



Spain's Counter-Terrorism Policy Under Challenge by Al-Qaeda and E.T.A.

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The Basque separatist group Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (E.T.A.), in a June 5 statement published by two Basque pro-independence newspapers *Berria* and *Gara*, said that it would end a 15-month cease-fire and resume its terrorist campaign "on all fronts to defend the Basque homeland." The declaration comes less than three months after al-Qaeda issued new threats against Spain, this time over its military deployment in Afghanistan. In a March 2007 video, a hooded man said the presence of Spanish troops in Afghanistan "exposes Spain again to threats" unless they withdraw their troops from the country. "The Spanish people have been tricked by a Socialist government which withdrew troops from Iraq and sent 600 to Afghanistan," the man proclaimed.

The dual terrorist threats, one from at home and the other from abroad, confirm what many political analysts have been saying for a long time: Despite the best intentions of the Spanish government, its counter-terrorism policy has not yielded the desired results. Indeed, the terrorist menace is posing a formidable political challenge to Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, who has been widely criticized even from within his own party for a series of policy missteps that have contributed to Spain's deteriorating security situation.

The bad news is that all of this comes at a time of intense discord within Spain, where the historical left-right animosity that so bedeviled Spain during the last century has again reared its head. Indeed, politi-

cal commentators say the country is more polarized today than at any time since the 1936-1939 Spanish Civil War. It is this very political divide that its enemies are trying to exploit through terrorist action.

The good news, however, is that the renewed threats by E.T.A. appear to be forcing Spain's main political parties to close ranks, at least in public and albeit somewhat reluctantly. In a gesture of unity vis-à-vis terrorist threats, Mariano Rajoy, the leader of the opposition center-right People's Party (P.P.) and one of Zapatero's most vociferous critics, met with the prime minister on June 12 to discuss the E.T.A. problem and counter-terrorism in general; the two promised to try to work together.

The Challenge Posed by E.T.A.

Analysts say E.T.A.'s declaration ending its cease-fire amounts to little more than a formality. Indeed, many Spaniards believe that in practice the original truce ended last December when E.T.A. bombed the Madrid airport, a devastating attack in which two people were killed. For its part, the government has interpreted the recent announcement as a signal that E.T.A. intends to resume its attacks. That assessment, in fact, appears to be the case.

Spanish Civil Guards on June 21 discovered an abandoned car in southern Spain, near the border with Portugal, which contained more than 100 kilograms (220 pounds) of explosive material, detonators, timers and a bomb-making manual in the Basque language. Spanish

police believe E.T.A., having been largely chased out of its traditional hiding places in France thanks to increased police raids, may now have set up a working base in the Algarve region of southern Portugal, from which it plans to attack tourism targets in Spain. In the past, E.T.A. has set off bombs in tourist locations during the peak summer season in attempts to damage the Spanish economy; tourism accounts for more than ten percent of Spanish G.D.P.

Indeed, Spanish police now admit that E.T.A. probably never had any intention to lay down its weapons and instead used the "permanent cease-fire" it announced in March 2006 to rearm and refine its bomb-making techniques. E.T.A. is now thought to have rebuilt several active units as well as a stable infrastructure in Madrid.

Nevertheless, the consensus among analysts is that E.T.A. is weaker today than at any point in its 40 year history. Although the Spanish government is not sure how many people are currently active in E.T.A., they estimate that the number of fully trained members could be as low as 30 but in any case probably not more than 200. Moreover, E.T.A. has suffered a steady decline in support from among Basques themselves, the majority of whom are quite happy with the current level of autonomy granted to them by the central government and do not want full independence from Spain.

The changed political landscape has also contributed to a split within

E.T.A. itself, where only a hardcore minority still believes that violence is the only way to achieve independence for the Basque country. Thus, when E.T.A. first announced its cease-fire, most analysts thought it was desperate after years of police action and political pressure, and that more moderate elements within the group had decided the time was right to seek a negotiated solution.

It was in this context that Zapatero, in the hopes of finally bringing an end to 40 years of violence, decided to seize the opportunity and open talks with E.T.A. Yet in what has turned out to be a major miscalculation, Zapatero refused to demand that E.T.A. first lay down its weapons as a precondition to peace talks. Indeed, in his haste to begin negotiating with the separatists, Zapatero pulled out of an agreement with the P.P. that he himself had proposed in 2000, which clearly stipulated that there would be no talks with E.T.A. unless the group agreed to disarm. This split between Spain's two main political parties has, in turn, had the effect of limiting public support for a negotiated settlement with E.T.A.

In any case, E.T.A.'s bombing of the Madrid airport in December 2006 shattered whatever hopes there were for a negotiated settlement to the Basque conflict, at least over the near-term. Indeed, the attack has left Spaniards evenly split: on the one hand, there are those on the left who remain open to the idea of re-establishing a form of dialogue with E.T.A. in the future; on the other hand, there are those on the right

who believe that E.T.A. must be forced into an unconditional surrender.

For the moment, however, Spaniards are hoping their government can find a way out of the current crisis before more civilians get killed. They are also hoping that the main political parties will be able to set aside their seemingly intractable differences and come together on the issue of counter-terrorism policy. In the meantime, however, almost everyone expects E.T.A. to strike again.

The Challenge Posed by Islamic Extremists

As if the terrorist threat posed by E.T.A. were not enough, the Spanish Secret Service (C.N.I.) in April warned of the increased risk of a new terrorist attack in Spain by Islamic extremists. According to an April 22 report in *El Pais*, a daily newspaper that is close to the Zapatero government, the C.N.I. believes that al-Qaeda has established an active cell in Spain and that the country is now the group's prime target in Europe.

Indeed, al-Qaeda frequently says that it intends to recover "al-Andalus," a Moorish reference to the four-fifths of Spain that was ruled by Muslims for 800 years until 1492. For example, in claiming responsibility for the April 11 bombing in Algiers which killed 24 people, an organization called Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb said: "We will not be in peace until we set our foot again in our beloved al-Andalus."

Fears of another attack have been heightened because of the interna-

tional spotlight on the 29 mainly Moroccan suspects who are on trial for the 2004 Madrid train bombings that killed 191 and injured about 1,800 people. That attack is believed to have been carried out by two groups: the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (G.I.C.M.) and the shadowy Takfir Wal Hijra, which stems from Egypt. Although these groups are said to act on their own, they also receive instructions from al-Qaeda.

Meanwhile, extremists from Pakistan are active in the northeastern region of Catalonia, especially in Barcelona, where police are tracking Asian groups like Jaish-e-Mohammed (J.E.M.) and Lashkar-e-Toiba (L.E.T.). The J.E.M. has been implicated in the 2005 bombings of the London Underground, while the L.E.T. is linked to attacks in India.

Terrorism experts say that Islamic extremists proselytize at the hundreds of unofficial mosques that operate in garages and basements throughout Spain. According to *El Pais*, terrorists recruited in Spain are trained in Afghanistan and Iraq as

well as in Africa, where al-Qaeda teaches them how to handle weapons and explosives; those who subsequently return to Spain pose the greatest threat to security.

Zapatero had hoped to buy his peace with Islamic extremists by withdrawing the 1,300 Spanish troops deployed to Iraq by the previous government of Jose Maria Aznar. Yet Spain's military presence in Afghanistan and Lebanon, as well as the government's continuing crackdown on Islamic radicals at home, ensures that it will remain high on al-Qaeda's hit list.

Conclusion

Spanish anti-terrorism judge Baltasar Garzon has cautioned that Spain is at a "very high risk" of attack by Islamic extremists. At the same time, the country is bracing itself for more attention-grabbing bombings by E.T.A. Although the country is more divided than ever over how best to confront the menace of terrorism, everyone seems to agree that Spain is in for a hot summer.