



FOREIGN POLICY

A VULNERABLE SPAIN

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NASA. STRAITS OF GIBRALTAR.

A country's vulnerability depends on the existence of a real threat and the implementation of national security and defence measures designed to dissuade or remove that threat. In this respect, one year on from the attacks of March 11, Spain is more vulnerable now than it was at that time, possibly more vulnerable than it has ever been. The threat persists and the national defence mechanisms designed to face this threat are not as strong.

A Persistent and Growing Threat

In spite of the image that the Socialist Government wishes to convey, Spain has not freed itself from the threat of Islamic terrorism by pulling out of Iraq. Although the attempted bombing of the AVE Madrid-Seville high-speed train link shortly after March 11 could be interpreted as being part of a single sequence of events, the same cannot be said of the plans to blow up the Audiencia Nacional (National Court) in Madrid, which were foiled by the police. Nor can we interpret the constant trickle of detentions in Spain of terrorists linked to Al Qaeda in this light. In Spain, as in the rest of Europe, the threat of Islamic terrorism has obviously increased.

The fact that Spain might continue to be a target for these terrorists is to be expected, although it may not fit with the theory which links the March 11 bombings with the PP government's foreign policy. In the same way as Bin Laden did in his day, the terrorists who committed suicide in Leganés not only demanded Spain's withdrawal from Iraq, but also from Afghanistan and from Muslim soil in general. Their condemnation of the presence of international troops in Afghanistan still stands, in

accordance with the instructions issued by the Al Qaeda network. As long as Spanish troops continue to participate in the political and economic reconstruction of Afghanistan, Spain will continue to be seen as an enemy to be defeated. This much is clear from reading numerous websites linked to Islamic terrorism.

The terrorists did not only get what they wanted from Spain; they also received the strong impression that they could interfere in Spanish political life whenever they liked. As far as Al Qaeda is concerned, Al Andalus is an essential point of reference in their speeches and objective plans. This is not just a question of rhetoric: Islamic terrorists believe that the decadence of Arab society began with the “Reconquest” of Spain and that it is necessary to recover this Spanish soil in order to reinstate the Caliphate. The fact that terrorist mobilization may be local does not mean that it cannot draw inspiration from this kind of motivation.

The Government’s Inadequate Response

In the same way as September 11 in the United States, March 11 marked a significant change of course in Spain, although in the opposite direction: instead of steadfastness, concessions; instead of action abroad, withdrawal; instead of national mobilization, party politics; instead of preparedness, negligence. After the attacks of March 11, Zapatero’s Spain withdrew its troops from Iraq. The Spanish government’s foreign policy witnessed a radical change, distancing us from established democracies such as the United States and the United Kingdom and bringing us into the same camp as Cuba, Syria and Venezuela. Defence expenditure was frozen and the process of transforming the armed forces remained a mere intention.

The policy pursued by the Socialist Government has disarmed us in three ways: conceptual disarmament, institutional disarmament and international disarmament.

- Conceptual disarmament is reflected in its principle of an “alliance of civilizations”. The Government’s peculiar perspective on the terrorist phenomenon is summed up by the approach which suggests that it is better to establish a dialogue than to be firm or face confrontation; and that violence has its roots in our own actions, being either the immediate consequence of our current foreign policy or the consequence of past policies that caused poverty, exploitation and resentment. There is no reference to the role played by political oppression, domestic corruption and theocracy in the Arab world. Furthermore, the Socialist Government believes that establishing a dialogue with the enemy is imperative, given that any other approaches are considered to be entirely counterproductive. Unfortunately, in Spain we have all the proof we need that when it comes to negotiating with terrorists, it is the terrorists’ own position that is strengthened, rather than that of the state. And nothing leads us to believe that Islamic terrorism will behave any differently –quite the contrary, in fact.

“Zapatero’s decision to immediately withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq was interpreted by the Islamic terrorists as a clear strategic victory, however much the Government may deny it”

This approach constitutes conceptual disarmament because it refuses to recognize that there is no form of dissuasion today vis-à-vis Islamic terrorism. To think that our armed forces and state security forces quartered within our own borders are going to serve as a means of dissuading these terrorists is to not only close our eyes to reality, but to commit an act of considerable imprudence.

- The Spanish Government's approach constitutes institutional disarmament, because Zapatero has not introduced changes to any of the three basic pillars of national security –the armed forces, the state security forces and the intelligence community– in order to improve their capacity to face the new terrorist threat. This apathy is completely out of tune with the measures our neighbours and allies are adopting.

Whilst the Strategic Defence Review (2003) conceived of a role for the armed forces in combating terrorism, the Zapatero doctrine on the (non-)use of force reduces the role of the armed forces to that of providing backup for the state security forces (the police and Civil Guard) in areas they cannot cover, such as the protection of basic infrastructures (and it is impossible to imagine that our armed forces will undertake counterterrorist missions abroad). As a general approach it is a grave error. If a suicide-bomber cannot be dissuaded, his plans must be foiled before he carries them out. Neither the Directive on National Defence nor the draft of the organic law on National Defence, which was recently approved by the Cabinet, provide for active defence missions.

Nor is the Government working on securing new forms of military capacity. The effects of a reduced defence budget are being exacerbated by a sluggish acquisitions policy, mortgaged as it is to the purchase of major platforms. In contrast to the policies of profound transformation promoted by NATO, the Spanish Ministry of Defence seems to be stuck in the past.

With regard to the state security forces, Zapatero is also departing from the policy being followed by our partners and allies. Unlike the US Administration, the Spanish Government has not raised the possibility of carrying out a far-reaching reform of internal security; unlike the UK, Spain has not sought to adapt its counterterrorist legislation in accordance with the grave nature of the threat that hangs over us. The Government has satisfied itself with the incorporation of a few dozen additional translators and 300 more agents devoted to combating Islamic terrorism.

This far-reaching reform should include the intelligence services. The only step that has been taken to improve the flow of information is the creation of a counterterrorist centre, but it has very few staff and lacks any kind of operational authority. The specific nature and scope of the Islamic fundamentalist threat will require a clear refocusing of resources and priorities, as well as improved means of exchanging information, not to mention enhanced coordination among the various intelligence services.

The inappropriate domestic security policy pursued by the Socialist Government is even more obvious when we take into account another factor, namely that of immigration. Spain's immigration policy has become increasingly porous and permissive under this government. Our current immigration policy needs to be reformed in its approach, not only because of the terrorist threat, to ensure a better control over who enters our country and who remains here. Precisely for this reason, it is essential to improve surveillance and control over our borders, as has occurred in neighbouring countries. This will involve concluding the deployment of the SIVE border surveillance system, introducing new and more effective electronic systems at airports and strengthening our control over land borders. Zapatero has little to offer in this field.

- We might also consider the matter of international disarmament. When a country cannot guarantee its own security, it must compensate for this failing through multilateral or bilateral alliances and commitments.

“The Government of Rodríguez Zapatero, far from increasing its network of international security, has left Spain in a more vulnerable position than ever. In fact, it has managed to destroy what was Spain’s most reliable relationship against Islamic terrorism, its alliance with the United States”

The Government has chosen to sign up to a different project, that of the European Union, whose security and defence policy is still at an early stage of development.

Nor has the Government sought to pursue a closer relationship with NATO. In fact, it has opposed the proposals with regard to the main issues on the NATO agenda, ranging from Iraq to Afghanistan.

Zapatero’s Spain is not only a diminished nation, a country of reduced weight and influence within our strategic arena, but a Spain that has chosen to form an alliance with countries that are really exporters of insecurity.

Spain: A Most Vulnerable Nation

A country’s vulnerability largely depends on the suitability or unsuitability of the policies that are adopted in the face of particular threats. The measures taken by the Socialist Government since it won power a year ago have not only failed to reduce the threat of Islamic terrorism, but have increased Spain’s vulnerability by applying a series of erroneous policies, ranging from the rapid withdrawal of troops from Iraq to the Government’s espousal of the “alliance of civilizations”.

What is more, not only is Zapatero’s Spain vulnerable, but the Socialist Prime Minister’s policy of distancing the country from its natural strategic environment, combined with his policy of continually weakening the position of the state vis-à-vis regional separatist movements means that Spain is now the most vulnerable country in the entire Western community of nations. There may well be countries that have done what they had to in order to enhance their security, but the Spanish Government has not. There may be countries that have strengthened their alliances in order to combat terrorism, but the Spanish Government certainly has not. There are countries which are prepared to stand firm against our enemies, but the Spanish Government certainly is not.