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11 March 2004 and its aftermath

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1. Terrorist attack 11 March 2004

The 11th March 2004, terrorist attack in Madrid provoked indignation and atonishment at the Spanish National Library as well as other terrorist attacks. This situation was very painful for us because three of our colleagues were killed.

Fascinated for the apocalyptic ideas, the killers obtained some of their macabre aims, as to kill innocent travellers, to shock and to afraid the population, and to turn themselves into supposed martyrs.

Unlike other terrorists, they did not seek to become interlocutors of any negotiation. With their religious fanaticism, their ethnocentrism and their schatological vision of the life, they try to break the ties between two cultures, whose members are strangers in some aspects but not so different.

2. Actions taken at the Spanish National Library

For forty years, terrorism has been present in the daily life of Spaniards, involving changes in the security of many buildings, for example the Spanish National Library. We set up metal detectors, x-ray for luggage, CCTV, and others devices in order to offset possible attempts and to decrease damages. A good idea because a few years later a terrorist group threatened the chairman. Therefore, 11 March 2004 didn't mean any significant change in security for the Spanish National Library.

3. The changes in the security of the Spanish National Library

Meanwhile, a new chairwoman was appointed on May 2004 in the National Library, and she fixed new aims. For example, to open doors to a major number of citizens and to increase cultural events, without diminishing the security. Therefore we implemented a discreet security that tries to avoid any sign of hostility towards visitors and it consists essentially in:

- To give a more pleasant aspect to the spaces with electronic devices, covering them with white panels and different drawings about Rembrandt or Don Quixote.
- To decrease the number of security guards with handguns and to promote the cctv system.
- To train security guards in order to offer a quality service. That is, to decrease the routine of their activities and to become good watchers, and so, to promote good interpersonal relations amongst library staff, customers and security guards, but without forgetting their tasks. With this we have reduced to minimum the number of complaints to our Area. A correct and exemplary bosses' behaviour is as well essential to offer quality service.
- And to strengthen the trust between security guards and the National Library staff. It costs time, but we get great results because we can improve our security system.

4. Latest experiences

Some months later, we found a bag with a few books in the National Library garden. At first, we thought that someone forgot it, but after the x-ray control, we watched an opened envelope which contained two shut envelopes with strange material.

On the first one, we could read "for life" and on the second one "for death". My face changed.

We remembered what happened in USA with anthrax and then, we called police. But at this moment, we didn't have enough rational cues to evacuate the Library.

Later, the police confirm us that there was no danger. In the envelopes there only were small burnt papers. This situation probably originated by someone mad made me think about the great vulnerability of the National Library and the society face terror.

5. Risk analysis

Today religious fanaticism is linked to violence. The aim of religious fanatic attacks are frequently politic, economic, military and also cultural. You might remember when Talibans destroyed two big statues of Bhuda in Afghanistan (Bamiyan) few years ago, because they thought that pre-islamic art is an offence to Islam.

Books, as cultural memory, are also at risk if fanaticism is present. Books mean frequently a personal enrichment, but for some people, including theocracy and dictatorship, books are a source of contamination and perversion. Therefore, books are burnt frequently as a purification act.

In any religion, fundamentalism or fanaticism could emerge. Catholicism has fundamentalist supporters, Protestants have fundamentalists too, Judaism has ultra orthodox believers, and even Hinduism has a belligerent faction. But today, Islamic fanaticism is in the spotlight. Remember New York, Madrid and London attacks.

Fanaticism and terrorism attacks are a major risk today in the world, so to gain the victory against them, we need to fight it with special forces, but we mustn't forget to reform social, economic, politics and cultural systems because it is the best way to get a democratic government and get respect for life in many countries.

If the international situation doesn't change, are the Libraries in danger? In our country, violent groups burnt few bookshops a long time ago because their owners sold books of different ideology.

It's possible that someone might plan an attack against Libraries. If your Library decides an exhibition of religious taboo, therefore it will represents more risks and the current security of your Library, I am sure, will be insufficient.

Thank you for your attention.