Committee on Foreign Relations
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Hearing on:

THE TERRORIST ATTACKS IN MADRID: IMPLICATIONS FOR TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS AND COOPERATION IN THE WAR ON TERRORISM

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Testimony of

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Introduction

Chairman Allen, members of the committee, thank you for convening this hearing at yet another critical juncture in the history of transatlantic relations. Thank you also for giving me the opportunity to share with you my thoughts on how the terrorist attacks in Madrid might affect relations between the United States and Europe and transatlantic cooperation in the war against international terrorism.

Let me say at the outset that the terrorist attacks of March 11, 2004 in Madrid have had a profound effect on the political landscape in Europe. Their secondary, inevitable effect will be on transatlantic relations. However, the ways that the attacks will affect transatlantic relations and also transatlantic cooperation in the fight against international terrorism are not pre-determined. While a deepening of the transatlantic rift that broke open a year ago in the lead-up to the war in Iraq is a possible outcome, it is not a necessary one.

First, I will touch on the way that the Spanish reaction to the attacks exposes a serious challenge to the United States in terms of European support for the war on terror. I will

then turn to the impact that the attacks have already had on intra-European relations and their potential implications for the transatlantic relationship. Next, I will assess whether the European reaction to the attacks (and the U.S. reaction to the European reaction) will drive the wedge deeper between the two sides of the Atlantic. There is no doubt that the U.S.-European alliance already faces a number of long-standing structural tensions. Different strategic approaches to combating international terrorism have deepened these tensions. However, the arrival of Islamic extremist terrorism on the European continent may in fact provide the impetus for the U.S. and European governments to start building a more coordinated approach to this critical aspect of their common security concerns.

Spanish Reactions and European Conclusions

It is hard to dispute the fact that the terrorist attacks on March 11, 2004 swung the Spanish general election in favor of the Socialist Party, led by Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero. Collectively, some three and a half million voters either abandoned the ruling party or added their vote to the Socialists compared to the previous election, contradicting the poll numbers that stood at the start of that fateful week.

Numerous American commentators and some senior legislators immediately accused Spanish voters of appeasing the terrorists by throwing out a leader – Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar – who had stood shoulder to shoulder with the Bush administration in its strategy to fight global terrorism. Others – and I include myself in this group – argued that this was a simplistic interpretation of the events in Spain between March 11 – 13. While some voters may indeed have wanted to punish Prime Minister Aznar for putting Spaniards directly in the terrorists' cross-hairs, many more chose to punish him for the government's apparent determination to pin the blame for the attacks on the Basque separatist group ETA, even when the evidence of the group's guilt was, at best, inconclusive and, at worst, lacking.

The Spanish instinct when faced with terrorism is not to appease. One should not forget that successive Spanish governments, socialist and conservative, have been fighting ETA terrorists implacably for nearly three decades, at a cost of some 850 lives over this period. The Spanish people are united in this fight, and Prime Minister Aznar's hard line on ETA had been one of the important elements of his electoral support ahead of the election.

But there was a second reason why the electorate turned so swiftly against Prime Minister Aznar's party after March 11, and this reason carries wider implications for the transatlantic relationship and the war against terror in the months ahead. The impression that the ruling government misled the public by blaming ETA also reminded Spaniards that the decision to go to war against Iraq was based on the apparently false premise that Saddam Hussein represented an immediate danger because of his possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Throughout Europe, the failure to find WMD in Iraq has severely undermined public confidence in the motives that drove the United States to go to war. And it has weakened the position of European leaders who chose to back the U.S. administration against the wishes of their public opinion.

Furthermore, the fact that the terrorist attacks in Madrid took place after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein has made not only Spaniards, but also other Europeans feel that they have now been placed on the terrorists' target list as a direct consequence of participating in a war that should not have been fought. The overwhelming conclusion for most Europeans, therefore, is that the terrorist threat to them has widened and deepened as a result of the invasion of Iraq. They now feel less rather than more safe and they hold the United States and governments that supported the war responsible.

A Changed Europe

The impact of the conservatives' defeat in Spain has been most profound for intra-European relations. It has swung the pendulum of power back to the continental members of the European Union, who had been derided as representing "Old Europe."

In his second term as Spain's Prime Minister, Jose Maria Aznar had become increasingly frustrated with the desire of the French and German governments to re-establish themselves as the drivers of the process of European integration. After two decades of dramatic economic modernization and emergence as one of the drivers of the EU's Mediterranean and transatlantic agendas, Aznar felt that Spain deserved a place in the core of EU decision-making.

As someone who had personally escaped a terrorist attempt by ETA on his life shortly before first becoming Prime Minister, he also supported instinctively President Bush's uncompromising stance in the war on terrorism. And, like Tony Blair, he saw a close relationship with the United States as a route to increased influence within the EU hierarchy. The debate over the merits of attacking Iraq gave Spain the opportunity to place itself firmly in the camp of the so-called "New Europe" that rejected the latent anti-Americanism and deference to Franco-German leadership of the "Old Europe."

Whereas the United Kingdom sought to repair during the latter half of 2003 the diplomatic damage that the Iraq debate had caused to its relations with France and Germany, Spain stepped directly into a second confrontation on the EU stage. This concerned the proposal contained within the EU constitutional convention that Spain cede some of the voting weight within EU decision-making bodies that it had secured a year earlier at the Nice summit. In December 2003, Spain and Poland refused to compromise and the long-awaited agreement on a first EU constitution fell apart. The EU was plunged into confusion.

Within two weeks of the Madrid bombings, the specter of gradual intra-European disintegration that the summit's failure had raised has receded. At the EU summit in Brussels on March 26, 2004, following statements from Jose Luis Zapatero that Spain would reclaim its position as a committed member of the European Union, EU leaders proudly announced their expectation that the new constitution could be signed by the

summer. Once again, an unexpected crisis has served as a catalyst for a further spurt of European integration.

Important among the EU constitution's proposals are a streamlining of EU decision-making better to accommodate the ten new members that will join the EU this May and the creation of a new EU Foreign Policy head combining the responsibilities of Javier Solana and External Affairs Commissioner Chris Patten. More important, perhaps, is a re-gained sense within the European Union of common mission and purpose following the terrorist attacks in Spain. This sense of bonding around the tragedy of Madrid was reflected in the summit's decision to approve a "Declaration on Solidarity Against Terrorism" that calls upon each EU member state "to mobilize all of the instruments at their disposal, including military resources" to prevent a terrorist threat against another, and to protect and assist it in the event of such an attack.

Impact on Transatlantic Relations

The impact of these events on transatlantic relations and cooperation in the war on terrorism are still hard to discern. One clear consequence is the disappearance for the time being of the "New Europe" as a distinct collection of countries sharing an unquestioning commitment to support the United States in the pursuit of its foreign policy and security priorities. "New Europe" still exists within the European Union, and tensions between new and old EU members will persist on internal issues, such as access to agriculture subsidies and EU financial assistance. However, the United States can no longer count on a "New Europe" pool of countries from which to try to recruit European participants into coalitions of the willing to tackle global crises or pursue its vision of the war against international terrorism.

It is not simply the fact that Aznar's defeat has removed one of the central members of the "New Europe." Nor is it the case that leaders such as Tony Blair, Silvio Berlusconi, or Aleksander Kwasniewski do not still share a deep sense of the importance of retaining

transatlantic solidarity in the face of the new threats of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. However, in each of these countries, the leader's political room for maneuver has been severely circumscribed. Most important has been the way that, despite the rapid military victory in Iraq, European public support for the decision to go to war and for U.S. leadership in general has now dropped off again precipitously, influenced not just by the failure to find WMD, but also to demonstrate rapid progress in Iraq's political and economic reconstruction. Al Qaeda's apparent ability to operate successfully in Western Europe, despite the huge investment of resources in Iraq, will harden this view.

The March 16, 2004 report from the Pew Global Attitudes Project paints this picture clearly, comparing polling figures prior to the war, immediately after the war, and last month. Perhaps most striking in terms of this committee's interests are two trends. First, a fall in European public confidence in the sincerity of U.S. motives for pursuing the war on international terrorism. In France and Germany, two thirds of respondents now believe the motives are not sincere, and even in Britain 41% do not trust U.S. motives. Second, is the growing number of Europeans who believe they should chart a more independent foreign policy from the United States. As expected, French respondents favored a more independent European role by a margin of 75% to 21%. More surprisingly, German and British respondents also favored a more independent European role by margins of 63% to 36% and by 56% to 40% respectively.

So, in the aftermath of what appears to be the first major Al Qaeda terrorist attack in the European Union, a swing toward a more united Europe, and a deepening skepticism in Europe of U.S. motives and leadership in the war on global terrorism, what are the prospects for transatlantic relations in the coming year? Are relations destined to get worse, with unpredictable consequences for cooperation on the war on terror, or will the tentative efforts to overcome these differences, which had been visible earlier this year, take root?

Common Threat, but Different Responses

Before trying to answer these questions, there are two further issues to consider. The first is the apparent coming together of U.S. and European perceptions of the nature of the threat that they face. And the second is the continuing dichotomy between U.S. and European strategic approaches to deal with this threat.

On the first of these points, it is remarkable to note how closely the new European Security Strategy (ESS), that EU leaders developed last year and approved in December 2003, resembles the administration's 2002 National Security Strategy in terms of conceptualizing the changed nature of the threat to national security. The European paper specifically highlights international terrorism, WMD proliferation, "state failure," and organized crime as the central security concerns for Europe in the future. It also highlights, as has the U.S. administration, that "the most frightening scenario is the one in which terrorist groups acquire weapons of mass destruction." The paper concludes that the threats to Europe of the 21st century are "dynamic" and bear little resemblance to the 20th century European preoccupation with invasion.

It would be easy to surmise that the language contained in the ESS represents an effort to mimic the United States linguistically, but without true political conviction. The attacks of 3/11 in Madrid will surely lay this view to rest. Europeans are well aware that their geographic proximity to the Middle East, large Muslim populations, porous borders, and uncoordinated national law enforcement agencies make it possible for Islamic extremist groups to operate in their midst with relative ease. Although intelligence agencies have penetrated national terrorist groups such as ETA and the IRA, the activities of loosely knit Islamic extremist groups pose new and unfamiliar challenges. Spain is a case in point.

Nor is this threat perceived as being limited to the countries that have supported the United States in Iraq. Most EU members have been active and willing participants in the U.S.-led war against the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Furthermore, European

nations offer other sources of ire to Islamic extremist groups – the French government's decision to ban wearing of the veil in public schools being just the latest example.

Following the attacks of 3/11, European nations find themselves explicitly, not just theoretically in the new security environment that U.S. leaders entered two and half years earlier. But agreeing on the threat does not mean that there is transatlantic agreement on the best way to confront it. As closely as Europeans might agree with U.S. perceptions of the nature of the threat, they tend to differ in their prescriptions.

At heart, Europeans start from the premise that, in a war against terrorism, the effectiveness of military power is always limited and often counterproductive. Terrorism reflects a failure of sovereign governments and is a manifestation of societal, cultural, and religious fault lines. It is rarely, if ever, a battle of good versus evil or freedom versus tyranny. Whatever the merits of soft power (diplomacy, financial and other assistance) versus hard power (military suasion) in dealing with inter-state rivalries, all European governments perceive instinctively as well as from hard-earned experience that military actions alone cannot defeat terrorism. From the European perspective, the satisfaction and achievements of military action against terrorists are always short-lived unless governments simultaneously work to starve the roots of the terrorist cause. This explains the majority of European leaders' deep frustration with the U.S. decision to follow up the war against Afghanistan immediately with a war to overthrow Saddam Hussein.

Central also to European thinking is the belief that a war against terrorism is a battle for legitimacy and not just for victory. Americans start from the view that their actions flow from a sense of what is right and wrong and that they are, therefore, intrinsically legitimate. Europeans are more cynical. Government action requires the legitimacy of international law and multilateral rules. In the international arena, such legitimacy can flow only from the United Nations, as imperfect an organization as it might be. Hence, also, Europe's general preference for an explicitly multilateral framework within which to pursue national actions to combat international terrorism.

Overcoming such fundamental differences in strategic outlook will be difficult, however much Europeans and Americans perceive a common threat to their security from international terrorism. Nevertheless, governments on both sides of the Atlantic must make a supreme effort not to allow the attacks of 3/11 to hand the terrorists a second victory by leading to a further fracturing of the transatlantic partnership. The stakes could not be greater. The United States, Europe, and key allies have built together a transatlantic community of democratic values, economic interests, prosperity, and individual freedoms that are spreading to the rest of the world. This growing community of modern, open, interconnected societies is especially vulnerable, however, to determined terrorist attack.

One Step at a Time

Mr. Chairman, following the attacks in Madrid, U.S. and European officials face a series of difficult near-term decisions if they are to confront the threat of international terrorism together and not allow the war against terror to become a source of division rather than common action. Each decision must be tackled individually, one step at a time.

First, neither the United States nor Europe can afford to lose Iraq. The risks to European countries, which are on the door step of the Middle East, have growing domestic Muslim populations, and are heavily dependent on Gulf energy imports, are as great as they are for the United States. Spanish withdrawal of all its 1,300 troops stationed in Iraq is not foreordained. Prime Minister Zapatero has repeatedly stated his intention to remove Spanish troops on June 30, providing that there is no new UN mandate that would authorize their presence. His harsh language on this issue is driven in part by the need to demonstrate to people at home and abroad that his views on Iraq are driven by conviction and not by fear of terrorism. With the hand-over of political sovereignty to Iraqis on July 1, every effort must be made in coming months to find a solution at the UN that meets Spain's requirement, but does not compromise the operational effectiveness of coalition

forces. A decision by the Spanish government to keep some or all of its troops in Iraq would be of huge symbolic value and would deliver a serious blow to the terrorists who carried out the outrages in Madrid.

Second, U.S., European forces, and their coalition partners must continue to secure Afghanistan's transition away from lawlessness and economic despair. NATO support for the gradual expansion of the role of Provincial Reconstruction Teams outside Kabul will be central to this process and to the credibility of the U.S. and European intention not only to defeat Al Qaeda and the Taliban militarily, but also to prevent their return.

Third, as many other commentators have noted, the United States and Europe must show a united front in their plans for long-term political and economic reform across North Africa and the Middle East. For such an initiative to be both credible and sustainable in the region, however, U.S. and European governments must be insistently and actively engaged in helping the Israeli and Palestinian peoples find a way out of their cycle of violence and toward a viable settlement.

Each of these steps will take time to bear fruit. In the interim, the United States and Europe can take more direct steps to confront the threat of international terrorism by closely integrating the domestic policies, procedures, technological standards, and organizations that they are putting in place to combat international terrorism in the wake of recent attacks and threats. In this context, the summit of EU heads of state on March 26 represented an important milestone in European commitment to coordinating their anti-terrorism initiatives. However, the summit declaration also highlighted how slowly EU governments are implementing the steps that they had identified two years earlier in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. The need for parallel transatlantic coordination could serve as a useful catalyst for European efforts, while making the transatlantic space a less attractive one for terrorist operatives.

U.S. and European leaders were hugely successful in building an integrated military structure to confront the danger of Soviet military aggression during the cold war. At

their upcoming EU and NATO summits this summer, U.S. and European leaders should consider creating new standing institutional arrangements that would bring together officials covering the fields of home affairs, justice, law enforcement, intelligence, and emergency response. These groups are key components in the war on international terror. Only once they start working together effectively will it be possible to roll back the threat of international terrorism.

It is worth noting that the growing transatlantic gap in military capabilities and spending that has so often been cited as a structural impediment to future transatlantic security cooperation need not be a central obstacle to transatlantic cooperation in the war on terrorism. Organizational coordination, political will, and bureaucratic flexibility will be as important as financial resources in this war, where the deliberately low-tech approach of the terrorists often bypasses the sophisticated defense systems we have put in place.

Conclusion

The attacks in Madrid heralded a new phase in the emerging post-cold war security environment. For their part, Europeans suddenly find themselves, once again, on the front-line of a non-traditional war. This is not a cold war of titanic, superpower proportions, as they experienced from 1948-1990. Nor is it a traditional war that threatens territorial conquest and identifiable enemies. In this new struggle the United States and Europe once again face a common enemy. But, as during the cold war, we see alternative and sometimes competing potential strategies to confront the threat.

Admittedly, Americans and Europeans entered the war against terrorism through different gateways – the United States through the exceptional events of September 11, 2001 and Europeans through decade-long struggles against domestic terrorist groups. After the events of March 11, 2004, however, we can no longer say that we confront different threats. The threat is common and urgent, and we urgently need to build common responses.