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*Spain's return to "Old Europe":
Background and Consequences
of the March 11 and 14, 2004
Terrorist Attacks and Elections*

– Joaquín Roy



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Introduction

It is hard to fully understand the ultimate goal and some of the key arguments made by former Prime Minister of Spain José María Aznar during a limited series of public appearances performed since he left office just before the elections of March 14, 2004, in which he voluntarily did not run. Observers and scholars still wonder as to the real motivations behind a pattern that seems to be solely geared towards delivering a criticism of mostly foreign policy dimensions of the current government of Spain that unseated his Popular Party. Through a European-wide prism, and more specifically through a U.S. perspective, this behavior is a novelty, if not a blatant example of protocol-breaking. It is indeed unusual that a former high official uses foreign travels (especially in the land of a traditional ally) to send barbs towards his own democratically elected government, as if it were an exile experience. In concrete U.S. terms, it is a custom that a president who either decides not to run, is barred from reelection by constitutional mandate, or is defeated at the booth, leaves the scene quietly, offers a loyalty oath to the new leader and lets the representatives of his party in Congress deal with the imperfections of the foreign or domestic policy of the new administration.

This civilized rule, elevated to the status of law in the United States, seems not to apply to the latest holder of the highest elected office in Spain. Moreover, what seems even odder about the behavior of José María Aznar is that he has been executing a systematic critique of the new foreign policy of his successor under the shadow of the White House, if not by the blessing and encouragement of President Bush, just before his reelection and most acutely after he was confirmed by a relative majority of the American people.

Reasonable commentators, Spaniards and more specifically Americans, cannot imagine how, for example, President George Bush Sr., just months after suffering defeat

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at the polls facing Bill Clinton (“it’s the economy, stupid!”), would accept an offer of, let’s say, La Sorbonne, and deliver a series of lectures in Paris in each case using a point to ridicule Clinton’s foreign policy. Lyndon Johnson, declining to run for reelection, would have never entertained the thought of going to Canada, accepting an offer of MacGill to lecture on the errors of Nixon’s overtures to China. Not even the wildest imaginations in the United States could envision Jimmy Carter giving speeches at Cambridge lambasting Reagan’s policies in the Caribbean. Why then Aznar has engaged in such disloyal behavior, under the auspices of Georgetown University, one of the respected universities in the United States, probably one of the jewels of Catholic educational entities on the planet, and recognized as a part of the elite of higher learning centers founded by the Jesuits?¹

The answer is complex, but it probably includes a miscalculation on the part of the Georgetown University’s administration that invited him when he was to leave office. University officials could not predict then the defeat of his party at the polls and the subsequent embarrassment for his resentment in facing the change of policies implemented by the PSOE. Explanations possibly also include the fact that a natural constituency of Georgetown University alumni is conservative. However, this thesis clashes with the fact that the bulk of the student body and faculty actually opposed the war on Iraq.

Presented as a series of lectures inserted in seminars offered at the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, at least one event in Miami sponsored by GU’s local Latin American alumni chapter (mostly of Cuban extraction), and in a handful of other appearances and op-ed pieces (The Wall Street Journal, a favorite), Aznar has offered an anthology of his own historical interpretations of world politics and his views of some of the new twists in foreign policy performed by PSOE Secretary General José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, elected as Presidente del Gobierno as a result of the election of March 14.

While the text of the speeches themselves don’t seem to be controversial per se and they are limited to generalizations regarding world views and the best way to face the current threats of terrorism, failed states, and economic ills, it often happens that impromptu questions fielded at the end of his lectures and dinners evolve into an expansion of certain ideas alluded in the main part of his expositions. Clichés, historical oddities, topic avoidance, and dubious humor take center stage.

For example, when asked by a student at his first appearance at Georgetown as to why he made the decision to side with Bush on the war in Iraq, in opposition to an outstanding majority of the Spanish people, he answered that “the same number of people are opposed to terrorism”. As an explanation for the Madrid terrorist attacks, Aznar discarded Spain’s alliance with the United States in Iraq as the main cause, and pointed out that Ben Laden has had in mind the long Reconquista since 911 and nostalgia for the recovery of El Andalus. When asked for some specific move of the Spanish government, he would answer that he did not understand what the policy was and questions should be fielded to Madrid. In his second appearance and columns he accused the Spanish government of generating anti-Spanish feeling in Spain. However, when faced with an unrelated question regarding the existence of a Spanish space agency, he answered that

¹ For a selection of media impact, see Appendix (Spain Compilation).

there was no such an entity, but that there should be one “to be able to send the Spanish government to Mars”.²

Observers of the Spanish political scene still ask themselves why Aznar has been missing so many opportunities at home, before the elections, and specially after the defeat of the PP, to explain, within the natural political setting of the Spanish Congress, the rationale for his historic decision for siding, along with UK prime minister Tony Blair and some other European leaders, with the policy of George W. Bush in Iraq. Expecting to receive a collateral answer when he testified for a whole day to the special committee to investigate the terrorist attacks of March 11 (the Spanish September 11), instead, he stuck to his script claiming that he acted under the intelligence conviction that the culprits of the attacks on commuter trains were members of the Basque terrorist organization ETA, and not Islamic fundamentalists. This adamant claim, ultimately discovered as manipulation of evidence, led to his undoing and the defeat of his party. Thousands of additional voters (the PP received a similar number of votes than in the last election of 2000) that in principle were going to abstain, rushed to the polling places and delivered a victory for the PSOE. In a way, it was the punishment for ignoring the bulk of Spanish opinion who opposed the war and the alliance with the United States.

However, central questions remained unanswered. Enigmas persisted on the precise strategic, political and social motivations for taking such a leap step and sidelining the traditional alliances of post-Franco Spain in Europe and returning to a sort of betting on one isolated card as Franco did in the 50s. The difference this time was that Spain was in no need to desperately seek a place in the sun, out of the pariah status it was in the wake of World War II. The agreement to establish military bases in Spain meant that Spain became a de facto member of NATO with all the disadvantages and none of the advantages, but the pact meant the guarantee of the survival of the Franco dictatorship, some feat for which the democratic left never forgave Washington. In contrast, for two decades Spain enjoyed full membership in the EU, was an example of international cooperation, its troops had contributed to dozens of peace keeping operations and its political transition was a model studied in practical text books in myriad universities and think-tanks around the world. Why Aznar manipulated history and wrongly claimed that Spain was still under the shadows of other European empires?

In an expansion of his early critiques on his successor’s foreign policy, Aznar used the proximity of the scheduled referendum for the ratification of the EU Constitution to remind audiences that he still prefers the Nice Treaty, under the claim that it was more beneficial to the interest of Spain and that it reinforced its power for blocking measures. In essence, in contrast with the absolute majority of Spanish political parties (with the exception of the former communists and independence-seeking), he ventured to a sort of campaigning for abstention, to the dismay of his own Partido Popular that simultaneously joined the PSOE call for a “yes”. The trace of this reluctance towards a European consensus in which he always felt uncomfortable in Aznar expressions have prompted observers to wonder once more about the initial motivations for his U-Turn

² General and specific critiques of different aspects of the new government’s foreign policy were issued in long interviews granted to programs “A Mano Limpia” (Channel 41) and “Maria Elvira Confronta” (Channel 22) in Miami in February 2005. Tappings of the first lectures delivered at Georgetown were available through CSPAN. Transcripts of some of the lectures were available in the webs of Georgetown and the FAES foundation. See also Appendix (Miami 2005).

leaving “Old Europe” and embracing post-September 11 Washington. Was his frustration with the French-German axis the spark that fired his enthusiasm for Bush and Blair? Was the prospect of the termination of EU assistance funds a need to seek Washington’s cover?

This monograph does not succeed in discovering the true explanations. It only explores certain avenues.

I

Setting the Stage

Spaniards and world-wide observers barely had recovered from the brutal terrorist attacks on March 11, 2004, in Madrid, when three days later, on Sunday, March 14, the Spanish electorate inflicted a stunning upset to the governing Popular Party (PP), which was ahead in the polls, catapulting Rodríguez Zapatero, as new Prime Minister of Spain, succeeding José María Aznar, and relegating polls-predicted new Prime Minister to be Mariano Rajoy to the opposition benches. The one-two punch rocked out not only the political scene of Spain but it also sent waves of nervous movements and concern from Washington and Brussels to Baghdad. The fact that the authorship of the coordinated bombing attack of commuter trains that claimed 202 lives and more than a thousand injured was attributed to Islamic fundamentalism made the Spanish tragedy similar in purpose and consequences to September 11. In fact, the coincidental dates baptized the Madrid terrorist attack as M-11.

However, the twin events had diverse and different commentaries and assessment in Europe and in the United States. While one sector of public opinion and political leadership (mostly in the United States) rushed to label the Spanish electoral decision as appeasement to terrorists, other commentators (a majority in Europe) distinguished other causes for the defeat of the PP.³ They especially targeted the handling of the crisis as the cause for the defeat, insisting on attributing the attack to the Basque terrorist organization, ETA. Accepting Islamic radicalism as the source of the bombings meant that Spain was finally the target of a reprisal for Aznar’s siding with President Bush in the war in Iraq, a move that was opposed by 90% of the Spanish citizens.⁴

While the linkage between the terrorist attack and the results of the election was undeniable, and the manipulation or bad management of the intelligence that the government had damaged the credibility of the PP leadership, other causes for the electoral disaster deserve also to be part of the overall explanation that needs to be considered. These factors are still present in the political and social fabric of Spain and Europe as a whole and will certainly have an effect on the future evolution of the European Union and its necessary alliance with the United States in the global fight against international terrorism.

³ For a review of the impact in the U.S. press, see appendixes labeled “Elections”.

⁴ For a sample of data, see references in appendix (Opinion).

The year of living dangerously

On Christmas eve of 2003, King Juan Carlos I of Spain delivered his traditional end of year televised message. Many personal experiences during the year were positive, including the engagement of his son, Prince Felipe de Borbón, to television anchorwoman Letizia Ortiz. However, political developments presented formidable challenges to Spain on three fronts. The war in Iraq had caused spectacular demonstrations and political divisions; the Spanish government manifested its disagreement with some proposals for the future of the European Union (EU); and the state's cohesion was threatened by the pressures of regional nationalism (not only of the radical Basque variance, but also coming from the moderate Catalan factions). No wonder that the King's speech, written by the Prime Minister's office, went quickly over the difficulties while stressing satisfaction for economic growth and political stability.⁵ The issues to be addressed in 2004, however, had the remnants of crisis characteristic of much of 2003.

Despite of 90% of public opinion disapproval, the Spanish government decided to support the United States in the Iraqi war. There was a rift between EU Member States (with Spain opposed to France and Germany) not only regarding Bush's foreign policy, but also over crucial matters of the draft of the EU Constitution. The result was a collapse of the negotiations in December, and one of its worst historical crises in the history of this regional organization.

Domestically, the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the Spanish Constitution of 1978 highlighted its shortcomings on regional home rule and the inefficiency of the Senate. Basques (led by the centrist Basque Nationalist Party) had been threatening with an independence-seeking referendum. Incidentally, this project that was confirmed when the Basque parliament approved the final text in late 2004, and was then presented to the Spanish Congress and rejected by 90% of the political sectors. In turn, the new Catalan government forming a leftist coalition around the Socialist party, as a result of the elections in November 2003, has since been pressing for a reform of the autonomy statute, mostly regarding its economic conditions, but spreading to encompass a wider sovereignty in fields such as public order and international profile.

Connecting these two regional challenges, the conservative Spanish government branded any substantial change in the degree of autonomy as unconstitutional. In the case of the Basque project, the Partido Popular, through its absolute (but isolated) majority in Congress, managed to pass a law criminalizing the potential Basque referendum motion which is not contemplated by the Constitution, prompting the opposition to expose banners protesting the move and volunteering to go to jail along with the Basques. Meanwhile, more than 300 criminal law professors labeled the law contrary to jurisprudence tradition. In any event, these moves were mooted by the presentation of the project to the Spanish Congress.

In sum, Spain's role in Europe was hardly influential through the year and ended based on the exercise of veto power. Its alliance with the United States was under constant internal questioning. Finally, the country was again faced with redefining its internal national identity.

⁵ This fact was not left unnoticed by the press: see editorial of El País, "Omissiones llamativas", 26 diciembre 2003.

While these three dimensions may seem to be independent of each other, a common denominator and a protagonist of all (as a reactive, more than an active factor) was the government of José María Aznar. He had suddenly decided to change course in the standing foreign policy bipartisan consensus crafted during the previous Social Democratic administrations, well grounded in its fundamentals in the centrist governments of the political transition period presided by prime ministers Suárez and Calvo Sotelo. Aznar drastically changed the anchoring of Spain in Europe and over-stretched the mutually respectful relations with the United States. In the domestic arena, he had resurrected the centralist, conservative, and apparently long-time gone attitude that was the trademark of the Franco regime regarding the shape of Spain's territorial structure. The combination of these latent factors contributed greatly to the PP's failure once they were ignited by the dramatic terrorist events of March 11 and the erratic handling of the existing evidence by the government.

A backdrop of Spain in the world

Since overcoming the initial obstacles of its political transition from the Franco dictatorship to democracy in the late 1970s, Spain had been steadily and dramatically improving its status in European and world affairs. Although world-wide popular opinion has barely surpassed the traditional stereotype, Spain's image and perception in the field of academic analysis (most especially in the United States, but also widely evident in Europe and Latin America) has been substantially enriched over the last two decades. In consequence, its sudden placement in a spotlight role in the Iraq crisis merited closer attention by political columnists, specialized commentary, and scholarly analysis.

The novelty of the new situation deserved an urgent and, at the same time, steady and methodical search for the reasons behind the decision to endorse the U.S. policy in Iraq and the consequences of the actions taken and yet to be implemented. After all, the existing literature about Spain's role in the world still marvels and simultaneously cautiously ponders the fast ascent of the country from a position of isolation to one of model and relative influence and power.

The 2003 commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the 1978 Spanish Constitution gave numerous observers and political forces a considerable excuse to critically evaluate the accomplishments of Spanish democracy, noticing its shortcomings as well as its successes. Overall, there was (and still is) an impressive consensus present in the academic scholarship, as well as in the political circles, that Spain's position in the world scene has dramatically improved in the last quarter of a century due to its objective and balanced behavior and its role as an independent mediator, and contributor of development assistance.

In this context, the sudden decision to side with the United States in such a controversial environment surprised and angered numerous observers at home and abroad and widely opened the floodgates of political commentaries, mostly because the decision was, according to the standards of modern journalism, news – for some, bad news. Surprisingly for some government officials and Aznar's backers, who were expecting to harvest the media benefits for Spain, U.S. public opinion paid scant attention, and had not

yet done so until the March 14 attacks, to the unconditional political endorsement given by the Spanish government to the U.S. policies.

In the crucial weeks preceding the war, the persistent presence of the name of the Spanish Prime Minister in the press and the reference to the status of Spain as a member of the UN Security Council contrasted with the lack of depth in commentaries, a vacuum remaining unfulfilled with the limited number of press interviews and cursory reports. This trend was in a way repeated after the tragic media limelight suffered by Spain after the terrorist blow of March 11, and the attention given to the stunning results of the March 14 election.⁶ Only time will say if Spain will remain as a permanent point of reference for U.S. attention.

The blunt absence of commentaries in depth in March 2003 may be partially explained by the traditionally self-centered attitude of the United States toward world affairs. On the other hand, it was also a sign of the relative limitations of a minor international actor, simply overcompensated for by the calculations of the Spanish leadership. This may be again the case after the March 11 attacks.

The symptom of the lack of a steady presence of Spain in the U.S. media is not surprising, considering that Spain does not have a very sharp and defined image in the United States, beyond the folkloric stereotype, and the positive reflection on different aspects of art and music. Yet, the absence of urgent commentaries represented in March 2003 the other face of the constant mention of Spain in the crucial duo of support for George Bush. José María Aznar was competing with UK's Tony Blair and France's President Jacques Chirac, while he outranked Italy's Berlusconi and Germany's Schroeder, both sort of missing in action from the limelight of public opinion during the first weeks of the war.

Still, from a strictly media angle, the protagonist role played by the Spanish leader during the weeks preceding the war contrasted with the one espoused by some of the most influential and powerful heads of European countries. This is, from the standard unwritten journalism code, that when "a man bites a dog," it is news. Instead of electing a middle-of-the-road attitude (something that key leaders of the PP recommended at the time and now regret it was not followed by Aznar), which would have Spain claiming to opt for its insertion in the setting of multilateral arrangements and alluding to lack of economic and military resources to back Spain's political endorsement, the unconditional attitude was starkly real news. Yet, public attention in the United States was (and still is, with the new exception of the March 11-14 events) absent.

In clear contrast, the role of the Spanish government (and the implications for its future) erupted with spectacular force in Spain's domestic arena. It became an explosive topic of political confrontation and acerbic media analysis with an unprecedented depth and acrimony, only comparable to some timely milestones of political crisis and developments in the last quarter century of Spanish democracy (among them the attempted coup of 1981).

Moreover, the controversy caused by the decision on Iraq propelled to the surface of public forums the issue of latent anti-U.S. sentiment, perceived as a monopoly of the European left (and isolated cases of the extreme right in France). This trend was in the past reinforced by the U.S. backing of the Franco regime, guaranteeing with the agreement for the military bases the survival of the dictatorship as part of the strategic

⁶ See Appendix (Elections: US Newspapers).

security of the Cold War. Ironically, left and right observers may agree that, taken in historical terms, the Franco-Eisenhower pacts might have been justified for reasons of state –Spain was in desperate need of a minimum of international anchoring. In contrast, the decisive and drastic agreement of the Spanish government with the U.S. policy in the Iraq crisis did not respond to an urgent need of the country, because Spain was well established in the international scene, enjoying considerable prestige in Europe and in the world in general. As a result of this anomaly, think tanks and scholars have already engaged in an in-depth analysis of a phenomenon perceived as responding to time-passing eventualities, or as non-transitory, revealing a deeper, and more permanent crisis.

Ironically, in contemporary Spain some particular conservative sectors have been critical of the United States since the defeat in the Spanish-American war. The Aznar's endorsement of the policies of the United States had apparently confirmed the end of this historical ambivalence. As a consequence, a wide gap between a minority of public opinion and more than 90 percent of the electorate opposing the war became evident, shattering a prevalent compromise in foreign policy.

In the special context of Spain's place in the international community, the existing consensus emanating from decision-making circles and analytic sources is that the notable solid insertion of Spain (and especially through important personal appointments) in key international and supranational bodies (EU, NATO, UN, etc.) was made possible through a solid coalition forged between the PSOE and PP, when the Socialists were in power between 1982 and 1996.⁷ This alliance in forging a real national foreign policy was deeply appreciated in Europe and the Americas, as it rendered considerable pragmatic benefits to the United States and Spain's partners in the EU. Meanwhile, in Latin America Spanish mediation was requested for the pacification schemes in Central America and the development aid programs of the EU. Spain was, as it appeared to be a permanent trend, not "different" (as Franco's slogan used to pitch in the 1960s) anymore. In view of the split in the context of the European Union (where apparently Spain was forced to side with the "new" Europe) and overall Latin American opposition or ambivalence to the U.S. strategy, the existing stabilizing and mediating role of Spain has been brought into question.

A constant hot news issue

Until the Madrid bombings, Spain had suffered selective personal damage as a consequence of its involvement in Iraq. On August 19th, 2003, a brutal suicide truck bombing demolished part of the UN headquarters in Baghdad, killing Brazilian Sergio Viera de Mello, head of the UN mission, and twenty two other officers and workers, while causing serious injuries to many. Unnoticed among the injured was Spanish Navy Captain Manuel Martín Oar. While suffering apparently only superficial body damage, he died of brain trauma hours later while waiting for treatment on a stretcher placed on the street outside the gutted building. Attached to the UN mission as an assistant to the Spanish embassy, Captain Martín was Spain's first military casualty not only of the

⁷ For a sample of the existing literature from the U.S. point of view, see the classic book by Kenneth Maxwell and Steven Spiegel, The New Spain: From Isolation to Influence. NY: Council of Foreign Relations, 1994.

overall conflict but also in the highly controversial relationship between the Spanish government and the United States in the Iraq crisis. His was the first of other coffins tragically filled with Spanish casualties to arrive in Madrid, a sensitive issue that became the center of acrimonious blame-attributed accusations between the government and the opposition.

A few days earlier, in the garden of the royal residence in Palma de Mallorca, the Balearic islands capital, just seconds after he was warmly received by King Juan Carlos I in the annual protocol summer visit, Aznar ended a customary press conference that is usually reduced to small talk, with a dramatic remark. In a controversial cautionary manner, he stated he felt “sorry” for those “who are going to be glad when Spanish soldiers come back from Iraq in coffins.” This statement was perceived as a shocking and veiled “pre-emptive strike” (according to the label used by journalists) against the opposition.

The incident was badly taken by the King, whose relations with Aznar had been characterized by well-informed press as cold and distant. Jealous of getting upstaged by the popular monarch, the Prime Minister was notorious for pointing out that the role of the King was constitutionally limited and from the political point of view had to adhere to specific functions. The most famous occasion for taking the opportunity for remarking on the political dependency of the King was when Aznar answered a press conference question regarding a possible trip of Juan Carlos I to Cuba with a terse: “he will go when he is due” (“cuando toque”). The Palma de Mallorca threat was the icing on the cake for a royal family that has felt much better treated by the Socialist administrations of Felipe González than in the eight years of conservative administration.

In any event, the unfortunate comment was strategically placed in the background of the aggressive tactics executed by the opposition against the Spanish government’s policy in backing the U.S. effort in Iraq by sending Spanish troops to substitute for occupation-weary GIs. Aznar’s comments, while in tune with previous confrontations, caught his political opponents off-guard while most of Spain was experiencing the worst and longest heat wave of the century. The media commentary and the response issued by the opposition were the aperitif of what seasoned observers predicted were going to be harsh political battles in the fall. The new political season was going to be a mix of electoral confrontations and historical commemorations (the September 26th 50th anniversary of the U.S.-Spanish agreement for the establishment of military bases in Spain, the December 6th anniversary of the Spanish Constitution of 1978), all leading to the finale of the national parliamentary elections of March 2004 for the renewal of the Spanish Congress.

In August 2003 over a thousand Salvadoran, Honduran, Dominican and Nicaraguan troops arrived at Spanish military airports and briefly received routine training for a few days at a lightly used military installation in northeastern Catalonia. Their final destination was Iraq, where they were inserted into a multinational division led by Polish officers, under the overall oversight of a Spanish general. Scheduled to substitute U.S. troops in occupation duties in central Iraq, the Spanish and Latin American troops were organized into a brigade of about 2,500 men and women, named Plus Ultra (one of the mottos of the Spanish coat of arms). After the March 14 elections, Prime Minister-elect, Rodríguez Zapatero, recalled that his electoral campaign included the return of the Spanish troops, unless there was a UN mandate. Immediately,

Salvadoran authorities issued a statement in the sense that their troops would have to follow this lead, not for political reasons, but because of the heavy military and equipment dependency on the Spanish command.⁸

As this study will show later, this unique Latin American dimension of Spain's role in Iraq is not isolated but also linked with a novel profile of the overall Ibero-American and Hispanic legacy in relations with the United States. Moreover, the presence of Spanish troops in Iraq became the subject of the first declarations of the newly elected Prime Minister when he reminded the United States of his campaign promise to withdraw them by June 30, 2004, unless there was to be a UN mandate. The Spanish troops and the apparent Moroccan origin of the perpetrators of the Madrid criminal attacks have something more in common. Eventually, Zapatero, accurately predicting a rejection of a UN mandate, complied with his electoral promise and ordered the return of the Spanish troops, sending tremors to the U.S. political and media establishment and angering the Spanish opposition.

The Moroccan dimension

As part of the tiny but rigorously trained elite of the Spanish military, some of the troops belong to the Spanish Legion contingent based in the southern Andalusian province of Almería. Feared in times gone as the harshest of the Spanish armed forces, veterans of colonial wars in North Africa and as elite units for Franco's rebellion during the Spanish Civil War, the Legion nowadays is the first one to be called to serve in humanitarian missions, such as in the former Yugoslavia. Its latest action, however, was in July 2002 when it was commissioned to dislodge half a dozen Moroccan policemen who were sent to "occupy" a deserted inlet named Perejil (parsley, in English), located just a couple hundred yards from the Moroccan coast, legally under Spanish sovereignty, but claimed by Morocco along with other cities and outposts as historical relics of colonial eras.⁹

After Spain's premier decided to confront this challenge with swift military action he then had to obtain assurances that a repeat attempt was not in the horizon before leaving the inlet as it was before the incident. Aznar then turned his head toward Brussels for the necessary backing. He received it, but the ambivalence expressed by the French government towards scolding Morocco, convinced Aznar that he needed a more convincing warranty: the United States. A series of calls settled the issue at least temporarily and confirmed Aznar's lack of confidence in France's Chirac. Less than a year later, Aznar would reaffirm his loyalty to Bush in exchange for his help in this matter when the United States decided to go to war in Iraq.

In an ever confrontational climate with Morocco, just days before the election, Spain's Minister of Defense, Federico Trillo, winding down a campaign stop, after an apparently ebullient dinner with PP supporters was caught on TV tape as regretting not being in his post years ago (he was President of the Parliament) to have the opportunity of "invading" Perejil "permanently". He was also filmed as mocking past leaders of the PSOE. The opposition made this commentary part of the campaign claiming a reckless and dangerous behavior in times of uncertainty, while PP prudent leaders censored Trillo's wrong step. It was probably his last public appearance.

⁸ See Appendix (Central America).

⁹ See Appendix (Perejil)

The assassination of Captain Martín was the prelude to the ambush and brutal killing of seven Spanish Secret Service agents south of the Iraqi capital, apparently as part of a series of targeted attempts against selective representatives of European forces serving in the ad-hoc coalition in the occupation of the country. Italian and Polish soldiers were also the victims of activity of the Iraqi insurgency (a term widely used by the U.S. press and government) before and after the capture of Saddam Hussein.

The funeral of the Spanish agents served as a trigger for a series of accusations and demands made by the Spanish opposition, pressuring the government for a definition of the status of the military forces, and setting the stage for future confrontations. The year ended with the surprise trip made by Aznar to visit the soldiers serving in Iraq, mirroring the spectacular appearance by President Bush to be with the American troops for a few hours on Thanksgiving Day.

A polemic choice

In summary, the mission to be performed by the Plus Ultra brigade was the culmination of a controversial decision made by the Aznar government, to back President Bush's strategy in Iraq. Aznar, disregarding an overwhelming majority of the Spanish public opinion, took a political initiative alongside British Prime Minister Tony Blair in leading the effort at the United Nations Security Council (where Spain was a non-permanent member) to justify the U.S. military action against Iraq.

Political opposition and massive demonstrations in Spain were the most impressive in Europe in the weeks preceding the U.S.-led attacks and subsequent occupation. Street actions were so spectacular that they even caught the attention of former President George H. Bush who was lecturing in Buenos Aires –“the foreign policy of the United States cannot be subject to a demonstration in... Barcelona”. The comment was initially perceived by Barcelona observers as giving the Catalan capital a good publicity, but keener analysts detected a sort of put down degrading reasoning of the former president. Barcelona was apparently not that important as Paris, Berlin or London. This patronizing attitude came to the surface of U.S. opinion when Spanish voters ousted Aznar in the wake of the attacks. Exaggerated applause and outcry for the decision revealed a superiority attitude from U.S. columnists. It also uncovered apprehension of a spill-over effect of the Spanish decision to other “more important” countries, and especially Europe as a whole.

The result of the polemic decision taken by Aznar in March of 2003 in the EU context was that the European political map was badly fractured. On one side, France, Germany and some other EU-old timers, confirmed their opposition to the war plans. On the other side, Spain, the United Kingdom, Italy, and a number of the newcomers to the EU supported the pro-U.S. position.

This division was, for all practical purposes, the partial result of the stunning positioning of Spain in the so-called “new Europe” band, as graphically crafted by the world famous expression coined by U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. This European faction was opposing an “old” Europe led by France and Germany. For a nation-state with a history of over one thousand years, once dominating the European scene, it was ironic that Spain was now allied with the most recent members to the European Union, in a coalition far from the traditional European power centers, while

closer to London and Washington. It was not coincidental that Spain became an ally of Poland (under which command the Spanish troops were placed in Iraq) in the stubborn opposition of France and Germany when considering the final text of the EU Constitution. It was also intriguing to witness that after the Spanish election; Polish authorities started backtracking in their endorsement of the U.S. strategy in Iraq and announced a new, moiré flexible attitude when considering again the voting conditions of the EU Constitution. Many Spaniards took the issue with a grain of humor after the election, stating that they awoke on Sunday, March 14, in “Old” Europe, and went to bed in “New” Europe.

In the Spanish domestic political arena, the decision to back the U.S. war plans caused serious damage to the established foreign policy consensus crafted between the previous Socialist government and Aznar’s Partido Popular. Public, political and intellectual attitudes towards the United States suffered noticeably impact, prompting observers to pay close attention to new trends and similarities with previous patterns.¹⁰

II Methods and Aims

Motivations of a polemical decision

In expectation of what some time in the near future will probably be a substantial body of analysis generated by academic and think tank specialists in the rest of Europe and the United States, this monograph, as originally designed, intended simply to contribute in a limited pioneer fashion to what was predicted would be a distinctive chapter of scholarship in the field of Spain’s politics and foreign relations. The events of March 11-14 considerably changed, in a more dramatic way, the scope and results. But certain original purposes still remain basically valid, if not more relevant.

In a U.S. context, in the days preceding the Iraq war, the limited samples of American media commentary on the attitude of Spanish Prime Minister Aznar allowed us to have a glimpse of the different dimensions of a possible profile that a more specialized inquiry could offer in the future, if for only historical purposes. Some themes are outlined in several scant press reports published during the Azores Summit (attended by the U.S. President and the British, Spanish and Portuguese Prime Ministers) which took place was on the eve of the war.

First, and most importantly, a central thought dominated the state of mind of observers: Why was Aznar taking such a political risk when facing internal protests against the war? Second, was he impelled by his conviction that this was “the right thing to do” based on values and not on electoral calculations? Compared to the “special relationship” of the United Kingdom with the United States, as a central justification for Blair’s decision, observers were wondering, what was the “special reason” for Spain’s support? More in depth, did Aznar’s decision to back President Bush respond heavily to wanting his nation “in ascendance” to play in the “major leagues”, as he declared to the U.S. media?

On a more practical level, researchers and casual observers may still ask if a U.S. promise of help in terminating the threat of Basque terrorism was what propelled him to

¹⁰ For a selection of media impact, see Appendix (USA).

action. If so, ironically (or tragically, it depends) when he insisted on ETA's authorship of the March 11 attack he simultaneously admitted the impotence of the U.S. backing in fighting the domestic threat. More dramatically, how influential was his wish not to be forced to live "kneeling" under the menace of terrorism? More personally, how lasting had been his traumatic experience of escaping a terrorist life threatening attempt for making this decision? In sum, the key question in this terrain was (and still is, even in a more distinctive way after his defeat): what impact did Spain's experience with terrorism have on Aznar's decisions? The answer remains to be determined. Moreover, ETA's terrorism was not only always behind all his considerations but significantly caused in great part such an obsession that it contributed to his party's downfall when Aznar insisted on the Basque origin of the bombing.

However, as in the case of the motivations of Spanish voters in the election, where other factors, in addition to the discovery of the Islamic authorship and its cover up, contributed to prompt voters to come out and punish him at the polls, observers of a more skeptical nature have dared to explore other explanations behind Aznar's pragmatic motivations in siding with Bush. Some of these interpretations are now irrelevant, but others are still at least part of a historical lesson.

For example, commentators had been wondering if he was offered a guarantee for the continuation of Spain's sovereignty in the North Africa situated Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla in a reshaped geopolitical scenario, covering a wide region from Afghanistan to the Atlantic. Across the narrow sea dividing Europe and Africa, was it the future of Gibraltar, with a possible but doubtful co-sovereignty deal with the UK, being discussed as a pay-off? Across the Atlantic, was there a guarantee made by Bush of a "hands off" Spanish investment policy in Cuba? On a more ambitious setting, did Bush venture help with other economic interests in Latin America, mainly the spectacular Spanish investments in the last decade?

Returning to Spain, how about rumors of an increase of U.S. investments in Spain, to offset the decrease of French and German economic activity, and as a means to ameliorate the negative balance of payments? Finally, all these diverse speculations and invitations for searching possible explanations for what was basically a Spanish backing for the U.S. strategy in a concrete scenario of the Middle East, Iraq, a more mundane, economic, pragmatic clarification has been in demand: What could be the role for Spain in the new oil industry in Iraq, mirroring Spanish energy investments in Argentina, replacing the leading status of France? If oil was not the reason, then what about the consolation prize of reconstruction contracts in a dictatorship and war-ravaged zone, once the conflict had subsided?

This kind of speculation still makes sense when reviewing the declarations made by President Bush's brother, Florida Governor Jeb Bush, on the eve of a trip to Spain, when he impressed reporters with the promise and expectation of "incredible" profits ("beyond their imagination", in a verbatim expression) and advantages for Spanish companies in what appeared to be a bonanza of contracts for reconstruction and world-wide investment under the U.S. leadership. In fact, they never came into a reality.¹¹

In any event, before the March 2004 events, it was premature to make any predictions for a noticeable change of the perception of Spain in popular and elite opinion in the United States. Before the conflict in Iraq, a factor to consider was how the war

¹¹ See Appendix (Business).

events would develop and how the occupation and reconstruction would proceed in the following months. Nonetheless, no matter how “clean” the occupation was expected to be and how complicated the implications could develop for the world economy, it was not expected that the popular image of Spain would suffer notable changes. This prediction appeared to be correct once the actual war was over in just three weeks. The novelty then was what was going to be the perception of the Spanish military units, after the official war ended, sniping and selective attacks against U.S. forces began, and the first Spanish soldiers arrived in Iraq. Following past patterns, Spain’s role was destined to be as unnoticeable as its military impact was, in view of the limited dimensions of the Spanish contingent.

Impact on national political identity

Quite different in nature has been the soul searching for a new political identity of Spain as a result of the Iraqi conflict, both internally, especially within the context of the European Union. A central question in this Spanish search is the evaluation of the importance of the role that U.S. perceptions (ally, model, or threat) play in terms of Spanish interests. This question was set to be answered differently in the event of a change in Spanish leadership as a result of a series of elections scheduled to be held within a year, from the municipal and local autonomies in May of 2003 to the Spanish legislative and EU Parliament elections, to be held in March and June of 2004, respectively. How pivotal a role the U.S. policy would play as a domestic issue could only be answered according to the evolution of these events, case by case.

As the results of the regional autonomous elections in Madrid and Catalonia demonstrated previously to the March 2004 national stunning upset, foreign issues had no impact on the results. Spanish voters seemed to be very mature and have managed to focus on their own domestic interests, with no perceivable distraction. “All politics are local”, Spaniards seem to adhere to the Tip O’Neill doctrine. However, as a correction to this view, the dormant Iraq issue exploded in the midst of the national vote.

Finally, additional questions required then further analysis. For example, was the move by the Spanish government towards a visible alliance with the United States the confirmation of a trend or a temporary circumstance heavily linked to the existing leadership? The central question, in any case, remained (and is still a mystery): Why? The parallel inquiry was: What were then the consequences for Spain’s internal affairs, future role in Europe, and perception in the world? How did the crisis and division of opinion in Spain affect the image of the United States in Spain? Undoubtedly, these questions were brutally dramatized by the March 2004 events. We can only contribute to a provisional explanation of the new situation from the lessons of the past by examining documentary evidence and the record of anonymous opinions given by elite sources in government and media.

Methodology

The investigative base of the study, designed and executed before the March 2004 dramatic events, was centered on the exhaustive monitoring of the elite and weekly press.

Then, a selective examination of the still scant output of think tank production, foreign policy analytical publications, and specialized journals was added to the picture. Simultaneously, the author conducted select interviews with representatives of the principal actors, secondary policy agents, international staffers, leaders of public opinion, and established scholars with considerable practice in academic analysis. These personal interviews were collated and compared with the media corpus, and two branches of the predominantly elite nature of the documentary sources used for the present analysis.

The choice of using the press as an anchor for initial reflection is doubly justified. First, while in most of the West the press is an accurate mirror of public opinion, in Southern Europe and selective countries of Latin America the “reference” press reflects more acutely the elite expression, with a heavy dose of intellectual inclination. Second, the analysis of the press content became necessary because, in contrast with parallel controversy created in London, the debate in the Spanish Congress was very limited, sporadic and generally avoided by the government, well guarded by a comfortable partisan majority that remained to the very end loyal to the thesis of the Prime Minister.

In consequence, the result of the inquiry was frustrating with regard to the available corpus provided by either the Prime Minister and his office, or members of his party. On a limited number of occasions through appearances in Congress, PP members and especially Aznar, revealed a traditional conservative profile with not only Spanish specifications, but also curiously with a Latin American flair. Along European conservative thought, rich in explicit examples to justify the preservation or consolidation of the system endangered by revolutions or other challenges to the established order, survivor of the ancient regime, Spanish thought, even though with less energy and conviction, had a notable tradition, in a certain degree lost with the impoverishment inflicted by the Franco regime. In Latin America explicitly designed and expressed conservative thought (not simply intolerant attitude) is as absent as it is necessary for the consolidation of democracy, latent in the basic theses of liberalism. As interpreted by scholars of the foundational period, the key for the limitations of conservative thought resides in its link with the centralist mind set, anchored on the dogmatic justification of the conquest and the subsequent political and economic control. Threatened by constitutional liberalism, which will not change much of the social and economic structures of the colonies, de facto conservatism simply opposed change, avoiding debate in the market of ideas. A similar attitude has characterized the absence of explicit reasoning to justify the alliance set in motion in the Iraqi crisis. To the dismay of professional diplomats recruited at high levels of the Spanish administration during the second term of Aznar’s mandate, pleas for developing an open and well-designed campaign of explaining the strategic policy were summarily rejected. Only confidential and selective admission remains the only source for confirming this trend. Frustration and guilt reached such levels, that silence has become the norm.¹²

All pattern of behavior, ironically, has been pointed out as contributing to the climate that led the Spanish government to stubbornly stick to the thesis of Basque authorship for the attacks, still under the comfortable position of denying a debate in Congress.

¹² From confidential interviews held during the summer of 2004.

Towards a wider setting

Although the present monograph (as originally designed, and more emphatically taking into account the electoral experience of March 2004) and supplementary documentation are limited in scope, it should be properly placed in an overall framework of a wider research project to be undertaken in the future. Some parallel topics dominate the skyline of this panorama, still open for future endeavors.

As demonstrated by the notable interest expressed in some European countries (especially France), closer attention should be given to the image of the United States in Europe and especially in Spain. As expressed in the introductory lines, the present research should also be studied from the perspective of the perceptions of Spain in the United States. In both cases, the research agenda is wide open as a consequence of the March 2004 events. In the case of the U.S. image in Spain, an object of study worth considering will be the harsh attitude of commentators against the decision of the Spanish voters. In the case of the image of Spain, it all depends on the evolution of the new policy of the Spanish government and its consequences for the strategic U.S. interests.

As a consequence, the limited results of this inquiry (initially focused on the pre-March 2004 events) should then be expanded to pay due attention to the impact Spain's actions has on its image in the United States. For historical reasons and a lesson for future decisions, Spanish interests, government officials, political leaders, and casual observers would still benefit from a systematic study of the impact of Spain's decision in March 2003 on its position in the European Union. In a wider context, researchers should review Spain's position in the United Nations (leading to its finale, when it extracted an official declaration blaming the bombings on ETA). The new administration had to work very hard to repair the damage done by Spain's representation under strict orders to follow a script which they probably do not believe. The same policy had to be implemented in Spain's special relations in the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and Latin America. Ultimately, U.S. observers and backers of U.S. interests in Spain should monitor the consequences of Spain's alliance with President Bush for the interests of the United States in Spain. This makes even more sense after the March 2004 election.

Objective and aims

With the above ideas in mind, the bulk of the paper intends to offer some glimpses of documentation and interpretation, with the hope of contributing to the general intellectual debate, supply a sample of scholarship, and deliver a modest dose of personal input. In consequence, the following pages have as a main objective the task of sharing a portion of the monitoring of the events that led to the traumatic terrorist attack and election, reviewing the existing literature, and evaluating the evolution and possible consequences (some of them dramatically confirmed) of the Spanish government's decision to endorse the U.S. policy on Iraq. While the potential reshaping of Spain's political and foreign policy status is the center of the analysis, the European and U.S. perception of Spain and the image of the United States in Europe and Spain will also receive considerable attention, if only hovering over the ongoing inquiry. The study of elite opinion, based mostly on selective media leaders, and sporadic studies generated by research centers and leading scholars, supplemented by interviews with influential leaders and observers,

constitute the framework of the methodology used. Mass popular opinion was only used as reflected in surveys provided by think tanks, government agencies, and independent poll taking institutes.

III

Findings

Searching for explanations

More than three years after the dramatic, tragic events of September 11, and two years after the decisive position taken by Aznar, observers of Spain's political scene are still wondering about his precise motivations for taking this turn, trying to evaluate its impact on Spain's role in the ever changing EU, and speculate about the permanent or transitory nature of the internal confrontations over relations with the United States. Apparently, nothing was supposed to be the same after the Spanish government's decision in 2003. After the March 2004 electoral defeat this assessment has taken on another meaning. What remained to be seen before the bombings and the election was the degree and the depth of the consequences in the Spanish political and social psyche. After the sudden political change, the alliance of Aznar with Bush is still seen by the PSOE sector as a scar, in urgent need of correction by a radical surgery, not simply cosmetic, while repairing what is considered as an erroneous foreign policy. Before the March 2004 election, there was a substantial degree of concern in the elite political circles (not limited to the PSOE entourage) regarding the future position of Spain in its most natural habitat – the European Union. This context returned to be the center of attention for the new government.

The exercise of reviewing Aznar's motivations has rendered some results that on the surface may seem to be surprising for casual observers, may raise some eyebrows in certain circles, and open questions in others regarding the sincerity of the officials and opinion leaders who were surveyed in total anonymity. For seasoned observers, however, the collective portrait seems to be the expected end product, with very few but subtle, interesting surprises. This collective panorama is mirrored by the content of the impressive volume of media analysis and commentaries generated by the controversial developments since mid 2002, and by the selective scholarly production available.

Any search of this nature would have as a central axis the direct opinions of the main protagonists. In this case, the speeches, writings, media declarations and content of press conferences given by Aznar should be awarded a pivotal spot. In order to answer the first simple question of this inquiry, the direct declarations of the Prime Minister would suffice. However, one of the intriguing and interesting characteristics of the political behavior of Spain's former Prime Minister is the fact that he did not project a charismatic profile. Instead, he limited his long appearances, and he did not feel comfortable addressing masses. He always looked unperturbed but stuffy and rehearsed, even when changing his distinctive acute high tone of voice. Political analysts (and many PP insiders, who remained fatefully silent) blamed part of the defeat to the adopting of the same low profile tactic by his successor and would be Prime Minister, Mariano Rajoy.

Bibliographical researchers may find themselves frustrated by the fact that Aznar's own intellectual production has been limited. Although a handful of works bear his name as author, some are collective books and editions. His most distinctive book was published before he was elected Prime Minister in 1996. Most of the books on his career have been written by journalists. Some have high humorous tones. One is authored by rival politicians (Joaquín Almunia and Iñaki Anasagasti) and two by historian Javier Tusell.¹³

Hence, readers would have had to wait for well after his current retirement from active politics, to receive long, solid, reasoned explanations for his policies.¹⁴ Finding the answer for the simple question about his motivations for his controversial decision inserted in his writings was a futile task, often reduced to one-liners. As a result of his painful retirement, a colorful and positive documentary legacy is in doubt, making the availability of further interpretations virtually impossible. Nonetheless, his limited public appearances, especially in the United States, have offered confirmation of well known facts and perceptions, and rather few novelties.

Moreover, conservative foreign observers (Robert Kagan, among others) and Spanish supporters of Aznar's general policies have pointed out that the crucial and detailed motivations for taking a pro-Bush attitude, while considered to be rightly based and just, were not rationally and effectively explained. With much regret, they discovered that when Aznar ventured beyond the basic issues and justifications, he failed to fully anchor the national interest with the specific topic of Spain's military involvement in Iraq. Some of the most lamentable cases were the arguments based on the presence of Hispanics in the United States and the details of economic rewards for Spain. According to these critical voices, his weakest line of defense was the specific non-evidence of the existence of weapons of mass destruction. All this explains his periodic retrenchment to generalizing issues and policies, or straight argumentation of vague principles and grand strategy.

Perhaps all this overall assessment is a coherent result emanating from an old-fashioned conservative conviction and therefore not subject to a public test. Dogma does not deserve to be treated in a market of ideas. As a consequence, there is a need for deciphering the enigma in the writings and interpretations given by some of the most knowledgeable sources. This vaguely detected trend was destined to be painfully evident in the dramatic hours after the Madrid March 11 attacks, when Aznar stubbornly stuck to the thesis of ETA's authorship, even when sharing partial evidence to the contrary with media editors –he even stressed his personal conviction over the arguments presented by Spain's intelligence services.

Some observers wrongly thought that they would have the first opportunity to obtain a cohesive and fully detailed explanation by enrolling in one of the seminars scheduled to be delivered by the former prime minister at Georgetown University during the academic year 2004-05, as visiting "scholar" at the School of Foreign Service. Unfortunately, the content of his speeches have been a capsule of his well known views and historical misinterpretations. Above all, Aznar violated one of the standard protocol principles of former prime ministers (and most especially presidents of the United States)

¹³ See appendix (Aznar Books).

¹⁴ For a review of his views before coming to power, see *España: La segunda transición* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1994).

of limiting criticism of the current government in a proper setting, either in Congress, or from other mechanisms in the opposition, but never from a foreign country and even less in an educational and scholarly setting. Even worse, this strategy was executed in the shadows of the White House, in the even of the U.S. reelection campaign and immediately following Bush victory.

Patterns in the press

A review of press commentaries, analysis and opinions issued in Spain on the policy of the government regarding the war in Iraq reveals some basic facts. Most outstanding is the overwhelming critical nature of the corpus. The number of negative articles not only was superior to the scant proportion of commentaries favorable to Aznar, but it also approached the percentages of popular opposition to the war. Any experiment of computing the number of negative articles and commentaries in comparison with the positive evaluations and staunch backing will reveal a ratio of 25-1 (or even higher), a proportion that surpasses by far the percentage of public opinion opposed to the war and to Spanish involvement in Iraq. Elite opinion, with notable exceptions heavily anchored in certain publications, was overwhelmingly negative toward Aznar's Iraq decision.¹⁵

Analyzed a little closer, the daily press and the weekly magazines of mostly political content present an impressively negative panorama for the theses of the Spanish government. Only one newspaper with national readership (ABC) and some sections of one weekly (Epoca) may constitute a positive counter balance, endorsing the reasoning of Aznar. Even newspapers of centrist tradition, if not conservative in either political or economic issues (if not both), as the notorious case of La Vanguardia of Barcelona, present a harsh view. The business press (especially Expansión and Cinco Días) could not hide opinion-oriented analysis with negative overtones.

This general impression was noticeable not only in the wide range of signed opinion articles (which in number and length published in each issue is comparatively important in its genre), but it is perceptible in the content of editorials. While leading columnists and editorials of ABC responded to a well-defined line of support for Aznar's policies, a number of opinion articles are moderately critical. Some ABC standing columnists (i.e. José Manuel de Prada) were sporadically opposed to some specific dimensions of the Spanish endorsement of the U.S. overall policy in Iraq, while others (Darío Valcárcel, who as the editor of Política Exterior, the prestigious clone of Foreign Affairs, became the protagonist of one of the most surprisingly harsh critical voices) were systematically negative of the U.S. strategy.

Observed as a whole, the fact that many leading political figures engaged in a race to meet an apparent obligation of writing and publishing an analysis or op-ed piece on the preparations for the war, its development, or especially the activity of the Spanish

¹⁵ Although a systematic review of all the media production (selectively limited to op-ed pieces and news items published in the national press and a handful of weekly magazines) could be a costly enterprise, a scientifically accurate sample of the daily scanning has been made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson office, the Diplomatic Information Office (OID). Professionally done, with no bias or attempt to hide negative articles even on the internal affairs of the ministry, this "Prensa de la Mañana" and the parallel monitoring of the weekly magazines are an accurate mirror of the overall public relations reflection of a disastrous policy, from a strictly media angle.

government, is very significant. This stunning evidence shows a decision to have within reach a precise timely register of personal (more than institutional) attitudes on an event considered of a historical magnitude. Few elected to comfortably avoid this difficult task. On the contrary, most seemed to have done it very gladly, fearing to lose a golden opportunity to distance themselves from a government that they had backed in certain, important political periods. Some samples signed by active leading politicians that normally are prudent in matters of foreign policy, seemed to be surprising, such as the notorious case of Catalan president Jordi Pujol. However, this attitude was coherent with the general policy of the Catalan conservative nationalists of *Convergència* and its partner in coalition *Unió Democràtica*, who bankrolled the PP congressional majority with their votes in the first mandate of 1996 to 2000.

Other interested contributors included politicians of conservative or liberal inclinations (in the European sense), as is the case of José Antonio Segurado (founder of the Liberal Party and former leader of the Employers Organization), show a definite critical stance towards the war and Aznar's policies. Of the past presidents, only Adolfo Suárez (matching his muteness since his retirement) remained silent. While the PSOE's former leader Felipe González has been publishing regular columns in the Spanish and international press, and many dedicated to the lambasting of Aznar's policies, *Unión de Centro Democrático* (UCD)'s brief president Leopoldo Calvo Sotelo reappeared on the scene with an unconditional support for Aznar. Joaquín Almunia (named by the new Spanish government to substitute for Pedro Solbes, new Minister of the Economy, as Commissioner), the PSOE predecessor to Rodríguez Zapatero as candidate for election against Aznar, had been publishing regular columns, especially in the Barcelona daily, *La Vanguardia*, with a focus on dismantling Aznar's justification for the Iraq decision, and authored a whole book evaluating very harshly the legacy of PP leader. Former EU Commissioner Manuel Marín, the spokesman of the PSOE in the Foreign Affairs Committee of Congress, named by Rodríguez Zapatero to be the next President of the Spanish parliament, was also publishing weekly articles in *Cinco Días*, most of them dedicated to critically commenting on Aznar's foreign policy, with clear sentiments against the U.S. involvement in Iraq.

Intriguing and significant dimensions of these commentaries was the tone used, the sharp profile of the language employed, and the absence of an intention to hide clear opinions behind an obscure language sporting some pretentious objectivity. Taking sides on the Iraq crisis, the policy of the United States, and the Spanish support for Bush was the trend, resulting in the clarity of expressions.

Although limited in number, there were samples of incisive analyses made by professional journalists who tried to select a few specific motivations of Aznar's policy and venture some possible gains to obtain for his backing of Bush's strategy. In this type of article, traditional objectivity used in investigative pieces is subtly mixed with an irresistible dose of opinion. In general, these incisive pieces, focusing on the reasons (the word *razones* is explicitly used in titles) for Aznar to make that decision, coincide with most of the critical analyses as well as with the central justifications offered by the theses of his backers. While personal convictions taken without much study (something denied by Aznar's defenders) and some expected gains are mentioned in some of the critical outlines, generally favorable analysts are inclined to the standard explanation of the

identification of Iraq as terrorist threat, a fact that converted the alliance with the United States in a must-do policy in the fight against the standing ETA terrorist challenge.

Venturing beyond the points of coincidence with the explicitly proposed reasons by Aznar, critics then pointed hidden causes and expectations, some concrete gains as a reward for taking such a considerable risk. According to this consensus, in a world of dangerous confusion, Aznar opted for siding (some use harsher expressions, as “subservience”) with the expected winner, especially in a war that was predicted to be short, with few issues pending before the May 2003 local Spanish elections. Other hidden, or not well explained reasons, mentioned were an expected backing of the United States in a possible future crisis with Morocco, Spain as a new venue for a future conference on the Middle East, and an increase in aid to Latin America. Some very perceptive analysts interpreted Aznar’s serious risk-taking as his calculation that the war was preventable by the heavy pressure imposed by the international community on Saddam Hussein or by the collapse of the Iraqi regime by internal treason. As a last hope, Aznar placed his bet on a fast resolution of the war itself.

A composite analysis of the pre-war picture involving Spain’s prime minister’s attitude and options include some facts and speculation shared by many observers with an inside knowledge. First, there was the conviction by the United States that the pressure exerted on allies would extract a positive backing from the Security Council for an authorization for a war action. This was designed in the expectation that Iraq would cave in and authorize the full implementation of the inspection. UK Prime Minister Tony Blair had the conviction of obtaining a possible resolution and as a consequence would receive the credit. Aznar was always at the mercy of both real protagonists. He finally was placed in the impossible situation of obtaining the backing of the Latin American members of the Security Council. He was out staged by the French diplomacy in gathering the non-commitment for the war efforts from the African representatives. The split in the Security Council was not only obvious but it was very negative for the U.S. interests. With the attack and invasion already decided by Bush, Aznar elected (he had no other choice) to bet on a fast resolution of the war itself.

Significantly, it has to be stressed once more, the clarity of the simplistic analysis made by the Spanish government contrasts with the limitation of the arguments used by Aznar to justify the overall strategic alliance with the United States, beyond the succinct generalizations reduced to the fight against terrorism and hence his support for Bush.

Foreign policy think tanks and publications

In contrast with the United States and some leading European countries, Spain does not have a long tradition of professional work on foreign policy produced by institutes and think tanks, a *rara avis* in the social and academic scene, mainly for combinations of reasons of lack of a policy of philanthropy and a distrust of government for independent thinking. Even less important is the tradition of foreign policy planning designed by the same think tanks (sometimes populated by opposition parties) and later executed by the government. Although a handful of academic journals are dedicated to diverse angles of international profile, they have been traditionally busy with regions that are, for some reason or another, a priority of academic research that needs a necessary time lag to obtain a minimum perspective. While Latin America, the European Union and, to a lesser

extent, the North African region have been the object of this type of academic analytical research, the field of international relations at large, and the United States foreign policy, have surprisingly seldom been the specific object of serious analysis. In contrast with the overwhelming impact of U.S. foreign policy on the evolution of contemporary Spain's situation in the world, from the defeat of 1998 to the Iraq crisis, including the strategic alliance of Franco with Washington for the establishment of the military bases in the 1950s, the think tank and academic scenario does not reveal the existence of a single institute, publication, or academic program fully dedicated to the United States (with the exception of one with a sociological profile sponsored by the University of Alcalá de Henares).

It is not then surprising that a historical decision of epochal proportions as the one made by Aznar was not initially received by an expected volume of in-depth analysis in the form of policy papers and evaluating monographs, beyond and above the space-limited analysis provided in the press by academic personalities. Although its importance may be limited, the fact that most research centers depend heavily on government subsidies, a highly controversial issue became rather muffled and a risky ground for exploration.

In any event, the result of this scarcity is that studies of the issue dealt with in this monograph (on the events before and after the dramatic changes of March 2004) will have to heavily concentrate on the output of one prestigious foreign policy publication and one think tank institute, both located in Madrid, and coincidentally a few yards away from the new site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.¹⁶ One is the recently founded Real Instituto Elcano and the second is the bi-monthly publication Política Exterior, one of the most prestigious foreign policy journals in the best tradition of Foreign Affairs, having captured that national spot along its clones in different European countries, with followers in the Middle East, Asia and Latin America.

Both institutions may be considered as part of the establishment with an inclination that can safely be branded as conservative (in the case of Elcano, especially before the change of government) and center-liberal (as in the case of Política Exterior). While the content of Elcano analysis, during the Aznar administration, only sporadically included extreme critical analysis of the Spanish and the U.S. foreign policy, Política Exterior has been noted for a wider array of views that has tilted towards an open negative perception of the Spanish-U.S. alliance and policy in Iraq in the period of 2002-2004. This is surprising (and shocking for some conservative observers that feel betrayed) considering the fact that Política Exterior¹⁷ was born out of the ABC establishment, and had been led since its foundation by a leading and well-established columnist (and at one point op-ed editor) Darío Valcárcel, whose views in domestic policies clash with the PSOE and leftist attitudes.

The Elcano web content and its periodic print analyses present a coherent and steady volume of studies and commentaries that can be interpreted (as a whole, with sporadic, notable exceptions) as justifying the Aznar government's foreign policies, while still offering some bases for improvement. In essence, sometimes, some papers available during the Aznar administration may be read as a substitute for the absence of explicit

¹⁶ The site has turned out to be temporary, because it will have to be vacated due to structural problems.

¹⁷ It eventually moved to another location.

and concrete justifications and explanations for the polemic decisions taken by Aznar with regard to his alliance with Bush and in his activity within the EU. This trend, objectively perceived or the product of a slanted view, prompted members of the Socialist opposition to present protests. However, as a whole, the general output of Elcano before the events of March 2003 is a must-do stop (for historical reasons, after March 2003) for any observer who wants to have a panoramic view of the issues confronted by Spain in the world scene. It was expected that the sudden political change as a result of the elections of March 14 would have an impact on the content and scope of the line of research. Overall, the institution, with a few changes in its analytical management, has succeeded in offering a wide array of views and opinion that reflects a well balanced mirror or Spanish elite production in foreign affairs as well as incorporating contributions from abroad.

The case of Política Exterior offers an opportunity for meditation on an enterprise that reflects an anguish for predicting and interpreting a fast pace of unresolved situations that are overcome by events, some of them as surprising and dramatic as the early failure of the approval of the EU Constitution. However, Aznar's motivations and an evaluation of the consequences of his actions are barely latent. It was expected that in the rest of 2004, with the needed perspective of the fiasco caused by the collapse of the EU Constitution, attributed to the stubborn resistance of Aznar, the journal would reveal and explain part of the enigmas. Depending on the degree of difficulties encountered by the U.S. occupation of Iraq, an overall assessment of the U.S. strategy was expected to become more evident in subsequent issues, as it was developed in a one-of-a-kind book jointly authored by Valcárcel and Spanish diplomat Carlos Alonso Zaldívar (later named Spain's ambassador to Cuba) in the form of an extended interview while the United States was readying for war. However, unanswered questions remain, not to be faulted to Política Exterior incapacity, but to the fact that Aznar's motivations were and are basically grounded on personal conviction.

Books

The Spanish publishing scene as a result of September 11 experienced a noticeable increase in the number of books dedicated to the pressing issue of international terrorism. Books of commentary on the tragedy hit the shelves in 2002, while new titles on the Middle East, and especially Iraq captured the attention of readers in 2003. Too soon to analyze the specific Spanish position on the war and its consequences, readers only have a handful of titles dealing, from a variety of angles, with the foreign policy of the United States. In spite of the fact that on September 25, 2003, Spain and the United States commemorated the 25th anniversary of the military agreement of 1953, the scant references in the press were a faithful reflection of the non-existent treatment in the form of books, with the notable exception of a volume by Angel Viñas, previously the author of a classic in the genre. The exception to this absence of titles directly treating the recent relationship between the Spanish government and the United States is a book authored by Carlos Elordi, El amigo americano.

Researchers on the motivations of the Spanish government in its alliance with the United States over Iraq had to wait for the inclusion of this topic in the handful of books published in the context of the 2004 elections. However, it was expected that the bulk of

the commentary was reserved to domestic policies as an evaluation of the eight years in power. The negative and critical approach of many of these books will undoubtedly be replicated by others that may appear to explain the debacle of the PP in the elections.

Bands and sectors

First, in a highly politicized and controversial subject such as Spain's role in the Iraq conflict, it was expected that, in spite of the perceived professionalism and objectivity (and, above all, honesty) of an impressive overwhelming majority of the personalities who accepted to be interviewed for this study), a sort of political bipolarity would result. The range of interpretations for the three main topics (motivations and aims of Aznar, Spain's current status in the EU, and the debate over the permanent/provisional condition of the confrontation and attitudes towards the United States) oscillated towards two main ideological poles.

One sector could be easily identified as government officials and media leaders with inclinations or party affiliations with the Partido Popular of Prime Minister José María Aznar. The others can tentatively be described as "the rest". Labeling this non-PP sector as Center-Left would be misleading because the controversy has grouped in one team such ideologically diverse political circles as the Socialists, the United Left ("reformed" Communists), the liberal-centrist Catalan nationalists, and other conservatives and liberals (in the European tradition) who do not respond to the guidelines of Aznar's ideological framework. This sector reflects the range of critical opinions exposed in op-ed pieces, as discussed above. Significantly, this "coalition of the willing" (adopting the U.S. government term to describe the limited number of countries actively siding with President Bush on Iraq's war) was instrumental in forging the final vote that ousted the PP from power.

Personal interviews

One of the most difficult, rewarding and partially revealing experiences of this research has been the part based on selective personal interviews undertaken with the generosity of approximately forty high level government officials, leading columnists and editors, and officers of international organizations, as well as informal conversations with an array of academics. The interviews were carried out either in a non-structured manner, or by asking three pointed questions: a ranking of three of Aznar's motivations of justifications, an evaluation of the current status of Spain in the world scene and in the EU, and an assessment regarding the permanency or temporary nature of the confrontation (in terms of transatlantic relations, the EU, and in the Spanish national setting) as closely related to the personalities or responding to a deeper cultural clash.

At all times, with very few exceptions, respondents seemed to have very clear answers for all questions. Predictably, while pro-Aznar officials and backers selected his personal conviction of doing the right thing based on the need for a solid alliance to fight terrorism, opponents preferred to rank "his own ego" (term used in most cases) and ideological affinity with Bush as main reasons and justifications. Concrete motivations and expectations of gains varied, with the pro-Aznar sector seldom admitting potential

specific economic rewards, preferring to point out the benefits in the fight against the ETA threat.

To be subsumed in the collective assessment about the prevailing perception of Spain's power in the world and especially the EU, the bulk of the opinion of a representation of the think-tank community and diplomatic establishment in Brussels was either guarded, skeptical or negative regarding the future leverage enjoyed by Spain as a result of its alliance with the United States. This general feeling became more acute in view of the failure to agree on the draft of the EU Constitution. Results of urgent and selected consultations made after the March elections defeat revealed a feeling of relief for "getting rid" (explicit term used) of a rather uncomfortable partner.

Trends and style

In answering the first pivotal question of deciphering Aznar's motivations, two groups of explanations raised to the surface. On the opposing side, personal convictions with some ideological touches dominated the scene, while in the conservative PP band, explanations concentrated around world strategic arguments and the need to face the terrorist threats. Surprisingly for some minority observers, strictly personal motivations and economic gains (bordering corruption) were universally absent in all explanations given. Isolated opinions pointed to hidden motivations toward possible future employment in the private sector (and academia, including positions in the United States), in addition to the customary expectations of high-level positions in international organizations such as the UN. Personal vanity occupied, in a stunning and unanimous manner, most of the priority spots targeted by the opposition when trying to explain Aznar's motivations. This identification significantly matched a preference of his backers for stressing personal integrity motivations and convictions, something that political opponents and many neutral observers equalized to an ideological leaning closer to the ideas professed by George Bush and his associates.

In the context of the electoral defeat, commentaries centered on some emblematic passages of Aznar's experience in his alliance with Bush. Among the favorite reminders was the historical photo opportunity of the Azores, framed in the company of UK Prime Minister Tony Blair. In view of the electoral defeat, this picture has been estimated by political experts to be Aznar's most expensive photograph of his career.¹⁸ Months later, Aznar boasted of being in such company, in comparison to other pictures where leaders are framed by Castro and Venezuelan Chávez.

In both bands and in the opinions of centered observers, harsh and foul language is seldom used when referring to either Aznar's inclinations or the actions of the political opposition. While the tone of the op-ed pieces was blunt (a feature that became harsher with his defeat) and direct, and speeches in Congress might have been sarcastic and rich in metaphors, including invitations to resign and some references to "shame" and "decency", a sort of mutual respect was minimally maintained. As expected, when Aznar chose a much harsher tone in denouncing the new foreign policy of Zapatero, especially while traveling in the United States, the press was merciless to him. In the expressions used in private interviews, only isolated cases of government officials, for example, used

¹⁸ Ironically, its author was awarded a coveted prize given by the prestigious El País in consideration of its intrinsic news and artistic values.

long-time gone labels such as “communists” for referring to demonstrators against the war. Opponents never crossed the delicate line of venturing into the terrain of personal or family details.

In sum, the answers emanating from the government-inclined sector were more precise, limited to a few topics. In contrast, the opposition seemed to be richer in speculation, opening grounds for further investigation, although this pattern does not mean that the results shed a more refined light on explaining the central enigmas.

On the extreme spatial sidelines of interpretations, one taking into account the foreign dimension and the other venturing into the exclusive domestic arena, two complementary issues captured the top spots in the analysis and opinions given by a surprising number of (for some tastes, unguarded) observers. Accepting that all politics are local, in Aznar’s mind the threat against Spain’s political unity is intimately linked to the global terrorist threat. Therefore, his personal experience miraculously escaping a death attempt by ETA in 1995 led to his uncompromising fight against this scourge. Hence, his opportune decision in seeking to end the Spanish domestic problem with his alliance with Bush’s global strategy after September 11. In a rather coherent way, his stubborn advocating for the ETA’s origin of the March 11 attacks makes a lot of sense. Nonetheless, as pointed out above, his insistence on this thesis, when contrary evidence was revealed, contributed to his fall.

In the foreign scenario, an apparently insignificant incident seemed to be chosen by numerous observers and leaders (in both political camps) as one of the dominant reasons for Aznar’s decision to set his lot with President Bush’s strategy: Perejil. According to this interpretation, the feeling of isolation and disdain by other European colleagues felt by the Spanish during the crisis, and the fact that Aznar had to rely on the mediating services of U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, convinced the Spanish premier of the necessity of siding with Washington in a highly uncertain global situation.

Regarding the status of Spain’s position in the EU as a result of the controversial decision, the bands were irreconcilable. For the opposition, Spain was in a sorry worse shape in Europe than before September 11 and his siding with Bush, while Aznar’s backers vouch that Spanish influence has been reinforced. This “consensus”, or agreeing to disagree, seemed to be broken when dealing with the third question, especially when entering a shaky terrain such as Spain’s attitude towards the United States. Surprisingly, some Popular Party observers agreed with the opposition in considering the confrontation over the role of the United States as opportunistic and electorally-linked. While some on the right thought that anti-U.S. sentiments in conservative circles had disappeared, some think they still survive. While some in the opposition thought that the controversy had solidified an innate anti-U.S. feeling in Spain, some considered (and still do, without any doubt) the trend intrinsically connected to the personalities of Bush and Aznar. Most optimists in the opposition band were hoping for a better future climate, wishing that any of the possible successors of Aznar (later to be confirmed as Mariano Rajoy) would seek a better accommodation with the opposition and would try to reestablish Spain’s role in Europe. If President Bush were out of the picture in Washington in 2005, this same sector of observers predicts that anti-U.S. feelings would had been reduced in Europe in general and especially in Spain.

Polarization best describes the resulting cleavage of opinions. However, while these were no exceptions to the rule of solid backing and standard explanations given by

most government officials and most PP-leaning political leaders, the media traditionally considered as conservative or “liberal” (in the European sense) often included critical commentaries on Aznar’s policies, and especially on the strategy of the United States in the aftermath of the Iraqi war. In sum, off-the-record comments given by government officials (with very few exceptions on specific items) mirrored the panorama offered by the PP representatives in Congress.

This expected result partially explains the reverberations of the controversial explanations given by Spain’s ambassador to the UN, Inocencio Arias. Accurately interpreted as a critical assessment of the overall U.S. policy, and hence of Spain’s role in the Iraqi crisis, his opinions caused a tremor in media and political circles especially when the Spanish envoy was ordered to return to New York when he was apparently at the beginning of his August 2003 customary summer vacation. Ironically, in what was one of his last active appearances at the UN, Arias had to carry out orders from his superiors advocating for ETA’s authorship of the attacks and forcing a vote from his colleagues, a move that was received with much opposition and resentment. He later officially apologized to his colleagues for misleading them.

The controversial episode of Arias' end of vacationing was seen as the tip of the iceberg of an open secret confrontational and low morale environment in the depths of the Spanish diplomatic service. Not necessarily identifiable as inclined to Socialist and liberal ideological preferences, a substantial number of Spanish Foreign Service officers have been extremely critical of the course taken by the government regarding the post-September 11 strategies. This atmosphere is attributed not only to political disagreements, but also to corporate tensions, feelings of isolation and irrelevancy while major decisions are crafted within the Prime Minister’s entourage. Moreover, this uncomfortable state was perceived as to be generated by what was described by even PP insiders as an erratic management style of Foreign Minister Ana Palacio, considered to be the most confrontational and morale-wracking in recent history.

As in the case of public opinion, as demonstrated by the spectacular number of people attending demonstrations against the war and protesting for Spain’s policy, media and elite attitudes reflect a much wider political spectrum than the usual center-left and center-right which is the current trend as seen in recent elections. Spanish opposition to the U.S. policy and Spain’s involvement in the Iraq crisis was much wider than the close to 50% of the electorate who voted for leftist or centrist alternatives in the municipal and autonomous elections of May 2003. Added to this sector, a substantial number of centrist, and even conservative, columnists and media leaders were extremely critical of the war projects, were apprehensive during the brief conflict, and have been increasingly skeptical and openly negative on the U.S. occupation strategy. They have been, as a result, concerned for the involvement of Spanish troops in a new mission that has been seen in a different light than the previous military or police experiences in diverse scenarios such as the former Yugoslavia, Central America, and even Afghanistan.

Reasons

Reduced to its minimum expression, Aznar’s decision to back Bush’s policy was simple and clear. It was a matter of choice for identifying and paralleling the strategy of the United States, criminally attacked by the terrorists of Al Queda on September 11, with

the particular ongoing threat of the ETA terrorists in Spain. In consequence, the logic to be followed was the unconditional antiterrorist cooperation, resulting in the support for Washington's initiatives.

Once the campaign in Afghanistan was implemented and positively supported by European governments and citizens, Bush had to face the reality of the evasive nature of Bin Laden. As a consequence of this shortcoming, the vague identification of an entity called "international terrorism" needed to be individualized and properly located without running the risk of losing the limited attention span of the U.S. people, still traumatized by the shock of September 11, unable to comprehend the nature of such event and its foreign origin. Americans were used to facing concrete enemies (from the affront suffered at Pearl Harbor and Hitler's Germany to the Soviet empire). Refining the shape of the "axis of evil", Iraq was chosen in a trio formed with Iran and North Korea.

When the response to this identification was skepticism, dry humor and outright opposition, Aznar retrenched to reach for a juridical endorsement. The legality of the actions of the United States in pointing towards Iraq was sustained by the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council regarding the inspections in search for weapons of mass destruction, a procedure that Saddam Hussein had opposed for a dozen years.

In this fashion, in a wide context related to the defense of Spanish interests, Aznar's strategy was justified to insert Spain in the place reserved according to his calculations (which did not match the legacy left by the preceding Socialist administration). Critics from the opposition and skeptical commentators reminded him, on one hand, that Spain had reached notable heights of international leadership and respect thanks to a consensus on foreign policy built between the PSOE and the PP since the Spanish accession to the EU and the compromise for the consolidation of membership in NATO. This consensus was now under grave danger, if not eliminated.

Moreover, on the strictly domestic front, Aznar pointed out that cooperation against international terrorism would be rewarded by U.S. help in appropriate intelligence and technology to be applied in tactics against ETA. The opposition responded that reinforcement of the relationship with France and other European countries, with respect to extradition processes, was more effective in resolving a problem that was essentially internal in causes and management. Ironically, when Aznar insisted on ETA's authorship of the March 11 attacks in Madrid, he was not doing a favor to Bush, in view of the futility of the alleged U.S. help in confronting the domestic Basque threat.

Aznar needed an additional, novel explanation for distancing himself from the customary interest prevalent in the nucleus of the European Union (mainly led by Germany and France), now far removed from the orbit of the United States. Aznar reminded observers and critics that Spain had a legacy in the Western Hemisphere (in addition to its European vocation) and historical obligations distinct from other European nations.

This dimension was not only sustained through the traditional links with Latin America, as expressed through the development of the Ibero-American Community project, but also through the presence of Hispanics in the United States. On the occasions when this link was presented to justify the strategic alliance with Bush, criticism abounded from the opposition and objective commentators. From acerbic notations to ironic references the result was the opposite of the intention.

In sum, when Aznar opted to utter explanations beyond the standard justification of the fight against international terrorism and its identification with ETA, the result was negative in communication. At the end of the year 2003, with the failed EU constitutional process, Spain apparently had returned to the initial departing point. The use of concrete reasoning was abandoned, with Congress ready to be dismissed for new elections in March, and the mantle prepared to be passed to his successor.

IV

The Game Plan of Aznar

From September 11, 2001, to March 11-14, 2004

With the arrival of 2004, almost eight years had lapsed with Aznar in power. As reviewed above, fulfilling his pledge, he was not running for re-election in March, although his party was destined by the polls for a repeat of a win, although capturing an absolute majority was totally discarded. It was an appropriate time for a review of the important events since September 11, 2001, which include the tempestuous developments of 2003 ending with the failed constitutional project of the EU. Domestically, the imminent call for new elections coincided with the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Spanish Constitution and the resolving of the Catalan autonomic elections, with the formation of a tripartite coalition led by the Socialists to oust the incumbent centrist nationalists historically led by Jordi Pujol, who retired from active politics.

In both cases, the pending issues of Spanish democracy became obvious when the Catalan coalition promised to obtain an increase in the degree of autonomy, adding pressure to the serious challenge posed by the Basque government pointing out towards independence. The incident caused by the interview held by Esquerra Republicana's leader Josep Lluís Carod Rovira (who was acting Catalan President, in the absence of Pasqual Maragall) with ETA's representatives, added fuel to the fire of political confrontation when the Aznar government accused the Socialists of associating with "accomplices" of terrorists. By labeling all Catalans unfaithful to Spanish democracy, the PP leadership only accomplished that potential Esquerra backers and other previously moderate nationalists catapulted Carod to political stardom. Removed from his position as Conseller en Cap ("prime minister") in the Catalan government, he ran officially for the Spanish Congress, and increased the number of seats of his party from a solitary one to a spectacular eight.

A review of the eight years of PP administration provides us with a necessary macrocontext to refine the analysis of the current pending issues. In this fashion, a window of speculation is open on to the future of Spain at the international and the European levels. A fast flashback motion beyond 1996 and a prediction for 2005 and the years afterwards still permit us to speculate if the present confrontational situation (domestically and between certain European powers and the United States) is permanent or responds to the conditioning imposed by the personalities that had monopolized the scene formed by Spain, the European Union, and the United States.

A lineup of motivations, means, and aims

The task of organizing the motivations, justifications, means, and aims of Aznar, since his arrival to power, is not easy. Explanations provided by Aznar have not always matched those of the analysts and secondary actors.

Instead of mapping out a series of interpretations in ranking order, a novel way of observing the resulting panorama is by laying out the comprehensive results of the inquiry, respecting both points of view in a sort of theoretical design as used in sports blackboards by coaches.

The choice of this metaphorical interpretation of a set of motivations, reasons and strategies used by Aznar in making and implementing his historical decision may look too light and non-academic. It is fully justified by the explicit choice of an expression that has the undisputed trademark of Aznar: he wanted Spain to play en la primera división (the major leagues, in U.S. terms).¹⁹

Adaptable to other sports, but avoiding the temptation of regimentally dividing the field into two different line ups of defense and offense, a more familiar European and Latin American soccer style design may be more appropriate. The proposed framework may help to elucidate the motivations and the reasons (explicit or not) for Aznar to take the path towards the alliance with Bush, as opposed to siding with the standard EU partners of the previous government and the trademark of Spain's insertion in the EU. Conservative but historically traditional, Aznar's game plan strikes at first sight as pre-modern soccer, as prevailed in the first third of the 1900s. It looks as it was before adopting the first revolutionary change with the English "WM" design positioning of three backs, two midfielders, two inside forwards, one center forward, and two wings. Aznar was bolder, as in the soccer infancy: one goalie, two backs, three midfielders, and five forwards. As we will see later in the game, he was forced to experiment not only with the novelty of the Brazilian 4-2-4 that propelled Pelé to stardom, but later by adopting the Italian defensive tactics using a "libero" or the prevailing 4-4-2 of present times. Let's explain.

The initial line up will then be the following:

1. Goal keeping
2. Outpacing the PSOE
3. Personal conviction
4. Confronting international terrorism
5. U.S. protection
6. Fighting ETA
7. Hispanics
8. National integrity
9. Major league play
10. EU-France
11. Economic gains

¹⁹ This lexicon (mostly related to soccer) is also standard in the frequent informal talk of politicians and media when describing political behavior. Red cards, penalties, goals and other terms are used to substitute for legal and procedural expressions.

The goalkeeper position represented Spain's position in 1996 and Aznar's vision of the EU and the world. Considered to be under the weight of the ballast imposed by the past legacy of the PSOE, Aznar did not show a special interest in the external dimension. Coldly obsessed with capturing power, he did not need a confrontation on the external agenda. Strategy was limited to exploiting the domestic weaknesses of Felipe González' government besieged by economic difficulties, personal corruption against some of his associates, and the logical erosion of power exercised since 1983. Relatively successful in the international area, González was hit by a call from Aznar: "It's the economy and corruption, stupid". The last months in office were spent in an environment dominated by an insulting invitation given by Aznar in Congress: "Váyase, Señor González [Leave, Mr. González]". Simultaneously, no special external program was offered. Weeks before the March 2004 election, when polls revealed an unnerving close call, some PSOE backers were sorry that Aznar was actually not running: "Quédese, Sr. Aznar" [Stay, Mr. Aznar], they claimed. Ironically, leaving office and staying out of the elections, he was actually framed as the real loser, instead of Rajoy.

Frugal in declarations, extremely limited in intellectual production, prudent in the elaboration of extensive campaign programs, Aznar did not then reveal major spectacular divergences with the incumbent regarding the practical placement of Spain in the European project or the world at large. Differences were reduced to a vague denunciation of the relative shortcoming of the Spanish economy compared with some of the major European powers. While he reinforced the customary endorsement of the Latin American legacy of Spain, Aznar's declarations filtered out a certain degree of skepticism for the deepening of European integration, a feeling not well detected then that later would be confirmed with the events of 2003.

Defense and midfielders

With the objective of ameliorating the solitude of the goalie (his only argument), Aznar placed in front two formidable reasons, as old-fashioned backs. While one part of the strategy was well publicized and admitted, the other became obvious to his opponents and keen observers. One was self-centered and based on his own trust in his personal possibilities. The second was anchored on a view over his shoulder, with a focus on the past.

On his right he used personal intuition and a protagonist role, with no apparent limitations. He studied alternatives but made decisions assisted only by a small circle of assistants working in the Moncloa Palace, the residence of the Prime Minister and office complex. In the fashion of modern side defense players, this strategy/player was ready to run forward along the sideline, infiltrating the enemy's defenses. This line of thought became more acute when he made the decision to not run for reelection. Shedding the weight imposed by prudence and calculation on the number of votes needed, he felt free to take bolder and riskier options. This was his undoing, according to a generalized assessment, propelling him to maintain his views until the last minute when he confronted the uncomfortable feeling of Islamic fundamentalism of the Madrid terrorist attacks. His personal calls to editors stressing his personal conviction were a trade mark of past behavior.

On his left, as a very negative factor, he stressed the need to distance himself from the policies of the PSOE. This decision forced him to seek any excuse to obtain a mark of difference from the characteristics of the foreign policy of Felipe González, at any price, even though they were part of a generally well-structured consensus that has its roots in the consolidation of a master plan crafted by the defunct UCD of Adolfo Suárez. Both side backs (personal conviction and distance from PSOE) had been impelled by a feeling of acting on their own, claiming not to have any debts with any other interest than the legitimacy of democratic victory in 1996 and 2000, especially the absolute majority in his last mandate. Endorsement from the Catalan *Convergència i Unió* (CiU) coalition and other minority parties in either obtaining a necessary practical absolute majority or to pass certain legislation was used for domestic purposes with no major disagreements in the international terrain.

After September 11, latent since the reelection in 2000 with absolute majority and the subsequent crisis of leadership suffered by the PSOE, Aznar armored himself with three more mechanisms, a powerful midfield line (repositioned, as we will later see, in moments of pressure) to give him a warranty and to be used as decisive weapons when he made the historic decision. This line was composed of an old-fashioned center midfielder personified by the United States –better said, by George W. Bush. He was accompanied by a pair of “half wings” represented on the right by the response against international terrorism and on the left a twin policy of confronting the criminal activity of the Basques.

Depending on the circumstances, the center midfielder played as a more modern center back, and at times as a last resort *libero* designed by defense oriented Italian *calcio*. Meanwhile, the two wings dedicated to the fight against terrorism were converted as a dual “pivot”, as a maximum justification for all polemic decisions. The back line was then composed of five players as used by modest teams today. By linking Al Queda terrorist activity with an alleged Iraqi connection, policy was justified by the threat posed by the Basque problem.

In this item, Aznar’s traumatic experience escaping by miracle a bombing attempt made on him just before coming to power was considered as central in targeting this scourge as a primary objective of his strategy. Personal scars fused with his uncompromising conception about the unity of Spain, in danger not only by terrorist separatist aims and actions of ETA, but by other independence-seeking projects laid out by the governing Basque Nationalist Party (PNV).²⁰

Although in principle these two “points” were creative in nature, they were progressively reformed into performing destructive tasks, ready to neutralize opponents accusing them of aiding or abetting terrorists. That was the Spanish variance of “to be with us or against us” doctrine issued by Bush. While sometimes the tactic that was followed was reduced to slow down the tempo of the game, at no time was the public managing to question the overall strategy because no one wanted to be caught in the collaborationist band, be it international or domestic. When Aznar crossed a delicate line, as when he ventured that the opposition was waiting to rejoice with the arrival of the first coffins filled with the bodies of Spanish soldiers from Iraq, he was directly questioned by critics and public opinion. Then, he retrenched to a more prudent position.

²⁰ For speculation of U.S. support for Spain in the fight against ETA terrorism, see Appendix (País Vasco).

The forward line

With the rear guard well-covered, Aznar then designed an ambitious offence, combining traditional positions with modern variations. As a symbolic center forward, Aznar needed a media attractive star. As a replay of the opening of the soccer market by the Bosman decision, Aznar announced his ambition to not only reduce Spain's dependency on EU aid, but to convert the country into a major international actor. Aznar wanted Spain to play, in his own words, en primera división, in the major leagues in U.S. terms. Moreover, a national first division was not enough –Spain deserved to be constantly competing not only in the Champions League, but in a World Series, in the real soccer sense of the World Cup. Of course, he felt uncomfortable playing in a UEFA cup for second stringers, nowadays reduced to a consolation prize.

As strengthening of the electoral scenario, this was the missing dimension to attract the attention of a sector of the middle class and conservatives who had nostalgic feelings of past imperial glories, not feeling comfortable in the confusing and competitive European scenario, dominated by the EU establishment, to which Aznar never felt a sense of belonging. Scant but blunt declarations revealed his intentions illustrated in popular Spanish expressions of warning, disdain, and arrogant attitudes. “They are going to get used to seeing Spain at the head table”, was a frequent admonition translated as “They will see; we’ll teach them a lesson”.

On the sides of this traditional forward line, Aznar placed two proposals, alternating their positions, crisscrossing the lightning moves of the center forward. On the right, he placed a safe, but ambitious business-oriented attitude, anchored on recent bold foreign investment (actually initiated by the Socialists) in Latin America (branded as a new Reconquista) aiming at benefiting from reconstruction contracts in Iraq. On the left, the winger seemed to look like the traditional inclination for the Latin American region, but it was heavily stressed to justify the apparent estrangement from the European scene. This player was to be more spectacular than in the past, bolder than the old-fashion affinity for the Latin American countries, the staple of all governments since the defeat of 98. Replicating the audacity of Spanish investment in the backyard of the United States, Aznar surprisingly offered a novel justification for siding with the United States in the war in Iraq and rejecting the opposition of most of his partners in Europe and the feeling of the majority of Spain's public opinion.

In a series of interviews, declarations and blunt announcements, Aznar acknowledged the presence of about 40 million Hispanics in the United States as an obligation for Spain to back Bush's strategy in Iraq. It is not clear by the statements made and the interpretations offered by the media if Aznar was engaging in a policy of obtaining the Hispanic endorsement for his alliance with Bush, or was actually designing a campaign strategy to capture part of their vote needed for the reelection in key electoral states.²¹ In any event, this novel player was up for grabs, free from transfer fees. He has been supplied by the pull immigration factor of the United States, and the push force of poverty and underdevelopment in Latin America. It is ironic that Aznar's strategy clashed with the arguments made by Samuel Huntington in his new controversial article and book opposing Hispanic immigration in starkly racist terms. The Harvard professor only

²¹ For a review of the commentaries made on Aznar visit to Miami , see Appendix (Miami Visit).

needed to add Aznar as an accomplice of the capturing of the United States by Spanish speakers.

This untapped sociological resource was the complement to the investment strategy in Latin America, reinforced with the expectation of good business in Iraq, and an increase in U.S. investment in Spain, converting the country into a solid beach head of U.S. activity in Europe. In reverse, Spain was aiming to substituting France (as suffering from the old Europe syndrome) in receiving the attention of Americans.

Back to the home front

Prudent and distrustful, in spite of his bold and aggressive moves, Aznar kept an eye close to the home front in case the opponents would try to launch an attack against the rear guard provisionally busy in functions of forward positions. On the one hand, retrenching to his original domestic obsessions, Aznar confronted the need to solidify internal territorial cohesion. Central in his political thinking, an uncompromising attitude towards regional nationalism, be it the moderate demand for increased autonomy in Catalonia, or a more radical stance for independence in the Basque Country, Aznar also reinforced his justification for a solid line of defense against outside enemies with an intolerant attitude in the domestic arena.

On the other hand, he still had to pay sharp attention to the position of Spain in Europe, counting on the support of the considerable power of the EU. Ironically, when Aznar was most in need of this support confronting difficulties in the Mediterranean, he felt abandoned, and then betrayed. Constantly under the pressure of instability, uncontrolled immigration and latent sources of Muslim fundamentalism, Spain was encountering a potential crisis.

Spain's national identity and European anchoring then deserved the attention of two inside forwards in a constructive mode, ready to come to the rescue when the homeland was in danger. Under extreme circumstances, these two key players would take the positions previously reserved to the double "pivot" (the double fight against terrorism), inserted in the middle of the defense.

While the internal nationalist challenge was barely under control thanks to the majority advantage enjoyed by the PP in Congress, and the fact that a notable sector of the PSOE has not been traditionally inclined to further experiments in this terrain, the existence of a challenge in the South became obvious after September 11. The fact that negotiations over the status of Gibraltar did not make the expected progress made the future of the relations with Morocco worrisome. The worsening of the relations between Madrid and Rabat after the death of Hassan II converted the precarious status of Ceuta and Melilla into a hot issue exploding with the crisis over the inlet of Perejil in July 2002.

The time had arrived for using the inside-midfield player specialized in European functions. However, he was missing in a sort of French inaction. In confronting Morocco's brief occupation of Perejil, pondering about the spillover effects of the recapture of the small rock, Aznar expected the unconditional endorsement of the EU and a warning against Morocco. He got the standard declarations from Brussels but French President Chirac did not want to antagonize France's historical partner in North Africa. Aznar took note, saw the irreplaceable need of the U.S. backing, received the decisive cooperation of Colin Powell in guaranteeing the return to the status quo, and he gladly

got ready to return the favor to Bush. The center midfielder was not only playing in the rear back but all over the pitch.

With no media puntas (as is the Spanish term for the accompanying guards of the solitary center forward), the wingers were left as orphans to play by themselves a twin isolated guerrilla warfare in the Americas and in the Middle East. With the defense occupied in confronting internal difficulties and unable to function constructively in Europe (as the result of the EU Constitution process has shown), the wingers could not expect precise ball centering throws from midfielders. Spain's presence in the Americas has returned to the situation of the pre-democracy times, when it was a simple foreign policy of substitution, an alternative product for action in a more favorable terrain when hostile scenarios (Europe) were banned. The result has been that the solitary center-forward who thought to be playing in the World Cup, had to struggle to help his team clinch to a middle position in the rankings, avoiding at all costs demotion to the second division.

V Conclusion

The fading

As the Spanish election was approaching and the U.S. electoral season gained strength with the Democratic primaries, Aznar executed a U.S. farewell by addressing Congress with the satisfaction of his followers and the polite congratulation of the opposition. Never mind that his audience was composed of only forty legislators and a handful of staffers and interns. He also failed to obtain a scant number of votes for a congressional medal that never came into fruition. Press reports and diplomatic leaks revealed that the Spanish government led by Aznar had contracted (for a total of US \$ 4 million) with a Washington DC lobby firm to influence the U.S. Congress in matters of interest for Spain. A norm in the case of many foreign governments, the additional problem was that among the items billed by the firm attorneys was the drafting of letters of introduction to Congress people on the qualifications of Aznar to attend his address and vote positively for the award. The Spanish opposition simultaneously grabbed the opportunity to slap him for refusing to appear in the Spanish parliament to face the controversy of the conflicting or faked reports about the existence of the weapons of mass destruction, while Blair was cornered in his own parliament and Bush resorted to blame the CIA.²²

In this climate the results of the attempt to capture the attention of U.S. Hispanics to obtain their endorsement for Spain's strategy regarding Iraq faded away. Limitations of resources to convert the traditional cultural programs into a sort of foreign assistance within the United States to encourage the social and economic development of Hispanics were in danger of back firing when expectations were raised by the new approach. Absence of empirical evidence in delivering an increase of the Hispanic vote for Bush would return the novel policy to the traditional dimensions. Seasoned commentators warned that, even worse, Aznar's strategy could be met by the ideological rejection formed by traditional inclinations of radical Democrats and the identification of the new Spanish insertion as new imperialism. The fact is that the label "Hispanic" is rejected by

²² For press impact, see Appendix (Medal).

a notable number of Hispanics who prefer to be called latinos for reasons of alleged cultural arrogance pointing towards this direction. These latent difficulties were added to recent problems encountered by customary lines of relations with Latin America, as is revealed by the lack of focus and efficiency of the Ibero-American Summits, far away from the initial enthusiasm when the aim was the foundation of a Community mirroring the British Commonwealth.

On the other side of the ambitious forward line, Spanish investments have encountered image problems by identifying them with the internal social, political and economic shortcomings of the Latin American republics, especially in the Southern Cone. Aznar's political support for Bush did not help in counteracting the aggressive complaints of populist leaders such as Argentina's Nestor Kirchner. The opposition had consistently criticized this negative change for the image of Spain while the meager or flatly non-existent economic rewards (only one company in secondary partnership with a U.S. conglomerate obtained a small reconstruction contract) for the backing in Iraq have not been sufficient to offset the political fallout. This overall panorama was on the radar screen of a future PP government without Aznar to reevaluate the general strategy, and order a retrenchment of the bold moves performed by him while in office.

In sum, two isolated figures in his strategy would remain in the pitch: the goalkeeper and the center forward, unconvincing past (a mirage created by Aznar) and the flashing future (a dream never realized). The goalie would return to be as Aznar portrays Spain's situation in 1996, but he had his vision blocked by an accumulation of backs, libero, midfielders converted into defense, and inside forwards lacking a clear mission. The star in front was hopelessly left alone waiting for a magic pass. With not too much to do in a major league for himself alone, he would have to wait for a transfer to pay for the debt incurred from the errors of a policy that turned out to be costly, contradictory and inefficient.

Central to the conclusions of this analysis, before and especially after the March 2004 debacle, is the evaluation of the impact of the crisis and decisions made by Aznar on the relative status of Spain in the European Union. Before the defeat at the booths, it was quite obvious that the constitutional disaster of Brussels in December 2003 only revealed that Aznar had converted Spain into a partner with a stronger veto power. He not only warned of that new fact, but he actually implemented it in a spectacular way. He slammed the door and left his one time powerful partners stunned and irritated and the EU in disarray. He had fulfilled his threat through the explicit declarations made by his faithful diplomats in the last stages of the IGC –Spain was not to agree on the changing of the voting procedure from the advantageous position acquired in Nice.

The cost was almost immediately high. Some concrete decisions made by the EU establishment regarding the selection of certain agencies were negative for Spain. First, there was the failure for the nomination of the sites for the ITER computer project (grabbed by France) and the food administration agency, which had been lobbied for Barcelona. Then there was the announcement of the confirmation of the reduction in the structural and regional funds with a considerable damaging effect for Spain, but this has been expected for a long time and had contributed to a loss of European enthusiasm for Aznar's calculating mind. Europe had ceased to be important, even before the dramatic series of events after September 11. Aznar had already planned a strategic shift and found it once the world was turned upside down by the Twin Towers attacks.

In the event (confirmed by pessimists and realists) that the EU would take a more intergovernmental profile after the slowing down of the constitutional project, this would have been interpreted as a partial personal triumph of governments, such as Aznar's, that professed that inclination. What was not well explained was the real and empirically detectable political benefit for Spain, a country that has at large received the positive consequences of a cohesive, supranational posture of the EU institutional framework. In this setting, small and medium powers have benefited from increasing international power and influence by inserting themselves in the overall impressive economic (and political) world power. By enlarging individual blocking power, Spain was on the way to losing considerable influence in building a necessary consensus for an efficient and credible EU.

Returning to the soccer analogies, with Spain without a World Cup to play in, eliminated in the early rounds of a particular Champions League, rejecting the consolation prize of playing the UEFA Cup, the threat of demotion from the league, earlier known "of the stars", forced the new management (the PP without Aznar) to meditate on a new course of action. The new situation also would advise the new coach (Mariano Rajoy), now on the bench, to look back to the stands and hear what the voting fans are shouting. "It's life in Spain (schools, roads, water, crime, pensions), stupid". It may appear as over stretching the soccer similarities, but coincidental as it may be, the end of the PP supremacy happened simultaneously with a series of losses for Real Madrid, the preferred team of Aznar. First, the club lost the final of the King's Cup to Real Zaragoza. Then, it was eliminated in the quarter finals of the European Champions League. Moreover, Rodríguez Zapatero confessed before the elections that he was a FC Barcelona fan. Finally, after losing a series of home matches, Real Madrid ended the season on fourth place, outpaced by FC Barcelona and Deportivo. It is no wonder that Madrid President linked his team's downfall to the consequences of the March elections.

Before the disaster, the PP was hopeful of obtaining a comfortable (although not absolute) majority, confirming the trend by which Spanish mature voters know how to distinguish between protests on foreign policy and a sound domestic management. This scheduled victory after leaving office might have had Aznar convinced of the goodness of his decision. With the new political situation after March 14, we would never be able to say if the alliance with Bush was good for Spain's future. But we know of the actual cost in European affairs and the collateral effects of the March 11 attacks.

In the pre-election setting, only speculation was possible to evaluate accurately if the confrontations over the Iraqi crisis, in the domestic Spanish scenario and in the terrain of EU-U.S. relations, were temporary and intimately linked and conditioned to the incumbent leadership (in Madrid, Washington and key European capitals). The alternative option was that they responded to a deeper chasm of ideological imprint in the Spanish national identity and the EU. Although the jury may still be out, signals given by important developments in the EU (a constitutional compromise in the making) and a reaching out by the U.S. government towards European interests and especially the new Spanish administration point in the direction that the confrontational attitude was and still is caused by a personality clash.

Post-Aznar's Reign in Spain

For over a year, readers of U.S. newspapers and magazines (from interviews in The Wall Street Journal in September 2003 to the international edition of Newsweek) might have had the wrong impression that until José María Aznar came to power in 1996 Spain was a third world country, politically situated in an international limbo, and for centuries under the wings of France. Any serious observer and especially rigorous scholars could answer that this assessment was far from the truth.

That explains the door slamming executed by the Spanish premier as a closing to the failed conference to approve the EU Constitution. Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset once said that “Spain was the problem, and Europe was the solution”. It seemed that now “Europe was the solution, and Spain was the problem”.

Never mind the Spanish president. On this side of the Atlantic, Aznar benefited for backing the U.S. foreign policy by addressing the scantily attended joint session of Congress, expecting to be awarded a medal by this high legislative body, an additional honor that never came for lack of needed votes. It is important to recall that Aznar's uncompromising support of President Bush in the Iraq war (in stark contrast with some of the most important European partners, and in opposition to an overwhelming majority of Spanish public opinion) was presented as being justified by the presence of 350 million Spanish speakers in the Americas, including 40 million in the United States. However, there is no evidence that Aznar asked any of those millions for their opinion on joining him in his alliance with Bush. Based on the reluctance of Latin American leadership in endorsing U.S. policies, an offer coming from Mr. Aznar would receive similar negative signals.

The notion that Aznar was the first Spanish leader to pay attention to Hispanics in the United States is an example of what in Spain is called “discovering America.” In the American colorful expression, it was like “been there, done that”. The only difference with previous Spanish governments is that they did not try to teach Hispanics a lesson in geography and history to remind them of their ancestral roots. Past Spanish governments also did not attempt to read their political inclinations. Common sense says that most U.S. Hispanics would choose effective social-democratic (read “liberal”) policies (free health care, education, retirement packages, etc.) instead of a conservative (republican) doctrine.

Moreover, Aznar had been advocating for an expanded justification for a trans-Atlantic policy instead of a deepening of the insertion of Spain in Europe, with the reinforcement of the relationship with Latin America, insinuating that he was a pioneer in that line of action. This is doubly misleading.

Politically, the priority given to Latin America was actually inaugurated by the Franco regime as what was called a “substitution” policy, priming a safe scenario in the absence of freedom of action in a complex, democratic Western Europe that despised the former Hitler ally. This rapprochement with Latin America was reinforced by the centrist government after the end of the Franco regime (by appointing itself as “bridge” with Europe), and spectacularly strengthened by the Social Democratic administrations of 1983-1996, after Spain became a member of the European Community. The foundation of the Ibero-American Community, lately demoted to annual summits with little substance, was the trade mark of that policy closely linked to the protection of human

rights and programs of peace making and peace keeping in Central America, while supporting transitions to democracy in the Southern Cone. Meanwhile, heavy weight officials and diplomats were assigned in Brussels to implement that vision within the EU institutions. Moreover, in terms of investment, what was sold by Aznar as a novelty nurtured by his government, was actually crafted and executed much earlier by his predecessors.

Ironically, while Blair has been engaged in an investigation over the faulty information regarding the existence of weapons of mass destruction, and Bush has promised to search for the truth over the CIA reports, Aznar remained silent in explaining his backing for the U.S. action in Iraq, claiming that he never vouched for the existence of such weapons that justified the war, occupation, and current problems. Leaving office, Aznar passed the buck to his successor, Mariano Rajoy, destined in the polls to be the next prime minister. Even when expecting to be the winner, Rajoy knew very well that the future of his party and his country rested on a solid relationship with Spain's European partners, and not in another distant location.

However, in the case of Spanish-U.S. relations, much has to be repaired. Misperceptions still survive and will remain part of the scenario in a damaged transatlantic relationship. While a considerable important sector of public opinion and elite media reacted extraordinarily positive to the sudden electoral upset in Spain, others interpreted it in a very different way.

To the ideological right, the defeat of the governing PP in Spain was a capitulation of Spanish voters to terrorism. This over simplistic diagnosis might had served as a consolation for outgoing Prime Minister Aznar and his handpicked successor Mariano Rajoy, but it badly serves the true interests of the United States.

To reduce the result of the election to the Madrid train bombings attack and to accuse the deciding voters of the victory of the PSOE of giving a blank check to the terrorists is inexact, unfair and patronizing. The vote was not a referendum on terrorism, but a choice between two political parties and two attitudes on the policy on Iraq. The Spanish political framework is more complex.

On the domestic scene, some facts need to be carefully studied:

(1) The stubborn economic arguments made by the PP for deserving reelection were counteracted by the high social cost to many labor sectors, unprotected by a highly liberalized market. Ironically, this opening of the economy was not the creation of the PP but was put in motion by the PSOE more than a decade ago. The high cost of housing and temporary jobs hurt mostly young people, who were voting for the first time.

(2) The social and political climate was exacerbated in the last four years presided by an absolute majority of the PP. The public media, especially the state TV network, was perceived as a branch not of the government, but of the governing party.

(3) The political consensus, a model a quarter of a century ago to approve the Constitution, was in shambles. Any suggestion of reforming the Constitution was met with disdain and accusations of unpatriotic disloyalty. Moreover, a Basque project to call for a referendum on independence was met by its insertion in the criminal code, a violation of political privilege and freedom of expression, which has been contested by an overwhelming number of jurists in Spain.

(4) When a serious political crisis exploded in Catalonia over the interview held by Josep Lluís Carod Rovira, the leader of the independence party Esquerra Republicana,

with representatives of the Basque ETA terrorist organization, the PP treated all Catalans as accomplices of terror, and the socialist party as dealing with assassins. As an apparent answer to this, all Catalan parties, with the exception of the PP branch in Catalonia, have doubled the number of seats in the Spanish Congress. Esquerra has not only confirmed its expectations (from a single deputy to eight) before the attacks, but has catapulted itself to be the fourth political force in Spain.

(5) The perceived arrogance displayed by the PP during the campaign contributed greatly to its fall. Its strategy was composed of a pincer in which Aznar and some of his ministers would do the dirty work, and use harsh language against the Socialists, while the candidate Rajoy would comfortably visit safe electoral sites and appear in the last minute in spectacular campaign gatherings. The selection of a rather boring personality was fatal for Aznar, who did not want to be upstaged even in retirement. Now, many in the PP are in disarray, longing for the missed opportunity of naming other personalities, who now feel vindicated.

However, on the foreign scene, the fatal mistake of the government was in the handling of the crisis that developed when its initial interpretation that the terrorist attacks were the work of ETA fell apart under the heavy evidence that they were indeed perpetrated by a branch of Islamic fundamentalism. In a frantic campaign of perceived cover-up, the Spanish government lobbied foreign correspondents in Madrid until the last minutes, forced a declaration of the UN Security Council targeting ETA, issued instructions to ambassadors and the state news agency, even while the Spanish intelligence services were confirming Islamic authorship.

New Spain

The electorate's perception oscillated from good faith to detecting manipulation and, something much worse for Spaniards, lies. That was the icing on the cake for citizens that had been waiting for evidence about the only solid reason why Aznar committed Spain to its alliance with President Bush –weapons of mass destruction.

The United States government, before and after the November reelection, was reassured of what the new Spanish administration would offer, and still is willing to share with the White House. There has been unlimited willingness of cooperation, on equal footing, in the fight against terrorism, domestic and international, in due synchronization with Spain's natural partners in the European Union. Declarations and facts show that Spain's place in the world was set to continue to be the same as it has been since the 80s. The record speaks for itself: Spain has become the 8th contributor to the UN budget; the sixth foreign investor in the world; one of leading providers of foreign assistance (by itself or within the EU, which commits more than half of all world development and humanitarian assistance). Spain has also been centrally present in NATO since it became a member, contributing to peacekeeping operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Central America, participated in the first Gulf War, and has been one of the leading providers of troops in Afghanistan.

Spain was in principle set to maintain its modest, symbolic (but highly important from the political point of view) presence in Iraq, but only first indications of the new Spanish government were that it would do so only under a mandate of the UN. In this direction were the meetings held by members of the PSOE administration and

declarations made by the new minister of Foreign Affairs. This move would have been only implemented with due backing of a stronger and more integrated European Union, re-anchored in a “new” Old Europe, from which Spain had escaped for a few months. However, the fast pace of events and the uncertainty of the U.S. attitude towards anything that might have seemed as conditional, propelled the decision of the Spanish government to elect an abrupt and strict adherence to the electoral promise. Spanish troops were recalled from Iraq, generating a visible disappointment (diplomatic term for anger) in Washington and the expressed disagreement of the previous Spanish administration. Public approval of the measure in Spain reached similar levels as during the war in opposing Spain’s siding with the United States in the Iraqi operation.

The decision and subsequent measures sent the relations between the United States and Spain to unprecedented depths. Both sides executed undiplomatic moves, exacerbated by media manipulation and partisan opportunism. As a retaliation for PSOE leader Rodríguez Zapatero’s decision to remain seated when the U.S. flag was displayed in the October 12th, 2003, national parade in Madrid, the U.S. ambassador declined to attend the following year’s event when American troops were not invited to participate. In a interview given while in Tunisia, Zapatero made remarks recommending other nations to follow the Spanish example and leave the coalition in Iraq, comments that immediately were received with animosity in Washington. In the months before the election, while the Spanish government remained scrupulously neutral of the outcome, numerous PSOE members and sympathizers, as well as a majority of the media, did not hide inclination towards a victory of John Kerry, a feeling well shared with the bulk of public opinion in Europe. However, after the November 2004 reelection, the Spanish government seemed to be identified as a special target for retaliatory disdain by the newly reelected president. Personal phone calls for congratulations remained unanswered. In contrast, frantic moves by other protagonists were set in motion, destined to either provide damage control, or, on the contrary, to add more fuel to the fire.

Coincidentally, as a result of an agenda well set with months of anticipation, the King and Queen of Spain reformed an unofficial visit to the United States to stop for a whole day just before Thanksgiving at the Bush ranch in Crawford, Texas. The occasion was interpreted as a diplomatic way to provide for a thaw of a stormy relation between the two countries. According to reputable sources, King Juan Carlos, well known for his affable and direct treatment, opened the visit with a question to President Bush, in the presence of his father: “Why are you so angry?” It was meant, obviously, at Zapatero. No immediate results were known but the tone and substance of the talks were to contribute to the lessening of the tensions.²³

The same and even more direct objective had the invitation made by Spanish Minister of Defense José Bono to former President George H. Bush Sr., while he was in the home Southern Castille region of the PSOE official. Meanwhile, however, the frequent visits of José María Aznar to the United States have contributed to insert a controversial ingredient in the delicate fabric of Spain-U.S. relations. Most observers may not find unusual that a former official pays a visit to an incumbent in office and most especially if he was heavily identified as an ally in difficult times. A victorious re-elected President Bush has as his own right to continue with a close relationship with a friend, but the

²³ For a selection of press reaction to this polemic, see Appendix (Bush).

timing of a well publicized visit to the White House was not easily interpreted by the Zapatero administration and was harshly treated by the Spanish media.

Meanwhile, in the European scene, the change of Spanish administration provided a respite for the constitutional stalemate generated when Spain's premier Aznar refused to accept the new proposed double majority voting system to substitute for the apparently more advantageous Nice Treaty reapportionment of votes that gave Spain and Poland a prominent level just below the big four European powers. Zapatero made the positive move and joined a majority accepting the new simplified system of 55% of the states and 65% of the population as conditions to pass new legislation in the Council. Spain was, in effect, back as part of a wider consensus that saw as a primary objective the approval of the Constitution, set later for the ratification by the states. This agreement became part of the contentious points for Aznar's commentaries during his public appearances in the United States, using the occasion for lambasting what he perceived was a loss of power and influence of Spain in European affairs.

In closing

Once the new EU Commission has settled in place and the other European institutions have smoothly incorporated the new members, with the approval of the Constitution in October 2004, and the referendum process has been programmed in all over Europe according individual legislation, the European Union has focused on addressing the most urgent issues to be faced in the new term. Relations with the United States is one of the most important areas. Taking into account that there are many economic items that remain to be confrontational but will always have the potential for a settlement, the overall sensitive strategic relationship will need all the attention of the leadership at both sides of the Atlantic. Washington will realize that Spain's destiny is heavily anchored in Europe and that the apparent estrangement of the last years of the Aznar administration was, from the historical point of view, an exception. Unless a catastrophic development (as a result, among other causes, of a constitutional crisis, for lack of ratification consensus) sends the EU in disarray in the course of the second term of President W. Bush the most plausible scenario is that Spain will continue to play a loyal role within the EU. Europe will find a way to compromise between a stance of unconditional alliance with the United States and a fractured attitude as a result of divisions as the one generated over the war in Iraq.

Even though the new Spanish government drastically disagrees with the U.S. strategy in Iraq, Madrid contributed with funds for the recent historic election and has pledged with training for Iraqi troops in removing antipersonnel mines, justice institutions and training of lawyers. This record was obviously present in the agenda of the discussions that took place in Brussels and other European capitals during the visit by new Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice, in preparation for the elaborate meetings of President Bush in a signal of a more coherent and frank relationship.

It is hard to predict what will be the shape of the U.S. attitude towards either a fractured Europe or a more cohesive and united EU, in the event of a hardening of the political and strategic world conditions within the context of a spillover effect of the doctrine as applied in Iraq. What is plausible in the Spanish context is that the drastic u-turn performed by Aznar in 2003 will be seen as an exception. Even taking into account

that the PP leadership will continue to disagree in several areas of foreign policy executed by the PSOE government, public opinion will continue to exert considerable pressure regarding two areas that are still perceived as detrimental for Spanish interests: a diminishment of the traditional solid presence in the European Union and too close unconditional endorsement of the policies of the United States in scenarios such as the Middle East and its wider vicinity. Lack of clear explanations (besides the ones exposed in this monograph) for a drastic exception to this rule, will render Aznar's decision a footnote in Spanish contemporary history, propelled by personal conviction.

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