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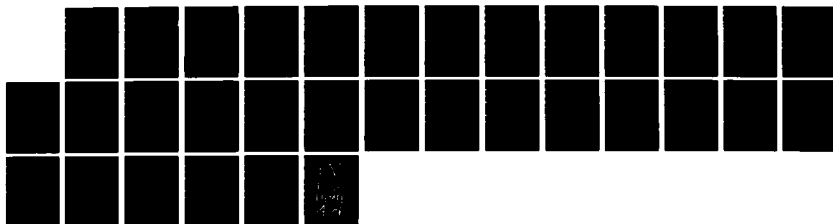
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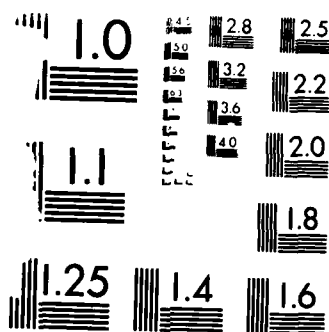
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The peaceful transformation of Franco's Spain into a modern constitutional monarchy is an important political achievement. During the 1960s and 1970s, the regime confronted its most severe security problem in the Basque region. This paper discusses the ETA and its activities. It concludes that the greatest future threat may be in possible linkages with European leftist groups, however past indications are that such linkages are not likely in any other mode than the occasional support mode under which they now operate.

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SPAIN'S ETA

by  
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for  
DR J. Goldberg

15 December 1985

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During the 1970s few, if any, single political achievements in Europe can compare in importance with the peaceful transformation of Franco's Spain into a modern constitutional monarchy. By contrast with postwar Germany and Italy, the creation of liberal-democratic institutions in Spain was not the result of military defeat or the subsequent intervention of foreign powers. Similarly, by contrast with the later Greek and Portuguese experiences, there was no overthrow of a dictatorship at the hands of domestic and, above all, military opponents. Rather, it was a matter of reformist elements, associated with the incumbent dictatorship, initiating processes of political change from within the established regime; seizing and maintaining the initiative in the face of opposition from their colleagues and dedicated opponents of the dictatorship.(1)

To better understand this metamorphosis, it is appropriate to briefly discuss the Franco dictatorship and the dilemmas it faced when critical decisions about its future arose.(2) The regime was created out of the victory in the Spanish civil war (1936-7) when Franco was chosen by fellow Nationalist generals as the new leader. The war was the culminating point in a process of political polarization that left Franco at the head of a broadly-based coalition of

right-wing groups ranging from fascists to liberal monarchists. Most of these groups were from the ruling class and lacked large popular support with one exception, the Falangists, who formed the backbone of the only legally tolerated political organization in post-civil war Spain. The Falangists however, were not used as a vehicle for the mobilization of mass political support. They were used by Franco and his conservative allies to effectively "depoliticise" post-civil war Spain when repression, economic privation, and war weariness continued to keep most potential adversaries preoccupied.(3) During this same period, the Roman Catholic Church conferred a significant measure of legitimacy on the regime and the military began its role as the "protector" of the dictatorship. Franco pursued a divide-and-rule policy that permitted each group within the ruling coalition a measure of satisfaction that always fell short of total hegemony.

During the 1960s, this regime presided over an unprecedented period of economic growth.(4) Elements within the dictatorship perceived this as a means of securing the maintenance of authoritarian rule. The aim was to lay the foundations of a mass consumer society, whose rewards would continue to divert attention from politics and would promote

satisfaction with the status quo.(5) In practice, however, rapid economic change exacerbated major conflicts in Spanish society and promoted cultural, social, and political changes that placed the regime's viability in doubt.(6)

Such change was observable on four main fronts. First, industrialization created an enlarged working class with expectations that were increasingly difficult to meet within existing institutions. Increased numbers of strikes, during the 1960s, testified to demands for increased economic rewards and for political change. Similarly, the activities of unofficial unions under Catholic, Socialist, and Communist auspices exposed the unrepresentative nature of the state's officially monopolistic unions and their inability to offer credible response to working class demands.(7)

Second, growing student dissent indicated a mounting alienation amongst a small yet significant group of ruling class groups which had traditionally supported the dictatorship. The rewards of a consumer society were not sufficient compensation for the regime's political constraints.(8) Further, the growing middle class and peasant groups perceived a loss of relative importance in their support for the regime.

Third, the dictatorship suffered a steady withdrawal of support by the Roman Catholic Church until, at the time of Franco's death, Church-state relationships were in a state of crisis. Socio-economic, cultural, and political changes in Spain combined with changes in the Vatican led to a growing opposition toward non-pluralistic government.

Finally, during the 1960s and 1970s, the regime confronted a revival of strong regional-based opposition from Catalonia and the Basque provinces. Efforts to forcibly eliminate the basis of distinctive regional cultural and ethnic identities were seen to have failed. Nationalist movements asserted themselves in response to repression and as a consequence of socio-economic developments. In the Basque region, ETA's (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna - Basque Homeland and Freedom) insurgent terrorist activities came to present the regime with its most severe security problem.(9)

The Basque country lies in the north west corner of Spain along the Bay of Biscay, separated by mountains from the plains of Castile. Originally a collection of mountain dwellers and fisherman, the Basque community straddles the Pyrenees extending into three provinces in France and four provinces in Spain. The Basque language, the point of culture around which the Basque nationalist movement was

originally found, is spoken more in Spain than in France. Currently, it is estimated that fewer than half a million inhabitants speak the ancient, unwritten language, and fewer still with any fluency.(10) Pronunciation and spelling differ widely within the region, and the relatively small base vocabulary limits the use of Basque in modern expression or technical analysis. Considered historically as a hardworking, independent, resourceful and self-reliant people, the Basques had established the highest standard of living in Spain under Franco. Basque economic success and a growing disdain for the "provincials" in Madrid were two reasons why the minority is disliked. The ETA played upon the Spanish dislike and manipulated popular support among the Basques in their attempt to attain an independent, autonomous homeland in the traditional Basque provinces.

The ETA came from the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) which was founded in 1894 to ensure the continuation of Basque language and culture, and establish an autonomous region of Euskadi (Basque land).(11) The PNV maintained a government-in-exile in France following the defeat of the Republican forces, which it supported, in the civil war. In 1957, a group of the party's youth section traveled to Paris in an attempt to persuade the party elders to embark upon an

armed struggle against the Franco regime and failed. Upon their return to Spain, they became involved with a group of university students who had founded a clandestine, irregularly circulated journal called Elkin (Action).(12) In 1959, when the Police broke up the Elkin group, these young members formed the ETA from a fundamentally patriotic conviction to perpetuate their language and research their history.(13) Their political convictions were democratic.

ETA's first assembly took place in May 1962 to review the effect of the earliest timid steps towards terrorism, inspired by the example of Castro in Cuba, the Israelis, the Congolese, and the Algerians.(14) The naivete of this new group led to police intervention, arrests, and the escape of some leaders to southern France. Two valuable lessons were learned. The absolute necessity for tight security in clandestine operations and the value of a sympathetic haven for the "politically oppressed" . The ETA defined and installed a three-man cell system in Spanish Basque country which would provide the required security, and redefined their raison d'etre as a revolutionary movement of national liberation. Its sole object was to rapidly obtain the independence of the Basque country by whatever means necessary, including violence.(15)

Later in the same year, confusion between ideology and nationalism came to the forefront among would be policy makers in the ETA, a problem which will lead to endless feuding and splits from the organization. A Spanish Basque studying in Paris, became enthralled with the works of Mao and quickly enthused others within the Basque movement. In an attempt to exclude these newly found Maoists, the founding leadership of the ETA called an assembly in March of 1963. Although no split occurred during this assembly, the newly read Maoist faction of the ETA published their own manual, "Insurrection in Euskadi," which called for an urban guerrilla campaign. The goal of this revolutionary campaign was to so infuriate and instigate the Spanish state into reaction that the hitherto passive population would turn with sympathy towards ETA.(16) A refined version of this action-repression-action spiral with increasing levels of violence will become the centerpiece of future ETA operations.

ETA reached a major turning point in 1964. Younger and more radical members again challenged the authority of the original founders who continued to maintain control, but just barely, as resolutions passed breaking with the PNV.(17) A further redefinition of the ETA now stated it was

anticapitalist and antiimperialist. Further, in a "Letter to Intellectuals," the ETA wrote of national and social problems as abstractions of the same reality, created by the development of capitalism in the homeland.(18) Later that year, the French government, alarmed by the ensuing acts of political violence, forced Basque leaders to leave French Basque country. At this time, two leaders went to Algiers to organize military action and training. One moved to Brussels where the Communist Party lent ETA its premises, and one leader went to Venezuela to promote ETA propaganda among a large ethnic Basque group. The removal of its leadership from the south of France left the ETA in the hands of those who wanted to turn the organization into a revolutionary workers' party and make it part of a general socialist revolution throughout Spain. For the next six years the ideological debate would revolve on the struggle to regain control of the movement by and for ethnic Basques.(19)

ETA's fourth assembly, held in the summer of 1965, was the first assembly to meet in Spain under clandestine conditions and approve important ideological and organizational changes. The new leadership viewed previous philosophy as too conservative and cautious, broadening it by approving, among others, the action-repression-action spiral

theory. (20) This theory held that ETA could create the objective conditions for spontaneous revolution by initiating armed struggle and direct action against the Spanish police, military, and Civil Guard. By means of specific attacks, ETA could provoke Spanish authorities into an overreaction that would inflict heavy damage on the civilian Basque population. In attempting to stop ETA, Madrid would aggravate already strong but latent hostility against its policies among the Basques, and the previously inert civilian population would then commit itself to support ETA's armed struggle. With each action, there would come a counteraction of such a repressive nature that ETA would benefit with an increased flow of members to its ranks and increased financial support from the populace. The end result would be a general inflammation of public sentiment in favor of ETA that would force Madrid to abandon the Basque country.(21) What ETA failed to calculate was whether they could withstand Spanish counterterrorist methods long enough to permit the rising of the proletariat. In 1968, when ETA activated this theory, they were quickly awakened to the cost of their decision.

An additional consequence of decisions made at the Fourth Assembly was the establishment of ETA "commandos" to assault banks, factories, and other sites where large sums of money

were kept, to finance the purchase of weapons, explosives, and vehicles required for increased armed operations. The first of these robberies occurred in September 1965. Within days, several of the perpetrators were arrested, and the others fled the country. With the last of more moderate leaders out of the way, marxists began to move to establish their control over ETA by taking control of the organizations's newsletter, Zutik, which they began to fill with articles criticizing the linguistic-cultural, and third world approaches.(22)

The Fifth Assembly met in two phases, the first during December 1966, and the second during March 1967. The first phase was marked by ideological discussions during which the marxists argued with the revolutionary nationalists, who argued with the Basque socialists in a failing attempt to reach a general ETA political line, hence the delay until March.(23) Still unable to achieve a consensus of opinion, the ETA split between the more nationalist and more socialist factions and expelled four radical maoists who took the name ETA Berri (New ETA). The nationalists claimed that the fight against Spain and for the freedom of the Basque country was to have precedence. The scientific socialists maintained that only in the context of a Spain freed from capitalism

would there be any chance of building a Basque socialist homeland, and consequently declared themselves solidly with the Spanish working class. The Sixth Assembly, meeting in 1970, ratified the split. The scientific socialists were in the majority and expelled the Basque nationalists when the latter accused them of "Marxism and Hispanism." (24) The nationalists, among whom were the last of the original founders of ETA, claimed the authority of the Fifth Assembly and called themselves ETA V, eventually becoming ETA militar (ETA M). The socialists became known as ETA VI, eventually becoming ETA politico-militar (ETA PM). (25)

The entire ETA numbered about 45 activists at the time of the split having dwindled from about 65 in 1963. Increased police pressure had been exacting a toll on the organization and in 1968, in response to the loss of its field leader in a gun battle with police, ETA avenged his death by murdering the San Sebastian chief of police. (26) On the same day, the government declared a three-month state of emergency for the province of which San Sebastian is capital. Over the next several weeks, nearly 2000 people were arrested of which 16 were put on military trail at Burgos in 1970 for the murder. (27) Habeas corpus was suspended, houses could be searched without warrant, and freedom of movement was

curtailed. To many it appeared as if the police were arresting anyone known to have Basque nationalist sympathies, regardless of whether the individual belonged to the old PNV or the newer activist groups, perhaps just in order to gather intelligence on the ETA. This openly indiscriminating procedure increased popular sympathy for ETA and made the police forces more detested than ever.(28) Priests were also among the victims of the police crack-down as many of the Basque priests were sympathetic to Basque nationalism while others belonged to the progressive Catholic groups.

The international press corps was fully represented at the Burgos trial, finding and reporting the evidence produced by police to be very dubious.(29) Regardless of the press, seven death penalties were handed down. At this time, ETA M kidnapped the German Consul in San Sebastian and held him as a hostage.(30) Eventually, the death sentences were commuted to life imprisonment and the consul was released. This tactic of kidnapping for political motives and, increasingly for large ransoms continued.

Perhaps ETA'S most spectacular terrorist action was the assassination of the prime minister, Carrero Blanco, in the center of Madrid in December 1973. The action was originally planned to be a kidnapping, but the increased security

coincidental to his recent appointment as prime minister, made the murder a more attainable goal than kidnapping.(31) Despite the international press coverage and the boost to the prestige of ETA in extremist circles, the assassination had little of the desired effect of interrupting the succession process. If anything, the assassination gave King Juan Carlos a free hand to pursue a gradualist approach to reform.

The twelve months preceding Franco's death in November 1975, were the most turbulent and violent in Spain since the Civil War.(32) Much of the violence stemmed from attacks launched by ETA, or from popular demonstrations in support of ETA members or objectives. Both ETA M and ETA PM were still uncertain about their strategies and ideologies for the post-Franco period, and the disorder of Franco's last year provided an unstable setting within which to develop them.

(33) ETA PM held the second half of their Sixth Assembly in which they combined armed struggle with an intensified effort to organize workers' councils to serve as governments in the Basque provinces upon achieving their goal. ETA PM scrapped their strategy of guerrilla struggle as well as the action-repression-action cycle in light of their new "war of attrition". From now on, they would force Madrid to the bargaining table by means of armed attacks that imposed such

a heavy psychological cost to the Spanish state that it would have no choice but to negotiate.(34) In order to achieve this end, they formed a new organization, the comandos especiales, who were to be assigned assault missions likely to have a great impact on the balance of forces. After terrorist attacks by both ETA M, and ETA PM, the Spanish government declared a state of absolute press censorship and secrecy about the events in two Basque provinces under an exception decree. Basque popular dissatisfaction was registered in three separate strikes where as many as 150,000 stayed off their jobs.(35) Weakened by arrests throughout the year, both factions of ETA became increasingly aware of the need to adjust to a post-Franco democracy. A sign of this new awareness was the forming of a coordinating body known as the Patriotic Socialist Coordinating Council (KAS) comprised of the Popular Revolutionary Socialist Party (EHAS), the Patriotic Revolutionary Workers Party (LAIA), ETA PM, labor unions, and with the support, but not active participation of ETA M.(36) During the transition to constitutional democracy and electoral politics, the KAS coalition will be a central rallying point for the Basque Left.(37)

The KAS was an attempt, once more, to fuse Basque nationalism with marxist ideology. The long term objectives which KAS set itself were the creation of a classless Basque society in a united and independent country. They stated that to achieve this goal, the capitalist and imperialist system which exploits and oppresses the Basque people must be destroyed. The political importance of the KAS was that it overlapped the terrorist fringe and provided the government with the possibility of dialogue, an initiative they undertook in late 1976 to no avail. The KAS still exists yet it was overtaken in importance by the formation of the Party for the Basque Revolution (EIA) by ETA PM in 1977. In the elections of that year, EIA joined a coalition called Basque Left (EE). In the elections of 1979, ETA PM actually seated a member in the Cortes. As ETA PM renounced violence in favor of working politically among the masses, it rejected terrorism as non-revolutionary and dismissed ETA M as elitist as it did not participate in elections. ETA M considered the monarchy as imposed on Spain by a dictator, and bourgeois elections could not guarantee a new order in Euskadi.(38) Realizing some compromise had to be made with democratic politics if the militarists were to have a political voice at all, ETA M founded a coalition with two fervently

nationalistic, left-wing, non-marxist groups, Basque Nationalist Action (ANV), and Basque Socialist Coalition (ESB), known as People's Unity (HB).(39) A review of 1977 and 1979 election results in the Basque region demonstrates the Basque population as a whole rejected the violence and rejected also the political program put forth by ETA in any of its guises.(40) It should be noted though that when, in cooperation with Spanish authorities , the French government revoked the status of political refugees for Basques, banished some from the frontier and handed seven over to the Spanish police in 1979, HB and KAS called a strike which was successful in most of the Basque provinces.(41)

All Basque parties with the exception of the socialists contributed to the Bill for Basque autonomy. It gave to Basque the status of a national language, equal to that of Spanish, and set up a General Council for the Basque country, although each province would function autonomously within the the Basque community. The General Council was given the responsibility for maintaining law and order, the state intervening and withdrawing only at the request of the Basque government.(42) There would be fiscal autonomy with each province responsible for the collection and for the spending of taxes, part of which would be returned by the province to

the state, and part put into a fund for the poorest regions of Spain.(43) In July 1979 the Statute of Autonomy passed into law. Basque provinces were granted their own police force, fiscal responsibility, powers over industrial and economic policy, town and country planning, energy resources, public works, agriculture and fisheries, social services, culture, the state savings banks and local nationalized industries. When this package was put to the Basque people in a referendum, ETA PM was in favor, and ETA M was opposed, with a 59% turnout, 90% approved.(44) Delays by Madrid in the final transfer of the powers of government, a failure of ETA PM negotiations with the government, and the use of bombs in terrorist attacks combined to make 1980 the most violent year of all.(45) Similarly, the cost of terrorism to the Spanish economy rose astronomically in 1980 as ETA M executed a limited campaign of bombing and threats of bombings along the tourist areas of the Mediterranean coast causing nearly a 30% decline in receipts.(46) The violence of 1980 galvanized a united response across the political spectrum. The sophistication of the ETA terrorist structure, increasing levels of violence, including kidnappings, extortions, arsons and murders of members in competing factions of the ETA, all in light of a successful move toward autonomy with

participatory democratic government, were not justified in the minds of the majority of the Basque populace.

This new sophistication in terrorist tactics was not achieved without help from abroad. Aside from the supposition that terrorists learn from one another, Dutch authorities have revealed firmly documented links between ETA and the Red Resistance Front in Holland.(47) Training is known to have taken place over a number of years in Algeria, and in the Middle East. The Dutch discovered four Basques returning from South Yemen where the Palestinians have training facilities. Earlier all four had been active in political violence in Basque country as members of the autonomous commandos. Spanish authorities believe that at least 160 terrorists had received training in Algeria in a two year period. Recently there has been a growing concern that ETA links with the IRA are mounting to more than that of general fraternization. For ethnic and geographic reasons, France has been the greatest aid to ETA who took refuge there as political refugees until the status was withdrawn in 1979. Most recently, extraditions of ETA terrorists from France to Spain demonstrate a positive action in an international approach to thwart terrorism.(48)

In the past year, more than 14 murders of ETA personnel, many in the upper echelons of leadership, have been attributed to the Anti-terrorist Liberation Group (GAL).(49) These losses, combined with a growing distaste for violence throughout the Basque country, manifested both in elections and unified public demonstrations, signify the waning of ETA's ability to destabilize democracy in Spain. The political mechanisms which provide the public the ability to demand and cause change are currently in position and operating in democratic Spain. The Socialist government, under the current Prime Minister, is moving to join NATO and the European Common Market. Economic and industrial growth is again under control after the world wide recession. Programs to decrease unemployment and equalize the standard of living throughout Spain have been implemented. If the government continues to fulfill its promises and implement the programs of regional autonomy, dissatisfaction and other irritants which allow insurgent terrorist groups to exist will continue to decrease. The electoral support for ETA was recently demonstrated at about 150,000 of 3 million Basque country voters.(50) Certainly some of these votes are in fact "protest" votes and don't indicate support for ETA's terrorist tactics. An estimate of 3% to 6 % of the Basque

population supports the ETA's terrorism for a wide variety of reasons.(51)

In summation of the foregoing discussion, the 17 year confrontation between the ETA and its various splinter factions with the Spanish government has seen cyclical bouts of terrorist activities with increasing levels of violence through the early 1980s. The failure of the Basque Separatist Movement to mobilize a broad base of public support is due in part to the role of the political process in Spain. Even under Franco, Basques fared well economically, and within the government. Their desire for autonomy began as a movement to preserve a language and investigate a cultural history. As Franco's reign drew to a close, the ETA perhaps had its best opportunity to broaden public support. It was at this time that ideological differences and personalities caused major schisms and, although the objective may have remained the same, ETA's plan of how to achieve their objective got lost in rambling, immature political debate. King Juan Carlos' ability and accumen at directing the transition period ,inspite of dangers from left and right, was remarkable, as was ETA's ability to wrench itself from apparent destruction time and again. Innovative methods of financing through kidnapping,

robberies and extortion, a close haven for political refugees and their support structure, training and occasional support from fellow terrorists at home and abroad, and an apparent attempt to limit unplanned victims of violence through specific targeting, combined with some luck at just the right time, have enabled ETA to endure this long. Conversely, recently fulfilled political promises, new strict policies not to violate civil liberties, even in pursuing the most vile terrorists, and a relatively free and diverse open press, provide vehicles which allow removal of irritants from society, and reduce the base for popular support of terrorists, whether cloaked as insurgents or not.

In conclusion, information about the leadership, structure, and tactics of the ETA through 1980 was available in one major English language book, several shorter studies, and press articles. For the period 1980 through 1985, the press provides the only open source material. As the ETA operates primarily in Spain (terrorist activities outside of Spain are limited to a few assassinations and arsons in southern France) and the targets of their terrorist activities have been the Spanish political-military establishment and fellow Basques, international interest and coverage of ETA's terrorist activities has waned, except to

warn northern European tourists of the threat along the beaches. Similarly, as the democratic institutions have become established and proven, interest has turned toward how the socialist government will proceed in joining NATO and the Common Market. Perhaps the greatest threat for a future resurgence of ETA terrorist activity may lay with possible linkages with European leftist groups such as the Red Brigade or the Red Army Faction and a corresponding move against NATO installations and national economies through threatening tourism. The ETA's poor track record on striking accord on ideology and tactics, even among themselves, and its underlying objective of Basque national autonomy, indicate that such linkages are not likely in any other mode than the occasional support mode under which they now operate.

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