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### Bombs, Ballots, and Coercion: The Madrid Bombings, Electoral Politics, and Terrorist Strategy

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## **Bombs, Ballots, and Coercion: The Madrid Bombings, Electoral Politics, and Terrorist Strategy**

TOM DANNENBAUM

*In 2004, an al Qaeda affiliate killed 191 civilians in Madrid. Spain's general election three days later confounded pollsters' expectations; the incumbent Partido Popular was ousted by the challenging Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), a party committed to withdrawal from Iraq. This manuscript examines the notion that this was a strategic terrorist success. The first strategic form considered is coercive bargaining. The paper finds that al Qaeda is not a credible coercive agent and debunks the popular myth that Spanish voters entered a coercive bargain with the network. The paper also considers the attacks through the strategic frameworks of terrorist advertising, provocation, regime destabilization, and morale building. It finds that the attacks' only strategic achievement was building morale. Finally, the paper provides a multi-factor explanation of how the Madrid bombings contributed to the PSOE victory despite their lack of strategic impact. The upshot of the analysis is that there is little reason to believe such electoral impact is replicable.*

As the morning rush hour began on 11 March 2004, three trains packed with commuters set off from Alcalá de Henares, about 12 km east of Madrid. A fourth stopped through en route to central Madrid. Before each train departed the station, a team of men loaded rucksacks onboard. In all, ten

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bags were loaded onto the four trains. At 7:37 a.m. the first train pulled into Atocha—Madrid's locomotive hub. Suddenly, three explosions ripped through the carriages, killing thirty-four and injuring scores more. Simultaneously, four bombs detonated in the second train, killing sixty-three. This latter train was two minutes behind schedule and just 800 m from the station. Had it been on time, the combination of the seven blasts would have caused severe damage to the station's structure, possibly causing a collapse and killing many more. Within less than a minute, three more bombs had exploded on the remaining two trains. One was at El Pozo station, the other at Santa Eugenia station. Seventy-nine more were killed. When the dust had settled, 176 innocents had been slaughtered and over 1,750 injured. In the ensuing days a further fifteen died in hospital, taking the total death toll to 191.<sup>1</sup> Spain had been hit by its worst ever terrorist attack and Europe by its deadliest since the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie. Exactly two and a half years after "9/11" became a tragic addition to the American lexicon, Spain suffered what became known as the attacks of "11-M."

In the immediate aftermath there was confusion. Who was responsible? The government initially claimed it was Basque separatist group, Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA), but this theory quickly lost credibility when a van with more explosives and taped recitals from the Qur'an was found near the Alcalá de Henares station. Then on 13 March, a videocassette was found in which a self-professed spokesman for al Qaeda in Europe claimed responsibility for the attacks and threatened more bloodshed if Spain did not withdraw its troops from Iraq and Afghanistan.

The very next day Spaniards took to the polls to vote in the quadrennial national elections. The incumbent Partido Popular (PP) had been in government for eight years under José María Aznar, who was standing aside to be replaced as PP leader by Mariano Rajoy. As is standard in Spanish elections, opinion polls were prohibited for the final week of the campaign. However, the PP had led throughout the campaign and seemed poised to win a third consecutive term, making Rajoy the new prime minister. Instead, the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), led by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, recorded a dramatic upset, garnering 42.6 percent of the vote for 164 seats in the Cortes (parliament), handily beating the PP's take of 37.7 percent for 148 seats.

Zapatero had long pledged to withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq. The PP had put them there. Popular theorizing quickly connected the surprising electoral result to the 11-M attacks. Pedro Schwartz, a former conservative legislator, said simply, "al-Qa'ida won the election," and labeled the result

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<sup>1</sup> On these details of the attacks, see Juzgado Central de Instrucción no. 6, Audiencia Nacional, Madrid, Sumario no. 20/2004 (10 April 2006), [http://www.elmundo.es/documentos/2006/04/11/auto\\_11m.html](http://www.elmundo.es/documentos/2006/04/11/auto_11m.html), in particular, 1–2, 6–11.

“appeasement.”<sup>2</sup> Departing foreign minister Ana Palacio commented, “We are giving a signal to terrorists that they can have their way because we have given in.”<sup>3</sup> Foreign allies of the outgoing government concurred. US House Speaker Dennis Hastert said Spaniards had “appease[d] terrorists,” while Polish Prime Minister Leszek Miller argued that withdrawing Spanish troops from Iraq would be “an admission that the terrorists are right.”<sup>4</sup> Of the planned withdrawal, White House press secretary Scott McClellan said, “It is the wrong message to let terrorists think that they can influence policy, that they can influence elections.”<sup>5</sup>

The international press was equally scathing. In the United States, Thomas Friedman warned, “If Spain goes ahead [with withdrawing its troops from Iraq], every terrorist in the world will celebrate, and every democracy will be a little more endangered.”<sup>6</sup> David Brooks asked, “What is the Spanish word for appeasement?” and predicted, “We can be pretty sure now that this will not be the last of the election-eve massacres. Al Qaeda will regard Spain as a splendid triumph.”<sup>7</sup> Tony Karon contended that the events “may be counted by al-Qaeda as its first success in the business of regime-change.”<sup>8</sup> In Europe, John Lloyd argued that any al Qaeda planner “would be a poor strategist if he didn’t [think] that the effect of the Madrid bombs on the Spanish vote can be replicated in Italy and Britain, the two other major European Union states which supported the Iraq invasion.”<sup>9</sup> Timothy Garton Ash concluded, “Terror works.”<sup>10</sup>

## ROADMAP

Were the 11-M bombings in fact the strategic success that these reactions suggest? In considering this question, this paper provides a much-needed examination of strategic terrorist efficacy in general and illuminates the debate over terrorist efficacy against democracies in particular. Answering the question requires distinguishing strategic success from causal relevance. Strategic

<sup>2</sup> John Vinocur, “Some in Europe see Spain’s turnabout as a victory for Al Qaeda,” *International Herald Tribune*, 18 March 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Lizette Alvarez and Elaine Sciolino, “Spain Grapples With Notion That Terrorism Trumped Democracy,” *New York Times*, 17 March 2004.

<sup>4</sup> For Hastert’s remarks, see David Rennie, “Appeasement will not halt terror, Bush tells Spain,” *Daily Telegraph*, 19 March 2004. For Miller’s, see “Wobbles in the Alliance,” *Economist*, 19 March 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Jarrett Murphy, “Global Jitters after Madrid Terror,” *CBS News*, 17 March 2004, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/03/18/terror/main607135.shtml>.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, “Spain must not let Al Qaeda’s vote count,” *New York Times*, 25 March 2004.

<sup>7</sup> David Brooks, “Al Qaeda’s Wish List,” *New York Times*, 16 March 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Tony Karon, “Did al-Qaeda Change Spain’s Regime?” *Time*, 15 March 2004, also available at <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,601306,00.html>.

<sup>9</sup> “Terrorism, Democracy and Muslims after the Madrid Bombs,” *openDemocracy*, 25 March 2004, [www.openDemocracy.net](http://www.openDemocracy.net).

<sup>10</sup> Timothy Garton Ash, “We must learn from Madrid,” *Guardian*, 25 March 2004.

success occurs when the intended result is achieved via the causal mechanism predicted by the terrorist actor, pursuant to the actor's strategic logic. If the terrorist actions contribute to the planned result via a chain of causation different from that intended or predicted, those actions would be causally relevant without being strategically effective. Often, of course, the actor's strategic logic is not made public, or there is reason to believe public statements of strategy to be disingenuous. In such scenarios, a comprehensive analysis will examine the applicability of all plausible strategies. Testing five alternative strategic models, I find that from almost all perspectives, the 11-M attacks cannot be deemed strategically successful. Their seemingly spectacular efficacy is not replicable.

The analysis is organized as follows. First, I examine 11-M and the election through the framework of coercive bargaining. I begin this examination by considering whether al Qaeda was a credible coercive agent. I find that it was not because its credible threats were not balanced by credible assurances. I then ask whether the Spanish electorate nonetheless entered a coercive bargain with the network, as implicitly charged by critics of the electoral decision. Considering both strong and weak forms of coercive bargaining, I find that it did not. On the contrary, consistent with the theory of democratic resilience, voters backed the party that they thought had a more effective strategy for combating terrorism, even though that involved violating directly the terrorists' demands.

Having rejected the coercive bargaining thesis, I proceed in the next section to alternative strategic frameworks. In turn, I consider the efficacy of the 11-M attacks as part of one or more of (1) a publicity strategy, (2) a provocation strategy, (3) a regime-destabilization strategy, and (4) a morale-building strategy.<sup>11</sup> I find that under none of the first three models was 11-M a strategic success. Moreover, although the attacks likely benefited al Qaeda by building internal morale, this limited achievement does not distinguish the events of 11-M from any other successfully executed al Qaeda attack on a Western target.

<sup>11</sup> This is not an exhaustive list of terrorist strategies. However, it includes all of those that could plausibly illuminate the relationship between the 11-M attacks and the subsequent election. Thomas Perry Thornton considers the four listed strategies to be among the five functions of terrorism. Thomas Perry Thornton, "Terror as a Weapon of Political Agitation," in *Internal War: Problems and Approaches*, ed. Harry Eckstein (London: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 71–99, 82–85, 87. His fifth strategic function—clearly inapplicable to 11-M—is the elimination of enemy forces (*ibid.*, 86). Other useful taxonomies of terrorist strategies are provided by Martha Crenshaw, Paul Wilkinson, and Andrew Kydd and Barbara Walter. Martha Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," *Comparative Politics* 13, no. 4 (July 1981): 379–99, 389; Paul Wilkinson, *Terrorism versus Democracy: The Liberal State Response*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 7; Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," *International Security* 31, no.1 (2006): 49–79, 51. Each includes at least some of the strategic functions listed here, in addition to strategies clearly inapplicable to the attacks of 11-M, at least as those attacks relate to the election. Examples of clearly inapplicable strategies include: spoiling a peace process by showing the moderates on the "terrorists' side" to be weak (Kydd and Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," 51) and eliciting cash ransoms or the release of imprisoned terrorists (Wilkinson, *Terrorism versus Democracy*, 7).

This is not to say that the 11-M bombings did not contribute to the PSOE victory. In the final section, I explain how 11-M catalyzed the PSOE victory despite the failure of the attacks on a strategic level.

## MOTIVATION FOR THE ANALYSIS

Several scholars have examined the PSOE's surprise March 2004 victory. The consensus is that the 11-M attacks played an important, perhaps even decisive, role in causing the PSOE's victory.<sup>12</sup> However, for at least some analysts, this finding is qualified by the complexity of the chain of causation and the existence of other important factors.<sup>13</sup> My findings generally support the latter view that the 11-M attacks played a complicated but real role in contributing to the electoral outcome, although the additional causal factors I identify vary somewhat from those emphasized in the existing literature. The purpose of this paper, however, is to go beyond this basic finding of causal relevance and to examine the empirics of March 2004 through the various analytic frameworks of terrorist strategy. I seek to address directly the question of whether 11-M was a strategic terrorist success.

This question has yet to be fully resolved. As noted above, in the media, and among policy makers and leaders, the 11-M attacks are widely considered a major terrorist victory. Among terrorism scholars, too, many argue that the bombers achieved a strategic triumph. Anthony Celso contends that "[t]he Madrid attacks' impact on the 14 March election . . . and the Socialists' decision to accelerate the withdrawal of Spanish forces from Iraq are testimony to al Qaeda's skills at political extortion."<sup>14</sup> James and Brenda Lutz

<sup>12</sup> See Charles Powell, "Did Terrorism Sway Spain's Election?" *Current History* (November 2004): 376–82; Raj S. Chari, "The 2004 Spanish Election: Terrorism as a Catalyst for Change?" *West European Politics* 27, no. 5 (November 2004): 954–63; Mariano Torcal and Guillermo Rico, "The Spanish General Election," *South European Society and Politics* 9, no. 3 (2004): 107–21; Josep M. Colomer, "The General Election in Spain, March 2004," *Electoral Studies* 24 (2005): 149–56; Javier Jordán, "The Madrid Attacks," *Terrorism Monitor* 4, no. 5 (9 March 2006); Ingrid van Biezen, "Terrorism and Democratic Legitimacy: Conflicting Interpretations of the Spanish Elections," *Mediterranean Politics* 10, no. 1 (March 2005): 99–108; José Antonio Olmeda, "Fear or Falsehood?" (working paper 4, Real Instituto Elcano, 5 May 2005); Narciso Michavila, "War, Terrorism and Elections" (working paper 13, Real Instituto Elcano, 6 April 2005); Robert M. Fishman, "On the Continuing Relevance of the Weberian Methodological Perspective (With Applications to the Spanish Case of Elections in the Aftermath of Terrorism)," (working paper 317, Kellogg Institute, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN, February 2005); Sarah Oates and Monica Postelnicu, "Citizens or Comrade? Terrorist Threat in Election Campaigns in Russia and the U.S." (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC, September 2005), [http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p\\_mla\\_apa\\_research\\_citation/0/4/1/5/3/pages41531/p41531-1.php](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/0/4/1/5/3/pages41531/p41531-1.php), 3–4.

<sup>13</sup> See Powell, "Did Terrorism Sway Spain's Election?"; Chari, "The 2004 Spanish Election"; van Biezen, "Terrorism and Democratic Legitimacy"; Torcal and Rico, "The Spanish General Election"; Michavila, "War, Terrorism and Elections"; Fishman, "On the Continuing Relevance."

<sup>14</sup> Anthony Celso, "The Tragedy of Al-Andalus: The Madrid Terror Attacks and the Islamization of Spanish Politics," *Mediterranean Quarterly* (Summer 2005): 86–101, 86.

assert that Zapatero's "withdrawal of the [Spanish] troops [from Iraq] has to be counted as a success" for the 11-M bombers.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, William Rose and Rysia Murphy deem the attacks to be emblematic of "at least partial terrorist success."<sup>16</sup> Offering a more equivocal assessment, but stopping short of labeling the bombings a strategic failure, Max Abrahms argues that the impact of the attacks on the Spanish elections was "questionable" and "uncertain."<sup>17</sup> Underlining the durability of the dominant narrative, however, Erica Chenoweth et al. conclude, "Abrahms was probably right that the 2004 Madrid bombings had a 'questionable' effect on the results of the Spanish elections and Spain's subsequent withdrawal of its military forces from Iraq. But many observers have interpreted these outcomes as examples of terrorist success—an opinion likely shared by many terrorists and leaders who are contemplating adopting a terrorist strategy."<sup>18</sup>

Bringing resolution to this issue is important not only for our understanding of 11-M as a terrorist episode but more broadly for our understanding of the efficacy of terrorism generally and the efficacy of terrorism against democracies in particular. Terrorist success on the order of near instantaneous satisfaction of policy demands would set a strong strategic precedent, with significant implications for the future of terrorism and counterterrorism in democratic states.

Emphasizing the need for research in this area, Andrew Kydd and Barbara Walter argue that "[w]hat is lacking [in contemporary terrorism studies] is a clear understanding of the larger strategic games terrorists are playing and the ways in which state responses help or hinder them."<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Abrahms claims that there is "scant empirical research . . . on terrorism's strategic effectiveness."<sup>20</sup> Perhaps providing a partial explanation for this, Robert Pape cautions that the key "analytical difficulty in assessing outcomes of coercive efforts is that successes are more ambiguous than failures," noting that even when "the target state does make policy changes in the direction of the terrorists' political goals," this is not necessarily attributable to terrorism's coercive efficacy.<sup>21</sup> Responding to the calls of Kydd and Walter and Abrahms, while heeding Pape's warning, I look past the apparent outcome success of the 11-M attacks to examine the strategic function and test the strategic efficacy of the bombings.

<sup>15</sup> James M. Lutz and Brenda J. Lutz, "How Successful Is Terrorism?" *Forum on Public Policy* (2009): 11, also available at <http://www.forumonpublicpolicy.com/spring09papers/archivespr09/lutz.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> William Rose and Rysia Murphy, correspondence with Max Abrahms, "Does Terrorism Ever Work? The 2004 Madrid Train Bombings," *International Security* 32, no. 1 (2007): 185–92, 185.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 189–90.

<sup>18</sup> Erica Chenoweth, Nicholas Miller, and Elizabeth McClellan, correspondence with Max Abrahms, "What Makes Terrorists Tick?" *International Security* 33, no. 4 (Spring 2009): 180–202, 181.

<sup>19</sup> Kydd and Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," 50.

<sup>20</sup> Max Abrahms, "Why Democracies Make Superior Counterterrorists," *Security Studies* 16, no. 2 (2007): 223–53, 235.

<sup>21</sup> Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win*, (New York: Random House, 2005), 63.

This analysis is of particular import given the ongoing debate as to the vulnerability or resilience of democracies to strategic terrorism. Pape observes that democracies “are thought to be especially vulnerable to coercive punishment” because “their publics have low thresholds of cost tolerance and high ability to affect state policy.”<sup>22</sup> This notion is widely endorsed by terrorism experts and has received some empirical support.<sup>23</sup> It is not, however, universally accepted. Paul Wilkinson counters that “liberal democracies have been extraordinarily resilient in withstanding terrorist attempts to coerce them into major changes of policy or surrender.”<sup>24</sup> Reaching a similar conclusion on the back of a detailed empirical analysis, Abrahms argues, “Liberal aversion to incurring civilian losses does not result in craven political concessions but rather in extraordinarily high motivation for combating terrorism.”<sup>25</sup> Liberal democracies, he finds, are particularly willing to sanction the use of force to this end.<sup>26</sup>

11-M provides a useful case in the study of strategic terrorism generally, because on its face it appears to have been a spectacular success. Moreover, the circumstances around the attacks ought to provide a particularly strong case for the theory of democratic vulnerability: the attacks occurred days before a general election (when a democratic public is at its most powerful), and the major parties disagreed on a key terrorist demand (the withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq).

My finding that 11-M's influence on the election was not due to strategic efficacy has three key implications. First, 11-M does not provide a replicable model for terrorist success. Copycat attacks would therefore be misguided. Second, a strategically intelligent al Qaeda leadership is likely aware of this and will adapt its approach accordingly.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, although strategically naïve affiliates may attempt to mimic 11-M, the Madrid bombings will not be a beacon of replicable efficacy to careful terrorist strategists. Third, counterterrorism strategists, particularly in liberal democracies, must

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>23</sup> Endorsing this perspective, see Kydd and Walter, “The Strategies of Terrorism,” 80; Walter Laqueur, *The Age of Terrorism* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1987), 224; Leonard B. Weinberg and William L. Eubank, “Does Democracy Encourage Terrorism?” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 6, no. 4 (1994): 417–35, esp. 420; Gil Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 22, 46–47; Audrey Kurth Cronin, “How al-Qaida Ends the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Groups,” *International Security* 31, no. 1 (Summer 2006): 7–48, 31; Richard A. Clarke et al., *The Forgotten Homeland: A Century Foundation Task Force Report* (New York: The Century Foundation, 2006), 8; Quan Li, “Does Democracy Promote or Reduce Transnational Terrorist Incidents?” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 2 (2005): 278–97, 283. Providing empirical support for this view see William L. Eubank and Leonard B. Weinberg, “Terrorism and Democracy: Perpetrators and Victims,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 13, no. 1 (2001): 155–64; Leonard B. Weinberg and William L. Eubank, “Terrorism and Democracy: What Recent Events Disclose,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 10, no. 1 (1998): 108–18.

<sup>24</sup> Wilkinson, *Terrorism versus Democracy*, 49.

<sup>25</sup> Abrahms, “Why Democracies Make Superior Counterterrorists,” 246.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 246–49.

<sup>27</sup> See *infra* nn. 274–276 and referenced text.



use these findings to inform their policy decisions. Specifically, they should note the possibility of naïve mimicry, but they should not expect al Qaeda to make a long-term or high-level strategic shift toward the manipulation of elections. Similarly, they should not interpret 11-M as an unusually alarming indicator of democratic vulnerability. If anything, the Spanish response should encourage strategists as to the resilience of democratic publics.

## COERCIVE BARGAINING

### Theoretical Underpinnings

Distinguishing coercion from brute force, Thomas Schelling explains, “[T]here is a difference between taking what you want and making someone give it to you.”<sup>28</sup> The coercive actor uses threats to elicit voluntary transfer, deriving bargaining power from her mere “*capacity* to hurt.”<sup>29</sup> That is not to say she eschews force; capacity must often be proven.<sup>30</sup> Force is used coercively when it serves as a signal (tacit or explicit) of the actor’s capacity and will to inflict further pain until the target grants her demands.<sup>31</sup> The target, in turn, engages in a coercive bargain if he interprets the pain already inflicted as a signal of the threat’s authenticity and decides to meet the conditions of the threat in exchange for the coercive actor’s assurance that she will cease exercising her power to hurt. He acts to avoid future pain “by accommodation.”<sup>32</sup>

Although not always cited directly in contemporary terrorism studies, the theory of coercive bargaining articulated by Schelling clearly forms the basis for one of the primary analytical frameworks used to model terrorist strategy. Abrahms contends it is “widely accepted” that “groups use terrorism as a communication strategy to convey to target countries the costs of noncompliance” and thus influence “the proclivity of target states to bargain.”<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Kydd and Walter describe terrorism as “a form of costly signaling” through which terrorists “persuade audiences to do as they wish” by demonstrating their “ability to impose costs and their degree of commitment to their cause.”<sup>34</sup> Pape holds that this is the “main purpose of suicide terrorism.”<sup>35</sup> These views are not isolated; the use of terrorism as a tool of

<sup>28</sup> Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 2.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 31 (emphasis added).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>31</sup> For elaboration on the distinction between tacit and explicit coercive signaling, see Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 21.

<sup>32</sup> Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 2.

<sup>33</sup> Max Abrahms, “Why Terrorism Does not Work,” *International Security* 31, no. 2 (2006): 42–78, 47, 59.

<sup>34</sup> Kydd and Walter, “The Strategies of Terrorism,” 50–51.

<sup>35</sup> Pape, *Dying to Win*, 27.

coercive bargaining is recognized (explicitly or implicitly) throughout the literature.<sup>36</sup>

The strategy of coercive bargaining receives extended attention here for four reasons. First, in contrast to many terrorist attacks,<sup>37</sup> 11-M was accompanied by a direct and explicit coercive threat. The threat came before the election and included the demand that Spain withdraw its troops from Iraq. When voters then shifted to the PSOE, it seemed, *prima facie*, that a coercive bargain was struck (that Spaniards heard the threat, considered the demand, and decided to satisfy the demand so as to avoid the threatened consequence). Although not precluding the applicability of other strategies to 11-M, this overt and seemingly effective strategy deserves heightened scrutiny.<sup>38</sup>

Second, the popular criticism that the Spanish electorate “appeased” the terrorists is framed in the language of a coercive bargain. It expresses the idea that the Spanish population satisfied the terrorists’ demand with a view to protecting itself from the threatened future attacks. It must therefore be addressed on those terms.

Third, al Qaeda is “[p]erhaps the most important example” of a terrorist group pursuing a coercive bargaining strategy.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, coercive bargaining is at the core of the network’s program of action.<sup>40</sup> Al Qaeda’s connection to the Madrid attacks demands that the bombings be analyzed for coercive efficacy.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Harvey E. Lapan and Todd Sandler, “Terrorism and Signaling,” *European Journal of Political Economy* 9, no. 3 (August 1993): 383–98, 384–85; Todd Sandler and Kevin Siqueira, “Games and Terrorism,” *Simulation and Gaming* 40, no. 2 (April 2009): 164–92, 182; Paul Wilkinson, “Terrorism: International Dimensions,” in *Contemporary Terrorism*, ed. William Gutteridge (New York: Facts on File Publications, 1986), 29–56, 29, 47; Alan Dershowitz, *Why Terrorism Works* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 94; David Fromkin, “The Strategy of Terrorism,” *Foreign Affairs* 53, no. 4 (July 1975): 683–98, 686; H. Edward Price, Jr., “The Strategy and Tactics of Revolutionary Terrorism,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 19, no. 1 (January 1977): 52–66, 55; Onora O’Neill, “Which are the Offers you Can’t Refuse,” in *Violence, Terrorism, and Justice*, ed. R.G. Frey and Christopher W. Morris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 170–95, 172, 177; Thomas C. Schelling, “What Purposes Can ‘International Terrorism’ Serve?” in *Violence, Terrorism, and Justice*, 18–32; Paul Staniland, correspondence with Max Abrahms, “What Makes Terrorists Tick?” *International Security* 33, no. 4 (Spring 2009): 180–202.

<sup>37</sup> Max Abrahms, “What Terrorists Really Want,” *International Security* 32, no. 4 (Spring 2008): 78–105, 89–90; Schelling, “What Purposes?” 24.

<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the principal argument ordinarily made against the coercive-bargaining framework is that terrorists often fail to make their terms explicit. Abrahms, “What Terrorists Really Want,” 90; David A. Lake, “Rational Extremism,” *Dialog-IO* (Spring 2002): 15–29, 15.

<sup>39</sup> Kydd and Walter, “The Strategies of Terrorism,” 63. Although terming it an “attrition strategy,” Kydd and Walter explicitly reference coercive bargaining in their elaboration of its functioning (*ibid.*, 59, n. 32).

<sup>40</sup> Pape, *Dying to Win*, 122; Abrahms, “Why Terrorism Does Not Work,” 59.

<sup>41</sup> After some initial ambiguity, investigations ultimately confirmed that there were links between the terrorists and al Qaeda’s core command. Javier Jordán and Nicola Horsburgh, “Spain and Islamism,” *Mediterranean Politics* 11, no. 2 (July 2006): 209–29, 216.

Fourth, among terrorist strategies, coercive bargaining provides a uniquely direct route from attack to desired policy objective. For example, instead of raising awareness of a cause in the hope that that will be the first step on the road to policy change, coercive terrorism demands such change directly. Successful coercion is therefore of particular preconditional consequence. This is especially true with respect to 11-M because the successful coercion of an electorate would suggest a viable (and perhaps superior) alternative to direct coercion of governments, reveal a key democratic vulnerability, and suggest an area of counterterrorism requiring special attention.

### Al Qaeda's Coercive Credibility

Before examining the efficacy of the 11-M attacks as tools of coercion, I consider whether al Qaeda was a credible coercive bargaining partner. There are two aspects to a properly constructed coercive posture. First, the coercive agent must credibly threaten to hurt the target if her demands are not met. Second, and oft overlooked,<sup>42</sup> the coercive agent must provide a credible assurance not to hurt the target if her demands are met.

The night before Spanish voters went to the polls, authorities found a videocassette on which a man claiming responsibility for the 11-M attacks made explicit the threat of future terror and outlined his group's demands. The translated transcript reads:

We declare our responsibility for what happened in Madrid exactly two-and-a-half years after the attacks on New York and Washington. It is a response to your collaboration with the criminals Bush and his allies. *This is a response to the crimes that you have caused in the world and specifically in Iraq and Afghanistan, and there will be more, if God wills it.* You love life and we love death, which gives an example of what the Prophet Muhammad said. *If you don't stop your injustices, more and more blood will flow, and these attacks will seem very small compared to what can occur in what you call terrorism.* This is a statement by the military spokesman for al-Qaeda in Europe, Abu Dujan al-Afghani.<sup>43</sup>

Both the threat and the accompanying assurance are contained in the penultimate sentence. In common language, if not pure logic, a statement of the

<sup>42</sup> Consider, for example, the following two analyses, emphasizing the importance of demonstrating threat capacity but neglecting the issue of assurance credibility. Sandler and Siqueira, "Games and Terrorism," 182; Baltzer Overgaard, "The Scale of Terrorist Attacks as a Signal of Resources," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 38, no. 3 (September 1994): 452–78, 455.

<sup>43</sup> "Full text: 'Al-Qaeda' Madrid Claim," *BBC News*, 14 March 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3509556.stm> (emphasis added).

type “if you don’t x, then y” carries the implication that “if you do x, then not y.” Were the two elements of al Qaeda’s bargaining posture credible?

By 14 March 2004, al Qaeda’s threats were substantiated by a compelling history. The network had repeatedly demonstrated its capacity to hit high-value US targets between 1993 and 2001, and affiliates had successfully hit lower-value French targets multiple times in the 1990s.<sup>44</sup> Spain, too, had suffered sporadic jihadist attacks in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>45</sup> More recently, the 2003 suicide bombing of Spanish restaurant and club in Casablanca, Morocco was interpreted as an attack on the Iberian nation.<sup>46</sup> Most importantly, the 11-M bombings themselves pointedly demonstrated al Qaeda’s ability to launch a coordinated series of deadly attacks in the heart of Spain’s capital city.

Public estimates of al Qaeda’s unexercised potential in 2004 further bolstered the network’s threat credibility.<sup>47</sup> Al Qaeda’s resources across Europe are relevant in this regard, given the network’s consistent use of transnational collaboration.<sup>48</sup> By the time of the 11-M attacks, al Qaeda cells had been observed in every nation of Western Europe.<sup>49</sup> In 2002, experts put the number of what Rohan Gunaratna describes as “the cream of Al Qaeda’s trained members” on the continent at between two and three hundred.<sup>50</sup> French anti-terrorism judge Jean-Louis Bruguière called al Qaeda’s European networks “very active” and described the overall threat as “stronger than ever.”<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the number of individuals involved was understood to

<sup>44</sup> For a detailed analysis of the al Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Center (1993), the embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam (1998), the USS Cole (2000), and the Pentagon and World Trade Center (2001), see Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror* (New York: Random House, 2002). On attacks carried out by affiliates, see Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside al-Qaeda* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 162–68 (recounting small-scale attacks on France in the 1990s).

<sup>45</sup> Javier Jordán and Nicola Horsburgh, “Mapping Jihadist Terrorism in Spain,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 28 (2005): 169–91, 170; Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus’ab al-Suri* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 66.

<sup>46</sup> Powell, “Did Terrorism Sway Spain’s Election?” 378.

<sup>47</sup> The extent to which the Spanish electorate was aware of this information is, of course, difficult to know. However, since the information referenced was publicly available at the time of the alleged coercive bargain, it directly impacts al Qaeda’s credibility as a coercive agent.

<sup>48</sup> Benjamin and Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror*, 211. Spain’s participation in the Schengen Convention renders it particularly vulnerable to al Qaeda cells in other participant states.

<sup>49</sup> Aaron Mannes, *Profiles in Terror* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 48. See also Jonathan Schanzer, *Al-Qaeda’s Armies* (New York: Specialist Press International, 2004), 107–11, who notes the efficacy of al Qaeda affiliate, GSPC (Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat) in permeating key European states. The European media had by the time of 11-M reported regularly on the existence of al Qaeda cells on the continent.

<sup>50</sup> Gunaratna, *Inside al-Qaeda*, 154. Magnus Ranstorp, director of studies on terrorism and political violence at Scotland’s University of Saint Andrews, was cited as estimating the number to be 250. Sammy Ketz, “Despite Arrests, Europe Remains Staging Ground for al-Qa’ida,” *Agence France Presse*, 27 November 2002.

<sup>51</sup> Ketz, “Despite Arrests, Europe Remains Staging Ground for al-Qa’ida.”

be growing.<sup>52</sup> European intelligence reports leaked in January 2004 warned of an expanding “fanatical network of men dedicated to the prosecution of jihad” stretching across Europe.<sup>53</sup>

Spain was not an anomaly in this regard. As was discussed in the Spanish media just two weeks prior to 11-M, several of those involved in planning and executing the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington obtained key documents and materials from al Qaeda sleeper cells in Spain.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, as Gunaratna observed in 2002, Spain’s location and demographic composition had always made it a “natural choice as an Al Qaeda hub,” so it was no surprise that after the network’s Turkish cell was disrupted, al Qaeda “relocated its regional bureau to Spain.”<sup>55</sup> In short, al Qaeda’s latent potential to inflict pain on the Spanish people extended far beyond the individuals who executed the 11-M attacks.

Of course, to be credible, a coercive agent must demonstrate not just the capacity but also the will to execute the threat. Here too, al Qaeda is highly credible. First, the network’s history, referenced above, does not indicate a proclivity for bluffing. Second, al Qaeda terrorists have demonstrated a willingness to engage in substantial personal sacrifice—most notably in the form of suicide attacks—to ensure al Qaeda’s “punishments” are inflicted on its enemies.<sup>56</sup> Osama bin Laden argues that members’ readiness to sacrifice is born of religious commitment, asserting, “Being killed for Allah’s cause is a great honor” and “is something we wish for.”<sup>57</sup> Skeptics, such as Pape and Marc Sageman, question the importance of religion and suggest that other commitments—including group solidarity,<sup>58</sup> moral outrage at the treatment of other Muslims,<sup>59</sup> or nationalism<sup>60</sup>—motivate al Qaeda terrorists. Ultimately, whatever motivates al Qaeda members, it is clearly sufficiently powerful to inspire in many of them a willingness to die. This fierce commitment helps to ensure that threats are executed even when the costs of execution

<sup>52</sup> Sebastian Rotella, “Extremists Find Fertile Soil in Europe, Threat of War in Iraq is Adding to the Pool of Potential Recruits for al Qaeda and Others,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 March 2003, <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/mar/02/world/fg-cell2>.

<sup>53</sup> Anthony Barnett, Jason Burke, and Zoe Smith, “How the tentacles of terror are stretching over Europe,” *Observer*, 1 January 2004.

<sup>54</sup> For the media report, see “La preparación de los atentados del 11-S se ultimó en España” [Preparations for the 9/11 attacks were finalized in Spain], *Cadena SER*, 29 February 2004, [http://www.cadenaser.com/internacional/articulo/preparacion-atentados-11-s-ultimo-espana/csrsrpor/20040229csrsrint\\_4/Tes](http://www.cadenaser.com/internacional/articulo/preparacion-atentados-11-s-ultimo-espana/csrsrpor/20040229csrsrint_4/Tes). See also Powell, “Did Terrorism Sway Spain’s Election?”

<sup>55</sup> Gunaratna, *Inside al-Qaeda*, 171. See also Anthony Celso, “The Tragedy of Al-Andalus,” 86–101, 88.

<sup>56</sup> There were seventy-one al Qaeda suicide terrorist attacks between 1995 and 2003 (the year prior to 11-M). Pape, *Dying to Win*, 109.

<sup>57</sup> Osama bin Laden, Interview by Peter Arnett, Afghanistan, March 1997, *CNN*, <http://www.anusha.com/osamaint.htm>.

<sup>58</sup> Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 51–52, 66–70, 84–88. See also Max Abrahms, “What Terrorists Really Want,” 97–101.

<sup>59</sup> Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 72–84.

<sup>60</sup> Pape, *Dying to Win*, 51–58, 102–25.

are extreme, debilitating ordinary means of deterrence and bolstering threat credibility.

Moreover, even supposing costs could be imposed on the al Qaeda core such that its will to execute were broken, this would not nullify the threat.<sup>61</sup> The leadership has delegated the execution of attacks to agents over whom it has minimal control and who are not personally impacted if the organization suffers costs as a consequence of threat execution. By relinquishing negative control (the ability to stop the threat from being executed), the central command gains positive control, enhancing the likelihood that the threat will be executed regardless of organizational cost and thus nullifying the efficacy of any attempt by the other party to respond to the threat with an effort at deterrence or decapitation.<sup>62</sup>

Al Qaeda has deliberately cultivated this positive control through adopting (at least partially) a radically flat and diffuse internal structure.<sup>63</sup> Shortly after 11-M, Sageman asserted that al Qaeda had “degenerated into something like the internet,” connecting “spontaneous groups of friends” with “few links to any central leadership,” but nonetheless capable of “very dangerous terrorist operations.”<sup>64</sup> Jonathan Schanzer notes that the network “has long relied upon small and local groups as ‘subcontractors’ for its major terrorist attacks,”<sup>65</sup> while Audrey Cronin describes a network energized by local initiative, inspired freelancers, and loosely connected groups.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, Scott Atran depicts al Qaeda as a “hydra-headed network” with minimal dependence on a central command.<sup>67</sup>

Some analysts caution against taking this point too far. Bruce Hoffman criticizes Sageman in particular for dismissing the enduring dominance of command hierarchy within al Qaeda.<sup>68</sup> However, even while making that criticism, Hoffman acknowledges the coexistence of a flat, diffuse structure alongside the more rigid center. Indeed, shortly before 11-M, he accepted that an “equally challenging threat” to that presented by the network’s core

<sup>61</sup> Ehud Sprinzak, for example, argues against “[t]he perception that terrorists are undeterrable fanatics.” Ehud Sprinzak, “Rational Fanatics,” *Foreign Policy* 120 (September–October 2000): 66–73, 73.

<sup>62</sup> See Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, 37.

<sup>63</sup> See, generally, Abu Mus’ab al-Suri, “The Military Theory of the Global Islamic Resistance Call,” translated in *Architect of Global Jihad*, 347–484.

<sup>64</sup> Marc Sageman, “Understanding Terror Networks,” E-Notes, 1 November 2004, *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, <http://www.fpri.org/enotes/20041101.middleeast.sageman.understandingterrornetworks.html>. See, generally, Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*.

<sup>65</sup> Schanzer, *Al-Qaeda’s Armies*, 16. See also Gunaratna, *Inside al-Qaeda*, 73.

<sup>66</sup> Cronin, “How al-Qaida Ends,” 33, 40.

<sup>67</sup> Scott Atran, “Mishandling Suicide Terrorism,” *The Washington Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 67–90, 67; Scott Atran, “Trends in Suicide Terrorism” (paper presented at World Federation of Scientists Permanent Monitoring Panel on Terrorism, Erice, Sicily, August 2004), <http://www.sitemaker.umich.edu/satran/files/atran-trends.pdf>, 2.

<sup>68</sup> See, especially, Bruce Hoffman, “The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism,” *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2008); Marc Sageman and Bruce Hoffman, “Does Osama Still Call the Shots?” *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2008).

was posed by “less discernible and more unpredictable entities” drawn from the broader population, particularly in Europe.<sup>69</sup> He later admitted that al Qaeda had become “an international franchise with like-minded local representatives, loosely connected to a central ideological or motivational base” and stated that it was “flatter, more linear and organizationally networked” than terrorist groups of the past.<sup>70</sup>

Ultimately, whether or not one takes it to be the dominant characteristic of al Qaeda, the flat, diffusion of cells and individuals is clearly an important feature of the network. Exemplifying al Qaeda’s willingness to delegate authority to the terrorist foot soldier, bin Laden, in his 1998 declaration of jihad, announced, “To kill the American[s] and their allies— civilians and military—is an *individual duty* incumbent upon every Muslim in all countries.”<sup>71</sup> In 2001, Ayman al-Zawahiri encouraged the bearers of this delegated authority to think for themselves and to check weakness among al Qaeda leaders.<sup>72</sup> Key al Qaeda strategist Abu Mus’ab al-Suri elaborates at length what he considers to be the fundamental importance to the network of independent individuals and small “spontaneously” established cells acting on their own initiative, pursuant to the overarching ideology and goals of al Qaeda.<sup>73</sup> These individuals and cells are to “participate in the Resistance without any organizational links with the Center. [They are joined to al Qaeda instead by] the common aim, a common name, the common doctrinal jihadi program, and a comprehensive educational program [made available to them].”<sup>74</sup>

By regularly disseminating the order to perform attacks far beyond the scope of its formal command, the al Qaeda leadership disables its capacity to cancel attacks.<sup>75</sup> This constrains its ability to bluff and limits the efficacy of deterrent or decapitation efforts targeted at the al Qaeda core. As al-Suri argues, “When the enemy comes to seize it [the organization], or some of its parts, he will discover that he has not seized anything worth mentioning, when compared to the rest of [the movement’s] body.”<sup>76</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Bruce Hoffman, “The Leadership Secrets of Osama bin Laden,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, April 2003.

<sup>70</sup> Bruce Hoffman, “Combating Al Qaeda and the Militant Islamic Threat,” testimony presented to the House Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities, 16 February 2006 (Arlington, VA: RAND, 2006), 3, available at [http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/congress/hoffman\\_testimony16feb06.pdf](http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/congress/hoffman_testimony16feb06.pdf).

<sup>71</sup> Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Abu-Yasir Rifa’i Ahmad Taha, Mir Hamzah, and Fazlul Rahman, “The World Islamic Front,” 23 February 1998, in *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden*, ed. Bruce Lawrence, trans. James Howarth (New York: Verso, 2005), 58–62, 61 (emphasis added). Bin Laden repeated this principle in 2003. Osama bin Laden, “Among a Band of Knights,” 14 February 2003, in *Messages to the World*, 186–206, 203. See also al-Suri, “The Military Theory,” 428, 438.

<sup>72</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri, “Knights under the Prophet’s Banner - Meditations on the Jihadist Movement,” *Al-Sharq al-Aswat*, 2 December 2001, translated in Gunaratna, *Inside al-Qaeda*, 298.

<sup>73</sup> Al-Suri, “The Military Theory,” 446, sections 4–5 in chap. 5, generally.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 445. See also ibid., 421.

<sup>75</sup> Hoffman, “Combating Al Qaeda,” 7.

<sup>76</sup> Al-Suri, “The Military Theory,” 424.

In sum, al Qaeda's record (particularly the 11-M attacks), its untapped resources in the region, its (at least partially) flat structure and appeal to independent actors, and the intensity of operatives' commitment to execute threats all contributed to making the videotaped threat issued following 11-M highly credible.

A credible threat, however, must be balanced by a credible assurance. As Schelling explains, "The pain and suffering have to appear *contingent*."<sup>77</sup> The very reason a target would comply with a coercive agent's demands is to avoid the threatened action. The target must, therefore, have some reason to believe his compliance will achieve that end. Two issues are particularly pertinent regarding the 11-M assurance: the scope of al Qaeda's agenda and the importance of negative control.

Some observers contend that al Qaeda has genuinely limited aims. Abrahms, for example, argues, "Al Qaeda has attacked the United States to change its foreign policies."<sup>78</sup> Similarly, Pape finds that al Qaeda attacks on US and European targets can be explained by the military presence of the target state in Muslim states and particularly in the homeland(s) of the responsible terrorists.<sup>79</sup>

The evidence is less clear than these conclusions suggest. To take one relevant example, Abrahms argues in support of his thesis that, following 11-M, "Spain withdrew its troops from Iraq without subsequent terrorist incidents, whereas Britain remained committed to Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Al Qaeda targeted London."<sup>80</sup> However, in the twenty-one months immediately following Spain's withdrawal from Iraq, there were at least eight aborted jihadist terrorist attacks in Spain,<sup>81</sup> and the country remains a target today.<sup>82</sup>

Moreover, a number of experts dispute the notion that al Qaeda's agenda is limited to changing foreign policy.<sup>83</sup> Gunaratna, for example, argues that al Qaeda has charted a series of escalating goals, culminating in the building of "a formidable array of Islamic states—including ones with nuclear capability—to wage war on the US . . . and its allies."<sup>84</sup> Wilkinson contrasts

<sup>77</sup> Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 4.

<sup>78</sup> Max Abrahms, "Al-Qaeda's Scorecard," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29, no. 4 (July–August 2006): 509–29, 513. See also Abrahms, "Why Terrorism Does Not Work."

<sup>79</sup> Pape, *Dying to Win*, 51–58, 103–4. See also Atran, "Trends in Suicide Terrorism."

<sup>80</sup> Abrams, "Al-Qaeda's Scorecard," 515.

<sup>81</sup> Jordán and Horsburgh, "Spain and Islamism," 225.

<sup>82</sup> Bruce Hoffman, "Al-Qaeda has a new strategy: Obama needs one, too," *Washington Post*, 10 January 2010.

<sup>83</sup> See, for example, Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (New York: Ecco, 2003), xix; Benjamin and Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror*, 161; Dershowitz, *Why Terrorism Works*, 94; Sageman, "Understanding Terror Networks."

<sup>84</sup> Gunaratna, *Inside al-Qaeda*, 119; National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (London: W.W. Norton, 2004), xvi.



what he terms al Qaeda's "uncompromising/absolutist commitment to changing the entire international system" with the "limited" objectives of "traditional" terrorist groups, such as ETA.<sup>85</sup>

Without seeking to adjudicate the debate over the extent of al Qaeda's true motives here, it is worth noting that certain al Qaeda communiqués suggest an underlying agenda of considerable breadth. Asked in 1997 if US withdrawal from Saudi Arabia would satisfy al Qaeda, bin Laden responded, "The reaction came as a result of the U.S. aggressive policy towards the *entire* Muslim world . . . the driving-away jihad against the U.S. does not stop with its withdrawal from the Arabian peninsula, but rather it must desist from aggressive intervention against Muslims in the *whole* world."<sup>86</sup> Although "aggressive policy" is undefined, bin Laden's claim that it applies to the "entire" Muslim world suggests that al Qaeda's objectives extend beyond the mere eviction of American troops. In 2001, bin Laden declared, "This war is fundamentally religious" and based on "enmity between us and the infidels."<sup>87</sup>

Perhaps most openly ambitious is al Qaeda spokesman Suleiman Abu Gheith. In "Why We Fight America," he writes, "How can [he] possibly [accept humiliation and inferiority] when he knows that *his nation was created to stand at the center of leadership, at the center of hegemony and rule*, at the center of ability and sacrifice? How can [he] possibly [accept humiliation and inferiority] when he knows that the [divine] rule is that *the entire earth must be subject to the religion of Allah*—not to the East, not to the West—to no ideology and to no path except for the path of Allah?"<sup>88</sup>

Al-Suri writes of al Qaeda's "global and universal (*umami*) horizon," asserting that "any Muslim, who wants to participate in jihad and the Resistance, can participate in this battle against America *in his country*, or anywhere."<sup>89</sup> He specifically states that this "religious duty of jihad" is "exactly the same" for Muslims based in Europe as it is for those residing in the Islamic and Arab world.<sup>90</sup>

On Spain specifically, Powell notes that in late 2001 Ayman al-Zawahiri "publicly described Al-Andalus (the Arabic name given the Iberian Peninsula by its Muslim conquerors) as a promised land that would revert ultimately to Islamic rule."<sup>91</sup> Similarly, as early as 1994, bin Laden declared, "The banner of jihad is raised up high to restore to our umma its pride and honor, and

<sup>85</sup> Wilkinson, *Terrorism versus Democracy*, 5.

<sup>86</sup> bin Laden, Interview by Peter Arnett.

<sup>87</sup> Osama bin Laden, quoted in "Bin Laden Rails against Crusaders and UN," *BBC News*, 3 November 2001.

<sup>88</sup> Suleiman Abu Gheith, "Why We Fight America," *The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) Special Dispatch Series* 388 (12 June 2002), available at <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archivesandArea=sdandID=SP38802>

<sup>89</sup> Al-Suri, "The Military Theory," 370 (emphasis added). See also *ibid.*, 393.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 395.

<sup>91</sup> Powell, "Did Terrorism Sway Spain's Election?" 376.

in which the banner of God's unity is raised once again over every stolen Islamic land, from Palestine to al-Andalus and other Islamic lands that were lost because of the betrayals of rulers and the feebleness of Muslims."<sup>92</sup> He repeated the description of Spain as the lost "al-Andalus" in 1998 and in January 2004.<sup>93</sup>

The debate over al Qaeda's true objectives cannot be resolved here. However, even uncertainty on this issue undermines the network's assurances. Put simply, al Qaeda's official position has not been sufficiently clear or consistent to establish that its agenda with respect to Spain does not extend beyond the withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. As Abrahms acknowledges, the network "has purported to support a highly unstable set of political goals."<sup>94</sup>

Furthermore, even if al Qaeda's goals were genuinely modest in 2004 (or are so today), it does not follow that the organizational agenda would not expand if current demands were satisfied. Unless normalized as a political partner in a peace process, a terrorist group that attains its goals will often seek new reasons to endure. Al Qaeda itself arose when, learning of Soviet plans to withdraw from Afghanistan in 1988, a core group of mujahideen "made the collective decision to remain intact while they hunted for a new political cause."<sup>95</sup> Chenoweth et al. argue that this proclivity to "invent new causes" is a function of the fact that "joining a terrorist group is often an irreversible decision."<sup>96</sup>

Finally, even assuming the al Qaeda core holds limited and temporally stable aims, these are not necessarily the goals that animate the relatively autonomous affiliates and locally developed cells that comprise the network. This is particularly significant given al Qaeda's flat structure, to which I now return.

The very devolution of authority that strengthens al Qaeda's positive control over its threats simultaneously eviscerates its negative control—the ability to prevent those threats from being executed. Thus, al Qaeda leaders cannot guarantee that a threat would not be executed even if their coercive demands were satisfied. Indeed, al Qaeda strategist Abu Bakr Naji "worries that low-ranking members of the movement will initiate their own large-scale attacks against high-value targets."<sup>97</sup> Al-Zawahiri and others in the High Command have related "headaches caused by overenthusiastic recruits."<sup>98</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Osama bin Laden, "The Betrayal of Palestine," 29 December 1994, in *Messages to the World*, 3–14, 14.

<sup>93</sup> Osama bin Laden, "A Muslim Bomb," December 1998, in *Messages to the World*, 65–94, 92; Osama bin Laden, "Resist the New Rome," 4 January 2004, in *Messages to the World*, 212–32, 227.

<sup>94</sup> Abrahms, "What Terrorists Really Want," 88.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 93. See also *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 56.

<sup>96</sup> Chenoweth, et al., "What Makes Terrorists Tick?" 184.

<sup>97</sup> Jarret M. Brachman and William F. McCants, "Stealing Al Qaeda's Playbook," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29, no. 4 (2006): 309–21, 311.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 312.

There are three reasons why the lack of negative control undermines assurances. First, lower-level members and affiliates of al Qaeda may have more expansive goals than does the core leadership and may therefore continue to attack Spanish and other targets even after formal al Qaeda demands are satisfied.<sup>99</sup>

Second, even if they share al Qaeda's current objectives and even if the core organization were to disband upon satisfaction of its demands, local affiliates and inspired groups may well seek new *raison d'être* if the objective they initially shared with al Qaeda is achieved. This problem may percolate as the conflict in Iraq winds down. Drawing a parallel with post-Soviet Afghanistan, Hoffman argues, "The surviving foreign jihadis who fought in Iraq will eventually return to their home countries or the émigré communities that they came from. Having been bloodied in battle in Iraq, they will possess the experience, cachet and credibility useful for both jihadi recruitment and operational purposes elsewhere."<sup>100</sup>

Third, the satisfaction of objectives aside, local networks and cells, just like larger terrorist groups, tend to have unstable and constantly changing political agendas. Indeed, the 11-M network itself arose from the merger of a number of cells with different nationalist agendas that eventually joined forces to "converge with global jihadism."<sup>101</sup>

In sum, the combination of a low level of negative control and the ambiguous (and potentially very broad) agenda of al Qaeda and its affiliates provided good reason to be skeptical that satisfaction of the videotaped demands would lead to a cessation of attacks against the Spanish people. Ultimately, therefore, although the threat was credible, the assurance was not. If the Spanish electorate engaged in a coercive bargain, it made a strategic mistake. I turn now to whether it did just that.

### Strong Coercion

The argument that the Spanish electorate complied with al Qaeda's threat involves three steps: (1) the final poll before 11-M gave the PP a lead of 41.8 percent to the PSOE's 37.7 percent,<sup>102</sup> a result that would have kept Spanish troops in Iraq; (2) 11-M happened and the terrorists threatened future attacks contingent on the demand that Spain withdraw from Iraq; (3) the voters—fearing the actualization of that threat—voted for the party committed to withdrawal, landing the PSOE a surprise haul of 42.6 percent, well ahead of the PP's 37.6 percent.

<sup>99</sup> Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 39.

<sup>100</sup> Hoffman, "Combating Al Qaeda," 12. See also Jessica Stern, "The Protean Enemy," *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 4 (July–August 2003): 1.

<sup>101</sup> Jordán and Horsburgh, "Spain and Islamism," 212.

<sup>102</sup> Cadena SER/Opina, "Opina Pulsómetro: Intención de Voto," 8 March 2004, [http://www.cadenaser.com/static/pulsometro/anteriores/encuesta\\_040314.htm](http://www.cadenaser.com/static/pulsometro/anteriores/encuesta_040314.htm).

I distinguish two theories of how Spanish voters might have been coerced. Under the strong-coercion theory, the threat of further attacks caused voters who had supported or been indifferent to the deployment of Spanish troops in Iraq to instead support a withdrawal. Under the weak-coercion theory, fear of future attacks caused voters already opposed to Spanish deployment in Iraq to prioritize that policy stance over their positions on other issues that they had previously considered vote-determinative.

A strong coercive bargaining success would be of great consequence. It would establish that terrorists are able to coerce democratic electorates into reversing positions on critically important policy issues, even when the terrorists are not credible coercive agents. Moreover, not being ostensibly dependent on any particularities of Spain, the model would be highly exportable. As discussed below, the implications of weak coercion are more modest.

If Spanish voters entered a strong coercive bargain with al Qaeda in March 2004, we should see greater opposition to Spanish involvement in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan after the 11-M attacks than we do prior to the March bombings. The evidence does not support such a finding.

Starting before hostilities even began, the Spanish people consistently opposed military action in Iraq and the involvement of Spanish troops with overwhelming majorities. In January 2003, just 16 percent of respondents told Gallup pollsters that Spain should support military action against Iraq; 73 percent believed that it should not. Indeed, 74 percent opposed military action against Iraq under any circumstances, with just 4 percent supporting a war waged by the United States and its allies.<sup>103</sup> The following month, Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS) reported that 70 percent of Spaniards disagreed with military intervention against Iraq; just 5.3 percent responded that they either very much agreed or somewhat agreed with such action.<sup>104</sup> Additionally, 21.3 percent said that if there were a military intervention in Iraq, Spain should support the Allies (though it is unclear in what capacity), whereas 66.9 percent advocated remaining neutral.<sup>105</sup> By October, 80 percent of Spaniards said that the military intervention in Iraq was either somewhat not or not at all justified, with just 3 percent claiming it was absolutely justified.<sup>106</sup>

Neither the war nor Spain's role gained popularity over time. A Harris International poll that closed one week before 11-M indicated that 78

<sup>103</sup> Gallup International Institute, poll, 17-20 January 2003, available at *Polling the Nations*, <http://poll.orspub.com>.

<sup>104</sup> Question: "¿Está Ud. muy de acuerdo, bastante, poco o nada de acuerdo con que se produzca una intervención militar contra Irak?" CIS, "Barómetro de Febrero," Estudio no. 2.481, February 2003, [http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/-Archivos/Marginales/2480\\_2499/2481/Es2481.pdf](http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/-Archivos/Marginales/2480_2499/2481/Es2481.pdf), 8.

<sup>105</sup> Question: "En su opinión, ¿qué debe hacer España si se produce una intervención militar en Irak?" Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Eurobarometer, poll, 9-16 October 2003, available at *Polling the Nations*, <http://poll.orspub.com>.

percent of Spaniards felt negative toward US policy in Iraq; only 13 percent believed that Spain should assist America by providing a substantial number of troops in Iraq, and 28 percent endorsed providing substantial financial assistance.<sup>107</sup> Responding to a February 2004 Real Elcano poll, 17 percent of Spaniards favored troops remaining in Iraq under the current terms or with a broader coalition, 40 percent wanted an immediate withdrawal, and 39 percent supported troops remaining as part of a UN-led multinational force.<sup>108</sup>

The specific questions asked in each of these polls were slightly different, but the pattern of overwhelming and consistent opposition to the war in Iraq and to Spanish deployment is clear. Confounding the expectations of the strong-coercion thesis, opposition to Spanish participation in the war did not rise following the attacks. In a Cadena SER/Opina poll taken directly after the election, 72.3 percent of Spaniards supported Zapatero's decision to withdraw troops from Iraq unless the UN took over; 14.7 percent opposed the decision.<sup>109</sup> Paralleling the pre-11-M Real Elcano poll, however, only 41.7 percent of Cadena SER/Opina's respondents advocated withdrawal if the UN were to take control of military operations in Iraq.<sup>110</sup> Confirming these levels, in April, 41.9 percent of respondents told Instituto Opina that the troops must return from Iraq, 31.7 percent said they must return unless the UN takes over, and 14.3 percent said that they should remain there under the existing policy.<sup>111</sup>

Command was not transferred to the UN, and the troop withdrawal began in May. That month, 78 percent of Real Elcano's respondents agreed with the withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq,<sup>112</sup> and 78.3 percent told Opina pollsters the same thing.<sup>113</sup> Only 42 percent, however, were opposed to sending the troops back under UN leadership; 51 percent were in favor.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>107</sup> Harris International Europe, 27 February–4 March 2004, available at *Polling the Nations*, <http://poll.orspub.com/>.

<sup>108</sup> Real Instituto Elcano, Fifth Wave of the Barometer of the RIE, press summary, February 2004, [http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano\\_eng/Content?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano\\_in/barometer/barometer05](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_eng/Content?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/barometer/barometer05).

<sup>109</sup> Question: "¿Apoya usted la decisión de Zapatero de retirar las tropas de Irak si la ONU no toma el mando de la situación?" Cadena SER/Opina, Resultados Pulsómetro, 29 March 2004, [http://www.cadenaser.com/static/pulsometro/antiores/encuesta\\_040329.htm](http://www.cadenaser.com/static/pulsometro/antiores/encuesta_040329.htm).

<sup>110</sup> Question: "¿Sí finalmente la ONU toma el Mando de la situación en Irak ¿cree usted que las tropas Españolas deben quedarse o retirarse?" Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Question: "¿Qué opina de la presencia de las tropas españolas en Irak?" Opina, Encuesta España, April 2004, <http://www.opina.es/usuarios/track/repositorio/encuestas/90023e.pdf>, 14.

<sup>112</sup> Real Instituto Elcano, Sixth Wave of the Barometer of the RIE, press summary, May 2004, [http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano\\_eng/Content?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano\\_in/barometer/barometer±6](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_eng/Content?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/barometer/barometer±6).

<sup>113</sup> Question: "¿Está usted de acuerdo con la decisión del regreso inmediato de las tropas de Irak que ha tomado el Presidente del Gobierno Jose Luis Rodríguez Zapatero como primera medida de su Gobierno?" Opina, Encuesta España, May 2004, <http://www.opina.es/pdfs/90025E.pdf>, 7.

<sup>114</sup> Real Instituto Elcano, Sixth Wave of the Barometer. Opina pollsters did not raise this question.

The above polling data does not support the thesis that voters switched to opposing the deployment of Spanish troops following 11-M. Spaniards opposed the war and Spanish deployment in similar numbers before and after the attacks. Particularly noteworthy here is the stability of the number (40–42 percent) that supported withdrawal even if the forces were to come under UN control. This absolutist commitment to withdrawal is the only position that conforms to the 11-M bombers' demands. What little fluctuation occurred with respect to the size of the population holding this view was well within the pollsters' customary range, offering no support for the thesis that Spaniards previously opposed to this view adopted it after 11-M and the subsequent threat. Of course, opinion polls alone cannot prove the absence of strong coercion. However, that more robust conclusion is bolstered by Spain's refusal to actually meet the terrorists' demands.

Recall in this regard the videotaped threat: "This is a response to the crimes that you have caused . . . specifically in Iraq *and Afghanistan* . . . If you don't stop your injustices, more and more blood will flow."<sup>115</sup> The spokesman, Abu Dujan al-Afghani, demands withdrawal from both Iraq and Afghanistan. If voters switched from the PP to the PSOE because the terrorist threat caused them to reverse positions on Spanish presence in Iraq in order to avoid future attacks, we would expect them to reconsider their positions on Afghanistan, too.

In contrast to its longstanding opposition to military intervention in Iraq,<sup>116</sup> Zapatero's PSOE supported the action in Afghanistan from the war's inception.<sup>117</sup> This left voters unable to comply fully with the terrorist threat in the polling booth. However, if Spanish voters elected the PSOE to satisfy the terrorists' demands, we would surely expect some form of public pressure on the new government to actually satisfy those demands by withdrawing from Afghanistan.

Instead, Spaniards offered no noticeable opposition as Zapatero immediately pledged to expand the 125-strong Spanish contingent in Afghanistan. On the contrary, a pollster noted that the announcement "respond[ed] to a demand by the people to fight terrorism."<sup>118</sup> The government's standing did not suffer. Having graded the PSOE at 4.8 and 5.0 out of 10 in February and March 2004, respectively, respondents to Opina polls gave the party 5.7 and

<sup>115</sup> "Full text: 'Al-Qaeda' Madrid claim," (emphasis added).

<sup>116</sup> See Anabel Díez, "El PP rechaza la petición de la izquierda para no secundar el ataque a Irak" [The PP rejects the left's request not to support the attack on Iraq], *El País*, 18 September 2002.

<sup>117</sup> Peru Egurbide, "Zapatero Critica la Falta de Liderazgo e ideas de Aznar Tras los Ataques a Afganistán" [Zapatero criticizes Aznar for a lack of ideas and a failure of leadership following attacks on Afghanistan], *El País*, 19 October 2001, reports that "Zapatero himself was the first to declare that his party maintained substantial support for the actions of the President [in entering Afghanistan]."

<sup>118</sup> José Miguel de Elías, quoted in Katrin Bennhold, "Spain May Add Peacekeepers to Afghanistan," *International Herald Tribune*, 24 March 2004.

Zapatero 5.9 in April, and by May Zapatero had climbed to 6.5 and the party to 6.1.<sup>119</sup>

Zapatero wasted little time in implementing his promise, quickly augmenting the Spanish deployment to 475 troops, a number that rose to one thousand by September 2004.<sup>120</sup> The PSOE's popularity continued to remain steady as the soldiers boarded planes to Central Asia. In May, September, and December of 2004, 45 percent, 46 percent, and 45 percent of Spaniards, respectively, said they would vote for the PSOE in a general election (each time exceeding the surprise 42.6 percent haul of 14 March).<sup>121</sup> Additionally, in the June European Parliament elections, typically considered a barometer on the national government's popularity, the PSOE took 43.3 percent of the vote, again overcoming the PP, which garnered 41.3 percent.<sup>122</sup> The majority of Spaniards believed this "revalidated" the result of 14 March.<sup>123</sup>

One might argue that voters saw Iraq as the primary condition of the threat and therefore largely ignored the mention of Afghanistan. It seems bizarre to think that persons supposedly engaged in a serious coercive bargain would ignore one half of a short and explicit list of demands.<sup>124</sup> However, even if Spaniards did misread the threat in this way, subsequent events would have disabused them of the misconception.

On 2 April, weeks after Zapatero's post-election announcements of withdrawal from Iraq and expansion in Afghanistan, a bomb was discovered on the tracks of the Madrid-Sevilla fast train.<sup>125</sup> The next day, the authors of the preelection video sent a fax to the newspaper *ABC*, threatening to turn Spain "into an inferno" unless the government withdrew its troops from Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>126</sup> Hours later, five 11-M suspects blew themselves up as police raided their apartment in the Madrid suburb of Leganés. Found in the

<sup>119</sup> For April 2004 results, see Opina, *Encuesta España*, April 2004, 8. For May results, see Opina, *Encuesta España*, May 2004, 4.

<sup>120</sup> "Spanish parliament backs more troops to Afghanistan, police to Haiti," *Agence France Presse*, 7 July 2004; James Graff and Jane Walker, "I Don't Want To Be A Great Leader," *Time* (Europe edition), 27 September 2004.

<sup>121</sup> Opina, *Encuesta España*, December 2004, <http://www.opina.es/pdfs/90042E.pdf>, 2.

<sup>122</sup> Ingrid van Biezen, "Terrorism and Democratic Legitimacy," *Mediterranean Politics* 10, no. 1 (March 2005): 99–108, 107.

<sup>123</sup> "La mayoría cree que el resultados de las europeas revalida el 14-M" [The majority believes that the results of the European elections revalidate the results of 14-M], *Cadena SER*, 21 July 2004, [http://www.cadenaser.com/espana/articulo/mayoria-cree-resultados-europeas-revalida-14-m/csrscsrpor/20040621csrscsmac\\_2/Tes](http://www.cadenaser.com/espana/articulo/mayoria-cree-resultados-europeas-revalida-14-m/csrscsrpor/20040621csrscsmac_2/Tes).

<sup>124</sup> This is particularly true in this case, because bin Laden had earlier described attacks on German and French targets as responses to those states' participation in the military action in Afghanistan. Osama bin Laden, "To the Allies of America," 12 November 2002, in *Messages to the World*, 173–75, 174.

<sup>125</sup> Jordán and Horsburgh, "Mapping Jihadist Terrorism in Spain," 174.

<sup>126</sup> "Inferno' Terror Threat To Spain," Associated Press, 5 April 2004.

rubble was another videocassette repeating the same demand for dual withdrawal.<sup>127</sup> Also found were more explosives and plans for further attacks.<sup>128</sup>

This stance was not a quirk of the 11-M cell. Following Madrid's decision to withdraw from Iraq, bin Laden issued a statement essentially adopting the dual withdrawal demand as the broader al Qaeda bargaining posture. The key excerpts read:

This is a message to our neighbours north of the Mediterranean, containing a reconciliation initiative as a response to their positive actions . . . [I] offer a reconciliation initiative to them, whose essence is our commitment to stopping operations against every country that *commits itself to not attacking Muslims* . . . The *reconciliation will start with the departure of its last soldier* from our country . . . For those who reject reconciliation and want war, we are ready . . . the killing of Europeans was after their invasion of Iraq *and Afghanistan*.<sup>129</sup>

Receiving this barrage of explicit and consistent statements, no Spaniard could have confusedly thought that Afghanistan was not part of the bargain. Yet Zapatero's new government increased Spain's troop deployments in Afghanistan more than eight-fold within six months of coming to office and did so without public opposition. Indeed, its popular standing only improved.

In sum, the strong-coercion thesis is untenable. 11-M did not noticeably change the electorate's posture towards Spanish involvement in Iraq. Moreover, it would have been incoherent to try to avoid the threatened action by "complying" with only half of the terms and, indeed, exacerbating the other half.

## Weak Coercion

The weak-coercion thesis holds that the desire to comply with the terms of al Qaeda's threat influenced a key bloc of voters to prioritize as vote-determinative their longstanding opposition to Spanish presence in Iraq over issues that would otherwise have dictated their electoral decisions. In requiring preexisting popular sympathy for the terrorist demand, this is a significant retreat from the strong-coercion thesis. Nonetheless, a weak coercive bargaining success would be selectively exportable under three conditions. First,

<sup>127</sup> "Threat video in Spain flat rubble," *BBC News*, 9 April 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3613775.stm>.

<sup>128</sup> Jordán and Horsburgh, "Mapping Jihadist Terrorism in Spain," 174.

<sup>129</sup> "Full Text: 'Bin Laden tape,'" *BBC News*, 15 April 2004, available at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/3628069.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3628069.stm) (emphasis added).



the target population would need to be overwhelmingly opposed to the relevant policy implemented by the incumbent government. Second, the opposition party would need to be committed to repealing that policy or to implementing some equivalent amendment. Third, for the attacks to be relevant, the incumbent party would need to be leading or at least competitive in the polls. In suggesting that al Qaeda strategists intended a weak-coercion strategy, the pre-11-M strategy document "Jihadi Iraq, Hopes and Dangers"<sup>130</sup> recommends targeting Spain—rather than Britain or the United States—precisely because these conditions were satisfied in the Iberian state.<sup>131</sup>

Under the weak-coercion thesis, we would expect to see the salience for voters of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan rise following the attacks. The evidence does not establish such an effect. The first problem for the weak-coercion thesis parallels a point made above: if the salience of Iraq grew because voters sought to satisfy the terrorists, what about Afghanistan? One response might be: Afghanistan's salience did increase, but because voters did not oppose troop deployments in Afghanistan, this increase in salience did not create mass unrest. However, even if only a significant minority of the electorate opposed deployments in Afghanistan in 2004, the war's increased salience would presumably have provoked at least some public protest against Zapatero's plan. Nonetheless, without polling data it is difficult to resolve this issue, so the weak-coercion thesis is best analyzed by focusing on the issue of Iraq deployments.

CIS tracks what respondents consider to be the three most important issues facing the nation at any given time. In February 2003, it became obvious that the United States was going to lead an invasion of Iraq. At this point, 27.5 percent of respondents deemed the prospective conflict one of Spain's top three problems.<sup>132</sup> Only unemployment (63.9 percent) and "terrorism, ETA" (47.9 percent) were identified more. Indeed, 82.8 percent of Spaniards said they were either very concerned or somewhat concerned about the impending war.<sup>133</sup> Iraq's salience was reflected in voting-intention polls. The PP had led comfortably in September 2002.<sup>134</sup> By March 2003, however, it had dropped to 36 percent, well behind the PSOE at 42 percent—a ratio similar to the electoral result twelve months later.<sup>135</sup>

<sup>130</sup> "Jihadi Iraq, Hopes and Dangers," excerpt in *Dying to Win*, 57. For a useful analysis, see Brynjar Lia and Thomas Hegghammer, "Jihadi Strategic Studies," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27 (2004): 355–75.

<sup>131</sup> Lia and Hegghammer, "Jihadi Strategic Studies," 368.

<sup>132</sup> Question: "¿cuáles son, a su juicio, los tres problemas principales que existen actualmente en España?" CIS, Barómetro de Febrero, Estudio no. 2.481, February 2003, 1.

<sup>133</sup> Question: "¿Está Ud. muy preocupado, bastante, poco o nada preocupado por este conflicto?" *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>134</sup> Opina, Encuesta España, September 2002, <http://www.opina.es/pdfs/90003E.pdf>, 1.

<sup>135</sup> Opina, Encuesta España, March 2003, <http://www.opina.es/pdfs/90010E.pdf>, 2.

The salience of the conflict then began to drop. In April 2003, the percentage of respondents that included the war among the three most important issues fell to 14.8 percent, fourth on the list and only a few percentage points ahead of the eighth most selected issue.<sup>136</sup> By the end of 2003, the Iraq War's prominence had plummeted. In December, the war was no longer an isolated option on the *cis* poll; respondents who deemed it one of the top three issues had to choose "the wars." Only 3.7 percent did so.<sup>137</sup> A November Cadena SER/Opina poll confirmed this level.<sup>138</sup>

Asking for the "three or four" most important problems facing the nation, Cadena SER/Opina tracked "war/world peace" rising back to 4.7 percent by the end of January, and then reaching 5.6 percent on the 11th of February, the last reading before 11-M.<sup>139</sup> Meanwhile, just 2.6 percent included "the wars" as one of Spain's top three problems in *cis*'s January poll.<sup>140</sup> In February, *cis* returned to tracking the importance of the "war in Iraq" specifically and found that 2.4 percent of respondents selected it as one of Spain's top three concerns.<sup>141</sup> That is not to say the war was irrelevant to voters. When asked by Opina in the final pre-11-M poll if the PP's policy regarding Spanish involvement Iraq would influence their votes, 37.5 percent of Spaniards responded affirmatively, with 52.9 percent saying it would not.<sup>142</sup> However, the issue clearly was not among the most relevant in influencing them.

The next polls occurred after 11-M and the release of the videotaped threat. Contra the weak-coercion thesis, there was not a significant jump in the salience of the Iraq War. In the post-election Cadena SER/Opina poll, 6.0 percent of respondents chose war/world peace as one of the "three or four" most salient issues facing Spain, an increase of just 0.4 percent from the 11 February level.<sup>143</sup> The *cis* March survey (conducted from 16 to 21 March) showed a slightly stronger increase over the pre-11-M reading, with 4.1 percent of respondents including the war in Iraq as one of the top three

<sup>136</sup> Question: "¿cuáles son, a su juicio, los tres problemas principales que existen actualmente en España?" *cis*, Barómetro de Abril, Estudio no. 2.508, April 2003, [http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/-Archivos/Marginales/2500\\_2519/2508/Es2508.pdf](http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/-Archivos/Marginales/2500_2519/2508/Es2508.pdf), 1.

<sup>137</sup> Question: "¿cuáles son, a su juicio, los tres problemas principales que existen actualmente en España?" *cis*, Barómetro de Diciembre, Estudio no. 2.548, December 2003, [http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/-Archivos/Marginales/2540\\_2559/2548/Es2548.pdf](http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/-Archivos/Marginales/2540_2559/2548/Es2548.pdf), 1.

<sup>138</sup> To the prompt "Dígame por favor, los tres o cuatro problemas que tiene España en este momento" [Tell me, please, the three or four most salient problems that Spain is dealing with right now.], just 4.0 percent chose *Guerra/Paz Mundial* [War/World Peace]. Cadena SER/Opina, Resultados Pulsómetro, 22 March 2004, [http://www.cadenaser.com/static/pulsometro/anteriores/encuesta\\_040322.htm](http://www.cadenaser.com/static/pulsometro/anteriores/encuesta_040322.htm).

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> *cis*, Barómetro de Enero, Estudio no. 2.554, January 2004, [http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/-Archivos/Marginales/2540\\_2559/2554/Es2554.pdf](http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/-Archivos/Marginales/2540_2559/2554/Es2554.pdf), 1.

<sup>141</sup> *cis*, Barómetro de Febrero, Estudio no. 2.556, February 2004, [http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/-Archivos/Marginales/2540\\_2559/2556/Es2556.pdf](http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/-Archivos/Marginales/2540_2559/2556/Es2556.pdf), 1.

<sup>142</sup> Question: "¿Influirá en su intención de voto la decisión del gobierno del PP de apoyar sin condiciones junto a Bush y Blair la intervención militar en Irak?" Opina, Encuesta España, March 2004, <http://www.opina.es/pdfs/90022E.pdf>, 15.

<sup>143</sup> Cadena SER/Opina, Resultados Pulsómetro, 22 March 2004.

problems facing Spain, a rise of 1.7 percent from February.<sup>144</sup> On aggregate, however, respondents considered ten other issues more important than Iraq, and two more lagged by only 0.1 percent.<sup>145</sup> Moreover, the salience of Iraq was nowhere close to the level of the previous year when the PSOE poll lead was similar to its March 2004 victory margin.

The April 2004 Opina poll comes closest to supporting the weak-coercion thesis: 41.8 percent said that the PP government's policy to support the intervention Iraq influenced their vote, while 53.7 percent said it did not.<sup>146</sup> The former is a 4.3 percent jump from the pre-11-M prediction (37.5 percent). There are, however, three key caveats that make it difficult to draw any robust conclusions from that increase.

First, the gain did not come from those Spaniards who said prior to 11-M that the war would not influence their vote—indeed that number also grew. Instead it came from those who were unsure as to whether the war would influence them. Even absent any outside cause, we would expect some transfer from the population of voters unsure as to whether a given issue would influence their future vote to the population of voters sure that it did or did not influence their past vote (a matter over which there is inevitably less uncertainty).

Second, the poll asks neither how the PP's policy in Iraq influenced respondents' votes nor whether it was vote-determinative. With respect to the former point, there is a key distinction between considering Aznar's Iraq intervention as exemplary of bad policy and considering it as a policy that ought to be reversed in order to satisfy al Qaeda. The wording of this particular question (focusing on the past PP policy rather than the issue of withdrawing or remaining) suggests that this poll captures the former effect. So too does the fact that other indicators of the war's salience show little change. This distinction is developed and examined in greater length in the final section of this paper.<sup>147</sup>

Third, the sample used for the April Opina poll was ideologically very different from that used in the final pre-11-M poll. Specifically, 20.4 percent of the April respondents classified themselves as on the "extreme left" ideologically, compared to 8.6 percent in the pre-11-M poll (and 9.6 percent and 11.7 percent in the two previous polls).<sup>148</sup> Moreover, this expanded extreme left group was not balanced by fewer on the left (which remained stable)

<sup>144</sup> CIS, Barómetro de Marzo, Estudio no. 2.558, March 2004, [http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/-Archivos/Marginales/2540\\_2559/2558/ES2558.pdf](http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/-Archivos/Marginales/2540_2559/2558/ES2558.pdf), 1.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Question: "¿Ha influido en su voto la política del gobierno del PP de apoyar la intervención militar en Irak?" Opina, Encuesta España, April 2004, 11.

<sup>147</sup> Within that final section, see specifically the subsection entitled "The Salience of the War on Terror."

<sup>148</sup> Question: "Puede usted autoubicarse ideológicamente en una escala del 1 al 7, siendo el 1 al extrema izquierda, el 4 el centro y el 7 la extrema derecha," Opina, Encuesta España, April 2004, 7.

but fewer on the center left and center right.<sup>149</sup> This massive ideological difference between the two samples makes it impossible to draw any firm conclusions from the small jump described.

For these three reasons, it is most useful to focus on the other salience measures discussed above. On those measures there is no basis for accepting the weak-coercion thesis. 11-M did not cause voters to prioritize the issue of withdrawal from Iraq in their voting calculation.

### The Implications for the Coercion Theses

In sum, the available evidence does not support the claim that the 11-M bombers drew the Spanish electorate into a coercive bargain, whether strong or weak (although there is some ambiguity on the latter issue). To truly refute the coercive bargaining theses, an alternative explanation for the PSOE's surprise victory is necessary. This is provided below. First, however, I consider alternative strategic frameworks through which to analyze the efficacy of the attacks.

## ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIC FRAMES

The inapplicability of coercive bargaining does not preclude the possibility that the 11-M bombers achieved the success of Spanish troop withdrawal via another strategic mechanism. Here I consider the four alternative strategies that might plausibly apply to 11-M.

### Publicity (Terrorist Advertising)

Because it overlaps with weak coercion, the strategy of terrorist "advertising" is addressed first.<sup>150</sup> Attracting publicity is one of international terrorism's strengths.<sup>151</sup> Publicity for an attack itself, however, is not a valuable strategic end.<sup>152</sup> Rather, the strategic value comes from publicizing "perceived grievances."<sup>153</sup> Thus, the paradigmatic success of Black September at the 1972 Olympics was channeling global attention onto "the Palestinian cause."<sup>154</sup> The logic underlying the advertising strategy is that if the grievance

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Thornton, "Terror as a Weapon," 82.

<sup>151</sup> Schelling, "What Purposes?" 19.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 20; Dershowitz, *Why Terrorism Works*, 23. However, as Martha Crenshaw notes, "Terrorists who are fundamentally protesters might be satisfied with airing their grievances before the world." Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," 386.

<sup>153</sup> Dershowitz, *Why Terrorism Works*, 31.

<sup>154</sup> Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 73 (emphasis added).

is one about which the target audience lacks awareness and to which that population might be sympathetic, raising awareness can contribute to furthering the cause. As Pierre Koroptkin explains, "Those who originally did not even ask themselves what 'those lunatics' were after, are forced to take notice of them, to discuss their ideas, and to take a stand for or against."<sup>155</sup>

To continue the terminology adopted with respect to coercion, I distinguish "strong advertising" from "weak advertising." Strong advertising "excite[s] human curiosity" in the grievance, causing individuals with no prior opinion on or awareness of the grievance to take notice and adopt a stance.<sup>156</sup> Weak advertising, by contrast, merely reminds members of the target audience of an issue on which they already have considered positions, raising the issue's salience and making them more likely to act on it.

In focusing on the activation of preexisting preferences, weak advertising overlaps considerably with weak coercion. The subtle distinction is in voter intention. If Spanish voters had been weakly coerced, Iraq's salience would have grown because of the importance of placating the terrorists so as to prevent future attacks. Under weak advertising, voters would not be motivated by satisfying terrorists. Instead, Iraq would have taken on greater salience simply because it had been brought to voters' attentions in an effective manner.

Under the strong-advertising thesis, we would expect to see the number of voters with defined political positions on Iraq and Afghanistan rise after 11-M. Under the weak-advertising thesis, we would expect to see the salience of Iraq and Afghanistan rise in the minds of voters following the attacks (much as we expected under weak coercion). On both counts, 11-M was not a strategic success.

A problem for the strong-advertising thesis is that the "grievances" associated with 11-M were neither new to Spaniards nor issues on which the population was previously ambivalent. In February 2003, CIS asked how much interest respondents took in following news on the potential conflict in Iraq. Just 3.3 percent (0.1 percent) answered "none."<sup>157</sup> Similarly, 3.4 percent (0.4 percent) reported not knowing whether they agreed with military intervention against Iraq.<sup>158</sup> Connecting this to party politics, 6.2 percent (0.6

<sup>155</sup> Pierre Koroptkin, *Paroles d'un Révolté* (Paris: C. Marpon et E. Flammarion, undated), 286, quoted in Thornton, "Terror as a Weapon," 82. Dershowitz suggests that the very fact of the attack might induce a sympathetic examination of the grievance due to an assumption that "any group of people willing to resort to such extreme measures must have a just and compelling cause." Dershowitz, *Why Terrorism Works*, 47.

<sup>156</sup> Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," 386.

<sup>157</sup> Question: "¿con qué interés, mucho, bastante, poco o ninguno sigue Ud. las noticias sobre el conflicto con Irak?" CIS, Barómetro de Febrero, Estudio no. 2.481, February 2003, 5. In this section, where pollsters separate the categories, I include non-respondents in parentheses alongside the proportion who answered "do not know" on the imperfect assumption that the former are ambivalent or unaware.

<sup>158</sup> Question: "¿Está Ud. muy de acuerdo, bastante, poco o nada de acuerdo con que se produzca una intervención militar contra Irak?" Ibid.

percent) of Spaniards told the pollsters that they had no appraisal of the government's position on Iraq, and 10 percent (0.8 percent) admitted having no appraisal of the opposition's position.<sup>159</sup> Finally in February, 9.1 percent (1.5 percent) of respondents did not know what Spain should do if there were to be a military intervention in Iraq.<sup>160</sup> The next month, 7 percent of respondents to a Pew poll did not know whether to support Spain joining the United States and its allies in a military intervention in Iraq.<sup>161</sup>

By April, the numbers were shrinking further: only 4.1 percent (0.5 percent) told CIS they had no appraisal of the government's position on Iraq, and just 6.2 percent (0.8 percent) said they had no appraisal of the opposition's position.<sup>162</sup> When asked whether they agreed with Spain's decision to send troops to Iraq on a humanitarian mission, 2.2 percent (0.6 percent) said they did not know, and 1.6 percent were indifferent.<sup>163</sup> Six months later, 4 percent of Spaniards told Eurobarometer that they did not know whether they were in favor of Spanish troops participating as peacekeepers in the "after war" in Iraq.<sup>164</sup> In February 2004, only 4 percent of respondents told Real Elcano that they did not know what they wanted to be done with regard to Spanish troops in Iraq.<sup>165</sup>

Overall, then, the vast majority of Spaniards felt certain about the issue of Spain's presence in Iraq long before 11-M. This left little space for strong advertising. Confounding the strong-advertising thesis, the bombings did not push even those few who were undecided or uninformed "to take a stand for or against" the relevant grievances. After the election, respondents were asked whether they supported Zapatero's decision to withdraw troops from Iraq if the UN did not take control of the situation; 11.7 percent (1.3 percent) said they did not know.<sup>166</sup> This was a substantial jump from those uncertain about PSOE policy in April 2003 or uncertain about what to do with the troops in February 2004. When asked whether Spain should withdraw even if "in the end, the UN takes control in Iraq," 19 percent (1.5 percent) said they did not know.<sup>167</sup> When asked, "In what context do you support keeping Spanish

<sup>159</sup> Question: "¿Cómo valora Ud. la posición del Gobierno español en la crisis de Irak?" "¿Y cómo valora la posición de la oposición?" Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Question: "En su opinión, ¿qué debe hacer España si se produce una intervención militar en Irak?" Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, poll, 12–17 March 2003, available at *Polling the Nations*, <http://poll.orspub.com/>.

<sup>162</sup> CIS, Barómetro de Abril, Estudio no. 2.508, April 2003, 7.

<sup>163</sup> Question: "Como Ud. sabe, España ha enviado al conflicto de Irak una fuerza militar en misión humanitaria. ¿Está Ud muy de acuerdo, bastante de acuerdo, poco de acuerdo o nada de acuerdo con este envío?" Ibid., 6.

<sup>164</sup> Eurobarometer, poll, 9–16 October 2003, available at *Polling the Nations*, <http://poll.orspub.com/>.

<sup>165</sup> Real Instituto Elcano, Fifth Wave of the Barometer.

<sup>166</sup> Question: "¿Apoya usted la decisión de Zapatero de retirar las tropas de Irak si la ONU no toma el mando de la situación?" Cadena SER/Opina, Resultados Pulsómetro, 29 March 2004.

<sup>167</sup> Question: "Si finalmente la ONU toma el mando de la situación en Irak ¿cree usted que las tropas españolas deben quedarse o retirarse?" Ibid.

troops in Iraq?" 31 percent (5.5 percent) of Spaniards responded, "I do not know."<sup>168</sup> More certain were respondents to Opina's May 2004 survey, 5.6 percent of whom did not know if they agreed with Zapatero's policy of immediate withdrawal.<sup>169</sup> Even this was a drop of just 0.7 percent from the highest pre-11-M uncertainty level.

These numbers clearly do not support the theory that 11-M caused Spaniards to consider and take a stand on the issue of Spanish presence in Iraq. If anything, uncertainty on the issue was slightly higher after 11-M. There is no similar information on public opinion regarding Afghanistan over the same period. Consistent with the general media focus on Iraq, the pollsters simply did not ask questions on Afghanistan. This indicates that the bombings did little to raise the profile of the terrorists' grievance in that regard, let alone influence voters to take a stance on it. Overall, then, the evidence does not support the theory that 11-M was part of a successful strong-advertising strategy.

Articulating the weak-advertising strategy, Javier Jordán argues that the 11-M bombers "appreciated the level of popular dissatisfaction" with Spain's role in Iraq and understood that "an indiscriminate attack in the heart of the country" could "force public discontent to boil over."<sup>170</sup> On this view, the goal was not to pique human curiosity but simply to reawaken Spain's "latent anti-war vote."<sup>171</sup>

As with weak coercion, the initial indicator of a weak advertising success would be the increased salience of the two wars in voters' minds. The causal mechanism by which salience is raised differs under the two strategic models. However, that distinction is moot here because, as described above, the available evidence does not support the view that 11-M affected the salience of either war. There is therefore no evidentiary basis for considering the 11-M attacks a weak advertising success.

### Strategic Provocation

An alternative strategic frame is that of "provocation."<sup>172</sup> On this model, terrorists use attacks to "provoke a disproportionate government reaction," preferably in the form of "cracking down on the population [from which the terrorists seek sympathy] indiscriminately."<sup>173</sup> The goal is to expose

<sup>168</sup> Question: "¿En qué contexto apoyaría usted la permanencia de las tropas españolas en Irak?" Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Question: "¿Está usted de acuerdo con la decisión del regreso inmediato de las tropas de Irak que ha tomado el Presidente del Gobierno Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero como primera medida de su Gobierno?" Opina, Encuesta España, May 2004, <http://www.opina.es/pdfs/90025E.pdf>, 7.

<sup>170</sup> Jordán, "The Madrid Attacks."

<sup>171</sup> Fishman, "On the Continuing Relevance," 17.

<sup>172</sup> Thornton, "Terror as a Weapon," 87.

<sup>173</sup> Chenoweth et al., "What Makes Terrorists Tick?" 184.

the regime's "repressive face"<sup>174</sup> to the target audience, thus motivating widespread resistance (whether active or passive)<sup>175</sup> and external condemnation. Paradigmatically, the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) used terrorist attacks to provoke a brutal response by the French occupying forces against indigenous Algerians, potentially discrediting French rule in the eyes of both the domestic French and the Algerian audiences.<sup>176</sup> Alan Dershowitz contends that Hamas has used this strategy expertly to turn global public opinion against Israel.<sup>177</sup> Similarly, a common interpretation of al Qaeda strategy is that the network deliberately provoked the United States into performing "counteratrocities" in response to terrorism, aware that these would "undermine [the United States'] international support and attract terrorist recruits."<sup>178</sup>

There are two ways in which strategic provocation could involve electoral politics. The first might be termed "indirect provocation." Here, the electorate (rather than the government) is the immediate target of the provocation, and a different community (often the international community) is the audience from which the terrorists seek sympathy. Citing the Israeli elections of 1996 and the US congressional elections of 2002 as examples, Robert Fishman observes that ordinarily when terrorism effects change via elections, "the direction of that change is likely to favor the most right-wing and militaristic political forces in the electoral arena."<sup>179</sup> Similarly, Kydd and Walter argue that democracies are particularly vulnerable to provocation because their publics demand visible counterterrorist policies, which tend to be the most repressive.<sup>180</sup> Although a plausible strategy, this clearly does not apply to post-11-M Spain, where a relatively hard-line government seemingly destined for victory was replaced by a left-wing opposition party committed to withdrawing from Iraq and eschewing draconian counterterrorism measures.<sup>181</sup>

A second way in which provocation might intersect with electoral politics is if the target of the provocation is the government, and the audience

<sup>174</sup> Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," 387.

<sup>175</sup> Price, "The Strategy and Tactics of Revolutionary Terrorism," 58. See also Kydd and Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," 69.

<sup>176</sup> See, for example, Chester W. Obuchowski, "Algeria: the Tortured Conscience," *The French Review* 42, no. 1 (October 1968): 97; John Talbott, "French Public Opinion and the Algerian War," *French Historical Studies* 9, no. 2 (Autumn 1975): 358; Fromkin, "The Strategy of Terrorism," 690, 693.

<sup>177</sup> Dershowitz, *Why Terrorism Works*, 81–83.

<sup>178</sup> Abrahms, "Al-Qaeda's Scorecard," 512. Bin Laden has certainly attempted to utilize the United States' response to al Qaeda attacks in a way consistent with the provocation strategy, arguing, for example, that after the 9/11 attacks, "The real, ugly face of Crusader hatred for the Islamic world immediately manifested itself in all its clarity." Osama bin Laden, "Nineteen Students," 26 December 2001, in *Messages to the World*, 145–57, 146.

<sup>179</sup> Fishman, "On the Continuing Relevance," 13.

<sup>180</sup> Kydd and Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," 71.

<sup>181</sup> In contrast to the PP, at the core of the PSOE's approach to counterterrorism was, as Anthony Celso explains, the goal of "reconciliation with Spain's Muslim community." Anthony N. Celso, "Spanish Post-3/11 Antiterror Policy: Zapatero's Tyranny of Circumstance and the Dashing of Good Intentions," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (2009): 11–25, 12.



is the electorate of the same state. On this model, the government's repressive response would offend its own electorate. As elaborated in the final section below, one of the critical factors behind the PSOE's electoral victory in 2004 was popular distaste with the PP's handling of the aftermath of the 11-M attacks.<sup>182</sup> One might argue that this could have been part of a successful terrorist strategy. The 11-M bombers might have hoped to provoke the government into a response that the electorate found objectionable, thereby ensuring PSOE victory and withdrawal from Iraq.

This interpretation must also be rejected. The timeline between attack and election did not provide the opportunity for a plausible provocation strategy.<sup>183</sup> Moreover, the PP's objectionable behavior between the attacks and the election was neither of the form applicable to strategic provocation nor otherwise predictable.

As explained below, the principal error committed by the PP following 11-M was what appeared to be a politically calculated effort to mislead the

<sup>182</sup> In the final section, see "Government Myopia in the Midst of Tragedy."

<sup>183</sup> Generally, of course, the provocation of a government can be the long-term goal of an attack. That may even have been the intent in behind the 11-M bombings. However, if it was, the attacks clearly failed. The PP government was immediately replaced and so was not provided the opportunity for a longer-term imposition of draconian measures. One might argue that the longer-term provocation would have been intended to apply to whichever party won the election (in this case, the PSOE). Note, however, that this would mean that the "success" of 11-M would have no relationship to the 2004 general election or to the withdrawal from Iraq (the points typically at the very foundation of any claim that 11-M was successful). Moreover, even if the bombers did see the 11-M attacks as a way of provoking longer-term repression, 11-M did not advance the strategic end. On the contrary, the new PSOE government rejected repressive counterterrorism policies. As Anthony Celso observes, "Negotiation, dialogue, and engagement with disgruntled Islamic and Basque communities defined much of the PSOE's early antiterror strategy. While not abandoning law enforcement, the PSOE's 2004 policy treated terrorism as a consequence of injustice that could be ameliorated by less punitive approaches. Zapatero's government sought to integrate Spain's Muslim community into the majority through cultural and economic measures, complete with proposals for Islamic representation in government policy making." Celso, "Spanish Post-3/11," 12. One of Zapatero's flagship counterterrorism initiatives following 11-M was the Alliance of Civilizations (<http://www.unaoc.org/>), which he proposed at the 59th General Assembly of the UN in September 2004. Intervención del Presidente del Gobierno, Excmo. Sr. Don José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero ante la Asamblea General de Naciones Unidas, Nueva York, 21 de septiembre de 2004, available at <http://www.un.org/webcast/ga/59/statements/spaspa040921.pdf>; English translation available at <http://www.un.org/webcast/ga/59/statements/spaeng040921.pdf>. Another flagship policy was the 2005 legalization of the undocumented population as a way of integrating more of the émigré North African community into Spanish society. Celso, "Spanish Post-3/11," 16. Celso reports that recently the PSOE has become less accommodating in its counterterrorism policies. Celso, "Spanish Post-3/11," 18, 21–22, 25. However, to the extent that this is an accurate description of PSOE policy, it is a consequence of terrorist activities since the PSOE came into office (Celso, "Spanish Post-3/11," 17–18) and not the 11-M attacks, which, after all, predated the PSOE's initial implementation of more accommodating policies. Thus, if the recent "crackdown" (Celso, "Spanish Post-3/11," 25) is to be considered the result of successful terrorist provocation, the 11-M attacks were not the source of that success. For these reasons, I focus in this section on the theory that the PP was provoked, immediately overreacted, and was punished by the voters, with the consequence that the PSOE won and Spanish troops were withdrawn from Iraq. As stated in the main text, the first problem with that theory is that the timeline between attack and election was simply too short for a plausible provocation strategy.

public as to authorship of the attack.<sup>184</sup> In short, the PP insisted the attacks were committed by ETA and disseminated that message aggressively, even as evidence quickly accumulated against that interpretation. This turned many Spanish voters against the government. Although catalyzed by the attacks, these actions are not of the form provocative terrorism seeks to elicit. As Kydd and Walter explain, “For provocation to work, the government must be capable of . . . *brutality*.”<sup>185</sup> Provocation is a strategy of radicalization.<sup>186</sup> It seeks to instigate a violent response from the government in order to rouse the audience against what becomes (or is exposed as) an oppressive regime.<sup>187</sup>

This is important not because it is inconceivable that strategic forms could be modified, but because when they are, the mechanism by which the strategic end is reached must be fundamentally predictable (although inevitably uncertain). This is what distinguishes strategic terrorism from random violence. Provocation is potentially effective because governments predictably respond to terrorism with varying degrees of repression, and this in turn predictably causes various forms of counteraction and opposition among those who bear the brunt of the government violence (and others who sympathize with their suffering). What occurred between 11 and 14 March, by contrast, was not something a strategist could have mapped out in advance. There was no reason to predict (1) that the government would be less than open-minded about authorship of the attacks, (2) that leaders would obfuscate when faced with contradictory evidence, or (3) that this would occur and be exposed in the three days between the attack and the election.

Indeed, predictability aside, the more general problem with applying the provocation frame to the events of March 2004 is that provocation is not a viable quick-impact strategy. Unlike advertising or bargaining, provocation requires the action of a third-party intermediary (the repressive government). Only when the governmental response has been formulated and enacted can the target audience itself react (however that reaction manifests). Because the intermediary controls the pace and nature of its response, a strategist using provocation must leave sufficient time for that response to occur and for its ramifications to sink in among the target audience. The timeline from 11-M to the 14 March elections simply does not fit that model. For these reasons, despite the electoral importance of public anger at the PP’s handling of the aftermath of 11-M, it would be wrong to interpret the 11-M attacks as accomplishing effective strategic provocation.

<sup>184</sup> In the final section, see the subsection entitled, “Government Myopia in the Midst of Tragedy.”

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 70 (emphasis added).

<sup>186</sup> Lake, “Rational Extremism.”

<sup>187</sup> Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism,” 387.

## Undermining and Destabilizing the Incumbent Regime

The strategy of regime destabilization provides a fourth frame through which to assess 11-M. Rather than seeking to provoke a particular response or force a particular policy change, terrorists employing this strategy hope to expose the government's helplessness, thereby sapping public confidence in the regime and causing its downfall. Terming this the terrorist's "objective par excellence," Thomas Thornton explains, "The primary responsibility of any incumbent group is to guarantee order to its population, and the terrorist will attempt to disorient the population by demonstrating that the incumbents' structure cannot give adequate support."<sup>188</sup> The initial objective of terrorists adopting this strategy, he argues, is mass anxiety.<sup>189</sup>

Ordinarily, such a strategy would seek not to determine an electoral outcome but to undermine democracy as a whole, destabilizing the democratic process so that a desperate population turns to the strong hand of the terrorist entity as the only regime that can stop the violence.<sup>190</sup> If al Qaeda held that extremely ambitious aim in Madrid, it failed spectacularly. Rather than turning their backs on Spain's democratic system, 76 percent of eligible Spaniards turned out to vote three days after the attacks, up from 69 percent in 2000. Indeed, the number that turned out because of the attacks far exceeded the number that stayed home for that reason.<sup>191</sup>

In select circumstances, of course, the regime-destabilization strategy could work through the existing system rather than against it. In a democracy this would mean causing the ouster of the incumbent party instead of the collapse of the entire electoral system. It might be suggested that the 11-M bombers intended to cause precisely such an incumbent defeat, knowing that the PSOE would be the likely beneficiary and that Zapatero's party was committed to withdrawing from Iraq.<sup>192</sup> However, in considering whether this modest form of regime destabilization might have occurred in Spain, it is important to be clear about the underlying logic of the strategy. Less sophisticated than the coercion, provocation, or advertising strategies, the regime-destabilization strategy does not seek to focus the population or the

<sup>188</sup> Thornton, "Terror as a Weapon," 83, 84.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>190</sup> This strategy has clearly animated terrorist actors in Iraq and Afghanistan in each of the recent electoral cycles. See also Price, "The Strategy and Tactics of Revolutionary Terrorism," 53.

<sup>191</sup> CIS, Postelectoral Elecciones Generales Y Autonómicas de Andalucía 2004, Estudio 2559 [The Postelectoral Poll for the General Elections and the Autonomous Andalusian Elections of 2004], 23 March 2004, [http://www.cis.es/cis/opencm/ES/1\\_encuestas/estudios/ver.jsp?imprimir=si&estudio=3754&cuestionario=3927&muestra=7642](http://www.cis.es/cis/opencm/ES/1_encuestas/estudios/ver.jsp?imprimir=si&estudio=3754&cuestionario=3927&muestra=7642). For specific question discussed here, see [http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/-Archivos/Marginales/2540\\_2559/2559/e255900.html](http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/-Archivos/Marginales/2540_2559/2559/e255900.html).

<sup>192</sup> Of course, the 11-M bombers' ambitions were greater than electoral victory for the PSOE, as indicated by their continued planning of attacks after Zapatero took office. See Jordán and Horsburgh, "Spain and Islamism," 225; Bruce Hoffman, "Al-Qaeda has a new strategy: Obama needs one, too," *Washington Post*, 10 January 2010. The bombers, however, might have deemed immediate withdrawal from Iraq a valuable first step.

government on specific policies or ideas. Instead, it aims at causing a visceral anxiety within the population about the government's very ability to serve its primary governmental function and protect its people. In the strategy's strong form, this leads the people to sacrifice the political system and adopt as the government the rebel terrorist group causing the violence. In the strategy's modest form, the anxiety causes the electorate to lurch away from the incumbent party at the ballot box.

However, for such an electoral reaction to be motivated by a destroyed faith in the capacity of the incumbent party to protect the people, there would have to be some alternative on the ballot with a greater capacity to serve that function. This option was not available to the Spanish people. Whether the PP or the PSOE had won, the resources of state security available to the governing party would have been the same. Neither party had any unique power to "turn off the tap" of violence, as might a party associated in some way with the terrorist actors.<sup>193</sup>

A potential objection here is that the 11-M bombers might have hoped to induce the electorate to evict the incumbent not in favor of a terrorist-linked party able to control directly the violence but in favor of an opposition party willing to make policy concessions to the terrorist actors and to reduce the violent threat in this way. This, however, would not be a strategy of regime destabilization but one of coercive bargaining and, as such, is addressed above. Regime-destabilization depends not on influencing the electorate's preferences with respect to particular policies but its faith in the incumbent government's very ability to keep the people safe. In sum, even if the 11-M bombers had been able to create the popular anxiety central to a regime-destabilization strategy, they failed to provide the equally crucial strong hand to which a people in such a state of anxiety could turn to ensure that order and security are restored.

### Morale-Building

A final possible strategic function of the 11-M attacks is morale building. Rather than advertising to a "mass audience" with the goal of piquing "curiosity," this strategy targets sympathizers and members of the terrorist group,<sup>194</sup> with the goals of "increas[ing] recruitment, rais[ing] more funds and inspir[ing] future attacks."<sup>195</sup> Attacks serve this function by establishing a group's enduring relevance and potency. So important is this end that groups occasionally

<sup>193</sup> Consider, for example, the capacities of Sinn Féin or the political wings of Hamas or Hezbollah in this regard.

<sup>194</sup> Thornton, "Terror as a Weapon," 83.

<sup>195</sup> Wilkinson, "Terrorism: International Dimensions," 149. Abu Mus'ab al-Suri cheers the effect of terrorist acts in "awakening the spirit of jihad and resistance within the Islamic Nation" and inspiring "a generation of youth dedicated to the Resistance [to] follow [the terrorists'] example." Al-Suri, "The Military Theory," 366.

falsely claim responsibility for destruction they did not cause.<sup>196</sup> Similarly, groups can benefit from the appearance that their terrorist actions achieved certain objectives, even if causation is ambiguous.<sup>197</sup>

The mere execution of the 11-M attacks was strategically valuable in this sense. The mass killing dispelled an emergent view that, since 9/11, al Qaeda's ability to strike Western targets had been severely dented.<sup>198</sup> Moreover, the perception (even though false) that the 11-M bombers successfully coerced the Spanish public further helped to "reinforce[] and rebuild[] the sense of strength and confidence in the organization."<sup>199</sup> Indeed, less than three months after the election, reports came through that "terrorism analysts have detected that al-Qaeda's ranks, while depleted since the Sept. 11 attacks, have been re-energized by the recent strikes."<sup>200</sup> Al Qaeda leaders, seemingly including bin Laden, have publicly referenced 11-M as exemplary of the network's continued relevance.<sup>201</sup>

This morale building is doubtless an important strategic gain for al Qaeda. Its significance, however, should not be overstated. First, every bombing in a Western country in which people are killed is successful in the narrow sense of proving that al Qaeda (or those inspired by it) can still attack those populations. Although one of the network's more spectacular attacks, 11-M is not unusual in that regard. Second, to the extent 11-M did have an enhanced mobilization effect, this was due not to any replicable features of the attack, but rather to the misleading appearance that 11-M achieved immediate strategic success in the form of Spain's withdrawal from Iraq.

### EXPLAINING THE PSOE VICTORY

To support the above dismissal of strategic explanations, I must otherwise account for the PSOE's surprising electoral victory. Four factors were key in this regard. First, the 11-M attacks inspired a bumper turnout of 76 percent, up from 69 percent in 2000. As in many countries, increased turnout in Spain tends to favor the major party of the left. Second, voters punished the PP for what they considered manipulative behavior regarding the ascription of authorship of the attacks. Third, the attacks brought international terrorism

<sup>196</sup> Al Qaeda has even taken "credit for the economic crisis." Hoffman, "Al-Qaeda has a new strategy."

<sup>197</sup> Dershowitz, *Why Terrorism Works*, 57.

<sup>198</sup> Gordon Corera, "The Legacy of the Madrid Bombings," *BBC News*, 14 February 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6357599.stm>.

<sup>199</sup> Fred Burton, "Re-Examining the Odds of a Pre-Election Attack," *Stratfor World Terrorism Report* (1 October 2004).

<sup>200</sup> Kevin Johnson and Mimi Hall, "Chatter over Madrid Attack's Success Helped Spur Warning," *USA Today*, 27 May 2004.

<sup>201</sup> "Bin Laden' urges Afghan pull-out," *BBC News*, 25 September 2009, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/8275746.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8275746.stm). See also al-Suri, "The Military Theory," 416.

to the forefront of voters' minds, and the electorate preferred the PSOE on that issue. Finally, the PP's lead was always more fragile than it appeared.

### Voter Turnout

Shortly after the elections, CIS produced a survey in which 28.5 percent of respondents said that 11-M influenced their voting a lot, some, or a little, with 71.3 percent saying it did not influence their vote at all.<sup>202</sup> Prima facie, this might appear to pose a challenge to my thesis that 11-M was a strategic failure. A deeper exploration of the numbers, however, dispels that initial impression.

More than half of the 28.5 percent influenced by 11-M explained that 11-M reaffirmed their intention, to vote for their preferred parties and 21.9 percent indicated that it had mobilized them to vote rather than abstain. Only 13.5 percent of those "influenced" stated that 11-M had changed the parties for which they intended to vote.<sup>203</sup> This represents just 3.8 percent of the electorate. Narciso Michavila estimates that the PSOE took 65 percent of these votes, and the PP took 11 percent.<sup>204</sup> In other words, the margin of advantage for the PSOE over the PP from switched votes was approximately 2 percent of the electorate, well below the 4.9 percent margin of the PSOE's electoral victory (and the 4.1 percent margin of the PP's pre-11-M lead). Moreover, even among those voters that switched to the PSOE, the key question is how 11-M influenced that switch. This is addressed below.<sup>205</sup>

More impressive than the direct changeover vote was the turnout impact of 11-M. Per the CIS survey, those mobilized by 11-M comprised 6.2 percent of the electorate. For many of these voters, the attacks appear to have affected them not by directing them to a particular party but simply through inspiring them to "do their democratic duty and vote."<sup>206</sup> This ostensibly neutral sentiment benefitted the PSOE because Spanish abstainers tend to be ideologically left-of-center.<sup>207</sup> On average, those mobilized to vote by 11-M classified themselves ideologically as 4.6 on a scale of 1 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right). This is far closer to the 2004 election's average PSOE voter (3.9) than its average PP voter (6.5).<sup>208</sup> Overall, 1.6 million of the almost three

<sup>202</sup> CIS, Postelectoral Elecciones Generales, 23 March 2004. For specific question discussed here ("¿Diría Ud. que el atentado del 11-M en Madrid le influyó personalmente mucho, bastante, poco o nada, en su decisión de voto?"), see [http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/-Archivos/Marginales/2540\\_2559/2559/e255900.html](http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/-Archivos/Marginales/2540_2559/2559/e255900.html).

<sup>203</sup> Question: "¿Y en qué sentido le influyó?" Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Michavila, "War, Terrorism and Elections," table 14.

<sup>205</sup> See subsections "Government Myopia in the Midst of Tragedy" and "The Salience of the War on Terror."

<sup>206</sup> "An Election Bombshell," *Economist*, 20 March 2004.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.; Raj S. Chari, "The 2004 Spanish Election," *West European Politics* 27, no. 5 (November 2004): 954–63, 960.

<sup>208</sup> Michavila, "War, Terrorism and Elections," table 16.

million new votes the PSOE gained on the previous election came from voters who had abstained in 2000.<sup>209</sup> Turnout was one of the key factors behind the PSOE win.

Of course, we cannot assume that all of those mobilized to turn out by 11-M voted according to preexisting ideological sympathy. Some surely reacted to the attacks not only by deciding to vote but also by choosing a party.<sup>210</sup> As one first-time voter commented, "After the attacks, I had to contribute to kicking out the PP."<sup>211</sup> Moreover, as noted above, the PSOE benefited from a net gain of about 2 percent in switched votes. The key question is: natural ideological fit aside, why did the 11-M attacks influence more persons (whether mobilized or prompted to switch) to select the PSOE than to select the PP? I argue above that effective terrorist strategy cannot account for this; the following sections provide an alternative explanation.

### Government Myopia in the Midst of Tragedy

The government's response to the attacks was crucial. As Lizette Alvarez and Elaine Sciolino, reported at the time, "Voters flooded the polls on Sunday in record numbers, especially young people who had not planned to vote. In interviews, they said they did so not so much out of fear of terror as out of anger against a government they saw as increasingly authoritarian, arrogant and stubborn. The government, they said, mishandled the crisis in the emotional days after the attacks."<sup>212</sup>

At first, it was widely assumed that ETA authored the attacks.<sup>213</sup> There was little initial dissent when interior minister Angel Acebes almost immediately ascribed responsibility to the group.<sup>214</sup> Indeed, Zapatero had already condemned ETA publicly.<sup>215</sup> As evidence began to accumulate, however, the narrative of ETA responsibility became increasingly implausible. Throughout this progression, the government insisted stubbornly on its initial assessment,

<sup>209</sup> Chari, "The 2004 Spanish Election," 960.

<sup>210</sup> After all, 10.6 percent of all respondents told CIS they decided which party to vote for after 11-M. CIS, Postelectoral Elecciones Generales, 23 March 2004. For specific question discussed here ("¿Cuándo decidió Ud. votar al partido o coalición electoral al que finalmente votó?"), see [http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/-Archivos/Marginales/2540\\_2559/2559/e255900.html](http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/-Archivos/Marginales/2540_2559/2559/e255900.html). To a similar question in the Cadena SER/Opina poll, 8.2 percent answered the same. Question: "¿Desde cuándo tenía usted decidido su voto del pasado Domingo?" Cadena SER/Opina, Resultados Pulsómetro, 22 March 2004.

<sup>211</sup> Keith B. Richburg, "Spanish Socialists Oust Party of U.S. War Ally," *Washington Post*, 15 March 2004.

<sup>212</sup> Lizette Alvarez and Elaine Sciolino, "Spain Grapples With Notion That Terrorism Trumped Democracy," *New York Times*, 17 March 2004.

<sup>213</sup> Chari, "The 2004 Spanish Election," 956.

<sup>214</sup> Paddy Woodworth, "Spain Changes Course," *World Policy Journal* (Summer 2004): 7–26, 20.

<sup>215</sup> "Los partidos suspenden la campaña electoral" [The parties suspend the electoral campaign], *Cadena SER*, 11 March 2004, [http://www.cadenaser.com/espana/articulo/partidos-suspenden-campana-electoral/csrscsrpor/20040311csrscrnac\\_3/Tes](http://www.cadenaser.com/espana/articulo/partidos-suspenden-campana-electoral/csrscsrpor/20040311csrscrnac_3/Tes).

manipulating information and enraging many who wanted straightforward answers.

A number of factors undermined the ETA narrative. The 11-M bombings were inconsistent with the group's modus operandi of low-fatality, single-explosion attacks targeted at persons associated with the state and tempered by pre-detonation warnings; ETA's deadliest ever attack killed twenty-one.<sup>216</sup> Moreover, within hours of the attack, two key developments occurred. First, ETA publicly denied responsibility.<sup>217</sup> Second, the police discovered a van in Alcalá de Henares (where the original bombs were loaded) containing detonators, explosives, and a tape recording of Qur'an verses.<sup>218</sup>

Although circumstantial, these clues suggested that, at a minimum, the government ought to remain open-minded on authorship.<sup>219</sup> Instead, PP leaders pushed the ETA narrative forcefully:

Aznar . . . personally telephoned editors of Spain's leading newspapers to reassure them that ETA was to blame. Later that afternoon, the foreign ministry instructed Spanish ambassadors abroad to confirm that ETA was behind the attacks, urging them to inform the local media accordingly. The government even insisted that the UN Security Council make an explicit reference to ETA in its official condemnation of the bombings, at a time when most analysts in the United States were working on the assumption that Al Qaeda was to blame, causing considerable discomfort to some of the senior diplomats involved.<sup>220</sup>

State-run television in Madrid changed its programming on March 12th and 13th (the day before the election) to show a film on ETA.<sup>221</sup> On the 13th, Mariano Rajoy said he had a "moral conviction" that ETA perpetrated the attacks.<sup>222</sup> Later that day, Acebes continued to push the same line, despite being aware of the imminent arrest of a jihadist suspect in connection with the bombings.<sup>223</sup>

Indeed, unfazed by the government's posturing, the police had started pursuing al Qaeda-related leads immediately following the attacks.<sup>224</sup> This led to five arrests on the afternoon of the 13th. Announcing the arrests at 8:00 p.m., Acebes admitted that an "Islamist" theory of the attacks was now the one producing some progress.<sup>225</sup> That evening, authorities recovered the

<sup>216</sup> van Biezen, "Terrorism and Democratic Legitimacy," 101.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Powell, "Did Terrorism Sway Spain's Election?" 379.

<sup>219</sup> Woodworth, "Spain Changes Course," 21.

<sup>220</sup> Powell, "Did Terrorism Sway Spain's Election?" 379.

<sup>221</sup> Jordán and Horsburgh, "Politics vs. Terrorism," 217.

<sup>222</sup> "Mariano Rajoy: «Tengo la convicción moral de que fue ETA»" [Mariano Rajoy: "I have a moral conviction that ETA did it"], *El Mundo*, 13 March, 2004.

<sup>223</sup> Jordán and Horsburgh, "Politics vs. Terrorism," 213.

<sup>224</sup> Powell, "Did Terrorism Sway Spain's Election?" 379.

<sup>225</sup> Olmeda, "Fear or Falsehood."



videocassette on which Abu Dujan al-Afghani announced the responsibility of al Qaeda in Europe.

Within these few days, many Spaniards became progressively more upset with their government. PSOE media allies stoked this anger, committing to the al Qaeda narrative as soon as there was any doubt over ETA and openly questioning the government's honesty on the question of authorship.<sup>226</sup> Anti-government sentiment was translated to mass action on the 13th, as protestors marched against the PP.<sup>227</sup> Media coverage, website publicity, and strategic text-messaging assured widespread participation, with protestors outside PP headquarters holding signs demanding, "No more cover-up."<sup>228</sup>

Suspicion of the government's behavior was rooted in the perception that authorship of the attacks mattered at the ballot box.<sup>229</sup> ETA responsibility would likely have harmed the PSOE due to a scandal involving its coalition partner in the Catalan regional government—the post-communist ERC.<sup>230</sup> Weeks before 11-M, ABC revealed that ERC leader Josep-Lluís Carod-Rovira had met secretly with ETA representatives in France, where he allegedly agreed a truce with ETA for Catalonia but not for the rest of Spain.<sup>231</sup> Refusing to withdraw from the coalition pact, the PSOE was tainted vicariously.<sup>232</sup> A brutal ETA attack in compliance with the alleged truce would have been politically devastating. This was compounded by the fact that the PP was widely credited with weakening ETA dramatically during its tenure in government.<sup>233</sup> Indeed, the PP had made its record against ETA central to its reelection campaign,<sup>234</sup> and there was a belief that the public would rally behind Rajoy's party if that issue were to grow in importance.<sup>235</sup> Transnational jihadism, however, was a different story. As elaborated below, by supporting the Iraq War, the PP was seen to have fundamentally misjudged this form of terrorism.<sup>236</sup> If authorship of 11-M could be ascribed to al Qaeda, the consensus was that the PP would suffer for this perceived miscalculation.<sup>237</sup>

<sup>226</sup> Jordán and Horsburgh, "Politics vs. Terrorism," 214, 217-18; Olmeda, "Fear or Falsehood?"

<sup>227</sup> Chari, "The 2004 Spanish Election," 956; Olmeda, "Fear or Falsehood?"

<sup>228</sup> On the role of media, the Internet, and texting, see Jordán and Horsburgh, "Politics vs. Terrorism," 215-16. Quoting the protest signs, see "Pro-U.S. Party Defeated in Spanish Elections," *Online NewsHour*, 15 March 2004, [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/spain\\_03-15-04.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/spain_03-15-04.html).

<sup>229</sup> Van Biezen, "Terrorism and Democratic Legitimacy," 104.

<sup>230</sup> Technically, the PSOE does not run in Catalonia, where it has a regional arm, the PSC, so the Catalan regional government actually consisted of a PSC-ERC coalition.

<sup>231</sup> Jesús Molina, "Carod-Rovira ultima un pacto con ETA para que no atente en Cataluña" [Carod-Rovira finalizes a pact with ETA so that it does not attack Catalonia], ABC, 26 January 2004, [http://www.abc.es/hemeroteca/historico-26-01-2004/abc/Nacional/carod-rovira-ultima-un-pacto-con-eta-para-que-no-atente-en-catalu%C3%B1a\\_235087.html](http://www.abc.es/hemeroteca/historico-26-01-2004/abc/Nacional/carod-rovira-ultima-un-pacto-con-eta-para-que-no-atente-en-catalu%C3%B1a_235087.html).

<sup>232</sup> van Biezen, "Terrorism and Democratic Legitimacy," 102.

<sup>233</sup> Jordán and Horsburgh, "Politics vs. Terrorism," 205.

<sup>234</sup> Torcal and Rico, "The Spanish General Election," 114.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.; Colomer, "The General Election in Spain," 153.

<sup>236</sup> See the immediately ensuing subsection entitled, "The Salience of the War on Terror."

<sup>237</sup> van Biezen, "Terrorism and Democratic Legitimacy," 102.

Electoral incentives aside, the government's recent history fed cynicism about its post-11-M behavior. The PP had been heavily criticized for obfuscation regarding government mismanagement of a severe oil spill caused by the sinking of the *Prestige* tanker in 2002 and for outright deceit about having ignored the military's safety concerns regarding a rented Soviet-era plane that crashed in 2003, killing sixty-two Spanish soldiers returning from a humanitarian mission.<sup>238</sup>

In this context of past practice and current incentives, many saw the PP's forceful advocacy of the ETA narrative as a manipulative election ploy. In a post-election poll, 65 percent of respondents said that information about the attacks had been manipulated and withheld. Of those, 80 percent blamed the outgoing government;<sup>239</sup> 51.6 percent said that Aznar did not act correctly following the attacks; and only 36.8 percent disagreed.<sup>240</sup> Of those who were critical, 80.8 percent named manipulation of information and obfuscation as Aznar's wrongs, and 28.3 percent believed he tried to use the attacks for political gain.<sup>241</sup> Some expressed uncomfortable parallels with Franco-era censorship.<sup>242</sup> Indicating the electoral impact of these views, 59.7 percent of Spaniards concluded that the PP lost the election; just 26.4 percent said that the PSOE won it.<sup>243</sup>

### The Salience of the War on Terror

The third factor contributing to the election results was 11-M's impact on the salience of international terrorism in voters' minds. Throughout 2003 and into the first two months of 2004, unemployment consistently received the most selections as one of Spain's top three problems in the CIS Barómetro. In the last three months before 11-M, it was selected by 62.9 percent, 65.2 percent, and 65.6 percent of respondents, respectively. The option "terrorism, ETA" was consistently the second most-picked issue, eliciting 43.3 percent, 37.5 percent, and 43.2 percent of selections in those same months.<sup>244</sup>

<sup>238</sup> See Torcal and Rico, "The 2004 Spanish General Election," 110; Olmeda, "Fear or Falsehood?"

<sup>239</sup> "El PSOE comienza la legislatura con 10 puntos de ventaja sobre el PP" [The PSOE begins the new parliament with a 10 point advantage over the PP], *Cadena SER*, 22 March 2004 [http://www.cadenaser.com/espana/articulo/psoe-comienza-legislatura-puntos-ventaja-pp/sernotnac/20040322/cscsrnac\\_1/Tes](http://www.cadenaser.com/espana/articulo/psoe-comienza-legislatura-puntos-ventaja-pp/sernotnac/20040322/cscsrnac_1/Tes). ("El 65% de los españoles cree que tras el 11-M, hubo manipulación y ocultación de información. El 25% piensa que no. El 80% de los que creen que hubo manipulación piensan que fue por parte del Gobierno; el 24% señala a TVE y sólo el 5% piensa que la SER manipuló.")

<sup>240</sup> Question: "¿Considera que el gobierno de Aznar actuó correctamente frente el atentado de Madrid?" Opina, Encuesta España, April 2004, 12.

<sup>241</sup> Question: "¿Por que motivos?" Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Alvarez and Sciolino, "Spain Grapples With Notion."

<sup>243</sup> Question: "¿Cree usted que el PSOE ha ganado las elecciones o que el PP las ha perdido?" Opina, Encuesta España, April 2004, 10.

<sup>244</sup> CIS, Barómetro de Diciembre, Estudio no. 2.548, December 2003, 1; CIS, Barómetro de Enero, Estudio no. 2.554, January 2004, 1; CIS, Barómetro de Febrero, Estudio no. 2.556, February 2004, [http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/-Archivos/Marginales/2540\\_2559/2556/Es2556.pdf](http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/-Archivos/Marginales/2540_2559/2556/Es2556.pdf), 1.

Problematically, the choice “terrorism, ETA” seemingly includes both ETA terrorism and other terrorism. By the time of CIS’s March poll, however, the ETA narrative of 11-M authorship had been firmly displaced by the al Qaeda narrative. Thus, any dramatic change from pre- to post-11-M polling almost certainly indicates a jump in the salience of jihadist terrorism. The shift was immense: up from 43.2 percent in February, 76.9 percent of respondents chose “terrorism, ETA” in the first poll conducted after the attacks.<sup>245</sup> The issue vaulted ahead of unemployment, which was now chosen by just 54.2 percent of respondents.<sup>246</sup> Charting a similar shift, Opina reported that on 11 February, 57.3 percent of respondents chose unemployment as one of the three or four most important problems facing Spain, while 36.4 percent chose terrorism. On 18 March, 62.5 percent chose terrorism and 46.1 percent unemployment.<sup>247</sup> Supporting the theory that this jump reflected heightened concern about international terrorism in particular, in June 2004, 97 percent of respondents told German Marshall Fund pollsters that international terrorism would be an important or extremely important threat to Spain over the next decade.<sup>248</sup>

The focus on unemployment prior to 11-M benefitted the PP as it had overseen unprecedented economic growth, sending unemployment levels to an all-time low.<sup>249</sup> Moreover, Opina reported that 51.9 percent of respondents to a January 2004 poll believed that Rajoy would do better than Zapatero in creating economic growth. Just 23.2 percent believed the reverse. Of all of the issues on which the leaders were compared, the differential on this issue was by far the largest.<sup>250</sup>

The heightened salience of international terrorism, by contrast, stood to benefit the PSOE. Like many leading counterterrorism experts, Spaniards had long considered a counterterrorist strategy involving military action in Iraq fundamentally self-defeating.<sup>251</sup> As the likelihood of invading Iraq grew from November 2002 to February 2003, the number of Spaniards believing that acts of “Islamic terrorism” might occur in Spain grew from 65 percent

<sup>245</sup> CIS, Barómetro de Marzo, Estudio no. 2.558, March 2004, 1.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Cadena SER/Opina, Resultados Pulsómetro, 22 March 2004. For marginally different numbers drawn on different days, see also Opina, Encuesta España, April 2004, <http://www.opina.es/pdfs/90023E.pdf>, 9, question, “Dígame por favor los tres o cuatro principales problemas que tiene España en este momento.”

<sup>248</sup> German Marshall Fund, poll, 6-26 June 2004, available at *Polling the Nations*, <http://poll.orspub.com/>.

<sup>249</sup> Powell, “Did Terrorism Sway Spain’s Election?” 378.

<sup>250</sup> Opina, Encuesta Electoral, January 2004, <http://www.opina.es/pdfs/90020E.pdf>, 18.

<sup>251</sup> Pape, *Dying to Win*, 241–50; Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 154–56; Rohan Gunaratna, “The Post-Madrid Face of Al Qaeda,” *The Washington Quarterly* 27, no.3 (Summer 2004): 91–100, 97; Richard K. Betts, “The Soft Underbelly of Primacy,” in *Conflict After the Cold War*, ed. Richard K. Betts, 2nd ed. (New York: Pearson, 2005), 520–36, 533; The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2003–2004* (London: IISS, 2003), 354; Hoffman, “Combating Al Qaeda,” 12; Colum Lynch, “Volunteers Swell a Reviving Qaeda, UN Warns,” *International Herald Tribune*, 19 December 2002.

to 81 percent.<sup>252</sup> Shortly before 11-M, 66 percent of those polled expressed a belief that the Iraq War had increased the threat of terrorism around the world; just 8 percent believed that it had decreased that threat.<sup>253</sup> This was not pacifism: mirroring the PSOE's position, Spaniards found "good reason" for the use of force in Afghanistan.<sup>254</sup>

Following 11-M, many blamed the PP's policies for the attacks.<sup>255</sup> Sixty-four percent of respondents told Real Elcano in May 2004 that the Madrid bombings would not have occurred if Spain had not supported the Iraq War; only 23 percent disagreed. Eighty-three percent stated that the Iraq War was counterproductive in the fight against terrorism.<sup>256</sup> In an Opina poll, 61.3 percent of Spaniards said that the PP government had not taken sufficient measures against "Islamic terrorism"; just 22 percent took the opposite view.<sup>257</sup>

This analysis raises an important question. Why does the fact that Iraq policy was crucial to determining the electoral impact of the increased salience of international terrorism not show the attacks to have raised the salience of the Iraq War, thus confounding my rejection of the weak-coercion and weak-advertising theses? The critical distinction here is between the salience of the Iraq War as a problem today and the salience of the historical decision to join the war in Iraq as indicative of a misguided counterterrorism strategy.

In March 2004, there was good reason to believe that participation in the Iraq War had rendered Spain more vulnerable to terrorism because it contributed to the radicalization of key constituencies in and around Spain.<sup>258</sup> The polls cited above suggest Spaniards appreciated this impact. That analysis, however, does not itself entail the view that withdrawal from Iraq would simply reverse that radicalization effect. As noted above, as their initial purpose fades, many terrorist groups adopt new *raison d'être* rather than simply disbanding.<sup>259</sup> Spanish intelligence officials anticipated this phenomenon with respect to those radicalized by Spain's role in Iraq.<sup>260</sup> More importantly, many Spaniards also grasped this. In the same May 2004 Real

<sup>252</sup> Real Instituto Elcano, Second Wave of the Barometer of the RIE, press summary, February 2003, [http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano\\_eng/Content?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano\\_in/barometer/barometer2](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_eng/Content?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/barometer/barometer2).

<sup>253</sup> Ipsos-Public Affairs, poll, 13-21 February 2004, available at *Polling the Nations*, <http://poll.orspub.com/>.

<sup>254</sup> Woodworth, "Spain Changes Course," 22.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>256</sup> Real Instituto Elcano, Sixth Wave of the Barometer of the RIE.

<sup>257</sup> Question: "¿Considera usted que el Gobierno del PP había tomado suficientes medidas contra el terrorismo islámico?" Opina, Encuesta España, May 2004, 11.

<sup>258</sup> See sources cited note 251.

<sup>259</sup> See Hoffman, "Combating Al Qaeda"; Jessica Stern, "The Protean Enemy"; Jordán and Horsburgh, "Spain and Islamism."

<sup>260</sup> "Una falsa pista sobre el explosivo desvió la investigación de la Guardia Civil hacia ETA" [A false trail regarding the explosives diverted the Civil Guard's investigation towards ETA], *Cadena*

Elcano poll cited above, only a minority believed that withdrawal from Iraq would reduce Spain's risk of a further attack, and yet 78 percent approved of the withdrawal.<sup>261</sup> Moreover, even after Spanish troops had returned, 97 percent of Spaniards still considered international terrorism an important or extremely important threat.<sup>262</sup>

In sum, 11-M seems to have (1) confirmed to voters that the PP had performed poorly in countering international terrorism (in particular, with respect to a policy that the PSOE had always rejected) and (2) convinced voters that international terrorism was the key issue facing the country. In this situation, Spaniards naturally elected the party that had consistently tracked their views on how to combat international terrorism. This did not mean focusing on withdrawal from Iraq as the key to solving the threat; it meant holding that the PP had made the wrong counterterrorism decisions in the past, and the PSOE (admittedly as an opposition voice) had made the right ones. Nor did this mean conceding to al Qaeda—just as Zapatero took 1300 troops out of Iraq, he ramped up the deployment to over 1000 in Afghanistan.<sup>263</sup>

### Partido Popular Vulnerability

The final reason for the surprise election result is that the PP lead was deceptively fragile before 11-M. The Spanish people were growing disillusioned with a regime that had held office for eight years. Meanwhile, the PSOE's new young leader offered a refreshing alternative. Indeed, Zapatero steadily cut into the PP lead throughout the first week of the campaign.<sup>264</sup> Having posted a 5 percent lead for the PP on 27 February, Opina's reading on 7 March put the PP just 2.5 percent ahead of the PSOE.<sup>265</sup> On some measures, the PP's lead in the polls shrunk from 8 percent to 2 percent in the space of a month.<sup>266</sup> Although the final polls before 11-M opened up a little from that point, an underlying vulnerability remained.

Indeed, although 66.2 percent of respondents to the final preelection Opina poll expected a PP victory, only 33.7 percent desired one, with 38.3 percent preferring a PSOE victory.<sup>267</sup> Public approval of government policy

SER, 7 July, 2004, [http://www.cadenaser.com/espana/articulo/falsa-pista-explosivo-desvio-investigacion-guardia-civil-eta/csrsrpor/20040707csrsrnac\\_11/Tes](http://www.cadenaser.com/espana/articulo/falsa-pista-explosivo-desvio-investigacion-guardia-civil-eta/csrsrpor/20040707csrsrnac_11/Tes).

<sup>261</sup> Real Instituto Elcano, Sixth Wave of the Barometer of the RIE, Press Summary.

<sup>262</sup> German Marshall Fund, poll.

<sup>263</sup> "Spain Threatens Iraq Troop Pull-Out," *BBC News*, 15 March 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3512144.stm>; Graff and Walker, "I Don't Want To Be A Great Leader."

<sup>264</sup> Chari, "The 2004 Spanish Election," 955.

<sup>265</sup> Opina, Intención de Voto Elecciones Generales, 14 March 2004, [http://www.cadenaser.com/static/pulsometro/antiores/encuesta\\_040314.htm](http://www.cadenaser.com/static/pulsometro/antiores/encuesta_040314.htm).

<sup>266</sup> van Biezen, "Terrorism and Democratic Legitimacy," 104.

<sup>267</sup> Opina, Encuesta Electoral, March 2004, 12. See also the parallel questions with respect to Rajoy and Zapatero (*ibid.*, 11).

had declined steadily from 50 percent in April 2000 to 27 percent in January 2004.<sup>268</sup> Perhaps crucially, given what occurred following 11-M, 35 percent of Spaniards told pollsters that Zapatero was the more honest of the two leaders, with only 28 percent selecting Rajoy.<sup>269</sup> The PP was also likely tainted by Aznar's standing: in January, 60.2 percent of CIS respondents expressed little or no confidence in the outgoing leader; only 6.5 percent expressed a lot of confidence in him.<sup>270</sup> Most remarkable of all, throughout the month of February and into the last week before the election, well over 55 percent (58.5 percent at final reading) of Spaniards consistently believed that Spain needed a change of government, with just over 30 percent saying that it did not.<sup>271</sup>

These underlying trends suggest that the PP's poll lead was fragile rather than robust. The door was wide open for the three factors discussed above to effect what appeared to be a dramatic electoral change.

### CONCLUSION: SPANISH DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF TERROR

In this paper, I have examined the 11-M terrorist attacks from several perspectives of terrorism strategy. First, I considered whether the al Qaeda-affiliated perpetrators of the Madrid massacres were credible coercive agents. I conclude that their threat was credible, but their assurance was not. Engaging in a coercive bargain with such actors would therefore have been strategically perilous. Nonetheless, many commentators and politicians have worried that the Spanish electorate did precisely that. This interpretation is mistaken. With respect to both the strong and weak theories of coercion analyzed in this paper, the data from opinion polls and voters' conspicuous lack of opposition to increasing troop deployments in Afghanistan indicate that Spaniards were not coerced. Voters neither changed their positions on the issues raised by the 11-M bombers nor prioritized those issues differently following the attacks.

Terrorism, of course, can be multifaceted in its strategic application. I therefore consider alternative plausible strategic theories as they might apply to the 11-M attacks and the subsequent electoral reverse. I find that

<sup>268</sup> van Biezen, "Terrorism and Democratic Legitimacy," 105.

<sup>269</sup> Question: "Entre los dos candidatos a la presidencia del gobierno Rajoy y Zapatero ¿cuál cree usted que es más honesto?" Opina, Encuesta Electoral, March 2004, 17.

<sup>270</sup> Question: "El Presidente del Gobierno, José María Aznar, ¿Le inspira, personalmente, much confianza, bastante confianza, poca o ninguna confianza?" CIS, Barómetro de Enero, Estudio no. 2.554, January 2004.

<sup>271</sup> Question: "¿Cree usted que España necesita un cambio de partido en el Gobierno?" Cadena SER/Opina, Pulsómetro, 7 March 2004, [http://www.cadenaser.com/static/pulsometro/anteriores/encuesta\\_040307.htm](http://www.cadenaser.com/static/pulsometro/anteriores/encuesta_040307.htm).

the attacks were unsuccessful when assessed through the frame of strategic advertising. Apathetic or uninformed Spaniards were not influenced to consider the justice of Spanish deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan, nor did those issues become more important to those who had already considered them. The attacks were equally ineffective in provoking a predictable government overreaction. Although the PP government mishandled the aftermath, it did so in an idiosyncratic and unpredictable way that could not have been strategically instigated by even the savviest terrorist agent. Finally, the attacks did not provoke mass anxiety through exposing the incumbent regime as fundamentally helpless.

The only major strategic boon to al Qaeda from 11-M was the internal morale-building effect of the attacks. This is a genuine benefit, and it provides a reminder that strategically naïve groups inspired by al Qaeda may attempt to replicate what they believe to be an 11-M success. Ultimately, however, it does little to set the 11-M bombings apart from any other properly executed terrorist attack against a Western target by al Qaeda or an affiliate.

To truly dismiss the strategic explanations of what occurred in March 2004, one needs an alternative explanation for the electoral reverse. Moreover, with 30 percent of voters claiming the events of 11-M influenced their votes in some way, the explanation must account for the impact of the attacks. I argue that four different factors combined to oust the PP. First, a sense of civic duty in the aftermath of the attacks helped to produce an unexpectedly high electoral turnout, favoring the PSOE as the major party of the left. Second, voters punished the government for what they saw as politically motivated mendacity in the aftermath of the attacks. Third, the attacks raised the salience of international terrorism, an area of weakness for the PP. Finally, the government's lead was already deceptively fragile before 11-M.

The 11-M attacks changed the outcome of the 2004 Spanish general election and thus precipitated Spanish withdrawal from Iraq. However, they did not do so through effective terrorist strategy but via an unpredictable and serendipitous (from the terrorist perspective) chain of circumstances. As such, contra Lloyd, only a poor al Qaeda strategist would think 11-M a success that could be replicated in other theaters.<sup>272</sup> It would also be a mistake to think, as does Thomas Friedman, that "Al Qaeda doesn't do exit polling. Al Qaeda does big picture."<sup>273</sup> Facing foes of vastly superior resources, al Qaeda cannot afford to be casual in evaluating the strategic efficacy of its actions. Thus, in "The Military Theory of the Global Islamic Resistance Call," al-Suri provides a candid assessment of al Qaeda's successes and failures to that point.<sup>274</sup> He demands of his fellow strategists that they

<sup>272</sup> See "Terrorism, Democracy and Muslims."

<sup>273</sup> Friedman, "Spain must not let Al Qaeda's vote count."

<sup>274</sup> See al-Suri, "The Military Theory," 350–59. He reflects, "We can blame nobody but ourselves when [in just two years] 80% of our forces were eliminated in the repercussions of September 11th" (ibid., 359).

research and develop the network's methods.<sup>275</sup> He also insists, "Action in Europe . . . must be subjected to the rules of political benefits versus political harms, judged against the positions of the European governments."<sup>276</sup>

Writing just a few days after the 11-M attacks, al-Suri's immediate reaction was to label the bombings a strategic success and to credit the perpetrators with Spain's withdrawal from Iraq.<sup>277</sup> However, if al Qaeda is the strategic "worthy enemy"<sup>278</sup> experts take it to be and if al-Suri's earlier candid evaluations of al Qaeda actions and demands for careful research toward the improvement terrorist methods are sustained by successors, the network's leading figures will not ignore any relevant information about past attacks.<sup>279</sup> Independent and strategically unsophisticated al Qaeda-inspired cells may try to copy 11-M. But given time for reflection and careful analysis, al Qaeda's top strategists will recognize that 11-M was not strategically effective and will be unlikely to attempt a precise repeat.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 367.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 395. See also *ibid.*, 416.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 420.

<sup>278</sup> Anonymous, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 2002), 11.

<sup>279</sup> Al-Suri was allegedly arrested in Pakistan in November 2005. It has been suggested that he was then transferred to a CIA secret detention facility. Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad*, 343-46. Subsequently, he may have been transferred to Syria and held in custody there. William Maclean, "Al Qaeda Ideologue in Syrian Detention—Lawyers," *Reuters*, 10 June 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/06/10/idUSLA456186>.