

Spain Transformed

The Late Franco Dictatorship, 1959–75

Edited by

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The United States and Spain: From Franco to Juan Carlos

Charles Powell

Introduction: Spain and the 'third wave'

In his seminal work, *The Third Wave. Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, published in 1991, the political scientist Samuel P. Huntington set out to explain why some 30 countries in Europe, Asia and Latin America experienced transitions from non-democratic to democratic political systems between 1974 and 1990. In his view, this third wave of democratizations (the first and second being those which had taken place worldwide in 1828–1926 and 1943–62, respectively) could be attributed to five global factors which had emerged in the 1960s to 1980s: (i) the deepening legitimacy problems of authoritarian systems in a world where democratic values were widely accepted, the dependence of those regimes on performance legitimacy, and the undermining of that legitimacy by military defeats, economic failures, and the oil shocks of 1973–74 and 1978–79; (ii) the unprecedented global economic growth of the 1960s, which raised living standards, increased education, and greatly expanded the urban middle class in many countries; (iii) the striking changes in the doctrine and activities of the Catholic Church manifested in the Second Vatican Council in 1963–65 and the transformation of national churches from defenders of the status quo to opponents of authoritarianism and proponents of social, economic, and political reform; (iv) changes in the policies of external actors, including in the late 1960s the new attitude of the European Community towards expanding its membership, the major shift in US policies beginning in 1974 towards the promotion of human rights and democracy in other countries, and Gorbachev's dramatic change in the late 1980s in Soviet policy towards maintaining the Soviet empire; and (v) 'snowballing' or demonstration effects, enhanced by new means of international

communication, of the first transitions to democracy in the third wave in stimulating and providing models for subsequent efforts at regime change in other countries.¹

This wave approach, though useful in encouraging us to look for commonality in democratization processes in countries that might otherwise appear very different from one another, has been criticized for the empirical problems it raises. As far as the Spanish experience is concerned, it is generally agreed that a number of European actors, such as the European Community, the Council of Europe, certain individual states (most notably Germany), transnational (though essentially European) political organizations (such as the Socialist International), political parties, trade unions, and party foundations played a significant role in undermining the Franco regime and paving the way for democratization, as Huntington acknowledged in the fourth of the factors mentioned above.² This chapter will examine whether 'the major shift in US policies beginning in 1974 towards the promotion of human rights and democracy in other countries' identified by this author had a comparable effect on events in Spain, as some of those responsible for US foreign policy at the time have repeatedly claimed.³

Cold War legacies

Although in the wake of the Spanish Civil War the United States was initially as ill-disposed towards the Franco regime as the major European democracies, the outbreak of the Cold War prompted a change of heart which led to the signing of a crucial bilateral agreement in September 1953, whereby Washington was granted the use of a network of air bases, naval stations, pipelines, and communications facilities in exchange for military aid worth around \$600 million and economic assistance to the tune of some \$500 million. The agreement, which went a considerable way towards alleviating the post-war isolation imposed on the dictator on account of his former association with the Axis powers, was also of considerable strategic importance to the United States, given the access the bases provided to the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. Washington would no doubt have preferred to link Spain to the West more permanently via NATO membership, but stumbled repeatedly on Scandinavian, Dutch, Belgian, and British opposition to Franco's authoritarian regime, notwithstanding the fact that the equally dictatorial Salazar had become a founding member of the Alliance in 1949. Inevitably, President Dwight D. Eisenhower's visit to Madrid in December 1959 came to symbolize both Franco's acceptance as a respectable friend

and ally by the world's leading superpower and the confirmation of his regime's stability and endurance.

President John F. Kennedy was rather less enthusiastic about his nation's ties with Franco than his predecessor, but as he had announced in his inaugural speech, he was willing to 'pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty', and this included the renewal of the Madrid agreements in 1963. Nevertheless, from the 1960s onwards, Washington was increasingly torn between the need to guarantee continued access to these valuable military facilities and the desire to support a gradual evolution away from authoritarianism in Spain. Thus, as early as 1965, the US Embassy in Madrid claimed to be grappling with 'the problem of achieving a transition from the Franco regime to a stable succeeding government with a minimum disturbance to public order and the economic structure, and hopefully in a manner conducive to the gradual application of liberal democracy and social justice in a form suitable to the Spanish framework'.⁴ However, given the priorities dictated by the Cold War, under President Lyndon B. Johnson (1963–68) the Administration generally kept a low political profile, though Ambassador Angier Biddle Duke (1965–68) did not shy away from discreet contacts with regime dissidents and even outright opponents. Nevertheless, US diplomats in Madrid remained anxious not to upset Franco unnecessarily: in late 1968, for example, they succeeded in preventing an official visit to Washington by his rival the Bourbon pretender, Don Juan, on the grounds that it was unwise to meddle in the succession debate.⁵

President Richard M. Nixon (1969–74) was more interested in Spanish affairs than his predecessor and held Franco's statesmanship in considerable esteem.⁶ When the bases agreement came up for renewal once again in 1968, the Spanish government initially called for the removal of the Torrejón Air Base near Madrid as a way of applying pressure on Washington in the hope of obtaining further military aid and an assurance of a full military commitment to Spain's defence. Under growing pressure from the Senate over Vietnam, Nixon was not in the mood to be generous to Franco, however, and Madrid's original request for \$1 billion was finally scaled down to \$50 million in military aid and \$25 million in credit. This paved the way for a new five-year agreement in August 1970 and an official Nixon visit to Spain in October, even though his national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, would later acknowledge that at the time 'the post-Franco transition was a subject too delicate for even the most oblique allusion'. This was perhaps just

as well, as both the 77-year-old Franco and a jet-lagged Kissinger dozed off during their only meeting, leaving the president to chat amiably with Foreign Minister Gregorio López Bravo. Curiously, Nixon's main concern was that the crowds lining the streets of Madrid should be larger than those that had turned out in 1959 to greet Eisenhower, a president whom he both respected and envied. According to Kissinger, Franco was 'able to assuage Nixon's unease over unfavourable comparisons with Eisenhower's reception by commenting sagely that once crowds exceeded several hundred thousand the only problem was to announce some plausible figure'.⁷

Nixon was at least able to meet Juan Carlos, whom the dictator had finally appointed his successor in July 1969 and who impressed him very favourably. Alarmed by Franco's physical condition, and partly at the suggestion of Lord Mountbatten, Juan Carlos' second cousin once removed, in January 1971 the President invited the Prince to an official week-long visit to the United States that was to prove a turning point in the Administration's strategy towards post-Franco Spain. In the Oval Office, the President advised the future king that, after Franco's death, his first priority must be law and order and that he should not concern himself about reforming the political system until stability had been guaranteed. He also urged him not to worry about presenting an image as a liberal and a reformer, but rather to play on his youth, dynamism, and amiability, as this would suffice to project the message that things would change once he was in the driving seat. The President confirmed his earlier favourable impression of the Prince, though he was not entirely convinced that he would be able to 'hold the fort after Franco's death'. Nevertheless, George Landau, the country director for Spain at the State Department, told a British diplomat in Washington that the visit had been arranged so as to 'express American confidence in the Prince not only in the context of US-Spanish relations, but also as the best bet in securing the internal stability of Spain after Franco'.⁸

Following this visit and partly at the Prince's instigation, in February 1971 Nixon sent the deputy director of the CIA, the Spanish-speaking General Vernon Walters, on a secret fact-finding mission to Madrid, which included an interview with the dictator. The President hoped to persuade Franco to hand over to the future king while he was still alive and fully in control – 'only you, Mr. President, are in a powerful enough position to tell him this', Mountbatten had pleaded with him – but the dictator reassured Walters that 'the succession would be orderly' and insisted that 'there was no alternative to the prince', while expressing complete confidence in the latter's ability to handle the situation after

his death. Despite an official State Department denial, in July 1971 the Washington Post reported that the Administration was waging a low-key campaign to convince Franco to hand over to Juan Carlos as soon as possible and during that year a number of high-ranking US officials travelled to Spain to make this point, though to no avail. Given Franco's reluctance to stand down, the Nixon administration hoped he would at least appoint a powerful prime minister, who would then oversee the transition from his dictatorship to the monarchy after his demise.⁹

In his memoirs, Kissinger, Secretary of State from September 1973, would later claim that America's contribution to Spain's evolution during the 1970s was 'one of the major achievements of our foreign policy'.¹⁰ According to his somewhat clichéd view of the past, 'encouraging a democratic Spain after Franco would be a complex challenge in the best of circumstances' as there was 'no precedent in Spanish history for change that was moderate and evolutionary, not to say democratic rather than radical and violent'. The former Harvard professor was of the opinion that 'Spain's history had been marked by an obsession with the ultimate, with death and sacrifice, the tragic and the heroic. This had produced grandiose alternations between anarchy and authority, between chaos and total discipline. Spaniards seemed able to submit only to exaltation, not to each other'. Spain on the eve of Franco's death was 'as if suspended, waiting for a life to end so that it could rejoin European history'.

According to Kissinger, during the final years of the Franco regime the US Administration had been faced with the choice of having to 'ostracize and oppose the existing regime or, while working with it, to extend our contacts and therefore our influence for the post-Franco period' and had opted for the latter course of action. Washington 'saw no sense in a confrontation with an aged autocrat whose term of power was clearly ending, a confrontation that would stimulate the proverbial Spanish nationalism and pride'; furthermore, international ostracism 'ran the risk of making Spain a prisoner of its own passions'. The Secretary of State's high opinion of the United States' ability to cultivate 'moderate elements in Spanish government and society' is rather overstated, however. Robert C. Hill, Nixon's first ambassador to Madrid (1969–72), was generally pragmatic, as is revealed by an embassy cable informing Washington in early 1970 that while 'mission officers will not reject opportunities to obtain the views of disaffected elements', they would 'make no special effort to cultivate them'.¹¹ Whenever in doubt, however, the embassy went out of its way not to antagonize the Spanish authorities: in May of that year, for example, Hill acted in collusion

with the government to prevent a delegation of moderate opposition figures, led by José María de Areilza, from presenting Secretary of State William Rogers, who was on an official visit to Madrid, with a document opposing the renewal of the bases agreement. This was in sharp contrast to the policy pursued by the German Embassy, which encouraged moderate opposition leaders to meet Foreign Minister Walter Scheel in Madrid in April 1970.¹² Hall's successor, Horacio Rivero (1972–75), the first Hispanic to reach the rank of admiral in the US Navy, was a committed cold warrior who surprised even members of the Franco establishment with his enthusiasm for the regime and his dislike for its opponents.¹³ Significantly, it was only after his departure in November 1974 that an assistant deputy secretary of state was able to meet moderate opposition leaders during a visit to Madrid later that year.¹⁴

If anything, developments in Spain's vicinity in the early 1970s augmented its already considerable geo-strategic value to the United States and hence Washington's reluctance to meddle in domestic affairs. Above all, the world economic crisis triggered by the 1973–74 oil shock increased the importance of the Straits of Gibraltar, since most Middle East oil reached Western Europe and the United States via the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean. In October 1973, the Yom Kippur War highlighted the importance of Spain's bases, even though the Franco government, anxious not to antagonize its Arab allies, forced US aircraft in transit to Israel to refuel in the air. Shortly afterwards, the collapse of the Portuguese dictatorship following the military coup of 25 April 1974 seriously threatened to undermine NATO's southern flank, prompting Washington to press for Spanish membership with renewed vigour. Several months later, at the opposite end of the Mediterranean, the Cypriot crisis resulted in the collapse of the Greek military dictatorship, which was succeeded by a government which saw in NATO a symbol of US military support for the defunct Junta. Additionally, the conflict over Cyprus led Washington to impose an arms embargo on Turkey, which retaliated by threatening to buy weapons from the Soviet Union. Finally, during these years the French and Italian communist parties steadily improved their electoral performance to the extent that many in the West came to see their participation in future coalition governments as inevitable. As Kissinger himself would acknowledge, 'the Administration did not believe that with the Middle East in turmoil and our other bases in the Mediterranean in jeopardy we could afford to abandon the Spanish bases and compound the impression of a global American retreat'.

Events within Spain and the Franco regime also discouraged the US Administration from adopting a more vigorous policy of democracy promotion. In June 1973, the dictator finally appointed his loyal alter ego, Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco, who was also a staunch ally of the United States and a committed cold warrior, president of the government, a decision that was well received in Washington. Barely six months later, however, his spectacular assassination by the Basque terrorist organization ETA raised fresh doubts about the country's political future. Kissinger, who had recently visited Madrid to negotiate the forthcoming renewal of the bases agreement and was one of the last people to see him alive, became increasingly despondent about the possibility of a peaceful succession. The Secretary nevertheless insisted that, out of respect for Franco, Vice President Gerald Ford, who had only recently been appointed following Spiro Agnew's resignation, should attend the admiral's funeral, something Nixon readily agreed to. Inevitably, the Spanish press did not fail to contrast his presence with the total absence of senior European dignitaries.

Although Carrero Blanco's death was almost universally perceived as a decisive blow to plans for the continuity of the Franco regime after its founder's death, it does not appear to have had much impact on the Nixon Administration's overall policy towards Spain. The admiral's successor, Carlos Arias Navarro, was largely uninterested in foreign policy, but valued Spain's special relationship with the United States. This became evident in July 1974, when Franco's health deteriorated to the extent of forcing him to stand down as Head of State for a few weeks, leaving Prince Juan Carlos to take his place. Undeterred by Franco's illness and determined as ever to guarantee access to their military facilities in Spain, only days later Washington pressed ahead with the signing of a joint declaration of principles which would pave the way for the subsequent renewal of the bases agreement. Prince Juan Carlos was of course happy to guarantee existing relations with the United States, but was also understandably reluctant to endorse a document that he was not responsible for, but for which he might nevertheless be held accountable after Franco's death.

Nixon's political demise in August 1974 as a result of the Watergate scandal and his replacement by President Ford resulted in an overall increase in Kissinger's influence over US foreign policy, but this was not immediately apparent with regard to Spain. Seemingly oblivious to Franco's increasingly precarious health and the changes his death would undoubtedly bring with it, Ford initially planned to replace Ambassador Rivero, who resigned in August 1974, with Peter M. Flanigan. The latter

was a controversial banker and former assistant to the President for International Economic Affairs, whose father had been a vocal supporter of Franco in the 1930s. In view of the doubts subsequently expressed about him by the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, however, in November Flanigan himself asked the president to withdraw his name, enabling an outstanding career diplomat, Wells Stabler, who had served as deputy assistant secretary of state for European Affairs, to take his place. Stabler had the added advantage of having worked closely with Kissinger in the past.

The United States and democratization

Given its excellent relations with the Franco regime, it is perhaps pertinent to enquire whether the United States had any substantive interest in a change of regime in Spain. On the one hand, it was reasonable to expect future democratic governments to become increasingly demanding when it came to renewing the crucial bases agreement, as was indeed to be the case. At the same time, however, a democratic Spain would finally be able to join NATO, thereby strengthening the southern European flank which so obsessed Kissinger. Similarly, it would also become eligible for European Community membership, something the United States had always advocated, even against its own economic self-interest. As a State Department memorandum argued in August 1974, 'it is our objective to favor and work for Spain's closer integration with the West, both because of the strategic importance of the country, and in order to provide an anchor to its domestic stability in the post-Franco period... it is in our long-term interest to use what influence we have, in Spain and in the other European countries, to move along the rapprochement between Spain and the rest of Western Europe, particularly in NATO'.¹⁵

As both Kissinger and Stabler have acknowledged, however, on the eve of Franco's death the top priority for the US Administration was not democratization, but rather the renewal of the bases agreement, which was due to expire in September 1975. This determination to secure a military presence in Spain regardless of the political price paid caused concern and dismay in some West European capitals. In May 1975, German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt reminded Ford that the Franco era was obviously coming to an end, in view of which 'we should be encouraging those we hope will govern after Franco; that means we must deal not only with those who are in power now'. Ford objected that the renewal of the bases agreement was of vital importance to

the West, including Germany, to which Schmidt replied that 'so that you can be sure of your bases and your special strategic ties with Spain you should talk about it with tomorrow's rulers as well'.¹⁶ Ford was unimpressed, however, and visited Spain later that month, ignoring his own ambassador's advice to the contrary. By then, Stabler was advising the Secretary of State in favour of postponing the signing of a new agreement until after Franco's death, but to no avail.¹⁷

Prior to the visit, Kissinger sent the President a lengthy memorandum explaining the situation in Madrid as seen from Washington. The Secretary acknowledged that 'younger Spaniards are less and less willing to acquiesce in the more repressive features of the authoritarian regime installed by Franco' and rightly predicted that 'many observers in and out of Spain will be inclined to view your visit... as an attempt to prop up Franco and his system'. Nevertheless, the President's presence in Madrid was fully justified by 'our political/military interest in a pro-Western Spain which allows us to use certain important bases to support our forces elsewhere in Europe and the Mediterranean'; most importantly, 'we want to be able to renew our bases agreement... and we also want to continue this defence cooperation after Franco goes', though he was aware of the fact that 'many Spaniards view the US base rights in Spain as more important to the US than Spain' and that 'some see them as an embarrassing symbol of US support for Franco'. This led the Secretary to conclude, somewhat implausibly, that 'we should strengthen our existing ties with the present leadership, particularly with regard to defence cooperation, while avoiding excessive identification with Franco'.¹⁸

Looking to the future, in Kissinger's view 'the prospect for the succession after Franco is reasonably good in the short term but less certain thereafter. Juan Carlos and (Prime Minister) Arias would probably enjoy reasonably broad acceptance at the outset, though not much active support... over the longer term, the success of the post-Franco leadership will hinge on their ability to steer a careful course between pressures to loosen controls and rightist insistence on preserving the status quo. The fragmented clandestine opposition parties, including the active Spanish Communist Party (PCE), would probably not be able by themselves to force government changes but would try to take advantage of problems as they arose...'. This generally sanguine view relied heavily on his perception of 'the deterrent role of the Spanish military, which appears united and disposed to accept political change and has generally wanted to stay out of politics, but would be disposed to intervene if a serious threat to law and order developed or if a radical left-wing

regime seemed about to come to power'. Given that 'the odds are against a radical upheaval in Spanish political life during the twilight and succession periods', Kissinger was not unduly concerned about the consequences of Franco's death for US policy, though he acknowledged that future governments would be 'much more susceptible to popular pressure than Franco needed to be, and there are certainly sectors of Spanish opinion – not all on the left – which favour reduced dependence on the US in defence and other areas'.

In his memorandum to the President, the Secretary also argued that 'we should signal our desire to continue these cooperative relations with the post-Franco leadership, with a view to developing a broad consensus on the value of US–Spanish relations which includes leaders in and out of government'. In keeping with this spirit, and in an attempt to improve Ford's standing in the eyes of Spaniards hostile to the regime, Ambassador Stabler sought and obtained Kissinger's approval for a brief meeting between the President and moderate opposition leaders, but when the Madrid government raised objections, the Secretary quickly backed down.¹⁹ Years later, Stabler readily admitted that this had been a mistake; had Washington insisted, the Spanish government would probably have allowed the meeting to take place and this would have been 'a signal – though a very minor one – that we did have some view about relations with the opposition'.²⁰ Worse still, Ford's visit coincided with the declaration of a state of emergency in the Basque country, decreed by the Spanish government to deal with an outbreak of severe unrest. The President was at least careful to spend considerably more time with Juan Carlos than with Franco during his visit, thereby giving some indication of the Administration's priorities. Nevertheless, in October 1975, at the height of a major international campaign against the regime triggered by the execution of five anti-Franco activists convicted for terrorist killings, and only weeks before the dictator's death, the United States pressed ahead regardless and signed a pre-agreement for the renewal of the lease on the military bases. In marked contrast, the major European democracies withdrew their ambassadors from Madrid in protest.²¹

The US Administration's determination to guarantee Spain's stability did not always militate against the cause of democratization, however. In early October 1975, news reached Madrid that King Hassan II of Morocco was planning a 'green march' of half a million volunteers to take over the Spanish Sahara, a territory it had long since claimed. With Franco on his deathbed and the Portuguese Revolution very much on his mind, Prince Juan Carlos feared that an armed conflict with Morocco might divide the army and destabilize an already fragile political situation at home.

He therefore turned to Kissinger, who agreed to intercede with Hassan II and other Arab leaders, as well as with the French President, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. This allowed Juan Carlos to travel to the Saharan capital of El Aaiún to address his fellow army officers, promising them a negotiated withdrawal rather than a dishonourable retreat. Hassan II was true to his word and called off the march in early November, thereby strengthening Juan Carlos's standing in the eyes of the army and even many regime diehards.²² In spite of the above, it would appear that the US Administration did less than it might have done to discourage the King of Morocco from adopting a belligerent attitude towards the Saharan question at a time of acute political uncertainty in Spain.

Sensing that Franco's death was now imminent, in early November 1975 Kissinger wired Stabler a fresh set of instructions.²³ In this highly revealing text, the Secretary reminded the ambassador that 'the basic US objective in Spain remains that of strengthening our broad political and security relationship with a Spain more closely linked to the Atlantic community'. At the same time, Washington favoured 'evolutionary political changes on terms acceptable to the people of Spain and leading toward a more open and pluralistic society'. Although Kissinger supported 'no particular political solution or party within the broad range of democratic thought', he anticipated that 'the transition will be in the hands of essentially conservative people' and did not hide the fact that 'we would view communist participation in a future Spanish government as an unhealthy development which would inevitably damage ties with us and the institutions of Western Europe'. In short, 'the US will play a stabilizing and supportive role, and counsel against any efforts to press for faster changes which might force the process beyond realistic limits and risk severe reactions'.²⁴ The State Department was nevertheless anxious that this role should not be misinterpreted, a matter openly addressed in a memorandum prepared for Vice President Nelson Rockefeller, who later attended the dictator's funeral on Ford's behalf: 'many Spaniards have come to believe that the United States Government has been willing to accept Franco because of our overriding interest in protecting our bases in Spain. With Franco gone, they may be concerned that we will somehow seek to discourage political change. The Communists in and out of Spain can be expected to keep pushing their line that we and the Spanish right are collaborating to preserve Francoism without Franco'.²⁵

Kissinger's telegram accepted that the US Embassy in Madrid 'must have continuing but discreet contacts with opposition groups, including those reasonably moderate groups now forced to operate illegally', but

'all contacts with the opposition should be monitored carefully in order to avoid leaving the impression that we would favour any particular party'. Indeed, since his arrival in Spain Ambassador Stabler had gradually established contact with leaders of the non-Communist opposition, including Felipe González, who had been elected leader of the Socialist Party (PSOE) in October 1974. However, although the Communist Party (PCE) was undoubtedly the largest and best organized opposition group at that stage, the Administration refused to have any formal dealings with it. In keeping with this position, the above-mentioned State Department memorandum prepared for the vice president argued that 'one indispensable element will be to legalize most of the opposition parties, excluding the communists and other non-democratic groups. While some opposition groups will probably be reluctant to accept overtures from the government if the communists remain illegal, most would eventually be persuaded to take part in electoral and other reforms with concrete political benefits'. This was precisely the – ultimately unsuccessful – strategy later adopted by the King's first government under Arias Navarro during the first six months of 1976.

The decision as to who should represent the United States at Franco's funeral and the future king's proclamation several days later is highly revealing of the Administration's policy towards Spain overall. When the matter was first raised by Ambassador Rivero in the summer of 1974, he had advised that the President himself attend both ceremonies. A year later, the State Department suggested that the US delegation be led by a senior member of the cabinet, but Ford finally decided in favour of Vice President Rockefeller. Significantly, unlike the major European democracies, the US Administration was represented at the same level both at Franco's funeral and at Juan Carlos' proclamation ceremonies. As a result, the Vice President found himself in the company of the likes of Imelda Marcos and General Augusto Pinochet at the former, but was joined at the latter by the Duke of Edinburgh, German President Walter Scheel and French President Giscard d'Estaing, amongst others. To the very end, the United States sought to invest in the future without distancing itself from the past, a policy whose subtlety appears to have been lost on most Spaniards.²⁶

In spite of his outspoken support for the young monarch, Kissinger, strongly influenced by events in Portugal and the electoral advance of the Communist Party in Italy, remained highly sceptical as to the long-term prospects for democracy in Spain, and greatly resented external pressure in favour of rapid regime change. In December 1975, he reassured foreign minister Areilza: 'I want you to know you won't be under

pressure from the United States. You know there must be some evolution, but you are doing it'. His European colleagues would 'take no responsibility if it blows up and they won't help you', he warned him and added, 'if Americans press you, if they are State Department, let me know; if they are not State Department, ignore them'. Indeed his advice to his Spanish counterpart a month later could be summed up in two words: 'Go slowly!' Not surprisingly, perhaps, Areilza soon came to the conclusion that Kissinger was 'a man of many doubts and little hope'.²⁷

In particular, the Secretary of State remained unenthusiastic about the legalization of the Communist Party, an issue that had come to dominate the domestic Spanish political debate. In January 1976 he reminded Manuel Fraga, the new Minister of the Interior, that the Communist Party was illegal in West Germany and was clearly relieved to hear that he had no intention of legalizing it in Spain. Two months later the Irish Prime Minister, Garret FitzGerald, who had recently seen Areilza, told Kissinger this was a mistake, because 'it is important to defeat communists, not to suppress them', but to no avail. In June, the Secretary told Areilza frankly that 'we won't say anything if you insist on legalizing the Communist Party, but we won't be too unhappy if you decide to postpone the decision several years'. Responding to media claims that the Administration sought to veto Communist participation in the first elections, later that month the State Department declared that, while this was purely an internal affair, 'in our judgement it would be absurd to make legalization of a party dedicated to authoritarian principles a litmus test as to whether or not democratization is taking place'. Absurd or not, this was precisely the view held by a majority of Spaniards at the time. In spite of this, according to a senior US diplomat in Madrid, 'our contacts with the Communists were only at the level of a junior or middle-grade officer in the political section and with Communists who were not members of the party's central committee'.²⁸

US policy after Franco

As the available diplomatic correspondence makes abundantly clear, at the time of Franco's death Kissinger's top priority was the renewal of the bases agreement, but at least he was willing to assist King Juan Carlos and his reformists in their efforts to make this more palatable to Spanish public opinion. Although the young monarch had inherited a Prime Minister, Carlos Arias Navarro, who was lukewarm about undertaking substantial reforms, he had also secured the appointment of a foreign minister who was firmly committed to the establishment of democracy

in Spain. Areilza insisted on raising the existing executive agreement over the bases to the status of a treaty, which required the approval of the US Senate, so as to underline Washington's recognition of the fact that it was no longer dealing with a dictatorship, but with a democracy-in-the-making. In spite of serious doubts concerning Arias Navarro's ability to further democratization, Kissinger allowed Areilza to convince him of the benefits of a new Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, which was duly signed in January 1976.²⁹ This 'excellent gift for the Monarchy', as Areilza described it, paved the way for Juan Carlos's highly successful visit to Washington in June 1976, in the course of which he committed himself to a Western-style parliamentary monarchy in a speech to a joint meeting of the US Congress which has come to be regarded as a turning point in Spain's transition to democracy. Although doubts had been raised about this process in the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, partly in response to the highly favourable impact of the King's visit the Treaty was ratified later in June and came into force in September 1976.

Prior to this state visit, Kissinger wrote a lengthy memorandum for President Ford analysing developments in Spain in some detail.³⁰ The Secretary made no bones about the fact that 'our purpose in the visit is to demonstrate our full support for the King as the best hope for the democratic evolution with stability which will protect our interests in Spain'. Juan Carlos, he argued, 'recognizes that, if the monarchy is to survive, he must not become just another participant in the political process. To avoid becoming a captive of any faction of a figurehead, he must project a broader image, above politics in a partisan sense but visibly committed to changes broadly acceptable to Spain's evolving society. He also recognises that the fate of the monarchy restored by Franco depends on the success of the democratic evolution. It will require skill, determination and cool nerves to walk this narrow line, and there is not yet sufficient evidence to determine whether the King has these qualities'.

The Secretary also acknowledged that 'there has been considerable foreign and domestic criticism of Prime Minister Arias' cautious approach, and it may well be that certain opportunities to assert positive leadership were lost in the first days and weeks after Franco's death', but in his view 'the Government has in practice managed to chart a middle course, staying clear of the die-hard reactionaries opposed to any significant change even if not satisfying the left oppositionists who call for a complete break with the past'. This was an interpretation few Spaniards would have shared: indeed Juan Carlos himself had told *Newsweek* in April that Arias Navarro was 'an unmitigated disaster'. Whatever the case, Kissinger himself acknowledged that one of the purposes of the visit

was to 'bolster the King's confidence in himself and to strengthen his resolve', something it undoubtedly achieved: on returning to Madrid, in early July 1976 he finally took the decision to remove Arias Navarro and replace him with a young, relatively unknown though up-and-coming reformist, Adolfo Suárez, who was to become the key figure in the subsequent democratizing process. If the point of the visit, as Kissinger's memorandum had claimed, was to 're-affirm our support for the King and thus to strengthen his influence', it was a spectacular success. Ironically, Areilza had hoped the visit would also improve his own chances of succeeding Arias Navarro, but it may well have been his undoing; as Kissinger would later tell one of the monarch's closest advisers, Manuel Prado, they had been 'absolutely shocked' by the way Areilza treated Juan Carlos in Washington: 'Ford would ask a question and the Foreign Minister would answer it for the king'.³¹

In the run-up to the November 1976 US presidential elections, both Ford and Kissinger inevitably paid less attention to events in Spain, just as King Juan Carlos's efforts were beginning to bear fruit. Nevertheless, the Secretary appears to have approved of the progress made by Suárez under the young monarch's guidance. As to the latter, in December 1976 he told Prado that 'I don't wish to sound condescending, but I am really very impressed with him, and I was not so at the beginning'. (The admiration seems to have been mutual: that same month Juan Carlos asked a senior State Department official to tell Kissinger that 'he not only has a friend but a King-friend'.) Curiously, though, he was still of the opinion that Arias Navarro was 'a rather decent man' and 'probably very good for the transition period'. His views on the future of the PCE were also unchanged. In September, at a meeting with leading West European diplomats, he had expressed the opinion that 'the practical point is whether they are more dangerous in or out', but when Sir Michael Palliser, a permanent under secretary at the Foreign Office, pointed out that 'some people in Spain who are non-Communists but leftwing will see it as a touchstone of whether Spain is moving toward liberalization', he had quickly agreed that 'if that is the case, they should do it'. His conversation with Prado in December was unusually frank in this regard:

as the Secretary of State, I have to tell you that from our point of view the legal position of the communist party has to be a Spanish decision. It is not ours to take, and it is not one on which we can comment. But speaking as a political scientist, my judgement is that to the greater degree that you can have your system evolve internally

before the changes take place, the better off you will be. Let matters begin to sort themselves out. Let the system stabilize itself. But I don't think you need the communist party to do it. If I were the King, I wouldn't do it. You show your strength by not doing it. You will have a completely normal spectrum of political opposition and opinion without it. The left may yell, but they will yell anyway.

On a more pragmatic note, he concluded: 'As far as I'm concerned, the decision you take should be whichever decision gives you the stablest government. You will simply have to weigh the pros and cons to see where the balance lies. Personally, I cannot shed tears over a party which declares all other parties illegal'.³²

President Ford's successor, the reformist Democrat Jimmy Carter, appears to have adopted a somewhat more flexible stance towards Communism in Western Europe generally, an attitude which may have tempered earlier US opposition to the legalization of the PCE. In January 1977, his Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, told Suárez's deputy prime minister that he advocated legalization on the grounds that 'icebergs are more dangerous when they are submerged', though he was still in favour of excluding the Communists from the first elections. José Manuel Otero Novas, a senior official whom Suárez had entrusted with the delicate task of mediating with the major opposition groups at a time when they were still illegal, came to the conclusion that senior US diplomats in Madrid – including ambassador Stabler – were generally far more in favour of legalizing the Communist Party than their political masters in Washington. Whatever the case, the Prime Minister soon concluded that without the PCE the first elections would not be seen as fully democratic either in Spain or in Western Europe and pressed ahead with legalization in April 1977. This may partly explain the rather cool reception awarded to him by the Carter Administration during his first official visit to Washington later that month, even though it was widely acknowledged at the time that Suárez would win the June elections, the first held in Spain since 1936. Surprisingly, in May Vice President Walter Mondale turned down the US ambassador's suggestion that he should meet a group of opposition leaders (excluding the Communists) during an official visit to Madrid. As pollsters had been predicting for some time, in the June 1977 elections the PCE fared rather badly, obtaining a mere 9 per cent of the vote.³³

Given Washington's overriding concern for Spain's stability and its long-standing support for the King, the Carter Administration's lack of enthusiasm for Suárez is more than a little surprising. In order to

bolster his image at home and abroad, the Prime Minister was keen to visit the United States officially prior to the June 1977 elections, but the State Department initially turned him down. This left Juan Carlos no alternative but to send a personal emissary to plead with the White House, which reconsidered its position. Stabler, however, was mortified to learn that Suárez had only been awarded a half-hour interview and insisted on a formal luncheon as well. The White House initially agreed to this, but changed its mind when they discovered he spoke no English; in the end, President Carter was with Suárez and his party for little over an hour. According to Stabler, the latter 'went away frankly a little irritated with what he thought was not exactly support'; although he remained in office until early 1981, Suárez never returned to Washington on an official visit. Understandably, the ambassador would later reflect that 'if we took the view that we supported Spanish democracy, then we ought to have followed through so that people involved believed we supported them'.³⁴

Conclusion

The behaviour of successive US Administrations towards Spain during the twilight years of the Franco regime and beyond is revealing both in terms of shedding light on some of the unintended legacies of the Cold War and the dilemmas of democracy promotion as a foreign policy goal. In his *Third Wave*, Huntington acknowledged that Nixon and Kissinger had 'espoused a realpolitik approach to foreign policy', but argued that 'in 1974 the tide began to move in the other direction'. As we have seen, however, there is little evidence of this with regard to Spain, even after Nixon's replacement by Carter. It is thus probably not unfair to conclude that Washington did not contribute significantly to the undermining of authoritarianism, and played only a modest role in promoting democratization, essentially through its support for Juan Carlos.³⁵

Overall, it would appear that US governments favoured a very gradual transition process which would respect the existing balance of power in southern Europe and, in particular, their continued access to Spanish military bases; in Kissinger's words, the goal was 'democratic evolution with stability'.³⁶ As a result, domestic Spanish opinion, which had generally perceived the United States as one of Franco's closest allies, later saw Washington as a somewhat lukewarm supporter of democratization during the transition proper. As Kissinger had foreseen, this partly explains why US bases continued to be tainted by their association with the Franco era long after his demise, a situation which eventually forced

the departure of the US Air Force from Torrejón following the renegotiation of the treaty in 1988.³⁷ Indeed, the history of US bases in Spain, Portugal, and the Philippines has led one author to conclude that 'engaging authoritarian leaders by striking basing deals with them has done little for democratization in those states because these leaders know that, at bottom, US military planners care more about the bases' utility than about local political trends'. As a senior US diplomat serving in Madrid in 1974–78 observed, 'the security relationship itself (would) be more soundly based for the long term if founded on a democratic consensus than if derived from the will of one man'. This advice, however, was only rarely followed by decision-makers in Washington during the twilight years of the Franco regime and beyond, thereby undermining the future standing of the United States in the eyes of many Spaniards.³⁸

Notes

- Samuel S. Huntington, *The Third Wave. Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), pp. 45–6.
- See C. Powell, 'International Aspects of Democratization: The Case of Spain', in Laurence Whitehead, ed., *The International Dimensions of Democratization. Europe and the Americas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 285–314.
- This question is also addressed in Angel Viñas, *En las garras del águila. Los pactos con Estados Unidos, de Francisco Franco a Felipe González (1945–1988)* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2003), pp. 424–8.
- National Archives at College Park (Maryland), Record Group 59. Central Foreign Policy Files, Subject Numeric Files, 1964–66, Box 2664, POL 13-10 Spain-POL 17 Spain. Aerogram A342 from the United States Embassy in Madrid to the State Department, 20 November 1965.
- NACP. RG 59. Central Foreign Policy Files, Subject Numeric Files, 1967–69, Box 2490, POL 14 SP-POL 15-1 SP. Telegram from the United States Embassy in Madrid to the United States Mission in NATO, 15 November 1968.
- Richard Nixon, *RN. The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), p. 248.
- Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston, MA: Little Brown & Co, 1979), pp. 930–2; Laureano López Rodó, *El principio del fin: Memorias III* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 1991), pp. 84–5; Vernon A. Walters, *Silent Missions* (New York: Doubleday, 1978), pp. 570–1.
- Charles Powell, *Juan Carlos of Spain, Self-Made Monarch* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), pp. 50–2; Philip Ziegler, *Mountbatten* (New York: Knopf, 1985), p. 204; Crowe (Washington) to Thomas (FCO), 4 February 1971, FCO9/1455, WSS3/304/1; Lopez Rodó, *Memorias III*, p. 147; Walters, *Silent Missions*, pp. 551–2.
- Walters, *Silent Missions*, pp. 555–6 and pp. 570–1; *The Washington Post*, 28 July 1971; Stanley Payne, *The Franco Regime 1936–1975* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), p. 574.
- Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 930–2.
- NACP. RG 59. Central Foreign Policy Files, Subject Numeric Files, 1970–73, Box 2597, POL 5 SP-POL 12 SP. Aerogramme A114 for United States Embassy in Madrid to State Department. 'Impact of Youth and the US National Interest. Mission Youth Program', 4 January 1970.
- José María de Areilza, *Crónica de libertad* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1985), pp. 150–5 and 103–4.
- Samuel Eaton, the deputy chief of mission at the Madrid Embassy from 1974 to 1978, has described Rivero as 'a man of the Right, identified with the now-fading Franco tradition', who was nevertheless 'a far better ambassador for his time than those who decided he should leave would admit'. Samuel D. Eaton, *The Forces of Freedom in Spain, 1974–1979. A Personal Account* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1981), p. 119.
- Wells Stabler, 'The View from the US Embassy', in Hans Binnendijk, ed., *Authoritarian Regimes in Transition* (Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Foreign Affairs, 1987), p. 193.
- Memorandum (Briefing Papers on Spain and Portugal) from the State Department to Brent Scowcroft, 20 August 1974, Spain (1), Box 12, National Security Adviser. PCF-EC, GFL.
- Helmut Schmidt, *Men and Powers: A Political Retrospective* (London: Cape, 1990), pp. 167–8. For a similar exchange between Kissinger and the Irish prime minister, see Garret FitzGerald, *All in a life* (London: Papermac, 1992), p. 180.
- Telegram from the US Embassy in Madrid to the State Department, 26 May 1975. Spain-State Department Telegrams to SECSTATE-NODIS(1) Box 12, National Security Adviser. PCF-EC, GFL.
- President Ford's visit to Madrid 31 May–1 June 1975, from the Secretary of State to the President, NACP, RG59, Briefing Books, 1958–1976, E.5037, Box 217.
- Secret, Memorandum of Conversation, 28 May 1975, NACP, RG 59. Department of State Records. Records of Henry Kissinger, 1973–77. Box 13. Misc documents, telegrams, etc. from 1975.
- In the ambassador's view, 'there was no real reason to have a presidential visit. It wasn't a question of shoring up the Franco regime because there was no need to do so. During and after the visit a great many Spanish friends asked me, "Why did you have to do this? What did you gain from it?" If we thought we had gained something important with regard to the bases, that simply wasn't true. That visit achieved absolutely nothing at all, except, again from Franco's point of view, to indicate that Spain's big friend was rallying around'. Stabler, 'The View', pp. 193–5.
- Defence Secretary James Schlesinger admitted that Madrid had threatened to block the renewal of the agreement if Washington issued pleas for clemency, as the major European democracies had done. *Time*, 13 October 1975.
- Kissinger would later tell the Spanish foreign minister: 'if you had gotten involved in a war in the Sahara, it would have been a disaster'. Secret, Memorandum of Conversation, 25 January 1976, NACP, RG 59. Records of the Department of State. Office of the Counselor, 1955–77. Box 3. HS Chron-Official January–March 1976.
- Telegram from the Secretary of State to the embassy in Madrid, 1 November 1975. 'Spain-State Department Telegrams from SECSTATE-EXDIS', Box 12, National Security Adviser. PCF-EC, GFL.

24. After seeing the US ambassador on 9 December 1975, the new foreign minister, Areilza, concluded that 'the United States wants the democratization of the political system, but true to their traditional pragmatism, without being unduly eager, demanding or impatient. Above all they want us to avoid the path followed by Portugal'. José Maria de Areilza, *Diario de un ministro de la monarquía* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1977), pp. 14–15.
25. Vice President's Mission to Spain, November 1975, from the State Department, E.5037, Box 231, NACP.
26. The State Department's confidential memorandum for Vice President Rockefeller explained that 'our objective in attending these ceremonies is to convey our sympathy on the death of a strong leader and to provide reassurance that we seek even closer relations with the new leadership'. Vice President's Mission to Spain, November 1975, from the State Department, E.5037, Box 231, NACP.
27. Secret, Memorandum of Conversation, 16 December 1975, NACP, RG 59. Records of the Department of State. Office of the Counselor, 1955–77. Box 3. HS Chron-Official October–December 1975; Areilza, *Diario de un ministro*, pp. 65–6.
28. Secret, Memorandum of Conversation, 25 January 1976, NACP, RG 59. Records of the Department of State. Office of the Counselor, 1955–77. Box 3. HS Chron-Official January–March 1976; Confidential, Memorandum of conversation, March 18, 1976, NACP, RG 59, Records of the Department of State. Office of the Counselor, 1955–77. Box 9. POL 2 Ireland; Areilza, *Diario de un ministro*, p. 196; Eaton, *The Forces of Freedom*, pp. 116–17 and 128.
29. Secret, Memorandum of Conversation, 16 December 1975. NACP, RG 59. Records of the Department of State. Office of the Counselor, 1955–77. Box 3. HS Chron-Official October–December 1975.
30. Memorandum for the President, RG 59, Executive Secretariat Briefing Books, 1958–1976, E. 5037, Box 241.
31. Secret, Memorandum of Conversation, 2 December 1976. NACP, RG 59. Department of State Records. Records of Henry Kissinger, 1973–1977. Box 19. NODIS Briefing Memos. 1976.
32. Secret, Memorandum of Conversation, 28 September 1976. NACP, RG 59. Records of the Department of State. Office of the Counselor, 1955–77. Box 6. Quadripartite Memcons February 1976; Secret, Memorandum of Conversation, 2 December 1976. NACP, RG 59. Department of State Records. Records of Henry Kissinger, 1973–1977. Box 19. NODIS Briefing Memos. 1976; Telegram from the Madrid Embassy to the Secretary of State, 14 December 1976, Spain-State Department Telegrams to SECSTATE-NODIS(3), Box 12, National Security Adviser. PCF-EC, GFL.
33. Alfonso Osorio, *Trayectoria política de un ministro de la Corona* (Barcelona: Planet, 1980), p. 280; José Manuel Otero Novas, *Nuestra democracia puede morir* (Barcelona: Plaza, 1987), p. 28.
34. Stabler, 'The View', pp. 196–7.
35. Significantly, there are barely any references to Spain in Tony Smith, *America's Mission. The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).
36. See also Alfred Tovias, 'US policy Towards Democratic Transition in Southern Europe', in Geoffrey Pridham, ed., *Encouraging Democracy. The International Context of Regime Change in Southern Europe* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991), p. 176.
37. According to a confidential, unpublished study carried out by Louis Harris International in June 1976, only one in ten Spaniards approved of US bases in Spain. Tellingly, only 13 per cent of those polled said they 'trusted the US completely', as opposed to 23 per cent who said this of Germany.
38. A. Cooley, 'Base Politics', *Foreign Affairs*, 84, 6 (November/December 2005), p. 80. Eaton, *The Forces of Freedom*, pp. 116–17. According to a poll conducted in mid-2006, 46 per cent of respondents still believed the US was responsible for the survival of the Franco regime. *El Mundo*, 30 July 2006.