

Two Kinds Of Spaniard

Today, when they cast their votes at the Spanish General Election, the voters are reportedly split on what lesson to draw from the fact that Al Qaeda has now committed mass murder on Spanish soil. Will their reaction be:

- 'He was right: global terrorism *is* a serious danger that we must fight'; or
- 'If we hadn't fought them, they would not have attacked us.'

Which is true? Well, both of them have been stated in a way that disguises a moral judgement as a pragmatic one. For in fact, to those who are in moral agreement with the terrorists' objective, global terrorism is *not* a serious danger but only a tiny additional risk in their lives, a price well worth paying to create a world worth living in. And to those who value a way of life that is incompatible with the world that the terrorists are trying to create, it is simply false that 'they would not have attacked us', for they already have attacked us, many times.

So the Spanish voters *do* have to choose which way to jump on this issue. But it's not a question of whether the recent attack tends to vindicate or refute Prime Minister Aznar's pro-Coalition stance in the war. It is whether they believe that our society is better than the one the terrorists are fighting for, or not.

Update: "...we seem to be very near the bleak choice between War and Shame. My feeling is that we shall choose Shame, and then have War thrown in a little later, on even more adverse terms than at present" – Winston Churchill in 1938. He was right on all counts, and that was Britain's moment of greatest shame. Today the Spanish people were given the choice between war and shame. They too chose shame. They too will get war. This is the most disgraceful moment for the Spanish nation since **1936** – or perhaps **1492**.

Sun, 03/14/2004 - 13:15 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Or their reaction may be:

Ansar has been wasting Spain's resources chasing a mirage in Iraq while leaving our home vulnerable.

by a reader on Sun, 03/14/2004 - 16:39 | [reply](#)

Or:

"If we had continued to attack al-Qaeda with our full military might, and not got side-tracked by paper tigers like Iraq, they would not have attacked us".

by a reader on Mon, 03/15/2004 - 03:32 | [reply](#)

interesting

Hypothesis: most supporters of tackling terrorism rather than appeasement would generally vote for whatever the smaller-taxation, less-interventionist party on offer is.

In Spain, and in the US, this means that the anti-war people probably wouldn't have been natural supporters of the party in government anyway. I wonder how much the "ETA is prime suspect" bit damaged the Spanish government, rather than their pro-coalition stance?

The really interesting thing is going to be watching what happens in the next UK general election, where a high-intervention, high-tax party went to war... maybe the (non)-liberal democrats will pick up all the anti-war votes? (polls aren't suggesting it at the moment)

Emma

by a reader on Mon, 03/15/2004 - 11:28 | [reply](#)

Will Tony Blair be a casualty of Spanish silliness?

Emma - Yes, you are right: It will be interesting watching what happens during the UK election. IMHO, the Spain election result will have panicked the British Labour party, most of whom did not support the war, and they will see Tony Blair as a liability to be got rid off before the election.

by a reader on Mon, 03/15/2004 - 23:39 | [reply](#)

Terror works

I'm going to say something about the Spanish situation, but before I do let me first tell you about another story which I believe has relevance for what's going on here. Today I was dismayed at reading in a Dutch newspaper the comment of a politician on the recent murder of an Islamic woman in Holland by her husband. Apparently in many Muslim countries it is seen as the perfect right of husband to kill his wife if she doesn't obey him, and he'll even get support from the woman's own family. Death threats are seen more and more in Holland within Muslim families. Anyway, this was the suggestion of the politician: "Government should help women receiving death threats from their husband get a new identity or move to a foreign country." This, it seems to me, is the epitome of the culture of appeasement. Surely, if women are being threatened

or killed, then the appropriate action is to go after the perpetrator and punish him so severely so as to discourage any would-be criminals to commit such crimes in future. But in the upside down world we apparently live in it's not the criminal who is to be dealt with in the case of crime, but it's the victim who should yield. This politician is proposing that we punish victimized women by banning them from their community, thus achieving the criminal's objective that there be a strong disincentive for women disobeying their men.

And so there we have it. As this example shows, terror works in our weasel society. And creating a system in which terror works creates more terror. For you get whatever you reward. And so it is for Spain. Those who would have us believe that going to fight off the oppressors in Iraq promotes terrorism got it backwards. It may be the case that Muslims would wish to seek revenge for Spain's participation in the fighting, though it's ironic that the Muslims will in fact do **better** with Saddam gone rather than worse, so you'd have to question the logic of the revenge theory. But that aside, being involved in a situation where the other party may commit revenge is not the same as **promoting** terrorism. Promoting terrorism would have to mean **rewarding** terrorism. And who is it who is rewarding terrorism? Aznar's party who sent troops to Iraq? No, that would count more as the opposite of a reward for terrorism. The ones who are rewarding terrorism are the voters who changed their vote from the ruling party to the socialists in response to the terrorist attack in Madrid. Those voters are the ones who are making it so that terrorism works. Terrorists commit a terrible terrorist act, and within a week they are rewarded by voters putting a party in charge that will obey the directives of the terrorists 100% by getting the troops out of Iraq.

These voters have done the whole of Europe a tremendous disservice. With this level of success for the terrorists, surely they will be inspired to act again. Who will be next? Holland? England? Well, I hope not, but it is a real possibility. Certainly they will be better targets than the US. Because if the US is attacked again, they are likely to get angry again. But if European countries are attacked they are likely to submit to the terrorist demands. And so it's the weasel mentality which promotes terrorism and not the hawk mentality.

Having said all this, I do also think that the voting result is partly Aznar's own fault. People rightly were angry that he continued to shift blame of the attacks on the ETA, even while evidence for an Arab attack was piling in. In fact, many of us correctly put the blame on Muslims as soon as the attack happened. But still I don't think this was the overriding reason for the voters to vote the way they voted. And I think without Aznar's foul play the same would have happened. They voted the way they did because they suffer from a dangerous case of blame-the-victim mentality. Shame on them.

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Tue, 03/16/2004 - 11:18 | [reply](#)

People with no emotions don't

People with no emotions don't get it.

by a reader on Wed, 03/17/2004 - 02:06 | [reply](#)

Not a terrorist victory!

Henry Sturman - Good posting, but I can see some holes in your argument. Let's look at this:

"The ones who are rewarding terrorism are the voters who changed their vote from the ruling party to the socialists in response to the terrorist attack in Madrid. Those voters are the ones who are making it so that terrorism works."

Undoubtedly, some voters did change their vote from the ruling party to the Socialists in response to the attack. But the attack also provoked a substantially larger turnout than the previous election. So it is quite possible that the election was determined by Socialists who would not otherwise have placed a vote. So I ask you: Is it a victory for the terrorists to get more voters into the booths? I think not.

"Terrorists commit a terrible terrorist act, and within a week they are rewarded by voters putting a party in charge that will obey the directives of the terrorists 100% by getting the troops out of Iraq."

But they won't be withdrawn until the handover in June and maybe not even then. So what's the problem - we should hope that Iraq can stand on its own feet by then. Could you point out some other examples of how the new government is engaging in appeasement? I think there is a danger in writing off the election result as a victory for the terrorists. For that truly is to encourage them.

by a reader on Wed, 03/17/2004 - 21:01 | [reply](#)

Terrorist victory

So it is quite possible that the election was determined by Socialists who would not otherwise have placed a vote. So I ask you: Is it a victory for the terrorists to get more voters into the booths?

Yes.

But they won't be withdrawn until the handover in June and maybe not even then. So what's the problem - we should hope that Iraq can stand on its own feet by then.

No it can't. But that's not the point. The point is that Spanish voters have given in to terrorist demands.

Could you point out some other examples of how the new government is engaging in appeasement?

Isn't this enough? Come to think of it, I think the new socialist

government should retract its campaign promise to withdraw the troops, on the argument that things have changed because of the bombing, and so they are no longer bound by that promise, and they refuse to be part of a terrorist plot to control Spanish policy. In other words, the honorable thing for the socialists to do is to keep the policy in place that would have occurred had the bombing not taken place, even if they don't in fact agree with that policy.

I think there is a danger in writing off the election result as a victory for the terrorists. For that truly is to encourage them.

The damage has already been done. Denying what happened won't change that. The terrorists know they were successful, even if we were to deny it. We must explain to the voters who changed their mind in the election (either by voting for someone else or by voting while they had planned not to vote) how bad that is, in order to help prevent such things from happening again.

Henry Sturman

by **Henry Sturman** on Thu, 03/18/2004 - 10:21 | [reply](#)

Not a terrorist victory!

Henry -

You are making certain assumptions about the motivations of the bombers. The election took place three days after the bombing. It was not clear at this stage who carried out the bombing let alone what their motivations were. We now know that al Qaeda were involved but there is still no clear evidence that they intended for a Socialist government to come to power. An argument can be made that in fact they wanted to cement in a victory for the ruling party. For example, see [this](#). Given the uncertainty, the rational thing for the Spanish people to do was to vote for the party they intended to vote for anyway (as you acknowledge). I suspect that most in fact did, given the opposition to the Iraq war that was already prevalent in Spain and given that larger turnouts have tended to favour the socialists. That more people turned out to vote is not a victory for the terrorists but a victory for democracy (and it is so, even if we hate socialism). Until we know more about what the bombers intended we cannot say that they won. I am not denying what happened. Sure the terrorists may think they were successful. But it doesn't help when we agree with them, especially when the evidence is not in and most especially when it may be the case that they didn't win. I agree that we need to make clear to people the dangers in changing your vote in response to terrorism but we cannot tell those who would not otherwise have voted to stay away from the polls. That is silliness.

Danny

by a reader on Thu, 03/18/2004 - 22:33 | [reply](#)

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