

Driven by Crisis: Spanish Foreign and Security Policy in 2011

Richard Gillespie,
Professor of Politics, University of Liverpool

If 2010 had already been a terrible year for Spain in terms of a weakening of its international position (Molina and Tovar, 2011), Spanish diplomatic activity in 2011 was to be affected even more decisively by the repercussions of the financial crisis and its ramifications in Europe.¹ Foreign and security policy was to suffer from major cuts in public expenditure, affecting diplomatic activity and above all international cooperation. Yet not only was Spain's operational capacity for a foreign and security policy hit: the crisis led its government to become obsessed with the challenge of reversing the country's financial and economic misfortunes. And given that these were now so intimately bound up with the Eurozone crisis, Europe inevitably became the prime focus of political and diplomatic activity.

Foreign policy had not been a notable area of achievement previously under the governments of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (Powell, 2009). Zapatero was not noted for a strategic grasp of international relations or for a consistent vision informing his foreign policy, yet trends towards the 'presidentialisation' of this policy area continued unabated. By 2011, decision-making was essentially reactive rather than pro-active as external pressures on the Spanish economy brought improvised responses by force of circumstance. Policy was now driven, if not dictated, by efforts to secure international support for Spain's efforts to cope with its problem of public debt and more general economic malaise, crucial to the quality of life in the country and its external credibility. Inevitably this meant a primary focus on the European level of external relations, while at the same time foreign policy in general became subject to geo-economic considerations.

All these factors—reduced capacity for external action, European preoccupation and lack of strategic orientation—help explain why Spain's response to the historic popular uprisings in the Arab world proved to be so modest. The so-called 'Arab Spring', in a region of fundamental importance for Spain, posed serious questions about the country's continuing ability to play an influential role in its southern neighbourhood, which had been prioritised in its foreign policy since the late 1980s, with considerable success both within the Mediterranean basin and as a major avenue of opportunity for Spanish influence within and through the European Union (EU). Spain suddenly found itself having to adjust to developments it had not expected and in worse conditions than many of its European partners to respond. Reliance on wider European activity, rather than distinctive Spanish input into EU Mediterranean policy, seemed now to characterise a new phase in Spain's involvement in Euro-Mediterranean relations, though with Europe itself handicapped by the impact of intergovernmentalism on the EU and the crisis of the Euro.

The context also accounted for considerable continuity in foreign and security policy that accompanied the alternation between the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) and the Partido Popular (PP) in government following the general election on 20 November 2011. The pressures on Zapatero's Socialist government during his second term of office had brought a deep preoccupation with external economic relations and this became a matter of doctrine for the government of Mariano Rajoy.² The latter was to be more absorbed with the European level of politics than José María Aznar had been in 1996–2004. In comparison with his PP predecessor, who at times had adopted more ideological positions, particularly over Cuba in 1996–98, there were early indications too that Rajoy's policy towards Latin America would be more pragmatic.

Yet, while the context of financial crisis and its impact on the Eurozone came to shape Spain's foreign and security policy to the point of being 'driven' by it, one must hesitate to go as far as describing it as 'determined' or 'dictated'. One very curious development, which will give Zapatero biographers plenty to speculate about in the future, was his surprise 'presidential' decision, virtually as his swansong as prime minister, to sign an agreement providing NATO with base facilities in Rota for the naval component of its planned missile-defence shield. This move, which delighted the United States (US) and contrasted greatly with his debut in foreign policy as prime minister (withdrawal from Iraq in 2004), showed there was still some scope for political discretion in decision making. Developments in Spain's relations with the US thus merit inclusion along with the other themes introduced above in this review of Spanish foreign policy in 2011.

Europe, Europe, Europe

Europe, especially western Europe, proved to be increasingly central to the external relations activity of successive prime ministers and foreign ministers during 2011, with both the EU institutions and the larger member states as targets of Spanish lobbying for support. Ironically, Spanish concerns shifted rapidly from news about the country being due to become a net contributor to the EU budget in 2012—partly a result of economic progress (though also of the 2004-07 eastern enlargement)—to a situation of growing external pressures on the Spanish economy arising from a loss of confidence in (especially) the southern underbelly of the EU. Spain's leaders undertook a very active offensive to convince key European actors of their serious determination to cut public debt, and thus to show Spain to be worthy of support, while also advancing the argument that austerity alone would not get the European economy out of its crisis.

Europe became crucial to Spanish interests now for near existential reasons. It was not so much a vision of Spain's place or role in the world that underlay this orientation, but rather the recognition that Spanish security, in the widest sense of the word, depended on European understanding and solidarity at this time of crisis. The fact that the European project itself showed symptoms of disintegration, contrasting with evidence of further integrationist endeavours among some EU actors, provided no grounds for estrangement from the European fold. Indeed, the conviction that Spain's destiny was bound up with that of Europe was reinforced by recognition of the rising challenge posed by new emerging powers, a trend which implied a relative decline of Spanish international influence, not least in Latin America. Having slipped four places in GDP per capital rankings already by the end of 2010, Spain's scope for influence, even in the medium to long term, seemed bound up with the European context and the scenario of an eventual Eurozone recovery.

At the bilateral level, Spain concentrated most of its effort in the direction of Germany and France, the main orchestrators of policy responses to the currency crisis; but with European policy-making ultimately dominated by Berlin, it was clear that the country that Spain really needed to establish its bona fides with was Germany. Its leaders were increasingly consulted over Spanish fiscal measures, expenditure cuts and structural reforms. Zapatero took the initial steps to win German approval during Angela Merkel's visit to Madrid early in

February 2011. Her support was expressed publicly, along with requests for greater control over public expenditure. Later, in early September and with PP support, Zapatero took the demonstrative step of getting Parliament to approve a controversial constitutional reform committing Spain to a firm and permanent legal limit on its future government debt and structural budget deficit (Abad and Hernández Galante, 2011). His objective was not only to reassure European political leaders and the European Central Bank but also to make Spain one of the first member states to do this, along with Germany.

While Zapatero inspired European confidence rather late in the day, Rajoy contributed to the effort through occasional bipartisan gestures as opposition leader by 'talking up' the Spanish economy when meeting Angela Merkel in Berlin on 11 April 2011, though this was in sharp contrast to his domestic discourse invariably aimed at discrediting Zapatero's economic management. Once in the Moncloa, he confirmed the European prioritization by appointing as his foreign minister José Manuel García-Margallo, who qualified both as a Europeanist and as an expert in monetary matters, having served as vice-chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs.

Spain still aspired to be taken seriously both by a preeminent Germany in need of less influential partners who might help it avoid the stigma of hegemony, and by France, with which relations had grown under Zapatero; but it also needed to obtain reinforcement as a second-order member state from an expansion of relations with other countries, such as post-Berlusconi Italy, the UK and Poland, all of which featured in the diplomatic drive launched by the new PP administration.

Behind Spain's intense European activity, there was also the objective to ensure that the country's status as a middle-order member of the EU was safeguarded and that the country was perceived as a reliable ally by those with greater influence. That it could not become part of a leading group was confirmed by the initial planning of the new European Stability Mechanism (ESM), designed to eventually replace the temporary bail-out mechanism devised in response to the Greek crisis, to prevent contagion in the event of individual members of the Eurozone losing international market confidence in the future. This experience confirmed the importance to Spain of having multiple allies within Europe; for based on relative economic strengths, the voting system adopted for the ESM afforded veto powers only to Germany, France and Italy, each of which would make funding contributions of 15 per cent or more (compared with Spain's 11.9%). Judged by its nominal GDP in 2010, Spain occupied the fourth

"In 2011 Spanish foreign policy in general became subject to geo-economic considerations"

position among ESM member states, ahead of the Netherlands, Belgium and Greece.

With Europe looming larger in Spain's external diplomacy, the prospect of renewed influence in the future depended more immediately on retaining the confidence of major EU decision-makers. In principle opposed to the concept of a multi-speed Europe, Spain none the less adapted to growing evidence that this phenomenon was emerging by aligning itself with German and French direction. Both Zapatero and Rajoy were among the supporters of the new fiscal compact agreed on 9 December 2011, the basis of a new intergovernmental treaty signed by 25 EU member states three months later. The difficulty for Spain lay in continuing to inspire external confidence in the measures taken to reduce the deficit as estimates of its extent, already communicated to the EU, had to be revised upwards towards the end of the year. This slippage and the Rajoy government's initial hesitations over dealing with it for fear of prejudicing PP chances of victory in the regional election in Andalucía in March 2012, fuelled renewed European concern (*Financial Times*, 29 February 2012).

Reduced Resources for Foreign Policy

With Europe now seen as fundamental to Spain's way back from economic adversity, the resources available to support a more global foreign policy were reduced severely in 2011 and the early months of the following year, adding to the impact of more modest cuts in budget allocation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (MAEC) announced during the previous two years. Zapatero's government had managed to increase the size of the diplomatic corps and foreign aid budget, yet that momentum was now decisively in reverse as the ministry became one of the main targets of further government cuts.

The principal victim of public expenditure cuts announced at the end of 2011, which deprived the ministry of two-thirds of its €1.5bn annual budget, was foreign aid.³ While this fact alone promised to make Spain more reliant on the EU for influence *vis-à-vis* the less developed countries, it was also a blow to Spain's international image as a country which, under Zapatero, had increased foreign aid significantly to 0.4 per cent of GDP by 2011, but in that year saw it plunge back down virtually to the 2004 level, reaching 0.29 per cent (*El País*, 8 January 2012; Manrique, 2012). Beyond the damage to national image, this was also a severe blow to Spain's autonomous capacity to use 'soft power' as an instrument of influence in international relations. Of specific concern to Spain was the prospect that, if its contributions to United Nations (UN)

agencies had to be reduced, the ambition to occupy a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council in 2015-16 might be jeopardised.

The resourcing of defence activity appeared to present a healthier picture, for 2011 saw Spain spending a record €861 million on military commitments abroad. The reality was one of scaling down, however, with an initial 10 per cent force reduction announced for Afghanistan in June and withdrawal from Bosnia-Herzegovina taking place after 18 years, in November. Participation in international military missions continued in Afghanistan (for the moment), in Lebanon and off the coastline of Somalia (to combat pirates). Indications here of retrenchment were to be confirmed by defence cuts of €340m announced in January 2012, accompanied by predictions of big cutbacks in arms programmes. To place all these figures in an even more revealing context, the military's share of central government investment had been cut from 24 per cent in 2008 to less than 15 per cent in 2010 and the following year's increase still left the 2011 level at scarcely half the 2008 figure (*El País*, 21 March 2012). Even so, there was criticism from the left that the cuts were falling more heavily on welfare than on defence.

'Economic Diplomacy'

While European activity was centrally concerned with seeking help in overcoming Spain's financial crisis, so too was much of its foreign policy towards other parts of the world, not least those ruled by authoritarian regimes, from China to Russia and from the Gulf to Equatorial Guinea. Increasingly the talk within the Foreign Ministry was of 'economic diplomacy', while for international relations analysts the keyword was 'geoeconomics', referring to the way in which external relations activity now focused largely on three objectives: attracting foreign direct investment (of which Spain was suffering a net outflow), finding buyers for Spanish sovereign debt and diversifying energy supplies at a time of turbulence in the Middle East and North Africa. Far from being a specifically Spanish trait, mercantilist influences were now evident among most of the middle and large member states, undermining EU efforts to develop the Common Foreign and Security Policy (Prislan and Torreblanca, 2011; Keohane and Youngs, 2012). This implied a neglect of broader foreign policy concerns, including democracy and human rights issues, which were not to be raised in anything but the most general terms for fear that they would be detrimental to the economic outcomes pursued.

In the case of China, 2011 was notable for the visit to Spain (together with Germany and the UK) of deputy prime minister Li Keqiang in early



January and Zapatero's short Asian tour in April, during which he met President Hu Jintao, who had recently referred to Spain as 'the best friend of China in the EU' (*El País*, 11 April 2011). Li Keqiang's visit held added importance for its hosts in view of his expected designation as prime minister the following year, but more immediately it was valued in terms of economic benefits: €6bn pledged in further Chinese purchases of Spanish sovereign debt and contracts worth €5.6 billion in key economic sectors. The confirmation of Sinopec's purchase of 40 per cent of Repsol in Brazil reflected recent ambitions for Spain to become a platform for China's growing involvement in Latin America. The trip to Asia included Zapatero's fourth visit to China as prime minister and a stopover in Singapore for the Asian version of Davos.

Zapatero's visit to Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) at the end of February brought tangible results, but was questioned on political grounds owing to the spreading scenario of popular uprisings in the Arab world. Qatar was a country of new interest for Spain, chiefly as a gas supplier, and it was also looked to for financial support.

This leg of the tour yielded commitments on the part of the Gulf state to invest some €3 billion in Spain's energy and telecommunications sectors, to contribute €300 million to the capitalisation of Spanish savings banks and to cooperate over transport infrastructure, with an eye to Qatar's preparations for the World Cup in 2022. There was a decision also to create a joint investment fund aimed at Spain and Latin America. The UAE visit resulted in a €150 million contribution for the savings banks and consolidated the signing of contracts involving Spanish companies, worth €1.4 billion. Its inclusion in Zapatero's travel itinerary in part reflected the new importance of the UAE as the main foreign investor in Spain following the purchase of Cepsa, but also the way in which it had become the largest market for Spanish exports in the Middle East, as illustrated by the presence of 120 Spanish companies in the Gulf Food Fair, which Zapatero visited while there.

Informed by a similar logic, although not giving rise to headline news about business breakthroughs, there were bilateral efforts in relation to Russia and the former Spanish colony of Equatorial Guinea. Spain was looking to Russia, as with China, for help in relation to debt and as a potential source of tourists, for which the question of visas was prominent. The need to make more effort in relation to the BRIC group of emerging nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China) was widely accepted by Spain's lead-

ing political parties for eminently pragmatic reasons; it would continue to be emphasized under the PP in order to improve on the very modest level of penetration of Spanish exports in these markets (7%).⁴

More controversially, prompting criticism from diverse opposition parties, was the visit of a parliamentary delegation headed by José Bono to Equatorial Guinea in February, which took place despite numerous rebuffs to earlier Spanish diplomatic overtures. If any of Spain's economically-driven foreign policy moves amounted to appeasement (albeit not at the highest political level), this was it, as one of the most repressive dictatorships in Africa was lent respectability by treating it with deference. Critics condemned the visit as an unscrupulous attempt to prepare the way for the entry of Spanish companies into this oil-rich country, where the admission price implicitly precluded any raising of sensitive issues in relation to civil liberties and human rights when meeting ruler Teodoro Obiang.

Economic diplomacy was a road down which Spain was being driven by deeply adverse financial and economic circumstance, critical to the future of the country, yet how far it should compromise on ethical standards and wider foreign policy interests was a moot point. In relation to norms and principles, it was not that Spain had been renowned for 'moralist' stances in its foreign policy in the way that Sweden, for instance, had been: indeed it had been one of the most cautious EU member states over the external promotion of democracy and human rights, especially in respect of its southern neighbourhood. However, the degree to which its representatives were now engaging in business as usual with authoritarian partners and the fact that its economy was ailing, leaving international cooperation activity much depleted, were bound to affect external perceptions of Spain. Its international image was suffering, not least in societies focusing on challenges of modernization and democratization.

At the same time, the narrowing down of foreign policy toward the economic domain risked having unintended consequences that would be detrimental to Spain's longer term interests. One risk was that economic competition for markets would sour the constructive relations that Spain had developed with European partners and perhaps leave them less willing to assist Spain in its long struggle to return to prosperity. Equally, there was the likelihood that competitive commercial behaviour among a number of member states might weaken the EU further, as emerging powers in other parts of the world took advantage of it to play them off against one another. Already there were signs of this in the case of China and India, especially over defence sales. Mercantilist behaviour would also make it

“Europe inevitably became the prime focus of political and diplomatic activity”

harder for Europe to engage with China about several of the security issues on the EU agenda.

While it would be unfair to judge any state against unrealistic standards of moral rectitude in international relations, Spain was acquiring a growing reputation for being one of the western European countries most ready to defer to China by arguing against the EU ban on arms sales and most reticent about common European action aimed at applying pressure over human rights issues. Whether this situation would change under the Rajoy administration was not immediately clear.

Surprised by the Arab Spring

In spite of its proximity to North Africa and considerable academic expertise concerning the Arab world, Spain—like the rest of Europe—was surprised by the tide of popular rebellion that began in Tunisia in December 2010 and continued through the following year. Fearing the effects of fallout from social upheaval and the possibility of hostile Islamist regimes being formed, Spain had worked previously for an expansion of cooperation with existing authoritarian regimes; it had not put pressure on them for reform or assisted opposition groups, yet had expressed approval of political reforms when they were introduced ‘from above’, especially in Morocco.⁵ Faced now with the reality of popular struggles for regime change, the Zapatero government’s response was somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand, it was emotionally supportive, particularly where revolts had the broad support of the people; and confidence was boosted by the mainstream demands of actors for change, compatible with the values of “moderate” public opinion in Europe. Perhaps more rapidly than France, Spain adapted to the electoral triumphs of reformist Islamist parties in Tunisia and Morocco, which offered reassurances about their commitment to pluralism and constructive relations with Europe. On the other hand, Spanish representatives still had a preference for regime-led reform and continued to harbour concerns about a range of security risks emanating from the Arab world. With Spain itself having avoided a *ruptura democrática* in 1976, its diplomatic and political elites still generally had a preference for the few Arab monarchies that were announcing reforms (in Morocco and Jordan) over the pattern of change in countries where pressure from below was the primary driving force.

Translated into action, one saw some demonstrations of support and approval for the Arab Spring, notably Zapatero’s visit to Tunis on 2 March 2011—the first by a European prime minister since the revolution—and his administration’s relatively early contact with the Libyan opposition in Benghazi.

Yet there were rather more instances of Spain holding back, urging caution within the EU and maintaining relations with authoritarian regimes after several other European countries had broken with them or were at least demanding the abandonment of office by authoritarian rulers. Spain was seen to be dragging its feet particularly over Syria, where the regime of Bashar al Assad showed resilience in response to rebellion and the outcome was not easy to predict. Influenced also by Spain’s economic interests in the country and broader Middle Eastern security concerns, Trinidad Jiménez—the last European foreign minister to visit Bashar as political opposition mounted—made the controversial comment that “in each country, the rhythms [of political change] are different’, which critics saw as ‘a convenient cover for business as usual’ (*El País*, 6 March 2011; Echagüe, 2011). Despite the failure of a Spanish attempt by Bernardino León to negotiate a peaceful solution to the Syrian conflict in July, and the regime’s resort to military repression, Madrid continued to refrain from calling on Assad to step down. In relation to both Syria and Libya, Spain continued to maintain diplomatic relations longer than other EU countries.

Spanish foreign policy faced a major, historical challenge in the southern Mediterranean because in a very short space of time the regional geopolitical context was being transformed dramatically and national political situations were becoming more differentiated. Coherence and consistency of response were thus difficult to attain, while action was bound to be modest with regard to any measures that required additional expenditure. Just one additional diplomat was sent to strengthen the Spanish Embassy in Tunisia, for example. Spain contributed to the collective European response by increasing its contribution to the European Investment Bank (EIB), arranging a €300 million EIB credit line for Tunisia over the next three years and spending a total of €94 million on its participation in the NATO ‘Unified Protector’ operation in Libya. This did not do much to enhance Spanish prestige, however, even in Tunisia where Zapatero’s improvised visit was compromised in the eyes of civil society activists by the fact that he was on his way home following convivial meetings with the autocratic rulers of Qatar and the UAE.

Carried along by the popular celebrations he witnessed in Tunis on 2 March, Zapatero may have raised expectations unrealistically when he made the claim that Spain was and would be in the forefront of the struggles to ensure a future of ‘democracy and freedom’ in the Arab world (*El País*, 3 March 2011). In the cool light of morn, he did not prove able to deliver on this promise. At most, it may be argued that Spain acted according to its capacity in the case of the Libyan intervention



(Núñez, 2011), and on this occasion occupied the moral high ground through Zapatero insisting on prior approval of the UN Security Council, the European Council and the Spanish Parliament, and not being prepared to go beyond the UN mandate. Nevertheless, there was public criticism from US secretary of defence Robert Gates that Spain, along with various other NATO members, was not pulling its weight (*Financial Times*, 9 June 2011). Of course, any impressions of the Spanish contribution were bound to pale by comparison with the image the country had established by making exceptional efforts in relation to international military and humanitarian missions in the past, when its economy was in a healthier state.

The Spanish response to the Arab Spring should be evaluated not only in terms of political and material support but also of the government's ability to constructively review existing Euro-Mediterranean relationships at more fundamental levels, in view of the changing context. In this regard, there was no change in pre-existing Spanish postures, despite advocacy of a greater European effort to meet the challenge of assisting economic transformation

"The reduced capacity for external action explain why Spain's response to the historic popular uprisings in the Arab world proved to be so modest"

in the southern Mediterranean, without which representative government would struggle to prosper. Spanish representatives opposed the EU-Morocco agreement on gradually liberalising trade in agricultural produce, eventually approved by the European Parliament in February 2012.⁶ Their concern was that domestic producers would suffer, with electoral consequences. Meanwhile, at the multilateral level, they seemed content to allow the Union for the Mediterranean to remain in place, despite widespread perceptions of this Euro-Mediterranean framework as a comatose failure, which reflected on Spain owing to its support for the French-led initiative (Gillespie, 2012) and the existence of its Secretariat in Barcelona.

Spain, whose diplomats had done so much to inspire and shape Euro-Mediterranean cooperation 15-20 years earlier, now lacked distinctive proposals on how the EU as a whole should respond to the Arab Spring. Aware of the severe constraints on its own national activity, it looked largely to an EU response, which came through reinforcement of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Yet the latter's bilateral approach to relations between the EU and its neighbours could not be expected to address South-South impediments to economic progress and political cooperation and thus there was still a need seen by many Mediterranean experts for some kind of effective Euro-Mediterranean regional structure with which to complement the

ENP. However, the only sign of regionalist sentiment returning to Spanish Mediterranean policy during 2011 was in the modest form of participation in a revived western Mediterranean forum, as the 'group of 10' attempted to become more ambitious than its predecessor, the '5+5'.

Fortunately, Spain still had its own experience of democratisation and devolution to exploit, and increased interest in these processes within the Maghreb did provide some potential for enhanced relations with emerging new elites and civil society organisations built around knowledge exchange (Segura, 2012; Amirah Fernández, 2012). Although Spain was by no means alone in offering the benefits of its own experience, it did have some advantages over others, such as not being perceived within the region as a major ex-colonial power.

Evolution of Special Regional Interests

The change of government brought some changes of emphasis in relation to parts of the world of special interest to Spain, yet an underlying continuity remained in the traditional regional focuses on the Maghreb and Latin America. Judging by the statements made by those defining foreign policy, the new administration headed by Rajoy would strive to overcome what many critics saw as an over-reliance on relations with Morocco through complementary overtures towards Algeria and greater attention to Tunisia. Certainly the importance of the Mediterranean was by now clear to the PP, at least in terms of security risks. Momentarily, at least, events in North Africa had overshadowed the Middle East conflict, notwithstanding the Palestinian efforts to secure UN membership. On this issue, Spain saw abstention as the only means of minimizing EU divisions, although when the Palestinian request for full membership of UNESCO came up in late October, Spain voted for it.

There also seemed to be strong determination on the part of the PP to address the question of declining Spanish influence in Latin America. There, the rise of Brazil and the emergence of radical populist governments had led to increased questioning of the Iberian-American Community, through which Spain and Portugal had sought to develop multilateral relations with Latin America. The failure of its latest summit, in Asunción, attended by only half the presidents from the region, fed concern about declining Spanish influence, as too did political challenges to the position of Repsol-YPF in Argentina. By now there was a growing consensus within Spain that its relations with Latin America needed to be revisited and addressed in a more equitable manner than in the past. This was to be the purpose of the next summit, scheduled to take place in Cádiz in November

2012, and under the PP a major diplomatic effort was embarked upon, envisaging full use of royal and other top-level visits to individual Latin America countries aimed at ensuring a high turnout. This multilateral endeavour was accompanied by plans to work for closer bilateral relations with Brazil, as well as other prioritised countries including Mexico, Chile and Colombia.

Zapatero's Swan Song

If policy on the Iraq War had been the first defining action of Zapatero as prime minister, and had deeply upset the Bush administration, so too did the United States feature in his final foreign policy decision, only this time—indeed for the first time—delighting Washington. This was his unexpected move in signing an agreement with NATO on 5 October, allowing naval facilities in Rota to be used for the purposes of the planned missile-defence shield. The foundations for this development were built through cooperation between the Spanish and US navies,⁷ but it only happened through political authorisation at the highest level. Indeed Zapatero made sure he placed his personal moniker on the decision by travelling to Brussels and announcing it at a NATO ministerial meeting at which his presence by no means required.

The agreement involved the granting of base facilities for four frigates, 1,200 military personnel and 100 civilians, promising some spinoff in local job creation but not enough to explain the decision, which was clearly political, and seemed to be a matter of Zapatero writing the final chapter of his prime ministerial memoirs in real time. His administration had suffered negative consequences its relations with Washington from its bold reversal of Spanish policy on Iraq, and even the election of Obama had not heralded an immediate re-appraisal of them within the White House. Zapatero's final act seemed intended to put an end to this transatlantic estrangement and at the same time establish his own reputation for posterity as a 'national' leader, not only noted for his domestic reforms. The move baffled many Spaniards. On the left, he was seen as performing a shameless volte-face, not only seeking to appease the Americans but also backtracking on González's earlier negotiation of a reduction of the US military presence in Spain. It was also questioned on the grounds that Spain seemed to be receiving little or nothing in return, and because of the potential damage it might do to relationships closer to home. Within Europe, it upset Italy, a competitor for the same collaborative defence role with the USA; and among the movements for change in North Africa, it was hardly likely to impress.

Zapatero also drew criticism for consulting only Rajoy and not involving Parliament before signing the agreement, thus exploiting the fact that he was on his way out of the Moncloa. He would be transferring power shortly to a party that would welcome this move towards a full restoration of relations with the US, in which defence cooperation would continue to play a significant role, sixty years on. The indications were that the PP would also make greater efforts to place Spanish brands in the American market, taking advantage of cultural links to the Hispanic community.

2011 thus saw further Spanish preoccupation with the financial crisis, to the extent that the focus on the European context and geoeconomic activity became the outstanding features of foreign and security policy. It also brought a change of government, heralding renewed overtures towards Latin America and the USA, yet with the prime focus remaining on Europe and on economic external relations. The subordination of all else to financial survival in the Eurozone and structural reforms aimed at creating a more competitive economy had huge implications for foreign policy, rendering it less comprehensive and signifying that Berlin and Brussels would become more involved in fundamental questions affecting Spain's future (Mallet, 2012). Declining influence in Latin America and the weak response to the Arab Spring left in question whether Spain's era of influence as a medium power had now ended, not only as a result of the prolonged national economic recession but also as part of wider shifts in the distribution of prosperity and power within the international system. Spain's geopolitical position still held opportunities for a significant international role to be played again in the future, within and through the EU, though this required appropriate strategies to be adopted by the country's decision-makers and, beyond that, a return of cohesion and vision to restore the fortunes of the collective European project itself.



Notes

1. The author wishes to thank Charles Powell, Vicente Palacios, Iván Martín, Haizam Amirah Fernández and several Spanish diplomats for sharing their personal views on the subject of this chapter.

2. PP international policy coordinator Jorge Moragas announced a future foreign policy based on 'economic growth, job creation and recovery of our international reputation' (*El País*, 28 August 2011)

3. *El País*, 31 December 2011, described the cuts as signifying 'the practical disappearance of the budget for international cooperation'.

4. See the interview with Mariano Rajoy in *El País*, 17 November 2011.

5. In March 2011, foreign minister Trinidad Jiménez described King Abdullah II of Jordan as "the most reformist of all" [Arab rulers], notwithstanding his modest track record. Spanish support for the reform process in Morocco was expressed by Zapatero in March, by Juan Carlos during a meeting with Mohamed VI in Marrakech in May and again after the Justice and Development Party victory in legislative elections in November, followed by a call for "advanced democracy with full respect for human rights" (*El País*, 28 January 2012).

6. *ENPI Information*, Brussels, 16 February 2012.

7. I thank Charles Powell for drawing this fact to my attention.

Bibliographical References

ABAD, José M. and HERNÁNDEZ GALANTE, Javier (2011). "Spain's Constitutional Reform: What is seen and not seen", *CEPS Policy Brief*, 257. Brussels: Centre for Policy Studies (www.ceps.eu).

AMIRAH FERNÁNDEZ, Haizam (2012). "España ante un Mediterráneo transformado", *Política Exterior*, January-February.

ECHAGÜE, Ana (2011). "Time for Spain to lead the EU's Mediterranean Policy", *FRIDE Policy Brief*, 74, April.

GILLESPIE, Richard (2012). "Adapting to French 'Leadership'? Spain's Role in the Union for the

Mediterranean". In BICCHI, Federica and GILLESPIE, Richard (eds.) *The Union for the Mediterranean*. London: Routledge.

KEOHANE, Daniel and YOUNGS, Richard (2012). "Is the EU trading foreign policy for commercial gain?" Brussels: E!Sharp, 12 March.

<http://esharp.eu/big-debates/external-action/28-is-the-eu-trading-foreign-policy-for-commercial-gain?>

MALLET, Victor (2012). "A Gathering Gloom", *Financial Times*, 23 March.

MANRIQUE, Manuel (2012). "Spanish foreign policy monitor: January-March 2012". *FRIDE Policy Brief*, 121, March.

MOLINA, Ignacio and TOVAR, Juan (2011). "El año en que estalló la otra barbuja: la política exterior y de seguridad española en 2010". *Anuario Internacional CIDOB 2011*. Barcelona: CIDOB.

NÚÑEZ VILLAVERDE, Jesús (2011). "España en Libia: ¿más madera"? *El País*, 13 June.

POWELL, Charles (2009). "A Second Transition, or More of the Same? Spanish Foreign policy under Zapatero". *Southern European Society and Politics* 14/4, December.

PRISLAN, Nika and TORREBLANCA, José Ignacio (2011). "The UK, France and Spain: commercial diplomacy rising". In MARTININGUI, Ana and YOUNGS, Richard (eds.) *Challenges for European Foreign Policy in 2012: What kind of geo-economic Europe?* Madrid: FRIDE, 2011.

<http://www.fride.org/publicacion/971/desafios-para-la-politica-exterior-europea-en-2012.-una-europa-geoeconomica>

SEGURA, Antoni (2012). "The Spanish Transition and the Arab Spring", *Euromesco Paper* 12, March. <http://www.euromesco.net>