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U.S. Is Urging Stronger Ties Between NATO and Spain

By Richard Eder

MADRID, June 13 (NYT).—The United States has stepped up its efforts to establish formal links between Spain and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

When NATO's defense planning committee met two weeks ago in Brussels, U.S. Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird submitted a paper arguing that the protection of the alliance's southern flank was being seriously hampered by the lack of Spanish participation.

According to informed diplomats here, the paper was emphatic in stating that an arrangement to link Spain to the alliance must be worked out. No public mention of it has been made because of the sensitivity among some NATO members on the subject of Spain.

Spanish membership in NATO was first proposed by the Eisenhower administration, but for many years the United States refrained from pushing the proposal. Opposition to the Franco regime is strong in many of Europe's democratic parties, and at different times it would have been politically impossible for countries such as Great Britain, West Germany, Belgium and Denmark to accept Spain.

The current American initiative, which is described both by American and other sources as the most vigorous to date, does not call for full Spanish membership, but for less public, though formal "arrangements" between Spanish military commands and those of NATO.

Two Possibilities

One such proposed arrangement would be the stationing of Spanish military representatives at NATO commands in Brussels and Lisbon. Another would be the integration into NATO's aircraft control and warning system of Spain's own network.

At present Spain's aircraft-warning setup is linked with U.S. European commands through an arrangement provided for by the bases agreement between the two countries. There is thus an indirect linkage to the NATO system, but the American argument is that a direct hookup would be more effective.

American military authorities also want to secure Spanish participation in NATO's navy patrolling in the western Mediterranean.

The renewed American interest in a Spanish tie to NATO dates from early in the Nixon administration. It rests, at least in part, on a wide-ranging review, by Deputy Secretary of Defense David Packard, of U.S. military strategy.

The American argument cites the growth of Russian power in the Mediterranean, the loss of U.S. bases in the area, doubts about the future of non-alignment in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, and the withdrawal of France from NATO's military commands.

To U.S. military planners, any doubts about what public opinion may do in Spain after Gen. Francisco Franco's departure are outweighed by the regime's present ideological firmness and by Spain's important geographical position—protected by distance and the Pyrenees from the Soviet Army and dominating entry into the western Mediterranean.

Spanish official opinion on creating ties with NATO is ambiguous. In the past, Spain has been eager to join, but more recently Foreign Minister Gregorio López Bravo has voiced doubts about the future of the alliance, and the usefulness to Spain of joining it.

On the other hand, there is no sign that the interest of Spain's armed forces—and probably of Gen. Franco—in NATO has ebbed significantly.