

Report from Madrid by Leonardo Servadio

ETA's dirty war

"Basque terrorism" is the same as terrorism elsewhere: Soviet low-intensity warfare against Western institutions.

On July 21, the Basque separatist-terrorist ETA staged its most sophisticated attack yet against the nation of Spain. Twelve self-propelled anti-tank grenades were placed in so many launching tubes on the roof of a car, parked at a distance of approximately 120 yards from the entrance to the defense ministry in Madrid. When the grenades were launched, activated by a remote control mechanism at approximately 10:25 a.m., a massacre could have occurred.

One grenade exploded a few inches from the window of the office of Defense Minister Narcis Serra; another penetrated the office of the director of personnel at the ministry; two grenades struck a bus passing in front of the ministry. Suddenly, it was war in downtown Madrid. Military men and police ran through the streets with their weapons drawn, toward the damaged bus and the car from which the grenades were launched. Terrified on-lookers cowered in groups.

Fifteen minutes later, the car which had served as the launching pad exploded. ETA had calculated the timing of the second explosion to maximize victims among the policemen investigating the vehicle. Had the police not stayed clear and kept people away, dozens could have been killed. After the smoke cleared, miraculously, only 10 people were injured, only one seriously.

The week before, a car-bomb had exploded as a bus transporting cadets of the Guardia Civil passed in the same area of Madrid, several blocks from

the defense ministry. Ten cadets died, in the biggest massacre of the recent years' terrorist spree.

These major terrorist atrocities have been accompanied by many smaller incidents. At the end of July, ETA sympathizers staged violent demonstrations in the Basque town of San Sebastian on the French border, to protest the policy of French Premier Jacques Chirac, of delivering ETA terrorists captured in France to the Spanish authorities. The rioters in San Sebastian set fire to two police buses, but there were no injuries.

Various regionalist, separatist, and terrorist groups work together in this step-up toward a new civil war in Spain. Two days after the attack on the defense ministry in Madrid, and coinciding with the delivery of a second ETA terrorist to the Spanish police by the French, the National Front for the Liberation of Corsica exploded several bombs on the island, in front of the Casa de España.

These terrorist incidents coincide with the opening of the new parliament elected on June 22, and the new government of Socialist Party leader Felipe González. But the wave of terrorism is not simply related to the opening of the new government—in fact, it is not an internal Spanish affair at all. Spain faces the same Soviet-sponsored "low-intensity operations" identified by Italian Interior Minister Scalfaro as a war against NATO.

Spain, now firming up its role in NATO after an April referendum on the issue was won by the government,

is an obvious target of terrorist attack. At the moment, Spain is negotiating cuts in U.S. troop strength at the Torrejón air base near Madrid. Torrejón is a crucial base for the defense of Germany, since it would be the staging area for deployment of troops and weapons to the Central European theater in the event of Warsaw Pact attack. This base has been the focus of attacks by various "pacifist" groups, which repeatedly conduct marches demanding the base's closing. The demand to shut Torrejón is also raised by the United Left party, and the left wing of the ruling PSOE.

Spain is potentially highly vulnerable to such low-intensity warfare. The country is still in the process of redefining its political and institutional identity after the long period of dictatorship, from the end of the Civil War in 1939 to 1975, the year Francisco Franco died. Felipe González, after a policeman was assassinated by ETA in June, declared that terrorism is the biggest threat to Spanish democracy, while the Socialist Party attacked ETA as "Nazi."

There is no question that the aim of terrorism is to discredit the post-dictatorship institutions, independent of any government, in order to deliver to Moscow a totally unstable nation, or a nation dominated by a new dictatorship, be it "right" or "left," of a pro-Soviet nature.

So far, the only figure to speak of the terrorists' actions as acts of war, has been King Juan Carlos, who, at the time of the opening of the parliamentary debate on the new government, telephoned various party representatives to tell them that the military views the attack on the defense ministry as an act of war, and that the nation is expecting its political representatives to take a strong stand against terrorism.