

Living through terrorism

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Can one 'make sense' of something as apparently senseless and inhuman as the terrorist attacks in Madrid?

The first step is to share the experience and our responses to it, to embrace those in shock, to tell them they are not alone. Then, also, to talk and argue about how anything like this can be prevented in future.

In advance of Sunday's general election Richard Torné assesses the underlying nature of Spanish politics in "[Spain's 3/11: democracy after atrocity](#)" [0]

In Europe, one reaction is to measure it against other European outrages. The most terrible since the Lockerbie bombing? But that was an intercontinental flight. Even worse than the Sveta Nedelya cathedral in Sofia, Bulgaria in 1925 which killed 123? But if we are talking the Balkans, should not the comparison be with Srebrenica, when 7,000 were massacred – not a terrorist outrage but a modern one linked to the bloody transformation of nations?

For me, it is important to see Madrid as part of the deliberate massacre of innocents, a necklace of outrages that threatens the birth of our new century and includes: New York (11 September 2001), Bali (12 October 2002), Moscow (23 October 2002), Mombasa (28 November 2002), Tel Aviv (5 January 2003), Mumbai (25 August 2003), Istanbul (15 and 20 November 2003), and Quetta, Baghdad and Karbala (2 March 2004).

Madrid is not only an attack against Spaniards, whether by crazed Basque militants or al-Qaida fundamentalists. It is also an indiscriminate assault which, without regard for home, religion or nationality, will ruin families and wound lovers long after the blood and damage has been cleared.

In a response we titled, '[Is this our fate?](#)' [0] which he wrote overnight after witnessing the attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Center, Todd Gitlin concluded:

"'Terrorism' is a more precise word than sometimes grasped. It's an *ism*, a belief – in terror. Some fierce rationalists refuse to confront the fact that there are people willing to die to terrify whole populations. That willingness, even eagerness, brooks no arguments. As best I understand this mentality, it's a belief that kicks in on the far other side of arguments. It asks for a focused military response – a precise one, not a revenge spasm, not an attack on a pharmaceutical factory, but an action that distinguishes killers from civilians. No easy matter. Nothing to rush into.

And then?

Tonight, grief abides."

What was then an appalling exception has become an intolerable part of our lives. We need to share our response to the atrocities of Madrid with those in and from the city, then weave into this an understanding - cool, patient, utterly determined - that places them within the larger pattern of terrorism, and works out how it can best be defeated.

What do you think? Post your responses in our global [forum](#) [0] on the bombings in Madrid and the growing number of terror attacks around the world.

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