

Evolution of Jihadism in Spain Following the 3/11 Madrid Terrorists Attacks

by Javier Jordán

Since the Madrid attacks on 3/11 2004, there have been more than twenty counter-terrorism operations carried out in Spain. This post analysis includes twenty-two of the most important operations but does not include the police operations directly related to the Madrid attacks [1]. This article seeks to enumerate significant conclusions from these operations in a concise manner.

Conclusions from Counter-Terrorism Operations:

Most of the members of the dismantled jihadist networks after 3/11 have come from the Maghreb, with slightly more Moroccans (74) than Algerians (63). This is a trend that existed since the permanent implantation of jihadist networks in Spain starting in the early 1990s, with the number of Moroccans increasing over time.

Fifteen of the twenty-two analyzed networks could be considered local cells functioning as subordinates to a superior organization. The other seven were grassroots jihadist networks - that is to say, groups of radicals that emerged as entities on their own.

The aforementioned 'subordinate cells' were for the most part connected to al-Qaeda in Iraq and jihadist organizations from North Africa (Salafist Group for the Preaching and Combat, Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group, at the present time, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb). However, the results of this analysis are provisional and of a preliminary character. The precariousness of the information available concerning the functional dependency of these groups on the larger regional and international organizations makes definitive conclusions impossible at this time.

With regards to the specific tasks carried out by the networks, logistical trends remain quite consistent between groups in that most carried out missions of recruitment, financing, or falsification of documents. Another remarkable commonality was the shared hostility of these groups towards Spain. In at least seven cases, new terrorist attacks against Spanish objectives were being planned. This fact demonstrates that, in spite of the hurried withdrawal of Spanish troops in Iraq after the election of President Rodriguez Zapatero in April of 2004, jihadists still considered Spain as a significant enemy requiring near-term attacks.

Although there is a high degree of confidence concerning trends in logistics operations, a thorough knowledge on the number of people recruited in Spain that have gone to fight to Iraq, as well as of the number of individuals that have since returned is lacking. There are certainly tens of volunteers that have been recruited from Spain and left for the Iraqi conflict. Indeed, some have likely returned, but the accuracy of their numbers is uncertain as well as most of their whereabouts.

Another disturbing commonality was that the dismantled jihadist cells in Spain were in contact with several different types of social networks. In most cases, these are jihadist networks abroad (in 16 of the 22 cases sampled). The second most frequent exogenous social network was that of contacts with networks of those associated with common organized delinquency (11 of the 22). Connections with members of 'old', previously dismantled jihadist networks in Spain are also relatively frequent (7 of the 22 cases). Another commonality was the utility found in exploiting mosques and other religious centres as places to establish contact with potential recruits (at least 7 of the 22 groups dismantled). Furthermore, at least 17 detained individuals in Spain have held the position of Imam in mosques or religious centres.

Concerning geographical distribution, a substantial proportion of police operations have taken place against networks in which some, or all, their members resided in Catalonia (13 of 22 operations), Andalusia (7), Valencia (5) and Madrid (4).

Two variables have been identified as having significant importance towards forecasting the future evolution of the jihadism in Spain. The first variable involves the sociocultural and socioeconomic integration of the hundreds of thousands of Muslims who currently reside, and the likely three or four million who will reside in Spain by 2025. One key factor in determining the success of integration efforts will be the role performed by certain Islamic movements present in the country. Particularly important among these groups are the Jama'at al-Tabligh, Muslim Brotherhood, the Moroccan Al adl wal Ihsan, Hizb ut-Tahrir, as well as various other Salafi-inspired groups [2]. In some cases the activities of these groups have turned out to be problematic for the social integration of the Muslims. Some of their leaders are also ambiguous about their rejection of terrorism. This is especially true concerning activities associated with recruitment networks, the attacks committed outside of Spain, in places such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine.

A second prominent factor influencing the evolution of jihadist networks in Spain will be the strengthening or weakening of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. The analysis of networks dismantled in the country after the 3/11 attacks shows that an important number of groups were functionally dependent on a superior organization. It is also assessed that the operational capability of these groups will depend on the evolution of al-Qaeda in North Africa.

In conclusion, analysis of the formation, composition and operations of jihadist networks in Spain has allowed for various commonalities or trends to be observed. Such commonalities have also importantly illuminated several potential indicators of the future course of this evolutionary process. These indicators should be monitored closely and used to develop preventive policy responses.

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[1] A complete list and data on counterterrorist operations in Spain is available at: http://www.mir.es/DGRIS/Terrorismo_Internacional/Operaciones_de_Lucha_Antiterrorista/ For more details on the characteristics of the networks dismantled media reports and personal interviews with Spanish security officials have been used

[2] Three *Athena Papers* on the activities in Spain of Jama'at al-Tabligh, Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Morabitun Movement are available at:
<http://www.athenaintelligence.org/athenapaperse.htm>