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Spain's Not-Quite-European Security View

Good Relations with U.S. Considered Important

Spanish public views on national security and the United States diverge in important ways from opinion in other NATO member states. The future success of the alliance, especially as it expands eastward, will depend to a large extent on its ability to accommodate opinion diversity such as that evident in Spain.

Key findings:

- The Spanish public supports belonging to NATO, but they are less likely than other west Europeans to have confidence in NATO's regional role or to consider NATO important to their security. For European security decisions, they prefer the EU over NATO.
- Spaniards favor a reduced U.S. role and a greater European role in NATO, but they are quite sensitive to the cost of such an adjustment.
- A plurality hold a negative view of the U.S. military presence in Spain, and a majority favor a reduction or complete withdrawal. Most of those who are aware of the proposed U.S. missile defense system oppose it.
- Most think good bilateral relations with the U.S. are important, but a majority remain skeptical of the U.S. role in international affairs and the impact of the U.S. in Europe.

Clear Support for NATO Membership

In Spain, three times as many support their country's membership in NATO as oppose it (*see table below*). A fourth (27%) say they strongly support belonging to NATO, while one in ten is strongly opposed. Support for NATO membership has increased somewhat since 1995 and is considerably higher than in the 1980's.

Views of Spain's NATO Membership

	Nov 95	*Sep 97*	*Oct 98*	***Jun 00***
Favor	62%	57%	66%	**68%**
Oppose	29	30	23	**22**
Don't know	9	13	11	**10**

Limited Trust in NATO's European Role

While public support for NATO membership is comparable to that found elsewhere in western Europe, confidence in NATO's ability to deal with European problems remains lower in Spain. Currently, about as many have confidence in NATO as have little or none (*see table below*).

How much confidence do you have in NATO to deal effectively with European problems?

	Mar 97	*Sep 97*	*Oct 98*	***Jun 00***
Fair amount +	37%	38%	40%	**46%**
Little or none	51	46	48	**43**
Don't know	12	16	12	**11**

This report is based on telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of adults age 18 and older in Spain conducted between June 4 and 28, 2000. The firm Dym in Madrid conducted the interviews for the Office of Research.

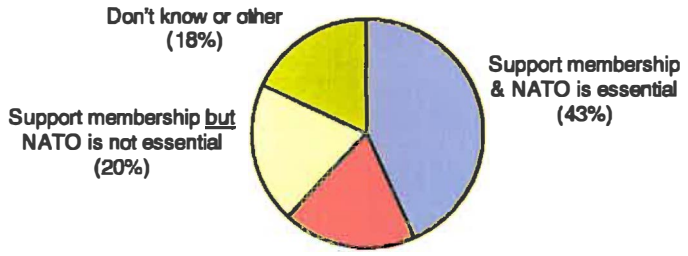
Public confidence in NATO remains lower in Spain than in other major west Europe nations (Britain 67%, France 66%, Italy 57%, Germany 56%), though it is somewhat higher now than in 1997 or 1998. The lack of confidence in NATO's effectiveness is related to opposition to NATO membership.

Limited But Stable Trust in NATO's Security Role

The conviction that NATO remains essential to the country's national security is not particularly widespread in Spain. Just under half (47%) agree NATO is still essential, while four in ten (40%) maintain the alliance is no longer needed. Over the last decade, Spanish views on NATO's essentiality have remained fairly stable. The proportion who consider NATO essential is smaller in Spain than in Britain (68%) or Germany (66%), but closer to that in France (54%) or Italy (51%).

Eight in ten of those who strongly support NATO membership and half of those who somewhat support it, believe the alliance is essential to their nation's security. Together they constitute a plurality (43%) of Spanish adults (*see chart at right*). Most of those who oppose NATO membership (somewhat or strongly) think the alliance is no longer essential. About one in five hold this pair of views (19%).

Support for NATO membership and Essentiality of NATO for Spain's Security



A potentially important minority (20% of all adults) support NATO membership but believe the alliance is no longer (or perhaps never was) essential for Spanish national security. They tend to be oriented toward the left on the political spectrum. They also tend to be younger than 36 or, to a lesser extent, older than 56 years old. Conceivably, they tentatively support membership on practical grounds but reject NATO's security premise on ideological or nationalist grounds or because they doubt NATO's effectiveness.

Substantial Security Role for EU Favored

A strong majority in Spain favor the EU over NATO or any other organization to make critical decisions concerning European security in the future (*see table at right*). Only one in ten prefers NATO. Spanish opinion on this issue is basically unchanged from 1998 (EU 68%; NATO 11%) and is similar to opinion in other west European nations except Britain.

What organization should make the most important decisions about the security of Europe in the future?

	Spain	Britain	France	Germany	Italy
NATO	**9%**	40%	19%	28%	14%
EU	**72**	33	63	51	66
Other	**3**	3	2	4	3
Don't know	**16**	24	16	16	18

Adjusted U.S. and European Roles in NATO Favored

When asked about the relative roles in NATO of European member nations and the U.S., the public in Spain remains inclined to favor a reduced role for the U.S. and an increased role for western Europe (*see table next page*). A third favor maintaining the existing roles for the U.S. and Europe. Those who favor a change in roles were asked if they would still favor adjusting roles if doing so required an increase in defense spending by west European nations. Half of those originally supportive of a change in roles (about a fourth of all adults) continued to support the change, while four in ten would shift to supporting the status quo.

Compared to other west European publics, Spaniards are about as likely to favor a shift in NATO roles as the French (53%) and Italians (52%) and are much more likely than the British (20%) or Germans (27%)[1]. The possibility of increased defense spending appears to be a larger concern in Spain as Spaniards are more likely than other west Europeans to drop their support for a change in the security relationship.

Views on U.S. and West European Roles in NATO		[OF THOSE WHO FAVOR A CHANGE] *If a reduced U.S. role and strengthened European role in NATO meant Europeans would have to spend more on defense, would you then favor ...*	
Now that the Cold War is over . . .			
Reduce U.S. role and strengthen west European role in NATO	50%	51%	(26% of total)
Maintain security relationship in NATO just as it is now	34	39	(19% of total)
Don't know	16	10	(5% of total)

Many Oppose U.S. Military Presence in Spain

Asked about the impact of the U.S. military presence on Spain, somewhat more consider it a bad thing (45%) than a good thing (37%). Of those who say it is a good thing, a majority believe the presence should be kept at the current levels and fewer think it should be reduced, withdrawn or increased (*see table at right*). Of those who think it is a bad thing, a majority think the American military should be completely withdrawn. Those who have attended university are much more likely than others to think the U.S. military presence is a bad thing.

Preferred Status of U.S. Military Presence in Spain			
		By view of U.S. military presence	
U.S. military in Spain should be		*Positive*	*Negative*
increased	2%	5%	
maintained	29	**63**	5%
reduced	22	19	25
withdrawn	38	9	**69**
don't know	9	4	2

Far more in Spain who have an opinion on the proposed development by the U.S. of a national missile defense system oppose (33% of the overall public) than support (13%) it.[2] Some of the opposition may stem from a negative image of the American military in Spain as those with a positive view of the U.S. military presence are much less likely to oppose the missile defense system.

A majority say that the U.S. military forces in Europe are unnecessary for Spain's security (59%). Half as many think they are necessary (31%). Even among those most positive toward the U.S. military presence in Spain, over a third say they disagree that a U.S. military presence in Europe is necessary for Spanish security.

Economic Benefits and Potential Military Threat Cited as Basis for Views

There are few surprises in the reasons given by the Spanish public for their views on the American military in Spain:

- Those who both consider the U.S. military presence in Spain a good thing and favor retaining it (25%) tend to cite the money and jobs provided to the local economy as well as the guarantee of their security as the most important reasons for their views. Secondary considerations include raising Spain's international profile and promoting friendship with the U.S.

[1] For security views from other west European nations see Office of Research report M-116-99, "Key EU Publics Resist Defense Spending For Independent Euro-Force."

[2] See Office of Research Report, M-104-00, "Key Allied Publics Say: 'National Missile What?'"

- One in ten of the general public thinks hosting the U.S. military is a good thing, but favors a reduction or in some cases withdrawal. This group acknowledges the same benefits noted above, but also expresses concern about Spain becoming a target during a conflict.
- Those who consider the U.S. military in Spain a bad thing and favor its complete withdrawal (31%) tend to cite the danger of Spain becoming a target in a military conflict and to a lesser extent the involvement of Spain in actions that only serve North American interests. Fewer express concern over social problems associated with the U.S. presence and some even cite the money and jobs as negative considerations.
- Another one in ten (13%) of the overall public considers the U.S. military presence a bad thing but favors retaining it or at most reducing it. This group also cites concern over the potential threat to Spain in a conflict and the possible entanglement in issues not germane to Spain's national interests.

Good Relations with U.S. Deemed Important

Despite any differences with America on security matters, nearly all in Spain think it is important for their country to maintain good bilateral relations with the U.S (86%, 39% think it is very important). Few consider it unimportant (10%). When asked about their country's current relationship with the U.S., six in ten agree that bilateral relations are good, while about half that many think they are poor (*see table at right*). Among those who say good relations with the U.S. are important, a majority rate current relations between the two nations as good. Those with the least education are most likely to say bilateral relations with the U.S. are important but that they are poor, raising the possibility that they are not well informed or are clinging to a traditional anti-American sentiment. The few who say good relations with the U.S. are unimportant, tend to think the current relationship is poor, suggesting that they may rate poorly what they don't value or that they may not value what they think will not benefit Spain.

Views of Bilateral Relations Between Spain and the U.S

		Maintaining good bilateral relations is:		
Current relationship:		*very important*	*somewhat important*	*not important*
Good	**62%**	**77%**	**60%**	31%
Poor	**30**	19	35	**64**
Don't know	**8**	4	5	5

Asked about another aspect of the bilateral relationship with America, the Spanish public splits on whether "the U.S. treats Spain with the proper dignity and respect" (46% agree, 41% disagree). Based on the assessments of the current relationship and whether the U.S. treats Spain appropriately, nearly four in ten (37%) are clearly positive about the relationship with the U.S. and two in ten (19%) are clearly negative. Another two in ten (20%) rate the current bilateral relationship as good but say the U.S. does not treat Spain as they should. The better educated are more likely than others to hold this view.

Many Concerned About American Influence

Many in Spain continue to express concern about the influence of the U.S. both internationally and domestically. In contrast to other west European publics, a sizable majority in Spain maintain that it is undesirable for the interests of their country that the U.S. plays a strong leadership role in world affairs (*see table at right*). Just one in four considers it desirable.

For the interests of Spain, how desirable is it that the United States exert strong leadership in world affairs?

		1993	*1997*	*1998*	*2000*
	Desirable	25%	24%	29%	27%
	Undesirable	66	50	56	61
Percentage who think U.S. leadership is "desirable" in:	Britain	65%	72%	77%	68%
	France	37%	44%	53%	43%
	Germany	70%	47%	64%	51%
	Italy	47%	53%	65%	40%

Spanish public opinion is less distinctive regarding the domestic impact of U.S. influence. Six in ten (62%) agree that the U.S. exercises too much influence on their country's affairs, similar to opinion elsewhere in western Europe. More in France (76%) and Italy (72%) and about as many in Germany (64%) and Britain (57%) say U.S. influence on their respective countries is excessive. Trend data suggest that west Europeans, including the Spanish public, consistently say the United States exerts too much influence on their domestic circumstances.

Overall Public Image of the U.S. and Americans Remains Unchanged

Half in Spain express a favorable opinion of the U.S. (51%), while four in ten hold a negative view (39%). The overall image of the U.S. among Spaniards has varied little during the last decade. Negative views of the U.S. appear to be only partially related to foreign policy concerns. Of those with an unfavorable view of the U.S., a strong majority nevertheless think maintaining good bilateral relations is important (82%), and slightly more than not rate the current relationship between Spain and the U.S. good rather than poor (51% to 45%). Still, views on how the U.S. treats Spain do account for some of the overall negative image. Those who disagree that the U.S. treats Spain with respect and dignity tend to have an unfavorable view of the U.S., while those who agree tend to have a favorable view.

Despite the tendency to oppose the U.S. military presence, a majority say their view of Americans living in their country (including American military personnel and their dependents) is either somewhat positive (54%) or very positive (10%). A fourth hold a negative opinion (23%).

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How This Poll Was Conducted

This report is based on data from telephone interviews conducted June 4-28, 2000 among a nationally representative sample of 1,003 adults, age 18 and older, in Spain. The research firm *Dym* in Madrid conducted the interviews for the Office of Research. The questionnaire was prepared by the Office of Research, translated by the contractor and subsequently reviewed by the Office of Research.

In theory, 19 times out of 20, results from samples of this size will differ by no more than about 4 percentage points in either direction from what would be found if it were possible to interview every adult in Spain. Sampling error is larger for subgroups within the population. In addition to sampling error, the practical difficulties of conducting a survey of public opinion may introduce other sources of error into the results.

For further information, please contact the analyst.