revolutionary causes, adopt an asymmetric approach to conflict, operate on the moral and legal margins of society, and make no distinction (or at least it is barely perceptible) between combatants and civilians”.

Some theorists have argued that in the twenty-first century the American subcontinent has witnessed a renaissance of insurgency, this time coupled with other contemporary, volatile, and versatile phenomena; hence one could properly speak of new insurgencies (Guindo, 2013). The Chilean case presented here would be an example of this, and evidence that this ambivalence is capable of having regional repercussions. In particular, the convergence of insurgent-criminal activity shows that the networks or tentacles of criminal organizations link up and optimize with their primary political objectives, perfecting their operations and assuming a political direction planned in advance by these collectives. As Cassaglia indicates: “although organized crime and terrorism have different objectives – in the case of the former it is the acquisition of money and with it the purchase of wills through corruption; in the case of the latter, their ultimate objective is political (...) they mix to optimize their actions” (2022:32).

The literature has shown that it is common for organized crime groups to relate pragmatically or even ideologically, in concert, with political positions in situations of internal conflict. De la Corte and Giménez-Salinas (2023) examine this convergence, accepting that it constitutes a habitual practice, exemplified by the recurrence of crimes such as vehicle theft, weapons theft, and any other material with the aim of committing insurgent-type attacks, with which they cover the costs of their seditious activity. This explains, in Chile, large-scale timber theft, forced land occupations, and extortion of farmers, which allow these entities to finance their activity and establish links with groups in Argentina, transforming this problem into an international issue.

There are numerous international examples of this link. FARC dissidents became a diaspora of drug trafficking networks and human trafficking agents, while in Peru's VRAEM, insurgent groups – remnants of Sendero Luminoso – operate in the main coca leaf and cocaine producing region. This demonstrates that, along with the sphere of political violence, they engage in practices typical of criminality. A similar phenomenon occurs in Chile's southern macrozone, with similar groups that: espouse an essentially insurgent discourse (of land recovery), based on historical reivindicative demands typical of separatist groups (a singular narrative of land, culture, and symbols); are of violent radicalism and appropriate local and peasant communities; maintain the autonomist conflict with the State (its institutions and laws); carry out guerrilla maneuvers and establish illicit economies (marijuana production and distribution, timber theft, extortion of farmers, and land seizures). Analogous practices have occurred in Colombia and Peru with similar organizations. What these

cases teach Chile is that early inaction and indecision by authorities transform low-intensity actors into regional-scale threats.

In classificatory terms, the various armed groups in southern Chile, as described above, largely fulfill the five pillars expressed by Jordán (2008) to classify them as new insurgencies: 1) they engage in armed struggle, 2) they develop propaganda, 3) they provide social assistance, 4) they practice social and political activism; and 5) they have guarantees of receiving support from abroad, that is, they engage in practice in international relations outside the national State. Indeed, in the Chilean case, armed violence coexists with identitarian propaganda, cross-border coordination, and support from local communities, configuring a mixture that transcended ethnic protest to become a politico-criminal actor.

This insurgent-criminal convergence constitutes what the specialized literature calls a hybrid threat: the synergistic combination of actors with a political agenda and organized crime practices that operate simultaneously as a seditious threat and a criminal threat (Bartolomé, 2019). This dual nature articulates strategies of criminal governance with irregular guerrilla tactics. Its protagonists practice criminal methodologies, but their main driver is a political agenda and its systematic regime of intimidation toward the population with the purpose of generating changes in their favor (in policies or laws), undermining the legitimacy of the political order, and mobilizing sympathizers toward their causes.

A clear example of this hybridity is the difficulty in obtaining exemplary and firm convictions against their members and capturing fugitive leaders, a habitual fact in insurgent and irregular struggles, characterized by asymmetry, concealment, and ambiguity. These maneuvers generate confusion and limit the effectiveness of the State's response policies and measures. Furthermore, their hybridity is evident in their political achievements, since certain Chilean elites with high social, cultural, political, and economic capital have provided them with continuous support (tacit or explicit), maintaining ambivalent positions, which has hindered their effective neutralization. This ambivalence manifested with high notoriety during the 2023 constituent process, when proposals for politico-territorial autonomy were debated that, from a security perspective, were interpreted as a possible avenue for the partial legitimization of these actors' demands. The underlying structural tension was not eliminated by the majority rejection of the constitutional proposal. In this case, the notion of hybrid threat does not designate only the coexistence of insurgency and criminality, but the strategic integration of both planes (Bartolomé, 2019).

6. Conclusions

The documented terrorist acts reveal enduring, adaptive, versatile, and economically sustainable active capabilities that have caused systemic consequences: 1) Chile is among the countries with the highest levels of fear worldwide; 2) the persistence of certain political elites that sympathize with or

justify the insurgency; 3) a deterioration of state capacities to confront these events, to the point of the existence of “shared sovereignty” with them in focalized zones; and 4) contagion to other social environments, as new forms of violence and criminality have transferred to urban and metropolitan contexts. Despite the capture of some of their members, the lack of cohesion among these collectives, and their domestic dissidences, their presence, economic capacity, and mobility have not diminished. They are proactive in concealment maneuvers and in variations of their *modus operandi*.

The persistence of a mobilizing ethnonationalist narrative, despite the predominance of its lucrative motivations, also introduces a possible analytical paradox that needs to be investigated in future studies. In the face of this persistence, three lines of institutional response arise: at the legislative level, to consolidate the classification of crimes linked to insurgent economies; in intelligence work, to develop analytical capabilities that differentiate and act on the political and criminal dimensions of the case; and at the educational-communicational level, to develop broad counter-narratives that delegitimize the insurgent discourse without stigmatizing affected communities. Progress on these points intensifies the debate regarding governmental technologies and devices to confront the phenomenon; however, limitations persist, as does the lack of decision or negligence on the part of authorities, very evident in the continuity of constitutional states of exception without conclusive results against proto-terrorist acts.

In short, the intersection between insurgency and organized crime in Chile reveals a multifaceted phenomenon that demands more rigorous, dispassionate attention and constant reflection. The combination of traditional and novel guerrilla tactics with classic criminal practices generates a context of hybridity and persistent violence that challenges the State’s ability to guarantee security and public order, as well as the authorities’ decision-making to act accordingly.

7. Referencias

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AQAP

AL-QAEDA IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

**ORGANIZATION TYPE:**

Insurgent, non-state, religious, terrorist, transnational

IDEOLOGY:

Jihadi, Salafist, Sunni

FOUNDERS:

Nasir al-Wuyashi

MAIN LEADERS:

Qasim al-Raymi, Khalid Batarfi

PLACES OF ACTUATION:

Yemen, Saudi Arabia

YEARS OF ACTIVITY:

2009 to present

MEDIA:

Al-Malahem

ALLIANCES AND SYMPATHIZERS:

Al-Qaeda

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, best known by its acronym AQAP, emerged in 2009 following the merger of al-Qaeda's Yemeni and Saudi branches and is considered one of its most dangerous affiliates. Its primary objective is the overthrow of "apostate" governments in the region and the establishment of an Islamic emirate under Sharia law.

AQAP has been responsible for numerous attacks, both in Yemen and in the West, including attempted bombing of commercial flight on Christmas Day 2009, known as the "underwear attack," in which Nigerian Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab attempted to detonate a device containing PETNs concealed in his underwear on Northwest Airlines Flight 253, which had departed from Amsterdam to Detroit. AQAP also claimed responsibility for the attack by brothers Saïd and Chérif Kouachi against the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, which took place in January 2015 in Paris and left twelve dead and eleven wounded.

Yemeni and US authorities have conducted joint operations with targeted drone strikes and raids to weaken the group, succeeding in eliminating leaders such as al-Wuyashi (2015) and al-Raymi (2020). However, AQAP has demonstrated resilience, taking advantage of the chaos of the Yemeni civil war since 2014 to control territory and recruit militants. Despite military imprisonment, AQAP remains a significant threat, capable of launching transnational operations and exploiting power vacuums in Yemen.

The Mumbai Attacks 26–29 November 2008

The 2008 Mumbai attacks, known locally as 26/11, represent one of the most lethal, audacious, and coordinated terrorist attacks in contemporary history. Over four days, ten militants from the insurgent group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) sowed terror in India's financial capital, simultaneously attacking multiple high-profile targets in the heart of the city. The final toll was devastating: 166 people killed, more than 300 wounded, and a crisis that paralyzed a metropolis of 20 million inhabitants while the world watched the events unfold in real time through continuous media coverage.

Historical and Geopolitical Context

To understand the Mumbai attacks, it is essential to analyze the historical tensions between India and Pakistan, two nuclear-armed nations whose enmity dates back to the 1947 Partition, when the British subcontinent was divided along religious lines, creating a Hindu-majority India on one side and a Muslim-majority Pakistan on the other. This process triggered massive migrations of between 10 and 20 million people and communal violence that caused approximately one million deaths. Since then, the two countries have fought four wars (1947, 1965, 1971, and 1999), centered primarily on the disputed region of Kashmir, a Muslim-majority territory under Indian administration that Pakistan claims.

In this context, Lashkar-e-Taiba (Army of the Pure) emerged. It was founded in 1990 by Hafiz Muhammad Saeed and Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi in Pakistan's Punjab province. Originally established as the military wing of Markaz-ud-Dawa-wal-Irshad, a Wahhabi Islamic organisation dedicated to education and preaching, LeT rapidly evolved into a militant group focused on the "liberation" of Kashmir through armed jihad. During the 1990s, LeT operated training camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan, receiving logistical and financial support from elements within the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Pakistan's military intelligence agency, which has historically used insurgent groups as instruments of foreign policy against India.

LeT distinguished itself through a broader pan-Islamist ideology than other Kashmiri groups, aspiring not only to annex Kashmir to Pakistan but to establish an Islamic caliphate spanning the subcontinent. The group carried out numerous attacks against civilian and military targets in India, including the assault on the Indian Parliament in December 2001, which brought both countries to the brink of nuclear war with a massive military mobilization known as Operation Parakram. This lasted ten months and involved nearly one million soldiers deployed along the border.

Following the 9/11 attacks and international pressure on Pakistan to combat terrorism, President Pervez Musharraf formally banned LeT in 2002. However, the group simply reconstituted itself under new names such as Jamaat-ud-Dawa, keeping its operational infrastructure intact. By 2008, LeT had developed sophisticated capabilities in urban warfare, intelligence, and complex operations, with a network extending from Pakistan to the Persian Gulf and Saudi Arabia, from where it received funding.

The attack on Mumbai was not an isolated event but part of an escalation that began in July 2006 with a series of coordinated bombings on Mumbai's suburban trains that killed 209 people, attributed to groups linked to LeT and the ISI. This precedent established the city as a strategic target, symbolizing Indian economic prosperity, multireligious coexistence, and Western influence – all elements that LeT rejected ideologically.

Planning and Preparation of the Operation

The Mumbai operation required meticulous planning that extended over at least two years. Preparations began in 2006, when LeT sent several reconnaissance teams to Mumbai to identify targets, study escape routes, and assess the security response. These teams, posing as tourists or merchants, gathered detailed information through photographs, videos, and maps, pinpointing locations that would maximize media impact and casualties: the Taj Mahal Palace hotel, the Oberoi-Trident hotel, Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (railway station), Leopold Café, Cama Hospital, Nariman House (Chabad Jewish cultural center), Regal Cinema, and the Times of India building.

The operational architect was Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, LeT's chief commander, who coordinated the recruitment and training of the attackers from camps in Muzaffarabad, Kashmir. The ten selected militants, aged between 20 and 28, came mainly from Pakistani Punjab. They were recruited from madrasas (Quranic schools) and poor families with promises of heavenly rewards and payments to their families. Among them was Ajmal Kasab, aged 21, who would later become the only one captured alive and provide crucial information during his interrogation.

The training lasted approximately six months and included urban combat, siege tactics, use of automatic weapons (AK-47s, hand grenades, C4 explosives), maritime navigation, and encrypted communications. Instructors, veterans of conflicts in Afghanistan and Kashmir, taught hostage-taking

techniques, resistance to interrogation, and maximization of civilian casualties. Not innocently, the militants were indoctrinated with videos of atrocities against Muslims in Kashmir, Gujarat, and Palestine, fueling their jihadist motivation.

The plan involved maritime infiltration from Karachi, Pakistan, travelling approximately 600 nautical miles to Mumbai. For this purpose, the attackers hijacked an Indian fishing vessel, the MV Kuber, killed its four crew members, and used it to approach the Mumbai coast undetected. From the main vessel, they transferred to Zodiac inflatable boats near the shore, disembarking at two points (Colaba and Badhwar Park) carrying backpacks with weapons, ammunition, grenades, plastic explosives, satellite phones, and GPS devices. The level of planning reflected sophisticated state support, as it included satellite communications, professional-grade military equipment, and real-time coordination from handlers in Pakistan.

Image 1. Passport of David Coleman Headley, one of the masterminds of the attacks.

Development of the Attacks

The attacks began on 26 November 2008 at 21:20 hours, when the ten militants, divided into five two-person teams, simultaneously struck multiple locations in southern Mumbai, a strategy designed to disperse security forces and maximize chaos.

The first attack occurred at Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CST), Mumbai's busiest railway station, where approximately 58 people died in an indiscriminate massacre. Ajmal Kasab and his partner Ismail Khan opened fire with their AK-47s on crowds of unsuspecting travelers for approximately 90 minutes, shooting at close range at people trying to flee or hide. Security cameras captured iconic images of Kasab, dressed in jeans and a T-shirt, carrying his rifle and a backpack, walking calmly through the hall while firing. The attackers threw grenades at groups of people, causing scenes of mass panic as hundreds ran towards the exits while bodies accumulated on the marble floor.

Almost simultaneously, two other militants attacked the Leopold Café, a restaurant popular with Western tourists in the Colaba district. They fired indiscriminately for several minutes, killing 10 people (including several foreigners) and wounding many more before withdrawing to join the rest of the attackers in the assault on the Taj Mahal Palace hotel.

The core of the attacks unfolded at two luxury hotels, the Taj Mahal Palace and the Oberoi-Trident, where the militants took hostages and entrenched themselves for days. At the Taj Mahal, an iconic 105-year-old building, four attackers gained access through different entrances, shooting at guests in the lobby and restaurants. They deliberately set fire to the upper floors, creating curtains of smoke and flames that complicated rescue operations. The militants moved methodically through the 560-room hotel, executing anyone who crossed their path.



Image 2. Ajmal Kasab, the only surviving terrorist, in the lobby of the Taj Mahal Hotel.

At the Oberoi-Trident, two other attackers followed similar tactics, seizing control of the upper floors and selectively executing guests, prioritizing Westerners, especially Americans and Britons, in line with specific instructions from their handlers in Pakistan. The terrorists used satellite phones and VoIP to receive real-time orders from a “control room” in Karachi, where coordinators monitored live news coverage and dynamically adjusted tactics. Intercepted conversations revealed explicit instructions: “Kill them all... remember this battle is to eliminate the infidels”.

A third team attacked Nariman House, the headquarters of the Chabad-Lubavitch Jewish movement, taking as hostages Rabbi Gavriel Holtzberg, his pregnant wife Rivka, and six other Jews. This attack reflected the antisemitic dimension of LeT’s Islamist extremism. The hostages were tortured and executed during the three-day siege. When special forces finally stormed the building on 28 November, they found six bodies showing evidence of extreme brutality, including signs of torture. The only survivor was the Holtzbergs’ two-year-old son, rescued by his Indian nanny.

Other attacks included shootings at Cama Hospital, where the militants killed six people, and two taxi bomb explosions that killed three people, designed as tactical distractions.

Security Forces’ Response

The initial response was chaotic and uncoordinated, reflecting the lack of preparation of Mumbai’s police forces for an attack of this magnitude. Local police, equipped mainly with lathis (batons) and obsolete firearms, were quickly overwhelmed by militants armed with AK-47s and grenades. The head of Mumbai’s Anti-Terrorist Squad, Hemant Karkare, and other high-ranking officers were killed in early confrontations near CST, leaving a critical leadership vacuum.

The Indian Army mobilized its elite units, the National Security Guard (NSG), which were based in Delhi, 1,400 kilometers away. The NSG’s arrival was delayed due to logistical problems, and they did not reach Mumbai until approximately 10 hours after the start of the attacks (a delay that drew massive criticism afterwards).



Image 3. Moments of the attack on the Taj Mahal Hotel. Credits: Hindustan Times.

Rescue operations at the hotels were extremely complex. For example, at the Taj Mahal, NSG commandos had to “clear” more than 1.600 rooms distributed across multiple interconnected buildings, facing well-trained militants who knew the terrain and had placed explosive booby traps. The siege lasted until the morning of 29 November, nearly 60 hours after the start of the attack. Special forces used helicopters to deploy operatives on the building’s rooftop, while other teams entered through windows using rappelling, facing heavy fire and explosions that caused sections of the building to collapse.



Image 4. NSG members during one phase of the assault.

During the operations, the media broadcast the development of events and the NSG assault live, providing real-time intelligence to the terrorists, who adjusted their positions by watching television coverage. Handlers in Pakistan warned them about commando movements based on news reports, representing an unprecedented challenge in the era of 24/7 coverage.

On 29 November, after intense combat, nine of the ten attackers were killed. Only Ajmal Kasab was captured alive when he tried to escape in a stolen vehicle; he was wounded in the shoulder by the police who detained him. His capture was crucial in establishing the links to Pakistan.

Victims and Immediate Consequences

The final toll confirmed 175 deaths, including the 9 terrorists killed and 18 police and military personnel, and more than 300 wounded. Among the victims were 28 foreigners of various nationalities (Americans, Britons, Israelis, Germans, Canadians, Australians, and others), reflecting Mumbai’s cosmopolitan character and the attackers’ intention to have an international impact.

The victims spanned all social classes, from wealthy guests in luxury hotels to working-class travelers at CST, including service workers trapped in the sieges. Individual stories later emerged, such as that of Sandra Samuel, a nanny who saved the Holtzberg baby and was recognized as a heroine, or retired General Ian Cardozo, who had lost a leg in the 1971 war but still helped evacuate 150 people from the Taj Mahal hotel despite his physical impairment, or the British couple Andreas and Kia Liveras, who spent 12 hours hidden in a cupboard while militants searched room by room.

Economically, the attacks caused damages estimated at 1.5 billion dollars, including property destruction, business losses, and reconstruction costs. Tourism in Mumbai plummeted in the following months, with massive cancellations of hotel reservations and a 40% drop in international arrivals during the first quarter of 2009.

Investigation, Trials, and Diplomatic Tensions

The investigation revealed the extent of the transnational conspiracy. Kasab's interrogation provided critical details, as he confessed his recruitment by LeT, training in Pakistan, the names of commanders, and the maritime infiltration route. Forensic analysis of his recovered satellite phone and GPS confirmed communications with numbers in Pakistan.

David Headley, arrested in the United States in October 2009 while planning similar attacks in Denmark, pleaded guilty in 2011 and testified extensively, revealing the direct involvement of ISI officers in the planning. His incriminating testimony spared him the death penalty; he was sentenced to 35 years in prison. It exposed Sajid Mir, LeT's controller in Pakistan, as a key architect and confirmed that Pakistani military personnel provided naval training and equipment.

Ajmal Kasab was tried in a special court in Mumbai, sentenced to death in May 2010, and executed in secret on 21 November 2012 in Pune prison. His highly publicized televised trial revealed operational details and the extremist ideology instilled during training.

Diplomatic tensions between India and Pakistan intensified dramatically. India presented evidence to Pakistan demanding decisive action against LeT and the arrest of Hafiz Saeed and Lakhvi. Pakistan initially denied any links but, under strong international pressure, admitted that the attacks originated from its territory. In 2009, it arrested Lakhvi and six other suspects, although Saeed remained free, operating openly under state protection. Lakhvi was released on bail in 2015, generating great outrage in India.

The United States designated LeT a terrorist organization and offered a \$10 million reward for Saeed, who died in Lahore in May 2025. India-Pakistan relations remained frozen for years, to the point that the peace process was completely suspended and military tensions increased, with sporadic clashes along the Line of Control in Kashmir.

Legacy and Reforms

The Mumbai attacks transformed India's security architecture. The government created the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in 2009, a federal counterterrorism agency modelled on the FBI, and modernized police forces with advanced equipment, counterinsurgency training, and protocols for multiple simultaneous attacks. Permanent NSG units were established in major cities to reduce response times.

Internationally, the attacks boosted intelligence cooperation between India, the United States, Israel, and Europe, sharing biometric databases and monitoring terrorist networks. The global media coverage during the siege sparked debates about media responsibility in the development of attacks, leading to concrete guidelines to avoid broadcasting tactically sensitive information live during similar crises.

The attacks also inspired subsequent operations, and various terrorist groups or cells studied LeT's tactics, especially the use of small, highly trained teams in prolonged urban attacks, a model that influenced incidents such as the Westgate attack in Nairobi (2013) and the Bataclan attack in Paris (2015).

For the victims and survivors of the attacks, the trauma persists, and many suffer severe post-traumatic stress, with studies documenting high rates of anxiety, depression, and sleep disorders. The 26/11 Memorial was inaugurated in Mumbai in 2012, honoring the victims and preserving the collective memory of a city that, despite the tragedy, demonstrated extraordinary resilience, resuming its vibrant urban life days after the attacks.



Image 4. Commemorative events at the 26/11 Memorial. Credits: Hindustan Times

EPHEMERIS



21ST JANUARY 2026

A large-scale Al Shabaab attack on a military base in Jubaland (Somalia) allowed the terrorists to take control of it for several days. The government claimed to have killed around 250 terrorists during the battle, while the group stated that it had eliminated more than one hundred Somali soldiers.



20TH JANUARY 2026

At least one hundred people linked to the Islamic State escaped from the Al Hol camp facilities (Syria) as a consequence of the withdrawal of Kurdish SDF fighters from their surveillance positions. Dozens of them were reportedly detained in the following weeks and the camp has been dismantled.



29TH JANUARY 2026

Diori Hamani International Airport in Niamey (Niger) was attacked by a contingent of jihadists on motorcycles belonging to Islamic State-Sahel and ISWAP. The terrorists managed to penetrate the airport compound, which houses both civilian and military flights, causing significant material damage.



4TH FEBRUARY 2026

A man from North Carolina (United States) linked to neo-Nazi ideologies was sentenced to the maximum penalty of five years in federal prison for sending antisemitic threats to the only Jewish member of the Georgia House of Representatives and to the rabbi of Temple Beth Israel in Macon.



14TH FEBRUARY 2026

Nigeria neutralized a senior ISWAP commander, Abou Aisha, in a military counterattack during a terrorist assault in Pulka (Borno). The terrorist attack caused a large number of deaths and injuries among Nigerian troops.



16TH FEBRUARY 2026

The United States deployed between 100 and 200 soldiers in Nigeria at the request of President Bola Tinubu with the aim of training local security forces against terrorism and armed crime in the north of the country.



9TH MARCH 2026

The Philippine army killed the emir of the Hassan Group while he resisted capture in Cotabato. Personnel from two Infantry Brigades were sent to arrest Emarudin Kulaw in his hideout in Barangay Tinimbacan. Kulaw and his companions resisted, triggering a confrontation that ended with his immediate death.



18TH MARCH 2026

A promotional video for Nigel Farage's 2024 "Road Rage Terror Tour" across Canada was published. The video was commissioned from the British politician by a Canadian neo-Nazi group affiliated with the extremist Diagon movement. The founders of Diagon paid for the video with the aim of countering criticism from the mayor of Hamilton.



25TH MARCH 2026

A joint operation by Spain's National Police with Moroccan authorities dismantled a terrorist cell composed of three individuals. One of the detainees had intended to carry out a lone-actor attack, while the other two maintained logistical and financing ties with the Islamic State in Somalia and the Sahara.



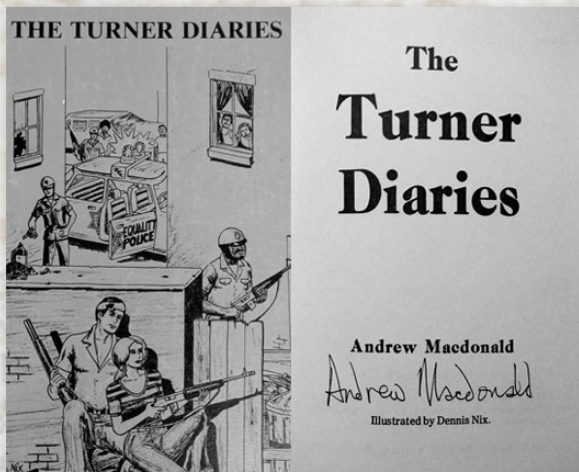
7TH APRIL 2026

Several attackers opened fire near the Israeli consulate in Istanbul (Turkey). Turkish police neutralized the attackers, killing one of them and leaving the other two wounded. Both Israel and Turkey declared the incident a terrorist attack.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...?

The attack on Naval Air Station Pensacola (Florida) in December 2019 was the first successful jihadist terrorist attack to be orchestrated abroad against US national territory since 9/11. This attack, in which three people were killed and left a dozen injured, was committed by a Saudi officer who served as a sleeper terrorist recruited by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

At the time of committing the attack, the terrorist was at the military compound participating as a student in a training programme. The commission of this jihadist attack generated a profound debate on the need to exercise greater control over the students participating in international military training programmes and also on security controls at US bases.



On the day Timothy McVeigh, the perpetrator of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, was arrested, some pages of the novel "The Turner Diaries" were found in his vehicle. This novel is narrated as the diary of a militant who participates in a clandestine organization called "The Organization" and describes the beginning of a violent insurrection against the United States government, with attacks, internal war and the collapse of the established order. As it progresses, the conflict escalates into a global confrontation driven by a supremacist ideology.

Such is the influence of this book on some violent actors of the extreme right that McVeigh himself was inspired by an attack that occurred in that work of fiction to design the attack that years later he would commit himself in Oklahoma.

Some terrorist organizations have explored insidious methods to create chaos by attacking essential supplies that the public considers safe. One of the most disturbing cases was the Aum Shinrikyo cult's plot in Japan during the 1990s. This group, responsible for the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway (1995), also attempted to poison the milk supply in schools and supermarkets. The idea was to spread botulism or chemical toxins in storage tanks, causing mass deaths without leaving an immediate trace. The plans were uncovered after police raids in 1995, where manuals with instructions for contaminating liquids and adapted laboratory equipment were found.

Most chilling is that the group had conducted preliminary tests by injecting small doses of toxins into dairy products, measuring how long it took for them to be detected. This incident led Japan to implement tamper-evident sealing systems on tanker trucks and random chemical testing protocols in factories.



In collaboration with:



The Disappeared by Terrorism

Inés Gaviria

All terrorist offences are of immeasurable cruelty. Yet failing to disclose the location where the victims' remains are buried entails a form of cruelty that is even greater. It is a way of prolonging the crime beyond the act of murder itself, of keeping the families' wound open, and of denying them something as elemental as the ability to bury their dead. "A person disappeared by terrorism is a crime, every single day, for the family". This is how Marta Rodríguez Fouz encapsulated it. She is the niece of one of the three Galicians who disappeared on 24 March 1973 after being mistaken for police officers in France. The three were kidnapped, tortured, and murdered by ETA. Marta served as curator of the exhibition *Ausencias presents: desaparecidos por terrorismo en España* (Present Absences: People Disappeared by Terrorism in Spain), which opened at the end of April 2026 at the Memorial Centre for Victims of Terrorism in Vitoria-Gasteiz.

The exhibition presents, in addition to the stories of José Humberto Fouz Escobero, Fernando Quiroga Veiga, and Jorge García Carneiro – the three Galicians who disappeared in 1973 – the case of Eduardo Moreno Bergaretxe, Pertur, a leader of ETA politico-military who disappeared in 1976. This case remains shrouded in shadows, with all indications pointing to his elimination by other members of the terrorist organisation due to his advocacy of subordinating armed struggle to the political path, as outlined in the so-called Otsagabia document. The exhibition also includes the case of Publio Cerdón, a businessman kidnapped in Zaragoza by the GRAPO on 27 June 1995. A ransom was demanded and paid, yet his body never appeared. His captors claimed he had died in captivity but never revealed what they did with his remains. Likewise, the exhibition features the case of José Miguel Etxeberria Álvarez, *Bakunin* or *Naparra*, a member of the Comandos Autónomos Anticapitalistas, who disappeared on 11 June 1980 in Saint-Jean-de-Luz, France, under circumstances that have never been fully clarified.

Disappearance adds a supplementary sentence to the murder for the relatives. Being unable to bury a father, a son, a brother, or a partner means living with an absence that never fully closes. It means having no grave to which flowers can be brought, nor a specific place to weep, pray, or remain silent. It means that mourning remains suspended in a kind of frozen time, in which death is known but cannot be accompanied by the most basic human gestures. Even this is taken from the families of the disappeared: the right to say goodbye.

This cruelty is not exclusive to the terrorism suffered in Spain. In Northern Ireland, the case of Jean McConville became one of the great symbols of the horror of the Troubles. A widow and mother of ten children, she was abducted by the IRA in Belfast in December 1972. For decades, her children did not know where her body was. They were unable to bury her until her remains were found on a beach in County Louth in 2003, more than thirty years later. Her story illustrates with particular rawness what it means to “disappear” a person: the victim is not only killed; her children, siblings, parents, and all those left waiting for a truth that others know and conceal are also punished.

For this is the central issue: we are not speaking of abstract mysteries or insoluble enigmas. Today there are people who know, or who could decisively help to discover, where these bodies are. In the case of the three Galicians murdered by ETA, those who belonged to the terrorist organisation or its support network bear an inescapable moral responsibility. Those who today hold public office or lead parties that are heirs to that world – such as Arnaldo Otegi and other leaders of EH Bildu – should use all their influence to demand that former ETA members tell the truth. In the case of Publio Cordón, many GRAPO members are still alive and could provide information about where he was buried. Yet they do not. And that silence constitutes an additional affront to the victims and their families.

The end of terrorism cannot consist merely of stopping the killing. It also demands cooperation with the truth. It demands acknowledgement of the harm caused, facilitation of the clarification of outstanding crimes, and, at the very least, the return to families of the remains of their loved ones. Every day that passes without those who know speaking is another day of moral impunity. It is a way of continuing to humiliate those who were already struck by terrorist violence.

That is why recounting these stories is an obligation. In this section we will remember four of these disappeared victims so that their names are not reduced to a list, nor their cases to a footnote in the history of terrorism. They were people with lives, families, projects, and a dignity that the terrorists attempted to erase. Against that attempt to make them disappear also from memory, there remains the duty to name them, to recount what happened to them, and to demand, once again, truth, justice, and reparation. For as long as their bodies remain unfound, the debt owed to them and to their families will remain outstanding.

JOSÉ HUMBERTO FOUZ

Born: La Coruña

Age: 29

Children: 0

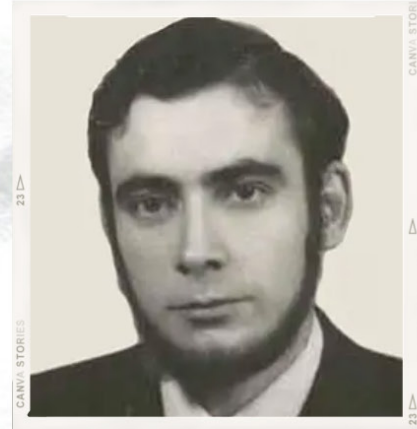
Marital Status: Single

Occupation: Interpreter-translator

Date of the attack: 24/03/1973

Place of the attack: Biarritz

Murdered by: ETA



Description of the attack:

On the afternoon of 24 March 1973, José Humberto Fouz Escobero, Fernando Quiroga Veiga, and Jorge Juan García Carneiro crossed the border between Spain and France to watch Last Tango in Paris in the French town of Biarritz. After leaving the cinema, the three friends went for a drink at a bar on the outskirts of Saint-Jean-de-Luz, where ETA terrorists mistook them for police officers. The ETA members decided to kidnap them. According to the available evidence, they then tortured and murdered them. Their bodies have never been found.

Humberto Fouz, aged 29, had moved from Galicia to Irún (Gipuzkoa) in the spring of 1970 to work as an interpreter-translator for a transport company. He spoke five languages and was studying Italian and Russian. He soon persuaded his friends Fernando Quiroga and Jorge García to move to the Basque Country as well. At the time they were murdered, all three were living in the home of Fouz's sister and brother-in-law.

JORGE JUAN GARCÍA CARNEIRO

Born in: La Coruña

Age: 23

Children: 0

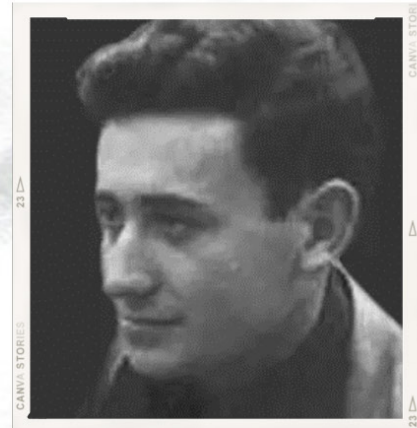
Marital Statatus: Single

Occupation: Unemployed

Date of the attack: 24/03/1973

Place of the attack: Biarritz

Murdered by: ETA



Description of the attack:

On the afternoon of 24 March 1973, Jorge Juan García Carneiro, José Humberto Fouz Escobero, and Fernando Quiroga Veiga crossed the border into France to watch Last Tango in Paris in the town of Biarritz. After leaving the cinema, the three friends went for a drink at a bar on the outskirts of Saint-Jean-de-Luz, where ETA terrorists mistook them for police officers. The ETA members decided to kidnap them. According to the available evidence, they then tortured and murdered them. Their bodies have never been found.

Jorge Juan García Carneiro, aged 23, had arrived in Irún (Gipuzkoa) from Galicia in January 1973, where his friends Humberto and Fernando were working. Humberto Fouz arranged for the company where he was employed to offer Jorge a trial period starting in April of that same year, but the young man never took up the position.

FERNANDO QUIROGA VEIGA

Born in: La Coruña

Age: 25

Children: 0

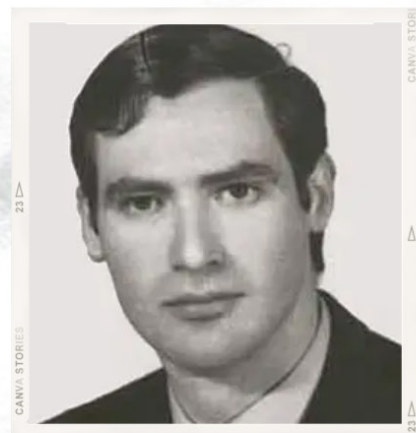
Marital Status: Single

Occupation: Customs employee

Date of the attack: 24/03/1973

Place of the attack: Biarritz

Murdered by: ETA



Description of the attack:

On the afternoon of 24 March 1973, Jorge Juan García Carneiro, José Humberto Fouz Escobero, and Fernando Quiroga Veiga crossed the border between Spain and France to watch Last Tango in Paris in the French town of Biarritz. After leaving the cinema, the three friends went for a drink at a bar on the outskirts of Saint-Jean-de-Luz, where ETA terrorists mistook them for police officers. The ETA members decided to kidnap them. According to the available evidence, they then tortured and murdered them. Their bodies have never been found.

Fernando Quiroga Veiga, aged 25, had arrived in Irún (Gipuzkoa) from Galicia in February 1972, a year after his friend Humberto Fouz. He soon found employment with a customs agency and moved into the home of Humberto's sister and brother-in-law.

PUBLICO CORDÓN MUNILLA

Born in: Soria

Age: 61

Children: 4

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: Businessman

Date of the attack: 27/06/1995

Place of the attack: Zaragoza

Murdered by: GRAPO



Description of the attack:

On 27 June 1995, the businessman Publio Córdón Munilla left his home in Zaragoza to exercise with his dogs. While running, a GRAPO commando kidnapped him and took him to a rented house in Lyon (France). They demanded a ransom of 400 million pesetas, which the family secretly delivered in Paris. The terrorist organisation announced his release on at least three occasions, but the businessman never appeared. According to the statement made years later by the commando leader, Córdón tried to escape and died after falling from a window.

Publio Córdón Munilla, a native of Soria, had moved to Zaragoza at the age of 19 and began working as a salesman. At the time of his kidnapping, he was president of the Previaisa insurance company and the Quirón Hospital Group and had four daughters. During his confinement in a cupboard, he marked the wall, probably to keep track of the days he had been locked up. The police found a total of 14 marks.

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Two files must be sent in Word format. One including the author's name, professional affiliation and a brief description of the author's CV at the footer, and the other with an anonymous version of the paper.

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- The papers must comply with the spelling standards of the Royal Spanish Academy, following the 2019 update of the 2010 edition.
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 - Second level sections must be numbered and in italics (1.1).
 - Third level sections must be numbered and underlined (1.1.).
 - Conclusions
 - Bibliographic references arranged alphabetically.
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- Numerically ordered tables or graphs may be included. All of them must have a short description beginning with FIGURE X. (FIGURE 4. EVOLUTION TABLE OF ATTACKS). It will be necessary to indicate the origin of the source at the end of the description, whether it is from another author or self-elaborated (SOURCE: own elaboration).

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