

## The Madrid Elections and the War on Terror

James S. Henry

SubmergingMarkets™

April 2, 2004

© SubmergingMarkets™ 2004

**T**he defeat suffered by Spain's Conservative Party at the hands of the **Socialist Party** in the March 14 2004 elections, just a few days after the devastating bombings in Madrid, led some newspaper accounts [to attribute the election outcome to al-Qaeda](#), and some neoliberal pundits to worry that Spain's threatened withdrawal of its 1300 troops from Iraq might be viewed as a "victory" by terrorists around the world.

For example, the *New York Times'* **Thomas Friedman** [wrote](#) that such a withdrawal would encourage al-Qaeda to use similar tactics to influence other elections, much as – according to him – Palestinian militants have tried to influence Israel's elections. In Friedman's



words, "The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is to the war on terrorism what the Spanish Civil War was to World War II" – a testing ground for new tactics.

As discussed below, however, if leading *gringo* pundits -- especially those like Friedman who have supported the Iraq War from Day One – really expect to be taken seriously by audiences outside the US, they will need to be a bit more careful with such historical analogies, especially those that involve a country like Spain that has suffered far more at the hands of terrorism and fascism than the US has.

They should also pay closer attention to the role that the Iraq War supporters' own *serial distortions* have played in giving aid and comfort to the enemy.

Finally, as we'll argue, they should also consider the possibility that some of the most dangerous forms of "appeasement" in the world today may be taking shape, not in Madrid (or Paris...), but in Washington D.C. and Tel Aviv.

### **WILL THE REAL APPEASERS PLEASE STAND UP?**

**I** **In the first place, Spain's Socialist Party has nothing to learn from the US about standing up to fascism and terrorism.**

It survived more than three decades of General Franco's terror-laden rule, including two decades when the US maintained a strong alliance with the dictator. The Socialist Party also managed the delicate transition from his dictatorship during the 1970s and 1980s, and governed Spain until 1996. During this period, its leaders, especially Felipe Gonzales, prosecuted a relatively successful crusade against ETA,



the Basque terrorist group. Evidently the Conservative Party, which has just presided over the largest terrorist attack in Spain's history, should have taken notes.

**I**n 1936-39, the Socialist Party, together with its allies on the Left, 35,000 volunteers from 52 countries (including 2800 Americans), and some inadequate, high-priced aid from Russia and Mexico, mounted a valiant effort to defend the Spanish Republic against a formidable right-wing alliance.

The opponents included General Franco, Hitler and Mussolini, plus Spain's landed and industrial elites and monarchists, and the Catholic Church. Their foreign sympathizers also included such leading figures as **Charles A. Lindbergh, Prescott Bush (G.W's grandfather), Lord Rothermere, the Duke of Windsor, Henry Ford, and General Robert E. Wood, the Chairman of Sears, Roebuck.**

While Germany and Italy provided Franco' with the latest airplanes, bombing tactics, submarines, and tanks, as well as pilots, commanders, and thousands of troops, the world's leading democracies, the US, the UK, and France, basically stood by and

watched. They indulged in what one leading historian has called **"the farce of non-intervention,"** embargoing arms sales to the Republic while permitting companies like **GM and Texaco** to supply Franco with trucks and fuel.

At the same time they also largely refused to help Europe's Jews emigrate, and turned a blind eye to Italy's aggressions in Ethiopia and Japan's in Manchuria. All this proved to be an astounding warm-up for the Munich Pact that awarded Czechoslovakia to Hitler.

## **LATTER-DAY APPEASEMENT**

**T**he Spanish Civil War analogy may really be more applicable to the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

True, Israel's Likud government is "democratic," not fascist, at least if one is a citizen of Israel. However, with respect to Sharon's policies in the Occupied Territories, the Bush Administration has pursued nothing if not a "farce of non-intervention." It has continued to provide \$billions in finance and arms to Israel while accommodating Sharon's "disengagement" plan, which includes large-scale expropriations on the West Bank and the strangulation of the Palestinian economy. It has also turned a blind eye to Israel's policy of extra-judicial assassinations, even though many security experts agree that blowing up 69-year old paraplegics on the way to the morning mosque only provokes further bloodshed and plays into the hands of extremists on both sides – many of whom can only be described as **"theological fascists."**

Anyone who has been to [Guernica](#) may also be tempted to emphasize another Spanish Civil War analogy -- Israel's lopsided military advantage, on the basis of its world-class arms industry, its total domination of air, land, and sea, and its unlimited access to state-of-the-art US military technology. If we're searching for testing grounds, it is hard to ignore Israel's vast experience with interrogation techniques, hit squads, urban warfare tactics, collective punishment, detentions without trial, and the use of helicopters, missiles, bulldozers, and jet fighters in heavily-populated areas. Indeed, the US military is already reportedly drawing on this expertise for its campaign in Iraq.

**"BY HIS OWN PETARD"**

**There were plenty of good reasons for the Aznar Government's defeat. Without them, the bombing would not have mattered.**

- First, former Spanish Prime Minister **Jose Maria Aznar**, who had been in charge of Spain for eight years, failed to make a persuasive case for the Iraq War to the Spanish people. Long before the bombing, it simply made no sense to more than **80 percent** of them. Accordingly, the Socialist Party had long ago pledged to withdraw its troops unless there were a UN mandate.



- Second, as we now know, immediately after the bombings Aznar (called "Anzar" by President Bush) and other leading members of his government [tried to blame](#) ETA rather than the true perpetrators, who appear to [have hailed mainly from Morocco](#) -- like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, another "staunch US ally" in the war on terrorism. (Morocco did volunteer 2000 mine-detecting monkeys for the Iraq War.) Aznar's attempt to switch the blame to ETA imitated President Bush's lame attempts to link Saddam with al-Qaeda and 9/11. In Spain's case, at least, the public saw through the deception and punished it appropriately.

Indeed, from the standpoint of "encouraging terrorists," it is precisely this kind of manipulation that does the most damage to national security. It may literally interfere with investigations. Senior EU ministers complained that Aznar's distortions delayed their investigations right after the bombings. It may also lead to strategic errors -- as other observers have noted, the Iraq War opened a whole new front for al-Qaeda, and even more important, a whole new source of regional antagonism and recruitment.

Finally, when detected, as it almost always is eventually, systematic government lying in the pursuit of dubious war aims is one of the best-known recipes for destroying public confidence. This can lead governments to be doubted during critical emergencies, just when they most need to be believed.

It should not be surprising that democracy is unkind to political leaders who cling to bald-faced lies in the pursuit of stupid, dangerous policies. But we doubt that terrorists read polls, or that they could possibly have anticipated that Aznar would be so dumb. (Bush, however, might be another matter...)

- Third, there were also many other factors that contributed to the defeat of Aznar's party beside the bombing and the Iraq War. The neatly manicured former tax inspector had become arrogant and remote after so many years in power. His government mishandled an oil spill, alienated trade unions, introduced legislation that cracked down on civil liberties, and took an unpopular, high-handed approach to negotiations on the EU constitution. From the standpoint the PP simply got what was coming to it.

## **SUMMARY**

All told, while the Spanish Civil War was a striking defeat for democracy, and a low point in the history of international resistance to fascism and terrorism, the recent Spanish election was actually a striking affirmation of democracy. It should be celebrated, not deplored. The new Spanish Government will **keep its commitment** to remove its troops in Iraq unless there is an international mandate, and it will also **keep its commitment** to struggle hard against terrorists of all kinds, at home and abroad. **After all, these are not *US Republicans that we are discussing here.* These are *Spanish Republicans.* *No pasaran, indeed.***



© James S. Henry, SubmergingMarkets™, 2004. All rights reserved.