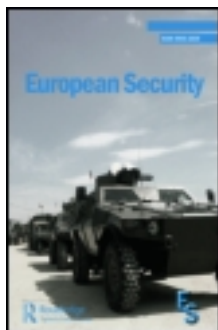


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The rise and fall of Spain's 'nuclear exceptionalism'

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The present article looks at the evolution of Spanish views on deterrence and non-proliferation. Like every member state of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), Spain is covered by the US nuclear umbrella and has accepted the logic of deterrence, while at the same time maintaining a denuclearised status and committing to the goal of disarmament enshrined in the non-proliferation treaty. This article explores the background of Spain's apparently contradictory situation as a denuclearised member of NATO and how it positions itself in regard to the nuclear question in the current security context. It concludes that while Spanish nuclear 'exceptionalism' originally rested on the reluctance of the political elites to alter the precarious compromise that once allowed for Spain's accession to NATO as a denuclearised member, it gradually withered away to give way to a close alignment with Alliance policies driven by a desire to preserve strong security links with its partners.

Keywords: Spanish security policy; extended deterrence; NPT; nuclear weapons; NATO

Introduction

Compared to its fellow NATO allies, Spain finds itself in a peculiar situation with regard to the alliance's extended nuclear deterrence arrangements. On the one hand, it is a member of the Atlantic Alliance, and has thus accepted the logic of nuclear deterrence. Prior to its accession to NATO, it even hosted nuclear weapons under a bilateral defence agreement with the US. On the other hand, it does not currently participate in the Alliance's nuclear-sharing arrangements, it is not particularly exposed to nuclear threats, and nuclear weapons issues remain very low profile with a public opinion generally unconcerned with nuclear proliferation. As a NATO member and a signatory of the non-proliferation treaty (NPT), Spain has traditionally resisted taking a clear position on nuclear issues and non-proliferation policy.

This article analyses the 'evolution of Spanish nuclear exceptionalism' as a prelude to its current position on questions of nuclear deterrence and nuclear disarmament. The term exceptionalism is defined as the condition of being exceptional or unique, or the belief that something, especially a nation, does not conform to a pattern or norm. In the domain of nuclear policies, it has often been applied to describe the policies of nuclear weapons states which consider their policies to deviate from the norm as justified on account of their exceptional character. The case of Spain is peculiar because, like neighbouring

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France, it chose to remain outside NATO's nuclear-sharing arrangement, although for reasons different from those adduced by France and in the absence of an indigenous nuclear weapons programme. The article proceeds in three sections. The first section details the process leading to the adoption of Spain's current status as a denuclearised member of NATO in the light of its transition from autocratic to democratic rule in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The second section reviews how Spain has positioned itself on specific questions relevant to deterrence, paying particular attention to current issues such as the planned missile shield and the development of an Iranian nuclear programme. This is supported by evidence from key official documents and statements by policy-makers. The third section provides a critical analysis of the current Spanish approach to nuclear deterrence and nuclear non-proliferation.

The article argues that the lack of public debate over nuclear weapons is due to the delicate nature of the original compromise that allowed for the accession of Spain to NATO in 1982, and its continued membership as a denuclearised member of a nuclearised NATO within the context of antinuclear Spanish public opinion. Thus, Spanish policy towards NATO is characterised by generally high levels of support by the political elite – with limited exceptions – but a strong imperative to avoid reconsideration of Spain's nuclear status.

From non-allied host of nukes to denuclearised ally

Compared to other NATO members, the situation of Spain with regard to nuclear weapons is highly atypical. It used to host US nuclear weapons in the early days of the cold war, before it joined the Alliance. But since acceding to NATO, Spain has remained a denuclearised country which does not participate in NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements. While this state of affairs appears contradictory at first sight, it can be best understood with reference to the evolution of Spanish security policy throughout the country's transition to democratic rule in the late 1970s.

The deployment of nuclear weapons on Spanish territory has its origins in a bilateral agreement concluded between the US and the Franco regime in the early days of the cold war. The deal, signed in 1953, was initially a ten-year agreement. These agreements permitted unrestricted access to military bases on Spanish territory in the event of a 'threat to the security of the west'. In return, the US would supply Spain with military equipment and direct economic aid. Even though the agreements did not entail a security guarantee, nor did they formally associate Spain with NATO, they were of key importance to the regime headed by General Franco. The conclusion of the agreements put an end to the international isolation to which the regime had been subjected since the end of the Second World War. The far-reaching powers granted to the US under the unequal terms of the agreement were acceptable to the Franco government as a de-facto guarantee of regime survival (Powell 1995, p. 40).

The agreement with the US was regularly renewed throughout the lifetime of Franco's dictatorship. Their recurrent renegotiations were characterised by consistent Spanish attempts to obtain enhanced benefits, including the provision of a security guarantee, which remained unsuccessful on account of Spain's relatively weaker position (Marquina 2003). Thus, from 1953 onwards, US air bases in Morón, Torrejón de Ardoz and Zaragoza, as well as the naval base of Rota near Cádiz in the South of Spain, hosted both strategic bombers and submarines equipped with nukes (Miranda 1997, p. 121).¹ Towards the end of the 1950s, in the wake of the renewal of the agreements, Spain attempted

unsuccessfully to negotiate the removal of nuclear weapons from the air base of Torrejón, located near Madrid, the capital and one of the biggest population centres of the country (Powell 1995, p. 44). Washington only banned flights transporting nuclear weapons over Spanish territory in the aftermath of an incident that occurred near the Mediterranean coast of Spain near the town of Palomares. In 1966, a B-52 aircraft carrying a hydrogen bomb had an accident, causing one of the bombs to fall into the seabed and leak radioactivity. Yet, the Spanish authorities kept the accident secret, as well as its consequences for the inhabitants of Palomares.

Towards denuclearisation

The transition to democratic rule following the death of Franco in 1975 brought about a reconfiguration of Spanish security policy. The rather cumbersome process leading to the definition of foreign policy involved striking difficult compromises among key political forces. The first transitional government under President Carlos Arias-Navarro managed to obtain a major upgrade in the renegotiation of the bilateral agreement with the US that was signed in January 1976. This included a US commitment to refrain from storing nuclear weapons or their components on Spanish soil, and the withdrawal of the Polaris submarines from the harbour of Rota by 1979. However, there were deep divisions among the emerging political parties over the desirability of joining NATO. Membership of the Atlantic Alliance was regarded by some political parties as a way of guaranteeing Spain's territorial integrity against the potential threat of expansionism from Morocco. In 1975, Morocco had annexed Western Sahara and had a claim on two Spanish enclaves in North Africa (Ceuta and Melilla). Spain was also concerned about potential threats originating in Soviet-leaning Algeria and Libya (Rodrigo 2011). Secondly, there was also an expectation that joining NATO would facilitate Spain's eventual accession to the then European Economic Community (EEC), a prime objective of Spanish foreign policy at the time. These motivations are similar to those of Central and Eastern European countries following the dissolution of the Soviet Union 20 years later, which also sought accession to the EU and NATO simultaneously in order to anchor their reintegration in western structures as democratic societies (Horovitz 2013).

However, both the social-democratic party (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*, PSOE) and the communist party (*Partido Comunista Español*, PCE), major political forces at the time, advocated the adoption of a neutralist security policy (Rodrigo 1995, p. 79). Indeed, Spain was no stranger to neutrality, which had characterised Spanish security policy throughout most of the twentieth century – as a matter of fact, the bilateral agreement with the US from 1953 had marked a major departure from Spain's traditional neutralist line (Powell 1995, p. 40, García Cantalapiedra 2011). In the context of the cold war, the ideological affinity of the leftist political forces with the eastern block compelled them to adopt a neutralist stance. Indeed, on the occasion of a state visit by the Spanish head of state King Juan Carlos I to the Soviet Union in 1984, Secretary General Chernenko expressed his gratitude for Spain's refusal to host foreign nukes on its soil (Story 1995, p. 68). The transitional government of Leopoldo Calvo-Sotelo, from the centre government party (*Unión de Centro Democrático*, UCD) obtained the parliamentary majority (186 vs. 146) necessary for Spanish accession to NATO in October 1981 on the condition that Spain would remain free of nuclear weapons (Rodrigo 1995, p. 93). Indeed, the parliament adopted a resolution tabled by a conservative party banning the deployment of nuclear weapons on Spanish soil, and stipulating that any subsequent

departure from this ban would require parliamentary approval (Miranda 1997, p. 122). The ban confirmed the stipulations regarding nuclear weapons reflected in the bilateral agreement with the US of January 1979. While the parliamentary resolution declaring the denuclearised status of Spain was adopted at the initiative of a conservative party, the PSOE – an opposition party at the time – announced its intention to reverse Spanish accession to NATO if it ever attained a parliamentary majority. Interestingly, one of the reasons adduced by the PSOE for its reluctance to join NATO was that it would ‘increase the risk of nuclear destruction’ for Spain (Rodrigo 1995).

The politics of the 1986 referendum

The PSOE did indeed win the elections that ensued in 1982, the same year Spain joined the Alliance. However, plans to relinquish NATO proved divisive within the new government and were thus postponed. The leadership of PSOE changed its position on NATO membership because of a desire to accede to the EC. Other alliance members favoured Spanish accession to the EC in the expectation that Spain would remain within the Alliance (Rodrigo 1995, Story 1995). For its part, the US was willing to accept the reduction of its military presence and the removal of nuclear equipment from Spanish bases on the condition that Spain joined the Atlantic Alliance. Subsequently, Prime Minister Felipe González became the primary ally of NATO members in persuading a divided ruling party and a rather hostile public opinion of the virtues of permanence in the Alliance (Story 1995, p. 63). Official statistics point to figures as high as 43 per cent of the population opposed to NATO membership in 1981 and 49 per cent in 1983 (Rodrigo 1995, pp. 96–97). In an attempt to build a consensus position capable of attracting support from different political forces, the PSOE leadership reframed the conditions for Spanish participation in the Alliance. With Spanish accession to NATO frozen, and following the French example, it decided to remain outside the integrated military command structure, even though it did not cancel Spanish participation in the Military Committee or the Defence Planning Committee (Rodrigo 1995).

In October 1984, Primer Minister González presented a catalogue of foreign policy principles reaffirming the nuclear weapons ban on Spanish territory, promising active support for multilateral disarmament initiatives and demanding a gradual reduction of the US military presence in Spain. This led to the progressive withdrawal of Wing 401 of the US Air Force from the base at Torrejón – a demand the US acquiesced to in the hope that it would facilitate a positive outcome of the prospective referendum on the permanence in NATO. Wing 401 aircraft, which was eventually removed in January 1992, was meant to conduct nuclear missions. The nuclear weapons they were designed to carry were stored in bases located in Italy and Turkey, where they would have been redeployed in the event of a crisis (Miranda 1997, p. 121). The referendum, which the PSOE government organised to make good on its electoral promise, was eventually held in March 1986. Its outcome confirmed Spain’s continued membership within NATO, but under the conditions spelt out by the government: a ban on the deployment, storing or the introduction of nuclear weapons in Spanish soil, non-participation in the military command structure, and the gradual reduction of US military presence in Spain. The participation of Spain in the integrated military structure was only made possible in 1996, when the parliament authorised the government to negotiate the accession to the new command structure, provided that the denuclearised status of Spanish territory continued to be respected. The full integration of Spain within the Alliance’s military command

structure eventually took place in 1999 under a conservative government (Partido Popular, PP), with ample parliamentary backing and in the absence of public controversy (Rodrigo 2011).

Acceding to the NPT

Interestingly, the Spanish decision to ban the stationing of US nukes on Spanish soil was not automatically accompanied by a commitment to forego the development of an indigenous military nuclear programme. Both decisions were not only unconnected, but the possibility of acceding to the NPT was not raised until the decision on NATO accession and denuclearisation of Spain had been taken, and Spanish accession to the NPT did not occur until 1987.

The late accession to the NPT has to be ascribed to the desire by successive transitional governments to maintain some ambiguity about the option of building an atomic bomb. During the Franco dictatorship, some consideration was given by the Spanish government to the idea of building a nuclear weapon. Spain had engaged in an aggressive campaign to develop its civilian nuclear energy sector in the early 1970s: a number of feasibility studies assessing the option of building a nuclear bomb were commissioned. However, these plans were eventually relinquished on account of technical and economic difficulties. Most importantly, the US insisted that the supply of fissionable material to Spain was conditional on the conclusion of a safeguard agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) (Garrido 1995, pp. 664–665).

Following the end of the Franco dictatorship, the transitional government under Prime Minister Suárez maintained the stance that had been held by the Franco regime, rejecting the NPT on account of its inherently unequal terms. When inquired about Spanish intentions to acquire its own nuclear deterrent, the government answered with a deliberate policy of ‘neither confirming nor denying’ the existence of such plans (Garrido 1995, p. 678). While during the Franco regime the desirability of a military nuclear programme had been justified by some quarters as a guarantee against Moroccan expansionism (at a time when Spain still had large possessions in North Africa), during the democratic transition period it was advocated as an asset strengthening the position of Spain in renegotiating the bilateral agreement with the US. The deliberate ambiguity of the Spanish government corresponds to the notion of ‘nuclear hedging’ identified by Ariel Levite. According to Levite, ‘nuclear hedging refers to a national strategy of maintaining, or at least appearing to maintain, a viable option for the relatively rapid acquisition of nuclear weapons, based on an indigenous technical capacity to produce them within a relatively short time frame (...) Nuclear hedging is a strategy that may be adopted either during the process of developing a bomb or as part of the rollback process, as a way of retaining the option of restarting a weapons program that has been halted or reversed’ (Levite 2002/2003, p. 69). Nuclear hedging is sometimes practiced by governments which have formally renounced nuclear weapons but possess extensive civilian nuclear programmes. However, this attitude soon proved unsustainable; the Spanish electorate grew uncomfortable with the government’s insistence on a policy stemming from the Franco era, while international pressure on Spain to join the NPT was stepped up. This pressure intensified after the Soviet Union joined the US in this effort in 1979.

Nuances of Spain's denuclearised status

Spain's nuclear-free status was cemented in three steps. Following the completion of its democratic transition, three major decisions were made regarding nuclear weapons. Firstly, the bilateral defence cooperation agreement with the US renegotiated in 1976 did not allow the US to store nuclear weapons or their components on Spanish territory. Secondly, the Spanish parliament confirmed Spain's non-nuclear status in 1981, stipulating that any change in such status should be subject to parliamentary approval. And finally, the 1986 referendum confirmed Spain's permanence in NATO under the condition that the 'deployment, storage and introduction of nuclear weapons' in Spanish territory were prohibited. However, some significant qualifications apply.

Firstly, the terms of the agreement failed to prohibit the transit of nuclear weapons. This was clarified by the Foreign Minister Francisco Fernández-Ordoñez in Parliament in June 1988. The prohibition referred to the introduction of nuclear weapons with the objective of deployment or storage, but did not apply to mere transit (Garrido 1998, p. 129). The bilateral defence agreement with the US renewed in 1982 included a provision allowing US warships to pass through Spanish territorial waters without specifying the cargo. As confirmed by the Spanish Ambassador to NATO Carlos Miranda, only flights carrying nuclear weapons or equipment are banned from entering the Spanish airspace. As far as vessels are concerned, prior authorisation is necessary for calls of all foreign warships at Spanish harbours, which is to be granted by the government on a case-by-case basis. Yet, it is the policy of several NATO allies not to disclose the nature of the cargo of their vessels. In addition, both the US and Spain renounced reciprocally to request information on the nature of the armaments transported in their respective vessels (Miranda 1997, p. 123). Secondly, the bilateral defence agreement with the US signed in 1988 provides that the 'deployment, storage and introduction of nuclear weapons in Spanish territory are subject to the agreement of the Spanish government'. Thus, current arrangements have visibly relaxed the prohibition originally enshrined in the parliamentary resolution of 1981, which featured an unequivocal requirement for parliamentary approval of any departure from the initial ban (Interview 2013).

Spanish security policy after NATO accession

In the aftermath of the accession to NATO and to the NPT, nuclear issues lost prominence. Interestingly, the base at Torrejón subsequently hosted the satellite centre that was allocated to the Western European Union (WEU), an organisation Spain joined in 1988, and is now part of the EU's military infrastructure inherited from WEU following the latter's dissolution.

Spanish security policy has often been described as oscillating between two poles: either unconditional backing or only limited support for US policy and the Atlantic Alliance. During the 1980s, Spanish reservations vis-à-vis the Alliance had found reflection in its decision to remain outside the integrated command structure, following the example of France, which had withdrawn in 1966. Once Spain had fully reintegrated into NATO in 1999, support for the alliance was no longer questioned. Subsequently, the attitudinal predispositions of Spanish governments concerned either political support to US military operations abroad or the commitment of troops to the Alliance's 'out-of-area' missions, which were incorporated to its duties following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This transition prioritised crisis management and effectively downgraded the alliance's deterrence functions. The 2003 Iraq war highlights the relative ambivalence of

Spanish foreign policy in the past decade. The conservative government under Prime Minister José Maria Aznar fully backed the US military intervention in Iraq in 2003 in an attempt to upgrade Spain's international status. The Aznar government aspired to enhance Spain's international visibility and reaffirm its status as a 'middle-power'. By contrast, the social-democratic government that took over shortly afterwards ordered the withdrawal of Spanish troops from the peacekeeping mission deployed in Iraq in the aftermath of the US and British-led invasion, making good on an electoral promise (Powell 2009). Despite the constant support for the Alliance and generous force deployments under the NATO flag, there is a certain volatility in the level of commitment to particular missions, modulated in response to the political climate and, in particular, to pressures stemming from public opinion (García 2011).

The shifting Spanish position on nuclear policies

In contrast to military operations, which can entail substantial force commitments, nuclear issues do not enjoy as much visibility with Spanish public opinion. But how has this relative ambivalence towards NATO and attitudes towards US leadership in the world affected Spanish views on nuclear deterrence and non-proliferation? The central features of Spanish policies on nuclear issues were defined in the early years of the post-Franco democracy and have not undergone substantial transformation since then. The visibility of nuclear issues has been very low, to the extent that there has been no public debate to speak of. However, possibly due to Spanish participation in NATO's missile defence plans, nuclear deterrence may become more prominent as a topic of public debate.

Attitudes towards the Atlantic Alliance

Over the past decades, Spanish security policy has been criticised for its lack of continuity and, in particular, for an oscillation between a resolutely pro-American stance and an attempt to somewhat distance itself from US policy. Such oscillation is a function of electoral calculations. While the Spanish public gradually eased its resistance to NATO membership, it remained openly ambiguous about the alliance. This position was motivated by a generally negative attitude towards the role of the US in international security, coupled with an unfavourable perception of the Spanish-armed forces among the general public and the unpopularity of nuclear energy (García Cantalapiedra 2009). According to 2008 statistics released by *Transatlantic Trends*, Spain is the European society least favourable to the alliance, and its 2011 survey revealed that 60 per cent of Spaniards find it 'undesirable that the United States exert strong leadership in world affairs', representing the highest percentage among EU countries surveyed (German Marshall Fund 2011). The negative attitudes observed in Spanish society vis-à-vis nuclear energy in general and nuclear weapons in particular stem from the Palomares incident of 1966 (see above). More generally, the unpopularity of American foreign policies can be explained by the population's resentment of US support for the Franco regime. After the Second World War, the US was the principal international partner of the Franco dictatorship, while European powers such as France and Germany remained critical of engagement with the regime as long as it remained undemocratic (Story 1995). In the Spanish collective consciousness, the US is partly responsible for the longevity of the Franco regime, which it furnished with international legitimacy, military and financial support. While the bilateral agreements of 1953 were criticised for the far-reaching

powers they granted to the US, Spain remained one of the top ten recipients of US military aid throughout the 1960s (Powell 1995, p. 44).

Deterrence versus disarmament

Spain has been a party to the NPT since 1987, having acceded to this regime shortly after joining NATO the previous year. How has the country reconciled its adherence to the objective of eliminating nuclear weapons enshrined in the NPT with the acceptance of the logic of deterrence? This puzzle is particularly interesting in the Spanish context given its denuclearised status.

In spite of its lack of participation in NATO's nuclear sharing arrangement, Spain has traditionally been a supporter of the Alliance's deterrence policy. In the immediate aftermath of the cold war, when global arms control experienced an unprecedented impetus, Spanish officials were quoted as supportive of drastic cuts in nuclear weapons, while advocating the maintenance of a 'minimum deterrent' rather than their total elimination (Garrido 1998, p. 135). Spain's assumption of the EU presidency in 1995, in the direct aftermath of the NPT Review and Extension Conference, had a galvanising effect on the Spanish position, as it started to back the idea of gradual elimination of nuclear weapons, publicly advocating reductions in the arsenals of the UK, France and China. Such positions were voiced by Spanish representatives during the NPT Review and Extension Conference in the run up to the Spanish presidency of the EU (Solana 1995). However, this progressive stance was short-lived, as the change of government that took place shortly after led to a quick retreat to the traditional support of deterrence and the rejection of total elimination. Representatives of the conservative party were quoted as stating 'there is no reason for NATO – or for the USA – to renounce totally its nuclear component, since a minimum nuclear deterrent is still needed' (quoted in Garrido 1998, p. 135).

The government's reluctance to criticise nuclear policies to avoid antagonising NATO's nuclear powers is not only perceptible with regard to the US, but also with France. This came to the fore in the aftermath of the nuclear tests in the South Pacific of October 1995, following which the UN General Assembly passed a resolution condemning French and Chinese nuclear testing as 'not consistent with the undertaking by the nuclear weapons states at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference' (A/RES/50/70). Among the non-nuclear weapons states (NNWS) which were members of the EU at the time, only Spain, Germany and Greece refrained from condemning the French tests by abstaining in the UN vote. The UK voted against, and all remaining EU members voted in favour. According to the then Prime Minister Felipe González, Spain's lack of condemnation was justified by a desire to 'respect the solidarity between European Union countries' and not to endanger progress on other disarmament issues (quoted in Garrido 1998, p. 139). In the words of the then Spanish Ambassador to NATO Carlos Miranda, small-scale testing was necessary in order to maintain the credibility of the nuclear deterrent (Miranda 1997, p. 124). This suggests a disconnect between the official stance and Spanish public opinion, which was resolutely condemnatory of the French tests, as expressed in public demonstrations as well as opinion polls. Spain also refrained from condemning the test conducted by India and Pakistan in 1998 on the grounds that these countries were not signatories of the NPT and had thus not breached their obligations under international law (Portela 2003, p. 16).

Spain has also occasionally displayed disarmament-friendly attitudes, but only in conjunction with other actors. Following the Global Zero initiative launched by US President Obama in its Prague speech in April 2009 (Obama 2009), Spain once again embraced the aspiration of achieving a ‘world free of nuclear weapons’ (Moratinos 2010). The recent release of a Spanish Security Strategy, the first document of its kind, followed the publication of the first European Security Strategy in 2003. This can be interpreted as a sign of the ‘Europeanisation’ of Spanish foreign policy, comparable to the publication of a similar document in Germany (Daehnhardt 2011). The current Spanish Security Strategy from 2011 states that Spain ‘aspires to’ and ‘works towards’ a ‘world free of nuclear weapons’ (Government of Spain 2011, pp. 62–63). However most of the measures contemplated towards this end fall into the realm of non-proliferation, thus mirroring US policies (Alvarez 2012). In terms of disarmament, the Strategy endorses NATO’s approach to harmonise minimal nuclear deterrence with disarmament commitments (Government of Spain 2011, p. 46). Additionally, it welcomes current talks between the US and Russia to reduce their arsenals as encouraging developments that should eventually involve the remaining nuclear powers.

Nuclear proliferation

The Spanish Security Strategy defines the proliferation of WMD and their delivery systems, as well as their potential appropriation by terrorist groups, as one of the main threats of our times. It points to North Korea and Iran as obstacles to the attainment of a world free of nuclear weapons, and characterises Iran’s acquisition of a nuclear military capability as a threat, with the potential to unleash a nuclear arms race in the Middle East and the Mediterranean (Government of Spain 2011, p. 62). In response to these threats, the strategy stresses prevention, underlining Spain’s commitment to the Proliferation Security Initiative, the ban on the production of fissile material, the Nuclear Supplier Group, the Global Initiative against Nuclear Terrorism, the entry into force of the CTBT and measures against the spread of mid- and long-range missiles. It also reaffirms its commitment to apply export controls, to enforce UN resolutions and to apply the EU regulation on the export of dual-use items.

The arrangements and initiatives endorsed are hardly new, as Spanish support for the above-listed measures predates the release of the strategy and is well established by now. Those measures are consistent with both the catalogues of measures supported by the US or NATO. Spain has lent its support to US-sponsored initiatives limiting access to the full nuclear cycle for civilian uses. Former Spanish foreign minister Miguel Angel Moratinos (2010) claimed that ‘proposals aimed at developing multilateral approaches to the nuclear fuel cycle ... must not be perceived as new constraints on the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes’. The language used is largely reminiscent of US or NATO documents. Firstly, the obstacles hindering the attainment of a nuclear-weapons-free world are presented as consisting of states intent on acquiring nuclear weapons, rather than countries unwilling to relinquish existing nuclear arsenals. Secondly, states seen as breaking the non-proliferation requirement of the NPT are mentioned by name: ‘North Korea and Iran’. Iran’s behaviour is condemned as the most blatant breach of NPT obligations (Moratinos 2010), and the country is the only one explicitly mentioned, alongside North Korea, in the generally discrete official statements by Spain. Spain also backs the measures taken in order to put pressure on Iran to freeze its nuclear programme, emphasising the role played by the United Nations Security Council (Government of

Spain 2011, Moratinos 2010). By contrast, in statements made in the context of the NPT review conferences and preparatory committees, the expectations on the nuclear powers and non-signatory nuclear powers are formulated without naming the countries in question. When calling for a reduction of global stocks of nuclear weapons, the special responsibility of the ‘states in possession of the biggest arsenals’ is mentioned without explicitly naming the countries concerned. This formulation points to the US and Russia, while silencing any expectation that the European nuclear powers should contribute to nuclear disarmament too (Sánchez 2012). Similarly, Spain expresses support for universal membership of the NPT without naming India, Pakistan or Israel (Sánchez 2012). Thus, Spain has adopted rhetoric locating the challenges to the non-proliferation regime exclusively with ‘deviants’ North Korea and Iran (Jasper and Portela 2010, p. 153).

While often discussed in conjunction with the North Korean nuclear issue, which is of little relevance to Europe in general, the Iranian crisis deserves special mention. The Spanish position on Iran coincides, again, with that of NATO and the EU. The project of creating a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Middle East, which dates back to the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference, is a priority for Spanish decision-makers (Aguirre 2010). This emphasis is reiterated in every speech by Spain within the NPT framework. This is in consonance with the perception that the security of Spain is intimately linked to that of the Middle East: ‘everything that happens in the South... [Syria, Iran, Lebanon, Israel and the Sahel] ... can create tremendous problems for us in the short term’ (Morenés 2012). Yet, the measures adopted to manage the Iranian crisis do not only entail UN sanctions, but also unilateral sanctions with a major bearing in the economy, such as an oil embargo and the prohibition of insurance of Iranian vessels. Notably, since January 2012, the EU has applied sanctions that go well beyond the requirements of UN resolutions (Meier 2012). Given that Spain was one of the top buyers of Iranian oil, the ban bears considerable disadvantages for the Spanish economy (Bassiri and Santini 2011, Escribano and Arteaga 2012) at a time when it is in a remarkably bad shape. As highlighted by recent analyses, the Iranian case constitutes the first time that the EU has privileged proliferation objectives over the protection of human rights, an issue that has long characterised its foreign policy (Kienzle 2012). The security concerns surrounding the Iranian nuclear programme are unusually strong, to the extent that they found reflection in the imposition of far reaching unilateral sanctions (Portela forthcoming).

Missile defence

In defence circles, the declining debate on nuclear deterrence has given way to the question of NATO’s Missile Defence. Government elites appear interested in highlighting the Spanish commitment to the alliance to the detriment of what is left of its exceptionalism. The drive towards reaffirmation of the political independence of the post-Franco democratic regime has been replaced by a desire to present Spain as fully aligned with the values and worldview of the Euro-Atlantic community. This is especially the case after Spanish full integration in NATO’s military structure, and in view of the disappearance of France as a model for a semi-integrated member. The Spanish Security Strategy devotes an entire paragraph to justify its significance: ‘The proliferation of ballistic missiles represents a growing menace to members of the Alliance... Spain will participate in the programme in order to protect the populations, territory and troops of all European members of the Alliance’ (Government of Spain 2011, p. 65). Indeed, Spain

agreed to participate in the missile defence shield of the Atlantic Alliance in October 2011. This entailed the stationing of four warships equipped with the Aegis systems in the naval base of Rota as from October 2013. The reasoning behind this decision is to enhance Spain's position within the alliance. In the words of the current Defence Minister Pedro Morenés, 'being linked to the missile shields gives us solidity and credibility with NATO and vis-à-vis the US' (quoted in González 2012); 'we believe that it is good for Spain ... it provides us with external credibility' (Morenés 2012).

Underlying the decision to participate in the missile shield is also a belief that Spain is strategically exposed and that the threat from the 'South' is growing. According to Defence Minister Morenés, '[w]e are already the first line of defence...in geostrategic terms'. In his view, after the cold war, Spain has become more exposed by virtue of its geographic location: 'during the cold war, the Germans were the ones that had problems. Today, we are in the south and we are in a situation that affects the entire Southern Mediterranean, reaching the Middle East all the way to Afghanistan'. The Mediterranean basin is regarded as a source of instability: 'everything that happens in the south, in the north of Africa and the Southern Mediterranean affects us in a very special way...[Syria, Iran, Lebanon, Israel and the Sahel] ... can create tremendous problems for us in the short term' (Morenés 2012). This perception of vulnerability portraying Spain as directly affected by threats emanating from a broadly defined 'South' encompassing Afghanistan, the Middle East and the Sahel is employed to justify Spain's need for enhanced protection by means of participation in the missile shield. On the other hand, hosting the naval component of the missile shield will also increase the strategic value of the Spanish base as the target of potential attacks (Lara 2012). Spain's recurrent concerns over the Iranian nuclear programme are a case in point.

Spain, nuclear weapons and NATO membership

In contrast to other continental European states which participate in NATO's nuclear sharing arrangement such as Italy, the Netherlands or Germany, the destiny of US nuclear weapons stationed on European soil during the cold war is not a preoccupation for Spain. While several European countries accepted the stationing of US nukes as part of NATO membership, Spain negotiated the withdrawal of foreign nuclear weapons ahead of its accession. For Spain, the parliamentary decision against hosting nuclear weapons permanently during peacetime, taken at a delicate moment when anti-accession forces were powerful, has had the effect of removing nuclear issues from the public sphere until our days. As a result, Spain has been able to benefit from NATO's nuclear umbrella without having to confront sensitive decisions regarding the deployment or withdrawal of US nuclear forces. Indeed, since the mid-1980s, no debate has taken place on the role of nuclear weapons in European security. The disconnect existing between public attitudes, overwhelmingly opposed to nuclear weapons and largely sceptical of US security policies, and Spain's official position suggests that political elites have deliberately avoided public debates which might jeopardise the delicate compromise which served as a basis for Spanish membership of NATO.

Interestingly, Spain was obliged to become more active in the formulation of nuclear and disarmament policies by virtue of its tenure of the EU presidency in the immediate aftermath of the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference. Yet, neither controversies over non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNW) within the Alliance nor the decision to deploy the missile shield instilled a fresh debate on disarmament and proliferation. If

anything, over the years, the differences between the main political forces on nuclear questions have narrowed. The most recent decision on participation in the missile defence shield rested on a broad parliamentary consensus. Partly, as a result of the reluctance to open the Pandora's box of nuclear issues and partly motivated by the belief that close alignment with NATO enhances both Spain's security and international prestige, Spanish non-proliferation policies consist in extending uncritical support to pre-agreed initiatives. This is apparent in the Spanish Security Strategy as well as in statements at the NPT Review Conferences where Spain expressed support for the disarmament and non-proliferation measures adopted by the UN, NATO and the EU. The formulation used is almost tautological: Since policies adopted by NATO or the EU were the product of unanimous agreement, it is self-evident that Spain supports such a line of action. UN sanctions directed against the Iranian nuclear programme are, as measures adopted by the UNSC, mandatory for all states anyway. As Spanish expert Garrido lamented in the late 1990s, Spain has not played any major role 'in any innovative or adventurous proposals on nuclear disarmament' (Garrido 1998, p. 129). Since then, the situation has not changed. At the same time, Spanish official statements carefully avoid any criticism of Spain's international partners, either from the EU or the Atlantic Alliance.

Indeed, the lack of participation in nuclear sharing seems to have given rise to a perception among Spanish decision-makers that they lack the entitlement to take a critical position on nuclear policies. Already in the early 1990s, an official was quoted as stating that it was inappropriate for a NNWS like Spain to 'tell nuclear powers how to control and manage their nuclear arsenals' (quoted in Garrido 1993, p. 129). On account of the absence of criticism of the nuclear powers coupled with the blanket support for NATO – and often US – policies, Spanish official positions reflect an imbalance in favour of the nuclear status quo: non-proliferation measures are emphasised while disarmament is neglected. It is, however, unclear how the support for non-proliferation alone can advance the goal of a nuclear weapons-free world that Spain embraced in its 2011 Security Strategy.

Conclusion

Spain's nuclear-free status and NATO membership, which other members accepted to secure its continued membership in the alliance, were not the result of a conscious decision by the political leadership. On the contrary, securing Spain's permanence in the Alliance proved a considerable challenge for the Spanish government. It had to win a referendum it had promised before taking office while confronting international pressure. The delicate nature of the formula for Spanish accession in the face of significant opposition within parliament and among voters, resulting in its status as a nuclear-free member, helps explain current attitudes towards NATO and the absence of debates on nuclear questions in Spain.

The framing of Spain's current position must be understood in the context of the evolution of its security policy since the signing of the first defence agreement with the US during the Franco period. While US backing proved central to the survival of the Franco regime, Spanish policies were originally geared towards reducing dependence on the US (Powell 2009). This objective remained elusive in view of the international isolation to which the Franco regime was subjected. Under such circumstances, the strongly asymmetrical relationship was accepted but still resented by the elites. It was only after the country transitioned to democratic rule that a relaxation of such dependence

could be contemplated. The positioning of the social-democratic party in the ‘decatalogue’ allowed it to maintain membership in the Atlantic Alliance while imposing restrictions on the stationing of nuclear weapons and their delivery vehicles in Spanish military bases. Symbolically, this signified an important attitudinal change whereby the young Iberian democracy reaffirmed its newly won independence in security affairs and sought to distance itself from what had long been a highly asymmetrical relationship.

However, the restrictions that Spain had placed on the stationing of nuclear weapons were only partly respected by ulterior practices: Like other NATO members, Spain adopted a policy of not requesting information on the nature of the cargo of US military vessels calling at its base in Rota. Its bilateral agreement with the US stipulated that the Spanish government would be responsible for authorising the introduction, transit or storage of US nuclear weapons in Spanish territory. Thus, the requirement for parliamentary approval promised in the wake of the referendum remained unsubstantiated. Eventually, full reintegration into NATO and participation in the missile shield marked the abandonment of the last traces of ‘exceptionalism’ that characterised Spain’s first steps into the Alliance.

The reluctance to alter the precarious consensus underlying Spanish membership in the Alliance is observable in the positioning of successive Spanish governments towards post-cold war policies. NATO policies in the nuclear field often enjoy Spanish support without much evaluation of their merits. Thus, the oscillation is normally one between ‘blanket’ and ‘qualified’ support of NATO policies, whereby the public debate in the security field is clearly dominated by the deployment of Spanish troops in NATO missions (Powell 2009) rather than by nuclear strategy. Backing NATO policies is routinely justified to the public in rather vague terms: participation in missile defence is presented as being ‘very important’ for Spain, as it will ‘enhance our credibility’. This contrasts with public controversies in other Alliance members, where the pertinence of the individual initiatives is publicly discussed, and where the debates are compounded by the continued stationing of NATO’s NSNW. Spanish enthusiastic participation in the missile defence shield is viewed as compensating for its absence from nuclear sharing. In turn, Spanish support helps to reaffirm its position within the alliance.

The absence of debate also owes to the fact that, in electoral terms, none of the major political parties stands to derive benefits from giving more publicity to nuclear weapons issues. Launching a debate on extended nuclear deterrence could reopen the broader issues relating to the adequacy of NATO guarantees for the security of Spain, fundamental questions which have not been discussed since the early 1980s. Analysts remain concerned about the fact that the Spanish enclaves in North Africa are not covered by the mutual defence commitment (García Cantalapiedra 2009), and thus remain unprotected from a hypothetical – if unlikely – revival of Moroccan expansionism. Thus, subjecting the current defence arrangements in which Spain is involved to closer public scrutiny could fatally expose the mismatch between alliance commitments and Spanish security needs (García Cantalapiedra 2011). Also, while the security of the Middle East is a traditional concern for Spain, it is unclear how any prospective Iranian nuclear capability could threaten Spain more directly than other Mediterranean Alliance members, and it remains debatable that the security of Spain can be considerably enhanced by participation in the missile shield, especially in the face of the antagonising effect that the decision on its deployment has had on powers outside NATO.

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Note

1. All quotations from non-English sources are the author's translation.

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