

# conflict studies

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SPECIAL REPORT

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## Portugal and Spain: Transition Politics

- Portugal's revolutionary cycle
- Election support for 'moderates'
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- Opposition challenge to reform
- Iberian strategic considerations

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### International and Strategic Considerations <sup>14</sup>

Looked at in the most general terms, Iberia, an area at once dominating the western entrance to the Mediterranean and a historic bridge between Europe and Africa, has great natural strategic significance. In modern times, however, neither Portugal nor Spain has had the power to exploit their respective positions, and the task has fallen to others. In the past the chief actor was the United Kingdom, which still possesses base facilities at Gibraltar—chiefly naval: the airstrip is so vulnerable that

it may be discounted. As a Mediterranean naval power the United Kingdom is, however, finished, and the predominant power is undoubtedly the United States, though in the past year the US government has been increasingly hamstrung by a Congress in revolt against the "Imperial Presidency", and by the influence of public opinion polls which have indicated that the United States should intervene outside its own borders only if Canada were involved.

Last year a House Committee on Foreign Affairs dispatched a special study mission to South Europe composed of members of such key committees as Appropriations, Science and Technology, and the Judiciary. Its report suggested that the possibility of "the replacement of NATO by a form of European defense cooperation in which these four countries (Portugal, Spain, Greece and Turkey) might also find a proper place. . . . These four countries will almost certainly be more comfortable politically under such an arrangement than under NATO". As will be seen in the short sections on Portugal and Spain respectively this judgment is subject to considerable qualification in the light of later events in both countries.

It remains true, nevertheless, that the Royal Navy still has a role beyond the Atlantic end of the Straits, but to the east the burden falls on the US Sixth Fleet, together with the other NATO navies (and, in a different category, but with an increasing willingness to co-operate the French navy).

At present Portugal and Spain occupy curiously contrasting places in relation to NATO. Portugal was a founder-member as a result of its old British connection and its intense anti-Communism—and, it should be added, its World War II provision of bases in the Azores, to which we shall return. It afforded limited forces, but valuable facilities. Up to April 1974, Portugal's contribution was in some respect offset by the political stigma incurred in some circles as a result of its domestic autocracy and its African colonial wars. After the April 1974 coup in Portugal there followed first a precipitate leftward movement, in which the PCP played a leading role, and then a general collapse of discipline in the armed forces and of organised government. Continued Portuguese membership of NATO was for some time in serious doubt, but the régime which established itself after the abortive left-wing coup of November 1975, has affirmed its NATO membership, though we must still await the outcome of presidential elections and the firm establishment of a stable non-Communist régime.

Spain, on the other hand, precisely because of the leftward drift in Portugal in the

summer of 1975, was coming to be regarded by some as on the brink of membership. Since then General Franco has died, and there are real hopes of a genuine democratisation of the new monarchy, which could make Spain acceptable to the other NATO members. Spanish ministers speak with some confidence of membership within two years. In any event, Spanish contributions to the alliance hitherto have come by way of bilateral agreements with the United States. The new formal Treaty signed by the two countries in February 1976 has radically altered the situation on both sides.

This is still a time of great fluidity in Iberian politics. The outcome of events in both countries will determine the future relationship of the area with NATO and with the Soviet Union: there can be no doubt that trends in Iberia have an overall significance for NATO as a whole, and a special meaning for the troubled southern flank. It may however be argued that the southern flank is already beyond repair within the familiar shape of the alliance. Greece and Turkey were late-comers and their relationship has always been predominantly bilateral to the USA, in a manner partly analagous to that of Spain, in a much looser form.

In view of the greatly differing nature of the actual and potential strategic significance of the two components of Iberia the fundamental problems of each country need to be considered separately, as in the other sections of this paper.

#### Portugal

We must leave aside Portugal's past contribution, however it may have been evaluated, in denying potential bases in west, southern and east Africa to the USSR, for this issue is now out of Portugal's hands. Almost as important has been the independence of the Cape Verde Islands, with the important international airport of Sal and the harbour of Mindelo. In an international crisis it is not to be expected that the PAIGC government of the islands would make facilities available to the West in present circumstances. Certainly they are no longer controllable by NATO powers.

In NATO Portugal has contributed above all to the naval balance in the Atlantic and the entry to the Mediterranean by providing bases for anti-submarine warfare ships and aircraft, and for static detection facilities. The Azores (in the form of the important air base complex at Lajes) have provided valuable airfields for refuelling purposes (especially on the route from the USA to Israel, for example in the "Yom Kippur war"), and for anti-submarine surveillance. The future of these islands and

<sup>14</sup> This section is indebted to papers presented by Professors Holland and Martin, and Mr. James Theberge.

the Lajes base no longer seems in serious doubt, since the great majority of the islanders showed their determination to have a broad degree of internal autonomy while there is a "moderate" government in Lisbon, or to insist on unilateral declaration of independence should a pro-Communist régime gain power there.

Then there is NATO's IBERLANT control headquarters, at Oeiras, just outside Lisbon; important radar facilities; and the use of Portugal's Atlantic ports (especially Lisbon) to the Alliance—and the denial of the use of these to the USSR. The latter requested the use of Portuguese ports during the earlier Communist-oriented Lisbon governments, but they were not granted; they are still less likely to be granted under the present government.

### Spain

Apart from Ceuta and Melilla, the enclaves on the Moroccan Mediterranean coast, Spain has no remaining African territories since the cession of Spanish Sahara to Morocco. The Canary Islands are already available to Russian "trawlers" for refuelling, but are not usable as naval bases. It is mainland Spain that is important, together with the Balearic Islands ports of Palma and Mahon. Spain was not satisfied with the 1970 Agreement of Friendship and Co-operation with the US, which essentially provided for the operation of American air and naval installations in Spain in exchange for military and economic aid. The agreement was sharply criticised in Spain because the presence of American bases increased its vulnerability to attack without any corresponding American defence guarantee: and the Spaniards were unhappy about what they considered to be the "meagre" military supplies so far received; and, especially, about the presence of American nuclear weapons on Spanish soil. The formal Treaty which has now replaced the US-Spanish "Agreements" specifically provide for greatly increased economic aid, and for the gradual elimination of nuclear weapons (including Polaris submarines at the Rota base, near Cadiz) from Spain. The monarchy looks forward not only to membership of EEC but also of NATO within the next two years, for Spain sees its economic and military security increasingly bound up

with that of Western Europe—and this trend must surely be strengthened as soon as a degree of free political party activity is allowed in the coming months.

Of the US bases in Spain, Cartagena, the naval base included in the original 1953 Agreement, was never used; the Sixth Fleet does use Barcelona and other ports from time to time, but they are in no sense bases. Morón has been in the process of being run down for some time now and has not been considered as important except as a transit base. Torrejón, near Madrid, was perhaps the most controversial from the popular Spanish point of view, because of its proximity to the capital. In fact, this very proximity has made Torrejón of increasingly less value to the US as air traffic at Madrid's airports has increased. At Saragossa there is an air base and an oil pipeline terminal: this has been important in the past as a refuelling and staging post. But most important in recent years has been Rota.

Spain's original role was to assist the US strategic strike, and this has been perpetuated in the basing of nuclear submarines at Rota. But this contribution was a convenience rather than a necessity: it affects time on station, but the US strategic capability is not so marginal as to be dependent on this. In the long run, advanced ballistic missiles will make forward basing much less desirable. And also, there have been signs on the part of the monarchy of a less uncompromising stand on the future of Gibraltar—one which, for the first time, takes into consideration the views of the inhabitants of The Rock.

The naval problem is dominated by anti-submarine warfare, and here we cannot separate Spain and Portugal. The facilities of these two countries, together with Gibraltar, combine to aid surveillance and active anti-submarine warfare operations in the Western Mediterranean and Eastern Atlantic. As a general rule such facilities serve to cut operational costs. Some activities, however, become almost impossible without reasonably close shore facilities, and in the ASW area Western resources are so stretched that the theoretical ability to compensate for lost shore facilities may not exist within the reality of defence budgets.