The Train in Spain Fell Mainly off the Rail (with apologies to "My Fair Lady")

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By Robbie Friedmann

The horrendous terror atrocity that murdered about 200 and injured some 1600 on Madrid trains has already become Spain's 9-11, acquiring its own symbol of 3-11, and is seen by some as a "reminder" that the war on terrorism has not ended ("Spain's 3/11: A horrifying reminder that the war on terror is not over," Editorial, *Wall Street Journal*, 12 March 2004). As if reminders are needed.

Initial reports from Spain blamed the multiple blasts on the Basque separatist group ETA and reports suggest that the Spanish foreign minister instructed all Spanish ambassadors to push this notion no matter what other evidence comes up (while keeping all investigation avenues "open"). This is partly because in Spain an act by ETA will be perceived as a unifying factor, while terrorism by Islamist groups may tilt the sentiment against the Spanish involvement in the war on terror. Given the elections slated for next week, the stakes are indeed very high. Even the U.N. Security Council rushed to condemn ETA *even as it had no proof ETA was involved* (see U.N. Resolution 1530).

Nevertheless, initial non-Spanish reports suspected al-Qaeda involvement and shortly thereafter ETA denied any responsibility and al-Qaeda indeed quickly declared it ("Al-Qaeda Took Responsibility for Thursday's Madrid Bombings: 190 people killed, 1,400 injured in Madrid train bombings. Stolen car with detonators and tapes in Arabic found near Madrid," *Ma'ariv* Online, 11 March 2004), and respected Israeli analysts tended to accept it at face value.

And thus a slew of speculations has started in earnest and is unlikely to be abated until further credible information comes out. One respected watch group is dubious of the declaration (and the act) being the product of al-Qaeda ("The Alleged al-Qaeda Statement of Responsibility for the Madrid Bombings: Translation and Commentary," Yigal Carmon, MEMRI, Inquiry & Analysis - Jihad & Terrorism Studies, 12 March 2004, No. 166).

Yet European intelligence sources are reported as insisting it was an al-Qaeda operation ("European Intelligence: al-Qaeda Sleepers Planned Attack," Special to World Tribune.com, 12 March 2004), and U.S. sources seem to also buy into the al-Qaeda angle but at least they caution it is too early to know for certain ("Bombing Clues Point To Islamist Terrorists: But Officials Say It's Too Soon to Know," Dan Eggen and Walter Pincus, *Washington Post*, 12 March 2004).

This flurry of speculations only serves the interest of the terrorists. If they have plausibly denied involvement yet can go on performing their atrocities without being stopped, then having third parties take responsibility or deflecting it from one group to another only serves to spread more fog and increase the fear even further. At this point it could be al-Qaeda, ETA, some splinter group or - the more horrifying thought - a closely coordinated operation between all of the above.

That is exactly the reason why capturing one arch-terrorist will matter little in the long term (but a great deal now). Hitler could not have done what he did without an infra-structure that believed in him and supported his policies. Bin Laden could be an independent operator but when looking at Iran (and North Korea?) one remains wondering how long will it (they) benefit from the terror that many signs indicate is guided, funded, designed and coordinated by Iran worldwide ("Capturing bin Laden isn't Enough," Daniel Pipes, *The Jerusalem Post*, 9 March 2004).

Agreeing with Bernard Lewis, a commentator suggests that terrorists are becoming desperate and by directing many of their recent actions against fellow Muslims are losing ("The Radicals Are Desperate: Islamic radicals are proving that the war against terror is not a clash between civilizations, but a clash within a civilization," Fareed Zakaria, *Newsweek*, 15 March 2004).

Even if the declaration of "victory" over the terrorists is more than a bit premature, this view at least exposes the fact that Arabs/Muslims have to wrestle with their own internal problems and that this unleashed force of barbarism has a double-edged sword that does not spare their own. And indeed for the "first time in half a century the royal (Saudi) family is more worried about American support for democratic change in the Middle East than we are of an oil embargo" ("Do We Want to Go Back?" Victor David Hanson, *National Review*, 5 March 2004).

This also fits into the Iranian picture. Fearing an internal uprising against the regime, the Ayatollahs opt to deepen their involvement in creating mayhem all over the world and lashing out at the "Zionist and American enemies." But they also have a deep interest in destabilizing Iraq and that explains rather well why they kill their fellow Muslims so they can have sectarian fights that will eventually - or so they hope - defeat the U.S. there (in Iran's backyard) and leave them in control.

Desperation has never meant there is no blame to be found. And the terrorists find plenty. It is their way to ignore the woes of their own society and to shed any responsibility for it by blaming outsiders. The likes of Osama bin Laden and the Palestinians have created a terror industry coupled with sophisticated "blame propaganda" that would have been hilarious had it not cost people's lives. Like the criminal who kills his parents and then cries he is an orphan, they use terror and then claim the West is responsible for it or that the West has actually done it. And by West they specifically point to Israel and the U.S. ("PA: Blaming Israel, U.S. for Arab Terror," Itamar Marcus, Palestinian Media Watch Bulletin, 12 March 2004).

An illustration and reminder of Jimmy Carter's failed understanding of international relations as president and today as a pretentious (but discredited) "moral beacon" can be found in an article written by his national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski ("The Wrong Way to Sell Democracy to the Arab World," Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The New York Times*, 8 March 2004). Zbig, who dismissed Islamism in the late 1990s, argues that George W. Bush is trying to implement democracy in the Middle East the wrong way. He could have suggested that democracy there is not possible, but that is not his beef. What irritates him is that Bush is not nice enough to the Arabs, is not "sensitive" enough to their needs and that he uses "democracy" as a tool to delay the settling of the Israel-Palestinian conflict (as if it does not really mean "Arab-Israeli" conflict). His undeclared motto is "Be nice to the Arabs and solve the Palestinian issue" and nirvana will come to the world. This, by the way, was the underlying criticism against

going to war in Iraq: that the road to Baghdad goes through Jerusalem. Namely, solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict first. As Zbig himself likes to say: nonsense.

In fact, no other than a Jordanian cabinet member provides a diplomatic lesson to Zbig by suggesting the exact opposite. Reform in the Arab world does not have the luxury of waiting until that conflict is settled, perhaps partly because the lack of reform is what is responsible for it in the first place ("Jordanian Minister of Planning Awadallah Says the Israel-Palestinian Conflict is No Excuse for Lack of Arab Reform," Access|Middle East, 8 March 2004).

And one of the most prominent Middle East scholars proves time and again the problem is indeed with the Arabs because they are the ones using terrorism and they are the ones rejecting any reasonable settlement including a Palestinian state. Bernard Lewis believes that democracy has to succeed because the alternative is continued tyranny and terrorism: "There are two kinds of terrorism, but, mind you, they're not in conflict and are often unified in their actions. The first kind is always armed with highly ideological means and is aimed at preserving existing tyrannies. The second, al-Qaeda kind, is aimed at subjugating the entire Western world." ("Avoid the Algerian Precedent," Fiamma Nirenstein, *The Jerusalem Post*, 11 March 2004).

This point is more evident than ever in the position taken by Israeli Arabs who adamantly refuse to have their villages become part of potential Palestinian rule ("Picking One Home Over Another," Erik N. Nelson, *Newsday*, 7 March 2004). Despite their affinity with their Palestinian brethren, Israeli Arabs prefer to stay under Israel's rule. Given that they will not be uprooted and physically moved under this plan but simply switched from Israeli rule to Palestinian rule, their objection is rather telling of their mistrust of Palestinian rule and that with all their complaints about Israel they prefer its proven democracy over the abuses of their fellow Arabs ("Umm el-Fahm, Palestine," Matti Golan, *The Jerusalem Post*, 10 March 2004). Of course, it also gives them a bridgehead to undermine Israel from within.

Sensing an ever so slight wind of change in the Arab/Muslim world, a prominent Israeli figure notes the perception of what Israel stands for and what Arabs are doing is striking a cord among some Arab writers who realize the true values that characterize and differentiates these societies and openly acknowledges them ("Something's Changing in Arab Media," Amnon Rubinstein, *Ha'aretz*, 8 March 2004): "in Israel's view, the life of an Israeli, even one of Arab origin, is considered invaluable. In contrast, an Arab citizen can be thrown into prison for having surfed on the opposition's Web site ... that shows how much a citizen's life is worth in the eyes of Arab regimes." Except of course that an Arab/Muslim life is far cheaper than that. Erroneous imprisonment happens in the most enlightened democracies but wanton killing does not characterize them. Not as a philosophy. Not as a practice. Not as state/religion policies (of course with the exception of the Holocaust). Not so in a community that does not cherish the life of others as well as that of its very own.

But terrorism does not only mean the killing of innocent civilians and striking fear in the heart of an unsuspecting population. It is also arrogantly taking over images and language. In 2001, Muslims clerics demanded the Pentagon change "infinite justice" - its code name for the war against terrorism - because it was "offensive" to Muslims. Apparently it was also offensive to some "sensitive circles" in the U.S. ("Infinite Justice? Recall the Pentagon's new code name for the war against terror -- before it's too late," Scott Rosenberg, Salon.com, 20 September 2001)

and abroad ("[The Algebra of Infinite Justice: As the U.S. prepares to wage a new kind of war, Arundhati Roy challenges the instinct for vengeance]," *The Guardian*, 29 September 2001).

Ten days after the 9-11 atrocity Muslim clerics worried more about the language the American president was using - finding it "offensive" - than worrying about the terrorism they were actively or passively conducive in producing. And commentators in the U.S. and England were more concerned about being politically correct than about condemning terrorism. One could only wonder if Winston Churchill submitted British World War II code words for Hitler's clearance and Joseph Goebbels acceptance prior to their use.

And this still continues. Now Arab American advocacy activists are complaining the President's TV campaign ads "profile" Arabs ("Group Says Bush Ad 'Profiles' Arabs: Removal of unidentified photo urged," Julia Malone,*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 13 March 2004). One might want to be persuaded perhaps that a photo of [Betty Crocker] would have been more appropriate as we all clearly know that recent terrorists have been "all-American"-looking white females. Oh they do not stop. Another Arab-American "advocacy" group now wants Webster to change its definition of antisemitism ("Arab Group: Change Dictionary Entry on Antisemitism," Ori Nir, *Forward*, 4 March 2004) and other Arab writers also try to "refine" the differences between being anti-Israel and anti-Jewish, trying to "remind" the world that "Arabs are Semites too" ("What is Antisemitism?" George S. Hishmeh, *Jordan Times*, 5 March 2004). With this intense pace they may be candidates for the Nobel Prize in linguistics. Surely Noam Chomsky will enthusiastically recommend them.

These are by no means naive and well-intended efforts at correcting language, but rather shrewd tactics to control it. The proof is in the activities they are involved in. While feverishly condemning "profiling" and the use of "offensive" language these "advocacy" groups embark on a relentless propaganda war, for they feel they have an entitlement that is immune from any similar criticism. Thus one such group invited a neo-Nazi to address students apparently in line with the long tradition of Muslim-Nazi cooperation ("CAIR Promotes a Neo-Nazi's Talk," Daniel Pipes, 11 March 2004).

At the same time they do not shy away from intimidating tactics, harassing even those who are sympathetic to the establishment of a Palestinian state simply because they also support Israel ("Bigotry Outside Faneuil Hall," Alan Dershowitz, Israelinsider, 5 March 2004) prompting the famous attorney to state: "The other day, I experienced violent antisemitism for the first time in my adult life. It took place in front of Faneuil Hall, the birthplace of American independence and liberty."

Antisemitism is difficult to understand. When most argue that Mel Gibson's movie is not antisemitic (except that most Jews think it is) a prominent novelist and cultural critic and former catholic priest, [James Carroll] is baffling in his inconsistency when dealing with Jewish-Christian matters on one hand and Israeli-Palestinian issues on the other. When it gets to the latter he somehow loses or purposefully ignores the nexus between Jews and Israel to an extent that seems to nullify his contribution to the former ("The James Carroll Paradox," Andrea Levin, *The Jerusalem Post*, 9 March 2004).

That point is proven by a recent op-ed piece in the *Guardian* (that British source of "objectivity")

where the writer - a former editor - essentially suggests that Jews are responsible for the surge of antisemitism because of their own action ("A Grotesque Choice: Israel's repression of the Palestinian people is fuelling a resurgence of antisemitism," Max Hastings, *The Guardian*, 11 March 2004). He of course replaces "Israel" for "Jews" as if the two are somehow not intertwined and proceeds - unstoppable - to perform double victimization: admit that Jews are victims of antisemitism and then claim they are responsible for their own victimization. Exemplary logic.

The reality of the outcome of such antisemitic rhetoric (whether malicious or "well-intended") is that words become guides for action, the results of which are evident in the remnants of the concentration camps as historical witnesses to the genocide that took place in them ("'The Passion' is Mute Next to Auschwitz's Quiet Power," Claudia Rosett, *The Wall Street Journal*, 10 March 2004).

There is no denial of the surge of modern Islamist antisemitism, both religious and secular. The problem is with attribution of cause and effect. The Arab version of antisemitism is independent of what the Jews do. It is inherent in the mere objections to whatever signified Muslims losing control over their perceived dominance. The problem is that it has drawn little attention from those who should have studied it, and it is therefore somewhat encouraging to see a call - even if belated - to recognize the need to focus on Islamic antisemitism appear in no other than the most important higher education newspaper ("The Urgent Need to Study Islamic Antisemitism," Neil J. Kressel, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 11 March 2004): "The warning signs surrounding Muslim Jew-hatred are too ominous to ignore. The dehumanizing rhetoric used to denounce Jews in the Muslim world is precisely the sort that alarms scholars who study genocide and mass atrocities. Surely the problem of Muslim antisemitism merits the attention of Western social scientists."

The view from Spain is depressingly sad. This mega-terror took the life of hundreds of people, injured thousands and shocked millions (not only in Spain). Every human being must have felt pain and many displayed sympathy with the victims. Yet the U.N. has never jumped the gun (excuse the metaphor) on Palestinian atrocities and thus far no one came out with statements that Spain should grant independence to the Basques. But this atrocity was the first in the heart of civilized Europe and it must have an effect on its citizens who now saw for the first time numerous people being blown away, and it was not in Israel or the U.S. Many European countries have elevated their alert level and for the first time Greece showed concern over Olympic security. The reminder we needed - that terrorism is scourge - was not yet another terrorist act. Rather what is needed is a world united in fighting it. Fat chance. A diet is urgently needed to equalize the odds.

Note: Subsequent to the writing of this article, al-Qaeda and not the Basque movement ETA is the prime suspect of the Madrid massacre; and the Socialists won the Spanish election.