



The Project for the Research of Islamist Movements (PRISM) Herzliya,  
ISRAEL

**Global Research in International Affairs (GLORIA) Center**  
**THE PROJECT FOR THE RESEARCH OF ISLAMIST MOVEMENTS**  
**(PRISM)**

**PRISM SPECIAL DISPATCHES**

Volume 2 (2004), Number 1 (13 March 2004)

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**Abstract:** This is a new series of special dispatches that translate and analyze articles, reports, religious decrees, and other documents, written in Arabic by Islamist scholars, clerics, activists, or intellectuals, on major issues of interest.

**Qa`idat al-Jihad, Iraq, and Madrid: The First Tile in the Domino Effect?**

**By Reuven Paz**

(PRISM Series of Special Dispatches on Global Jihad, No. 2/1)

**Introduction**

The horrible series of explosions in train stations in Madrid in 11 March 2004, which killed so far about 200 people, and injured over 1400, has shocked the whole world. Beside the results and the repeated evidence of the evil and dark side of terrorism, there lies the question of the responsibility for such attacks. The pendulum moves so far between the Basque terrorist group of ETA, and Qa`idat al-Jihad or any other Islamist group affiliated with Global Jihad. Against the denial of spokesmen affiliated with ETA stands one message of a virtual group by the name of Abu Hafs al-Masri Brigades, which claim to speak for Qa`idat al-Jihad, and which took the responsibility for the attacks in Madrid.

The dispute between experts of international terrorism and officials all over the world, about the responsibility for the attacks is unsolved for the time being. The first public analysis of the Islamist message by the Israeli-based institute of MEMRI, throws doubt on this message with some very logical arguments, based primarily on the style of the letter, which is not in accordance with the



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writings of Al-Qa'ida's scholars.<sup>1</sup> Despite the logic of this analysis, which dismisses the authenticity of the message, there are two elements worthy of comment here. One is the fact that many Islamist operatives have poor knowledge of Islamic doctrines, and their style in writing such messages is far from that of the scholars that write or speak in the name of Qa'idat al-Jihad or Global Jihad. The other is that even if the Abu Hafs Brigades' message is false, it does not rule out the possibility that an Islamist terrorist group has carried out the attacks in Madrid.

Spain is mentioned from time to time in Islamist writings, as part of the lands that should return to Muslim sovereignty by Jihad. Yet, the Islamists have other priorities where there are present conflicts between Muslims and "infidels." In July 2003, a great mosque was opened in Granada, 500 years after the Christian reconquest of Andalusia, and following many years in which the various Spanish governments denied allowing its opening. The celebrations received great publicity in the Arab and Muslim world.

Yet, the main claim against Spain by Islamists affiliated with Global Jihad was the Spanish involvement of about 2300 troops in the occupation of Iraq, and the full support for the United States both in Iraq and in the global war against terrorism. Furthermore, the Spanish authorities have been fighting fiercely to uncover Islamist cells on Spanish soil, and have made some impressive successes. The fight against Islamist terrorism raised antagonism among many of the Muslim Moroccan immigrants residing in Spain, against oppression and discrimination since the September 11 attacks. It also revealed the range and depth of Islamist cells, sympathizers, and involvement of Islamist groups among the Muslim community in the country.

### **Spain and the Mujahidin in Iraq**

In the past year, the anti-Spanish expressions in Islamist writings were focused on the Spanish strong support for the United States in Iraq, and the presence of a small force there. Spain was regarded, with Italy, the leading European countries in support for the American global policy, which is perceived by them above all as anti-Islamic. Two terrorist attacks were carried out so far against

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<sup>1</sup> Yigal Carmon, "The Alleged Al-Qa'ida Statement of Responsibility for the Madrid Bombings: Translation and Commentary," MEMRI, *Inquiry and Analysis Series - No. 166*, 12 March 2004. See on-line in:

<http://www.memri.org/bin/latestnews.cgi?ID=IA16604>



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the Spanish forces in Iraq. In October 2003, a senior Spanish intelligence officer was shot and killed. In December 2003, seven Spanish intelligence officers were ambushed and brutally killed. Photos of Mujahidin treading the bodies of the killed Spanish officers were circulated in radical Islamist web sites.

The most detailed and explicit statement against Spain's involvement in the Iraqi issue, by elements of Qa`idat al-Jihad, appeared in December 2003, in an analysis of the situation in Iraq and the role of the Mujahidin there. The analysis is found in 50 page book, titled "Iraqi Jihad, hopes and risks: Analysis of the reality and visions for the future, and actual steps in the path of the blessed Jihad."<sup>2</sup> The book was published in Islamist web sites on the Internet by "The information institution in support for the Iraqi people – the center of services for the Mujahidin." The title of "Center of Services" should remind us of the basis of the development of Al-Qa`ida in Afghanistan in the late 1980s, from a similar institution.

One of the main links of the book to Qa`idat al-Jihad appears in the introduction, where it is presented as a follow-up of a book written in the beginning of 2003, by Sheikh Yousef al-Ayiri, who was killed by the Saudi authorities in June 2003. Al-Ayiri was the leading Saudi scholar responsible for anonymously writing and directing most of Al-Qa`ida's propaganda over the Internet.

About 8 pages of the book "Iraq al-Jihad" are dedicated to Spain. They include a detailed analysis of Spanish politics, personal ambitions of the Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar, and the political balance between the right and left wings, towards the coming elections for Parliament, in 14 March 2004. The main motive in this analysis is how to create a change in the Spanish government that enforces the withdrawal of the Spanish forces from Iraq; significant decrease of the Spanish support for the United States by popular pressures; opposition in Italy and Poland to the presence of their troops in Iraq; and creating pressure in the United Kingdom against the alliance of their government with the Americans. A kind of domino effect, in which the starting point is Spain:

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<sup>2</sup> *Iraq al-Jihad Aamal wa-Akhtar: Tahlil lil-Waqi` wa-istishraf lil-mustaqbal wa-khutuwat `amaliyyah `ala tariq al-Jihad al-mubarak*, Published by Al-Hay`ah al-I`lamiyyah li-nasrat al-Sha`b al-Iraqi (Markaz khidamat al-Mujahidin). See on-line in:

<http://www.e-prism.org/images/book - Iraq al-Jihad.doc>



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Therefore we say that in order to force the Spanish government to withdraw from Iraq the resistance should hit its forces by hurting attacks against its forces. This will be accompanied by a propaganda campaign, which would present the Iraqi reality. It is a must to exploit the coming general elections in Spain in March 2004.

We think that the Spanish government could not afford more than two or three attacks for the most, after which it will have to withdraw, as a result of the popular pressures. If its troops would remain in Iraq despite the attacks – the victory of the Socialist Party is almost secured, and the withdrawal of the Spanish forces will be on its elections' agenda.

The withdrawal of the Spanish or Italian forces from Iraq would serve as a huge pressure on the British presence [in Iraq] a pressure that Toni Blair would not be able to overcome.

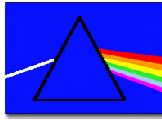
Hence, the domino tiles would fall quickly. Yet, the basic problem of how to drop the first tile is still there.

The task of pushing the Spanish public to change its government is not an easy one according to the author of this book. Prior to his above quoted conclusion, he explained the main difficulties of such a move. One is the reservation of the Spanish public in punishing its politicians, despite its twenty-five years of democracy, unlike the British public, for example. The other is the strict solidarity of the supporters of the right wing with their party, even though they do not necessarily support the Spanish involvement in Iraq, or the pro-American policy.

### **Conclusion**

The conclusion of this part of the book regarding Spain is that the Spanish forces should suffer terrorist attacks on Iraqi soil. Yet, the book was written, according to the introduction in July 2003, and published on the Internet in December 2003. Between October-December 2003, the Spanish forces in Iraq suffered two direct terrorist attacks, one of them was painful, and increased the opposition in Spain to the involvement in Iraq, but not in a manner that would lead the government to change its policy.

The book does not refer to terrorist attacks on Spanish soil. Yet, the issue of the elections is emphasized in the book, and the attacks in Madrid on 11 March, only three days before the elections, should ring a bell. This attack might have been carried out by Qa'idat al-Jihad itself, and not just by any affiliated Islamist



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group. The direct language in which the book targets Spain and the linkage to the elections, is followed by an attempt to present Spain as the weakest link of the European allies of the United States in support for the occupation of Iraq and the war against global terrorism. Therefore, targeting Spain is more suitable than Italy or Poland to launch a major attack in order to drop the first tile of the domino.

To the above mentioned we should add the possible wide infrastructure of Islamist cells arrested in Spain in the past two years. As we have more information about the September 11 attacks it seems that a significant part of the planning of these attacks has been made in Spain. The persistence of the Spanish authorities in uncovering and prosecuting Al-Qa'ida's operatives in Spain, under the direction of the Spanish investigative judge Garzon Belthazar, is impressive. However, it seems so far sisyphic, and hints that Spain is a safe haven for many Islamists.

If the attacks in Madrid were indeed carried out by Qa'idat al-Jihad, it would mark a significant escalation of the group's terrorist activity, and another sign that Iraq is turning into the "new Afghanistan." It might mark also a turning point in the *Modus Operandi* of the group, by using multi-coordinated bombings in a small area, not by suicide attacks. This is an operational success by itself.

In any case, whether carried out by Qa'idat al-Jihad or another Islamist group, or by ETA, either mark a new phase in international terrorism, at least by their future impact.