

## Spain, Europe and the United States: The Military Power

By Ignacio Cosidó  
Presentation held at the FAES Seminar

December 16, 2003

Analysis Nr. 45

The United States is at present the only superpower that survived the Cold War and the only country with a global strategic projection. In contrast, the European Union is undergoing difficulties as it attempts to consolidate its integration process and to outline its role in the international arena. On the other hand, Spain is in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century a medium power, which is gearing up to become a leading strategic country.

It is in this context that Spain has the opportunity to build up a special relationship with the U.S., which on top of the strategic value that it entails enables the reinforcement of the transatlantic link. The distinctive attribute of the new bilateral relationship --in contrast to those of the past-- is the fact that it is not based on the grounds of individual national interests but on a common interest to achieving a safer, better, more democratic world.

The military cooperation between Spain and the U.S. is indeed half century old. It dates back to 1953 when the first bilateral agreements for military cooperation between Spain and the U.S. were signed. Such accords allowed the U.S. to use a number of air and naval bases, which were instrumental for the strategy of contention of the former USSR and --should it be the case-- for the defense of Western Europe. The relationship with the U.S. made it possible for Spain to break with the international isolation that European democracies put on Franco's Regime. In addition, Spain obtained material assistance aimed at the modernization of its Armed Forces as well as a certain economic cooperation that later on the time proved itself to be instrumental for the economic development of the 60's and the alignment of Spain with the Western Security.

Spain's accession to NATO in 1982 and the EU four years later caused the strategic bilateral relationship to lose a great deal of importance: Spain was in line with Europe and the Western Security. Hence, there was no need for backdoors. The new democratic framework --on which the renovation of the agreements with the U.S. was based-- leads our country to turn down the direct compensations for the use of the Bases.

As for the U.S., its interest in the bilateral relationship was also decreasing. On the one hand, technological developments caused the range of nuclear platforms to be larger. Ultimately, this led to the Spanish bases --although still important-- to partially lose strategic significance. On the other hand, Spain's accession to NATO clearly aligned Spain with the Western Bloc.

Surprisingly, the end of the Cold War caused the reevaluation of the strategic relationship between the two countries. As the USSR collapsed the spotlight was on the Grand Middle East --from the North of Africa to Central Asia-- , which was regarded as the focal point of the strategic tension. Hence, Spain was in the first line of the new confrontation, unlike in the times of the USSR when Spain was in the rearguard. Such a change became apparent in 1991 during the First Gulf War: One third of the air operations launched by the U.S. took off from Spanish Air Bases. More recently, during the Iraqi War a significant part of the North American deployment crossed the Straits of Gibraltar.

The bilateral relationship with the U.S. shall now be based on different grounds. To begin with, both countries share a solid commitment to fight terrorism. Secondly the new Foreign Affairs policy of the Bush Administration is much more proactive in solving the world's security issues. Thirdly, President Aznar's political shift from the Socialist European concept led by the French-

German Axis towards a special relationship with the U.S. is aimed at strengthening our position in an expanding EU.

### **The Hegemonic Military Power of the United States**

The U.S. emerged as the only world superpower after the Cold War. The U.S. strategic hegemony is rooted on its economic, technological and cultural advantage. But it is even more meaningful in the military field. In the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> the U.S. changed from the moderately passive power of the 90's into a hegemonic power willing to exercise its rule in order to change the world into a better and safer planet.

The leading position of the U.S. military capacities is out of question. The U.S. military budget is larger than that of the sum of the world's following ten largest military powers. The latest increases of its defense budget make the U.S. defense expense twice as large as that of the sum of its European Allies. With a smaller effort to that made during the Cold War, the military expense of the U.S. is nowadays about 3.5 per cent of the GNP. In the second half of the 80s it reached six per cent of the GNP. The distance in terms of military capacities is even larger.

Nevertheless, the military advantage of the U.S. is greater in qualitative than in quantitative terms. The U.S. has a real capacity about twenty times larger than that of its European Allies with only the double military expense. One example: out of the nearly 250 brigades of the European countries only fifty of them can be deployed outside their frontiers. However, if we take into account the need for such brigades to rotate during overseas operations, the real availability goes down to fifteen. In summary, out of the nearly two million forces of the European military only eighty thousand can be deployed in operations overseas simultaneously.

The capacities of the European brigades are far below those of the U.S. Moreover, it would be extremely difficult for the European forces to face a consistent enemy without the support of global communication and intelligence systems, without the support of the air force and the navy and without the strategic transportation capacities of the U.S.

From the European perspective it is disturbing that such distance will grow in the upcoming years in a very noticeable manner. The transformation process promoted by the Pentagon, along with a large increase of the U.S. military expense will place the North American Armed Forces literally in a different orbit. In the years to come the American military is expected to multiply its projection and combat capabilities while making the European forces appear obsolete.

The growing military distance between the U.S. and its followers is based on the U.S. technological supremacy. The U.S. military effort is paying special attention to innovation, investment and development instead of acquisition programs. However, the main difference between the U.S. forces and those of the rest of the countries will not only be based on the availability of better equipment, but on the way of approaching combat. It is all about increasing the rhythm of operations in order to break the cycle of decision of the enemy. Also, operations will be aimed at achieving the same results with much smaller units than --as in the old strategic approach-- through the mass.

The bottom line is that there is no power that compares to the U.S. in a foreseeable future. Moreover, the distance between the U.S. and the rest of the world will tend to grow in the years to come significantly. Not even an unlikely and unnatural coalition of all regional powers --the EU, China, and Russia-- could compare to the North American superpower in military terms.

Paradoxically, the U.S. military superpower feels today more vulnerable than ever. The terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> were the first large-scale direct attacks within the territory of the U.S.

The hypothesis that such attacks could take place again using WMD is a likely, intolerable scenario.

Faced with this new strategic reality, the U.S. military superiority is insufficient to deter aggressors. The asymmetric nature of the terrorist threat reveals such superiority is not enough by itself to guarantee security. The traditional deterrence doctrine breaks down in light of the terrorist nonsense we are faced with.

September 11<sup>th</sup> was a nightmare that woke the U.S. from the dream of feeling safe in this convulse world. Not even the Strategic Defense Initiative was enough to shield the U.S. from the threat of an attack that could have devastating effects on its population. Possessing capacities only was not enough to guarantee security. Thus, the determination to make a use of them became necessary.

For the U.S. the answer to the superiority-vulnerability dilemma was to make use of its hegemonic power to turn the world into a safer place. The aim of achieving a higher degree of safety incorporated the ideal of a more democratic world. The military power plays an instrumental role in achieving the ideal of changing the world, but it is not enough. The Armed Forces of the United States will have the goal of destroying terrorist capacities wherever they are, making it impossible for them to produce WMD in those countries that could pose a hypothetical threat and even overthrowing those totalitarian regimes that back terrorism up in any way or pose themselves a threat to democracy. However, it takes more diverse and more complex tools to build up democratic societies.

The said security doctrine makes the U.S. not just today's only global military power, but also an hegemonic power with the determination to change this planet in a more democratic and safer world.

### **European Confusion**

The U.S. hegemony results in a dilemma for Europeans. On the one hand, some of us believe that the hegemony of the U.S. is positive and that Europe and the U.S. must reinforce their alliance in order to face threats and challenges of the future. On the other hand, other Europeans believe that such situation entails serious risks, which Europe must prevent by realizing a contention and even confrontation strategy with the U.S. It is in this context that some Governments consider alliances between Europe and other regional powers such as China and Russia can contribute to controlling the most powerful. The different approaches towards the new world order are causing division not just among the national governments but also among Europe's public opinion.

Secondly, there are differences between Europe and the U.S. with regards to the role the military power is to play in today's world. The Strategic Concept recently passed by the European Union Council contains a calculated ambivalence that attempts to include both points of view. Hence, the *Concept* stands for having the Atlantic Alliance being an instrumental piece for the European Defense. However, it also says that the challenges security is faced with call for diplomatic, economic and development cooperation instead of merely military actions. There is no explicit rejection to the use of force, but on the other hand the document hardly refers to it.

Such concept arises two problems: To begin with, it broadens the breach between the U.S. and the EU strategy. Then, it causes NATO –as a political and military organization– to loose significance as a proper instrument to face current security problems.

A third instrumental point in this debate is the extent to which Europe must seek an autonomous defense or a shared one with the U.S. The recent decision made in Naples of creating a cell

designed to plan and command operations within the EU General Staff seem to be a first step towards the construction of an European Defense independent from that of the Atlantic Alliance. Countries allegedly opposed to the idea of an autonomous defense --such as Spain and the United Kingdom-- seem to have accepted the creation of the command cell as an alternative to creating new General Headquarters in Tervuren, as approved by France and Germany.

The problem is that whilst Europe debates its role in the world and whether it should have an autonomous defense or a shared one with the U.S., at the end of the day it cannot have neither one nor the other. The increasing military gap of the European countries with regards to the U.S. --that we already referred to-- together with the inappropriate capacities we have to face present threats such as terrorism, is resulting in a mounting irrelevance of Europe as a strategic partner for the U.S. If this is not amended soon it will lead to the progressive helplessness of Europe.

In the Helsinki Summit of 1999 Europe agreed to have a sixty thousand effective Rapid Reaction Force that allowed Europe to undertake missions outside its territory by the end of 2003. However --and regardless of what official statements say-- it seems very difficult for such force to really work at an operational level, in light of scarcity in key areas such as communication, intelligence, command, control and strategic transportations.

Furthermore, even if the European Rapid Reaction Force were fully operational, two question marks would remain. Would its design as a robust Peace Corps attain the needs of the new conflict scenario that we are faced within the global war against terrorism? And would the European Rapid Reaction Force work at an interoperability level with the combat units of the U.S.?

In short, Europe has three problems: First, it does not know what it wants. Second, it lacks the political determination to generate the capacities it needs. Third, in the event Europe managed to define what it needs and decided to endow itself with the means to realize it, it would still have serious problems to gather the necessary funds to achieve it.

### **Spain, A Rising Power**

Spain has become the eighth world's economic power. In addition, with forty million inhabitants, our country is the fifth most populated nation of the EU.

Neither demography nor its increasing economic dynamism can solely explain Spain's increasing specific weight in the EU and the world, but the renovated determination to play a leading role in the international arena and the determination with which the Spanish Government has defended its foreign projection vocation.

Spain has changed dramatically in the last decade. It shifted from being a country of emigrants to becoming Europe's number one receptor of immigration. For instance, ten years ago there used to be hardly three hundred thousand foreigners living in Spain in contrast to today's nearly two million. Since 1996 the Spanish income has moved eight points closer to the average income of the EU. Our economy has become international and nowadays Spain is a net capital exporter. In areas such as Latin America, Spain is the number one foreign investor. Similarly, Spain is gaining a more central role in the Southern Mediterranean countries. Spain's largest firms and Banks have become multinational. Likewise, Spain is opening new markets in areas where it hardly used to be present, such as Eastern Europe and Asia.

The said economic foreign projection has also been echoed in a political dimension. Spain is no longer feeling inferior to its European partners, as its development does not depend on the economic assistance of the rich countries to any further extent. The EU's enlargement towards the East and Spain's convergent income level places our country in a scenario, where Spain may shift into a net fund donor in the middle run. Being a rich country has the disadvantage of not

receiving economic help, but in contrast it has the enormous plus of increasing the decision-making influence power.

Consequently, Spain has developed the determination to take on a significant international responsibility. Many examples could be given, but the most relevant of them all might be the fact that the Spanish Armed Forces are undertaking missions in mostly all the conflict areas: namely the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq. At present the *Guardia Civil* has effectives deployed in almost twenty countries. Similarly, Spanish culture is also boosting internationally. All the above has contributed to the dramatic growth of Spain's specific weight in the international arena in the last decade.

In the framework of this process, Spain's Foreign Affairs Policy has undergone a significant change. Spain has shifted from being a reluctant member of NATO to becoming one of the most important leaders of the Transatlantic Link. The U.S.-Spain Joint Declaration of January, 2001 provides the grounds for a special relationship between the two countries. Moreover, in the recent European crisis brought about by the War on Iraq, Spain headed the group of countries that stood for a solid support to the U.S. in contrast to the firm opposition of France and Germany. The Azores image, where the President of the Spanish Government could be seen together with President Bush and Prime Minister Blair would have been an unimaginable picture just a few years ago. The reinforced bilateral relationship with the U.S. provides our country with a number of opportunities that we will only be able to judge in full later on.

There are however two problems with regards to the special relationship with the U.S: On the one hand the anti-Americanism of the Spanish public opinion and on the other hand, Spain's irrelevance as a strategic partner.

Spain's anti-Americanism is deeply rooted and reaches its climax following the War of Cuba of 1898. Later on, the U.S. accords with Franco were regarded by the Spanish left political wing as sustaining Franco's authoritarian regime. In any case, the majority of the Spaniards -52 per cent- have a negative perception of the U.S. and 57 per cent consider U.S. unilateral policy a threat. According to the Institute El Cano latest opinion analysis 37 per cent of the Spaniards regard the U.S. as the number one ally of Spain, as opposed to the ten per cent of France, eight per cent of the U.K. and seven per cent of Germany. This could be an indicator that the foreign policy shift might be leading to a transformation of the public opinion, although this is something that is yet to be proven.

The second problem is Spain's military irrelevance, which makes Spain rather a dialectical ally than a real one. Spain is the EU-NATO country, which earmarks the smallest Defense budget in relation to its resources, despite its growing strategic ambition. In addition to the traditional shortage of resources of the Spanish Armed Forces human resources are also scarce. However, the Government recently passed programs for 20.5 billion Euros, which will translate, into a progressive increase of Spain's military expense along with an enhancement of our limited military capacities.

In any case, Spain's growing strategic ambition following the War on Iraq makes it essential a better balance between the growing cultural, economic and political weight and its limited military capacities. If Spain wants to take more responsibility worldwide it needs by all means efficient and modern military capacities. This will be especially relevant for the consistency of our relationship with the U.S.

### **Conclusion: A Reinforced Bilateral Relationship**

Spain is no longer an irrelevant European Partner, but a leading member of the EU. This applies to the definition of its foreign affairs and defense policy as well as to the development of the

agenda for economic reforms. On the other hand, our country has managed to find a balance between the European dimension of its foreign policy and the renewed Atlantic vocation. This includes the intensification of its relationship with Latin America and the determination of becoming a privileged interlocutor of the U.S. in Europe. The bottom line of such double dimension is that it is not excluding but complementary.

The ultimate goal that Spain must pursue in the special relationship with the U.S. is to assure our security in light of the terrorist threat. In order to achieve so, Spain must contribute to such battle significantly. In addition, Spain must invigorate the transatlantic link within the EU as the most important instrument to guarantee Europe's security against the terrorist threat.

A more significant contribution of Spain to the War against Terrorism - on top of the political support that Spain has demonstrated to date— call for an increase of the Spanish military capacities, in addition to the reinforcement of the military bilateral cooperation with the U.S.

Increasing Spain's military capacities involves in first place raising the limited Defense expense of our country. It would be difficult for Spain to comply with the new requirements of the Armed Forces with a Defense Budget of 0.86% per cent of the GNP, eight tenths below the expense of European-NATO allies. The rise of Spain's defense budget has to do not just with the necessary increase of Spain's military capacities; but it is also aimed at enhancing Spain's political credibility.

The goal is not merely increasing the resources, but achieving a transformation of the Armed Forces that enables them to meet the new requirements of the battlefield and to accomplish the interoperability with the North American military. This entails reducing the number of traditional platforms such as aircraft, warship vessels and tanks and giving priority to command, control, communications, intelligence and surveillance capacities as well as to the means of force projection and long-range weapons precision.

In addition, the bilateral relationship must guarantee Spain's access to the U.S. more technologically advanced systems. This involves the possibility of acquiring the said in addition to an industrial relationship that enables the collaboration of Spain's defense industry both in terms of system production and maintenance. In return, Spanish defense industry must be guaranteed an easier access to the U.S. market.

In any case, the compatibility of technological systems by itself does not assure the interoperability of units. Thus, a student exchange program between the military academies of both countries must be promoted. A joint military bilateral exercises agenda -in addition to those of NATO-- should also be implemented. All the above could be negotiated in the framework of the periodical revisions of the current bilateral Agreement.

Finally, Spain could eventually make some additional capacities available. For instance, the *Guardia Civil* has units especially trained for post-conflict situations that could be of enormous strategic interest for the U.S. However, it would be a mistake to confine Spain's contribution to just this kind of Peace and Reconstruction Operations. By enhancing its warfare capacities Spain would become a first-line strategic ally in addition to being able to face non-shared threats.

On the other hand, the military relationship with the U.S. should also include the military cooperation with Latin American countries. Spain and the U.S. have a shared interest to achieving the democratic stability of Latin America. In order to attain this goal it is instrumental to have fully professional, politically headed Armed Forces.

Finally, Spain must continue to stand for the need to reinforcing the transatlantic link within the EU as the most efficient guarantee of the European Security. To this effect, the EU enlargement

towards the East may play a double beneficial role: On the one hand achieving a more balanced Europe where no country acquires excessive power, on the other the stronger Atlantic calling of the new member states.

More Europe means a tighter transatlantic Link. Historically this has always been this way and it seems it will continue to be so. The EU has been possible with the initial drive of the U.S. and the security umbrella that the U.S. has provided Europe with in the last fifty years through NATO. Likewise, the future of the Atlantic Alliance depends on Europe's ability to develop a more coherent, capable defense. Only this way it will be possible to continue to maintain a balanced, useful Alliance for both parties.

The dilemma of European versus transatlantic defense is a fake and dangerous debate. In light of its increasing specific weight within the EU and its starting special relationship with the U.S. Spain is in the position to play a rising leading role in the conjunction of both spheres. In order to achieve this it will be critical to maintain the strategic coherence of Spain's behavior -which translates into a major change of our society's mentality-- and consistently increasing the very limited military capacities Spain has at present.