



Spain, NATO, and Israel

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"In recent years there has been a change for the better in Israel's portrayal in the Spanish media. Now at least a few columnists expose Palestinian terrorism, attack anti-Semitism, and outline the problematic context in which Israel has to operate. Op-ed writers like Florentino Portero at ABC, Gabriel Albiac at La Razon, and others sharply contrast with the correspondents and editors at the same newspapers. They remain, however, a small minority. A few years ago, if you wrote an article defending Israel, you were marked as a secret agent or a 'Zionist.'

"Both the terror attacks in Madrid on 11 March 2004 that killed about two hundred, and the Israeli disengagement in 2005 have changed Israel's image. It is unclear yet whether this will last. Ariel

Sharon's transfer of the Gaza territory was disconcerting to those Spaniards hostile to Israel. Previously the Spanish media portrayed him as a killer, responsible for Sabra and Shatilah and indicted in Brussels as a criminal.

"Now the impression has been created that an Israeli center party may be viable. It is too soon to assess how that will affect Spaniards' irrational sentiments about Israel."

Raphael Bardaji is head of International Policy Studies at FAES, a Spanish foundation for social research and analysis. It is headed by José Maria Aznar, the former prime minister and leader of the Popular Party. FAES aims to develop new ideas that the party can then promote.

The Political Scene

Bardaji explains that Spain's political scene is dominated by two parties, the Center-Right Popular Party and the Socialists. "There are also some communists who are marginal, and several regional parties, of which the Catalanian one is the most important. In the Popular Party, support for Israel is far from united. Aznar is unequivocally pro-Israeli. Yet when he was prime minister he had great difficulty explaining his positions on the Middle East to conservatives.

"For many, it is not a natural attitude. Several come from families that were linked to the dictatorial regime. Old ideas still float around, including those propagated by Franco that major problems of civil society should always be blamed on an international Jewish conspiracy.

"In the early 1950s, Franco passed a law against all subversive forces, which he defined as Freemasons, Jews, and communists. It remained valid until his fall in November 1975. Franco took this position despite the fact that there is no significant Jewish community in Spain. Another paradox was that he helped Jews escape from the Germans during World War II.

"Mariano Rajoy, the present leader of the Popular Party, was deputy prime minister under Aznar. He is a very balanced man and has managed the party well in the two years that we have been out of power. I do not remember any specific statements on Israel, but I am sure his views are close to Aznar's.

"Also in the Socialist Party the positions on Israel are very heterogeneous. It would be mistaken to claim that the party has a clear position on the Middle East conflict."

The Media

"In general, the Spanish media remain biased against Israel. This is particularly true for television but also for some of the leading dailies. They often portray the Israeli government in a harsh light. The correspondents of the Spanish papers are based in Jerusalem and spend a large part of their time with the Palestinians.

"Even so, these correspondents have changed their tune somewhat and no longer present the Palestinians as freedom fighters. However, they continue to depict terror attacks either as a reaction to Israeli policies or as manifesting 'root causes.' They may claim that these militants are poor, ignorant, or that their family has been victimized by the IDF. In this way they always justify terrorism.

"Few explanations are needed. The TV images show Israeli tanks, and these prompt the viewers' irrational feelings. One first sees the IDF moving around a city, and thereafter a Palestinian child. The Palestinian cameramen are adept at these games and know how to play on the audience's emotions."

Justifying Terrorism

"El Pais, the country's leading paper, is formally independent. The owner is a businessman who gives priority to his interests irrespective of politics. He battled the conservative Aznar government

because he thought it did not serve his pocket well enough. The paper now supports the Socialist government of Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. It may sound exaggerated, but rather than the newspaper being controlled by the Socialist government, one could go so far as to say that the government is controlled by El País.

"The paper's editor in chief is a former Francoist who now is a democrat by evolution. He also demonstrates that sometimes people cannot get rid of views from their past. In addition, many of El País's journalists have, like those of other papers, a leftist bias. Their anti-Israelism derives from their anti-Americanism. They see Israel as an extension of the United States and present both as monsters. Although the editorial line is anti-Israeli, El País lets pro-Israeli columnists write from time to time as a sop to its purported pluralism.

"El País even found some justification for the Madrid bombings by radical Muslims. It wrote that there was a clear connection between these and the policy of the outgoing Aznar government. If Aznar, El País suggested, had not been such a close ally of Bush and had not sent Spanish troops to Iraq, the bombing would not have taken place.

"So both this paper and the Socialists blamed the government rather than the murderers. Until then, terrorists had always been condemned after attacks. Acts by the ETA, the Basque independence movement, were denounced by those in power and the opposition alike. After the March 2004 bombings, the Socialists changed their tune and put the blame on the government. They had de-

clared in demonstration after demonstration that the Spanish people would pay a price for being close to Bush and taking part in the Iraq war."

The Denial of Global Jihad

Bardaji observes that a strange paradox has developed in Spain. "Socialist circles deny the existence of a global jihadist movement. They say things such as: 'These poor Moroccans live in inhuman conditions in Spain.'

"It is increasingly clear that the March 2004 terrorists organized themselves in a local cell. Seventeen were Moroccans, one was a Tunisian. None were born in Spain. They were neither criminals nor poor. Most lived a normal life in Spain, not an underworld one. Some had links to the Mafia. Most had university degrees or were studying. Some specialized in electronics, one in physics. The majority were attending mosques.

"Although the perpetrators were living in Spain, they had links to Syrians, Iraqis, and others. The records of their phone calls have been found. In the hours before the attacks, they were calling imams and other Muslims in London, Casablanca, and Paris."

More Terrorist Attempts

"The number of legal Moroccan immigrants in Spain is estimated at well over five hundred thousand. The country's total population is around forty-four million. The number of illegal immigrants is not known. Surprisingly enough, there were no racist demonstrations after the Madrid attacks, even

though Spaniards have always looked down at people from Morocco.

"The rage was cleverly manipulated against the Spanish military presence in Iraq. After they came to power, the Socialists told the people: 'You are safe now, our soldiers are out of Iraq. There will be no more attacks.' This, however, was untrue. A few days after the Madrid bombings, the same people tried unsuccessfully to blow up a high-speed train.

"Another terrorist attempt was made a year later by a different Islamist cell. They tried to kill the judges of the special court for terrorism in the center of Madrid with a bomb. These terrorists had been followed by our intelligence service, and were intercepted by the police. Several other smaller-scale bombing attempts were made by radical Muslims. In January 2005 the police arrested a dozen of them, some preparing to bring a dirty chemical bomb into Spain.

"We are discovering that the country is not safe at all but permeated by radical Muslim terrorism. Spain also serves as a logistical support base. In the last two years more than two hundred suspects have been arrested, and the number who have been jailed is probably ten times higher."

Learning Lessons from the Madrid Bombing

Aznar, Bardaji notes, pointed to an important lesson other countries must learn from the Madrid bombings. "The Muslim terrorists have shown that a substantial attack a few days before elections can change the political situation in a country. Until the bombings, all polls

showed that the Popular Party would remain in power. Yet public opinion changed because of the bombings and the Socialists ended up winning.

"The Spanish intelligence service has an Al Qaeda strategy document written in 2003 by a sophisticated Iraqi political analyst, apparently belonging to the organization. We do not know the author's name, but in the document he said that Spain was the weakest ally among the coalition forces.

"He wrote that the Aznar government did not have public support for sending troops to Iraq. He claimed that two or three strikes against Spain would bring the government down, and the Socialists would then come to power and withdraw the Spanish soldiers.

"The document is over fifty pages long, of which seven are devoted to Spain. It was intercepted by the Swedish Defense Ministry and given to us around the beginning of March 2004. It was misinterpreted as indicating that the attack would be mounted against the Spanish forces in Iraq."

Other Dailies

Bardaji comes back to his description of the media. "The next largest daily is El Mundo, which has no clear policy line. El Mundo opposed Spain's military participation in Iraq and tended to link it with the Madrid bombings. It has, however, undertaken by far the best media investigations of those bombings. The more they have discovered, the more they claim that in fact it was wrong to link these to developments in Iraq. Actually El Mundo is the main proponent

of the thesis that points to ETA, some Spanish intelligence officers, and probably some Spanish socialists as the real masterminds of the bombings.

"Another important daily is ABC, which is traditionally conservative and pro-Catholic. Its current editor in chief, José Antonio Zarzalejos, is pro-Israeli. The editorial line has to reach a compromise because many writers and editors are more to the Left. The reflex of such journalists on all papers is to look suspiciously at Israel and naively at the Palestinian side.

"In March 2004 after the change of government in Spain, when the Israeli army killed the Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the editor in chief of ABC called me for an opinion. He was probably seeking a critical reaction. But I told him that whereas in the then Spanish reality the action might not have been justifiable, the Israeli reality was very different. I gave a long explanation of why targeted killings are an effective Israeli defense against Palestinian terror.

"He published my op-ed prominently in his paper. Thereafter he showed me how many negative reactions it received, yet kept defending my point of view and my right to express it. ABC never made any linkage between the Madrid attacks and the Spanish involvement in Iraq. Nevertheless, the paper's editorial board believes that Spain was attacked by the global jihad. (MG to Dh: I do not understand the Nevertheless, perhaps we drop the word?)

"La Razon, a relatively new conservative daily, has not yet found its overall policy line. It has several columnists who are

pro-Israeli. The paper was not yet widely distributed when the Madrid bombings occurred.

"Another important daily is La Vanguardia, published in Barcelona in the Catalan language. They do not have a clear-cut position on the Middle East. Some of their writers compare the Palestinian struggle to that for Catalan autonomy, but the paper's position varies."

The Academy

"A major source of support for the Palestinians is in universities. Over the last twenty years Palestinians have quietly pursued a strategy of planting exchange professors in departments of international relations, and in this way they have created a constituency."

Bardaji speaks from his own experience. "In the late 1970s I tried to do my PhD at the Madrid Complutense University. My professor was pro-Palestinian, anti-American, and anti-Israeli. His only concern was promoting the cause of Yasser Arafat. I could not do my thesis with him. The subject I had chosen was NATO and Spain, and he literally told me that 'if I wanted to talk about weapons, I should choose to defend Fatah and not the imperialistic Americans.'

"The main problems for Israel in Spanish universities are located in the international relations departments. There are only two exceptions: Rey Juan Carlos University in Madrid, which is private and small, and the University of Navarra, which is very conservative and linked to Opus Dei. They are not automatically anti-American.

"In lectures on the Middle East, professors often manipulate their audience. One can do that very simply by using TV images. These academics also portray the Israeli government as a devious force that promotes Jewish interests in the world. They never define what these interests could be.

"In addition, there is a growing group of revisionists. They do not challenge Holocaust history but claim that the Jews, by representing themselves as victims, manipulate the public to advance Jewish interests.

"In the Spanish academic world, anti-Americanism, anti-Israelism, and anti-Semitism are all related. When anti-Americanism is linked to attacks on Israel, there is always a conscious or subconscious element of anti-Semitism at play. I believe that the distorted images of the Jews brought about by the expulsion in 1492 are somehow still under our skin. Something like 'they deserve it' still runs through our veins."

Building Fences

Bardaji refers to a similarity between Spain and Israel. "Spain has built fences around two of its enclaves in North Africa, Ceuta and Melilla, which are surrounded by Morocco.

"These have been reinforced and made higher. Their purpose is to keep Moroccan immigrants out. These fences have not been criticized in Spain because we see large numbers of Moroccan immigrants trying to cross them. The fear in Spain of being flooded by Moroccans is so great that people tend to forget what their principles are.

"I have written articles asking what is the difference between the Israeli fence—almost all media keep calling it a wall—and our fences. The usual answer is that Spain builds on its own territory, whereas Israel does so on what is called occupied territory though actually, according to international law, it is disputed territory. I have replied that these writers agree that we should put up fences to keep poor illegal immigrants from entering the prosperous areas of Spain. At the same time they want to forbid Israel the right to defend itself by keeping terrorists out. That usually silences them."

Reconquering Al-Andalus

"Aznar has been making headlines with his proposal to enlarge NATO membership with Japan, Australia, and Israel." This idea is propounded in a brochure under his name that Bardaji wrote, and that was published by FAES.¹

Bardaji explains: "I prepared this proposal because of West European and Spanish interests and not because I am pro-Israeli. I believe that the West is at war and we are not just facing a few terrorists linked to Al Qaeda. The latter is the tip of the iceberg of a larger phenomenon—a global Islamic insurgency. We need to be prepared to fight this as effectively as possible."

Bardaji has been specializing in Islamic terrorism, particularly Bin Laden. "I am probably one of the few Spaniards who has read all his statements, including tapes and interviews. He frequently mentions Spain as well as conquering Andalusia for the Muslim world."

Bin Laden and Hitler

Bardaji already stated in 2001 that one of Bin Laden's goals was to turn Andalusia into Muslim territory. "He thinks it belongs to the House of Islam because in the Middle Ages it was, for several centuries, in Muslim hands. Back then, everybody I told that to laughed at me."

Aznar presented this thesis at Georgetown University in 2004. He said:

.- Bin Laden shares a common characteristic with Adolf Hitler; he writes and says what he intends to do. And his vision and plans are crystalclear [sic]. He talks about the Land of Islam stretching from Al-Andalus (the name the Muslims used many centuries ago to refer to Spain) to the Philippines.... Some say Islam is a tolerant faith. But not Bin Laden's Islam, that is for sure.

.- In order to achieve our victory, we must accept and understand that we are at War. Obviously, not a conventional or traditional War, but a new form of conflict. A war that we never looked for, but a War that fell upon us just because of the implacable logic of our enemy. Bin Laden declared War on us, on the democratic, prosperous, free and basically laicist Western society. And he declared a total War where, according to his view, there is neither room for negotiations nor peace agreements.²

Bardaji comments: "El Pais mixed this speech up, saying that Aznar and Bin Laden had the same fantasies about Al-Andalus. Today, reluctantly, many more people understand that this is what Bin Laden wants. You are no longer discred-

ited if you say so, but people do not wish to think about its consequences."

Israel Should Join NATO

"NATO is Europe's best military instrument. For several decades it focused on targets linked to the Soviet Union. These are irrelevant to today's security needs, and to win the next world war NATO now has to reorient. Israel would introduce a new dynamic within NATO helping it focus on the right issues.

"Israel would also benefit. It has become isolated, and one major reason is that the Europeans do not want to face the challenges ahead. Iranian nuclearization threatens the West as well as Israel. Although Israel might be forced to take unilateral action, if it were part of NATO the Iranians might realize they were facing a strong deterrent force representing the entire Western world.

"However anti-Semitic parts of Europe's population may be, I still cannot imagine any European politician saying it would be fine if Israel were nuked by Iran. We would be much better protected if we were all together on this issue."

Discussing NATO's Future

In his brochure, Bardaji wrote:

We are fully aware that Israel's membership of NATO poses greater political problems, for example, than that of Australia. Nevertheless, we believe that the benefits of this expansion would well outweigh any possible disadvantages. What is more, NATO and Israel would not be starting from scratch. In fact, since the Istanbul Summit of 2004, the Alliance's authorities and those of Israel

have been drawing up a framework for closer cooperation between the two parties as a part of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue. Unfortunately, the Alliance has not been able to go one step further and grant this important relationship the publicity it deserves, nor has any initiative been designed that goes beyond the narrow framework of the Mediterranean Dialogue. It is time to change this attitude.³

Bardaji relates that before he wrote the brochure, he and several FAES staff members traveled to a dozen NATO member states as well as the proposed candidates. They spent four months conducting 240 interviews, both within and outside governments. "The draft document was discussed with experts in Brussels and Washington. Before its publication it was discussed with staff members of Angela Merkel, when she was still opposition leader; with Nicholas Sarkozy, then president of the ruling UMP in France; with Conservatives in Great Britain; and with the then Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi. Aznar has a very close relationship with him. Of course we also discussed it with leaders and staff of our own party in Spain.

"When the report was published, Aznar made two presentations, one in Washington and one in Brussels. He sent the report to all heads of state, foreign ministers, and ambassadors related to this issue. We also sent it to Zapatero. We got no answer from him; he doesn't read English and we did not have a Spanish text then.

"Russian president Putin sent us a relatively positive response. He said we did not understand that his problems in Chechnya also involved Islamists. The reaction of French president Jacques Chirac was not as negative as expected. The British tend always to be very cautious of any change.

"Overall, most people thought it was an excellent report. The problem, however, remains how to make some of the ideas operational and what calendar to apply. In December 2006, the NATO summit will determine the organization's strategy for the coming fifteen years. So there is still time to discuss the issue with additional decision-makers.

Notes

1. José María Aznar, "NATO: An Alliance for Freedom," Fundación para el análisis y los Estudios Sociales, Madrid, 2005.
2. Jose Maria Aznar, "Seven Theses on Today's Terrorism," lecture presented at Georgetown University, 21 September 2004, www.president.georgetown.edu/aznar/inauguraladdress.html.
3. See note 1