

Spain in the 21st Century: The Case for a National Security Strategy

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Theme: France and the UK have just released their national security and defence strategies in 2008. For Spain the case for a national security strategy is growing because it shares the same complex and uncertain strategic challenges.¹

Summary: At the beginning of the 21st century, governments across the globe have struggled to keep up with the growth and complexity of the challenges facing them. The Spanish government is no exception and finds itself exposed to the changes across a global system that often reverberates unpredictably throughout Spanish society. To ensure the government takes a holistic approach to national security a strategy should be developed. A strategy would aim to: (1) articulate a vision of the current and future security environment; (2) communicate Spain's values in the 21st century; (3) develop a framework for collaboration across the government on national security and identify policy areas where departments and agencies can be more efficient and effective in working together; and (4) prioritise national security policies and initiatives and the allocation of resources.

Analysis: It has become something of a cliché that the beginning of the 21st century is marked by increasing complexity and uncertainty, on a national, regional and international scale. Yet it is an intriguing paradox of the post Cold War world that national security has become, if anything, more frantic while the world around has become relatively more peaceful and benign than in previous decades (G. Trevorton, *Reshaping National Intelligence for an Age of Information*, CUP, 2003).

This sense of vulnerability is further perpetuated by an information revolution that has powerfully influenced expectations around the globe. Twenty-four hour news, seven days a week, has shortened time horizons, and governments have found it increasingly more difficult to request time to deliberate when television and online media report the latest unfolding tragedy minute by minute. It is an environment in which European governments find themselves ever more interconnected, where changes anywhere in the system reverberate unpredictably –and often chaotically throughout society–. Cause and effect are no longer close in time and space (C. Edwards and S. Parker S., *Futures Thinking (And How to Do It)*, Demos, 2006).

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¹ This paper is taken from the Demos Essay: C. Edwards, *The Case for a National Security Strategy*, Demos, 2007.

Towards a Networked Approach to Security

The strategist John Bryson suggests that this increasing interconnectedness is perhaps most apparent in the blurring of three traditionally important distinctions between domestic and international spheres, between policy areas and between the public and private spaces.² This blurring can be seen most obviously when you consider the mass of trends and events affecting the EU from terrorism, immigration, pandemics, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the impact of fragile states on the international community and the growth of serious and organised crime.

The challenge faced by Spain, France and the UK is that these diverse trends are marked by complex interactions that link, rather than divide, streams of events in the present and the future. Governments may by default remain linear, but life can no longer be understood or dealt with in such terms (L. Fuerth, 'Strategic Myopia: The Case for Forward Engagement', *The National Interest* 83, Spring 2006). Threats and hazards –two different terms to distinguish between natural disasters, like the Hurricane Katrina, and human-inspired risks, such as terrorism– cannot be adequately dealt with solely by a single government department or even by a national government. As threats become increasingly interlinked, such as terrorism and organised crime for example, joining forces across governments and with the EU has become an everyday necessity.

Increasingly, governments will have to take a 'networked approach' to national security, shaped and directed by an overarching strategy. This will lead to greater interdependence among departments and agencies, demanding a more holistic approach to security policy. The ramifications will become increasingly apparent as the responsibilities of departments blur, along with traditional lines of accountability, creating further opportunities for collaboration between public servants and enhancing the prospects for innovation across government.

For Spain, the case for a national security strategy is growing. In the absence of a clear framework it is difficult to prioritise security policy at the national level given the lead times needed for the procurement of equipment, to allow initiatives to mature and be evaluated and for an overarching strategy to be accepted by the Spanish public.

Defining 'National Security'

With the expansion of the concept of national security comes a major challenge to the organisations on which we rely for the management of security policy. Thus, we need to expand the operational definition of national security from its core interest in physical protection towards a comprehensive definition that embraces the sources and realities of power in the 21st century.

The debate about what is and is not a concern of 'national security' is long overdue. Defining the concept of national security is an urgent requirement, as threats and hazards mutate over time, becoming more interconnected and thus more difficult to respond to by a single government department or agency. As recent events have shown, Spain faces a broad spectrum of threats and hazards to its national security. For instance:

² J.M. Bryson, *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations: A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement*, 3rd edition, Jossey-Bass, 2004.

- *Serious and organised crime.* Organised crime is increasingly becoming part of a globalised network. It is estimated that each year, 700 million smuggled-in packs of tobacco are sold in Spain and US\$4 billion is laundered in the country. Key areas of activity include big cities as well as the Mediterranean seashore.
- *Terrorism.* This includes state-sponsored terrorism, domestic extremism, religious extremism and violent secessionist movements.
- *Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.* The threat does not come only from countries of concern, but also from non-state actors (eg terrorists and criminal networks).³
- *Fragile states.* The growing number of failed or failing states is one of the most disturbing of recent security developments. These states contribute to instability and can be a haven for terrorists and organised crime groups that exploit weak or corrupt governing structures to pursue their nefarious activities.⁴
- *Natural disasters.* Spain has been subject to natural hazards such as earthquakes and hurricanes, as well forest fires and severe heat waves.
- *Pandemics.* Examples such as the SARS epidemic or Avian Flu (H5N1) demonstrate how accelerated international travel patterns have amplified the risk of pandemics and related health threats to the security of Spanish people.
- Other key risks include *energy security*, in particular Spain's dependence on North Africa and the wider *European critical infrastructure* which has become increasingly fragile.

Adapting to the New Security Environment

The development of a national security strategy for Spain would provide the government with an anticipatory view of risks. Long-range strategic thinking is imperative if the government is to prepare for future uncertainties and is a crucial process in allowing individuals in government to question organisational assumptions about the direction of policy. For example, so much of what goes down in history as 'intelligence failures' results from assumptions, ones that are often derived from mirror imaging –asking what we would do if we were in someone else's shoes–. If getting the questions right is the first task, being clear about what is an assumption and what is a critical variable is the second. There are a number of methods that allow organisations to attempt to understand the future, including forecasting and scenario planning.

Techniques such as scenario planning, for example, are useful because they allow organisations to develop strategies that will work in all conceivable futures –the key question they answer is not 'what will the future look like?' but 'how can we prepare for all likely futures?'–. Once completed, scenarios serve two main purposes. The first is protective: anticipating and understanding risk. The second is entrepreneurial: discovering strategic options of which you were previously unaware (P. Wack, 'Scenarios: Shooting the Rapids', *Harvard Business Review*, November 1985).

Good scenario planning also allows a diverse range of perspectives to be aired in public and private, a crucial factor given the more diffuse range of security challenges of the 21st century, when 'it will not be possible to accumulate the breadth and depth of understanding which intelligence collectors, analysts and users built up over the years

³ *Countering International Terrorism: the United Kingdom's Strategy*, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, July 2006.

⁴ *Securing an Open Society: Canada's National Security Policy*, Privy Council Office, 2004.

about the single subject of the Soviet Union'.⁵ The failure to entertain different perspectives can lead to 'group think'. The importance of not becoming trapped by our own assumptions and thinking is further highlighted by Geoffrey Vickers, as he suggests: 'A trap is a trap only for creatures who cannot solve the problem it sets. Man traps are dangerous only in relation to the limitations of what men can see and value and do... We the trapped tend to take our own state of mind for granted –which is partly why we are trapped–' (G. Vickers, *Freedom in a Rocking Boat*, Penguin, 1972).

Individuals and organisations are also very bad at learning the right lessons from random or unpredictable events. There is a clear place for learning operational lessons from events such as the 11 M bombings on the Madrid train network in order to prepare ourselves for a similar event next time. However, this should not be at the cost of ignoring other potential scenarios; the strategic aim should be to better prepare for unpredictable events in general. As Nassim Taleb suggests: 'Our track record in predicting [random events, such as 9/11] is dismal; yet by some mechanism called the hindsight bias we think that we understand them. We have a bad habit of finding "laws" in history (by fitting stories to events and detecting false patterns); we are drivers looking through the rear view mirror while convinced we are looking ahead' (N. Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, Random House, 2007).

Finally, some of the biggest threats to organisational survival are often not shock events but slowly building pressures and trends. Like the British and French systems of government, the Spanish government's ability to foresee and respond to increasing threats and hazards is often handicapped by an archaic and compartmentalised system. The ability to plan for the long term will become an ever-greater priority as domestic and international politics, and policy areas blur, creating 'wicked problems'.

The Emergence of 'Wicked Problems'

There is a growing literature on how governments across the globe lack a strategic approach to 'wicked problems'. 'Wicked problems', like national security, are 'problems which are unbounded in scope, time and resources, and enjoy no clear agreement about what a solution would even look like, let alone how it could be achieved' (J. Chapman, *System Failure: Why Governments Must Learn to Think Differently*, Demos, 2004). National security relies on a multitude of departments, agencies and, increasingly, private sector and voluntary organisations in a growing network of collaboration and coordination. Bryson suggests that this requires organisations to adopt four approaches:

- (1) Organisations must think, act and learn strategically as never before.
- (2) They must translate their insights into effective strategies to cope with their changed circumstances.
- (3) They must develop the rationales necessary to lay the ground work for the adoption and implementation of their strategies.
- (4) And they must build coalitions that are large enough and strong enough to adopt desirable strategies and protect them during implementation.

⁵ Report of a Committee of Privy Councillors, *Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction, The Butler Report*, TSO, London, 14/VII/2004.

The Case for a National Security Strategy

Until the early 1980s, strategic planning in governments was primarily concerned with military strategy and the practice of statecraft on a grand scale, according to Bryson. And while there is not the space to discuss the transformation of the term strategy across the military–civil divide we should bear in mind the suggestion of Michael Howard, the British military historian, that the term *strategy* needs continual definition.⁶ In the case of national security the role of strategy is important in a number of respects.

First, it is crucial to articulate a vision of the environment in which Spain operates, both for individuals and organisations working in government and the public at large. Often policies and missions pursued by government departments are in conflict with each other, resulting in poor coordination, failure to meet policy goals and objectives, and a sense of confusion in government.

Secondly, a national security strategy should offer scope to arrive at a political assessment of the risks on which to prioritise and allocate funding and direct resources. Developing a government-wide framework therefore would promote greater synergy between the relevant departments and agencies, thus enabling a more strategic approach to national security, while ensuring the Spanish government was able to anticipate future threats and challenges.

In order to do this, such a strategy would also have to:

- Define the remit of national security and Spanish security interests.
- Assess the national and international security environment.
- Identify the risk factors within the national and international environment.
- Outline the goals and objectives that would contribute to safeguarding and asserting national security and Spain's wider interests.
- Identify courses of action and means for ensuring national security.

A third reason for such a strategy would be to provide some form of integration and consistency with the strategies of international organisations such as the EU (European Security Strategy), the UN, NATO and the OSCE.

Publishing an agreed document would also follow a global trend of national governments publishing their national security strategies. The British, French and Dutch governments have, for example, all published national security strategies in the past three years. In his statement to the House of Commons, the British Prime Minister Gordon Brown argued that a radically updated and more coordinated response was now required and that 'today, no country is in the old sense far away when the consequences of regional instability and terrorism –and then also climate change, poverty, mass population movements and even organised crime– reverberate quickly round the globe'.⁷

In France, Francois Heisbourg has argued recently that the French government must 'adapt to globalisation, with its potential for systemic upsets, be they the result of real threats –such as the attacks of September, 11 2001– or from unintended disasters whose ripple effects rapidly reach every corner of the earth. At the same time globalisation is

⁶ M Howard, 'The Dimensions of Strategy', in L Freedman (Ed.), *War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford Readers series, 1994.

⁷ Gordon Brown, National Security Strategy statement, published 19 Mar 2008

being de-westernised, increasingly driven by the rise of Asia, limiting the Atlantic world's ability to write the rules. The old crises of the Middle East are converging, aggravated by the proliferation of nuclear weapons'.⁸

A Coherent Approach

The risks associated with the lack of a holistic approach by government to national security were recently identified by the Netherlands national security strategy steering group, many of which can be applied directly to the British system of government, including:

- *The lack of a suitable framework.* Current national security policy is also fragmented and compartmentalised, which stands in the way of adequate proactive policy development.
- *Failure to recognise the initial signs or early warnings.* Threats or hazards may come from unexpected sources –this is not to say the latter may be prevented entirely but the capacity to distinguish and recognise such signs could be increased–.
- *Deficient risk analysis and identification* –though this is becoming a central plank of the British government's protective security and resilience planning–.
- *Insufficient opportunity to prioritise.*
- *Leadership.* Structures are fairly well organised for an adequate approach to large and small-scale incidents in the response phase. The current British approach, for example, is to convene meetings of senior officials and ministers in the Civil Contingencies Committee colloquially referred to as COBR (Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms). Members vary according to the issue being dealt with and a diverse set of issues is discussed. It is seen as a model of how effective government coordination in a crisis can be, especially in the definition of strategic goals, options and risk appraisal, and the allocation of work to secure those goals.

Conclusion: There can be no greater role for government than the protection and safety of its citizens. But managing national security without a strategy is like running an orchestra without a musical score: a recipe for an ill-coordinated and out-of-tune response. A national security strategy is not a panacea for joined-up government, and there are limitations to strategy: a strategy by no means renders national security invulnerable to threats. Nor does a strategy eradicate all risks. It would, however, enable the government to communicate clearly concerning its ability and inability to safeguard national security.⁹

The Spanish government must see the development of a national security strategy in terms of an investment in the future; in terms of responding to the uncertainties and complexities of the current and future security environment and helping shape and influence the government's agenda. Creating a national security strategy is a critical step towards organising the government's response to the challenges of the 21st century. The results of this process cannot remain solely in a white paper, but must provide for a revolution in how the government protects the Spain. Present and future challenges demand it.

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⁸ F Heisbourg, *Knowledge holds the key to French defence*, Financial Times, June 18 2008

⁹ *National Security: Strategy and Work Programme 2007-2008*, Government of the Netherlands, 2007.