

Spain: Aznar's Popular Party faces growing criticism over Iraq

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Spanish Prime Minister José Maria Aznar and his right-wing Popular Party (PP) government's claim that Iraqi weapons of mass destruction represented a military threat to Spain has been undermined by the government's own head of counterespionage forces.

The head of the Spanish secret service, Jorge Dezcallar, said he was only "inclined" to believe that Saddam Hussein's regime had obtained WMD and that he also believed that there was no link between the deposed Iraqi leader and the terrorist group Al Qaeda. In response to questions from a parliamentary committee on the control of secret funds, he admitted that Al Qaeda had made criticisms of Hussein for not respecting the principles of Islam.

Dezcallar's comments highlight the fact that the secret service and sections of the military are increasingly worried at the implications of Spain's support for Washington's war and its ever more problematic occupation of Iraq.

In a report published in *El País* in August, Spain's intelligence service CNI had ruled out Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, saying merely that it still had the capability of producing WMD.

In a comment on the report *El País* states, "The chiefs of the General Staff, however, are not a political body. Instead, they are described by law as an 'an organ of military assessment to the prime minister and the Defence Ministry.' Their role is therefore to advise the government, and not be advised by it on what to say. The document affirms without question the threat Iraq's weapons of mass destruction supposedly posed, and even lists of the quantities of chemical and biological agents as well as materials that Saddam Hussein's regime could use to make nuclear arms. It is the same argument Prime Minister José María Aznar used in his February 5 address to Congress, and the

same as that used by the United States and Britain in support of going to war. None of these governments have since been able to support the claims with hard evidence."

Dezcallar's comments contradict Aznar's repeated remarks, most notably those of February 5 in a speech to the Madrid parliament, asserting that there were links between Al Qaeda and the Iraqi president.

Aznar has so far blocked any attempt to have him address the Spanish congress and has refused to hold an inquiry into the claim that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. The PP has not commented on Dezcallar's remarks, but has made clear it will not tolerate anyone who contradicts their position that Hussein had WMD. For example, Spain's permanent representative to the United Nations, Inocencio Arias, was told to cut short his holiday and return to New York after he said that the war with Iraq was "questionable" if no WMD were found.

Arias, who carried out the Spanish government's negotiations inside the UN Security Council to win backing for the war, caused further embarrassment to Aznar when he reminded him that finding the arms was the "principal reason" for Spain's support of the war. The failure to discover arms "threw everything into doubt," he added. He later told a meeting in Santander that the US had only attacked Iraq "because it was cheaper than north Korea."

Aznar is also facing increased pressure inside parliament from the opposition Socialist Party (PSOE) to bring home the 2,000 troops already in Iraq. But he refuses to contemplate such a move because of the intimate relationship between the policies of the Bush administration and those of the PP.

Aznar seized upon the September 11 terrorist attacks in the US two years ago as justification for the PP's

own “war on terrorism.” The PP’s main election platform in the recent municipal elections was for a clampdown against the Basque separatist paramilitary ETA, which has been used to push through wider-reaching attacks on democratic rights. The so-called war on terrorism is to form a central plank of the forthcoming parliamentary election campaign of the PP, together with continuing to push through rightist economic policies similar to those championed by the Bush administration in the US and a systematic onslaught on the living standards of ordinary working people.

Spain also has its own significant interests in Iraq and throughout the Middle East, which Aznar believes are best protected through support for the US war and occupation of Iraq. In February this year, embarrassing details were leaked to the press of how in 1997 Aznar had offered to pay Baghdad in aid if it gave oil contracts to the Spanish-owned company Repsol. According to the newspaper *El Mundo*, the government was to make a series of “donations” if Repsol were given contracts for the development of the Nasiriyah oilfield. This action would have clearly gone against UN sanctions on Iraq. The amount of money was a “sum to be sent later” and the deal was never closed. One direct result of Spain’s support for the US is that Repsol has just been awarded an Iraqi oil contract by the US government of occupation.

But there are those who argue that in aligning Spain so closely with America, Aznar and the PP are missing an opportunity to establish a leading role for Spain within Europe. A July 22 editorial comment in *El País* voiced these concerns in relation to the efforts by the US to more closely involve the European powers and the United Nations in Iraq: “Russia, Germany and even France and Chile are lining up behind a new resolution, a move which they hope will reinvest the UN with some authority, speed up the holding of elections in Iraq and end the US occupation. It is all the sadder, therefore, that the Spanish government has missed an excellent opportunity to show international leadership by heading this movement, particularly in light of its two-year rotating presidency of the Security Council,” the paper said.

At the same time, there is increasing concern within sections of the ruling elite over the growing alienation of the vast majority of the population from official

politics. This alienation can only deepen as the full extent of the government’s lies and disregard for democracy in support of a criminal war become known.



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