

III. Book Reviews

Fernando Reinares: ¡Matadlos!/ Quién estuvo detrás del 11-M y por qué se atentó en España [“Kill Them! Who was Behind 3/11 and Why Spain was Targeted.”]

Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg/Círculo de Lectores, 2014. 320 pp. US \$ 15.14 (Price at Amazon.com).

Reviewed by Ely Karmon

Fernando Reinares, the prominent terrorism researcher at the Madrid Elcano Royal Institute, recently published the book, in Spanish, “Kill Them! Who was Behind 3/11 and Why Spain was Targeted”. It elucidates the circumstances of the March 11, 2004 Madrid train bombings, the most lethal jihadist attack in Europe in terms of fatalities and injuries.

Against the background of the growing threat from the current participation of thousands of Western and Muslim foreign fighters on behalf of al Qaeda-type insurgents in the civil wars in Syria and Iraq, as well as their involvement in the insurgencies in Libya, Somalia, Nigeria or the Sahel, Reinares’ book is an important tool to understand and prepare for this immediate threat of homegrown Islamist extremism in the West and its ties to such foreign conflicts. The author describes in detail the rise of jihadist networks in Spain, in the larger context of jihadist terrorism in Western Europe, Afghanistan and Pakistan. He provides a clear and concise historical background about the major organizations involved in the jihadist activity in Spain and Western Europe like al-Qaeda, the Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA), the Salafist Group for Call and Combat (GSPC), Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM) or the Islamic Cultural Institute (ICI) in Milan.

His dissection of the jihadist network responsible for the March 11 attacks follows the pattern of a criminal police investigation relating individuals to professional and terrorist contacts, movements across Europe, Pakistan, Afghanistan and beyond, based on a huge amount of juridical and police documents, personal interviews, journalistic and academic sources. This information is extremely important for understanding the complexity of the terrorist network and its mechanism, although it is at times difficult to digest for a more hasty reader.

The book raises several important operational issues connected to the activities of al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups: the importance of the reconquest of al-Andalus (Spanish territory under Muslim rule during the Middle Ages) in the strategy of northern African jihadist groups; the role of Tablighi Jamaat movement in the recruitment of young Muslims to terrorist organizations; the radicalization of Muslim criminals in prisons and their contacts with the local criminal scene.

Ten years after the tragic events of March 2004, Reinares convincingly demonstrates that the al-Qaeda Central command and not a loose ad-hoc local Islamist group was behind the Madrid attack, thereby challenging the “leaderless jihad” paradigm. According to the author, the decision to attack Spain was made not in direct response to the Iraq War, but instead was taken already in December 2001 by the Moroccan Amer Azizi, an important member of al-Qaeda’s Spanish Abu Dahdah cell which was dismantled after the 9/11 attacks. The Madrid bombing network began its formation in March 2002, more than one year before the start of the Iraq war. Azizi, who took refuge in Pakistan and became a senior figure in al-Qaeda’s military command, had a central role in the building of the Spanish jihadist network and the planning of the attack.

However, to conclude that the decision to attack Spain was mainly the result of Azizi’s desire for vengeance

after the arrests and trials of Abu Dahdah's cell members while the operation used the Western intervention in Iraq as a favorable pretext is a bit farfetched. It underestimates al-Qaeda's strategic thinking at the time that it had to challenge UK, Spain and Italy's roles in supporting the U.S.-led fighting in Iraq, which viewed Spain as the weakest link in the Western military coalition.

Reinares stresses the difficulties and constraints of law enforcement approaches in challenging the threat of the jihadist terrorism in the juridical framework of a democratic state. Proof for this is the survival of part of the Abu Dahdah's network after the arrest of those notoriously involved in the 9/11 plot in the U.S. and their participation in the 3/11 plot in Madrid. The recent terrorist attack at the Jewish Museum in Brussels, Belgium, by the French jihadist Mehdi Nemmouche, an ISIS terrorist who was one of the captors and torturers of Western hostages in Syria and reportedly planned a major terror attack in Paris, is proof of the need to improve the juridical framework and the operational tools to challenge the threat so well analyzed by Professor Reinares.

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