

# Stalinist Podemos minister pledges to keep US military bases in Spain

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Alberto Garzón, consumer affairs minister for the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government and general coordinator of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE)-led United Left, has welcomed Joe Biden's election as US president. On this basis, he pledged to keep US military bases in Spain.

Last Sunday, in a television interview in La Sexta's programme *El Objetivo*, Garzón hailed Biden's election as "good news." Donald Trump's defeat, he said, was a loss for "the far-right of the whole world," adding: "People committed to freedom have voted en masse for the Democratic candidate who represents a very diverse space, who raises hopes around the world because he is something different from Trump."

After promoting Biden—who as vice president of the previous Democratic administration bailed out Wall Street at the expense of the working class, waged war in Iraq and Afghanistan, launched new wars in Libya and Syria, and orchestrated coups and drone murders around the world—Garzón then went on to defend the renewal of Spain's military agreement with the US.

He endorsed the agreement that regulates the presence of the US military bases of Rota (Cadiz) and Moron de la Frontera (Seville) in the southern region of Andalusia. He used the cynical argument that "from the labor point of view, it creates a large number of jobs and this is the first thing that has to be preserved."

Garzón was referring to the estimated 500 civilian jobs, and a few thousand more indirect ones, involved in the bases. He did not mention that these two bases played a key role in US-led wars in the past three decades in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria that led to the deaths of millions in the Middle East, North Africa and the Balkans.

Garzón's comments were a calculated signal to Washington. Days after the interview, the Spanish government announced it would grant a one-year extension to a bilateral defence agreement with the United States that expires on May 21, 2021. This would give an incoming Biden administration time to organise new geopolitical guidelines and renegotiate the defence agreement with

Spain.

The military bases are an important asset for Madrid in trade and military negotiations with Washington. The PSOE-Podemos government hopes to use US military presence in Spain to request lower US tariffs on Spanish products. Last year, the Trump Administration imposed 25 percent tariffs on Spanish agricultural products such as olive oil, wine and cheese, whose exports to the US total around €800 million.

More importantly, it is a bargaining chip for a greater Spanish presence in South America. Diplomatic sources told *El País*: "there is some leeway [with the renewal of the agreement] on a few issues, like the sanctions imposed on Spanish entrepreneurs in connection with Title IV of the Helms-Burton Act [and] Latin America policy, particularly with regard to Cuba and Venezuela."

The bases are of key strategic importance to Washington. In 2011, Washington secured with the previous PSOE-led government an eight-year extension to the Agreement on Defence that allowed the deployment of four Arleigh Burke-class destroyers, 1,200 soldiers and 100 civilians. In 2017, two US warships steamed from Spain to the eastern Mediterranean to fire 59 Tomahawk missiles at Syria.

At the end of 2019, the PSOE-Podemos government accepted that more modern US warships would replace these US destroyers. They are to arrive next year. They are part of the Missile Defence System, which forms an essential component of the Pentagon's plans for waging offensive nuclear war against Russia and China: this system would aim to shoot down whatever missiles Russia and China fired back at the United States or Europe after a US nuclear first strike.

The *Washington Post* has named Rota as a candidate to house the headquarters of USAFRICOM, the United States Africa Command.

While Garzón was defending Spain's imperialist interests with the US on television from Madrid, his government counterpart, Spanish Deputy Prime Minister and Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias was attending the inauguration of Luis Arce of Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) in Bolivia at the

behest of Spain's major corporations and banks.

The Spanish ruling class banked on Iglesias' "left populist" ties in the region. Travelling with Spanish King Philip VI with a large delegation to welcome the MAS government in Bolivia, Iglesias held closed meetings with candidates for the presidency of Peru and Ecuador, Verónica Mendoza and Andrés Arauz, and Argentine president Alberto Fernández.

While most of the pseudo-left groups orbiting the Podemos-United Left alliance remained silent on Garzón's comments and the imperialist foreign policy trip of Iglesias, the Morenoite Workers' Revolutionary Current (CRT) expressed concern at how Podemos is rapidly exposing itself.

Its article published in *Izquierda Diario* stated: "Garzón's replies show up to what point IU [United Left] and the PCE are subordinated to the PSOE and to positions on 'order' and 'responsibility of state' in order to get a seat in the government. IU and the PCE have historically made rhetorical points against military bases and NATO. To be consistent in this central anti-imperialist question (against US and Spanish imperialism) would mean going much further than the 'politics of gestures' they have had in recent years. But what happened with Garzón is a qualitative leap. The integration is such that the IU and Podemos ministers have become true defenders of the agenda of Spanish imperialist capitalism."

It concluded with an appeal to members of the Stalinist PCE machine to "ask themselves how is it possible to talk about 'communism' while their leaders, such as Alberto Garzón or [Labour Minister] Yolanda Díaz, are ministers of a neoliberal and imperialist government with the PSOE."

The pro-imperialist role of Podemos and the PCE flows from their history and anti-Trotskyist programme, and the middle-class interests that they defend. These are state parties that attack workers' living standards, support wars and coups, attack democratic rights and block working class opposition to the bourgeoisie's fascistic agenda. The CRT's appeal to the PCE underscores that the CRT is itself a barely disguised wing of the United Left and of Podemos.

In truth, the Stalinist politics of the PCE and Podemos have for decades been inseparable from their support for Spanish imperialism and, in the last four decades, for the PSOE.

Under the 1953 Madrid Pacts, agreed with the fascist dictator General Francisco Franco, four US military bases were built in Spain. In exchange, the Franco dictatorship received economic and military aid, and de-facto international rehabilitation after years of isolation following the Second World War, when Franco tacitly backed Nazi Germany after having received aid from Hitler in the

Spanish Civil War. The Franco regime was integrated into the Western defence system aimed at the Soviet Union, though without formally being accepted into the NATO alliance.

Three years later, in 1956, the PCE called for a "National Reconciliation" with Spanish capitalism's "modern" sector, based on a perspective of establishing a capitalist parliamentary regime. The PCE called for the fictitious "peaceful coexistence" and "neutrality" between Spanish imperialism and the Soviet Union, while not calling for the end of US military bases.

In 1975, according to recently-declassified CIA documents, PCE leader Santiago Carrillo spoke to a *Time* magazine correspondent, who was apparently functioning as a US intelligence asset. Carrillo, who was infamous for his implication in Soviet intelligence agents' murder of revolutionaries in Spain during the Civil War, told him that "Americans can stay as long as the Russians keep troops in Czechoslovakia."

In 1976, as the PCE suppressed the largest strike wave since the 1930s against the Franco regime, Carrillo said he was against "all foreign bases, both American ones in capitalist countries and Russian ones in socialist countries." For now, he added, the PCE "would accept the American bases in Spain."

Washington welcomed Carrillo for an 11-day visit the following year. He spoke at Yale, Harvard and John Hopkins and the Council on Foreign Relations in New York. The *New York Times* wrote: "Chatting informally at a dinner Saturday with politicians, businessmen and journalists with connections to the United States, Mr. Carrillo said half-jokingly that he was going to the United States 'to sell merchandise'—namely, his novel brand of Communism."

Since then, the PCE and since 2014 Podemos have aligned themselves ever more closely with NATO wars in the Middle East in Afghanistan and Libya, Spanish weapons sales to Saudi Arabia in its war against Yemen, and Spain's membership in NATO. Former chief of the Armed Forces General Staff General Julio Rodríguez, who led Spanish participation in the 2011 NATO war in Libya that left 30,000 dead, is a leading Podemos member.



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