

Analysis: Plot to Bomb Spanish Train Foiled by Police

ETA (Basque Fatherland and Liberty) terrorist, 2 placed bombs, TNT, police stopped a suspicious passenger

Summary

- Christmas Eve 2003, Spanish police foil ETA **plot to detonate 2 bombs on Madrid-bound train**
- Bombs were to detonate as train entered Madrid's Chamartin station **at height of pre-holiday travel period**
- Police first arrested one suspect at a mid-route train stop who had a **61 lb. bomb in a suitcase**
- Police then stopped the train outside the city and found **another 44 lb. bomb planted on the train**
- 190 passengers were evacuated, **authorities removed and detonated the bomb**



Local Response

- **Two weeks prior to this incident**, French police arrested 3 leaders of the ETA's operational wing
- **Spanish police received intelligence from French authorities** that another ETA attack was imminent
- Day of the attempt, **Spanish police arrested man acting suspiciously** (wearing a wig) at a stop along the Madrid train line
- Suspect had a train ticket and a 61 lb. bomb he was going to plant to supplement a bomb already placed on board the train. **Police quickly extracted from him information about the second bomb**
- Terrorist who had already placed the first bomb on the train was later arrested at his home

Device

- The device placed on board the train was a suitcase bomb constructed of 44 lbs. of dynamite
- The bomb carried by the second individual was a suitcase bomb filled with 61 lbs. of dynamite
- Each of these devices were armed with a **manual detonator**

Tactic

- In recent years, the ETA has started targeting civilians, mainly at tourist resorts throughout Spain
- The initial bomb (44 lbs.) was placed by one suspect on the train from the point of departure

- This device was placed in a **suitcase on a luggage rack**
- Second bomb (61 lbs.) carried by another suspect dressed in a wig and waiting at a scheduled stop
- The second suspect was in possession of a pistol, fuse, and timer
- The second device was designed to supplement the on-board device or replace it if found by authorities
- The two suspects were “legal,” meaning they were operatives not previously identified by the police
- Suspects also told police of placement of other bombs alongside other train routes in the Basque region
- On 28 February, Spanish police intercepted van filled with 1,100 lbs. of explosives that ETA planned to detonate in midtown Madrid. The bomb contained 1,116 lbs. of chloratite explosive and 66 lbs. of dynamite along with a timing device

Implications for Local Law Enforcement

- Police must presume the existence of multiple devices in any type of threat—even suicide bombers
- Therefore, police should quickly attempt to extract information from any terrorist arrested in the act
- International cooperation and awareness of world events is critical—in this case it helped crack the plot
- Accomplices may be waiting to board trains at mid-route stops, not only point of origin

Additional Links

Basque RedNet: Perspectives on Basque Separatism

<http://www.basque-red.net/homei.htm>

A Geography of Basque Political Violence

<http://www.may.ie/staff/dpringle/igu/mansvelt.pdf>

Mailbombs and Car Bombs: the Basque Conundrum

<http://www.ce.berkeley.edu/~coby/essays/basqnat.htm>

For more information please contact Georgia Pellegrini, Associate Director of the Center for Policing Terrorism, at (212) 599-7000 or via email: gpellegrini@manhattan-institute.org