

Spain seeks to appease Bush

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Spain's political establishment is in turmoil following the presidential victory of George W. Bush.

Since its election earlier this year, Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE) Prime Minister José Rodríguez Zapatero has veered between actions that have deeply angered Washington and abject grovelling before it. The re-election of Bush has increased greatly the pressures on the Spanish government to retreat further along the road of appeasement.

Zapatero was swept to power in March 2004 after the PSOE received the highest number of votes of any party ever in Spain. His election reflected the broad popular hostility to both the Iraq war and the lies of the previous government of José María Aznar—an outspoken supporter of both the war and America's role as a global "superpower." Zapatero earned the wrath of the Bush administration by pulling out troops from Iraq, urging other countries to do likewise and strengthening ties with Cuba.

The prime minister has used opposition to US aggression not in a principled manner to combat imperialism and militarism, but to bring about a reorientation of Spanish foreign policy and promote Spain's national interest. Zapatero adopted a policy of "First comes Europe, then our historic ties with Latin America and the Mediterranean and after that comes trans-Atlantic ties." He hoped that this would meet with support from France and Germany for a combined assertion of independent European action—and also to a big yes vote in Spain's February 2005 referendum on the European Union constitution. It expresses the desire of a section of the Spanish elite to return to Spain's traditional axis in foreign policy as a counterweight to the unilateralist ambitions of US imperialism. To this end, Zapatero re-oriented Spain towards Paris and Berlin, which had not supported the US over Iraq, insisting that "a strong Europe is the most important, historic project of the century, given what it represents for world order."

At the same time, however, Zapatero has sought to avoid unduly antagonising the Bush administration. Zapatero's withdrawal of troops from Iraq notwithstanding, his government has made it clear to Washington that it will continue to provide finance, carry out reconstruction and provide humanitarian aid there as long as Spain is not required to send in troops.

More generally, Spain continues to back up the US on the international arena. Shortly before the presidential elections, General Felix Sanz Roldan, the Spanish armed forces chief of

staff, complained that Spain's military relationship with the US was "odd" and unbalanced. "I feel we give more than we receive," he said, "and also we give at a huge political cost for whoever is in the government." Sanz Roldan pointed out that Spain has more than 2,300 personnel in Afghanistan (the second-largest force after the US), Bosnia and Kosovo (more than half of Spain's 70,000 troops have seen service there) and now in Haiti. He added that during the Iraq war, US aircraft entered Spanish airspace about 8,000 times and US warships docked in Spanish ports nearly 850 times.

Zapatero was hoping his dilemma would be diminished by a John Kerry victory in the presidential elections and a return to a more multilateralist approach in US foreign policy. In an interview with *El Pais* on October 21, he said, "After what we have been through in the recent past I think what the international order needs are more ideals and fewer lies."

He added, "Policy conducted at a given moment by an administration like President Bush's is one thing and the value upheld by US society and the main US leaders is quite another. These principles of international law, of multilateralism and relevance of the United Nations will return in a very short time."

Instead of Zapatero's hopes of normal service being resumed shortly, Bush has indicated he will use his election as a mandate to pursue more vigorously the political and economic reorganisation of the entire world in the interests of the American ruling elite—and to isolate and threaten any country that attempts to undermine US hegemony. This requires the subordination to its will of not only weak and underdeveloped countries such as Iraq, but also, and above all, its powerful imperialist rivals in Europe.

Zapatero was one of the first world leaders to make a congratulatory call to Bush. In his telegram he wrote, "I and my government have a firm intention of collaborating with you and your administration with the aim of intensifying relations of friendship and cooperation." Bush waited two weeks before replying to the telegram and, to rub salt into the wound, he invited Aznar as his first foreign visitor for a 40-minute private meeting in the White House.

In response, the Spanish government is rushing to offer its services and pledges of loyalty to US imperialism. Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos has reminded Bush, "Today, with the exception of Great Britain, among the 25 member

states of the European Union, there is no state or government that can bring as much to the US as Spain.... Spain can provide the most to the US in international policies...especially the added value we can give in Latin America and the Middle East.”

He promised, “We are going to give this administration results. In Latin America, we can deliver more than the previous government. We have tremendous capability in the Muslim world. We’ll get results.”

This grovelling was acknowledged. Moratinos was granted a call to national security advisor and then nominee for secretary of state Condoleezza Rice, and Defence Minister José Bono had a conversation with George Bush senior. The King and Queen of Spain have also been invited to dine at Bush’s ranch in Texas next week, after he found out they were visiting Seattle.

At the same time, the heat is being turned up on Zapatero. Aznar refused to tell the prime minister what he discussed with Bush, but warned him to “reverse his imprudent foreign policy.” Mariano Rajoy, leader of Aznar’s Popular Party (PP), said Zapatero should “stop joking with a country that is the world’s only superpower.”

The conservative *ABC* daily poured scorn on Zapatero, Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos and Defence Minister José Bono, saying they “have even supplanted illustrious names like Schröder, Joschka Fischer [German foreign minister], Jacques Chirac and Michel Barnier [French foreign minister] on the list of characters who cause most irritation on the other side of the Atlantic.”

The paper criticised Zapatero’s repeatedly expressed support for John Kerry as “a rashness that could cost us dearly.”

Defence analysts at Real Instituto Elcano, Spain’s most influential foreign policy institute, have predicted that the US will not transfer its Sixth Fleet headquarters from Italy to its naval base at Rota on Spain’s Atlantic coast as had been hoped. Nor will it fulfill its promise of maintenance work to Izar, Spain’s state-owned shipyards that have witnessed violent riots by workers in response to plans to restructure the company.

One analyst said, “This was to be the salvation of Izar. Thousands of jobs were at stake.... The Americans won’t leave Rota; it is still important for them to have a naval base at the entrance to the Strait of Gibraltar, but we are no longer regarded as a strategic ally, and this is a disaster for Spain.” The institute also believes Israel cancelled its contracts with Izar to build frigates under pressure from the Bush administration and that Washington might relax its restraint on Morocco, which claims the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in North Africa.

Zapatero still harbours hopes of being useful to the US, but this does not signal that he will abandon his efforts to build alliances in Europe. He knows that without such alliances, neither Spain nor any European power can hope to defend its interests against Washington. And his overtures have not fallen on deaf ears. The first positive reaction he received was from

German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. Meeting in what they described as an “impeccable atmosphere of collaboration,” the two leaders agreed further cooperation on law and order and defence issues and reaffirmed their joint approach in international affairs. *Der Spiegel* magazine quoted Zapatero as saying Germany must become again the “powerhouse” of a Europe that “must believe that it will become the world’s leading economic and political power within the next 20 years.”

He insisted it is Washington’s responsibility to change its attitude to its European allies saying, “We demand honesty and respect of our principles and ideals.”

El Pais, the Spanish daily closest to the PSOE, expressed most clearly the dilemma facing Zapatero and explained the course he is attempting to navigate. It warned him that Bush’s “unequivocal mandate of international strength” means he “must accommodate the new reality, even though the result isn’t what we hoped for.”

But it then goes on to say that either Bush will take advantage of “a golden opportunity to be the unifying president he has promised to be—a promise he made four years ago, but did not fulfill”—an alternative reflecting little other than wishful thinking—or his re-election “might spur the Europeans, or at least some of them, to accept the fact that they need to seek (and to pay for) their own military autonomy if they are able to take action on their own and to avoid being dragged into crises they do not want.”

Calls for a more aggressive development of European militarism show a belated recognition that America’s drive for hegemony poses a threat to the political, economic and strategic interests of the European ruling elite. It threatens a direct and open conflict, potentially violent, between the major imperialist powers.

The PSOE’s perspective is to advocate an alliance of the European bourgeoisie to strengthen its hand against the US and to carry through its own colonialist ambitions. This never offered a viable alternative to the Spanish and European working class for combating US militarism and hegemony. Rather, the contest that has developed between the US and Spain will take place at the expense of the working class, which will pay for the increased military spending and the drive to compete on the economic front with speed-ups, job cuts and tax hikes—and inevitably, as militarism develops, in human lives lost in both wars of conquest and the terror attacks such as those on March 11 that they engender.



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