National Counter-terrorism Strategy

2023

NATIONAL Counter-terrorism STRATEGY

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The National Counter-terrorism Strategy was approved by the National Security Council on March 19, 2024.

The Ministry of the Interior, through the Intelligence Centre against Terrorism and Organised Crime (CITCO), has been responsible for its coordination.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, the Ministry of the Presidency, Justice and Parliamentary Relations, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of the Interior, the State Secretary for Communications and the National Security Department have participated in its development.

Contributions provided by the Autonomous Communities and Cities within the framework of the Sectorial Conference for National Security Issues, the victims of terrorism, as well as a group of experts representing the academic community have been taken into consideration.

Our Constitution enshrines the right to freedom and safety. At the Ministry of the Interior, as part of this grave responsibility, in the public spirit, we work continuously to tackle the serious threats that could affect peaceful living in our society and in the State as a whole.

One of the most severe of those threats is terrorism, a complex and constantly changing challenge that requires the full attention of public authorities and of security forces. Therefore, naturally, we are committed to improving mechanisms to combat terrorism, optimizing the State's prevention and response capabilities, and strengthening resources and competencies.

Victims of terrorism —our moral and ethical motivating force— inspire us to continue working relentlessly to improve how we combat all forms of terrorism. We know that terrorism can be defeated under the rule of law. Painful experience has taught us the immense effectiveness of taking the initiative against terrorists and mobilizing all necessary capabilities, of the State and of society as a whole.

To do this, and to provide a comprehensive and collaborative response, we need instruments such as this National Counter-Terrorism Strategy, a bona fide political and strategic framework for combating terrorism and violent extremism within the framework of Spain's National Security System.

Almost five years have passed since the previous strategy was published. Factors such as international expansion of terrorism in certain regions, changes in the global geostrategic situation and technological advances make adaptation of the strategy advisable, as well as its alignment with the 2021 National Security Strategy and the strategies of the European Union and the United Nations, international organizations of which Spain is a member.
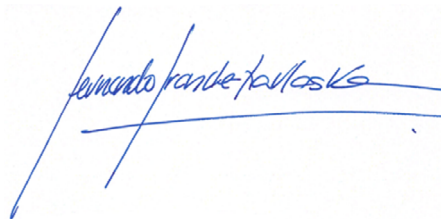
This National Counter-Terrorism Strategy is the result of work by the Specialist Counter-Terrorism Committee, a supporting body of the National Security Council. It provides renewed impetus and will become the backbone and inspiration for current and future action plans, developments and operations. Its structure continues to be based on four pillars: Prevent, Protect, Pursue and Prepare the Response.

The aim of the Strategy is to neutralize terrorist threats against Spanish citizens and interests within and outside our borders, reducing society's vulnerability and combating radicalization processes that lead to violent extremism and terrorism.

If we have learnt anything from our experience of combating terrorism, it is that we must not and cannot lower our guard. Terrorist violence is a priority, and society as a whole must fight it. That is why this strategy is publicly available, as is its predecessor: it is also for every citizen.

Quoting Cicero, "the most decisive demonstration is proof", this document shows our deep-seated, unequivocal and unbreakable commitment to the values and security of the society in which we live.

Fernando Grande-Marlaska Gómez

Minister of the Interior

SUMARY

Executive Summary

The National Counter-Terrorism Strategy (NCTS), which forms part of the National Security System, is the political and strategic framework in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism.

In order to adapt to the new situation of threats and to the framework of the National Security Strategy approved in December 2021, 2023 NCTS updates 2019 NCTS,. The new draft:

- reduces the number of strategic objectives and lines of action;

- eliminates the pre-2021 National Security Strategy structure based on development areas;

- pays special attention to the risks and threats contained in the 2021 National Security Strategy.

- The structure has been updated in line with the strategies of international organizations of which Spain is a member, following the models of the European Union Counter-Terrorism Strategy and the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Our integrated approach to national security policy is based on four pillars: Prevent, Protect, Pursue and Prepare the Response. Each pillar establishes a general goal, containing strategic objectives and lines of action.

PILLARS

01 Prevent
02 Protect
03 Pursue
04 Prepare the response
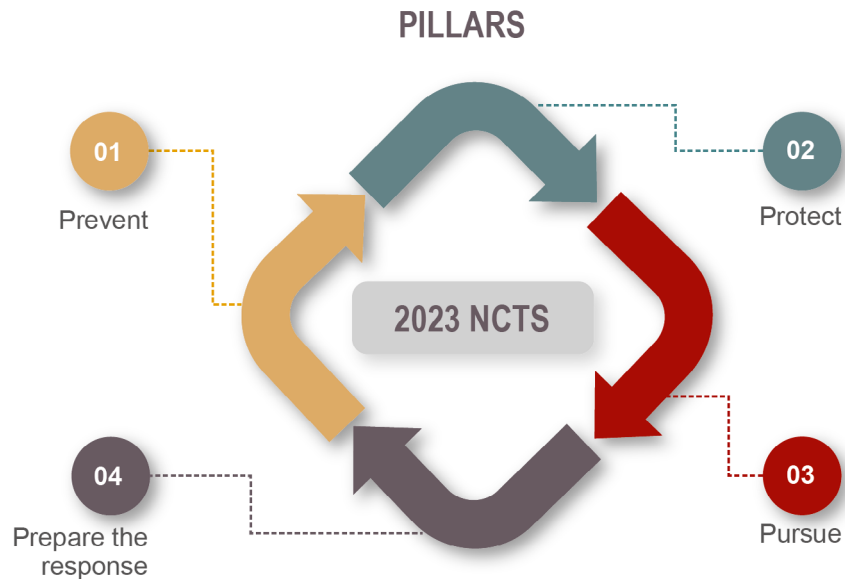
2023 NCTS

In keeping with the values of the Spanish Constitution, 2023 NCTS contributes to fostering conditions that guarantee the freedom, equality and safety of society as a whole, of both citizens and institutions, with absolute respect for human rights and the exercise of public liberties.

State institutions must provide society with maximum security and protection, but society must also take part in this fight. That is why the update of NCTS is public and is addressed to every citizen.

Inspired by the principles of transparency, public communication and the involvement of the whole of society, 2023 NCTS aims to foster integration and cooperation between public authorities and the private sector, in line with our partners and allies' counter-terrorism strategies.

The Strategy offers the victims of terrorism broad and ongoing support, based on respect for their dignity and memory.

The impact of global threats and the evolution of terrorism mean it is necessary to constantly adapt capabilities to combat terrorism and violent extremism. Technological progress has given terrorist groups access to new resources, boosting their capacity in terms of financing, recruitment, propaganda and radicalization.

Unless amendments are required owing to events, 2023 NCTS will be in place for five years, in accordance with the instructions of the Specialist Counter-Terrorism Committee, attached to the National Security Council.

The Strategy is divided into six chapters.

1. The first chapter, "Update of the National Counter-Terrorism Strategy", examines the reasons for updating NCTS, as well as its main characteristics.

2. The second chapter, "The Threat of Terrorism and Violent Extremism", analyses patterns and trends in terrorism and violent extremism, as well as Spain's situation with regard to these threats.

3. The third chapter, "Spain: Safe from Terrorism and Resilient to It", lays out the measures and initiatives in place in Spain to reduce the risks and threats linked to terrorism and violent extremism.

4. The fourth chapter, "Goal, Principles, Mission and Vision", establishes the overall aim of NCTS, as well as its driving principles, mission and vision.

5. The fifth chapter, "Pillars, Strategic Objectives and Lines of Action", describes the specific goals of each of the four pillars of the State's concerted action, and the strategic objectives and lines of action to apply to achieve those goals.

6. The final chapter, "Combating Terrorism in the Framework of the National Security System", underlines how NCTS is interlinked with the National Security System.

Chapter 1

Update of the National Counter-Terrorism Strategy

This chapter explains why NCTS has been updated and describes its main characteristics.

Updating NCTS is an ongoing process that requires a continuous assessment of threats and risks and of current methodologies, as well as inter-agency collaboration and clear and effective communication.

The process reflects how terrorism changes and evolves, and aims to make Spain safe and resilient, protect lives, rights and freedoms, and the constitutional order.

Therefore, on 21 June 2022 the National Security Council approved the procedure for drafting a new NCTS.

This system of adaptation and evolution was already apparent in Spain's first counter-terrorism strategy, the "Comprehensive Strategy to Combat International Terrorism and Radicalization" from 2012. Since then, new documents have been drawn up, to stay ahead of terrorism and violent radicalization and deal with the changes and the evolution of these scourges. The approach to these circumstances entails regular assessment of these strategies, in order to determine the degree to which their goals are achieved, and optimize allocation of resources and concentration of efforts.

This led to 2019 NCTS, the first Strategy to be made publicly available, which involved society as a whole as a key stakeholder in the fight against terrorism. By publishing 2023 NCTS, we aim to make this normal practice.

NCTS is therefore conceived as a living document, enabling it to be adapted to changing threats and terrorist tactics, as well as the threat linked to different groups and actors associated with violent extremism. Several factors play a part in this evolution: deteriorating global security, the return of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs), attacks by lone actors, terrorist and extremist propaganda, as well as radicalization processes in prisons.

Therefore, terrorism and those involved in it:

- remain predominantly jihad-oriented;

- increasingly use advanced technology including drones, cryptography and social media; use technology in their recruitment and radicalization efforts, as well as to coordinate and communicate more easily and more effectively;

- have a more decentralized and fragmented structure, making identification and dismantlement more difficult;

- have adopted an approach increasingly aimed at soft targets;

- support the activities of lone actors without links to organizations, who are affected by mental illness.

International security has also been affected by the threats and challenges to global security posed by changes in the geostrategic environment. The rise in geopolitical tension, increased connectivity, constant technological revolution and social polarization dynamics are just some of the issues transforming the global environment and which characterize the terrorism we must confront.

Aligned with the National Security Strategy and the equivalent strategies of the international organizations of which Spain is a member, 2023 NCTS takes into account agreements and measures promoted by those organizations. Since the approval of 2019 NCTS, new responses and answers have been championed within the framework of the European Union (EU), the United Nations (UN), NATO and the Council of Europe in order to deal with the threat of terrorism and violent extremism.

During this time, the EU has developed a regulatory and legal framework that expands prevention and protection measures and responses regarding EU citizens. The EU has also reaffirmed the importance of discussions of counter-terrorism between the Union and third countries and international organizations, and strengthened its strategic partnerships, as well as multilateral counter-terrorist collaboration. Moreover, the EU has continued to develop new instruments to combat terrorism, making use of the necessary political and operational measures in order to improve anticipation of, protection against and response to this threat. All of the above must follow the principles of and focus on human rights and the rule of law.

In this context, special priority has been given to the Western Balkans, the North of Africa, the Middle East, the Sahel and the Horn of Africa.

Furthermore, the EU has developed plans in specific action areas such as the Counter-Terrorism Action Plan for Afghanistan.

The plan is intended to lead to adoption of measures to prevent creation of safe havens for terrorists, which may then become hubs from which terrorism spreads. These measures include reinforced checks on entries into the EU and strengthening systematic exchanges of information and strategic intelligence among Member States and with other international organizations and institutions.

Moreover, the EU continues to promote the role of the Counter-Terrorism/Security Experts' Network, boosting research related to the sources of terrorist financing, such as the improper use of the Internet and of new technologies for said purposes.

As for cybersecurity, the EU has developed guidelines and regulations to prevent and combat the spread of terrorist content. The EU's new Cybersecurity Strategy has laid the foundations for the creation of the new collective capabilities to respond to cyber attacks, while promoting the joint work of partners and allies to guarantee international security and stability in cyberspace.

In the area of cooperation between the EU and the Council of Europe, there is a new Council of Europe Counter-Terrorism Strategy for 2023–2027. Its aims are to expand efforts to combat manifestations of terrorism, their roots, and their driving forces, in the face of the growing threat of violent extremism in Europe, the use of new technologies for recruitment and training, and the violation of the laws of armed conflict.
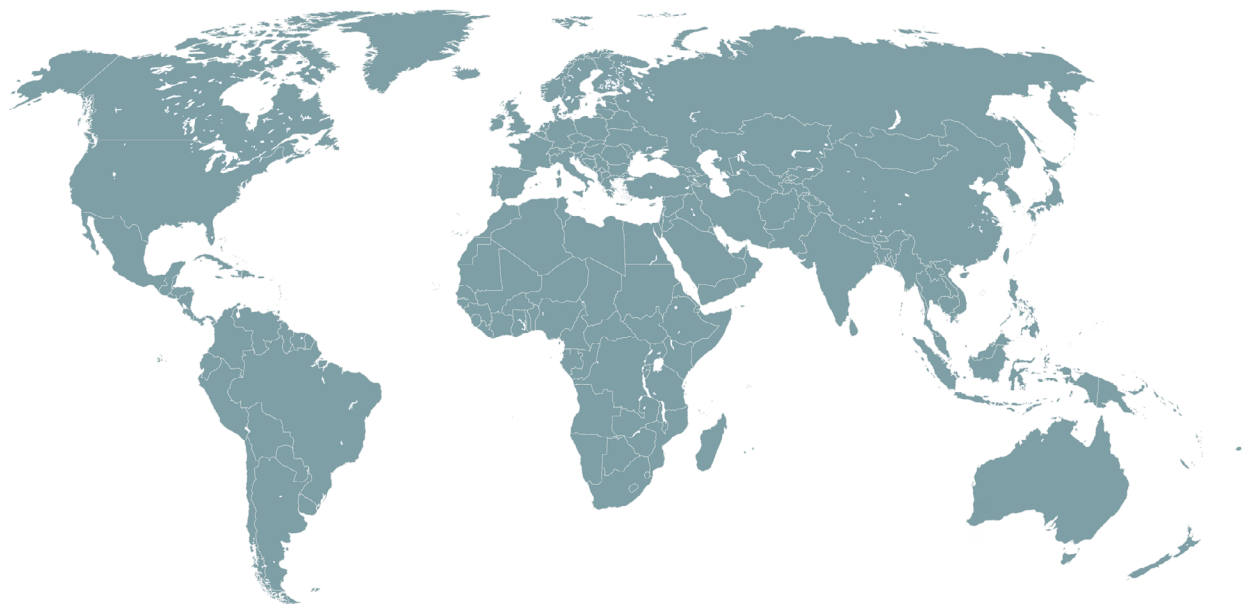
Continuing with this summary of the importance attached to the fight against terrorism by the main international organizations of which Spain is a member, a new Strategic Concept was approved by consensus at the NATO summit held in Madrid in June 2022. It states, "Terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, is the most direct asymmetric threat to the security of our citizens and to international peace and prosperity".

Lastly, the seventh review was performed of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, whose drafting Spain co-led and which takes a comprehensive approach to the fight against terrorism. This Strategy recognizes that the international terrorist threat exists outside the Middle East, with influence expanding into Europe, Africa and Asia. Moreover, it notes new terrorist threats with different ideological and political roots, which must be addressed in order to guarantee citizens' rights.

In this context, with regard to the institutional counter-terrorism framework, in June 2023 the Madrid Office of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism was created, which will publicize the measures pursued by the UN against this threat.

Chapter 2

The Threat of Terrorism and Violent Extremism

This chapter will analyse how terrorism and violent extremism have evolved, as well as Spain's position with regard to these threats.

A strategy that adapts to evolving threats

The first Spanish counter-terrorism strategy to be made publicly available was 2019 NCTS. It enabled a comprehensive approach to the fight against terrorism, strengthening collaboration and cooperation between different security agencies and advancing in the fight against violent extremism.

This update of 2019 NCTS follows the principles set forth in the 2021 National Security Strategy on the need to reduce society's vulnerability and to neutralize the threat of terrorist actions targeting Spanish citizens and interests both within and without the country's borders, as well as to address the radicalization processes which lead to violent extremism. To achieve this, the collaboration of society, law enforcement agencies and intelligence services is required, as well as that of the armed forces in international missions against terrorism.

Current challenges arising from terrorism and violent extremism

Terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, is one of the greatest threats to Spain and its citizens, given its asymmetric and transnational nature. Terrorism today has evolved towards decentralized and fragmented structures, with smaller groups and less hierarchical structures, operating across different countries.

FTFs represent an ever-increasing threat to national security and international stability, as they may return to their country of origin or of residence. This problem is common to the entire EU: the training and indoctrination these fighters have received, as well as their possible links to terrorist organizations, mean there is a risk they may carry out attacks on home soil or recruit new terrorists.

Radicalization in prison is an increasing concern around the globe. Prisons can sometimes be fertile ground for radicalization of individuals with similar experiences, who are especially vulnerable to violent extremism and the radicalization that leads to terrorism.

Terrorist and extremist propaganda is constantly changing, adapting to new technologies and methods, to access a wider, younger and more vulnerable population, and thus have a greater impact on radicalization of individuals. Such propaganda is spread using encrypted messaging platforms, artificial intelligence and social media.

Social media and the continuous appearance of new platforms have created increasingly effective means for terrorist and extremist groups to recruit and radicalize new members.

Attacks carried out by lone actors or small groups are particularly hard to detect and prevent.

There is also an economic angle to combating terrorism and violent extremism. Extremist groups constantly explore different sources to finance their activities, including fund-raising online, virtual assets, new financial platforms, drug and weapons trafficking, and kidnapping.

Terrorist and extremist groups are adopting new attack techniques and methods that are difficult to anticipate. To combat links to organized crime, use of drones and cybercrime, strategies must be continuously adapted and updated.

The improper use of a range of technological advances, such as artificial intelligence, quantum cryptography and virtual reality, among others, are present and future challenges that must be addressed.

In conclusion, the fight against terrorism and violent extremism entails a multi-faceted challenge. The different factors that can lead to radicalization and violence call for a coordinated and efficient response from the international community to prevent and combat them.

Increase in the threat posed by lone actors

The threat posed by lone actors has increased in recent years largely due to:

- accessibility of extremist propaganda online: immediate and easy access to radical information on the internet and social media facilitates the radicalization of individuals without them becoming members of established terrorist groups;

- difficulty of detection: lone attackers are difficult to detect because they act alone or in small groups, and do not have direct links to formal terrorist organizations;

- use of any kind of instrument as a weapon to carry out terrorist attacks.

Although no one single profile applies to all lone attackers, analysis of European cases has provided very valuable information on the magnitude of the threat this type of terrorist activity poses, the most likely ways attacks will be committed, and lone attackers' activity and behaviour, especially in the run-up to an attack.

In order to deal with this threat, we must adopt preventive security measures, such as early identification of radicalization processes and agents, and the removal of terrorist content from the Internet. It is also important to promote education and raise awareness in society on the threat from lone attackers, as well as to foster tolerance and inclusion to prevent radicalization.

Lone attackers and mental health

Initiatives and research to identify possible links between mental health and radicalization have become a priority in all strategies to combat terrorism and prevent violent radicalization, both within the European Union and internationally.

Experts have concluded that no direct links can be drawn between mental illness and violent radicalization; however, certain mental illnesses can make individuals more vulnerable. This vulnerability is predominant among lone attackers. Social isolation is a particularly important added risk factor.

Foreign terrorist fighters in Spain

Since the start of the conflict in Syria in 2011, a significant number of individuals residing in Spain or of Spanish origin have joined terrorist groups such as Da'esh and Al-Qaida.

This trend is a threat to national security and represents a significant concern for the Spanish authorities, especially in the case of returned foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs). Their presence and activity in conflict zones has provided them with sufficient operational knowledge, experience in handling weapons, contacts, knowledge of routes and facilitators, possibly a position of leadership, turning them into the backbone of radical propaganda and providing them with real chances of later committing acts of terrorism.

Spain has adopted the necessary measures to monitor FTFs, making a unified shared list of such fighters, managed by the Centre for Intelligence against Terrorism and Organized Crime (CITCO). The Centre updates necessary police and court surveillance measures, as well as sharing data as needed through the usual channels.

The Spanish legal framework includes a series of measures to combat terrorism and violent extremism, fostering international cooperation and strengthening monitoring and surveillance procedures at the country's points of entry and exit.

Repatriation of women and children currently in refugee camps or prisons in areas with a large terrorist presence is another factor linked to the phenomenon of FTFs. Policies for the return of women and children from said conflict areas have been the subject of debate, owing to the complexity of the situation in the region and existing concerns over security issues. Nevertheless, the EU has acknowledged the need to address this issue and has put in place some programmes to facilitate the return of these people.

The measures adopted by the EU include identification and registration of European citizens in the region, collaboration with countries of origin to facilitate repatriation, guarantees of access to health care and psychological care, and social and labour market reintegration programmes for repatriated persons.

The EU has encouraged Member States to take measures to facilitate the safe and voluntary return to countries of origin. To this end, mechanisms have been established for coordination and cooperation among Member States, local authorities in the region and international organizations.

However, repatriation of these persons is a complex and delicate issue. Many EU Member States are reluctant to receive citizens who have joined extremist groups in the region.

In this regard, Spain has completed some repatriation processes for women and children in refugee camps in the countries most affected by terrorism, guaranteeing their well-being and protection, as well as psychological and social support to allow their reintegration into society and prevent possible future radicalization, either of the repatriated persons themselves or of those close to them.

Propaganda as a tool to spread violent ideologies

Propaganda has been used as a tool to spread violent ideologies throughout history. It is a key component of terrorist organizations' strategies, and it is their main tool to radicalize sympathizers and spur them to act. Propaganda is used to spread a message and attract followers, justifying and promoting violence as a way to achieve their goals.

Terrorist and extremist groups use propaganda to attract vulnerable persons, promoting a distorted view of reality, in which violence and extremism are the only ways of achieving significant changes. Propaganda creates a feeling of belonging and camaraderie among members of such groups, which can be especially attractive for those who feel marginalized or excluded by society. In this regard, it is essential to pursue strategies that counter violent propaganda and promote peaceful and constructive alternatives to resolve issues.

Increase in violent extremism that can lead to terrorism

The increase in extremism and radicalism, and their possible expression through terrorist, violent, racist or xenophobic acts is a worrying global trend.

Moreover, extremist, violent, denialist and anti-establishment forms of extremism reject scientific, historical and political evidence, and create distrust of institutions.

Violent extremist movements seek to impose their view of the world through illegitimate and anti-democratic means, and they pose a threat to society's safety and well-being.

Several factors contribute to growth of this threat:

- Polarization caused by economic, health, social, energy and migratory crises, as well as growing mistrust of institutions, which can lead to adoption of extremist or radical ideologies, especially among young people.

- Discrimination, racism and a sense of grievance favour the adoption of extreme or radical ideologies, especially among marginalized or excluded groups.

- Propaganda and misinformation used to spread this kind of ideology, especially on social media and other online media.

Risks in prisons

Monitoring and supervision in prisons is a priority for Spain and other EU Member States. This is because prisons can be fertile ground for radical individuals to proselytize, radicalize and recruit persons who are prone to violence or especially vulnerable to violent extremist ideology and radicalization, leading to terrorism among the prison population.

In Spain, since 2019 NCTS entered into force and as a result of counter-terrorism operations by the country's law enforcement agencies, many people have been jailed

for crimes related to jihadist terrorism. Many of them have been released after they served their sentences and are now on probation. During that same period, as part of the implementation of the prison strategy to prevent and detect radicalization processes, monitoring and surveillance protocols have been activated and applied to certain prisoners who, despite being in prison for other crimes, have shown signs of being actively or passively involved in radicalization processes.

Geostrategic context

Geographically, Spanish territory is not limited to the Iberian Peninsula; it also includes archipelagos, islands, outcrops and the Autonomous Cities of Ceuta and Melilla, as well as a significant maritime area. Geography and history make Spain a European, Mediterranean, and Atlantic country, which reaches out to the world in its commitment to contribute to international peace and security.

"Our geographical location puts us in a privileged position and, at the same time, places us in a scenario not lacking in difficulties and risks".

The main terrorist threat for Spain is still from jihadist terrorist organizations, mainly Da'esh and Al-Qaida. Currently, their strategies for the West are centred on calls for their followers to commit terrorist acts by themselves.

In addition, Da'esh and Al-Qaida are considered to be seeking to carry out large attacks in Europe. To do this, they could make use of FTFs who have returned from conflict zones or members from their regional branches or local cells.

The Sahel, the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Guinea are the main areas in sub-Saharan Africa where terrorist violence has increased exponentially and where, in some cases, there are also governance crises, internal inter-ethnic violence or humanitarian emergencies which feed into growing instability.

This multifaceted crisis in the Sahel inevitably affects the stability of the area and has a direct impact on Spanish interests. This is especially true in the case of the terrorist threat and the increase in irregular migratory flows, which can be exploited by terrorist organizations to cover their movements. Therefore, Spain considers that counter-terrorism efforts in this region must focus on training missions, to enable local

law enforcement agencies to fight terrorism, and on improving systems to control migration.

Combating terrorism in the Maghreb is a priority for Spain. It affects the country's security and interests in the area directly and, therefore, is a major challenge in that respect. Links between organized crime and terrorism are leading to the expansion and development of jihadist terrorism, providing the African branches of Da'esh and Al-Qaida with logistics, training and weapons.

The security situation in the Maghreb is therefore one of the most significant factors affecting the terrorist threat level in Spain and Spanish interests in the region. Moreover, several factors contribute to this threat, such as the close ties between Maghribi jihadists and Spanish residents and the high proportion of Maghribi FTFs and terrorists detained in Spain.

Specific ties detected between jihadists and people trafficking networks, especially in the central Mediterranean, increase the risk of highly radicalized individuals, as well as returned persons and other terrorists, gaining entry into Europe.

European and international collaboration and cooperation in security matters in the area is the key tool to counter this growing threat.

The complex situation in Afghanistan is also worthy of mention, where after the departure of American troops, the Taliban retook power in August 2021. In this context, security in Afghanistan is becoming increasingly fragile. Da'esh's branch in Afghanistan, known as Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), is continuing to step up its activities. It has consolidated as the main threat for the self-proclaimed Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA). In this regard, ISKP considers Afghanistan a potential location to develop its operability and expand its ideology into neighbouring countries or even Western countries. ISKP is increasing its capacity to carry out high-impact attacks in the area and boosting its political and religious propaganda. This system strengthens its presence in the area.

As regards security, the threat of terrorism in Asia requires a comprehensive strategy that combines the fight against terrorism and insurgency with strengthening local law enforcement agencies and creating a safer and more peaceful society. This strategy

would need international cooperation and collaboration to achieve lasting peace and stability.

A potential catalyst for terrorism is the war caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The situation in Ukraine has led to an increase in the circulation of weapons and explosives, as well as participation in the war by volunteer fighters of other nationalities. These circumstances could be exploited by those involved in global terrorism, terrorist organizations, related groups or sympathizers to undermine public security, and by State actors to carry out terrorist attacks.

The new flashpoint of global instability caused by the war between Israel and Hamas is not only affecting security; it is having social, political, economic and migratory consequences whose scope is difficult to foresee. Terrorism, violent extremism and the appearance of new movements that promote radical and violent ideologies pose a real and direct risk.

Lastly, domestic terrorism, after its defeat by the democratic State and the rule of law, is not a significant threat today. Nevertheless, law enforcement agencies must continue their work investigating criminal acts. We must also honour the memory of victims of terrorism and raise social awareness of democracy's fight against terrorism.

Goals

Terrorists aim to destabilize and create chaos to bring about political, social, religious or economic changes. Specific goals and ideologies vary from one terrorist group to another. Their actions usually seek to undermine the stability and functioning of a government, organization or society as a whole, using targeted or indiscriminate attacks against people, infrastructure, the economy or the interests of a specific country.

In recent years, targets in the West have evolved from large gatherings, the media, transportation hubs, means of transport, places of worship, and personnel from the armed forces and law enforcement agencies, to random individuals, as a result of attacks committed by lone actors where opportunity trumps preparation.

Many attacks in such scenarios, by lone jihadi terrorists, were carried out with little preparation and rudimentary methods, such as running over or stabbing victims. This makes such attacks difficult to prevent and detect, but highly lethal, which increases their usefulness as propaganda.

In Spain, there is still a terrorist threat from self-radicalized individuals instilled with jihadist propaganda. The current trend suggests that lone actors are more likely to be involved, but small groups cannot be ruled out. In both cases, simple and easy to access means would be used. However, we must not rule out the use of firearms or homemade explosives, or even more sophisticated methods. They prioritize so-called soft targets: large gatherings in public spaces, means of transport, transportation hubs, large events or celebrations, and easily accessible places of worship. Attacks on any of these can lead to a high number of victims.

Law enforcement agencies have continued to carry out counter-terrorism operations. They have noted the existence of individual and group support structures for several jihadist organizations, with the potential to become operational.

Chapter 3

Spain: Safe from Terrorism and Resilient to It

This chapter lists the actions carried out in Spain, as well as measures or plans to be implemented to reduce risks and threats.

Spain is a social and democratic State governed by the rule of law. It is also a leader of and active contributor to international security. Terrorism and violent radicalization are global threats to which Spain is also exposed. Because of the magnitude of the risks and threats, the resources, means, systems and organizations used to address them must be adapted, to make them more resilient.

Spain's position in the fight against terrorism

Spain has developed leading security models, which must continue to be updated in line with a pro-active, inclusive and resilient approach to address global threats that require comprehensive, coordinated and cooperative responses, at the national and international levels.

The fight against all kinds of terrorism and violent extremism requires political and social unity; the involvement of central, regional and local administrations; civil servants and society as a whole; efficient and coordinated actions by law enforcement agencies, the armed forces, intelligence services; and continuous support and assistance for victims.

As made clear by 2019 NCTS, Spanish experience in the fight against all kinds of terrorism and violent extremism has enabled the country to extract best practices and lessons, including:

- the effectiveness of a firm determination to combat terrorism, which translates into taking the initiative against terrorists and mobilizing all of the capacities of the State and of society as a whole;

- joint action by all public powers supported by the maximum political and social consensus, allowing lasting action with all of the weight and the effectiveness of the rule of law; reflecting international collaboration, police and judicial activity, and the importance of the intelligence community;

- the fight against terrorism from two social angles, seeking to create a society which is ever more resilient to terrorism and violent extremism, and is also inspired by and supportive of the exemplary civic role of the victims of terrorism.

A true reflection of these practices is comprehensive coordination and cooperation, exemplified by the Inter-Agency Protocol for Responding to Terrorist Attacks, approved by the National Security Council in June 2022, which identifies the different actors in the State Administration, as well as their capacities and duties in the event of a terrorist attack.

Well-established strengths in the fight against terrorism

Experience in combating terrorism gives Spain well-established strengths. The country has robust legislation and specialized prosecutors and courts. Political consensus is another defining characteristic of the Spanish counter-terrorism model; political unity favours social cohesion that supports victims and opposes terrorism. It also sends a message of resolve and determination to those who seek to destroy our free and democratic way of life.

The country has information and intelligence structures with powers to deal with terrorist threats, a comprehensive national approach to national security and its society has great resilience to overcome terrorism and its effects. This all operates under the principle of protecting people's lives, rights, and freedoms, and the constitutional order.

Spain's security and intelligence agencies have been able to evolve and show their effectiveness in combating terrorism, adapting to new trends in terrorist threats arising from the current situation. Despite the constant risk of terrorist attack, which also affects Spain's partners, a keystone of the country's struggle against terrorism is its experience in investigating and combating domestic terrorism.

Counter-terrorism operations and arrests on terrorism charges in Spain

During the period covered by the previous NCTS, from 2019 to 2023, over 110 operations related to terrorist activity were carried out. Of these, over 90% were linked to terrorism with jihadist roots, and a little over 5% were linked to domestic terrorism.

Agreement to build unity in defence of freedom and the fight against terrorism

This agreement, known as the "Anti-Terror Agreement", was set in motion in 2015 by the two main political parties in Spain. Later, almost all Spanish parties with parliamentary representation joined the agreement. Since 2015, several meetings have been held, and it is still a vital tool to display democratic unity publicly in the wake of terrorist attacks committed in Spain and neighbouring countries.

Comprehensive protection for the victims of terrorism

Throughout its history, Spain has suffered terrorism originating from different ideologies. The 11 March 2004 attack in Madrid had the highest number of victims of any terrorist attack in Europe. To pay homage to the victims, every 11 March the EU holds a European Day of Remembrance of Victims of Terrorism.

Spain believes in promoting values of freedom, peace, democracy and the memory of victims as moral and ethical guiding principles for society. The story of victims of terrorism is an active factor in preventing terrorism and violent radicalism and a key tool for strategic communication to counter any narrative inciting or legitimizing terrorist activity.

Spain's model for protecting and supporting victims of terrorism is emulated around the world. The model was born from a legislative agreement signed as part of the Law on the Recognition and Comprehensive Protection of Victims of Terrorism, passed in 2011. It gained very broad support in Parliament, with one of the highest number of votes in favour in recent years, and was based on the principles of memory, dignity, justice and truth. In addition, there are specific bodies to support public administrations, as well as a number of diverse associations, foundations and civil movements, representing victims and their families.

Spain played a leading role in promoting counter-terrorism policies and, particularly, policies to support victims of terrorism, during the first Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism, under the auspices of the UN.

Funding of terrorism

The fight against the use of cryptoassets or cryptocurrency or any kind of financial innovation used for payments or investments to fund terrorist activities is one of the main lines of action to neutralize terrorism.

Therefore, we must increase the specialization of all institutions and bodies that, under the rule of law, have the mission of fighting terrorism and violent radicalization. Thus, training for judges, prosecutors, police units and the staff of all the other public bodies with powers to investigate financing of terrorism will put analysis of wealth and assets at the heart of inquiries and make it a key part of prevention and eradication of this threat.

It is also important to continue promoting interoperability between databases in different institutions, in order to identify actors and enable full traceability of funds that could be used for terrorist purposes.

Lastly, it is also important to encourage establishment of channels for sharing information among bodies and institutions, both public and private. These channels should be used to communicate important information on use of new technologies, as well as any possible money-laundering or financing of terrorism.

Preventing and combating radicalization

The prevention and fight against radicalization must be the result of the joint, ongoing work carried out by consensus between the authorities and Spanish civil society. Its main goal is to establish an effective framework to mitigate factors or motivations which could lead people into violent radicalization processes of any kind, fostering knowledge of those processes and how to deal with them. All of this will enable us to make society more aware, mindful, safe and resilient.

In the case of prisons, preventing and combating radicalization is a priority goal. The aim is to detect individuals who may be involved a radicalization process, whether they are radicalizing or being radicalized, and to be able to intervene in these processes, from security and treatment perspectives.

Moreover, international and, especially, European collaboration through the European Commission's Project Based Collaborations on the local sphere in order to prevent radicalization is seeking to create a European guide for the prevention of radicalization, which aims to support local communities. The guide will be a national support tool to set up these groups and assist their functioning within the new structure. Simultaneously, Spain takes part in the European Commission's Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN), which seeks to exchange information on best practices and lessons learned, and issue recommendations for Member States on preventing radicalization.

Neutralizing propaganda on social media and the Internet

The European Agenda on Security, presented by the European Commission in 2015, set the fight against the spread of terrorist propaganda on the Internet as a priority. To this end, a voluntary cooperation framework was established among Member States and hosting service providers, which remains in place to date.

One of the initiatives that was rolled out in December 2015 was the creation of the EU Internet Forum. This forum has been promoting voluntary cooperation between Member States and hosting service providers, as well as other measures to reduce access to terrorist content online. It has also empowered civil society to give greater voice to effective counter-narratives online.

The development of different initiatives at EU level on removing online terrorist content made it clear that the system for reporting such content needed to be accompanied by a clear legal framework that could help to continue reducing the availability of such content, thus contributing to combating this constantly evolving problem.

International collaboration

Faced with a shared threat that affects the entire international community, the only possible solutions will be the fruit of joint efforts and cooperation. Therefore, Spain is committed to combating terrorism with a response based on international collaboration and coordinated action with our closest allies and participation in international initiatives.

Internationally, Spain co-led the seventh Revision of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, adopted by the UN General Assembly by consensus in July 2021. As part of this Strategy, the first High-level International Conference on Human Rights, Civil Society and Counter-Terrorism was held in May 2022 in Málaga. A few months later, the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) Office in Madrid opened.

Moreover, Spain is an active participant in international initiatives and projects to combat terrorism and violent extremism. This guarantees reinforced, seamless collaboration with other European authorities and with police and intelligence services from other countries.

Operations and arrests abroad

International cooperation in security and intelligence matters is increasingly necessary, and it has notably increased in intensity in recent years. Spanish law enforcement agencies have carried out coordinated operations with other countries and supplied information to foreign law enforcement agencies.

In this regard, Spain takes part in EU and international organization projects to strengthen institutions and train local security forces in the fight against terrorism in different geographical areas.

Citizen collaboration

Citizen collaboration is an essential instrument of society's rejection of violence and the processes that justify its use. The struggle against radicalization, violent extremism and terrorism involves all of society, whose unity allows more effective policies to be applied to counter these phenomena.

As well as using means made available by security and intelligence services, citizens collaborate in the prevention of terrorism through different channels such as the Coordination Centre for Information on Radicalization. These channels must make communication between citizens and institutions easier, in order to report any sign of radicalization or extremist, intolerant or hateful behaviour motivated by racism, xenophobia, or beliefs and ideologies that glorify violence, as well as possible cases of radicalization in individuals or movements to and from conflict zones.

Treating radicalization and assessing risk of radicalization in prisons

The 2021 National Security Strategy underscores the need to improve and update the tools for preventing, detecting and monitoring radicalization processes in prisons through implementation of radicalization risk detection and assessment tools and treatment programmes.

Spanish prison authorities have developed their own objective, actuarial, quantitative tool to assess the risk of violent jihadist radicalization. It provides individual profiles on violence and radicalization on each case, and supports prison interventions, at the level of both treatment and security.

Chapter 4

Goal, Principles, Mission and Vision

This chapter establishes the strategy's general goal, as well as its guiding principles, its mission and its vision.

Strategic Goal

Neutralizing the terrorist threat to Spanish citizens and interests at home and abroad, reducing the vulnerability of society, and addressing processes of radicalization leading to violent extremism and terrorism.

Strategic Goal

Neutralizing the threat posed by terrorism

Guiding Principles

Unity of action, promoting coordination, cooperation and collaboration, both domestically and internationally

Vision

Fostering necessary conditions of freedom, security and justice, promoting peaceful living among all citizens

Mission

Protecting life and freedom, boosting safety and well-being, countering the threat

Principles

The protection of the exercise of human rights is a guiding principle of this NCTS, fostering the conditions that guarantee the freedom and safety of all people, and of society as a whole.

Ongoing support and assistance to victims of terrorism, and respect for their dignity and memory are a fundamental guiding principle for NCTS.

Comprehensive coordination and cooperation are necessary principles to unify the actors within the administration involved in responding to a terrorist attack, streamlining and optimizing their capabilities and powers.

In line with the basic principles that inform national security policy, the guiding principles of this Strategy are:

- a comprehensive vision of security;

- shared commitment and responsibility, which involves the Administration as a whole, private-sector bodies, civil society, and international organizations and coalitions of which Spain is a member;

- unity of action, promoting coordination, cooperation and collaboration, both domestically and internationally;

- coherence, efficiency and anticipation in preparing actions;

- resilience as a resistance and recovery capacity with respect to terrorist attacks;

- transparency and accessibility;

- adequacy and sustainability of resources;

- specialization and updating to adapt to the changing nature of threats;

- the importance of internal coordination between different public administrations and cooperation internationally and within the EU.

Mission

Protecting life and freedom, boosting safety and well-being, countering the threat posed by terrorism and violent extremism to Spanish citizens and interests within and outside Spain, as well as online, reducing society's vulnerability and addressing the processes of radicalization that lead to violent extremism and terrorism.

Vision

Fostering necessary conditions of freedom, security and justice, promoting peaceful coexistence among all citizens, contributing to the consolidation of a democratic, pluralistic, and diverse society that is resilient to terrorism and violent extremism.

This security environment must be the result of an integrated and coordinated action by society as a whole, whose involvement must be encouraged as an vital requirement for the enjoyment of freedom, justice, well-being, progress and citizens' rights, contributing as such to the resilience of its structures. It aims to:

- create a feeling of responsibility in every citizen for their own and their fellow citizens' security, collaborating actively with State institutions in the struggle against the threat posed by terrorism and violent extremism and, if needed, swiftly mitigating the effects of a terrorist attack;

- achieve coordinated action by all administrations and institutions, as a tool to counter the threat of terrorism and violent extremism, boosting society's protection;

- accomplish permanently integrated operation of the institutions responsible for combating terrorism in any of its forms during processes for assessing risks and threats, planning and implementation of prevention, protection and persecution actions and initiatives against terrorists and terrorist organizations, and of networks that may provide them with the capabilities to act.

Chapter 5

Pillars, Strategic Objectives and Lines of Action

This chapter sets out the specific goals for each of the four pillars of the State's concerted action, and the strategic objectives and lines of action that must be adopted in order to achieve those goals.

| Prevent | Protect | Pursue | Prepare |

PREVENT

Prevent recruitment and indoctrination of terrorists and violent extremists, promoting coordinated action by the different stakeholders involved in prevention, detection and treatment of radicalization that encourages violence, as well as the ideologies and resources that support it.

Strategic Objective: Spread knowledge and encourage society to commit to the fight against terrorism as one of the main measures to improve the prevention thereof, and foster the creation of a less vulnerable society.

- Promote training of stakeholders involved in the fight against terrorism and violent radicalization.

- Implement and develop the Comprehensive Plan for National Security Culture as the foundation for freedom, progress and well-being for all citizens and society as a whole, which form the basis on which the rule of law is built and rests.

- Prioritize actions for highly vulnerable groups, especially with regard to protection of minors from radicalization for terrorist purposes.

- Prioritize care for individuals affected by mental illnesses, to protect them from radicalization for terrorist purposes.

- Publicize the accounts of victims of terrorism, as tool to prevent radicalization, countering the terrorist narrative.

- Boost different communication channels between citizens and the different bodies that allow rapid and efficient interaction with law enforcement agencies.

Strategic Objective: Combat indoctrination and violent radicalization.

- Implement the Strategic National Plan to Prevent and Combat Violent Radicalization and its associated plans, which view the problem from a cross-cutting and integrated perspective, as well as the plans drawn up by the different public administrations and bodies with powers in this sphere.

- Strengthen laws to facilitate the blocking and removal of terrorist content online, in accordance with European law.

Strategic Objective: Combat terrorist financing.

- Boost the identification, recovery and management of assets domestically and internationally.

- Promote international collaboration and cooperation in the field of undesirable investment funds.

- Implement a Strategic National Plan to Counter the Financing of Terrorism, as well as associated plans, seeking to address the problem from a cross-cutting and integrated perspective.

Strategic Objective: Improve tools to identify, assess and analyse risk.

- Strengthen the National Unit for Reporting Online Content.

- Promote the development of tools to combat radical violent or terrorist propaganda on social media and the Internet.

- Bolster the systems allowing the assessment and prospective analysis on the risk of terrorist threats.

Strategic Objective: Increase capabilities in the fight against disinformation.

- Increase the capabilities of public administrations and investigation units of law enforcement agencies to tackle disinformation campaigns which affect national security or have terrorist or radicalization purposes, whether through the publication of false narratives, the use of cognitive warfare, hybrid strategies, persistent manipulation or other tactics, techniques and procedures.

- Promote international, domestic and public-private collaboration between competent bodies, civil society and academia.

Strategic Objective: Promote international coordination, cooperation and collaboration and the development of common foreign action, both within international organizations and bilaterally.

- Take part in forums, initiatives and projects internationally to prevent terrorism and violent radicalization.

- Support the training of law enforcement agencies in third counties in the fight against terrorism.

Strategic Objective: Support and strengthen the UNOCT Office in Madrid.

- Support the provision of aid and collaboration from UNOCT to Member States to create and build capacities in the fight against terrorism.

Strategic Objective: Boost intelligence work.

- Strengthen information gathering capabilities and production of intelligence relating to the nature, scope and trend of terrorist threats and the associated risks, and share information and intelligence with partners and allies.

Strategic Objective: Prevent radicalization in prisons.

- Promote the adoption of cooperation, coordination and collaboration framework among the different prison administrations, and between said administrations and the intelligence and information services.

- Prevent, detect and counter radicalization processes in prisons through identification and monitoring of individuals promoting or holding extremist ideas, and act appropriately.

Strategic Objective: Prevent the risk of movement of radicalized persons to and from conflict zones, as well as the return of FTFs.

- Foster international cooperation on the transfer and return of displaced persons.

- Boost and share information with partners or allies in cases of FTF return.

- Promote the necessary legal mechanisms to guarantee a suitable response to this threat.

- Develop risk assessment of FTFs.

PROTECT

Guarantee maximum safety and protection for society, citizens, institutions and national interests, reducing the vulnerability of potentially sensitive targets to terrorism and violent extremism, making the State's actions visible.

Strategic Objective: Implement and develop specific protection plans, as well as related second-level plans.

- Always keep the Prevention, Protection, and Anti-Terrorist Response Plan up to date.

- Strengthen chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear protection plans, and the protection plans for cybersecurity, critical infrastructure, ports and airports and public and sensitive areas.

- Cooperate on security, control and non-proliferation of the international trafficking of weapons and explosives, as well as their precursors and dual-use materials.

- Update and implement protection plans for individuals at high risk, as well as mitigating the vulnerabilities of critical infrastructure based on its staff.

- Use appropriate channels to keep Spanish citizens abroad informed about the risk situation and the measures to adopt if they are affected by a terrorist attack, ensuring the protection of Spanish interests abroad.

Strategic Objective: Boost cooperation and coordination measures with regard to law enforcement agencies and security companies.

- Reinforce private security as a complement to and collaborator in public safety, encouraging training and information sharing within the rule of law regarding terrorism and violent extremism.

Strategic Objective: Increase capabilities and resources, and promote detection tools.

- Strengthen cybersecurity, border controls, and controls on the trafficking of weapons, explosives and dual-use materials.

Strategic Objective: European and international cooperation and coordination.

- Participate in and promote protection measures within the EU, strengthening external borders and interoperability through databases and integrated digitalization.

- Pursue and develop protection and collaboration measures on security policies with third countries.

Strategic Objective: Boost information sharing.

- Boost information sharing and reciprocal assistance nationally and internationally.

PURSUE

Detect and investigate terrorists and violent extremists comprehensively and globally, preventing planning and execution of attacks, acting against their support, logistics and finance networks, and ensuring their prosecution.

Strategic Objective: Combat financing.

- Develop a Strategic Plan to Combat the Financing of Terrorism and plans associated thereto.

- Bolter international cooperation in matters of financial investigation of terrorism and violent extremism.

Strategic Objective: Ensure and increase operative cooperation and coordination, as well as intelligence work.

- Strengthen the system for coordination between law enforcement agencies and private security.

- Boost cooperation, coordination and information exchange among the different prison administrations, and between said administrations and the intelligence and information services.

- Strengthen the tools for sharing information and intelligence domestically and internationally.

Strategic Objective: Thwart synergies between terrorism and organized crime.

- Boost control measures to avoid the establishment of ties between organized crime and terrorism.

Strategic Objective: Combat terrorists' narratives.

- Avoid and counter terrorist and violent extremist propaganda online or in any other medium.

Strategic Objective: Combat and eliminate the use of all types of weapons, explosives and dual-use materials.

- Boost control measures and early warning systems for all kinds of weapons, explosives and dual-use materials.

Strategic Objective: Boost and maintain international cooperation systems in criminal matters.

- Strengthen bilateral and multilateral instruments for international cooperation, facilitating the investigation and prosecution of the perpetrators and means used to commit terrorist attacks; promote the mutual recognition of court orders to guarantee the effective pursuit of perpetrators of terrorist crimes in Europe and internationally.

PREPARE

Minimize the consequences of terrorist attacks, guaranteeing maximum support for victims, repairing the damage caused and restoring normal conditions by implementing prepared actions and plans for a swift recovery, learning lessons to prepare for future response actions.

Strategic Objective: Promote a more resilient society.

- Develop society's action and response capabilities by means of comprehensive training in national security matters.

- Boost citizen collaboration by means of public programmes.

Strategic Objective: Minimize consequences and return to normal.

- Promote public-private coordination to minimize the consequences of a terrorist attack.

- Respond comprehensively in the physical and digital environments, and recover normality as swiftly as possible.

- Implement the Strategic Communication Plan for crisis management, allowing all stakeholders to minimize the impact, including psychological effects, of terrorist attacks and acts by violent extremists.

Strategic Objective: Foster comprehensive and ongoing support for victims of terrorism, based on respect for their dignity and memory.

- Circulate, especially through the EU Centre of Expertise for Victims of Terrorism and the Radicalization Awareness Network, the Spanish model's good practices with respect to comprehensive protection of victims of terrorism, as an international benchmark.

- Continue promoting the work of the Victims of Terrorism Memorial Centre Foundation.

- Actively promote specific training projects for educators, with teaching materials on the history, memory and prevention of terrorism in Spain.

Strategic Objective: Implement a system of lessons learned in crisis management matters.

- Develop critical assessment systems with the participation of all stakeholders, enabling optimization of future responses and extraction of lessons, as stated in the Inter-Institutional Protocol for Terrorist Attack Response.

Strategic Objective: Promote European and international cooperation.

- Share information and experiences within the EU on response mechanisms.

- Promote the review of EU legislation linked to the functioning of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism referred to in the Counter-Terrorism Agenda for the EU

- Keep the external threat map up to date.

- Strengthen assessment of threats and risks in areas of operation where the armed forces are deployed.

Final chapter

Combating Terrorism in the Framework of the National Security System

This chapter underscores how NCTS and the National Security System are interlinked.

The characteristics of the threat posed by terrorism and violent radicalization in all its forms concern national security, which is defined as the State's action to protect the freedom, rights and well-being of its citizens; guaranteeing Spain's defence and its constitutional principles and values; and to contribute to international security in collaboration with our partners and allies.

When directing national security policy and chairing the National Security System, the Spanish President is advised by the **National Security Council**, an executive committee of the Government for this matter, assisted by the sole specialized committee for the whole of the National Security System, the **Situation Committee.**
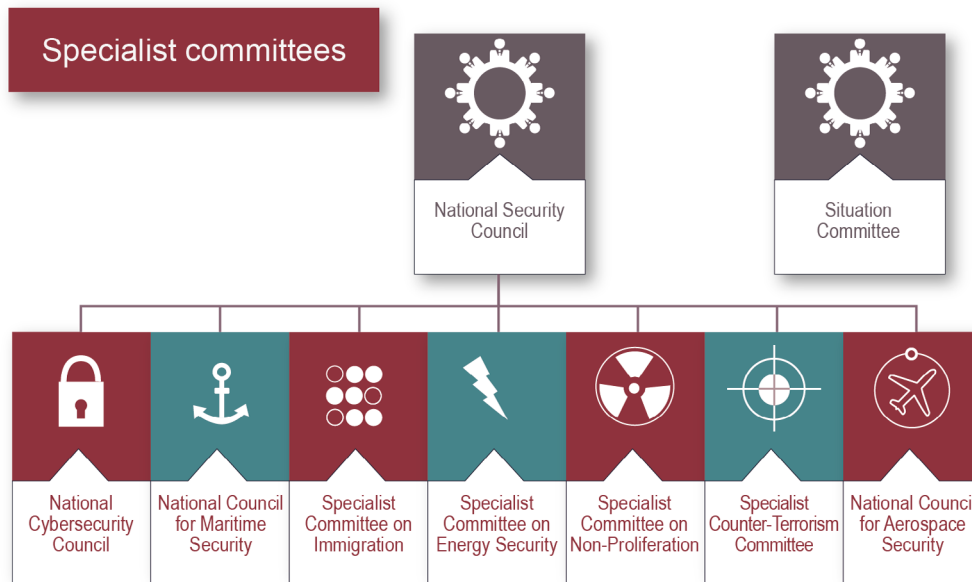
The Situation Committee is the body responsible for supporting the National Security Council in directing and coordinating **management of crisis situations**, including those related to terrorism and violent radicalization. Thus, the Situation Committee will be convened to manage crisis situations caused by terrorism or violent radicalization, and it will be supported by the **Specialist Counter-Terrorism Committee**, which is responsible for assisting the Situation Committee by carrying out complementary actions. Each must work within their remits, but in the same strategic and policy direction set by the National Security Council.

The **Specialist Counter-Terrorism Committee** is responsible for proposing to the National Security Council guidelines on planning and coordinating national security policy and aiding decision-making in matters related to combating terrorism. It also takes part in the analysis of the National Security System's performance with regard to combating terrorism and, where appropriate, proposes a review thereof.

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SECURITY
(Chair)

PRESIDENCY OF THE GOVERNMENT DIRECTOR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL SECURITY
(Deputy Chair)

PRESIDENCY OF THE GOVERNMENT - DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL SECURITY
(Secretary)

MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR
Intelligence Centre Against Terrorism and Organized Crime

MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR
Directorate General for Coordination and Studies of the Secretariat of State for Security

MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR
Information Commissioner General of the National Police

MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR
Chief of Intelligence of the Civil Guard

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, EUROPEAN UNION AND COOPERATION

MINISTRY OF THE PRESIDENCY, JUSTICE AND RELATIONS WITH PARLIAMENT

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

OTHER
appointed by the Committee Chair

SPECIALIST COUNTER-TERRORISM COMMITTEE

SECRETATIAT OF STATE FOR COMMUNICATION

NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE CENTRE

The Committee promotes cross-cutting initiatives against terrorism and violent radicalization, and it contributes to drafting regulatory proposals to strengthen the National Security System with respect to terrorism.

Moreover, it checks fulfilment of the Counter-Terrorism Strategy, takes part in processes to prepare draft strategic plans, implement existing plans and has the capacity to create task forces to provide technical support. Moreover, the Committee is the body responsible for strengthening relations between public administrations, as well as coordination and collaboration between the public and private sectors in counter-terrorism matters.

The Committee is chaired by the Secretary of State for Security. Owing to the multidisciplinary and cross-cutting nature of combating violent radicalization and-terrorism, departments and bodies with powers in these areas from across the administration take part. The National Security Department of the Office of the Presidency of the Government acts as Technical Secretariat and as a standing working body of the Specialist Counter-Terrorism Committee.

Crisis management

The National Security Strategy identifies a need to foster development of an integrated model to tackle crisis situations. Such a model enables, the National Security Council to detect and assess risks and threats and thus ensure an optimal coordinated response by the State, using its resources based on a comprehensive and resilient approach.

In this regard, **prevention** is a key element that requires awareness-raising and coordination by those responsible for tackling the terrorist threat. Such efforts enable suitable assessment of risks and, on the basis of the assessment, appropriate measures to improve citizens' safety.

Despite all of this, it is important to keep in mind that it is impossible to guarantee complete and absolute protection. Therefore, a coordinated, comprehensive and proportionate **operational response** must be prepared to risks stemming from the threat of terrorism. Moreover, where appropriate, steps must be taken to strengthen coordination of the operational capabilities of law enforcement agencies and other sector-based centres and bodies with powers in security matters in the event of terrorist attacks.

Preparing this response entails building an **organizational structure** based on the principle of unified action, promoting coordination, cooperation and collaboration, both domestically and internationally. Readiness to respond to a terror attack is a priority, achieved through strengthening of response coordination systems, victim assistance, remedy of damage caused, and recovery of institutional and social normality.

Experience in combating terrorism gives Spain well-established strengths. In this regard, Spain has robust legislation and prosecutors and courts with experience in the field. There are operational and intelligence structures with capabilities to tackle the terrorist threat, and also an integrated approach to national security, which, alongside law enforcement agencies' counter-terrorism capabilities, jointly offer a far-reaching response capacity.

How these response structures' act in the wake of a terrorist attack is determined by the Ministry of the Interior's operational framework, while the political and strategic response will originate from the National Security System, where appropriate, depending on the magnitude, cross-cutting nature or combination of factors.

Thus, in this specific area, further development is required of suitable measures to build a comprehensive **early warning system within the National Security System, based on critical political and strategic indicators**.

It is also of the utmost importance that effective and proactive **strategic communication** is fostered, allowing all stakeholders to respond to acts committed by terrorists or violent extremists, and to counter their propaganda, mitigating its repercussions and increasing the affected population and institutions' resilience, while encouraging collaboration and involvement by social media.

This strategic communication must be viewed comprehensively, with a three-pronged approach: the internal sphere, aimed at citizens; the external sphere, tackling terrorist threats in the today's globalized world, which occurs in an environment of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA); and, lastly, the capability to transmit to terrorists and violent extremists a clear and unmistakeable message of Spanish society's determination to use all lawful means to defeat them.

In conclusion, Spain's fight against terrorism and violent terrorism is based on a fully developed system which has proved to be highly capable in terms of preventing and managing crises, stemming from the large number of terrorist acts the country has had to handle. The system is equipped with extensive capabilities to respond to and swiftly recover from the effects of such acts, providing exemplary support to victims, with the greatest respect for their dignity and memory.

Term and updates

The 2023 NCTS will be **in place for five years**, as indicated in the 2021 National Security Strategy, and in line with all other related sector strategies.

Given the ever-changing nature of the risks linked to terrorism and violent radicalization, NCTS may, however, be updated earlier, if the National Security Council deems it necessary.

The 2023 NCTS will be subject to ongoing assessment, with **Annual Assessment Reports.** The report will assess compliance with the goals and strategic objectives set out in this document.