



Do Government and Citizens Agree on How to Combat International Terrorism?

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Theme: This paper looks into the measures adopted to combat international terrorism, the adaptation of domestic national security structures and the perceptions of public opinion in Spain.

Summary: Over the past two years, the Spanish government has implemented a series of initiatives to adapt Spanish domestic security structures to the threat posed by international terrorism. One of the main lines of action is to increase police information and intelligence capacities, strengthen coordination among state security agencies, establish special plans for prevention and protection and boost cooperation with other countries also affected by Jihadist terrorism. These moves, implemented within the Interior Ministry's area of competence, are in line with the measures which Spanish public opinion considers to be most decisive in combating international terrorism. The consensus among citizens in this regard suggests that conditions are particularly ripe for improving these measures, and that what is anomalous is the absence of an explicit political consensus in this respect between Spain's two main political parties.

Analysis: As soon as the government took power, following the 11 March terrorist attacks in Madrid and the suicide blast on 3 April in Leganés, it began adapting Spanish domestic security structures to the challenges posed by current global terrorism. Until then, Spain had a highly developed and highly efficient counter-terrorist system in respect of ethno-nationalistic or socio-revolutionary terrorism, whose attacks were limited to Spanish territory, although the terrorist organisations behind them sought refuge, supplies or propaganda abroad. Nevertheless, they proved to be a set of poorly provisioned instruments and agencies –in terms of both human and material resources and specialist expertise– when it came to preventing and containing Jihadist terrorism acting in Spanish territory but forming part of a complex network of global dimensions. In Spain the phenomenon dates back to the 1990s, although until the massacre of the so-called 'death trains' it was underestimated as a threat by both the political elite and society as a whole.

In contrast, now at least seven out of ten Spaniards understand that international terrorism is a threat to Spain. Five out of ten even consider it to be the most serious terrorist threat currently facing Spain. This is the conclusion drawn from the 12th wave of the Barometer of the Elcano Royal Institute (BRIE) public opinion survey, made in June 2006.¹ This perception, which is now so widespread in Spain, fits in with the fact that, for just over two years since the government changed hands, the fight against Jihadist terrorism has been at the very top of the political agenda of the central institution in

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¹ The results of the 12th wave of Barometer of the Elcano Royal Institute (BRIE), of June 2006, are available at http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/barometro_eng.asp

counter-terrorist policy, namely the Interior Ministry –under José Antonio Alonso, with Antonio Camacho as Secretary of State for Security–. More specifically, this perception is in line with a series of measures implemented to accommodate the domestic security structures to the challenges inherent to an international terrorism whose ideological orientations, organisational articulation, sociological composition, cross-border connections, mobilisation strategies and operating modalities set it apart from other expressions of this kind of violence. What are these measures? How important does public opinion consider them to be? Do governmental decisions coincide with the view of Spanish citizens?

Boosting Intelligence Capacities

The experience accumulated in the fight against other forms of terrorism does not necessarily transfer immediately or readily to the fight against today's Islamist terrorism, although it does provide important lessons in terms of the approach to reforming the security instruments and agencies available to the state –within the framework of the Rule of Law– to combat the various facets of this most serious criminal activity. We know, for example, that to prevent and reduce a terrorist threat, in any of its expressions, means holding well-compiled, thoroughly analysed information that is converted into quality intelligence and adequately disseminated. It is therefore not surprising that precisely one of the main aims of adapting domestic security structures to international terrorism has been to boost intelligence capacities, in this case police intelligence. This is why as soon as the present governmental term began, the decision was made to boost central information and police intelligence services in both the police and Civil Guard forces, with new sections specialising in matters particularly related to operating procedures and modalities that are typical of Jihadist terrorism.

This is also why not only was the decision made to increase the number of staff at the various international counter-terrorism services, but the Interior Ministry authorities also decided to recruit 300 new police and Civil Guards in 2004, in addition to the one hundred odd who worked at foreign information units at the time of the 11 March attacks. In 2005, another 300 were recruited, and there are plans to recruit similar numbers this year, in order to meet the initial objective for the end of the term of office of close to 1,000 members of the state security forces devoted to combating Jihadist terrorism, thus meeting estimated needs. New recruits will also be provided with adequate equipment and will undergo training programmes, while some 40 Arabic translators have been also be hired. In this connection, the Barometer of the Elcano Royal Institute reveals that 84% of those surveyed consider it to be important to 'increase the number of police and Civil Guard officers' in order to combat international terrorism, and up to 61% believe that it is very important, in line with the governmental decisions made in this regard.

Counter-terrorism Coordination Developments

Another priority in adapting internal security to the challenges posed by Jihadist terrorism has been enhancing the coordination among state security agencies. In addition to the creation in May 2004 of the Executive Committee for the Unified Command of the State Security Forces, chaired by the Secretary of State for Security, there followed shortly afterwards that of the National Counter-Terrorism Coordination Centre, which effectively entered into operation in the summer of that same year. This body, comprising both police and Civil Guard specialists, as well as analysts from the National Intelligence Centre (which reports to the Defence Ministry), is a very significant step forward in achieving integrated intelligence analysis and counter-terrorist coordination. In last June's BRIE survey, when people were asked to give their opinion about the measure of 'making police and Civil Guard work together' in combating international terrorism, no less than 97% said it was important and 88% very important. The government's initiative in this matter, even when formulated with a clearly imperative emphasis in the survey, is the one that receives the most support from the Spanish public.

Closely related with developments in counter-terrorist coordination is a decision based on both the same general principle of public interest that underlies the strengthening of coordination and the specific principle concerning the sharing of information among the various state security agencies. It has been decided to implement the principle of making available any information of interest to public security in general and in particular to the fight against terrorism, through an overhaul of the police databases to ensure quick, joint and shared access for all state security forces. Since 2005, this has been the case for databases such as national identity cards, weapons and explosives permits, passenger records and finger print identification systems, for example. In this regard, as many as 94% of those surveyed in the last BRIE consider important –as a means of combating international terrorism– not only the possibility of joint and shared access but, even more, the ‘unification of the state security forces’ databases’. For 81% of those surveyed it is indeed a very important measure.

Prevention and Protection Plans

Preventing attacks and responding to possible terrorist incidents in any part of Spain requires specific deployments inasmuch as Jihadist terrorism acts perpetrated in Western societies are highly lethal and generate great social impact. It is in this connection that the Executive Committee for the Unified Command in March 2005 approved the Counter-terrorist Prevention and Protection Plan, which contains regulations to mobilize a huge amount of police resources in extraordinary circumstances –and even military resources provided it is at the request of the Interior Minister and to support the police effort– in line with the estimated threat level, which may vary according to the time of year or changing domestic and foreign circumstances. In this regard, the June BRIE reports that 87% of those surveyed consider that implementing ‘special prevention plans for special dates or events’ is an important measure to combat international terrorism to be important and as many as 61% even see it as very important.

However, based on what is probably considered to be the likely course of current global terrorism, and specifically its tendency towards the perpetration of attacks involving chemical, bacteriological, radiological and even nuclear agents, authorities at the Interior Ministry also decided to draft a specific plan to prevent possible incidents involving this kind of non-conventional weapons and to prepare responses in line with this type of threat. The implementation of this plan has been entrusted to the Civil Guard. According to the BRIE, 72% of Spaniards consider that having ‘plans in the event of terrorist attacks with nuclear, radiological, bacteriological or chemical weapons’ is an important measure in the fight against international terrorism, and 57% see it as a very important measure. The fact that the importance of these two plans is considered to be fifteen percentage points below that of the special counter-terrorism prevention and protection plans relating to special dates or events is perhaps because part of Spain’s public opinion does not lend as much credibility to the threat of the use of non-conventional weapons or WMD by Jihadist terrorists.

Financing, Prisons, Muslims

Ninety-one percent of those surveyed consider that to ‘increase the control over financial institutions to prevent the financing of terrorism’ is an important measure in combating international terrorism, with 78% considering it a very important measure. These figures point to widespread support by the public for government initiatives such as implementing effective supervision by developing further regulations under the provisions of the current law concerning the prevention and blocking of terrorist financing, which dates from 2003. The development of this law is combined with the efforts of the police intelligence units specialising in the economic analysis of terrorism and of the renowned Spanish financial intelligence unit. There is a lower degree of consensus among citizens regarding the importance (according to the June 2006 BRIE) of ‘Preventing persons convicted for acts of international terrorism from coming into contact while in prison’, which 74% see as

important and 57% as very important. These assessments correspond to measures implemented in November 2004, whereby convicts related to Jihadist terrorism were distributed separately over more than 30 prisons. But it might well also indicate the public's opinion concerning other organisational and disciplinary measures of preventive control over this kind of prisoner in Spanish jails, currently numbering just over 150.

The set of measures to counter international terrorism described so far does not include other highly important measures, such as those connected with the updating of administrative and penal regulations to exert a greater control over the storage, handling and use of explosives, as substances which might be used for terrorist acts.² However, the success of the governmental measures implemented against international terrorism perpetrated by individual and collective operatives who define themselves as being followers of Islam depends to a large extent on the perceptions towards these terrorists and towards the counter-terrorism measures among Muslim communities themselves. It is particularly among these communities where, especially from their recognised religious authorities, it is necessary to de-legitimise and stigmatise Jihadist terrorism, preventing processes of violent radicalisation. It is therefore easy to understand that 'keeping an open dialogue with Muslim communities in Spain' –a priority for the Interior Ministry and, in particular, the Secretariat of State for Security– is, for 80% of those surveyed recently by the Elcano Royal Institute, an important step in combating international terrorism, and very important for 57%. Once again, the government's action in regard to this matter is in line with the assessment of the Spanish public.

International Cooperation and Europeanisation

But today's Jihadist terrorism is a widely transnational and indeed global phenomenon, so that the success of initiatives devoted to both increasing domestic information and intelligence capacities and enhancing coordination among state security agencies, among other measures, would be highly limited in the absence of international cooperation –both bilateral and multilateral–. Accordingly, enhancing this international cooperation was defined as a priority for the authorities entrusted with domestic security as soon as they were sworn in, establishing areas and countries for preferential and strategic action, starting with the countries in our immediate European neighbourhood and with the EU itself. Spain, through its Interior Ministry, has continued to participate actively to enhance cooperation within the framework of the European area of freedom, security and justice, as well as, naturally, within the framework of the European Justice and Home Affairs Council. Some decisions made at the national level in the last two years have later been passed on to these intergovernmental spheres, in turn leading to collective decisions whose mandatory transposition to Spanish law implies a considerable Europeanisation of Spain's counter-terrorism policy in general, and of the programmes developed to combat international terrorism in particular.

Secondly, the strengthening of counter-terrorist police cooperation during the first half of this government's term of office has also defined North Africa as a priority area, especially Morocco –where three quarters of Muslim immigrants to Spain come from, as do around four out of every ten prisoners jailed in Spain for offences linked to Jihadist terrorism³– but also other Islamic countries, which is obvious given the bilateral cooperation agreements regarding an Islamic-oriented terrorism with widespread transnational interconnections. Thirdly, cooperation against international terrorism has brought to the fore the exchange

² In regard to public opinion about the introduction of other measures in the context of the fight against international terrorism or an assessment of the role of some institutions in this connection, see

http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/200511brie_eng.asp and

http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/2006AbrilBrie_eng.asp

³ Fernando Reinares has written a preliminary study of the figures titled 'Towards a social characterisation of Jihadist terrorism in Spain: implications for domestic security and foreign intervention', available at

www.realinstitutoelcano.org/analisis/949.asp

of information with the United States. While cooperation with the European Union is important for 97% of those surveyed in the latest BRIE and very important for 91%, these figures decline to 81% and 64%, respectively, when it comes to cooperating with Morocco, 79% and 64% for Islamic countries as a whole and 79% and 61% for the United States. In the case of Morocco and other Muslim countries this may be due to the public's negative perception of Islam and the ruling regimes in the Islamic world, whereas in the case of the US it may derive from the Spanish public's distaste for the Bush Administration's war on terror, as well as from a certain degree of latent anti-Americanism.

Conclusions: The package of government measures developed during the first two years of this government's term of office aimed at adapting Spain's domestic security structures to the risks and threats inherent to international terrorism, are in line with the measures which the Spanish public consider to definitely important in this regard. Both in relation to increased intelligence capacities and counter-terrorist and international cooperation, as well as in respect of specific prevention and protection plans and other initiatives considered in this paper, the decisions made by the Interior Ministry as a result of the 11 March attacks are in harmony with a series of generic measures of whose importance the Spanish public is overwhelmingly in agreement. The widespread nature of this feeling in favour of the government's action regarding the measures necessary to combat Jihadist terrorism suggests two recommendations. First, the competent authorities in charge of domestic security have a considerable margin of popular support to make further progress and perfect the measures in place, especially in terms of coordination between state security agencies, the unification of police databases, control over terrorist financing and European cooperation. Secondly, the widespread agreement among citizens regarding the measures that are most important to combat international terrorism should provide further support for a stable and explicit public consensus on such an important issue between Spain's two main political parties.

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Appendices

Appendix I. What do you consider the greatest threat to Spain?

	%
International terrorism	51.2
ETA	26.5
Both	20.4
Neither	1.1
DK/NA	0.8

Total sample: 1,208.

Source: Barometer of the Elcano Royal Institute (BRIE), 12th wave (June 2006).

Appendix II. Are the following measures to combat international terrorism in Spain very important, quite important, not very important or not important at all? (%)

Measures	Very	Quite	Not very	Not at all	DK/NA
Increasing the number of police and Civil Guard officers	61.1	22.9	11.4	4.3	0.3
Making police and Civil Guard work coordinated	87.5	9.5	1.7	1.0	0.3
Unification of the state security forces' databases	81.0	12.7	4.1	1.2	0.9
Increasing control of financial institutions to prevent terrorism financing	78.1	12.5	5.6	3.1	0.7
Special prevention plans for special dates or events	60.6	26.2	9.3	2.9	1.1
Plans to prevent terrorist attacks with nuclear, radiological, bacteriological or chemical weapons	57.1	14.7	10.8	16.6	0.8
Preventing persons convicted for acts of terrorism from coming into contact while in prison	57.3	17.0	13.2	10.6	1.9
Maintaining an open dialogue with Muslim communities in Spain	57.4	22.6	11.7	7.7	0.7

Total sample: 1,208.

Source: Barometer of the Elcano Royal Institute (BRIE), 12th wave (June 2006).

Appendix II. Is Spain's cooperation with the following countries in the fight against terrorism very important, quite important, not very important or not important at all? (%)

Countries	Very	Quite	Not very	Not at all	DK/NA
US	60.7	18.5	10.8	9.4	0.6
European Union	90.6	6.5	1.7	1.2	0.2
Islamic countries	63.7	15.6	10.8	9.3	0.7
Morocco	63.7	17.0	10.3	8.5	0.4

Total sample: 1,208.

Source: Barometer of the Elcano Royal Institute (BRIE), 12th wave (June 2006).