

Madrid Forum seeks to strengthen Vox's hand amid Ceuta fallout

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Kevin Roberts, the president of the Heritage Foundation, delivered one of the principal addresses to the fifth regional meeting of the Madrid Forum, held in Santiago, Chile September 3. The speech was devoted overwhelmingly to familiar far right tropes: the defense of “the West,” the denunciation of “socialists, atheists, woke fanatics, and elitists,” the invocation of a “3,000-year heritage passed down to all of our diverse nations from Rome, Athens and Jerusalem.” Its political center of gravity, however, was a single passage concerning the Spanish enclave of Ceuta, on the North African coast.

“We are seeing such a physical attack right now in the invasion of the Spanish city Ceuta,” Roberts declared on the same day that Pedro Sánchez, the Prime Minister of Spain and Secretary-General of the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE), was summoned by Congress to testify on the crisis.

“We must all at this moment, all, including the United States, stand with the people of Spain in this hour. And we must call this problem what it is. An invasion once again by Morocco, who is using people as pawns for its own aim.” He further attacked Sánchez for criticizing the Spanish king: “the first time this has been done in the post-Franco era,” Roberts noted, in a revealing tribute to the Generalissimo Franco.

The statement has been widely reported, in the Spanish and international press, as an expression of solidarity with Spain against Moroccan pressure, a gesture of “standing with the Spanish” at a moment of crisis. This is an inversion of the truth. Roberts’ speech was not a defense of the Spanish people, against the tens of thousands of impoverished Moroccan workers and youth who crossed into Ceuta at the end of July and were, for the most part, expelled back within days. It is the latest maneuver in a coordinated campaign by the most reactionary sections of the American and European bourgeoisie to exploit the Ceuta crisis as a weapon against the working class—in Spain, in Morocco and internationally—and to consolidate the fascist networks that gathered in Santiago.

The Madrid Forum is the international alliance of far-right parties and think tanks founded in 2020 by Spain’s Vox party and its intellectual arm, the Fundación Disenso. It was constructed, from its inception, in direct coordination with the American far right and the Trump wing of the Republican Party. That year, the Madrid Charter was drafted by the Fundación Disenso after Santiago Abascal, the president of Vox, toured the United States to meet the Heritage Foundation, the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the American Conservative Union. Abascal attended the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) addressed by Donald Trump, where he also met Eduardo Bolsonaro, son of the then-Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro and a signatory to the Madrid Charter.

The Heritage Foundation occupies a distinctive place in this architecture, functioning as the organizational vehicle through which the Trump administration was staffed, most conspicuously through Project 2025, the program for the authoritarian transformation of the American state. Roberts, who became Heritage’s president in 2021, has described

the foundation’s role as “institutionalizing Trumpism.” His colleague Mike Gonzalez, a senior Heritage fellow, was one of the founding signatories of the Madrid Forum and sits on the Fundación Disenso’s international advisory board.

The Santiago gathering made the character of this network unmistakable. Alongside Roberts, the US was represented by Sarah Rogers, the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy, and Brandon Judd, the US ambassador to Chile. The event featured José Antonio Kast, the president of Chile and a founding signatory of the Madrid Charter, and Javier Milei, the president of Argentina. The panels included Joshua Treviño, a speechwriter in the George W. Bush administration; John P. Walters, president of the Hudson Institute and drug czar throughout the Bush years; and Eric Farnsworth of Continental Strategy. In others, this represents a section of the ruling class, allied with the US state security apparatus and leading a growing number of far-right Latin American governments, organizing internationally against their own populations.

The political function of Roberts’ “invasion” speech

Over several days beginning July 30, tens of thousands of people, most of them young Moroccan men, crossed the breakwaters and fences separating the six-square-kilometer enclave from Morocco. At least 91 died in the attempt. The movement was driven overwhelmingly by intolerable conditions in Morocco and amplified by a viral misreading, spread on TikTok and WhatsApp, of a July 8 ruling by Spain’s Supreme Court restricting the summary “hot returns” of migrants intercepted in open water.

Within a week, Spain and Morocco reported that roughly 69,500 of those who entered had already returned, leaving a few thousand in Ceuta’s overwhelmed reception centers. There is no evidence that any significant number reached mainland Spain, let alone the rest of Europe.

This is the reality that the “invasion” narrative deployed by Roberts, Trump, the State Department and the entire fascist right, whose purpose was to convert a migration event into a civilizational emergency that justifies the repression of the working class and the consolidation of authoritarian rule. It is a weapon that Sánchez himself has wielded with equal facility. When the crossings began, the Spanish Prime Minister denounced the migrants for having launched an “attack on Spain’s territorial integrity” and dispatched the army to Ceuta in a repeat of the methods and language he had used in June 2022, when his government oversaw the massacre of at least 37 refugees by the Civil Guard and Moroccan gendarmerie at the Melilla border.

Spain's break with Washington over the Iran war

The reason the American far right seized on Ceuta with such speed has to do with the conflict between the Sánchez government and the Trump administration over the US-Israeli war launched against Iran.

On February 28, 2026, the Trump and Netanyahu administrations launched military strikes against Iran. The Sánchez government, under the pressure of mass opposition within the Spanish working class, publicly condemned the operation and denied Washington the use of the jointly operated bases at Rota and Morón, arguing that the campaign fell outside the bilateral defense agreement and the United Nations Charter. On March 30, Spain closed its airspace to American aircraft involved in the campaign. Fifteen US aircraft left the two bases. Trump responded with threats to cut off trade with Spain.

Sánchez's posture was not the product of principle, but of calculation. The bases at Rota and Morón, which operate under agreements dating back to the US defense pact with General Francisco Franco in 1953, have been used in every US war of aggression of the past three decades, from Kosovo to Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. Even as Sánchez publicly invoked "international law," US destroyers stationed at Rota, the USS Roosevelt and the USS Bulkeley, participated in the defense of Israel during the attack on Iran, while KC-135 and KC-46 aerial refueling aircraft operated from Spanish bases. Sánchez's so-called opposition to the war in no way represented a break with the imperialist system of which Spain is a member.

Nevertheless, the denial of Rota and Morón was a material blow to Washington. Rota, home to five Arleigh Burke-class destroyers integrated into the US ballistic missile defense architecture, is among the most important American naval installations in Europe. Morón is a central node in US power projection into the Mediterranean, the Gulf and Africa. Spain's refusal made Madrid the most visible European government resisting American strategy at the moment Washington most needed compliance.

It is this rupture that explains the torrent of American hostility that followed. In March, Michael Rubin, a senior fellow at the neoconservative American Enterprise Institute (AEI), published pieces urging Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio to recognize Ceuta and Melilla as "occupied Moroccan territory," and calling on Morocco to send unarmed civilians to breach the border fences. In April, the House Appropriations Committee, under the direction of Republican congressman Mario Díaz-Balart, vice-chair of the committee and a close ally of Rubio, inserted language in the fiscal year 2027 national security appropriations bill describing Ceuta and Melilla as "Spanish-administered cities ... located in Moroccan territory," while allocating \$40 million to Morocco. A leaked Pentagon email drafted by policy adviser Elbridge Colby, grandson of the late CIA director William Colby who oversaw the Phoenix assassination program during the Vietnam War, floated options for punishing NATO members that had denied the United States access during the Iran war, explicitly naming Spain.

The rupture, however, has not interrupted the deepening of the military relationship. Even as Madrid denied Washington the use of Rota and Morón for the Iran operation and closed Spanish airspace to American warplanes, the Pentagon has been moving to consolidate its long-term grip on those very installations. In April, it awarded a \$100 million contract for the modernization and maintenance of infrastructure at Rota and other US and NATO facilities in Spain and Portugal. It has now followed this with a pre-solicitation notice for a second, far larger framework contract worth up to \$495 million, with an initial term of three years extendable by five one-year options, a vehicle that could remain active until 2034. The first project will expand the Morón Apron, creating three positions specifically prepared for B-52 strategic bombers loaded with live munitions.

This is the real content of Sánchez's "resistance," a rhetorical gesture pitched to the mass opposition of the Spanish working class to the war on Iran, even as his government continues the material consolidation of the military relationship that makes the PSOE-Sumar government one of Washington's most reliable European partners.

The US-Morocco architecture: minerals, bases, and the encirclement of Spain

The campaign against Spain did not proceed merely through threats, but, concretely, through the construction of a parallel military and economic architecture in Morocco, which Washington has been building for years and has accelerated dramatically since the rupture over Iran.

Morocco holds Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA) status, granted in 2004. It normalized relations with Israel in December 2020 under the Abraham Accords, in a deal under which Washington recognized Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara. In February 2026, the two countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the exploration of critical minerals in Western Sahara, aligning with the US strategy to reduce dependence on China. In April 2026, they signed a ten-year Defense Cooperation Roadmap (2026–2036), accompanied by an annual military action plan with Israel covering training and technology. Israeli firms have supplied Morocco with surveillance drones and reconnaissance satellites, and Moroccan defense spending reached roughly \$15.7 billion in the 2026 budget.

The economic dimension is inseparable from the military one. On February 18, 2026, the Trump administration added phosphate and potash to the US Critical Minerals List, mobilizing the Defense Production Act. Morocco's state-owned Office Chérifien des Phosphates (OCP Group) controls over 70 percent of the world's known phosphate reserves that is now officially classified as vital to US national security.

The apparent contradiction at the heart of the American far right's position—building an intensely close strategic partnership with Morocco while denouncing Morocco for "invading" Spain—is resolved not in the realm of diplomatic calculation, but in the class content of the politics involved.

The US-Morocco alliance is a component of American imperialism's drive to re-colonize North Africa and the Mediterranean, and to encircle Spain as punishment for its defiance. The "invasion" narrative is a component of the same drive, addressed to a different audience. Both are directed, in the final analysis, against the working class.

The imagery of Muslim, military-age men "invading" a European border serves the American far right's immigration demagoguery ahead of the November midterm elections. It serves the Spanish far right by constructing the Sánchez government as the "feckless far left" leader whose "open borders" policies have delivered an "invasion" to Spain, thereby boosting the electoral fortunes of the Popular Party (PP) and Vox.

The strategy of regime change in Spain is not confined to rhetoric. Heritage's own written analysis, published by Mike Gonzalez in August under the title "Blame Pedro Sánchez for Ceuta. Not Spain," lays out the calculation: the PP and Vox are, in Heritage's assessment, poised to win more than 200 seats in the 350-seat Spanish parliament in elections next year, and will "undoubtedly lead a more pro-American foreign policy." To achieve this aim, Washington and its far-right Spanish allies are prepared to employ the same methods of electoral subversion, state corruption and assassination exposed in the ballooning scandal over the region-wide activities of the US-backed operative Fernando Cerimedo in South America.

The pseudo-left and Sánchez prepare the ground

The PSOE-Sumar government has spent years implementing the very policies that the far right now uses to whip up reaction. It has enforced the “Fortress Europe” border regime, militarizing the fences at Ceuta and Melilla and presiding over the deaths of migrants at those very borders. It has overseen a doubling of military spending between 2018 and 2025 to more than €66 billion, and deepened Spain’s integration into NATO war preparations. And it has, as the *World Socialist Web Site* documented, been complicit in the US-Israeli attack on Iran even as it publicly condemned it, allowing its bases and airspace to be used in the operation while denouncing the war in words.

The pseudo-left parties, Podemos and Sumar, have been the indispensable props of this government. Podemos, during its time in the coalition from 2020 to 2023, signed the agreement increasing the number of US destroyers at Rota from four to six and garrisoning up to 3,800 US troops; its minister Alberto Garzón defended the agreement on the grounds that the bases “create a large number of jobs.” Podemos deepened military, economic and diplomatic ties with Benjamin Netanyahu’s far-right Zionist regime, continuing arms sales to Israel even as its ministers publicly accused Israel of genocide. Sumar, which split from Podemos to continue in government after the latter’s departure, has joined in the anti-immigrant agitation over Ceuta, blaming Morocco and sending a letter to the United Nations demanding an investigation.

This is the real content of the “left” that Roberts denounces as the enemy of “the West.” It is a left that governs on behalf of capital, that enforces austerity and militarization and the persecution of immigrants, and that has thereby disarmed the working class politically. The far right grows because the pseudo-left has betrayed the working class at every turn by channeling opposition to war, austerity and the border regime back into the service of the very system that produces those crimes. The rise of Vox, of the Madrid Forum, of the entire international fascist network is the pseudo-left’s political product.



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