

Spain: Madrid Commission confirms conspiracy of lies used to justify Iraq War

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Evidence presented to the commission investigating the train bombings on March 11 in Madrid in which 191 people died and 1,700 others were injured confirms that a conspiracy of lies was used to justify the Iraq war and deceive the Spanish people.

The evidence emerged when current Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero testified at the Spanish Congressional Commission of Inquiry into the Madrid bombings. Zapatero confirmed allegations first published in the Spanish daily *El Pais* on December 13 that the former Popular Party (PP) government led by José María Aznar ordered the destruction of computer records dealing with the key period between the Madrid train bombings and the general election held three days later that it lost to Zapatero's Socialist Workers Party (PSOE). *El Pais* reported that a specialist computer company was paid \$12,000 to erase the computer records, including back-up security copies.

Zapatero confirmed the allegations during questioning at the inquiry, "In the prime minister's office we did not have a single document or any data on computer because the whole cabinet of the previous government carried out a massive erasure."

"That means we have nothing about what happened, information that might have been received, meetings or decisions that were taken from March 11 until March 14," he added.

Since then, it has emerged that Aznar and his cabinet office in fact erased all records covering their eight years of government. According to the *New York Times*, a Spanish official said every file had been wiped out on the hundreds of computers at the presidential complex, known as the Moncloa Palace. "Not a single trace of any files was left behind," the official said. "Zero, nothing."

Knowledge that the files were destroyed only came to light because the commission had requested the minutes of Aznar's Cabinet Office crisis meetings on the day of

the bombings. Officials from Zapatero's government could not produce them, nor any other document of the time, including conversations held by Aznar with the heads of the Spanish media, foreign envoys, what reports he received or what instructions he gave.

It means none of Aznar's declarations earlier this month to the commission can be proved or disproved. None of his statements regarding crisis meetings he held or measures taken by his government following the bombings can be verified.

The only conclusion that can be drawn is that Aznar and his government not only lied about what they knew about the authorship of the Madrid bombings, but that they also systematically lied about the illegal war in Iraq and rushed to destroy their records after their surprise election defeat by the PSOE on March 14 to hide the truth.

The election vote revealed a broad and intense popular hostility to both the war and the government lies that accompanied it, particularly Aznar's unsubstantiated claims that the Basque separatist group ETA was responsible for the Madrid atrocity. The PP wanted ETA blamed because Aznar rightly feared that revelations of an Al Qaeda connection would become a focus for the overwhelming opposition to the government's support for the war in Iraq. According to opinion polls, 90 percent of the Spanish people were opposed to the war and millions had demonstrated against it in 2003.

At the commission, Zapatero confirmed previous testimony from the intelligence services and police that within hours of the attack officials had concluded the "sole responsibility" for the Madrid bombings rested with Islamic terrorists and not ETA. First, a tape of verses from the Koran was found in a van near the station where the trains started their journey. Then it was discovered that the explosive used to make the bombs was Goma-2 and not titadyne, the material favoured by ETA.

He explained, "This was the decisive information,

evidence; that from that moment there was never an ETA line of investigation.”

The bombers also issued a video on the night before the election, Zapatero added, saying the attack was Al Qaeda’s revenge for Spain sending troops to Iraq and Afghanistan. He accused the Aznar government of carrying out a “massive campaign of deception” by blaming ETA for the bombings and of still “sowing confusion” by repeating the claims ever since.

In the hours after the bombings, as evidence mounted that implicated Al Qaeda, the conviction grew among broad masses of Spaniards that Aznar’s support for the US invasion had made Spain a terrorist target and politically implicated the government in the tragic loss of life in Madrid.

On the eve of the election angry protests against the PP escalated with some 5,000 people gathering outside its headquarters in Madrid, shouting, “Our dead, your war!” In the Basque city of Bilbao, 8,000 protested. Rumours grew that the PP was considering canceling the election and planning a coup d’etat. To this day the PP claims it was itself the victim of a left-wing putsch and refuses to accept the result of the election.

The March events threatened Spanish capitalism with one of the gravest crises to its rule since the death of General Franco and the “transition to democracy”. It was imperative to neuter the mass movement and restabilise political relations. That task fell to the PSOE. It had been brought to power on the back of a mass anti-war movement, but its principal aim was to cripple that movement, bring it under control and—if possible—to re-legitimise the PP.

After his election Zapatero met the immediate demand of the Spanish people to withdraw troops from Iraq. He told the commission, “I withdrew the troops from Iraq because I always said the war was illegal and because the majority of the citizens clearly and resoundingly rejected it”. Zapatero said descriptions of the troop pullout as an appeasement of terrorists and of the Spanish people as cowards, were “brutal and unacceptable.”

However, a central demand of the antiwar movement was for Aznar and the PP leadership to be prosecuted for war crimes. Instead, Zapatero held out a hand of friendship to his defeated opponents by offering them “collaboration in the affairs of the state.” He set up the commission to investigate an alleged “breakdown in communications” between branches of the police and security services that allowed the bombers to “slip through the net”, rather than exposing Aznar’s crimes.

Zapatero’s performance at the commission was conducted in a similar vein. In his opening statement he had made no mention of the destruction of the cabinet office records even though the PSOE must have known about it from day one of their move into the Moncloa Palace. Only under questioning did he speak about it.

Zapatero has said that his government has “no intention to ask for responsibilities” for the destruction of government records. The PP should forget its own political partisanship, he added, and unite in a cross-party pact against international terrorism to which everything else has to be sacrificed and which should become a model for Europe and the world.

Zapatero continued, “My government wants to create, put forward and support a major agreement against international terrorism with the political forces represented in parliament”—one similar to the 2000 Anti-terrorism Pact against ETA that the PSOE proposed and Aznar’s government accepted and implemented. Whilst the pact was ostensibly aimed at clamping down on ETA, it sanctioned the suppression of civil liberties and an extension of police powers.

El Pais reports that Zapatero believes the PP has been suffering from “political frustration” over the last few weeks which he puts down to Aznar’s appearance at the commission, Foreign Minister Moratino’s accusation that Aznar had supported an attempted coup in Venezuela and the PSOE decision to reform the Judiciary Law. It is “a feverish outburst that will pass,” he added.

Zapatero justified minimising the importance of the sharpening political climate with the following words: “The transit from government to the opposition is very difficult for a party that has ruled for a long time”.

Meanwhile, Aznar and his henchmen who have been involved in a criminal conspiracy to destroy official records relating to the aftermath of the biggest outrage in Spain in recent history—the “war on terror” and invasion of Iraq—in a way that resembles the methods of the fascist Franco years and have been allowed to get away with it.



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