

# Spain sends warships to Cyprus after Trump threatens to cut off US trade unless Madrid joins Iran war

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6 March 2026

*The World Socialist Web Site is holding an emergency global webinar this Sunday, March 8, at 3:00 p.m. EDT to explain the origins of the US imperialist war against Iran, the social forces driving it and the strategy required to stop it. We urge all our readers to register to attend.*

Workers and youth cannot halt the US-Israeli war of aggression against Iran and the escalating war across the Middle East by relying on the military and diplomatic initiatives of the European powers. This reality was starkly illustrated by the unprincipled and cowardly zig zags of Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE)-Sumar government.

This week, after the PSOE-Sumar government refused to allow US-Spanish military bases of Rota and Moron to continue being used to bomb Iran, US President Donald Trump threatened to sever all US trade with Spain.

Trump delivered this threat during a meeting in the Oval Office with German Chancellor Friedrich Merz. Speaking to reporters, Trump denounced Madrid: "Some European nations have been helpful and some haven't, and I'm very surprised," Trump said. "Germany's been great [...] Others have been very good. [...] But some of the Europeans, like Spain has been terrible." He then instructed his Treasury Secretary to sever economic relations with Spain. "I told Scott [Bessent] to cut off all dealings with Spain."

Trump's statements revealed the collapse of relations between US and European imperialism that is intensifying even as the European powers collaborate with Trump in his war against Iran.

The next day, speaking from the Moncloa Palace, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez declared that "the Spanish government can be summed up in four words: No to war." (*No a la guerra.*) This was the main slogan of mass protests that erupted across Spain against the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq. Washington, he said, "dragged us" into the Iraq war, which unleashed "the greatest wave of insecurity" in Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall. The invasion, justified by false claims that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction, produced "greater insecurity, terrorism and economic instability."

Sánchez sought to portray himself as speaking for the overwhelming opposition to war in the European, American and international working class. He declared, "We are not alone; the government stands with whom it must stand—with the values of the Constitution, of the EU, with the UN Charter, with peace. Millions of people around the world stand for peace and prosperity."

Yesterday, however, Madrid suddenly moved to reassure Washington that Spain remains a reliable ally committed to military operations targeting Iran.

The government dispatched the frigate *Cristóbal Colón* to the eastern Mediterranean to "offer protection and aerial defence," in the words of the Defence Ministry. The 481 foot warship, the most technologically advanced vessel in the Spanish navy and displacing 6,390 tonnes, is equipped with advanced missile defence systems, including 64 RIM 162 Evolved Sea Sparrow missiles capable of intercepting retaliatory drone and cruise missile strikes from Iran. Operating near Cyprus, it will be positioned to counter Iranian and Hezbollah strikes directed at US and British bases on the island or at Israel, and free up US military resources directly for bombing Iran.

Underlying the zig zags in the PSOE-Sumar government are the imperialist interests of the Spanish bourgeoisie that it represents. On the one hand, it does not feel itself or Spain's European allies militarily strong enough to risk a clash with Washington and seeks to accommodate to US policy. On the other, it fears the deep-seated opposition in the working class to Trump and to imperialist war and seeks to cynically posture as an opponent of the war.

At every decisive juncture, however, its anti-war pretenses are exposed as political frauds aiming to dupe the workers while the Spanish and European ruling classes pursue their own predatory interests.

Around 63 percent of Spaniards believe Trump represents a risk to world peace, and 66 percent view him as a danger for Spain. Some 71 percent say his actions violate international law and the UN Charter, while roughly 61.5 percent believe his policies threaten global peace, and 65 percent describe his foreign policy as driven by "recolonisation and resource

predation.” Concern about the widening Middle East war is also very high, with over 80 percent of Spaniards expressing anxiety about the war.

Sánchez is acutely aware that a new Middle East war threatens to trigger eruptions of mass opposition, like the protests across Spain against the invasion of Iraq in 2003. At that time, the PSOE and the Stalinist United Left channeled anti-war protests behind the election of a PSOE government in 2004. Once in office, the PSOE quickly abandoned its anti-war posturing, while withdrawing Spanish troops from Iraq, it increased deployments to Afghanistan, sent “peacekeeping” forces to Lebanon and later participated in the 2011 NATO war for regime change in Libya.

Today, the PSOE-Sumar government, which has been discredited by its policies of war and austerity over several years in office, is terrified above all of an uncontrollable eruption of working class opposition to its own policies.

Sánchez’s government has overseen a massive expansion of Spain’s military and deeper integration into NATO’s war planning, including the sending of billions of euros of weapons and tanks to the far-right Ukrainian regime in NATO’s war against Russia. Total military spending stood at around €30 billion in 2018 when Sánchez came to office, rose to roughly €55 billion by 2024 and exceeded €66 billion in 2025, the largest surge since the end of the Franco dictatorship. It reflects Spain’s integration into NATO, preparations for great-power conflict and the rearmament drive unfolding across Europe.

Madrid responded to mass protests against the Gaza genocide by making limited criticisms of Israel. In May 2024 it formally recognised the non-existent State of Palestine. The government also supported international legal proceedings against Israel at the International Court of Justice, thought it made clear it was not adhering to the case itself, adopting a “neutral” position. It stressed that “this is not against Israel” and explicitly refused to call Israeli actions a genocide.

During the first year and a half of the NATO-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza, Sánchez’s government continued selling and purchasing weapons from Israel and allowing Spanish ports to ship weapons to the Israeli military. This policy continued at the outbreak of the Iran war.

Sánchez let Spanish territory serve as a launch pad for the initial US attack on Iran. US aircraft involved in the strikes flew from bases at Rota and Morón—long employed in US wars against Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and in support of Israel’s assault on Gaza. *El País* reported that two US destroyers stationed at Rota, the USS Roosevelt and the USS Bulkeley, joined in the operation after moving to the eastern Mediterranean to reinforce Israel’s air defence against Iranian retaliation. US refueling aircraft operating from Spanish bases also reportedly supported long-range strike missions.

The bankruptcy of attempts to oppose the Iran war through the capitalist establishment is further illustrated by the nationalist response of the pseudo-left Podemos party. It seeks

to pressure Sánchez and the Spanish bourgeoisie to pursue a more aggressive, independent military policy.

Former Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias expressed this perspective bluntly on social media, declaring that Trump’s threat “should be answered as follows: We leave NATO, take your 8,000 soldiers and all the military equipment with you. Europe must have its own defence system and its own nuclear deterrence system. That should be the role of France in the Union.”

Iglesias’ call for a European nuclear deterrent led by France aligns with French President Emmanuel Macron’s push for a major expansion of France’s nuclear arsenal and efforts to anchor it more deeply within the EU, including nuclear coordination with Germany. This provides no basis for opposing the war on Iran. Indeed, it is public knowledge that Macron tries to coordinate his Iran policy with Trump, and Macron has now deployed an aircraft carrier to join in the war in the Middle East.

The policy of European “strategic autonomy,” that is, building a vast military machine to rival that of Washington, itself entails waging class war against the workers at home. It would require transferring gigantic sums from social to military budgets, strengthening the military-police machine and using it to repress working class opposition.

This is reflected in Podemos’ own record in government from 2020 to 2023. It participated in a coalition government with the PSOE that imposed austerity and funneled billions of euros in European Union COVID bailout funds to the banks and big business. While workers saw their living standards eroded by surging inflation, while the government backed NATO’s war against Russia in Ukraine and supported the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

At home, Podemos was hostile to workers’ struggles, sending riot police to attack striking metalworkers in Cádiz and mobilising tens of thousands of cops against a 2022 nationwide truckers’ strike.

Any orientation to European imperialism—whether in Madrid, Paris or Berlin—is reactionary. The only progressive alternative lies in building an independent, international and socialist movement of the working class against the war on Iran. This requires the systematic development of opposition in the working class to NATO and the European powers’ plans for military rearmament and interventions in the Middle East, as well as the organisation of meetings, protests and strikes against imperialist war.



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