

## Aznar's war: Understanding Spain's decision to participate in the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq

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### **Abstract**

*This article seeks to examine what factors influenced the Aznar government's support of the US-led invasion of Iraq to understand the Spanish symbolic contribution to this operation as part of the Coalition of the Willing, a decision that appeared focused on the short-term benefits for Spain rather than the long-term benefits for Iraq or the international community.*

*Traditional approaches to state behaviour tend to focus on states as the main actors, and on decisions as a means to establish why states behave the way they do, and why states decide to participate in international military operations. However, these approaches seem too superficial and fail to take into consideration domestic dynamics and political narratives employed to justify particular political decisions. A closer look at the political narratives reveals what factors appear to be influential in the decision-making process and help us understand what lies behind states' support for and contribution to international military operations.*

*The article concludes that in the months leading up to and following the Iraq crisis, it became very clear that the factors that appeared to influence the positions of political actors in Spain were different, and those that constituted the narratives of Aznar's government were as much a response to the external environment as ideological factors.*

Today's Western armed forces are less expected to fight a war to defend the national territory from an attack by the armed forces of another state and more required to participate in multinational campaigns with political objectives and strategies rather different from those of times past. Furthermore, today's international relations take place in a complex social and political environment in which traditional perceptions about state behaviour and the international system are being challenged by new forms of socialisations, interdependence and international standards.

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they do, and why states decide to participate in international military operations. However, these approaches seem too superficial and fail to take into consideration domestic dynamics and political narratives employed to justify particular political decisions. A closer look at these narratives can reveal what factors appear to be influential in the decision-making process and help understand what lies behind states' support for and contribution to international military operations, rather than *why* states might make these decisions.

Spain has been participating in such operations since 1989, and currently has troops participating in UN and EU operations in Africa and the Mediterranean, as well as in Afghanistan. The case of Iraq is worthy of analysis on its own for two reasons.<sup>1</sup> First, the conservative government of the Popular Party in power at the time, and especially Prime Minister José María Aznar, defended its position in the face of unprecedented public and political opposition. Second, of all the operations the Aznar government became involved in during its governing period (1996-2004), the Iraq operation instigated a rhetoric that suggested the Government's perceived national interests were conflated with a party vision, and the extent to which Aznar viewed a potential contribution as an opportunity to correct historical wrongs in the development of Spain's international place. The Spanish case demonstrates that domestic considerations, and historical events, not only continue to inform political narratives but contribute to the construction of state and political identities.<sup>2</sup> A third reason, and one not necessarily inconsistent with other operations, is the extent to which the Aznar government sought to convince Spain that the invasion was, in fact, legal as an attempt to justify its legitimacy. This is interesting because it raises questions about the impact that international law and international regulatory mechanisms have on the development of constraints or new normative frameworks in which states perceive themselves to be acting.

The purpose of this article is to examine what factors appeared influential in the Aznar government's support of the US-led invasion of Iraq so as to understand Spain's symbolic contribution to this operation as part of the *Coalition of the Willing*, a decision that appeared focused on the short-term benefits for Spain rather than the long-term benefits for Iraq or the international community. This will be done by illustrating the different political narratives resulting from the dramatic shift in focus in Spanish foreign policy that took place in the period between the election of Aznar's conservative party and his government's decision to support the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. It is argued here that the events that took place during this period demonstrate how political narratives can reveal that conceptualisations of security and national role perceptions can vary within the same country.

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<sup>1</sup> The Iraq case study is part of a broader research project that compares political rhetoric in four military operations currently being undertaken at the University of Melbourne.

<sup>2</sup> Various other examples come to mind; the political situation in Zimbabwe under Mugabe, the complexity of politics and identity in Africa generally, the various interpretations of Australian identity and the so-called History Wars, the formation of ethnicities and nationalist movements in Europe and around the world, etc.

## Analysing the Spanish decision

There are a number of ways in which Spain's decisions to support and participate in *Operation Iraqi Freedom* can be interpreted. The three most obvious options lie in the field of International Relations (IR), and they are also the most prominent within this field: Realism, Constructivism and Liberalism. Through a Realist lens we would understand Spain's decisions to be rooted in the national interest, or in violation of it: for Realists, states should not participate in international missions that do not directly serve the national interest (for example humanitarian interventions) because their governments do not have the moral right to risk the lives of their armed forces, and states only have duties to their own citizens.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the practice of 'humanitarian' intervention can be abused by states. Therefore, states should only participate in missions affecting their direct national interests, which are in turn defined in geostrategic or economic terms, fixed in time and space, and objectively and rationally articulated.<sup>4</sup> The Constructivist lens would indicate that states' actions are a response to the development of a new international normative framework in which the utility of force and perceptions of the national interest have changed over time and across states. Finnemore contended that the main argument to explain why states decide to intervene militarily is that which maintains that military intervention serves a functional purpose, versus normative arguments that contend that military intervention can in fact be viewed as a legitimate or right option. Constructivists focus on the latter argument, analysing language and decisions as a reflection of identity and of how the normative framework in which states perceive to be acting is changing and affecting decision-making.<sup>5</sup> The Liberal

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<sup>3</sup> N. Wheeler and A. Bellamy, 'Humanitarian Intervention in World Politics' in J. Baylis and S. Smith (eds.), *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> While it is acknowledged that there are differences within Realism, such as the role of the intrinsic violence of human nature, the role that domestic politics play in decision making, and states' need to pursue absolute or relative gains, all branches share the same ontology and epistemology, they all agree on the anarchical nature of the international system and on the imperative to pursue the national interest as a means to survive. They also agree that morality plays no role in politics and the international relations is a struggle for power. For a sample of this literature see for example some of Realism's key proponents and commentators H. Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1977; E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*, London: Macmillan, 1939; C. A. J. Coady, 'Intervention, Political Realism and the Ideal of Peace' in C. A. J. Coady and M. O'Keefe (eds.), *Righteous Violence: The Ethics and Politics of Military Intervention*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005, pp. 14-31; J. Mearsheimer, 'Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War', *International Security* Vol. 15, No. 1, 1990, pp. 5-56; J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York & London: W. W. Norton, 2001; H. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, K. W. Thompson and W. D. Clinton (eds.), 7th ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2006 [1948]; G. Rose, 'Review Article: Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy', *World Politics* Vol. 51, No.1, 1998, pp. 144-172; S. Walt, 'International Relations: One World, Many Theories', *Foreign Policy* Vol. 110, Special Edition: Frontiers of Knowledge, 1998; K. Waltz, *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1959.

<sup>5</sup> Constructivism is a relatively new and still evolving approach to the study of International Relations. Constructivists do not share the same ontology or epistemology that Realism and Liberalism do (although some would go as far as arguing that Realism and Constructivism in fact do share, or at least complement each other's ontology, see for example J. Sterling-Folker,

lens would provide an image of cooperation and regulation. Liberalism believes in the progressive improvement of human beings and their ability to change for the better. This ability is reinforced by democracy and institutional mechanisms to promote cooperation and economic interdependence, which lead to the spread of democratic values and the subsequent regulation and elimination of war and conflict.<sup>6</sup>

It is acknowledged that the above theories serve a functional role in the study of international politics, and they are all equally useful in explaining some state decisions. However, the shortcomings of the above approaches lie in their attempts to explain *why* states behave the way they do, and aim to use this knowledge to predict future behaviour as a mechanism to regulate or mitigate armed conflict. IR theories understand states as actors with agency and often are less interested with the domestic tensions and narratives that emerge around decisions to contribute armed forces, focusing mainly on the final decision; the state remains the main unit of analysis. They furthermore tend to understand decisions as reactions to the external environment, at times influenced by identity or domestic politics, but conditioned by external factors. While the external environment plays a big role in decisions, it is argued that it is not perceived equally by all actors involved in decision-making at a domestic level, nor are normative ideas or frameworks

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'Realism and the Constructivist Challenge: Rejecting, Reconstructing, or Rereading', *International Studies Review*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2002, pp. 73-97. Constructivists disagree that state's interests and attitudes are fixed and based on individualistic and materialistic principles that condemn them to set behavioural patterns. Instead states undergo a cognitive dynamic in which they form identities, which are shaped first, by their historical past, and second, by the process of interaction itself. Therefore they are sceptical of claims to objectivity and rationality in decision-making. See for example M. Finnemore, 'Constructing Norms of Humanitarian Intervention' in P. J. Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, pp. 153-185; M. Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention. Changing Beliefs About the Use of Force*, Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2003; M. Finnemore and K. Sikkink, 'Taking Stock: The Constructivist Research Program in International Relations and Comparative Politics', *Annual Review of Political Science* Vol. 4, 2001, pp. 391-416; P. Katzenstein, *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996; A. Wendt, 'Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics', *International Organization* Vol. 46, No. 2, 1992, pp. 391-425; and A. Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Much like Realism, within Liberalism there are different approaches such as Democratic Peace Theory and Institutional Liberalism or Neo-Liberalism that provide different arguments, but Liberals in general also agree on the role of power in international behaviour. Furthermore, Liberals do not believe that the problem of bad or violent behaviour is rooted in human nature but in the structures and institutions that set the rules and parameters in which interdependence and cooperation take place. Although they see the individual as the object, leading to a shift from thinking of military security to economic and social welfare, they continue to view the state as the main actor in international politics, acting in an anarchical system. See for example M. Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace: Realism, Liberalism, and Socialism*, 1st ed. New York: Norton, 1997; F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York: Free Press, 1992; S. Hoffmann, 'The Crisis of Liberal Internationalism', *Foreign Policy* No. 98, 1995, pp. 159-177; R. Keohane, 'International Institutions: Can Interdependence Work?', *Foreign Policy*, No. 110, 1998, pp. 82-96; C. Layne, 'Kant or Cant: The Myth of the Democratic Peace', *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 1994, pp. 5-49; Walt, op. cit.

understood equally, nor do all domestic actors perceive the state equally in terms of the role it is to play internationally.

For this reason this article turns to Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) with the objective of increasing the depth of the analysis and understand less *why* Spain participated but *what factors appeared influential to the Spanish position*. FPA is more concerned with the impact that domestic institutions, public opinion, psychological factors of leaders, national role conceptions, etc. have in the process of decision-making. Thus, any of the main IR theories can be used to carry out FPA and this has helped answer many questions that mainstream theories failed to address.<sup>7</sup> Despite FPA's emphasis on quantitative and comparative approaches, it is flexible enough to allow for different methodological approaches to answer different questions.

Hence, in adopting a Foreign Policy Analysis this article does not focus on the decision itself but on a qualitative examination of the process of justifying or contesting a particular policy position and the discourse employed in articulating justifications by the main government and opposition officials (mainly the President of the Government, Minister for Defence and Minister for Foreign Affairs and their equivalents in the main party of the opposition). This discourse is not necessarily understood to be a reflection or articulation of motivations; it is well known that politicians are not known for their transparency or sincerity, especially when decisions involving security issues are concerned. However, it is argued that the choice of rhetoric and the framing of the crisis served a particular purpose and therefore this choice offers an opportunity to understand what factors contributed to the decision to support the US-led action, factors specific to Spain and to the Spanish domestic context. Public narratives and rhetoric are considered a reflection of the political process regardless of the differing views that individuals might hold within the parties, which is why top officials form the core of the research, as they are charged with publicly defending their party's official policy positions and decisions.

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<sup>7</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the development of this field see V. Hudson, 'Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations', *Foreign Policy Analysis*, No. 1, 2005, pp. 1-30; V. Hudson and C. Vore, 'Foreign Policy Analysis Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow', *Mershon International Studies Review*, No. 39, 1995, pp. 209-238; R. Kuperman, 'A Dynamic Framework for Analyzing Foreign Policy Decision Making', *International Studies Review*, No. 8, 2006, pp. 537-554; S. Smith, 'Describing & Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior', *Polity*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 1985, pp. 595-607. See also some of the approaches used in I. Gallhofer and W. Saris, *Foreign Policy Decision Making. A Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis of Political Argumentation*, Westport, Connecticut & London: Praeger, 1996; K. J. Holsti, 'National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy' in S. G. Walker (ed.), *Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis*, Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 1987, pp. 4-43; D. P. Houghton, 'Reinvigorating the Study of Foreign Policy Decision Making: Toward a Constructivist Approach', *Foreign Policy Analysis*, No. 3, 2007, pp. 24-45; Katzenstein, op. cit.; R. Snyder, H. W. Bruck, and B. Sapin, 'The Decision-Making Approach to the Study of International Politics' in J. N. Rosenau (ed.), *International Politics and Foreign Policy: A Reader in Research and Theory*, New York: Free Press, 1969, pp. 199-206; N. B. Wish, 'Foreign Policy Makers and Their National Role Conceptions', *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 4, 1980, pp. 532-554.

## Spain and the invasion of Iraq

The participation of Spanish troops in the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq has been the most controversial decision since the country began participating in international operations in 1989. The majority of Spanish society and political groups opposed not only the PP's decision to participate, but the role the Spanish government played as the events leading to the invasion played out amidst worldwide protest and sharp divisions within the EU.<sup>8</sup> Spain contributed a maximum of 1,300 troops in total to *Operation Iraqi Freedom* and this contribution was first, during the actual war, and then in the reconstruction process once the UN recognised the coalition.<sup>9</sup>

Spain went to Iraq in defence of international law, or at least the Government was convinced of this fact.<sup>10</sup> The rhetoric employed was very similar to that used by the Bush administration and the British government, but was also very much conditioned by the domestic political environment. Thus, while Aznar, Bush and Blair might have shared some of their perceptions about why a military response was the only option to achieve their political goals, Aznar's plans were conditioned by his own ideas about the role Spain should play in addition to substantial domestic opposition to the war and his inability to convince Spaniards.<sup>11</sup> All opposition groups in Parliament disagreed with the use of force, did not believe there was enough proof to justify a military attack, and deemed Spain's position as one of submission or excessive alignment with the US.<sup>12</sup>

In the Spanish government's narratives leading up to the invasion, Saddam was guilty; he *had* WMDs, *was willing* to use them and presented a clear threat, and *had* links to terrorist groups and could supply them with WMDs.<sup>13</sup> According to the Spanish Government, the international community had been trying since 1991 to ensure Iraq's disarmament and just as the use of force was justified and appropriate then, the use of force was again required in 2003: the situation was the same and it was the only way to make Saddam comply.

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<sup>8</sup> These divisions were even described by Donald Rumsfeld as reflecting of the existence of an Old Europe and a New Europe, see for example BBC, Outrage at 'old Europe' remarks, 23 January 2003, available at: <[www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)>.

<sup>9</sup> The UN Security Council authorised Resolution 1483 in May 2003 approving the formation of a stability and security force. The Consejo de Ministros on 25 April announced a change in the composition of the Spanish contingent to be included in a Multinational Security Force.

<sup>10</sup> See even for example the memoirs of I. Arias, *Confesiones De Un Diplomático. Del 11-S Al 11-M* (Barcelona: Planeta, 2006), a diplomat who also represented Spain at the UNSC during the crisis.

<sup>11</sup> Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, *Barómetro De Opinión Pública. Estudio No. 2481*, CIS, February 2003, available at: <[www.cis.es](http://www.cis.es)>.

<sup>12</sup> This was obvious in all parliamentary debates, but see for example Congreso de los Diputados, *Pleno Y Diputación Permanente Año 2003 VII Legislatura Número 222. Sesión Plenaria Número 213 Celebrada El Miércoles, 5 De Febrero De 2003*, 5 February 2003, available at: <[www.congreso.es](http://www.congreso.es)>.

<sup>13</sup> This was mainly based on the evidence that was being produced by the US and Britain. The Government never spoke of having its own evidence but quoted US and British government officials as well as previous UN Resolutions and reports to back up its case. This conclusion is confirmed by Pizarroso, who conceded that Aznar never produced reports from Spanish intelligence services in A. Pizarroso Quintero, *Nuevas Guerras, Vieja Propaganda (De Vietnam a Irak)*, Madrid: Cátedra, 2005, p. 357.

In the Government's view, Saddam had violated numerous UNSC resolutions over the past twelve years and had shown little or no intention to cooperate with the international community despite the many opportunities he had been given. Furthermore, the international community was legally authorised to act by virtue of past UNSC resolutions (including those that authorised the use of force) and to stop Saddam's repeated flagrant violations of international law. In the Government's view, if international law was not protected and Saddam was allowed to govern and act with impunity, it would set a bad precedent to other tyrants around the world; international law must be defended and an example set. This narrative was repeatedly used by Aznar in Parliament, and by Ana Palacio, Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the UN Security Council.<sup>14</sup>

Of course there was also mention of the international terrorist threat and the Spanish government's narratives often mirrored those employed by the US. For example, then Secretary of State Colin Powell said that inspectors were not 'detectives' and their job was not to look for nor find the weapons.<sup>15</sup> Aznar repeated the same statement: 'The inspectors are not detectives; the inspectors must act like auditors that document the elimination of the weapons of mass destruction that we know Iraq has' and 'It is Saddam Hussein who has to give up his weapons, rather than the inspectors find them' repeatedly emphasising Saddam's guilt.<sup>16</sup> The Spanish government borrowed much of its discourse from the justifications being offered by British Prime Minister Blair and the Bush administration. But the fact that any military action would be considered legal and legitimate was not the only justification, and Aznar appeared influenced by other factors in his position.<sup>17</sup> These factors were more related to the past, ideology and a break with traditional foreign policy goals to pursue a different vision of the role that Spain should play in the international arena and within the Euro-Atlantic area.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See for example *Anuarios de Política Exterior*, 'Intervención De La Ministra De Asuntos Exteriores, Ana Palacio Vallelersundi, Ante El Consejo De Seguridad De Naciones Unidas', Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y Cooperación, MAEC, 7 March 2003; *Anuarios de Política Exterior*, 'Intervención De La Ministra De Asuntos Exteriores, Ana Palacio Vallelersundi, En El Consejo De Seguridad De Naciones Unidas Sobre Irak', Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y Cooperación, MAEC, 14 February 2003.

<sup>15</sup> United Nations, *Security Council 4701st Meeting S/Pv.4701*, 5 February 2003 [cited 5 June 2009]; available at: <www.un.org>.

<sup>16</sup> Aznar even stated on 5 February that Saddam had sought to enrich uranium and the international community had been powerless to stop him, see Congreso de los Diputados, *Pleno Y Diputación Permanente Año 2003 VII Legislatura Número 222. Sesión Plenaria Número 213 Celebrada El Miércoles, 5 De Febrero De 2003*, 5 February 2003, available at: <www.congreso.es>.

<sup>17</sup> This is, unsurprisingly, a contested issue. See for example C. de Castro Sánchez, 'Las Acciones Armadas Por Razones Humanitarias ¿Hacia Una Injerencia Humanitaria? Una Aproximación Teórico-Práctica' Madrid: Ministerio de Defensa, 2003; R. Fawn, 'The Iraq War: Unfolding and Unfinished' in R. Fawn and R. A. Hinnebusch (eds.), *The Iraq War: Causes and Consequences*, Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006, pp. 1-18; J. Howorth, 'France: Defender of International Legitimacy' in R. Fawn and R. A. Hinnebusch (eds.), *The Iraq War: Causes and Consequences*, Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006, pp. 49-59; R. Thakur, *The United Nations, Peace and Security*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> R. Gillespie, 'Spanish Foreign Policy: Party Alternatives or the Pursuit of Consensus?', *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2007, pp. 29-45; C. Skola, 'Spanish Foreign Policy and the Impact of Ideological Change', *Perspectives on Business & Economics. Modern Spain emerges*, No. 23, 2005, pp. 55-64; and P. Woodworth, 'Spain

## Aznar and Spanish foreign policy

While Spain's regions of focus have traditionally been Europe, Latin America, the Mediterranean and North Africa, the PP government privileged an unconditional relationship with the US over Spain's long-established interests, as was already manifested in Aznar's support and contribution of troops in Kosovo and Afghanistan. From the moment Aznar came to power, he sought to re-establish Spain's international position, and increase its influence, even if that meant breaking the existing consensus forged in Spain during the democratic transition and the governments of the PSOE from 1982 to 1996.<sup>19</sup>

The policies of the PP, headed by Aznar from 1996 until 2004, personified a shift towards the universalisation of Western (or US) values with a neoliberal approach to economic policy and what seemed like a realist approach to security that entailed a return to the Atlanticism that characterised Western security attitudes during the Cold War.<sup>20</sup> Some argued that Aznar pursued the nationalisation of Spanish security, frustrated with the government's inability to promote Spain beyond its middle power status within the EU, limited by big powers, Britain, France and Germany.<sup>21</sup> But arguably, a deterioration of relations with Morocco was attributed largely to Aznar,<sup>22</sup> there was a decrease in defence spending in relation to Spain's GDP during both his governments,<sup>23</sup> the domestic fight against terrorism continued to rely heavily on relations with France, and aid and development budgets decreased between 1996 and 2004,<sup>24</sup> which raises questions about the extent of such nationalisation beyond mere rhetoric.

Despite this, there were changes. While the PP appeared to move to the political centre in search of votes during political campaigns, it made a dramatic return to the political right following its absolute majority in Parliament in 2000.<sup>25</sup> González Bustelo argued that from 2000, the PP's majority was characterised by authoritarian governance, paying no attention

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Changes Course. Aznar's Legacy, Zapatero's Prospects', *World Policy Journal* XXI, No. 2, 2004, pp. 7-26.

<sup>19</sup> Gillespie, op. cit.; Woodworth, op. cit.

<sup>20</sup> See for example C. del Arenal, 'Consenso Y Disenso En La Política Exterior De España' *Real Instituto Elcano* Documento de Trabajo No. 25/2008 (2008); P. Heywood, 'Desperately Seeking Influence: Spain and the War in Iraq', *EPS* Vol. 3, No. 1, 2003, pp. 35-40; J -C Jiménez Redondo, *De Suárez a Rodríguez Zapatero, La Política Exterior De La España Democrática*, Madrid: Dilex S.L., 2006.

<sup>21</sup> Woodworth, op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>22</sup> R. Gillespie, 'Between Ambition and Insecurity: Spanish Politics and the Mediterranean' in S. Balfour (ed.), *The Politics of Contemporary Spain*, London & New York: Routledge, 2005, pp. 198-214.

<sup>23</sup> F. Perez Muínelo, *El Presupuesto De Defensa En España: 1946-2006*, Madrid: Ministerio de Defensa, 2006.

<sup>24</sup> Intermon Oxfam, *La Realidad De La Ayuda 2004-2005*, Intermon Oxfam, 2004, available at:

<[http://www.intermonoxfam.org/UnidadesInformacion/anexos/2987/0\\_2987\\_261004\\_realidad\\_ayuda.pdf](http://www.intermonoxfam.org/UnidadesInformacion/anexos/2987/0_2987_261004_realidad_ayuda.pdf)>.

<sup>25</sup> S. Balfour, 'The Reinvention of Spanish Conservatism. The Popular Party since 1989' in S. Balfour (ed.), *The Politics of Contemporary Spain*, Oxon, UK & New York: Routledge, 2006, pp. 146-168; Woodworth, op. cit.

to public opinion and launching vicious discrediting campaigns against anyone with opposing ideas.<sup>26</sup> Spanish participation in Kosovo and Afghanistan was decided without prior consultation with Parliament, and understood as another way in which Aznar demonstrated his desire to look towards the US.<sup>27</sup> Spain during Aznar's second administration (2000-2004) witnessed the most severe distancing of traditional foreign policy focus since the country's democratic transition, and was characterised by Aznar's unconditional support of the US international strategy after the events of September 2001.<sup>28</sup> As Gillespie noted, the events of 9/11 led Aznar to 'see new opportunities for Spain in an enhanced alignment with Washington, even at the expense of European unity'.<sup>29</sup> Not only did this shift lack the support of most other political parties in Spain, but also Spanish public opinion.<sup>30</sup> Del Arenal argued that Aznar's foreign and security policy abandoned multilateralism and the primacy of international law in favour of unilateralism and a relationship of convenience with international legal standards.<sup>31</sup> This climate culminated in the decision to send troops to Iraq and the discourse employed to justify this decision, described as a paternalistic approach to governing.<sup>32</sup>

Aznar's PP rhetoric often implied the existence of a binary ideologically divided world: liberal democracies vs. non-democracies. This rhetoric had already been used in the lead up to decisions to support the sending of troops to Kosovo (1999) and Afghanistan (2002) and in the Iraq case, good and evil remained the same (the democracies that espouse fair principles and values and have the moral responsibility to defend these values around the world versus tyrants, dictators, terrorists) but this time in addition evil had no rights (unlike democracies, which did). That is, the world had a right to expect Saddam to respect legality and a right to security,<sup>33</sup> but Iraq did not enjoy the same right for the international community to respect legality and the right of Iraqis to security. This rhetoric, and Aznar's views of the role of the US in the

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<sup>26</sup> M. González Bustelo, 'Terrorismo Y Democracia: España Y Los Atentados Del 11-M' Madrid: Centro de Investigación para la Paz, 2005.

<sup>27</sup> This conclusion is part of my dissertation at the University of Melbourne.

<sup>28</sup> Del Arenal, 'Consenso Y Disenso En La Política Exterior De España', op. cit.

<sup>29</sup> Gillespie, 'Spanish Foreign Policy: Party Alternatives or the Pursuit of Consensus?', op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>30</sup> See for example Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, *Barómetro De Opinión Pública. Estudio No. 2481*.

<sup>31</sup> Del Arenal, 'Consenso Y Disenso En La Política Exterior De España', op. cit.

<sup>32</sup> González Bustelo, op. cit. Despite the literature consulted, it must be noted that Spain has traditionally been notorious for the lack of critical analyses and while there exists some literature that evaluates the Aznar period, at times attempts at self-reflection focus on telling a particular version of the story and carry out 'light' assessments. This paper was considered too problematic for publication in Spain and I was instructed to elaborate on the theory part but discard the Spanish case study or replace it with an Australian case study. It is not unusual to find such critical commentators publishing outside of Spain, see for example C. Navajas Zubeldia, 'From the 'War on Terror' to the Terror War: Spanish Defense Policy after 9/11' in G. Kümmel, G. Caforio, and C. Dandeker (eds.), *Armed Forces, Soldiers and Civil-Military Relations*, VS verlag, 2009, pp. 231-244; C. Navajas Zubeldia, 'The Spanish Defense Policy in Regression' in K. Haltiner, P. Klein, and F. Kernic (eds.), *The European Armed Forces in Transition: A Comparative Analysis*, New York: Peter Lang, 2005, pp. 91-128.

<sup>33</sup> See for example Congreso de los Diputados, *Pleno Y Diputación Permanente Año 2003 VII Legislatura Número 225. Sesión Plenaria Número 216 Celebrada El Miércoles, 12 De Febrero De 2003*, 12 February 2003, available at: <www.congreso.es>.

world, sounded very much like the interventionist doctrine of neoconservatives.<sup>34</sup>

Aznar would later admit being disappointed with the development of the European security architecture. He argued that with the end of the Cold War and the emergence of the US as the world's sole superpower, Europeans made the grave mistake of believing that all threats were over and decided to 'lower their guard and disarm'.<sup>35</sup> This, he maintained, increased the gap in terms of technology and capabilities to guarantee security, as the US followed the opposite judgement, to the detriment of the European countries.<sup>36</sup> For Aznar, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, other threats materialised: international terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), and what he called 'States without principles', as well as Islamic fundamentalism.<sup>37</sup> Further, Aznar deemed Europe incapable of carrying out the work the US must do, due to a lack of consensus and capabilities, as was exemplified with the crisis in the Balkans.<sup>38</sup> He contrasted Europe's oblivion to the realities of global security with Spain's experience with dealing with the challenges of terrorism.<sup>39</sup> The arrogant tone in which Aznar expressed these judgements suggests his discontent with the EU's security architecture and the dominance of France and Germany over decision-making. In this sense, Woodworth conceded that Aznar perceived Spain as constrained in its decision-making by Paris, thus a shift towards Washington with the support from London, Rome and Poland would, in Aznar's eyes, reposition the country closer to its rightful place in global politics.<sup>40</sup> However, as has been pointed out, this had not translated into increased defence spending, which raises questions about the type of international security structure he envisaged, other than enhancing the role of the US.

Aznar's perceived security environment was also strikingly similar to the environment described in the Bush Doctrine.<sup>41</sup> Aznar claimed, in an attempt to further justify the Bush Administration's decision to invade Iraq in 2003 pre-emptively, that the best attitude should be to take action before an attack takes place, such is the nature of the security environment in his view, and the legality of international action must take this into account. Further, he noted 'You cannot tell a country to do nothing, knowing that others are working towards attacking it and weakening it' since 'These are the rules of the modern

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<sup>34</sup> GEES, *Qué Piensan Los 'Neoon' Españoles*, Madrid: Grupo de Estudios Estratégicos, 2007. There are very few people who would dare make this claim in Spain, but there is little doubt that Aznar was influenced by this ideology and this is obvious not only in his policies but also in his institutional affiliations both in Spain and the US.

<sup>35</sup> J. María Aznar, *Ocho Años De Gobierno. Una Visión Personal De España*, 3 ed. Barcelona: Planeta, 2004, p. 148.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 149.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 176.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 185-86.

<sup>40</sup> Woodworth, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>41</sup> White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington: The White House, 2002.

world'.<sup>42</sup> Another similarity between Aznar's security policy and the Bush Doctrine rests on Aznar's emphasis on the importance of recovering the 'national conscience', without which there is no commitment to defence and security.<sup>43</sup> Thus, Spain in Iraq was not defending the US; it was defending western democracies, especially the Spanish democracy.<sup>44</sup>

## The role of Spain and the invasion of Iraq

However, while in power and without the benefit of hindsight, Aznar resorted to the history of Spain to justify his Government's position. His emphasis on enhancing Spain's role in the world resembled at times the political rhetoric of Franco's political project in which the dictator sought to restore the glory of Spain, profoundly disappointed with the loss of the last colonial remnants in Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines in 1898, and the decline of Spain as a Great Power in the world.<sup>45</sup> This was illustrated in a number of narratives that emerged as the possibility of a military intervention became clearer. On 3 March 2003, in the lead up to the US-led invasion of Iraq, Aznar was reported as saying that 'Spain cannot remain sitting in the corner of History', calling for a 'responsible foreign policy avoiding joining 'countries of no use''.<sup>46</sup> During a parliamentary debate two days later, the leader of the opposition, José Luís Rodríguez Zapatero, leader of the Socialist party (PSOE), responded by saying that Aznar 'would not make History with this war' and 'Spaniards did not need to be taken out of a 'corner', as they came out by themselves peacefully 25 years ago, 'a dark corner, in which we were kept for four decades, the result, by the way, of a damn war''.<sup>47</sup> The previous day, the Spanish Congress had approved the PP's proposal in a secret ballot, which supported the US and the UK in their decision to use force, if necessary, against Iraq to deal with Saddam Hussein's alleged weapons of mass destruction. The approval was realised thanks to the advantage in numbers of the PP in Congress, resulting in 183 votes in favour (all from members of the PP) and 164 against.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Aznar, op. cit., p. 172, White House, op. cit., p. 15. Ironically, an assessment Saddam Hussein himself would have agreed with. Such is the ironic ethnocentrism of Aznar's, and the West's security policies.

<sup>43</sup> Aznar, op. cit., p.173, White House, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Aznar rejected claims that US policy in Iraq was imperialistic and argued that the US in Iraq, together with Spain and other allies, was 'articulating the possibility for the Iraqi people to be able to live a dignified and decent life in a democratic and liberty-based regime' Aznar, op. cit., p. 173.

<sup>45</sup> The PP was created by a former Franco minister (Manuel Fraga) and it is no secret that many of Franco's officials and supporters gravitated towards the PP during the democratic transition, therefore in terms of ideological bias, this is not surprising, but an allegation such as this remains taboo in Spain. For more on Franco's rhetoric and his project for Spain see for example B. Crozier, *Franco*, Boston: Little Brown, 1967; P. Preston, *Franco: A Biography*, London: Harper Collins, 1993; J. Tusell, *La Dictadura De Franco*, Madrid: Alianza, 1988. For a discussion on the impact of ideology and the past on Spanish foreign policy see Skola, op. cit.

<sup>46</sup> El Pais, *Aznar Asegura Que No Quiere Ver a España Alineada Junto 'A Los Países Que No Sirven'*, ElPais.com, 3 March 2003, available at: <www.elpais.com>.

<sup>47</sup> El Pais, *Aznar Reitera Su Defensa De La Segunda Resolución Como Medio De Presión Contra Irak*, ElPais.com, 5 March 2003.

<sup>48</sup> El Pais, *El Congreso Aprueba La Proposición De Aznar Sobre Irak Con El Apoyo Unánime De Los Populares*, ElPais.com, 4 March 2003.

During the parliamentary debate on 5 February 2003 that preceded the invasion of Iraq, Rodríguez Zapatero responded to Aznar's various public references to the role that history played in his decision to support military action in Iraq on the side of the US. Rodríguez Zapatero claimed to have a different definition of history, one which does not 'send the bill' to politicians for their decisions: Aznar had lamented the inability of the League of Nations (and the leaders of its members) to stop the rise of Hitler and avoid the Second World War as a set of circumstances repeating themselves in Iraq<sup>49</sup> to which Rodríguez Zapatero responded '...yours is an old conception of history. I share with many people another definition of history, that in which history refers to the men of the world as soon as they join together in society and work, fight and improve themselves'.<sup>50</sup> Further, Rodríguez Zapatero argued that Spain was not in any 'corner' to be taken out of, as Aznar had alleged. In the narratives of the PSOE, Spain came out of a 'corner of history' with the end of the Franco dictatorship and the ensuing democratic transition,<sup>51</sup> while in the narratives of the PP the 'corner of history' refers to Spanish modern history and the loss of its former status relegating the country to a perceived less influential and less recognised actor within the international system.

On 16 March 2003 the US organised an emergency summit on Iraq in the Azores hosted by Portugal and attended by the UK and Spain. This meeting represented the clearest demonstration of Aznar's complete and unconditional support for the US policy towards Iraq and the complete departure from previous Spanish foreign policy focus.<sup>52</sup> This, however, had already become rather obvious in the Spanish policy towards Iraq and the borrowing of arguments from the US rhetoric and again manifested in the *Statement on Iraq* released following the summit.<sup>53</sup> By now there was no doubt that Spain would be pursuing an active role in the forthcoming military intervention of Iraq.

However, despite the bellicose nature of the Government's rhetoric, domestic constraints proved too much for Aznar. As the US-led invasion loomed, Aznar was forced to explain the nature of the Government's commitment to a now imminent military intervention of Iraq in humanitarian terms. Thus, he stated that '...any [Spanish] military presence, if necessary, will be temporary and directed towards promoting security and the destruction of the weapons of mass destruction as well as delivering humanitarian aid...' following these comments with the Government's commitment to solving the Middle East

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<sup>49</sup> Congreso de los Diputados, *Diario De Sesiones Del Congreso De Los Diputados, Pleno Y Diputación Permanente, VII Legislatura, Número 231, Sesión Plenaria Número 212 Celebrada El Miércoles, 5 De Marzo De 2003*, 5 March 2003, available at: <[www.congreso.es](http://www.congreso.es)>.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11751.

<sup>51</sup> This interpretation was confirmed in an Interview with the Defence Spokesperson in Parliament for the PSOE, 22 July 2008.

<sup>52</sup> Aznar's attendance to this summit resulted in a photo of him with Bush and Blair, a photo that has become a joke in Spain for Aznar's critics to talk about how desperate Aznar was to be perceived as a close friend and ally of Bush's.

<sup>53</sup> BBC, *Text: Azores Summit Statement*, BBC News Online, 16 March 2003, available at: <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/2855567.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2855567.stm)>.

conflict and the creation of an independent, democratic Palestine,<sup>54</sup> as if suggesting it was part of a broader foreign policy agenda, and appealing (unsuccessfully) to Spain's traditional pro-Palestinian stance. Furthermore, Trillo argued in his memoirs<sup>55</sup> that the Government had internally decided to make a mere humanitarian contribution if a new resolution at the Security Council was not signed, which seems ironic given that the Government had been arguing at least since February 2003 that a new UNSC resolution would not be legally essential but politically desirable.<sup>56</sup>

In the end, Spain contributed in two different ways. First, the Spanish Government gave authorisation for the US to use its air space and bases as part of the bilateral agreement on defence. The Spanish Minister of Defence, Trillo, admitted on 19 February that the US had requested authorisation to use the Spanish bases of Rota and Morón for operations in Iraq, to which the Government had responded favourably.<sup>57</sup> But interestingly he argued that the authorisation of this logistical support was for the '...United Nations authorised operations for Enduring Freedom, Resolution 1373...' and as part of surveillance operations *Northern* and *Southern Watch*.<sup>58</sup> UNSC resolution 1373 was adopted on 28 September 2001 as a result of the events of 9/11 and was aimed at combating terrorism. It is based on Chapter VII of the UN Charter and reminded members that '...every State has the duty to refrain from organizing, instigating, assisting or participating in terrorist acts in another State or acquiescing in organized activities within its territory directed towards the commission of such acts...'.<sup>59</sup> a Resolution that was also used at times to legitimise military action in Afghanistan.

*Northern* and *Southern Watch* were operations carried out in no-fly zones targeting Iraqi aircraft from 1991 to protect groups as part of *Operation Provide Comfort* (which officially ended in 1996) although *Northern Watch* and *Southern Watch* continued until 2003.<sup>60</sup> Trillo suggested that Resolution 1373 provided legal cover for *Operation Enduring Freedom* and Operations

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<sup>54</sup> Congreso de los Diputados, *Pleno Y Diputación Permanente Año 2003 VII Legislatura Número 227 Celebrada El Martes, 18 De Marzo De 2003*, 18 March 2003, available at: <www.congreso.es>, pp. 12056-12057.

<sup>55</sup> F. Trillo, *Memoria De Entreguerras: Mis Años En El Ministerio De Defensa (2000-2004)*, 1 ed. Barcelona: Planeta, 2005.

<sup>56</sup> See for example *Anuarios de Política Exterior*, 'Entrevista De La Ministra De Asuntos Exteriores, Ana Palacio Vallelersundi, En El Diario 'El País'' p. 379.

<sup>57</sup> See for example C. Navajas' analysis of the PP's defence policy in Government in which he confirmed that the Spanish Government had guaranteed the unconditional use of Spanish bases to the US as far back as January 2003 (with or without Security Council authorisation for an intervention) and '...in fact the US had been using these bases since September 2002' for operations in Iraq (N. Zubeldia, 'The Spanish Defense Policy in Regression' op.cit, p. 108).

<sup>58</sup> Congreso de los Diputados, *Pleno Y Diputación Permanente Año 2003 VII Legislatura Número 228. Sesión Plenaria Número 219 Celebrada El Miércoles, 19 De Febrero De 2003*, 19 February 2003 [cited 1 June 2009]; available at: <www.congreso.es>, p. 11618; see also Consejo de Ministros, *Rueda De Prensa*, Presidencia del Gobierno, 21 March 2003, available at: <www.la-mocloa.es>.

<sup>59</sup> United Nations, *Resolution 1373*, 28 September 2001, available at: <www.un.org>.

<sup>60</sup> A. Prados, 'CRS Report for Congress. Iraq Crisis: US and Allied Forces' Foreign Affairs and National Defense, Congressional Research Service. The Library of Congress, 1998; N. Serafino, 'CRS Issue Brief for Congress. Peacekeeping: Issues of US Military Involvement' Defense Foreign Affairs, and Trade Division, Congressional Research Service, The Library of Congress, 2003.

*Northern Watch* and *Southern Watch*, a statement that is at best questionable since these operations started prior to the actual resolution. This logistical support, which was maintained as *Operation Iraqi Freedom* was launched, was not subject to parliamentary debate or vote because the Government had invoked the Spain-US bilateral defence agreement. In fact the Government could argue that it was legally required to provide support by the very nature of the treaty. Thus, the Spanish government was able to provide logistical support for combat operations using when needed the above legal arguments. But why go to such length to argue the legality of the operation if the Government could simply resort to this bilateral agreement? Because, according to international law, Article 53 of the Vienna Convention and Article 103 of the UN Charter in particular state that international law and the UN Charter take precedence over bilateral agreements and other treaties when a conflict between the two exists.<sup>61</sup>

Second, Spain's contribution to *Operation Iraqi Freedom* was composed of a naval hospital ship with the pertinent logistical support (an amphibious assault vessel, a frigate and a tanker) that included engineers and nuclear and biological defence experts from the Army for deactivation of mines, reconnaissance and decontamination. In total, the contingent was composed of up to 900 troops.<sup>62</sup> In addition, the Government committed six F-18 planes and one Hercules for the defence of Turkey (under NATO)<sup>63</sup> bringing the total to 1,100 troops.<sup>64</sup> This contribution was decided, argued Aznar, on the morning of 18 March and he stated that '...Spain will not participate in attack missions or [missions] of an offensive character...there will not be Spanish combat troops...The Government understands that Spain has an obligation of solidarity with those countries of whom it is an ally, and with whom [Spain] shares the same position of defence of international legality'.<sup>65</sup> This was certainly an interesting spin, and a much more deflated rhetoric.

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<sup>61</sup> I am very grateful to Raquel Regueiro Dubra for her advice on this issue and for providing me with the information that I needed to clarify this point.

<sup>62</sup> Navajas argued that the Ministry of Defence supported the Government's decision to participate in Iraq and had even developed various plans for a Spanish contingent of combat troops in an unilateral US attack; see in N. Zubeldia, 'The Spanish Defense Policy in Regression', op. cit. However, Trillo denied this in his memoirs, although he admitted some preparations some paragraphs later as well as the pressure that public opinion opposition exerted on the Government Trillo, op. cit., pp. 252-53.

<sup>63</sup> Interestingly the *El Pais* newspaper reported in early March that the Spanish Government had announced to NATO that it was willing to make an unspecified military contribution to the defence of Turkey. Perhaps they thought the situation would end up in a similar way to Kosovo – no UN authorisation but NATO legitimacy.

<sup>64</sup> Congreso de los Diputados, *Pleno Y Diputación Permanente Año 2003 VII Legislatura Número 227 Celebrada El Martes, 18 De Marzo De 2003* pp. 12059; Consejo de Ministros, *Rueda De Prensa*, Navajas Zubeldia, 'The Spanish Defense Policy in Regression' p. 109.

<sup>65</sup> Congreso de los Diputados, *Pleno Y Diputación Permanente Año 2003 VII Legislatura Número 227 Celebrada El Martes, 18 De Marzo De 2003* p. 12058. In fact, the cost of the contingent was charged to the budget section allocated for peace missions (concepto 228), despite the fact that the peaceful nature of the mission was more than questionable. Also, interestingly budget constraints might have been another reason why, coupled with mounting opposition, the Government was forced to consider only a humanitarian contribution. In fact, during the press conference following the Consejo de Ministros on 21 March 2002 Trillo anticipated that, given the agreed reductions in other operations, the cost of the contribution to Iraq would not have a big impact on the budget. Trillo expected the final figure ending the

Following the Government's decision to send troops to Iraq as part of the *Coalition of the Willing*, the PSOE made Spanish security and foreign policy a political priority. The 2004 electoral program clearly reflected this shift. While all previous programs had featured Spain's defence and security policies towards the end of the document, the 2004 program featured a lengthier section at the start. With the next Spanish general election on the horizon, the PSOE campaigned in 2003 and 2004 with a clear objective to make a radical and quick change in the current direction of Spanish foreign policy adopted by the Aznar government, and the withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq if, by 30 June 2004, the UN was in no position to take military and political control in Iraq.<sup>66</sup>

On 14 March 2004, three days after the worst terrorist attack on Spanish soil,<sup>67</sup> the PSOE, headed by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, won the election, and Aznar's political career officially ended, as he had promised he would step down after eight years in government. Shortly after, on 18 April 2004, the new President of the Spanish Government announced the withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq with an immediate effect. While the announcement came as no surprise, Zapatero's decision not to wait until 30 June as had been promised,<sup>68</sup> and not to even wait until the first Consejo de Ministros took place the following day, attracted various degrees of criticism even among supporters of the decision.<sup>69</sup>

It is very possible that this change responded more to populism despite the fact that it was consistent with the PSOE's position, maintained from the very beginning of the crisis. This argument is somewhat reinforced by public opinion surveys. A CIS report from March 2004 reported that only 3.9% of Spaniards surveyed felt the Iraq war<sup>70</sup> constituted one of Spain's main problems and only 1.7% responded that the Iraq war affected them personally, but 35.4% said that the Iraq war was the international issue that worried them

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year with a similar expenditure and '...even if possible, lower' which is a significant prediction to make that arguably responded to opposition to the war.

<sup>66</sup> Which meant that the US would have had to reduce its role significantly and ceased to have control over the operation, which would have been completely assumed by UN troops and command, a highly unlikely prospect especially given the way the conflict was evolving.

<sup>67</sup> The attack on 11 March 2004 was carried out by Islamist fundamentalists who were also Spanish residents, mainly of Moroccan origin. The bombings were often publicly linked to the presence of Spanish troops in Iraq and were viewed as a direct consequence, although politically there was caution about this debate. See for example Congreso de los Diputados, *Pleno Y Diputación Permanente Año 2004 VIII Legislatura Número 4. Sesión Plenaria Número 4 Celebrada El Martes, 27 De Abril De 2004*, 27 April 2004, available at: <[www.congreso.es](http://www.congreso.es)>.

<sup>68</sup> Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), *Programa Electoral* (2004).

<sup>69</sup> Congreso de los Diputados, *Pleno Y Diputación Permanente Año 2004 VIII Legislatura Número 4. Sesión Plenaria Número 4 Celebrada El Martes, 27 De Abril De 2004*; Celestino del Arenal, 'La Retirada De Las Tropas De Irak Y La Necesidad De Una Nueva Política Exterior' *ARI No. 82/2004*, Madrid: Real Instituto Elcano, 2004; Carlos Ruiz Miguel, 'La Retirada Española De Irak: Significado Y Consecuencias' *ARI No. 81/2004*, Madrid: Real Instituto Elcano, 2004.

<sup>70</sup> Note that the CIS explicitly used the term 'the Iraq war' in its questions despite the fact that the war itself ended in May 2003. The same applies for the survey carried out by the Real Instituto Elcano. This use of language, arguably, might have affected responses, and it is interesting to note that it is how the conflict was still being perceived in Spain.

most.<sup>71</sup> But even more relevant was the survey carried out by the Real Instituto Elcano in which 62% of Spaniards consulted still thought 'there were no sound reasons' to overthrow Saddam's regime (versus 30% who did); and 40% of Spaniards wanted troops to be withdrawn from Iraq versus 39% who thought that troops should stay if they were part of a UN-led multinational force and 20% who thought troops should stay.<sup>72</sup> In light of these results, Zapatero's decision to act before the timeline he had proposed prior to the election can arguably be considered a populist initiative.

But what remained unambiguous was that in the months leading up to, and following the Iraq crisis, it became very clear that the factors that appeared to influence the different positions of political actors in Spain were different, and those that constituted the narratives of Aznar's government were as much a response to the external environment, as ideological factors driving perceptions of the role Spain was to play internationally and constraints of a domestic political and social environment heavily opposed to the military intervention of Iraq.

## Conclusion

Iraq illustrated the superficiality with which military intervention can be viewed by politicians and policy-makers alike, and this was no different with Spain. The PP's claims that its involvement in Iraq was humanitarian are a fallacy. If anything, it was nothing more than the reflection of the progressive militarisation of aid and foreign policy. The tasks assigned to the armed forces followed a clear political agenda, and lacked the neutrality and impartiality that characterises humanitarian action.<sup>73</sup> The real motives behind Aznar's position of support for military intervention in Iraq can be interpreted through various lenses, but the factors that appeared to influence his decision were consistent in government rhetoric and narratives and responded as much to the external environment as to the domestic and ideological context.

The national interest has been argued by various commentators as being behind Aznar's 'strategic' decisions, and it is very probable that the Government perceived the benefits of participation to be in the national interest. A national interest defined in rather subjective terms it seemed, especially since Spain's position did more damage than good for the image of the country in Europe. International legality and legitimacy were also deemed important, which explains the Government's emphasis in convincing Spaniards that it was the framework in which the *Coalition of the Willing* was acting. This could be interpreted as a reflection of both a new normative framework and a recognition of states' responsibilities acting in a managed anarchical international system. But it can be concluded that security and foreign policies, political narratives and public political discourse in Spain

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<sup>71</sup> Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, *Barómetro De Marzo. Estudio No. 2,558*, 2004, available at: <[www.cis.es](http://www.cis.es)>.

<sup>72</sup> Real Instituto Elcano, *The Fifth Wave of the Brie (February 2004)*, available at: <[http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano\\_eng/Content?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTENT=/Elcano\\_in/Barometer/Barometer05](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_eng/Content?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTENT=/Elcano_in/Barometer/Barometer05)>.

<sup>73</sup> This does not mean that the soldiers involved did not have the welfare of civilians in mind or that they were not able to carry out their duties to the best of their ability.

show that different governments' perceptions of the world, and responses to particular events or crises, are a result of a process of social construction which is influenced by the leader's personal background, interpretations of historical memory, emotions, ideology, ideas and interpretations of the domestic and the international context.

Regardless of its motives, the Spanish government seemed determined in supporting the US policy. Where it could, it did indeed contribute to combat operations by lending its air space and air bases to US planes carrying out the attack within the framework of the bilateral defence agreement, with legal implications which the Government tried to address by maintaining the rhetoric around a perceived or constructed legality of the operation. This happened even in the weeks before *Operation Iraqi Freedom* was launched. But when it came to a more physical (and visible) presence of Spanish troops, the Government could not avoid the public debates and political scrutiny of the opposition and was forced to opt for a symbolic 'humanitarian' contribution.

An analysis of the rhetoric and narratives used in the debates surrounding the decision to contribute Spanish troops indicates that those factors that appeared more influential to the Aznar government's support of the US policy had more to do with the Government's perception of the international system and with a political opportunism for domestic purposes, based on ideological factors and Aznar's vision for Spain. Ultimately, it was Aznar's war, and one that led him to break the domestic and European consensus in favour of an unconditional support for the US position, the benefits of which were not clearer then than they are now.