



FOUR YEARS AHEAD OF US Rafael L. Bardají and Florentino Portero*

Over the last two years, various nations have pursued a different policy to that of the United States. However, they have behaved in a different manner to that of the Spanish Government. They have always maintained their sense of prudence and their good manners. The rhetorical excesses and gratuitous gestures of hostility on the part of the Zapatero Government have created an atmosphere in which it will be more difficult and arduous to repair relations. If this were only a personal problem concerning Mr. Zapatero, nobody would have any objection. However, unfortunately, this is now a national problem for the whole of Spain.

The current Head of the Spanish Government stated last March that: "I think Kerry is going to win. In fact, I want Kerry to win" (The Guardian). Following his sense of intuition, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero warned us that: "I will not go to the White House before 2005". Imprudence is an unfortunate quality in foreign affairs. It is obvious that Zapatero believed Bush would lose. And he also imagined that the Democratic Party's candidate would be a different kettle of fish. Perhaps he should have paid more attention to Senator John Kerry's declarations when he called for greater solidarity in Iraq and for Spain to reconsider the unilateral withdrawal of its troops from the country. He should have considered the possibility that his intuition might fail him and that Bush would be reelected. But he didn't. Above all, he should have considered the fact that, as a politician, he is entirely free to put all his eggs in one basket, but that a nation such as Spain cannot afford to take this risk. This is precisely because Spain is already facing too many risks.

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The list of mistakes is long and well-known: these range from his public moves to desert the international coalition in Iraq to his promotion of a “vote no” policy at NATO, where Spain rejected the idea that the organization should involve itself in training Iraqi forces. More recently, we might highlight Spain’s objection to the unification of the missions in Afghanistan in order to promote an improved management of resources, or the arrogant declarations of his ministers, such as that of José Bono, who explained the removal of the American flag from the 12th October Parade by stating that “Spain does not kneel”, or those of Miguel Ángel Moratinos, who attributed himself the role –a role that was duly denied– as Washington’s special envoy for the Middle East. Neither should we forget to mention the much-applauded declarations of high-ranking soldiers regarding the high political cost of Spain’s bilateral relationship with America. And this is only the tip of iceberg.

Zapatero’s stance has created so many problems that it can only be explained by a total neglect of his responsibilities vis-à-vis the international situation or by the fact that he was entirely convinced that, for whatever harm he might do to Bush, he would be rewarded sooner or later by an electoral victory for Bush’s Democratic rival, John F. Kerry. That is to say, he must have believed that the harm inflicted on Spain’s bilateral relations with the United States during his first year in Government would be contained and rectified once Bush had left the White House. However, his calculations were wrong, and now Bush will continue in the White House for another four years.

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Zapatero’s Spain has sought to find consolation within the Franco-German Axis, where it considers its natural place to be. However, now that Bush is staying, the French and the Germans have made their desire to accommodate and even stage a rapprochement with Washington more obvious. And they will have an easier time of it than Spain, because although their leaders may not have always agreed with Washington in the past, they cannot be accused of discourtesy.

In the days leading up to intervention in Iraq, Zapatero advocated that the United States should be internationally sidelined. There was very little chance of this ever happening. It was more likely that things would turn out as they actually have: the country that finds itself sidelined –and not principally by the United States– is, in fact, Spain.

The Government of the Spanish Socialist Party has denied the UNO its role in stabilizing and rebuilding Iraq; it has attempted to break up the consensus within the European Union regarding the sanctions applied to Cuba, which it wishes to alleviate, if not remove entirely; it has authorized its party to declare that Taiwan should be reincorporated into the People's Republic of China, even though this would deprive the Taiwanese people of democracy and freedom. The fruits of Spain's having jumped on the Franco-German bandwagon are yet to be seen, whilst Zapatero's incipient relations with Blair's Government have already led to the abandonment of traditional stances, even positions traditionally held by the PSOE, regarding the contentious matter of Gibraltar, recognizing the Gibraltar inhabitants' right to a place at the negotiating table and conceding to the idea that the Rock's sovereignty should not be discussed. However, the most serious and longest-lasting consequences will be this Government's concessions regarding the European Constitutional Treaty, in which it has abandoned the institutional power secured by Spain in the Nice Treaty. We are sorry to repeat the fact that Spain, today, is a diminishing and increasingly insignificant player (See. FAES Papers Nº 2).

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Nothing is irreversible when it comes to international relations. We do not need to fall back on cliché to realize that permanent friends do not exist, just permanent interests. However, it happens to be the case that Spain's interests –and, in general, those of Europe– and those of the United States are essentially the same. We both have the same democratic system, featuring shared values and similar political and social movements. We both unfortunately find ourselves in a position in which we must face up to a totalitarian terrorist threat, one that hangs over the entire civilized world that we share. Rodríguez Zapatero should take active measures to reestablish Spain's position as a strong ally. And he could do it. He should, perhaps, stage a complete international policy U-turn. However, we are well aware that coherence is not exactly one of this Government's most sacred ideals. And, of course, the situation is not going to change simply by sending a congratulatory telegram.

Fortunately, there are various measures the Spanish Prime Minister could implement if he really wishes to prevent Spain's relations with America from deteriorating still further. For example: Spain should comply with the United Nations Resolution 1541 and make a real contribution to stabilizing Iraq. Whilst American and Coalition soldiers are actively working for a democratic Iraq, Spain does nothing to improve its image by simply standing on the sidelines. Likewise, Spain should join the initiative to halt Iranian plans to acquire nuclear capability, as an example of its sincere commitment to non-proliferation. Spain should back the initiative for the Greater Middle East, as proof of its desire to eradicate the real causes of Islamic terrorism, the despotic nature of Arab régimes, religious fanaticism and hatred of Western values. Spain should also promote a Europe that is compatible with America, a Europe firmly embedded within the Atlantic relationship, and not a Europe that aspires to

emerge as a counterweight to the United States. Having done that, the Government could also cease to make the unbecoming gestures it has made. In short, less rhetoric about the “alliance of civilizations” and more practical input into the Atlantic Alliance.

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A firm and unified stance against terrorism, the transformation of the Middle East and the Muslim world, the battle against weapons proliferation and expansion of the free-market economy and democracy, are the key issues that will dominate the political agenda over the next few years. And these are issues that are being tackled right now by the United States and its allies. Zapatero can choose to cooperate with them in this task - and he has the capacity to do so if he so wishes - or remain on the sidelines. The problem with the second alternative is not only that he himself will be sidelined, but that the entire Spanish nation will be sidelined. This is the position he has effectively led us towards over the last few months.



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