

Terror Alert: What Does Ashcroft Know?

by Edward Spannaus

When Attorney General John Ashcroft announced to a press conference on May 26 that Al-Qaeda is planning “an attack on the United States in the next few months,” and that the terrorist network had announced that “90% of its arrangements for an attack in the United States were complete,” officials in other Federal agencies—including the Department of Homeland Security—were shaking their heads in amazement and disbelief.

Where was the Department of Homeland Security, which has been designated as the lead agency for issuing terror alerts? The day before, Homeland Security officials had been saying they had *no* new intelligence pointing to the threat of an attack. The day of Ashcroft’s press conference, Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge was on the morning television news shows, saying that there was no reason to raise the terror alert level.

Should we assume that this was just John Ashcroft playing the clown once again, and jumping in front of the TV cameras, as is his wont? Or should we take the Attorney General seriously, and ask: What does John Ashcroft know, that others in the Administration may not know?

Aznar’s and Cheney’s Predictions

The only alternative to dismissing Ashcroft as a buffoon, is to examine his conduct in light of the warning issued by former Spanish Prime Minister José Maria Aznar in mid-May, that the United States will be hit with a major terrorist incident, and could be under emergency rule in June. During his travels in the United States, which began on May 14, Aznar reported “with certainty” that America will be hit with terrorist attacks intended to shape the outcome of the U.S. elections, “just as the terrorists attacked Spain on March 11.” Aznar made statements of this type in at least three separate venues: a speech at Chapman University in California, where he was invited to receive the Global Citizen Award; and interviews with the *Los Angeles Times* and with AP.

Aznar was, of course, a rare European ally of George Bush, Dick Cheney, and Britain’s Tony Blair in their invasion of Iraq. After the Synarchist-conducted Madrid bombings, it is reliably reported, Aznar attempted to cancel the Spanish elections to keep himself and his conservative Popular Party in power. Contrary to the mythology peddled by the news media, Aznar’s ouster was not a reaction to the bombings; before the elections, non-governmental polls already showed

Aznar losing to Rodrigo Zapatero, who had pledged to withdraw Spain’s troops from Iraq.

In response to Aznar’s predictions of a terror attack, Democratic Presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche asked whether Aznar was helping to stage “a Herman Göring-style stunt to fix the elections”; and he called for a full investigation of Aznar’s warnings by relevant security agencies and by Congress. (See *EIR*, May 28).

Moreover, after hearing about Ashcroft’s May 26 press conference, LaRouche urged that Congress should move preemptively, and immediately question Ashcroft and Dick Cheney—who has been the most outspoken Administration official in predicting, with certainty, another major terrorist attack before the elections, to be blamed on “Islamic terrorists.” Congress should act now, to prevent any more terrorism surprises, LaRouche stated.

Another major terror attack could not only be used as a “Reichstag Fire” pretext to fix or cancel the November elections, but also to ram through further police-state laws. The Bush Administration is right now pushing for still more draconian “anti-terrorism” powers. In his April 17 Saturday radio address, President Bush kicked off an effort to pressure Congress into extending the provisions of the Patriot Act—which are not even due to expire until the end of 2005. During the week of April 18, Bush travelled to Hershey, Pennsylvania and Lackawanna, New York to meet with law enforcement personnel to boost the Patriot Act.

The Justice Department is quietly working, at this moment, on getting a number of changes through Congress which would significantly expand the powers given it under the 2001 Patriot Act. Some of the measures are recycled from the draft “Patriot II” bill, which was supposedly abandoned last year following the uproar which ensued when it was leaked to a watchdog group.

Some of the provisions now making their way through Congress are:

- The “lone-wolf” provision, which would allow the government to conduct secret surveillance on suspected terrorists or spies, without proving that they have any connection with a foreign government or terrorist organization. Right now this would apply to non-U.S. citizens; under the original “Patriot II,” this would also have applied to U.S. citizens. This provision has already passed the Senate, and is part of the “Anti-Terrorism Intelligence Tools Improvement Act of 2003” in the House.
- Additional powers for the use of “national security letters,” which allow the FBI to obtain business and financial records, and records of electronic communications, without a court order or search warrant. It would also provide a five-year prison term for anyone disclosing that he has received a national security letter. (An individual served with a subpoena is under no such restriction.)
- Vastly expanded powers for the DOJ to seek the death penalty in vaguely-defined “terrorism” cases.