



## Spain's 'Feminist' Approach to Fighting Terrorism Goes Awry

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In what has been called the best book on Spanish bullfighting in the English language, Ernest Hemingway's *Death in the Afternoon* (1932) analyzes the metaphysics of the sport that Spaniards call *tauromaquia*. And what he tells us is that bullfighting is not primarily a contest between a man and a bull. Much rather, it is the embodiment of a more fundamental struggle that involves man's conquest of his own fear. Thus the contest is not really about the matador triumphing over the bull, but over himself.

Lately, however, some Spanish bullfighters appear to have succumbed to their own fear. Indeed, an increasing number of them have been engaging in a scandalous practice known as 'shaving', in which the horns of the bull are illegally altered by sawing

off a few centimeters. As a result, the bull loses its ability to coordinate its movements, and the bullfight is tilted decisively in favor of the matador. Post-modern Spanish bullfighting is therefore degenerating into a rigged spectacle that critics say has very little in common with the 'heroic' sport that Hemingway once knew.

In many ways, the feminization of bullfighting reflects the broader changes taking place in Spanish society as a whole. And nowhere is this more evident than in the anti-terrorism policies of Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, a self-proclaimed feminist who lately has committed a number of blunders so outrageous that Spaniards of all political leanings now fear that he has made Spain

more, not less, vulnerable to terrorism.

For many Spaniards, including his supporters, Zapatero is an accidental political leader who was thrust into the prime minister's office by the Islamic terrorists who set off a series of train bombs in Madrid that killed 191 people only three days before the 2004 general elections. Although the incumbent Popular Party (PP) was widely expected to win another term in office, Zapatero benefited from the hysteria fomented by Spain's left-leaning mass media in the hours before voters went to the polls. With the aid of a motley hodge-podge of leftist and nationalist parties, Zapatero, who failed to win an absolute majority, was able to cobble together a coalition government. Thus Zapatero, who is dogmatically attached to the ideas of the European left, is beholden to the extreme left in order to remain in power.

### **Setbacks on the International Arena**

A few days after taking office, Zapatero withdrew the 1,300 Spanish troops that were deployed to Iraq by the previous government of José Maria Aznar. Opponents of the withdrawal accused Zapatero, who broke his own campaign pledge that Spanish troops would remain in Iraq until the United Nations voted on the matter later that summer, of naively thinking that the Al-Qaeda terrorist problem exists only because of the war in Iraq. And although it is true that a majority of Spaniards opposed the intervention in Iraq, many also

believed that Zapatero's precipitous action smacked of appeasement that not only weakened Spanish national security, but also destroyed the international credibility and stature that Spain had built up during the Aznar government.

Although the withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq did not make much of a strategic difference in terms of the war effort, the move sent a symbolic message that represented a major victory for Al-Qaeda. Because what Zapatero did not seem to understand was that Islamic radicals still consider four-fifths of Spain to be Muslim land that must be liberated from the Spanish infidels who drove out the Moors in what is known as the *Reconquista* (711-1492). Thus by appearing to give in to the demands of medieval-minded Islamic extremists, Zapatero reinforced the perception that it is the terrorists, not the government, that sets the agenda in Spain.

Confirming the growing suspicion that Zapatero's post-modern approach to fighting terrorism lacks a basis in reality, he told TIME Magazine in September 2004 that 'sexual equality is a lot more effective against terrorism than military strength'. At the same time, he announced an ill-defined initiative he calls the 'Alliance of Civilizations', which borrows heavily from the 'Dialogue of Civilizations' concept promoted by Islamic radicals in Iran during the 1990s; in its essence, the initiative calls on the West to negotiate a truce with Islamic terrorists, and on terms set by the latter.

Indeed, Zapatero seems to believe that multilateral group therapy is the best way to work out his differences with the Islamic extremists who want to take over his country. But the prime minister's initiative has been widely criticized in Spain and elsewhere because of its failure to comprehend that Al-Qaeda and other Islamic extremists are at war not just with Spain or other individual states, but with the very ideals of Western society...and especially with hyper-secularists like Zapatero himself.

But now that Zapatero has had three years in office to test his feminist approach to fighting terrorism, has it brought any tangible benefits for Spain? A Google-search on Zapatero will show that he is almost universally held up as the epitome of a post-modern appeaser. Even those on the political left in a Europe that is awash with like-minded equivocators have expressed serious doubts about the wisdom and efficacy of Zapatero's anti-terrorist policies.

But what do the terrorists think? Well, they seem to understand Zapatero better than Zapatero understands himself. Indeed, in March 2007, Al-Qaeda launched new threats against Spain, this time over its military deployment in Afghanistan. In a video, a hooded man said the presence of Spanish troops in Afghanistan "exposes Spain again to threats" unless they withdraw their troops from the country. "The Spanish people have been tricked by a socialist government which withdrew troops from Iraq and sent 600 to Afghanistan," the man proclaimed.

So much for Zapatero's truce with Islam.

The irony, however, is that Zapatero, who is deathly afraid of the domestic political fallout of military casualties abroad, has placed so many restrictions on Spain's presence in Afghanistan that in the over three years that they have been there, Spanish troops have almost never left their bases (which, not surprisingly, are located in the most pacific region of Afghanistan). In fact, as everyone familiar with the embarrassing reality knows, Spanish troops do not serve any meaningful purpose in Afghanistan because they focus all of their efforts on keeping out of harm's way. Indeed, Zapatero has so neutered the Spanish military of its original purpose that it now has more in common with Spain's post-modern bullfighters than it does with its NATO allies.

In any case, most Spaniards now fear that Zapatero's appeasement tactics have left Spain dangerously susceptible to terrorist intimidation and coercion. Indeed, polls show that many voters believe Spain is much more of a target for terrorists today than before. In fact, Zapatero's ruling Socialist Party has fallen behind the opposition PP for the first time in 18 months in opinion polls.

### **Setbacks on the Domestic Front**

Notwithstanding the embarrassing setbacks for Spain on the international arena, however, Spaniards have reserved their fiercest criticism of Zapatero due to his domestic anti-terrorism policies.

And critics across the political spectrum say that nowhere has the prime minister erred as much as when, in June 2006, he agreed to begin a dialogue with ETA, the Basque separatist group, without first requiring that the group disarm. ETA, which is listed as a terrorist organization by both the European Union and the United States, has killed almost 900 people over the past four decades in its quest for an independent Basque state in seven parts of northern Spain and southwest France.

To initiate his dialogue with ETA, however, Zapatero pulled out of an agreement that he himself had proposed in 2000 with the PP not to talk with ETA unless it agreed to disarm. 'Any normal person understands you can't negotiate with someone whose negotiating weapon is as powerful and hard to argue with as a pistol,' PP leader Mariano Rajoy said at the time. The PP also opposed any talks with Batasuna, the outlawed political front of ETA.

This split between Spain's two main political parties had the effect of limiting public support for a negotiated settlement; it also left the PP positioned to gain politically should the peace process break down. Zapatero, on the other hand, made the peace process the centerpiece of his political agenda in the hopes that a resolution to the Basque conflict would help him secure an easy re-election victory in early 2008. This highly risky proposition, however, also made him acutely vulnerable to intimidation from ETA.

Indeed, during the final months of 2006, ETA began complaining that the peace process had stalled because Madrid was refusing to make preliminary concessions. For example, ETA has long demanded that more than 400 of its prisoners, who are being held in locations across Spain, be moved closer to the Basque region. ETA has also insisted that the government stop arresting ETA suspects and that it legalize Batasuna.

Undeterred, Zapatero said at a year-end news conference on December 29 that his peace initiative was making progress. "Are we better off now with a permanent cease-fire, or when we had bombs, car bombs and explosions?" he asked. "This time next year, we will be better off than we are today."

The very next morning, ETA set off a powerful car bomb at Madrid's Barajas International Airport, killing two people and bringing to a dramatic end nine months of a so-called 'permanent cease-fire'. The bombing caught Zapatero completely by surprise and shattered his attempt to solve the 40-year Basque conflict through dialogue. It also sent hundreds of thousands of Spaniards onto the streets in rallies to protest the attack and left a reeling Zapatero fighting for his political future.

The attack has produced a profound split within Spain: on the one hand, there are those on the left who remain open to the idea of re-establishing a form of dialogue with ETA in the future; on the other hand, there are those on the right

who believe that ETA must be forced into an unconditional surrender.

But by far the most controversial decision Zapatero has made since taking office was to convert the prison sentence of Iñaki de Juana Chaos, a high-profile member of ETA, to house arrest. De Juana began a hunger strike in November 2006 to protest a second jail sentence, which he received for 'inciting terrorism' (he had already completed an 18-year term for the murder of 25 people). In March 2007, when de Juana was reportedly near death after more than 100 days without eating, Zapatero agreed to transfer de Juana to his home in the Basque Country, where he will finish his sentence.

The popular outcry was immediate, with spontaneous anti-government demonstrations held across Spain. In response to the criticism, however, the Zapatero government justified its decision with an incredible statement that encapsulates the moral confusion of the post-modern mindset: "One of the differences between terrorists and us is that for us, life is important, no matter whether the person is a terrorist or not, and this is where our moral legitimacy derives," said Interior Minister Alfredo Rubalcaba.

Many Spaniards argue that it was not morals that guided the decision, but weakness and deception. Indeed, critics of the government say that although the Madrid bombing was to have brought an end to the fledgling peace process, it did not, in fact, diminish Zapatero's willingness to negotiate with terrorists. Some believe he still hopes that a resolution to the Basque conflict will earn him another term. Others argue that Zapatero allowed himself to be blackmailed by ETA, and that he caved in to that blackmail.

Whatever the rationale behind Zapatero's decision to free de Juana, it has dramatically divided Spain in a way not seen since the 1936-1939 Spanish Civil War. And that, say critics, is precisely the problem. Because when Spain is divided, terrorists are strengthened.

Indeed, in Zapatero's Spain, the terrorists seem to have more influence than the government. And like Spain's post-modern bullfighters, Zapatero has been conquered by his own fear...his fear of opinion polls. The terrorists, in any case, have taken notice. Many Spaniards now fear it's only a matter of time until they strike again.