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ANOTHER DEADLY WAKEUP CALL FOR EUROPE

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The deadly attacks on March 11 that killed about 200 people in Spain and wounded more than a thousand others will surely serve as a call to action against the international terrorism of al-Qaeda and its affiliates. The sooner that leaders and citizens of countries around the world, and particularly in Europe, internalize the fact that they are not immune and that the terror that struck this time in Madrid and last time in Istanbul is likely to strike again in other European cities, the fewer victims there will be.

The experience of the past four decades demonstrates that modern international terrorists are indifferent to their victims' nationality, gender, religion or place of residence. From the terrorists' perspective, no means are excluded and no place is off limits. Terrorism has only a few common denominators – it strikes at the innocent in strictly civilian settings, and it invokes some ideology to justify the indiscriminate killing. Terrorism too often benefits from "understanding" by those who do not understand the essence of terrorism or, even worse, by those with vested political interests in justifying it.

The fact that mass terrorist attacks have not occurred for a long time in Europe is not due to some consensus that the continent is not a legitimate theater of operations. It is, instead, the

result of the failure of al-Qaeda and its affiliates to overwhelm the counter-terrorist efforts of Italian, French, German, Belgian and British security services. Besides, European cities did serve as logistical bases for the September 11 suicide-bombers on their way to the United States.

In the aftermath of the Madrid attack, the public debate over the authenticity of the claim of responsibility by the "Abu Hafiz al-Masri Brigades" included the kind of reflections on al-Qaeda's reasons for attacking Spain that are often voiced in other countries after they are attacked, as if to suggest that the target country has somehow brought it on itself. Such reflections play into the hands of al-Qaeda and its affiliates and divert the focus of attention from the more urgent question of how Europe should coordinate with the United States in a common effort to block the terrorist organizations and deter states that, either deliberately or through lack of capacity to act otherwise, allow the organizations to operate freely within their borders.

The involvement of states in Europe and elsewhere in the military or diplomatic struggle against terrorism or even in humanitarian assistance under UN auspices exposes them to terrorist attacks for which "Global Jihad" spokesmen can give eloquent and superficially

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persuasive explanations. According to this logic, Italy, France, Germany, Norway, Poland, and Britain -- along with Australia and perhaps Japan and China (accused of oppressing its Uighur minority) -- can expect to incur the wrath of al-Qaeda and its affiliates in their major cities, just as Turkey and Spain have already done.

Al-Qaeda and its affiliates -- the "Afghan alumni" -- have undergone a conceptual shift since September 11 and particularly since the US-led counteroffensive in Afghanistan and Iraq. These events sharpened their sense that they are locked in an all-out war with the West, or, more precisely, with the rest of the world, including "apostate" Muslims. That raises the distinct possibility of an era of unconventional terrorism encompassing mass, indiscriminate killing of opponents with every means at the terrorists' disposal. In keeping with this world-view, Islamic theologians last year explicitly authorized the mass murder of "unbelievers," and in Saudi Arabia, a *fatwa* (religious edict) was issued permitting the use of weapons of mass destruction.

Consequently, European leaders will need to view the recent attack within the broader context of an international counter-terrorist campaign and to influence European Union members to play an active role, together with the United States, in the coalition that leading Asian countries such as Australia joined following the attack in Bali. The policy of that coalition will logically require that the traditional state-sponsors of terrorism that host al-Qaeda and its affiliates, especially Iran and Syria, cease their support of terrorist networks and instead provide active support for the war against terrorism. It will also require that state-supporters of terrorism which resist the demands of this international coalition be subjected to comprehensive and effective sanctions, under the auspices of the Security Council, of the type that were imposed on Libya and ultimately brought about a complete transformation in that country's policy

concerning terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. The Libyan case has strengthened the assumption that a coordinated international coalition can impose political and economic costs heavy enough to make it worthwhile for any country to reverse a policy of support for terrorism.

But in addition to dealing with state supporters of terrorism, the coalition will face the equally urgent and daunting challenge of forcing "failed states" to act against the presence of terrorist organizations on their soil. Those states, too, will have to be confronted with the demand to stop allowing terrorists to use their territory as sanctuaries or even as springboards for operations in other countries. States such as Kenya, Somalia, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and others do not assert their nominal sovereignty over local Muslim populations giving cover to terrorists on the grounds that they are incapable of imposing their authority. If that is the reason for their failure to act, then they can be offered international assistance, including military assistance and counter-terror expertise, to carry out the obligations implicit in their sovereignty -- perhaps under UN auspices in order to minimize injury to national pride. But if it transpires that the real reason is lack of political will stemming from calculations of cost and benefit, then those calculations can be shifted by a mixture of carrots and sticks in order to induce them to change policy and combat terrorism more actively.

The events of recent days once again demonstrate the costs of the head-in-the-sand policy still practiced by many countries in the hope that terrorism will somehow pass them by: a ceaseless wave of high-casualty attacks, each time striking a different country. That price is not a natural disaster. Instead, it results from the failure of political leaders to acknowledge the nature of the threat and to act with sufficient vigor and determination against it.