

COUNTRY CHAPTER ON SPAIN

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SPAIN AND THE FUTURE OF NATO

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Historically, Spain's relations with NATO have been characterized by a certain ambivalence. The careful steps towards membership after Franco's death in 1975 were not motivated by security concerns but rather by an attempt to anchor Spain within a democratic security institution, to facilitate the transformation and modernization of the armed forces and generally to overcome the country's isolation and backwardness. The path towards NATO proved to be contentious, however, with opposition coming largely from left-wing parties. After the Socialist Party (PSOE) came to power in 1982, Prime Minister Felipe González made a pragmatic U-turn that eventually resulted in a conditional accession. Spain joined NATO on 30 May 1982, but stayed out of the integrated military structure and did not allow nuclear weapons on its soil. Again, accession was not motivated by external security concerns, but rather by worries about the stability of the democratization process that gained new urgency after the attempted coup d'état of 1981 and concerns that not joining would impact negatively on the EU accession process (Bueno/Testoni 2021).

Since then, the attitude of ambivalence has not changed much. On one hand, Spain has been a reliable NATO member. Spain joined NATO's integrated structure in 1996, the former PSOE foreign minister Javier Solana excelled as NATO's Secretary General from 1995 to 1999, and Spain has contributed troops to NATO missions. In fact, Spain understands itself as a staunch promoter of multilateralism, and membership of NATO and the EU is part of this multilateral self-image.¹ The political parties (with the exception of the populist VOX party) share this consensus. While the Populist Party (PP) has been more transatlantic, PSOE is a strong advocate of European integration and autonomy. On the other hand, membership of NATO, as one of our interviewees remarked, is largely a goal in itself. The public's

interest in NATO remains low.² Currently, the NATO issue that is attracting some public interest concerns the pending decisions to extend the leasing contracts for the US Rota Navy base and the Morón Air Force base.³ Governments have never provided a convincing rationale for Spain's membership (Bueno/Testoni 2021: 172). With regard to collective defence, Russia is far away and the two flashpoints of Spanish security – the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla – are outside of NATO's Article 5 perimeter.⁴ Government attempts to refocus NATO's attention on security risks emanating from the South have been only partially successful (see below). At the initiative of Italy and Spain, NATO launched its Mediterranean Dialogue already in 1994. Reacting to NATO's return to collective defence in the aftermath of the Ukraine crisis, Spain and its partners in the »Southern quartet« (Portugal, France and Italy) have lobbied NATO to retain focus on the task of projecting stability into the Southern neighbourhood. Yet the initiatives agreed at the Wales summit in the context of NATO's 360 degree approach, such as the »framework for the South« (Becker 2018; Calmels 2020) pale in comparison with the reinforcement of NATO's eastern flank.

The leading think tanks and research institutes, such as the Elcano Royal Institute and the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB), support this multilateral orientation and Spain's integration into transatlantic and European frameworks. Both focus more on regional security and European integration than on NATO. While the FAES Fundación, a think tank affiliated with the PP, has a stronger transatlantic leaning, the Fundación Alternativas, a progressive think tank with close relations to parties on the left, shows more interest in European security and defence. The Instituto

¹ The recently adopted National Defense Directive and the Guidelines for International Relations reflect this affirmation of multilateralism. The latter document announces that Spain will encourage »a more federal European Union« with greater strategic autonomy and will improve relations with the United States. It portrays Spain as a progressive global actor that will promote multilateralism, »a feminist foreign policy« and »humanitarian diplomacy«. See: <https://english.elpais.com/politics/2021-01-26/spain-drafts-new-foreign-policy-that-incorporates-gender-perspective.html> (last accessed 12 May 2021).

² NATO's approval ratings in Spain are relatively low (only in Greece and Turkey are its approval ratings lower). Cf. Pew Global Attitudes Survey.

³ This decision is politically sensitive because Podemos, one of the coalition partners of the current left-wing government, was founded in 2014 on a platform that promised exit from NATO. Since joining the government, however, Podemos has been back-paddling and has signaled its support for the extension of the lease.

⁴ Article 5 of the NATO Treaty reads as follows: »The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all (...)« Article 6 extends this area of protection by including, for example, Turkey and specific islands under the jurisdiction of the parties. However, when Spain joined, NATO did not extend Article 6 to include Spain's enclaves in Africa.

Español de Estudios Estratégicos (ieee.es) at the Spanish defence ministry contributes detailed analyses to the debate on the future of NATO. The Madrid branch of the European Council on Foreign Relations connects debates in Spain with those in the rest of Europe and focusses its security-related research on European Security and Defence Policy.

THREAT PERCEPTION

Pundits agree that NATO is facing new challenges, including a more assertive Russia, the emergence of China as a global actor and security risks from the South. Yet, scholars assume that »the most important challenges NATO is facing today are internal and political rather than strategic« (Rodríguez 2020: 1). Cognizant of the importance of US leadership, FAES scholars in particular already saw the first signs of a partial US disengagement during the Obama presidency and thereafter the lack of authority under the Trump administration was one cause of NATO's current woes (FAES 2019). Others identify disagreements between those NATO members who look to the East and those who are affected by events in their Southern neighbourhood as a risk to the cohesion of the alliance (Bacaria/Donnelly 2017; FAES 2019: 18). However, they are confident that NATO will be able to adapt and will continue to represent transatlantic unity.⁵

CHINA

Spanish scholars, on one hand, acknowledge the huge economic opportunities that China offers and on the other, recognize the rise of authoritarian China both as a regulatory and a normative competitor and as a potentially hostile military power. The debate on the consequences of the looming US-Chinese conflict for NATO, however, is just beginning. Most Spanish pundits emphasize what they see as differences between the American approach of decoupling from China and a European approach of critical engagement. NATO, too, should define its relationship with China »in a way that would be mutually beneficial to both actors« (Calderon 2020: 9).

RUSSIA

Spanish scholars share the assessment of a resurgent Russian threat and support NATO's dual track approach of deterrence and dialogue (FAES 2019: 129). In their view, common interests in areas such as climate change, the fight against jihadist terrorism or stability in the Mediterranean suggest a more substantial dialogue (Calderón 2020: 8). In the view of some scholars, Russia's behaviour is a product of its weakness and not its strength and its alienation from the West has been caused in part by Western policies. Thus scholars ask whether it is »time to change strategy and re-

place one model of confrontation with another of coexistence« (de Santayana 2020). As a faithful ally, as one interviewee has put it, Spain will follow NATO's policy on Russia. On a bilateral level, however, and given its economic interests in Russia, Spain seeks a rapprochement. Institutionalized meetings of business representatives, which had been put on hold since 2014, are about to be resumed.

In accordance with this focus on dialogue, Spanish think tanks are critical of further NATO enlargement. An ieee.es paper argues that further enlargements might strain the cohesion and decision-making capacity of the Alliance and will lead to further conflicts with Russia. An FAES paper advises NATO »to remain faithful to its open door policy«, but argues that, for the time being, consolidation should take precedence over further inclusion of new members (FAES 2019: 13). Moreover, many of the current candidates are not in a position to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area. Thus, »the enlargement policy should be re-evaluated« (Rodríguez 2020: 28).

DISINFORMATION AND ASYMMETRIC WARFARE

The issue of asymmetrical threats and Russian disinformation campaigns figures prominently in Spanish debates. For example, Russia Today and Sputnik are also present on the Spanish market and deliver their messages to Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America (de Pedro/Iriarte 2017). More importantly, the massive disinformation campaign during the Catalan independence referendum that authorities and the public attributed to Russia has made huge waves in Spain, is still being reviewed in courts and has deeply damaged Russia's reputation (Milosevich-Juaristi 2017). However, Spanish scholars do not see NATO as a prime responder in such contingencies.

ARMS CONTROL

The Spanish expert community takes some interest in arms control. Researchers at the ieee.es deplore the deterioration of the arms control and non-proliferation architecture in recent years, support the decision to prolong the New START treaty and remain sceptical about proposals to trilateralize nuclear arms control. In the opinion of Spanish pundits, attempts to include China at this point will delay possible progress in the Euro-Atlantic theatre. In their view, the nuclear prohibition treaty may be well intentioned, but it is an inadequate instrument for achieving disarmament (Almela 2018). Although some scholars express sympathy for the treaty, the general sense is that Spain, as a faithful ally, should not join.⁶ Moreover, if NATO's non-nuclear members were to join, they would lose information and »references that are important to their security« (Torres 2021:18).

⁵ FAES 2020: »OTAN 2030«: adaptarse para sobrevivir, 9.12.2020. Available at: <https://fundacionfaes.org/en/news/47341/otan-2030-adaptarse-para-sobrevivir> (last accessed 12 May 2021).

⁶ Interview with Spanish expert, 4.3.2021.

SOUTHERN DIMENSION

Not surprisingly, Spanish think tanks focus on the growing instability in the Maghreb and, even more so, in the Sahel, as well as on illegal migration, terrorism and hybrid threats (Samaan 2017). In their view, instability in North Africa and the Sahel region is largely a consequence of insufficient economic and social development, bad governance, local conflicts and rising Islamic fundamentalism (FAES 2019: 14). Against this backdrop, think tanks support the Spanish government's view that NATO, while bolstering its position on the Eastern front, should not neglect southern challenges. Together with Italy, France and Portugal, Spain launched an initiative within NATO that resulted, for example, in the »package for the South« and the »Regional Hub for the South« at Allied Joint Force Command in Naples in 2018 (Missiroli 2019). While Spanish think tanks welcome NATO's resulting efforts to cooperate more closely with the EU in the region, and to better understand and respond to conflict dynamics through dialogue, capacity-building and crisis management (Martin 2020), scholars deem these initiatives too limited (Arteaga 2019b). NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue is perceived by Spanish scholars as insufficient (FAES 2019: 18) or even an outright failure (Marquina 2019). A recent CIDOB study on Spain's Southern neighbourhood for the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung headlines NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue but does not discuss it at all (Soler i Lecha/Morillas 2020). More generally, Spanish scholars agree that some NATO activities, such as capacity-building and training of local forces, might reduce the fragility of states in the Southern region but that NATO as a military organization is presently not well equipped to deal with the root causes of instability. This mismatch to a certain extent explains Spain's support for a broadening of NATO's agenda (see below).

NATO AND CSDP

As already mentioned, the Spanish expert community advocates both strong transatlantic links and European defence initiatives that would result in a more capable and autonomous EU. Scholars leaning more towards the PSOE have traditionally been more in favour of European defence than those who lean towards the PP. The former group supports European projects such as PESCO or the creation of a European headquarters. The latter group perceives European defence initiatives as a means to strengthen NATO and to make the alliance more attractive for the United States (FAES Fundación 2020). They are sceptical of Macron's initiatives (Arteaga 2019a), fear that efforts towards European autonomy could weaken NATO (Yeste 2018) and argue that European cohesion should be achieved by concerted cooperation involving not only France and Germany but also Italy, Spain and others (Rodríguez 2020: 29). NATO and the EU should stick to a division of labour under which NATO is responsible for collective defence and crisis intervention, whereas the EU focuses on crisis prevention and the more efficient organization of European armament production and procurement processes (Cobo/Tosato 2018; Rodríguez

2020). These scholars see the added value of recent European initiatives in the field of defence in a more efficient organization of the arms development and procurement processes. However, they insist that instruments such as Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and NATO should be complementary (FAES 2019: 29). But the uncertainty about the future orientation of the United States has resulted in a certain shift across the board towards more support for European defence integration.

BURDEN-SHARING

Spanish scholars acknowledge that their country will not achieve the 2 per cent goal (with defence spending below 1 per cent of GDP, Spain ranks near the bottom among NATO countries). In fact, given the costs of the Covid-19 pandemic, defence spending in real terms will not increase in the next few years. To avoid further transatlantic controversies, pundits propose replacing the 2 per cent metric by output-oriented criteria (Rodríguez 2020: 129) and, for example, the inclusion of money spent on the Spanish Civil Guard, which participates in NATO operations, as defence expenditure (Ortega 2019).

CONSULTATION, COMMUNITY OF VALUES AND BROADENING NATO'S AGENDA

As pointed out above, Spanish pundits have traditionally emphasized NATO's character as an alliance of democracies. Yet, there is little debate on how NATO should react to deviations from liberal values in some member states. Spanish scholars have looked on with concern as Turkey has drifted apart and flirted with Russia. In line with the traditionally close Spanish-Turkish relations, most emphasize the importance of keeping Turkey within NATO (Soler i Lecha/Morillas 2020: 12) and call for »a new positive impulse« in relation to Turkey (Gürsoy/Toygür 2018).

Although this debate is just beginning, it seems that Spanish scholars will support the Reflection Group's proposal to broaden NATO's agenda. Scholars take a strong interest in NATO's potential contributions to societal resilience and discuss what NATO could do, for example, to contain the next pandemic or fight domestic terrorism.

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