



Center for Strategic & International Studies
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**MEETING WITH JOSÉ ALONSO,
SPANISH MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS**

APRIL 19, 2005

The Transnational Threats Project and the Europe Program hosted a dialogue with the Spanish Minister of Home Affairs Jose Alonso on April 19, 2005.

The opening remarks were delivered by Dr. Robin Niblett, Executive Vice President and Director of the Europe Program. Dr. Niblett stressed the importance of the events of September 11th, 2001 and March 11th, 2004 as the basis for U.S.-Spanish cooperation, especially on the issue of global terrorism.

Minister Alonso opened his presentation by stating that since March 11, 2004, Spain has been facing terrorism on two fronts – one domestic and one international. The Minister described the actions of the Basque militant group ETA as a thorn in the side of a usually peaceful Europe. Spain's 30 year history of fighting against such domestic terrorism has led to the formation of a strong political and public conscience against, and a constant awareness of, terrorist activities. As such, ETA remains a live and valid threat to Spain's national security, as well as a force that compromises the rights of all Spanish citizens, especially those living in Spain's northern Basque region. Due to ETA's long-term presence in Spain, however, the Spanish government and the Spanish people have acquired experience in combating terrorism.

While Spain has long been dealing with the internal security threat posed by ETA, since March 11, 2004, the Spanish people have also been thrown headfirst onto the frontlines of combating international terrorism orchestrated by Islamic fundamentalists. In response to these developments, the Spanish government has increased its antiterrorism Guardia Civil units, as well as its efforts to cooperate with other European police forces, especially those of France and the United Kingdom. Efforts undertaken by the Spanish government also include the establishment of a centralized body to deal with the issue of international terrorism, a continued emphasis on the importance of international intelligence sharing, and a focus on cutting off financial sources for international terrorist groups.

As Islamic immigration is a recent phenomenon in Spain, the country has also faced the rather new task of addressing Islamic fundamentalism on the socio-cultural front. The main objective of this approach has been to make clear the distinction between radical Islamic terrorism and the religion of Islam. In order to make this distinction, the Spanish government has tried to increase dialogue with Spanish Muslim communities, though it has run into a lack of clear representation from the side of the Muslim community in Spain. In addition, efforts towards dialogue also face

the issue of rapidly growing radicalization of certain sectors of the Spanish Muslim community - the region of Catalonia, for instance, has seen several moderate Islamic preachers replaced with more radical counterparts, and actions tied to radical Islam have also taken place in the city of Granada. In this respect, the Spanish government continues to stress the importance of communication with Muslim communities and the use of democratic processes to address this complex issue.

In addition to steps taken in the domestic realm, Spain has also addressed the problem of international terrorism on the international stage. These efforts have focused on international cooperation and have centered around three main relationships. The first of these is the importance of EU cooperation on this issue. As pointed out by Minister Alonso, the EU currently finds itself at a critical moment, both in its history and in the streamlining of anti-terrorism efforts. Should the current EU Constitution ratification trend continue on track, it will be easier to address the issue of international terrorism from a common EU perspective. However, should the process be thwarted by something like a French “no” vote, such efforts will become much more complicated. In either case, the Minister stressed Spain’s desire to collaborate with its EU partners in facing the challenge posed by international terrorist cells.

Spain’s international anti-terrorism efforts have also focused on the importance of close cooperation with North African countries and their governments, especially with that of Morocco due to the country’s geographic proximity and the issue of immigration that ties the two nations together. Finally, according to Minister Alonso, Spain also perceives US-Spanish cooperation as crucial to its response to terrorism. The cornerstone of cooperation on all three of the above-mentioned fronts has been an emphasis on intelligence and data sharing.

In conclusion, although Spain was thrown to the forefront of the global war on terror in March of 2004, it is important to remember that the country also faces the threat of terrorism from within its borders. This situation, however, has provided both the Spanish government and the Spanish people with counter-terrorism experience. In order to address the new challenges posed by international terrorist networks, however, Minister Alonso stressed the importance of international cooperation, intelligence sharing, and continued domestic efforts to bring together Spain’s Muslim and non-Muslim communities through dialogue.