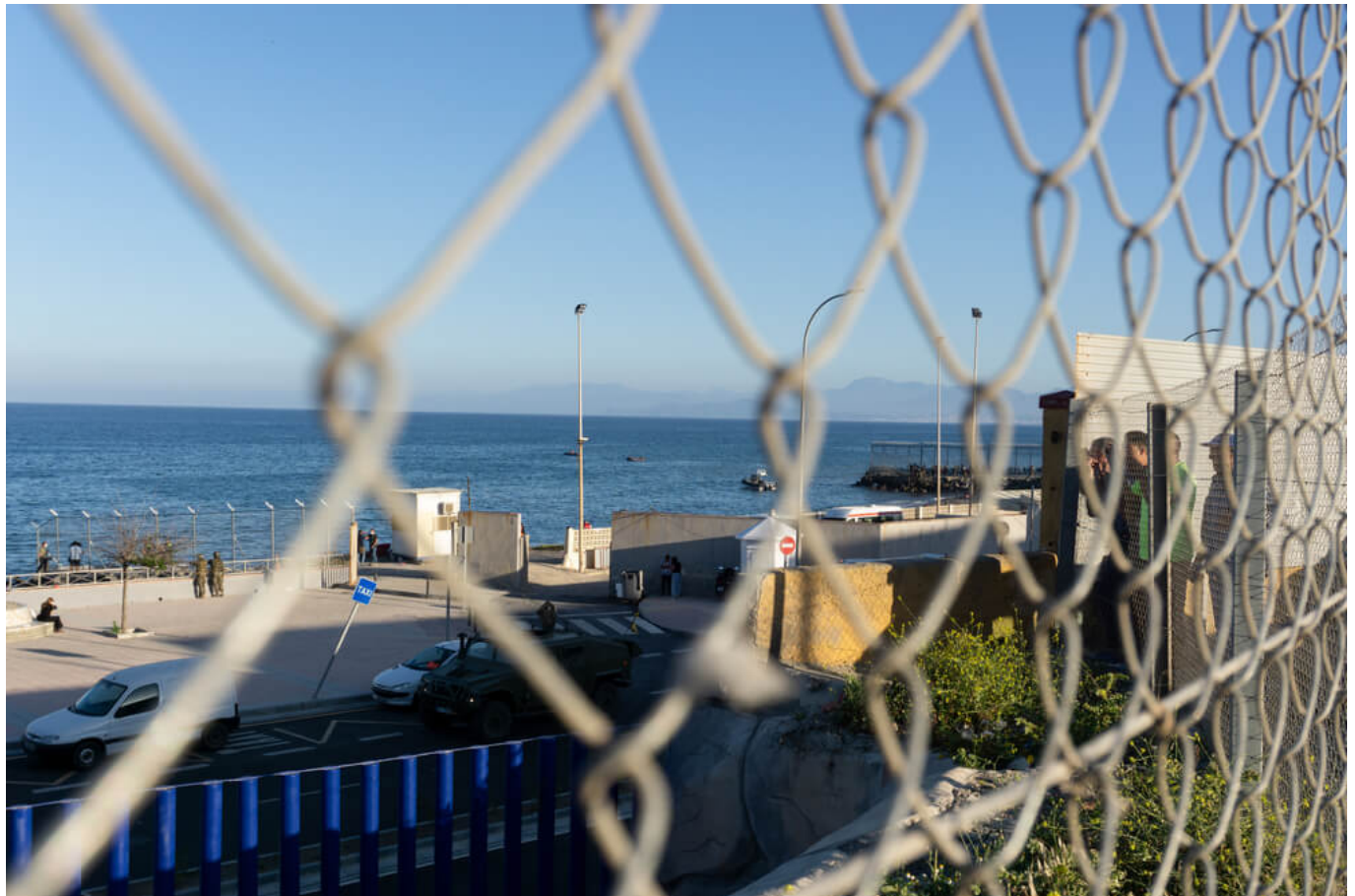




By: TA | AP Brief

Spain deploys military to restore order at its border with Morocco



Spain will deploy its military to restore order at its border with Morocco in Ceuta after **thousands of migrants** streamed into the tiny Spanish territory, with at least nine dying in the attempt.

The announcement came after local authorities in Ceuta had asked the central government in Madrid for reinforcements to manage a border crisis that boiled over Thursday with large crowds of people breaching the border fence.

Spain's government said it would send the Armed Forces to help the Civil Guard "maintain security in the city of Ceuta." It also announced that Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez would join Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska in a visit to Ceuta on Friday.

"The situation is absolute chaos," Rachid Sbihi, head of the association that represents Spain's Civil Guard officers who police the border in Ceuta, told The Associated Press. "It's not possible to give precise numbers, but there are thousands of migrants crossing," he said, adding that the border had "totally collapsed."

Achraf Maimouni, a member of the Moroccan Association for Human Rights in northern Morocco, described the situation as "exceptional."

"The Tarajal border was opened under unusual circumstances this morning and people crossed," he said.

Video footage showed crowds of people, mainly Moroccans, walking around the breakwaters at Tarajal beach onto local roads.

While most appeared to be young men, there were also families with women and small children.

"Viva España!" some shouted to a freelance photographer working for the AP. It was not immediately clear what prompted so many migrants to cross to Ceuta.

Spain's government delegation in Ceuta said at least nine people died Thursday during the

chaos. It did not provide details on the circumstances of the deaths but bodies could be seen floating in the water. Dozens have died this year trying to reach Ceuta, according to local authorities.

Arrivals had been increasing, but reasons are still unclear

The escalation at the frontier between Spain and Morocco comes after a surge in migrants attempting to reach the small exclave, mainly by swimming, on Wednesday.

Moroccan authorities have not publicly commented on the crossings, and Morocco's Interior Ministry did not respond to requests for comment.

Spain's Interior Ministry said the Moroccan government was "closely cooperating" with Spain to handle the situation and that Moroccan police are stopping "numerous people" who are trying to cross the border.

Both countries agreed to work together "for the return, as soon as possible, of all the people who entered Ceuta illegally."

The ministry earlier said it would guarantee the safety of citizens and the integrity of the nation's border but that the Spanish government could not declare a national emergency — as local authorities had asked — over migration concerns.

The chaos had ripple effects in Italy, another key destination for migrants. Premier Giorgia Meloni threatened to suspend Italy's open-border Schengen agreement with Spain "to defend our borders and ensure the safety of our citizens," though Italy doesn't share a border with Spain.

Ceuta authorities had previously linked the surge to a Spanish Supreme Court ruling earlier this month that barred authorities from immediately returning migrants who arrive by sea without due process. The ruling does not apply to migrants who enter Spain by land,

including by climbing over the border fence.

But some activists in Morocco expressed doubt that the ruling was behind the surge, arguing most migrants would have been unaware of such legal decisions.

Spain is a **main point of arrival** into Europe for migrants seeking better economic opportunities or an escape from violence in their home countries.

To reach Ceuta, located on the northern African coast, migrants often swim from the Moroccan town of Fnideq, covering about 3.1 miles (5 kilometers) to reach Spanish territory.

Others attempt the crossing from the nearby town of Belyounech, where the distance is shorter.

The scenes of people streaming across the frontier recall the border **crisis of May 2021** when more than 8,000 migrants poured into Ceuta in just two days.

At the time, Morocco was accused of easing border controls and allowing migrants to cross into Ceuta after Spain allowed Polisario Front leader Brahim Ghali to receive treatment at a Spanish hospital, triggering a diplomatic crisis between Rabat and Madrid.

The pro-independence Polisario Front for decades has claimed to be the legitimate representative of the Sahrawi people of the Western Sahara. Morocco claims Western Sahara as its own.