

Are European Terror Threats 'Islamic'?

by Rainer Apel

Along railway tracks, at central railway stations, water dams, chemical factories, and at numerous other key industrial and administrative sites in Spain, military and anti-terror units of the police are conducting patrols these days. Though not on the same scope as in Spain, one can also spot army and police patrols along railway tracks and at select buildings of economic and religious life in France and Italy. The Vatican is under special protection around the Easter weekend, to deter and detect in time, "potential terror attacks."

Attacks—by whom? Officially, a number of groups and terror cells linked in some way or the other to al-Qaeda, are said to plan bomb attacks on sites in Europe, modelled on the example of the March 11 train bombs that killed almost 200 passengers and wounded more than a thousand in Madrid. A number of e-mails and faxes have arrived at newspapers and administrative offices, since March 11, announcing terror attacks on targets on Spain and other European countries. But the authenticity of the "Islamic" origin of these threats is uncertain. Targetting mostly Moroccan exiles in Spain, investigators have presented a new alleged "mastermind" every few days: first, a Syrian or a Moroccan; then an Algerian; then a group of six Moroccans; finally a Tunisian was said to have led the March 11 terrorists.

A Terror Bombing Under Surveillance?

Reviewing the first two weeks' investigations in Spain, Knut Mellenthin wrote on March 31 in the Berlin daily *Junge Welt*, that there is not much substance to the official line of investigators that "al-Qaeda" is behind the Madrid bombs. Mellenthin had likened the Madrid train bombs to the Italian "Strategy of Tension" period 20 years ago—when train bombings were a trade mark of the neo-fascists. He speculated that the "crucial evidence" for the Moroccan "al-Qaeda" track—a sports bag filled with explosives, found at the Madrid central station, which did not explode because the mobile-phone ignition device in the bag did not work properly—was "a consciously placed false track." It was this unexploded bag which produced a very rapid identification of the alleged Islamist perpetrators of the crime, via a store for used mobile phones in Madrid—owned by a Moroccan. Likewise, the story about more than 100 kilograms of explosives having been stolen by a collaborator of the "Islamic terrorists"—a petty criminal well known to the police—from a northern Spanish mine, poses question marks: The owner of the mine

told the media that no theft had ever occurred there.

Moreover, as Mellenthin pointed out, all of the more than 20 Moroccans arrested in Spain have been known to and (as it turns out) surveilled by the Spanish authorities for years. Arrests and police raids—after Sept. 11, 2001, and after last year's May bombings in Casablanca—of those among the alleged members of what is now presented as "Moroccan terrorist cells," did not yield anything of substance. But the surveillance of the Spanish-based Moroccans surely continued. Why could the "al-Qaeda" network in Spain prepare a complex terrorist operation, even though the network's members were known to police and heavily surveilled? Why would—if the owner of the mobile phone store really was a key link to the network of Moroccan radicals and extremists—the police in Spain allow him to walk freely, in spite of an official Interpol arrest warrant against key suspects of the May 2003, Casablanca bombings? No police raids against the Moroccan exiles were known between May 2003 and March 2004.

And, as far as "surveillance" is concerned: How could the mobile phone store be broken into and emptied by criminals, when anti-terror units should have observed the site around the clock, as it was a cornerstone of the entire investigation? Likewise, three "terrorists" were said to escape from a building in a Madrid suburb, which anti-terror units sealed off and attacked on April 3, leading to a shoot-out and an explosion that killed all six "terrorists" inside, including that "Tunisian" who was said to be the leader of the entire March 11 ploy. As in the case of the (meanwhile emptied) mobile phone store, no evidence of anything "Islamic" was found in the exploded building—except some unused packs of dynamite and 200 unattached detonators in the rubble. Likewise, three backpacks that were found unexploded by police at the Madrid central station on March 11, were not even investigated for more evidence, but detonated by anti-bomb experts. Critical anti-terror experts in other European countries are somewhat puzzled by this unprofessional pattern in the Spanish investigation. Is there a method to these strange events?

A big question mark is the murky role played by a certain Jean-Charles Brisard, whom Mellenthin identified as the main source of information leaked to the media from allegedly secret official anti-terror dossiers in Spain. Brisard is a Frenchman, who co-authored the 2002 book *Hidden Truth*, which blames Saudi Arabia for the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Mellenthin wrote: "Because of his all-too-evident critique of the cooperation between the Bush Clan and the Saudis, Brisard has received attention and applause also from among the political left. What is overlooked here, is that his prime interest apparently is to cause damage to the cooperation between the U.S.A. and Saudi Arabia—which perfectly corresponds to the strategy of neo-conservative propagandists of World War IV against the Islamic countries."

A line of questions should start from these neo-conservative scripts and scenarios.