



## UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL

### Madrid bombings carry al-Qaida hallmark

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WASHINGTON, March 11 (UPI) – "It's a declaration of war against democracy," said Pat Cox, the president of the European Parliament, of Thursday's attacks in Madrid. On that point there is no debate. What is debatable, however, is who is responsible for the senseless slaughter of innocents.

While all fingers in Spain are pointing at the Basque separatist movement ETA as the perpetrators of Thursday's atrocious train bombings that left some 186 dead and 600 wounded, the attacks carry all the markings of al-Qaida and its jihadi affiliates.

For starters the Brussels-based World Observatory of Terrorism, an independent think tank affiliated with the [European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center](#), points to five major reasons that cast doubt on the involvement of ETA.

First, ETA generally warns Spanish authorities moments before launching their attacks in which civilians are likely to be harmed. This, obviously, was not the case on Thursday.

Second, ETA traditionally targets representatives of the government or the administration, such as policemen, the military, magistrates or even journalists who oppose them.

Third, ETA customarily selects "symbolic" targets, such as military barracks and administrative buildings. Although ETA's largest attack to date was in 1987 against a supermarket in Barcelona that killed 21 people, this was the exception rather than the norm.

Fourth, ETA always claims its attacks. Following any ETA bombing, ETA militants call in a claim to Spanish authorities. This failed to happen this time.

Fifth, ETA has never in the past carried out multiple attacks. According to some sources, at least 10 bombs were detonated almost simultaneously on Thursday.

On the other hand, these murderous attacks bear the traditional hallmark of al-Qaida: multiple bombs detonating a few seconds apart and programmed to cause the largest possible number of human casualties.

Again, according to the World Observatory of Terrorism, several elements seem to point to the "International Jihad Movement."

The "multiple targeting," reports the WOT, is the standard operating procedure of the fundamentalist Islamist movement.

Just look at the past attacks attributed to al-Qaida; the twin attacks against the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salam on Aug. 7, 1998, the double attacks in Istanbul last year, the various attacks in Iraq and of course, the twin 9/11 bombings against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

Furthermore, attacks planned to cause large numbers of civilian casualties is the preferred jihadi approach.

Spain, says the WOT, is "an acceptable target" for al-Qaida for its unflinching support of the United States in the war in Iraq. Spain, along with the United Kingdom, has contributed troops to the war effort, and its prime minister, Jose Maria Aznar, showed unflagging support to President George W. Bush and the war effort. Aznar stood side by side with Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair at a pre-war summit in the Azores.

The Madrid bombings appear to be unlike anything ETA has accomplished in the past. French and German intelligence officers who spoke to United Press International on condition their names not be revealed say, "the Madrid attacks are far too sophisticated to be the work of ETA. There was too much logistics involved for this to be the work of ETA."

Several Islamist movements were traced to Spain, and some were apprehended and dismantled, intelligence officials reported. The Brussels think tank further stated in a previous report that Spain was "classified in eighth position on the list of Western countries most threatened by the jihadist movement."

"We underlined that the countries participating in the coalition in Iraq - including Spain - could expect to be the target of Islamic attacks," said Claude Moniquet of the WOT.

Another reason why it does not appear to make sense that ETA would be behind these attacks is that the Basque separatist movement already suffers from a lack of popular sympathy. If proof of these murderous killings were to be tied to ETA, the group would stand to lose even more support, without which it would have a hard time sustaining itself politically. Even the Basque population would reject such thoughtless killings and would begin to distance themselves from the group. Of this, the ETA leadership is well aware.

Finally, discounting the Istanbul bombings, al-Qaida has not struck in the West since 9/11, and Osama bin Laden and his followers have been largely on the defensive. This would be the perfect time for them to show their supporters and the Western powers that they are still very much a force to be reckoned. In many ways, Spain was the ideal target. It's a Western European nation, a member of NATO, a U.S. ally and a participant in the war in Iraq. Furthermore, given Spain's experience in combating terrorism over the years, it was far from being a "soft target."

As one German intelligence officer lamented, "now the war has reached Europe."

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