

# Foreign minister: Spain's longterm ties with United States won't suffer

By Ed McCullough  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MADRID, Spain — Spain's withdrawal of its troops from Iraq should not harm its long-term relations with the United States, the new foreign minister said in remarks published Monday, adding that his country will remain steadfast in the fight against terrorism.

Foreign Minister Miguel Moratinos also said the government of Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero will honor Spain's pledges at the recent Iraq Donor's Conference and help in Iraq's reconstruction and transition to democracy.

"We're not washing our hands" of the situation, Moratinos said in an interview Monday in the El Pais newspaper.

On Sunday Zapatero ordered the 1,300 troops to return home as soon as possible, fulfilling a campaign pledge to a nation recovering from terrorist bombings that al-Qaida militants said were reprisal for Spain's support of the war.

"This decision should not affect bilateral relations between Spain and the United States," Moratinos said. He said aside from the issue of Iraq, Spain's agenda with the United States would be "wider and more attractive" under Zapatero.

Zapatero issued the abrupt recall just hours after his government was sworn in, saying there was no sign the United States would meet his demand for United Nations control of the postwar occupation — his ultimatum for keeping troops there.

Zapatero's Socialist party won the March

14 general election amid allegations that outgoing Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar, by backing the war in Iraq, had provoked commuter-train terrorist bombings that killed 191 people three days before the vote.

Though Zapatero, a 43-year-old lawyer and career politician, had promised to remove Spanish troops, his immediate action was a bombshell, and a setback for the United States as Moratinos prepared to travel to Washington to discuss the dispute with Secretary of State Colin Powell. He was scheduled to leave Tuesday.

The Bush administration has been eager to maintain an international veneer on the increasingly besieged coalition force in Iraq, which is dominated by its 130,000 American troops.

In a five-minute address at the Moncloa Palace, Zapatero said he had ordered Defense Minister Jose Bono to "do what is necessary for the Spanish troops stationed in Iraq to return home in the shortest time possible."

He cited his campaign pledge to bring the 1,300 troops in Iraq home by June 30, when their mandate expires, if the United Nations failed to take political and military control.

"With the information we have, and which we have gathered over the past few weeks, it is not foreseeable that the United Nations will adopt a resolution" that satisfies Spain's terms by its deadline, Zapatero said.

The latest poll showed 72 percent of Spaniards want the troops withdrawn.

In Washington, U.S. officials said Zapatero's announcement was not a surprise.

"We knew from the recent Spanish election that it was the new prime minister's intention to withdraw Spanish troops from the coalition in Iraq," said a White House spokesman, Ken Lisaius. "We will work with our coalition partners in Iraq and the Spanish government and expect they will implement their decision in a coordinated, responsible and orderly manner."

Zapatero said Defense Minister Jose Bono would give details in coming days of the process of bringing the soldiers home, and that he himself had convened an urgent meeting of Parliament to discuss his decision.

For now, Spain will continue with scheduled troop replacements, including 190 troops to head to Iraq later Monday, the Defense Ministry said. About 240 new troops went to Iraq last week, in addition to 165 earlier this month, a ministry spokesman said. Corresponding numbers of troops in Iraq returned home.

Most Spanish political parties including the Socialists endorsed the decision. The now-opposition Popular Party immediately denounced it.

Mariano Rajoy, who ran against Zapatero in the election after Aznar decided not to seek another term, said the decision made Spain "much more vulnerable and weak in the face of terrorism in the face of terrorism."

Zapatero has "thrown in the towel" rather than try to exhaust all possibilities of getting a new U.N. resolution to meet his demands, Rajoy said.

In his announcement, Zapatero indicated that nothing argued for him to reverse the course of his campaign pledge.

"More than anything, this decision reflects my desire to keep the promise I made to the Spanish people more than a year ago," he said.

**"This decision should not affect bilateral relations between Spain and the United States."**

— Miguel Moratinos  
Foreign Minister

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Two employees of U.S.-funded Iraqi television shot dead by U.S. troops

BAGHDAD, Iraq (AP) — U.S. troops shot to death two employees of U.S.-funded television station Al-Iraqiya on Monday and wounded a third in the central city of Samara, the station said. Correspondent Asaad Kadhim and driver Hussein Saleh were killed. Cameraman Bassem Kamel was wounded "after American forces opened fire on them while they were performing their duty," the station announced.

The station, which is funded by the Pentagon, interrupted its broadcasts to announce the deaths and showed photos of Kadhim. It then began airing only Quranic texts as a symbol of mourning.

The U.S. military had no immediate comment. Thamer Ibrahim, an Al-Iraqiya editor, told The Associated Press he had no details on how the shooting occurred. But "it was on the road leading to the city of Samara. Before they reached it, they were fired upon."

They were taken to a Samara hospital, he said. "We wanted to go to them) now, but the road is closed, so we will go tomorrow." On March 18, U.S. troops shot dead correspondent Ali al-Khatib and cameraman Ali Abdel-Aziz of the Dubai-based Al-Arabiya news station.

Al-Khatib and Abdel-Aziz were shot near a U.S. military checkpoint while covering the aftermath of a rocket attack on the Burj al-Hayat hotel in Baghdad.

With the deaths of the two men on Monday, at least 26 Iraqi and foreign journalists and media workers have been killed during the Iraq war and its aftermath, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists Web site.

Al-Iraqiya began broadcasting on May 13, set up under a Defense Department contract. The Iraq Media Network, which runs Al-Iraqiya and two Baghdad radio stations, was conceived during the State Department's war preparations.

The TV station gets exclusive interviews with coalition leaders and

streams live broadcasts of speeches by L. Paul Bremer, the top U.S. official in Iraq. But most Iraqis continue to get their news from Arab satellite stations based abroad, like Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya.

Among the journalists who have been killed during the Iraq conflict is Reuters cameraman, Mazen Dana, shot by U.S. troops in August. The military ruled that the soldiers acted in accordance with rules of engagement because they believed his camera was a rocket launcher, a conclusion Reuters disputed.

Another Reuters cameraman, Taras Protsyuk, and Spanish Telecinco cameraman Jose Couso were killed on April 8, 2003, when a U.S. tank fired at the Palestine Hotel where they were staying.

### U.S. Gen. Richard Myers to Syria: Do more to help quell violence in Iraq

WASHINGTON (AP) — After new violence that flared near the Iraqi border with Syria left five Marines dead, the U.S. military's top general urged Damascus to do more to cut the flow of foreign fighters entering Iraq.

The warning Sunday from Gen. Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, came as the U.S. effort in Iraq suffered a setback when the new Spanish prime minister, fulfilling a campaign pledge, said he would withdraw the 1,300-member Spanish military contingent as soon as possible.

The White House said it expected the move and hoped for Spain's continued help in the fight against terrorism, but lawmakers voiced concern.

"The military situation can accept this, but it will put pressure on the other coalition nations that have joined in this, I'm sure," said Sen. John Warner, R-Va., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. "It's troublesome."

The battle Saturday on the Syrian-Iraqi border, in an area that had seen little fighting previously, left at least 25 Iraqis dead. Myers said the stability not only of Syria and Iraq, but also of the entire region is at stake.

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