

Death squad inquiry continues to shake Spanish social democrats

Vicky Short

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In Spain, a four-year criminal investigation into death squads used to kill alleged Basque separatists continues to shake the social democrats.

From 1983 to 1987, a series of assassinations and kidnappings were undertaken by so-called Anti-terrorist Liberation Groups (GAL--Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación). In total, 29 people were killed and another 30 wounded. Most were members of the Basque separatist organisation ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna--Basque Homeland and Freedom), but seven others were killed by mistake. Most of the killings took place on French territory. GAL's reign of terror occurred when Spain was ruled by the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE--Spanish Socialist Workers Party) under Felipe Gonzalez.

In October 1982, during the general election campaign, Gonzalez told journalist José Luis Martín Prieto that 'the only road to finish with ETA is to fight it using their own weapons.' In 1983, a meeting of seven high-ranking government officials discussed how to deal with ETA. One former official, Ricardo Damborrea, testified in court that the group discussed what he termed 'the Israeli' solution.

GAL was set up to curb the armed activities of ETA by wiping out its leadership. It issued communiqués taking credit for the killing and bombing of alleged ETA members. Large sums of state money were used to bribe French police officers, hire hit men from the ranks of former French paratroopers, and pay contract killers from Lisbon and Marseilles.

A secret government fund was created to finance GAL and pay the hired killers. GAL was established and organised by government officials (both from the central and regional governments), Secret Service officials and high-ranking police and military officers. It was masterminded by the Defence Intelligence High

Command (CESID).

Newspaper reports in Spain, published in *Diario 16*, began to raise the possibility of government involvement in GAL, and its operations abruptly ceased. In 1987 it was disbanded. France also began extraditing a number of ETA leaders to Spain, reversing its previous policy of granting them asylum.

In 1988, judge Baltasar Garzón began investigating the allegations of a government link with GAL. Garzón is the same judge who has recently issued the arrest warrant for General Pinochet on charges of torture and killings. His initial investigation into GAL was blocked by a higher court. After a number of other high-profile cases and a brief spell in parliament as a pro-PSOE independent, judge Garzón took up the case again in 1994.

In the meantime, in 1991, two former chiefs of the Basque Civil Guard (paramilitary police), José Amedo and Michel Dominguez had been sentenced to 108 years in prison after confessing to acting alone in a series of attacks against Basque separatists. It transpired later that the State Security Department had paid the two defendants more than \$1.5 million to keep quiet, and also provided monthly payments to their wives. When the money dried up the two decided to tell their story to an opposition newspaper, *El Mundo*, in 1994.

As a result of Garzón's new investigations, 14 former police and government officials were brought to trial for their involvement with GAL.

In 1995 evidence came to light that at least two ETA suspects who died in police custody had been tortured. Links were also discovered between the police and GAL. A former director-general in the Security Department and an ex-chief of police in Bilbao admitted helping GAL operations, and insisted that other higher officials were involved. Both men

incriminated José Barrionuevo, who was Gonzalez's Interior Minister from 1982 until 1988.

In June this year, Gonzalez himself was called to give evidence to the High Court in a different case relating to the kidnapping of Segundo Marey. Twelve people, including the ex-Interior Minister, José Barrionuevo, and the former secretary of State for Security, Rafael Vera, are accused of having taken part. Barrionuevo and Vera were sentenced to 10 years in prison for their involvement in the kidnapping. Marey, a Spanish industrialist living in France, was mistaken for a leader of ETA. Even though his kidnappers soon realised their mistake, they kept Marey in a hut under inhuman conditions for 10 days before releasing him. He is now claiming millions of pesetas in compensation.

Seven more people have been tried for the murder of two young ETA supporters in 1983 under the auspices of GAL. Their bodies were only identified years later.

On October 15, 1983 two of the defendants in this case, Enrique Dorado Villalobos and Felipe Bayo Leal--both officers of the Civil Guard--together with two other policemen, were dispatched to Bayonne in France, with instructions to apprehend the two youths and bring them back to Spain. The two had migrated to France fleeing police harassment, although their connection with ETA was never proven.

They were located at a house in Bayonne where they lived with brothers and friends. On October 16, as they left to attend a party, they were set upon by the four policemen who beat them up, threw them in the boot of their car and immediately drove back across the border to Spain.

The news was transmitted to Commander Rodriguez Galindo--another of the defendants in the trial--who ordered that they be taken to the abandoned Cumbre Palace in San Sebastian, in the Basque Country. There they were tortured terribly for several days, before being transported to Alicante in south-east Spain. They were then taken bound and gagged in the boot of a car to a solitary spot near Foya de Coves, stripped of everything but the bandages covering their eyes and mouths, placed before an open grave and shot through the head.

The PSOE held power for 14 years from 1982 to 1996 under Gonzalez, who was prime minister. His government followed the demands of big business to the letter, destroying thousands of jobs, cutting wages

and slashing the already meagre welfare services. These policies lost it the support of the majority of the working class, and its connections with GAL cost Gonzalez dearly at the polls. The right-wing Partido Popular (PP) utilised the GAL scandal to force Gonzalez into calling elections a year early on March 3, 1996, which the PP won.

The affair continues to haunt the party, and the jailing of ex-Minister of Interior Barrionuevo and former Secretary of State for Security Vera is by no means the end of the matter. Further court hearings are already under way to establish misappropriation of state finances. This includes not only the illegal funding of GAL but also the siphoning of funds to personally enrich officials from the Interior Ministry and other government departments, as well as their relatives.

These investigations have brought infighting within the PSOE to a head. Gonzalez has decided to re-register as a practising lawyer in order to defend his former Minister of Interior and Secretary of State for Security at their appeal hearings. He is supported by those in the party who want to continue the cover-up of the GAL. Others, such as PSOE candidate for the presidency, José Borrell, are calling on Gonzalez to admit his 'past mistakes' out of fear that the dirty war issue could become a millstone around their own necks.

These concerns were epitomised in an article by Josep Ramoneda in El Pais who wrote, that to 'numerous people with left leanings,' it has been 'a trauma seeing the government of the socialist party implicated in events which conjure up images of a dictatorship ... at least from the point of view of those of us who thought that one of the differences between the socialists and the right was that they would not do these things.'

See Also:

Political crisis deepens in Spain following ETA ceasefire

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