



Spanish Authorities Foil Weaponized Drone Attack by ISIS Sympathizer

OE Watch Commentary: On 8 May, Spanish authorities in Barcelona arrested a suspected Islamic State sympathizer who was planning a drone attack. According to the accompanying Spanish news article from *El Periódico*, authorities arrested a Moroccan citizen whom they believed became radicalized while living in Spain. The report said the detainee was in constant online contact with an alleged Islamic State fighter who was coaching him from Syria. He was allegedly told to purchase a drone in Barcelona, learn how to use it, and load it with explosives to carry out a terrorist attack during a Barcelona – Real Madrid soccer match.

The investigation was an international effort by Spain's Central Investigating Court and the Office of the Public Prosecutor of the National Court, the Moroccan Directorate General for Territory Security (DGST), and the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The investigative report indicated that the detainee's radicalization and affinity for the Islamic State has been ongoing for at least 4 years. According to *El Periódico*, the detainee used the COVID-19 lockdown and defied quarantine orders to scout locations for potential targets for attacks. Another accompanying Spanish news source, *El Sexta*, reported that the detainee confessed to authorities that his objective was to attack a soccer match between Barcelona and Real Madrid; however, no drone was found during the raid in his apartment in Ciutat Villa.

The Islamic State has an extensive history of weaponized drone use in Iraq and Syria during the existence of the territorial Caliphate, with fielding beginning in August 2014 through about December 2017. While no recorded incidents of such drone use have taken place in Europe or the United States by Islamic State operatives or lone wolves inspired by the group, this incident demonstrates the continued threat of such attacks. The threat of similar Salafi-Jihadi linked weaponized drone attacks pre-date those of the Islamic State by some years. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bunker and Keshavarz)**

“A waiter who has spent 12 years in Spain – now 34 years old – is now in jail and accused of exalting terrorism and self-indoctrination. The coronavirus left him without his job as a waiter. During the lockdown, he swore allegiance to the Islamic State and was being given guidance out of Syria.”

Source: J.G. Albalat, “La Guardia Civil detiene en Barcelona a un supuesto yihadista que buscó objetivos bajo el estado de alarma (The Civil Guard arrested a suspected jihadist in Barcelona, who sought targets during a state of alarm),” *El Periódico*, 8 May 2020. <https://www.elperiodico.com/es/politica/20200508/yihadista-detenido-barcelona-guardia-civil-objetivos-estado-alarma-7954745>

The Civil Guard reported that there were references to the detainee's radicalization and affinity for the Islamic State for at least 4 years.

Source: Luis Rendueles and Vanesa Lozano, “El yihadista que iba a matar en Barcelona, un camarero que se radicalize cuando se quedó sin trabajo por el covid (A jihadist who was going to kill in Barcelona, a waiter who was radicalized when he lost his job because of covid),” *El Periódico*, 18 May 2020. <https://www.elperiodico.com/es/politica/20200518/yihadista-barcelona-detenido-matar-maquina-picar-carne-coronavirus-7964858>

A waiter who has spent 12 years in Spain – now 34 years old – is now in jail and accused of exalting terrorism and self-indoctrination. The coronavirus left him without his job as a waiter. During the lockdown, he swore allegiance to the Islamic State and was being given guidance out of Syria.

The detained jihadist recorded himself exploring the city and the subway during the pandemic lockdown.

Source: Alfonso Pérez Medina, “El yihadista detenido en Barcelona pretendía atentar con un drone durante un FC Barcelona – Real Madrid (The jihadist detained in Barcelona was planning an attempted drone attack during an FC Barcelona – Real Madrid match),” *La Sexta*, 13 May 2020. https://www.lasexta.com/noticias/nacional/yihadista-detenido-barcelona-pretendia-atentar-dron-barcelona-real-madrid_202005135ebc2b014ab42000011f0c7f.html

He told authorities his objective was a drone attack during a game. He didn't say when the attack would occur, and no drone was found.