

# A Second Transition, or More of the Same? Spanish Foreign Policy under Zapatero

Charles Powell

*This text explores the extent to which José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's foreign policy during his first term (2004–8) as prime minister should be seen primarily as a reaction to (and a rejection of) that of his immediate predecessor, José María Aznar, or whether it is best interpreted as an original, proactive response to changing domestic and international circumstances. It concludes that, although Zapatero's administration was essentially reactive at first, it gradually acquired some unexpected, novel traits of its own, which contributed fresh ideas to the debate over Spain's foreign policy identity and its role in an increasingly globalised world.*

*Keywords: Spain; Foreign Policy; Zapatero*

This contribution seeks to examine the motivations, goals, style and outcomes of Spanish foreign policy—with the sole exception of Spain's policy towards the European Union (EU) (see Closa, this issue)—during Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's first term in office (2004–8). In keeping with the agent-oriented and actor-specific focus of much of the recent foreign policy analysis (FPA) literature, it shares the assumption that 'all that occurs between nations and across nations is grounded in human decision makers acting singly or in groups' (Hudson 2005). Careful attention will therefore be paid to the beliefs, motivations and goals of the head of government, who was ultimately responsible for the formulation of policy in this area. However, given that foreign policy in a globalised world increasingly involves a multiplicity of actors and levels, this text will take into account not only the individual level of analysis, but also the state and international system levels. This will allow us to explore the performance of the Spanish Prime Minister while taking into account both the domestic and international environments (and constraints) within which he operated.

In the wake of the March 2004 elections that brought Zapatero and his Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE, Spanish Socialist Party) to office, a number of (mainly British and North American) commentators greeted his arrival as evidence of a 'second transition', a metaphor that was intended to suggest that Spain was 'entering a new phase of democratic development' (Grimond 2004). Interestingly, this notion proved far less popular with Spanish authors, possibly because they recalled that a decade earlier, his predecessor, the Partido Popular (PP, Popular Party) leader José María Aznar, had published a book—which went largely unnoticed abroad—with the title *Spain: The Second Transition* (Aznar 1994). Whether or not it can fruitfully be applied to other policy areas, in our view the notion of a second transition is not particularly useful in helping to understand the evolution of Spanish foreign policy under Zapatero, because it fails to reflect both its contradictions and the fundamental continuities that it shared with earlier periods. This is not to say, however, that foreign policy did not experience some interesting departures under his leadership, which are explored in detail below.

The central research question addressed in this text is the extent to which Zapatero's foreign policy during his first term should be seen primarily as a reaction to (and a rejection of) that of his immediate predecessor, or whether it is best interpreted as an original, proactive response to changing domestic and international circumstances. Inevitably, this also raises the question of whether, by reversing Aznar's policy goals, his successor was also departing from the well-trodden path frequented by his Socialist predecessor, Felipe González. This contribution will argue that, although Zapatero's foreign policy was essentially reactive at first, it gradually acquired some unexpected, novel traits of its own, which contributed fresh ideas to the debate over Spain's foreign policy identity and its role in an increasingly globalised world.

On coming to office, Zapatero went to great lengths to dissociate his government's policies from those of his immediate predecessor, as if acting under the influence of what has only half-jokingly been described as a Swedish pop group syndrome (after ABBA, or 'Anti- Bush, Blair & Aznar') (Powell 2006). Like Aznar in 1994, he believed the time was ripe to move beyond certain 'givens' of Spanish foreign policy and explore uncharted waters, albeit in a markedly different direction. As with Aznar, this was also a highly personal, ideologically driven departure, and one that was arrived at somewhat intuitively, without prior consultation or debate within his party or cabinet. What is perhaps most surprising is that, in marked contrast to both González and Aznar, it was undertaken by someone who had never shown much interest in foreign policy matters during his surprisingly long career as an obscure back-bencher (1986–2000), who had barely travelled abroad as leader of the opposition (2000–4), who spoke no foreign languages and seemed generally impervious to external influences.

Interestingly, this vehement rejection of Aznar's perceived legacy did not lead his successor to identify wholeheartedly with that of his Socialist predecessor either. Zapatero claimed to have become interested in politics after attending a González rally in Gijón in 1976, when he was only 16 years of age. Furthermore, given the latter's standing both amongst PSOE voters and with international public opinion at large,

the incoming prime minister naturally paid lip service to his leadership and his outstanding contribution to recent Spanish history. However, Zapatero also went out of his way to dispel the notion that he regarded González as his mentor, or that he would be turning to him for advice in times of crisis. The most obvious reason for this is generational: González was born in 1948, Zapatero in 1960; the former was a relatively young member of the generation that entered politics during the transition, while the latter is very much a post-transition politician, who obtained his law degree in 1982, the year his predecessor took office. Additionally, it should be noted that Zapatero became party leader in 2000 (at the age of 39), after defeating two prominent González supporters, José Bono and Matilde Fernández. Furthermore, he did so as leader of a new political platform, Nueva Vía (New Route), whose members largely belonged to the same age group. Although Nueva Vía has sometimes been compared to Tony Blair's New Labour and Gerhard Schroeder's Neue Mitte (New Middle), it is perhaps better understood as the expression of a post-transition generational mood than as an ideological platform critical of the policies implemented by González in 1982–96.

### **Zapatero's Perceptions of Spain and the World**

In spite of a surprising reluctance to commit his foreign policy views to paper even after reaching office, it is possible to infer Zapatero's 'operational code' (George 1993)—in other words, those fundamental beliefs that provide norms, standards and guidelines for decision-making—from major speeches, interviews and other public statements. What is perhaps most original about his operational code is that it was explicitly premised on the notion that, due to the progress of globalisation and economic interdependence, a 'middle power' such as Spain could only hope to maximize its potential for global leadership by defining a new international identity for itself. In turn, this led him to develop a new 'national role conception' (Holsti 1987), by which we mean a different perception of the role Spain should play in the international system, and hence a new definition of the types of foreign policy decisions and behaviours that should be considered appropriate for a country such as his to undertake. At one level, of course, this new national role conception was simply an expression of his rejection of his predecessor's: in Zapatero's view, Aznar's decision to seek a 'special relationship' with the United States (US) and support the invasion of Iraq was not only wrong, but also totally out of character with Spain's foreign policy identity. At a deeper level, however, it grew out of a firmly held belief that, as a result of globalisation, distinctions between foreign and domestic policy were rapidly being eroded (Ortega 2006). Consequently, the Socialist leader believed that the values he professed at home (peace, justice, solidarity, social cohesion, tolerance, secularism and so on) should also be those that identified Spain abroad. This, in turn, led him to attach far greater importance than had hitherto been the case to 'soft power', which has been defined as 'the values a government champions in its behaviour at home (for example, democracy), in international institutions (working with others), and in

foreign policy (promoting peace and human rights)' (Nye 2004). The future standing, reputation and influence of a middle power such as Spain would therefore increasingly depend less on specific actions than on what it might represent to the outside world.

National role conceptions are closely related to leaders' views of the international system as a whole. Given his age—he was 29 when the Berlin Wall fell—Zapatero may be considered Spain's first post-Cold War prime minister. The Socialist leader felt no nostalgia either for the 'certainties' of the bipolar, Cold War period, or for those of the subsequent 'unipolar moment', during which the US emerged as the world's only superpower. His public statements also suggest that on coming to office he already saw the international system as a multipolar one, in which the US, China, Russia, Japan and the EU should all play leading roles. He was also of the opinion that peace and progress would best be served by 'effective multilateralism' (a concept that Spain, together with other EU member states, had formally embraced in 2003 when it signed up to the European Security Strategy), though he rarely sought to clarify its precise meaning. In public, Zapatero invariably linked effective multilateralism with the United Nations (UN) system and a vigorous endorsement of the principles of international law, both out of genuine conviction and as a way of distancing himself from (and implicitly condemning) his predecessor's behaviour during the Iraq crisis. In doing so, however, he seemed blissfully unaware that even the most enthusiastic defenders of international law were often highly critical of the workings of the UN system, and that the dynamic of the Security Council in particular had frequently produced results that were contrary to the values (democracy, solidarity, human rights) that he so strongly identified with.

In terms of its foreign policy style, Zapatero's government mainly differed from its predecessor in that it was initially less 'presidentialist', which is not to say it was truly collegiate. Partly as a reaction to Aznar's very high foreign policy profile, the Socialist leader initially went out of his way to emphasise that policy would be conducted from the Foreign Ministry, and not from La Moncloa, the prime minister's office. His appointee, Miguel Angel Moratinos, a career diplomat ten years his senior, who had specialised in the Middle East and had represented the EU as special envoy to the region (1996–2003), seemed well suited to the job. Like González's first foreign minister, Fernando Morán, he was also a member of the Socialist Party, and had won a seat in the Congress representing Córdoba in the 2004 elections. In keeping with this spirit, Zapatero was also quick to announce a long-awaited overhaul of the Foreign Service, implicitly suggesting that if his predecessor had listened to the impartial, professional advice that only highly qualified civil servants can provide, certain excesses might have been avoided. True to his word, the Prime Minister (who was notoriously reluctant to spend time abroad) was initially happy to have Moratinos in the driving seat, but the growing need to oversee and coordinate policy closely and give some key matters his personal endorsement gradually forced him to become more involved. However, it was not until his second term (beginning 2008), when he finally developed an appetite for international affairs, that the centre of gravity of foreign policy decision-making shifted back to La Moncloa, as had happened under both his predecessors.

As part of a broader effort to make decision-making more democratic and accountable, while in opposition the Socialists had also promised that parliament would play a much more active role in defining foreign policy, a pledge that was only partially honoured, as we shall see below. Unlike Aznar during his second term (2000–4), Zapatero needed the support of other parliamentary groups to pass legislation, but he was generally content to woo those whose support was most forthcoming, and the foreign affairs committee's traditionally sleepy existence went largely unperturbed. In opposition the Socialists had also claimed to wish to make the decision-making process more inclusive by bringing in new actors, most notably autonomous communities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), interest groups and thinktanks, but once they were in office progress in this regard was disappointingly modest.

### **Principles versus Expediency: The US, Iraq and Afghanistan**

Given the widely held (though largely unjustified) perception that Zapatero's first term brought about a sea change in Spanish foreign policy, it is interesting to note that neither the PSOE's 2004 electoral programme nor the Prime Minister's inaugural speech to the Congress contained much that could be considered truly novel (PSOE 2004). What was perhaps most striking about the former was the gusto with which it attacked the policies it attributed to the Aznar government and the pernicious influence of 'neoconservative centres of power', and its determination to combat the combined evils of unilateralism, preventive war, and regime change imposed from abroad. Otherwise, both party and leader paid lip service to the by now traditional priorities of Spanish foreign policy: strong support for the process of European integration; respect for international law as embodied in the UN system; a clear endorsement of the Iberoamerican Community of Nations; a strong presence in the Mediterranean region, partly with a view to contributing to a just and peaceful solution to the Arab–Israeli conflict; a recognition of the importance of a 'robust and balanced' transatlantic relationship, to be conducted multilaterally, at the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and EU level, and bilaterally between Spain and the US; and a commitment to the global struggle against terrorism and organised crime. If anything, the most innovative aspects of the electoral programme were its commitment to a very significant increase in development aid, to a greater Spanish role in sub-Saharan Africa and to the provision of more social benefits for the one-and-a-half million Spaniards living abroad (many of whom would shortly be voting in the forthcoming general election).

In many parts of the world, Zapatero will probably be remembered best as the leader who stood up to the US administration and withdrew Spanish troops from Iraq. Had it not been for the war, he might have enjoyed the kind of relationship with Washington that González had forged in the late 1980s to early 1990s. As the PSOE's 2004 electoral programme recalled, since the return of democracy, successive Spanish governments had sought to define a more balanced bilateral relationship with the US, an effort that had culminated in the 1988 renegotiation of the bases agreement.

By standing up to a significantly more powerful ally but later taking part in the first Gulf War, González had proved that it was possible to engage in constructive criticism while remaining a loyal partner. Ironically, this had enabled that Socialist leader to enjoy a particularly close relationship with Republicans Ronald Reagan and George Bush (senior), in spite of an obvious lack of ideological affinity. Since 1996, however, this 'delicate balance' had been upset as a result of Aznar's conversion to a more Atlanticist worldview, an imbalance Zapatero would correct in order to return to the pre-existing status quo. Seen in this light, his policy towards the US may certainly be seen as a continuation of that of González, and it is interesting to note that he never objected to the bilateral Agreement on Defence Cooperation (most recently updated in 2002 by Aznar) which enabled US forces to make ample use of Spanish military bases throughout the Iraq War and beyond, and which was pointedly described in the 2004 electoral programme as being fully compatible with Spain's security commitments to both NATO and the EU.

Some critics, however, have claimed that Zapatero's attitude towards the US was always fundamentally different to that of his Socialist predecessor, in the sense that he was far more hostile to the notion of American leadership per se, and tended to empathise almost instinctively with Washington's traditional antagonists, most notably in Latin America and the Arab world. As a result, he regarded the 'special relationship' avidly sought by Aznar as an aberration, which had greatly reduced Spain's autonomy and influence in these regions, and in Europe as well. Although it is difficult to document this attitude, some have interpreted it as the expression of a deep-rooted, latent anti-Americanism, which certainly ran deep amongst broad sectors of the Spanish left. By all accounts, González probably shared a rather similar worldview in the 1970s, but gradually modified his stance once he came to office, even though it would not always be in his best electoral interest to act accordingly. However, it could also be argued that the key variable was that the two leaders operated in very different international contexts: while the power and influence of the US was almost undisputed in the late Cold War and post-Cold War period most familiar to González, his successor came to office in a markedly different, post-9/11 environment, in which doubts concerning the US's international standing were already commonplace.

Prior to taking up office, Zapatero had announced that Spanish troops would be withdrawn from Iraq unless the UN passed a resolution modifying the legal status of foreign troops there in keeping with international law before 30 June 2004, when formal sovereignty was due to be reinstated. On 18 April, however, his government decided to withdraw immediately, without waiting for the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 1546 on 8 June 2004, which was construed by some as having provided the invading troops with a modicum of legal cover.<sup>1</sup> Spanish public opinion, still reeling under the impact of the 14 March train bombings in Madrid, was generally supportive of the government, and, according to one poll, withdrawal enjoyed the support of 67 per cent of the population. The decision was also highly divisive, however; although it met the approval of 91 per cent of PSOE voters, it only had the backing of 26 per cent of PP ones.<sup>2</sup> In keeping with the PSOE's electoral promise to

allow parliament a greater say with regard to troop deployments abroad, in April 2004 the decision was put to the vote in the Congress of Deputies, which endorsed it by 185 votes in favour, 141 against and four abstentions.

Spain's 1,300 peace-keeping troops, which had arrived in Iraq in the summer of 2003, once the occupation had been completed, accounted for less than one per cent of the US-led forces there, and their withdrawal had no significant military impact, though it did force the small Nicaraguan, Dominican, Honduran and Salvadoran contingents serving under Spanish orders to withdraw as well. By all accounts, what irritated Washington most was the unilateral, unnecessarily hasty manner in which the withdrawal was implemented. Although the Bush administration claimed to respect Zapatero's decision, it effectively ceased to regard the Spanish government as a reliable partner, an attitude that only prompted the Prime Minister to publicly encourage other European leaders to follow his example during a visit to Tunisia in September 2004.

Spain's withdrawal from Iraq led to the most serious political spat in its bilateral relations with the US since Franco's death, and Zapatero would go down in diplomatic history as the only EU leader who was never invited to set foot in the White House during Bush's second term. More worryingly, perhaps, this had an immediate impact on Spaniards' attitudes towards the US, even if they were largely coloured by predominantly negative views of the Bush administration. Somewhat tentatively, however, both sides made efforts to mend bridges. Although Madrid refused to involve the Spanish army in the training of troops in Iraq, it did agree to help train Iraqi police, magistrates and civil servants in Spain. Furthermore, the new government did not renege on its predecessor's commitment to Iraq's reconstruction, and donated US\$20 million towards the organisation of the first Iraqi elections, held in January 2005. Relations at the ministerial level remained cordial, and Spanish ministers travelled to Washington frequently to engage their counterparts. In April 2007, after five years of desultory talks, an agreement was finally reached regulating the presence of US military intelligence in Spanish bases, which had been left pending when the Agreement on Defence Cooperation was updated in 2002. A month later, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice finally visited Madrid for the first time since the crisis over Iraq. Throughout this period, the US continued to make unrestricted use of its air and naval base in Rota, in southern Spain, its most important military facility in the western Mediterranean.

In spite of these efforts, the potential for serious disagreement remained. In November 2005, the Minister of Defence agreed the sale of transport planes and patrol boats to Venezuela valued at €1,700 million, supposedly to be used in combating drug-trafficking and terrorism. Fearing this equipment might be used against its closest ally in the region, Colombia, Washington effectively quashed the sale of the planes by refusing to grant the licence this transfer of technology originally developed in the US would have required. In general, the US was never slow to object to Spanish diplomatic overtures it did not approve of, such as Moratinos's unexpected visit to Damascus in March 2006. The US administration was also displeased by what it saw as an unduly conciliatory attitude towards the Cuban regime, and did not hide

its irritation when Moratinos visited Havana in April 2007, the first Spanish foreign minister to do so since Aznar's foreign minister, Abel Matutes, held talks there in 1998.

Although relations remained cool at the highest political level, it is unclear whether this did any lasting damage to the fundamentals of the bilateral relationship, in the same way that Aznar's proximity to Bush does not appear to have translated into any tangible long-term benefits. Police and judicial cooperation in the struggle against global terrorism continued unabated, and the two governments worked closely behind the scenes in trouble spots such as Venezuela.<sup>3</sup> In the economic sphere, in spite of the political crisis, in 2005–7 the US was the fourth/fifth-largest foreign investor in Spain as well as its seventh/eighth-largest trading partner, and it was during Zapatero's first term that the US briefly became the second most popular destination for Spanish direct investment (Barbé & Soriano 2008). However, some Spanish companies may have lost contracts with the US government as a result of its animosity towards the Socialist Prime Minister, particularly in the defence field.

One of the few ways in which Zapatero could compensate the US administration for its withdrawal from Iraq was by confirming Spain's commitment to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, which dated back to 2002.<sup>4</sup> In principle, this was politically acceptable to the Spanish government because, unlike the situation in Iraq, this presence had been endorsed by UN Security Council resolutions 1386 (2001) and 1510 (2003). In practice, however, this distinction was not always a simple one to argue or explain to Spanish public opinion; having questioned the efforts by Washington and its allies in attempting regime change in Iraq, it was not easy to convince Spaniards that a heterogeneous, US-led international coalition would achieve stability and progress in Afghanistan simply because it enjoyed UN support.

In spite of both the political and logistical difficulties involved, Zapatero increased the presence of Spanish troops in the run-up to the Afghan presidential elections held in November 2004, and again in September 2005, this time in support of the forthcoming parliamentary elections. Spain established its own military–civilian Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in August 2005 in western Afghanistan, and the embassy in Kabul was reopened by Zapatero himself later that year. In May 2006, after a rowdy debate in which the PP accused it of not owning up to the dangers faced by what was supposedly a peace-keeping force, the government obtained parliamentary permission to add an extra 150 troops to the 540 already deployed there. In short, in spite of the 23 casualties incurred in Afghanistan, the pacifist instincts of many PSOE voters, and growing concern over ISAF's ability to defeat the Taliban, in this area there was very little Zapatero could do other than honour his predecessor's commitments.

Iraq notwithstanding, there was thus considerable continuity between the Zapatero and Aznar governments in terms of their willingness to take part in international peace-keeping missions. When the former came to power, Spain was already making significant contributions to the EU's military operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR-Althea), with some 500 troops, and to NATO's long-standing military mission in Kosovo (KFOR-Kosovo Force), with a further 700. The major novelty in

this area was the UN's mission in Lebanon (FINUL-UN Interim Force in Lebanon), to which Spain contributed 1,100 troops as of September 2006, in response to UN Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), adopted in the wake of an Israeli attack provoked by the kidnapping of two of its soldiers by Hezbollah. In March 2007, the UN acknowledged Spain's long-standing commitment to its peace-keeping operations by asking it to house its communications and data centre for all peace missions in Europe.

In spite of this basic continuity, Zapatero sought to distance himself from his predecessor by passing a new national defence law in November 2005, which required parliamentary approval to send troops abroad. The PP opposed the law on the grounds that, by demanding that future missions enjoy the prior backing of the UN Security Council, the EU or NATO, governments might be prevented from acting expeditiously; it was unclear, for example, whether the mission to retake Parsley Island after its brief occupation by Morocco in July 2002 (discussed in further detail below) would have met this requirement. The defence law also limited the maximum number of troops deployable abroad to 3,000, a somewhat arbitrary figure that was later abandoned as impractical.

### **Spain's Traditional Priorities: Europe, Latin America and the Maghreb**

As leader of the opposition, Zapatero had repeatedly claimed that Aznar's policy on Iraq and his subservience to the Bush administration had seriously undermined Spain's standing in Europe, both within the EU and at the bilateral level. Once in office, therefore, restoring close relations with France and Germany in particular became a top priority. Gerhard Schroeder and Jacques Chirac were undoubtedly relieved by the departure of 'the Abominable Doctor No', as the *Financial Times* famously dubbed Aznar,<sup>5</sup> and both went out of their way to establish friendly relations with the new Spanish prime minister, who lost no time in visiting Paris and Berlin in April 2004. The three leaders met again in Madrid in September, providing their host with an opportunity to snub US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld by proclaiming that 'old Europe is as good as new'. More tellingly, perhaps, Schroeder and Chirac invited Zapatero to share a summit with Vladimir Putin in Paris in March 2005, as a way of rewarding his determination to place Spain back at the 'heart of Europe', or to accept Franco-German leadership unquestioningly, depending on one's interpretation. This honeymoon was short-lived, however; Angela Merkel's victory in the September 2005 elections and that of Nicholas Sarkozy in May 2007 deprived Zapatero of his closest allies in Europe, and his public support for Schroeder and Ségolène Royal did not immediately endear him to their successors. Like González before him, however, he soon discovered that German Christian democrats and French conservatives make curiously comfortable bedfellows for a Spanish Socialist leader. More surprisingly, given Blair's intimate relationship with Aznar, partly as a result of the sense of solidarity generated by the July 2005 terrorist attacks in London, Zapatero also developed a good working relationship with the British Prime Minister, who publicly endorsed his controversial negotiations with Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) while

advising him privately on the basis of his own dealings with the Irish Republican Army (IRA) (Ortega 2006; Valenzuela 2007).

While in opposition, Zapatero had been particularly outspoken in his criticism of Aznar's foreign policy towards Latin America, or alleged lack thereof, which Zapatero invariably attributed to his rival's unholy alliance with the Bush administration. According to this critique, Spain had lost much of the autonomy, influence and prestige it had once enjoyed in Latin America, and as prime minister Zapatero was keen to regain it. In practice, however, this would turn out to be a more complex task than initially envisaged. Most importantly, the usefulness and viability of the Iberoamerican Community of Nations, an organisation not unlike the British Commonwealth, was coming under increasingly critical scrutiny, particularly in Latin American countries with left-wing, populist leaders who were somewhat ambivalent—to put it mildly—about Spain's colonial legacy. Additionally, these same leaders were becoming increasingly belligerent in their treatment of the major Spanish multinational corporations active in the region, such as Repsol YPF (oil and gas), Telefónica (telecoms), Endesa (electricity) and Santander and BBVA (banks), which accounted for a very significant proportion of Spain's foreign direct investment. As a result, improving political relations with these governments, while defending Spanish economic interests, would become an increasingly daunting task.

With regard to the Iberoamerican Community of Nations, the government's most significant effort to enhance its credibility and capacity for delivery was undoubtedly the creation of a permanent secretariat, with headquarters in Madrid, run by the Uruguayan Enrique Iglesias, a former president of the Inter-American Development Bank, who took up office in October 2005. The goal of the permanent secretariat was to provide continuity between summits, and to ensure that these did not become irrelevant, high-level talking-shops with a tendency to be hijacked by media-savvy leaders. However, the difficulties experienced at subsequent summits proved that the future of the Community remained uncertain. The 14th summit, held in San José (Costa Rica) in November 2004, was singularly uneventful, while the 15th, hosted by Salamanca in October 2005, provoked yet another diplomatic spat with the US on account of references to the lifting of its 'blockade' (as opposed to embargo) of Cuba in the summit's conclusions. The 16th summit, held in Montevideo in November 2006, failed to attract the interest of eight Latin American presidents who stayed away, and its successor, hosted by Santiago (Chile) in November 2007, attracted worldwide attention not on account of its content but due to a colourful exchange between Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez and the King of Spain, who memorably requested that the former shut up.

This episode is of more than anecdotal interest, and is quite revealing of the nature of the new challenges facing Spanish foreign policy in the region. Chavez, president of Venezuela since 1999, greatly preferred Zapatero to Aznar, whom he accused of having backed the coup staged against him in April 2002, and Zapatero, who invited Chavez to Madrid in November 2004, initially saw himself as a moderating influence in Caracas. This role enabled him to travel to Venezuela in March 2005 to mediate in

the conflict arising between Chavez and the Colombian President, Álvaro Uribe, triggered by a border incident involving Colombian guerrillas. However, Chavez subsequently became increasingly arbitrary in his treatment of Spanish companies with interests in Venezuela, and it was Zapatero's advice to Latin American governments to do more to attract foreign investment if they wanted to overcome their domestic difficulties that initially prompted Chavez to interrupt the Spanish leader at the Santiago summit in 2007, later going on to accuse Aznar of being a fascist lackey of the US. Much to his credit, on this occasion Zapatero gallantly rose in defence of his predecessor, reminding Chavez that, even though they had little in common, Aznar deserved respect as the democratically elected leader of a sovereign state. Nevertheless, the episode served to illustrate the dangers inherent in currying favour with foreign governments on the basis of domestic political rivalries, a sport Zapatero had practised with some relish at first. The Spanish Prime Minister did not fare much better in his dealings with Evo Morales, who visited Spain in January 2006, shortly before taking up office as president of Bolivia. In spite of Madrid's efforts to dissuade him, Morales nationalised the oil and natural gas industries in May, though Spanish companies later agreed to remain after ceding commercialisation rights to the state. The fate of Spanish investments in the Argentine oil industry also gave Zapatero cause for concern, prompting a visit to Buenos Aires in January 2005 (the first by a Spanish prime minister since 1997), though they were largely put to rest after a visit to Madrid by Nestor Kirchner in June 2006. The irony of all this, of course, was that, after having denounced Aznar repeatedly for allowing economic considerations to dictate his Latin American policy, the Socialist leader found himself treading very similar ground.

During the course of his first term in office, the Spanish Prime Minister gradually concluded that it made better sense to seek strategic partnerships with the more predictable leaders in the region, particularly those who sought to achieve both economic growth and greater social justice. This resulted in an explicit rapprochement with Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, whom he met in Brasilia in January 2005 and who visited Madrid in September 2007, by which time Spain had become the second-largest investor in the country, and Michelle Bachelet, who visited Madrid in May 2006, shortly after taking office as president of Chile. Zapatero also cultivated Mexican President Felipe Calderón, who visited Spain in January 2007, and with whom he signed a new action plan in Mexico City in July, aimed at developing the strategic association agreement endorsed by the two countries during the Aznar years.

The only area in which the Socialist Prime Minister was able to distance himself significantly from his predecessor's Latin American policy was with regard to Cuba. Aznar had effectively frozen relations with Fidel Castro in the spring of 2003, following the summary execution of three people who had hijacked a ferry in an attempt to escape the island and the arrest of 75 dissidents, and had later succeeded in getting EU member states to follow suit. This policy, which was of course seen by critics as yet another example of unseemly subordination to the Bush administration, was reversed by Zapatero on the grounds that it would not allow Spain to play a leading role in the changes that would presumably be unleashed by Castro's departure. The Spanish

authorities therefore sought to establish a new working relationship with both the government and the opposition movement, a policy that resulted in the release of 14 dissidents, including the writer Raúl Rivero, in November 2004. Spain's U-turn on Cuba was not universally welcome, however, and its demand that sanctions be lifted initially met some resistance, particularly from the newer EU member states, who attributed it to Madrid's economic interests in the island. Following Moratinos's visit to Havana in April 2007, in September Spain restored the flow of aid that had been interrupted in 2003 and launched a renewed bilateral dialogue that included human rights issues, which may have prompted the release of a further seven dissidents. In spite of this progress, however, doubts remained as to whether the new policy would have a significant impact on the regime's evolution overall (Roy 2007).

Another region of great importance to Spain where Aznar was said to have weakened Spain's influence and credibility on account of his ideological prejudices and dangerous friendships was the Maghreb. Admittedly, relations with Rabat had reached an all-time low in July 2002 due to the crisis resulting from the occupation of Parsley Island, a minuscule territory allegedly belonging to Spain, by a detachment of Moroccan gendarmes that was subsequently evicted by Spanish troops. Although there was no loss of life, Zapatero would have preferred to solve the crisis by diplomatic means, but the Aznar government believed Rabat was testing Spain's resolve with a view to subsequently challenging its presence in Ceuta, Melilla and other North African enclaves later on, and that therefore a determined show of force was the only possible response. In spite of this episode, in late 2003 his government granted Morocco a very generous financial aid package which helped to improve relations considerably. While in opposition, the Socialists had also accused their political rivals of drawing dangerously close to Algeria on account of its willingness to provide Spain with much of the natural gas it consumed (60 per cent in 1998), a dependence that had also allegedly led them to adopt an unusually belligerent stand in defence of the former Spanish Sahara's right to self-determination, thereby antagonising Morocco unnecessarily.

Zapatero set out to rectify his predecessor's policies at once, visiting Rabat officially in April 2004 on his first trip abroad as prime minister (something Aznar, and González before him, had also done). Given that 14 Moroccans were being held in Spanish prisons at the time on suspicion of involvement in the 14 March train bombings, it was important to show public opinion that anti-terrorist cooperation in particular was high on the bilateral agenda. This was followed in January 2005 by the first state visit to Morocco by King Juan Carlos since 1979, during which King Mohammed VI called on Spain to upgrade its bilateral relations to the higher level of a strategic association. In return, the Moroccan government significantly improved its control of the flow of illegal immigrants heading for Spanish shores, though the fences erected to keep them out of the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in the autumn of 2005 were not always effective. Rabat also signed an agreement with the EU in 2005 which mainly benefited the Spanish fishing fleet, allowing for a limited presence in Moroccan waters, though it did not enter into force until February 2007. Although Zapatero's

visit to Ceuta and Melilla in January 2006, the first by a Spanish prime minister since 1980, did not appear to annoy Rabat unduly, a royal visit to the enclaves in November 2007 prompted a much stronger reaction from Morocco, whose ambassador was recalled for two months, thereby giving the lie to the government's claim to have overcome bilateral tensions for good.

Zapatero also went out of his way to prove wrong those who claimed it was impossible to be on friendly terms with Morocco without jeopardising relations with Algeria, or vice versa (Ortega 2006; Valenzuela 2007). After his first visit to Algeria in July 2004, Spanish energy companies signed major new contracts in November, and his government reached an important anti-terrorist agreement in December. Subsequently, in March 2007, King Juan Carlos conducted his first state visit to Algeria in 24 years. However, in September 2007 the state gas company (Sonatrach) announced it was going back on the contracts mentioned above, raising fresh doubts about the future of Spanish investments in the country.

In the past, the main obstacle to close relations with both Morocco and Algeria had been the dispute over the former Spanish Sahara. True to its strong commitment to the UN and international law, the Zapatero government initially backed the II Baker Plan, which called for immediate self-government for Western Sahara and a referendum after five years, but abstained when it was put to the vote in the UN's Special Committee on Decolonisation in October 2004, on the grounds that it was clear that the international community had no intention of forcing Morocco to hold such a referendum as the UN had been requesting since Spain's departure in 1976. Subsequently, Spain appeared to endorse the autonomy proposal for Western Sahara unilaterally presented by Morocco in April 2007, a change of attitude that inevitably gave the Algerian government renewed cause for concern. In short, the goal of developing a balanced relationship with Morocco and Algeria remained as elusive as ever (Amirah-Fernández 2008).

### **Breaking New Ground**

The argument that Aznar's relationship with the Bush administration had jeopardised Spain's standing in regions of the world where it had hitherto enjoyed a degree of influence and autonomy was used to considerable political effect by his Socialist critics while in opposition. The natural corollary to this was that once this unseemly alliance was terminated there would soon be ample evidence of the benefits of having reversed this misguided policy. Ultimately, this is probably the reasoning that best explains Zapatero's somewhat surprising decision to commit himself personally to the launching of an 'Alliance of Civilizations' in a speech to the UN General Assembly in September 2004.

The Alliance of Civilizations initiative was initially envisaged as a coming together of 'the Western world' and the 'Arab and Muslim worlds' in order to prevent 'hate and misunderstanding' from erecting a new wall that might divide the world far more permanently than that which had fallen with relative ease in 1989. Like the 'Dialogue

of Civilizations' originally promoted by Iranian President Mohammad Khatami in the late 1990s, the initiative was conceived as a reply to Samuel Huntington's view that religious and cultural divisions (or what he termed the 'clash of civilizations') would motivate the defining conflicts of the early twenty-first century, an interpretation he believed had been largely borne out by the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The Alliance therefore aimed to avoid the fulfilment of this predicted clash 'by promoting security, understanding, tolerance and mutual respect in a globalised world' (Zapatero 2009a).

Initially, the Alliance of Civilizations failed to attract much attention, particularly in academic circles, though some objections were raised at once with regard to its fundamental tenets, including doubts about the use of the term 'civilization'. Most importantly, some noted that it was premised on the understanding that the 'clash of civilizations' predicted by Huntington was indeed taking place, when in fact al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups had been condemned in no uncertain terms by most mainstream interpreters of Islamic thought. Others pointed out that, by definition, a dialogue of this nature would be asymmetrical and artificial, since most Arab and Muslim countries continued to live under authoritarian rule. Similarly, if this was intended to be an alliance between societies, rather than states, the means and instruments whereby it could be achieved remained problematic. Finally, from a purely domestic perspective, it was also argued that, given Spain's difficulties in coming to terms with its own Muslim and Jewish identities, the nation that invented the Inquisition was hardly in a strong position to lead by example (Elorza 2008; Riordan 2006). Although the Alliance of Civilizations initiative was at least partly designed to improve Spain's standing in the Arab and Muslim worlds, the government no doubt hoped it would be well received by the half million Muslims already living in the country as well. In short, this initiative is perhaps best understood as a by-product of the Prime Minister's new national role conception, which led him to believe that, given its growing multiculturalism and its capacity to act as a bridge between different regions and cultures, Spain should position itself globally as a 'reliable mediator' (Zapatero 2009b).

To his credit, the Spanish leader convinced Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who was no doubt grateful for his outspoken support for Turkish membership of the EU, to co-sponsor his initiative, and in July 2005 the UN Secretary General appointed a high-level cross-cultural group, consisting of 20 world figures, who produced a report containing specific proposals. The report, released in Istanbul in November 2006, led to the appointment of former Portuguese president Jorge Sampaio as the UN Secretary General's high representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, and to the celebration of its first forum in Madrid in January 2008. Thereafter, the Alliance (which by that stage enjoyed the support of more than 80 states and international organisations, and a budget of €350 million) would seek to develop specific programmes in four areas, namely education, youth, migration and the media. Against all odds, Zapatero, probably Spain's most parochial prime minister since Adolfo Suárez, had succeeded in launching a major international initiative, whose future success or failure would largely depend on others.

The Zapatero government also broke new ground in seeking to extend Spain's presence and influence beyond its immediate North African vicinity and into the sub-Saharan region (Guerrero 2008). Admittedly, this was partly in response to two relatively new developments, namely the growing influx of illegal immigrants from the region, who either sailed to the Canary Islands from the coast of Senegal in precarious fishing-boats (*cayucos*) or used Morocco as a transit country, and the increasingly serious threat posed by Islamic fundamentalist terrorists present in a number of failed, or rapidly failing, states. Though hardly revolutionary either in terms of its content or ambition, the government's Africa Plan for 2006–8 envisaged a novel package combining debt relief, a significant increase in development aid and an enhanced diplomatic presence (with new embassies in Mali, the Sudan and Cape Verde), which added up to a significant departure in Spanish foreign policy priorities. In spite of its pacifist rhetoric, the plan was of course silent about the fact that Spain was the leading exporter of munitions to sub-Saharan Africa. Overall, its most remarkable significant short-term achievement was the signing of highly innovative repatriation agreements with Mali, Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Guinea-Buissau, Guinea Conakry and Senegal, whereby these countries agreed to take their immigrants back in return for significant Spanish investments in education, training and infrastructure. As a result, the number of boats sailing to the Canary Islands from sub-Saharan countries carrying illegal emigrants halved from 2006 to 2007, and there was also a very significant increase in the number of detained immigrants, some 5,000 in 2006 alone, who were returned to their countries of origin.

Overall, the Africa Plan is best understood in the context of Zapatero's determination to place development aid at the heart of Spain's foreign policy agenda, a concern that soon became apparent when the government department in question was quickly renamed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation. This is probably the clearest example of how Zapatero's national role conception influenced his foreign policy priorities, and may be seen as an attempt on his part to position Spain as a 'norm entrepreneur' (Ingebritsen 2006), by which we mean a state that fosters the development of norms and standards within international organisations that favour an increased transfer of resources to the poorest countries in an effort to lessen global inequality. In opposition, and in keeping with the UN's so-called 'millennium goals', the PSOE government had promised to double Spain's official development aid by 2008, with a view to reaching the 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) goal set for developed nations by the UN by 2012. Once in office, development aid rose from €1,985 million in 2004 to €5,509 million in 2008, making Spain the eighth-largest aid donor worldwide.

In order to bring about a qualitative improvement in the nature of Spanish aid commensurate with this remarkable quantitative increase, the government adopted an ambitious Master Plan for Spanish Cooperation (2005–8), which aimed to modernise and overhaul the state's development-aid-related institutions and methodology. In keeping with its political traditions and other foreign policy objectives, about 40 per cent of Spanish aid was earmarked for Latin America (mainly the poorer

Central American countries), the rest going to the Maghreb (including the displaced Sahrawi population resident in Algeria), sub-Saharan Africa (in keeping with the Africa Plan), the Middle East (with special emphasis on the Palestinian territories, but also Iraq), the Philippines (a former colony) and Vietnam. In practice, this meant that Spain was spreading its resources too thinly, only 36 per cent of the total reaching its 23 priority countries, against a target share of 70 per cent. Furthermore, critics complained that Spanish aid policies were excessively bilateral, unnecessarily expensive to implement and not always coherent with some of the country's immigration, trade and commercial policies (Olivie 2008). Although the PSOE had accused the Aznar government of having subordinated its aid policies to narrow commercial interests, some members of the NGO development community felt that not much had changed in this regard either (Intermon-Oxfam 2009).

### **Conclusion**

Zapatero's foreign policy has received rather poor reviews, many of them justified (Areilza & Torreblanca 2009; Grant 2009). The criticism most frequently levelled at him is that, partly due to his initial lack of knowledge and experience, he did not take foreign affairs seriously, and saw policy in this area almost exclusively in electoral terms. Given the political consequences of the March 2004 train bombings, which many Spaniards attributed to Aznar's proximity to Bush and his support for the Iraq War, it was perhaps inevitable that he should have concluded that reversing his predecessor's policies was an easy vote winner. Nevertheless, it should be noted that this concern did not prevent him from sending fresh troop contingents to Afghanistan, which was bound to prove unpopular with his voters, even if his government seemed hesitant as to its role there. Furthermore, it is important to note that his regard for the UN system, international law and 'effective multilateralism' was broadly in tune with Spanish public opinion.

Zapatero's foreign policy undoubtedly incurred a number of contradictions. His rhetorical emphasis on democracy and human rights, for example, sat uneasily with his generally conciliatory attitude towards the governments of Cuba, Russia, China (the Socialist leader refused to meet the Dalai Lama) or Equatorial Guinea, a former Spanish colony governed by one of the region's most unscrupulous and corrupt dictators, whose famished territory boasts abundant oil reserves. Similarly, his government's enthusiasm for multilateral institutions and procedures was not much in evidence when Spain broke ranks with the vast majority of EU members states by refusing to recognise the independence of Kosovo, and later abruptly withdrew its troops from NATO's KFOR mission, disregarding the consequences this might have for the stability of the country and the region overall. If this was done to curry favour with Serbia and (or) Russia, the reasoning was surely faulty, and the results meagre. Finally, Zapatero's enthusiasm for Spanish membership of the G-20, which was justified in terms of the need to contribute to the emergence of a new multilateral world order, was curiously reminiscent of Aznar's (much maligned) aspirations for G-8 membership.

Spain's foreign policy during these years also suffered from a lack of strategic thinking, something its Foreign Ministry has never been famous for, in spite of the undeniable quality of its professionals. On occasion, there was also evidence of insufficient coordination between the various departments involved in policy implementation, most notably the Foreign and Defence Ministries. Most regrettably, the government failed to push through the long-awaited modernisation of the Foreign Service, promised in 2004.

Judged in terms of his own professed priorities, however, Zapatero's foreign policy can be cast in a reasonably favourable light. There is little doubt, for example, that he succeeded in reversing his predecessor's infatuation with the Bush administration, though his later efforts to forge a special relationship with that of Barack Obama on the strength of personal chemistry and ideological affinity, rather than more permanent shared interests and values, is once again reminiscent of Aznar. Similarly, it could be argued that his enthusiastic endorsement of 'effective multilateralism' paid off handsomely, allowing Spain to join the G-20 (albeit informally), even if his government's tangible contribution to the debate on the future of global governance was not much in evidence. Overall, it is likely that Zapatero's attempt to change perceptions of Spain abroad (and at home) by promoting his own national role conception, visible in areas such as the Alliance of Civilizations and his emphasis on development aid, will prove his most lasting foreign policy legacy. Even his most enthusiastic admirers, however, would probably hesitate to describe this as a departure amounting to a second transition.

## Notes

- [1] The haste with which it was carried out may have been related to the fact that elections to the European parliament were due on 13 June 2004, which the PSOE narrowly won with 43 per cent of the vote against the PP's 41 per cent.
- [2] *El Mundo*, 26 April 2004.
- [3] Author's interviews with State Department officials, Washington, DC, May 2006.
- [4] Zapatero gave Bush personal assurances that Spain would send more troops to Afghanistan at their very first meeting, during a NATO summit in Istanbul in June 2004 (Valenzuela 2007).
- [5] *Financial Times*, 15 June 2004.

## References

- Amirah-Fernández, H. (2008) 'Spain's policy towards Morocco and Algeria', in *North Africa. Politics, Region and the Limits of Transformation*, eds H. Amirah-Fernández & Y. H. Zoubir, Routledge, London, pp. 348–364.
- Areilza, J. M. & Torreblanca, J. I. (2009) 'Diagnóstico diferencial, política exterior', *Foreign Policy Edición Española*, no. 33, pp. 12–24.
- Aznar, J. M. (1994) *España: la segunda transición*, Espasa Calpe, Madrid.
- Barbé, E. & Soriano, J. P. (2008) 'En busca de la relación perdida con Estados Unidos o cómo (des)iraquizar la relación transatlántica', in *España en Europa 2004–2008*, ed. E. Barbé, Institut Universitari d'Estudis Europeus, Barcelona.

- Elorza, A. (2008) 'De Granada a Bombay', *El País*, 29 November.
- George, A. L. (1993) *Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy*, US Institute of Peace Press, Washington, DC.
- Grant, C. (2009) *Will Spain remain a small country?* Briefing Note, Centre for European Reform, London.
- Grimond, J. (2004) 'The second transition', *The Economist*, 26 June.
- Guerrero, F. (2008) 'Las relaciones España–África subsahariana: ¿a remolque o en la vanguardia de la UE?', in *España en Europa 2004–2008*, ed. E. Barbé, Institut Universitari d'Estudis Europeus, Barcelona.
- Holsti, K. J. (1987) 'National role conceptions in the study of foreign policy', in *Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis*, ed. S. G. Walker, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, pp. 5–43.
- Hudson, V. M. (2005) 'Foreign policy analysis: actor-specific theory and the ground of international relations', *Foreign Policy Analysis*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 1–30.
- Ingebritsen, C. (2006) 'Norm entrepreneurs: Scandinavia's role in world politics', in *Small States in International Relations*, ed. C. Ingebritsen et al, University of Washington Press, Seattle pp. 273–285.
- Intermon-Oxfam (2009) *La realidad de la ayuda 2008–2009*, Madrid.
- Nye, J. (2004) *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Public Affairs, New York.
- Olivé, I. (2008) *¿Somos coherentes? España como agente de desarrollo internacional*, Marcial Pons, Madrid.
- Ortega, A. (2006) 'Entrevista con José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero', *Foreign Policy Edición Española*, no. 13, pp. 22–29.
- Powell, C. (2006) 'Dalla A(znar) alla Z(apatero)', *Aspenia. Rivista di Aspen Institute Italia*, no. 34, pp. 200–208.
- PSOE (2004) *Merecemos una España mejor. Programa electoral. Elecciones generales 2004*, Madrid.
- Riordan, S. (2006) 'Alliance of civilisations or alliance of the civilised?', *Análisis del Real Instituto Elcano*, no. 41/2006, Madrid.
- Roy, J. (2007) 'The attitude of the European Union and Spain towards Cuba: an assessment a year after Castro's illness', Working Paper no. 38/2007, Real Instituto Elcano, Madrid.
- Valenzuela, J. (2007) *Viajando con ZP*, Debate, Barcelona.
- Zapatero, J. L. (2009a) 'In Spain's interest: a committed foreign policy', speech delivered at the Prado Museum, Madrid, February.
- Zapatero, J. L. (2009b) 'Los retos de España en un mundo multipolar', *Fundación Ideas para el Progreso*, October.