

Spain's PSOE-Podemos government denounces migrants as “hybrid threat”

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Spain's PSOE (Socialist Party)-Podemos government has demanded that NATO consider migration, as well as food insecurity and terrorism, to be “hybrid threats.” This reference to NATO denunciations of Russian “hybrid warfare” before the war in Ukraine comes as Madrid prepares to host the 2022 NATO summit from June 28–30.

PSOE Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares told Reuters the Spanish government intends to push for the inclusion of these “nonmilitary” threats into NATO’s “Strategic Concept” document, the alliance’s new policy roadmap for the next decade. The document, to be drafted at the conference, will lay out NATO’s “mission” amid the war in Ukraine and the admission of new members such as Sweden and Finland.

NATO must also strengthen its “southern flank”—i.e., the Sahel and Maghreb—Albares told Reuters, even as the military alliance funnels billions of dollars worth of weapons and military vehicles to Ukraine to wage NATO’s proxy war against Russia.

“We want it to be recognised,” Albares stated, “that there are also serious threats coming from the southern flank. Terrorism, cybersecurity, the political use of energy resources and irregular migration affect our sovereignty.” The inclusion of these “hybrid threats” in the NATO strategic document, as well as an explicit reference to the “southern flank,” would have a “deterrent” effect, Albares claimed.

The PSOE-Podemos government’s characterisation of migration as a “hybrid threat” is not only a declaration of its intent to launch a brutal crackdown on refugees and asylum seekers. Madrid means to instrumentalise the arrival of a few thousand refugees a year at its borders to push for neo-colonial wars and interventions in these resource-rich regions of North and sub-Saharan Africa.

“Nobody should doubt that these hybrid threats could be used to challenge our territorial integrity and our sovereignty,” Albares continued. “We don’t have to do anything new; we just have to take into account that a series of threats can come from the southern flank that at any moment could require a *defensive reaction from NATO exactly like what we’re seeing on the eastern flank* [emphasis added].”

This is nothing less than a call for NATO to turn the Maghreb and Sahel into a new Ukraine, asserting its interests in this region via proxy wars or even direct military intervention.

If migration were to be acknowledged as a strategic, “hybrid” threat, several questions are raised. Would the arrival of refugees on the southern borders of the NATO bloc constitute an “attack” on the alliance? Would this trigger Article 5 of NATO’s treaty, obliging all 30 member states to come to Spain’s “defence” by waging war on impoverished African or Middle Eastern states?

Which country would be considered the aggressor? The one from which the majority of migrants are coming? Or any country that refugees pass through on their way to Europe, and which fails to apprehend them? Each of these scenarios risks the outbreak of large-scale war.

In this regard, it is significant that Albares framed his reactionary demands as being a part of NATO’s ongoing conflict with Russia, explaining that interventions in the Sahel and Maghreb would be necessary to combat the “growing Russian influence” in the region. Referring to the deployment of Russian mercenaries from the Wagner Group in Mali, he stated: “The presence of Russia [in Mali] doesn’t help anything, doesn’t help to advance democracy, to stabilise, at all.”

The statements made by Albares recall events last autumn. In October and November, as a few thousand refugees from Iraq, Syria, Yemen and other war zones tried to enter the European Union from Belarus, European politicians and media denounced Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko for supposedly using refugees and migrants as a weapon in a “hybrid war.” Their aim was to ramp up tensions with Belarus, a Russian ally, as part of their campaign to militarily encircle and ultimately wage war on Russia.

Spain’s calls for a strategic focus on the “southern flank” come amid growing Spanish-Algerian tensions triggered by the Algerian-Moroccan conflict over the Western Sahara.

Algerian-Spanish relations have been strained since PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez recognised Morocco’s claim to the Western Sahara in mid-March. The Western Sahara is a sparsely inhabited former Spanish colonial possession on Morocco’s southwestern border, with considerable mineral and phosphate reserves. Rabat has long sought to bring it under Moroccan administration as an “autonomous region.”

After Spain ended its long-standing neutrality in this dispute, Algeria, which has backed the pro-Sahrawi independence Polisario Front, withdrew its ambassador from Madrid. On June 8, reports then emerged that Algiers had officially ended its 20-year treaty of friendship with Spain, although the Algerian government later denied the report.

The Spanish government fears that Algeria, which provided 40 percent of Spain’s natural gas imports in 2021, may now cut energy supplies to the country. This comes as the European Union and NATO campaign for an energy embargo against Russia, the EU’s major oil and gas supplier, amid the war in Ukraine.

Spain’s economy minister and first deputy prime minister, Nadia Calviño, tried to blame Madrid’s deteriorating relations with Algeria on Russia, telling Catalunya Radio she’d “already seen that Algeria was more and more aligned with Russia. [The decision] did not surprise me that much. The important thing is for the EU to respond with unity and determination.”

The call for refugees to be considered a type of “hybrid” warfare is a significant escalation of Madrid’s vicious anti-migrant campaign, which it has adopted directly from the programme of the far-right Vox

party.

In a statement on May 18, Vox declared: “The Moroccan government continues to attack Spain through its hostile actions against the autonomous cities [Spain’s North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla].” Referring to migrants on the Spanish-Moroccan borders as “hybrid warfare,” Vox continued: “the aggression suffered by Spain is not finding any response in the face of the hostilities of Morocco.”

Vox’s comments themselves echo those made by Prime Minister Sánchez last May. As several thousand Moroccan migrants tried to cross over into Ceuta, Sánchez had all but accused the Moroccan government of waging war on Spain. Rabat, which had reportedly opened its side of the border in retaliation for Spain’s earlier position on the Western Sahara, had “used immigration,” Sánchez stated, “due to disagreements in foreign policy.”

Sánchez declared that this was “inadmissible” and akin to “attacking borders.”

The PSOE-Podemos government already has the blood of thousands of refugees on its hands. Blocking off “legal” routes to enter Spain, it has forced desperate migrants to make perilous sea journeys in unsafe or makeshift vessels, in which thousands have drowned. On Friday, dozens of African migrants were killed and hundreds injured as they tried to climb the border fence between Morocco and Melilla.

The PSOE-Podemos government of warmongers has fully signed itself up to NATO’s war against Russia and is campaigning for the escalation of imperialist conflict abroad, all while it cracks down on refugees at its borders and workers’ opposition at home. The decisive issue is to build an anti-war movement in the working class, in irreconcilable opposition to pseudo-left parties like Podemos, defending refugees and migrants as part of a struggle for socialism in Spain and internationally.



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