

Beat: News

Spanish Civil Guard and FBI dismantle the largest jihadist propaganda structure

Coordinated operation from EUROPOL

Madrid, 16.06.2024, 21:42 Time

USPA NEWS - The Spanish Civil Guard and the FBI have dismantled the largest online propaganda dissemination structure that the Islamic State terrorist organization had until now. This international operation, coordinated by EUROPOL and EUROJUST, has ended with the largest action to date against the online propaganda structure associated with the terrorist organization Islamic State (IS). Specifically, its objective has been against the so-called Terrorist Operated Websites (TOW).

In Spain, the Civil Guard has arrested a total of nine people in Algeciras (Cádiz), Antas (Almería) and Salt (Gerona). The first of these detainees was a subject settled in Lleida who, after reaching the last stage of the jihadist radicalization process, made the decision to move to the conflict zone. The agents detained him in January at the Barcelona airport, moments before traveling.

The investigation began in Spain in 2022, after the translation into Spanish of terrorist content linked to said terrorist organization was detected in the I'lam Foundation media entity, and has ended with action against the servers that hosted the terrorist content. As a result of the investigations carried out, it has been objectively confirmed that those responsible for the I'lam Foundation are also the creators of other media entities related to IS. In particular, the Al-Raud, Fehras and Alfajr websites, as well as other similar platforms whose activity dates back to 2015, all of them currently operating under the so-called Sarh Al-Khilafa network.

Terrorism in more than 30 languages

The main characteristic of the I'lam Foundation is its ability to facilitate access to said content in a wide variety of languages, more than 30 currently. This allows it to deliver the slogans and guidelines of the Islamic State with exponential dissemination to a global audience. The Al-Raud platform was launched at the end of 2021 with the purpose of archiving and sharing different official propaganda publications of the Islamic State terrorist organization, while the Fehras platform is an aggregator of links to TOWs linked to the Islamic State, which facilitates the permanent access to the websites of the I'lam, Al Raud and Alfajr Foundation.

Although these media entities do not formally make up the catalog of “official” platforms of the IS, they currently constitute the main points of public access to the terrorist propaganda of the Islamic State, both that considered “official” of said organization and that created by sympathizers. and classified as “unofficial”.

In this sense, we can find the complete catalog of “official” IS products, such as the self-proclaimed global news agency AMAQ, as well as the information offices of the different wilayas (provinces) of IS worldwide. Among them, those from Africa/Sahel, Afghanistan/Khorasan, Syria and Iraq stand out, as well as Al-Bayan radio, the official production companies Al Hayat Media Center and the foundations Al-Furqan, Al-I'tisam, Furat, Ajnad, the Al-Himma publishing house, the weekly magazine An Naba, and the magazines Rumiya, Dabiq, Dar al Islam, Konstantiniyye and Istok, among others.

On the other hand, there is also the complete repertoire of “unofficial” entities such as the Voice of Khorashan magazine (linked to ISKP, the most active branch of the IS and which projects a greater threat in the European context), the Voice of Hind and the Al Battar, Al Murhafat, Al Taqwa and Al Azaim Foundations, among others.

The relevance of the structure investigated lies not only in the enormous amount of terrorist material to which they gave access, but also its design stands out, made up of a complex structure of servers specifically configured to be resilient. Of the dozens of servers that have been investigated and intervened, it is worth noting that several terabytes of information have been found and are being analyzed, with the aim of continuing to compile evidence that will allow the prosecution of those responsible. On the other hand, it should be noted that they operated both through the “surface web” and the “dark web”, which has made traceability and investigation of them difficult.

These TOWs acted as a repository and central node for the content produced by the different media entities mentioned above, proceeding to mass distribution thereof in a decentralized manner through various social networks and messaging applications, all

within the framework of a strategy multiplatform broadcasting of a magnitude never before appreciated. Likewise, the investigation has made it possible to verify the financing of the network through the systematic use of different cryptocurrencies, launching financing campaigns from the investigated websites themselves. With them they intended to obtain funds, providing both cryptocurrency wallet addresses and QR codes to facilitate the transfer of funds.

According to EUROPOL's European Counter-Terrorism Centre, propaganda and recruitment activities carried out via the Internet are explicitly recognized as an integral part of jihad by terrorist organisations, allowing sympathizers to be mobilized to commit attacks under the banner of ISIS. The websites investigated constantly instigated terrorist actions, and the latest terrorist attacks committed both in Europe and globally have been widely publicized. Among the published contents, there are translations into various European languages ??suitable for inciting violence and committing terrorist attacks.

The Spanish Civil Guard has been able to verify in numerous investigations carried out in recent years, both in Spain and globally, that access to these TOWs is the common denominator of the majority of individuals investigated for terrorism crimes. For this reason, there is a direct relationship between the radicalization of these people and access to terrorist content provided by the web infrastructure investigated.

The success of this operation is fundamentally based on the effectiveness of the international cooperation mechanisms, both at the police and judicial levels. Throughout it, coordinated actions have been carried out in multiple countries -Holland, Germany, France, Estonia, Romania and Iceland-, which has made it possible to carry out the takedown, thus blocking one of its main sources of terrorist propaganda in the online space.

The operation has been developed jointly between the Information Service of the Civil Guard and the American FBI, under the direction of the Central Court of Instruction No. 1 and the Prosecutor's Office of the Spanish National Court, and the coordination of Eurojust and Europol.

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-24628/spanish-civil-guard-and-fbi-dismantle-the-largest-jihadist-propaganda-structure.html>

Editorial office and responsibility:

V.i.S.d.P. & Sect. 6 MDSStV (German Interstate Media Services Agreement): Jose A. Martin

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Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619