



Spain and the World From Bad to Worse

In Libertad Digital n° 1276

January 16, 2008

Step by step, with perseverance worthy of a better cause, the people in charge of Spanish foreign policy are succeeding in their endeavor to wipe Spain off the map of important nations, away from the actors shaping current Western policies.

For a Spaniard such as I, it is extremely unpleasant to listen to a top official at an international body suggest that, in recent times, Spain “has vanished;” in other words, its representatives are not part of the real debate and they do not present interesting initiatives which may have an influence on events.

Since the death of General Francisco Franco, until recently, one of the basic agreements between Spain’s two largest political parties was to place Spain in the most prominent global position possible. The generation carrying out the Transition period had been shaped by the isolation suffered under the dictatorship of General Franco.

Therefore, overcoming it was an objective easily agreed upon. The prominence of this objective has disappeared due to the Spanish Socialism re-foundation; in its place has emerged the Socialists meteoric metamorphosis as a result of generational change; and to its populist demagoguery – that was ever fostered by the old Socialist guard.

Former Spanish Prime Minister Felipe González dispensed anti-Americanism, and yet, took President Bush Sr. by surprise by cooperating in the Gulf War endeavor; he drank daiquiris with Fidel Castro and celebrated Sandinism, all while trying to support parliamentary democracy... The old contradictions have been solved by going for radicalism, avoiding the commitment with democratic values, and ignoring the country’s national interests. The image of González traveling to the State Department in order to request from Rice a firm

policy against Hugo Chávez of Venezuela in contrast of the image of Zapatero laughing along with the Venezuelans and coming to understand the violation of our companies' interests is paradigmatic of that generational renewal.

In these last days, we have had new indications of our international presence's constant decline. We would like to focus on three particularly striking cases.

Relations with the United States

Our Minister of Foreign Affairs, Miguel Ángel Moratinos, recently traveled to Washington and had an interview with U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. For weeks, this appointment was preceded by journalistic comments intending to use it as an example of normality in the bilateral relations, and to suggest that the anecdotal personal problem between Bush and Zapatero is an exception.

Moratinos leaked his desire to speak about several issues, for example, the Middle East crisis, the Annapolis Conference, the Cuban transition, Spanish General Sanz's possible appointment as Chairman of NATO's Military Committee.... In the end, according to what we could read in the national press – because there were no references in the international press – Mrs. Rice confined herself to receive him as the person currently heading the OECD; and they just spoke about that agenda.

The conversation lasted less than half an hour, and there was no joint

press conference. One does not have to be a great specialist to conclude that Rice wanted to stage this unsuccessful encounter before international public opinion. No matter how much insistence the average pro-government official gives, it is obvious that American-Spanish relations are at their worst, since General Franco's death. It is not a personal problem between two leaders, but a clash of positions that Washington solves by systematically ostracizing Spain.

The Middle East crisis

Moratinos considers himself a Middle East expert, a region to which he has dedicated an important part of his professional career. Spain maintains old and relatively important ties with the Arab world. With Israel, we share the Sephardic legacy, a heritage that opens the doors of Jerusalem for Spain. One does not have to be a rocket scientist to conclude that Spain has a chance to play a role as a mediator, providing it starts from a series of premises: The defense of democratic values, rejection of terrorism, recognition of Israel's right to exist, and vindication of a Palestinian State. It is not a matter of choosing sides because, as it would not be useful neither to the chosen side nor to ourselves; we would become a predictable actor, not worthy of any trust to undertake discreet negotiations.

That is exactly what Moratinos has done. He has freely chosen to become Syria's traveling ambassador shocking all and sundry; moreover, he has hinted that his conduct

counted on the support of other European chancelleries. Not long ago, a *Quai d'Orsay* spokesman had to deny that Paris supported the pro-Syrian negotiations of our Minister. In the same fashion, the Arab House has become the loudspeaker of radical Islam, confirming the increasing preconceptions of many Spaniards that this old civilization is adrift, and provoking the protest of some Arab States, according to diplomats of those nationalities trying to project a more moderate and modern image of their own societies.

He has burned his bridges in Washington as well as in Jerusalem, which explains why his ability as mediator is void. It is pathetic to see him begging for an invitation to the Annapolis Conference, because he doubtlessly knows that today nobody considers Spain as a necessary actor in the negotiations of the crisis.

Ceuta and Melilla

The latest mess is very recent. Zapatero told the Opposition's leader Mariano Rajoy to rest assured that everything was under control when it was announced that the King and Queen of Spain would visit Ceuta and Melilla. The Moroccan government's reaction was logical; it was exactly what the Opposition's leader had wisely feared - and, naturally, anyone else with some common sense and a bit of knowledge about bilateral relations.

Morocco - particularly its royal house - defines the relationship

with Spain by our presence in its territory. The *natural* course cannot be anything other than our gradual withdrawal. Friendship must be expressed with concessions on our part; otherwise, we will provoke them, and will have to be ready to face their punishments: Increase in illegal emigration; limits on fishing licenses - now decided by Brussels; - problems for our companies; disruption of cooperation efforts in anti-terrorist issues; and finally, attempts to destabilize Ceuta and Melilla.

After giving us non-requested moral lessons, Felipe González, full of love towards the Sahrawi cause, changed his mind drastically about his former foreign policy, helping Morocco, advised by Dezcallar and Moratinos. Ceuta and Melilla's stability had a price: giving up Western Sahara. Now, from the government, Moratinos's plunge towards ignominy persists. Ceding Western Sahara to Morocco is not the way to secure those two Spanish cities; it is only buying time, and most of all, it shows weakness: It is the one thing that must not be done through politics, especially because it has to do with the Arab World.

The Moroccan Royal House has staged the expulsion of Spanish Protectorate of Morocco, the recovery of Tarfaya and Ifni and the occupation of Western Sahara. It won over Franco and the Socialists. It only failed with former Spanish Prime Minister Aznar who reacted to the challenge presented during the crisis over Isla Perejil as one

could hope of any Spanish government's Prime Minister: Refusing to play the Moroccan game. Sovereignty is non-negotiable; it must be defended with all the possible means.

For that reason, Rabat saw with relief, the arrival of Zapatero and celebrated his immediate cession. They have accepted that it is time to start negotiations about Western Sahara, and, needing Spain's support, they are ready to postpone the creation of a joint commission on the future of Ceuta and Melilla - the commission is a González concession. They do not want to cause problems with Zapatero and remain silent. However, that agreement, more or less tacit, does not admit changes on the Spanish side.

The trips made by Zapatero and the King and Queen to Ceuta and Melilla imply a vindication of Spanish sovereignty and, therefore, a "provocation" seen from a Moroccan perspective. Quite rightly, they see that Zapatero plays with two decks, something that already has caused another illustrious diplomatic slap in the face for our Sovereign; in that occasion, it was Algeria and quite rightly so, too. It is obvious that Zapatero is lying; mainly his party colleagues have paid the price, and turned into distinguished corpses today. In foreign policy, the victims are the national interests and the illustrious face of our Monarch.

The situation becomes more shocking if we analyze the reason for

these trips. In view of the policy followed by this government in Catalonia, Basque Country and Galicia, and with the Alliance of Civilizations, it is difficult to think that the trips made by Zapatero and the King and Queen have as a goal, a clear wish to defend the sovereignty of both cities.

Zapatero does not get complicated with ideals alien to his vision about national reality. What worries our President is the collapse of the Socialist electoral expectations in those cities. As the polls are showing, the elections will be won by a very small margin; and in those circumstances, it is necessary to fight for every seat. He has no shame when using the Crown for partisan objectives. What happens is that, even to commit these outrages, it is necessary to know how to carry them out. And, once again, he has wrongly measured the consequences of his acts.

It is not possible act without paying a price. This is the second time the Moroccans feel deceived by Zapatero. The first time was during the Algerian crisis. After the declarations made by Moroccan spokesmen and the calling home of its ambassador for consultations, it is clear that, in spite of humiliating concessions and pathetic declarations by our Vice President De la Vega, the relations with our southern neighbor are extremely poor at the moment.

After three long years in power, Zapatero has succeeded in ruining most of the successes achieved by

previous administrations regarding foreign policy. Spain has not only vanished; it has also lost prestige and credibility. In this issue, as in many others, next March's general elections in Spain will be crucial. It

is not only about deciding which party will govern, but also avoiding a course of action that leads to disaster, and forcing the Socialist Party to undergo an in-depth overhaul of its strategy.

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