

“The Process from Authoritarianism to Democracy in Spain: The Impact of the 1981 Failed Coup”

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Abstract

Two different events are being proposed for analysis: the attempted coup of February 23, 1981, and the trial of the golpistas, from February to October, 1982. The purpose is to identify, describe, and explain the outcomes of these events from an institutional perspective that combines institutional historical accounts, actor centered approaches, contextual factors, and cultural and ideational or belief systems. To investigate the role of each of these different explanatory factors, the concept of civilian supremacy is introduced as my explanandum, broadly defined as the extent and nature of military intervention in the political process and the capacity of civilian power to conduct defence policy and obtain the subordination of the military. I assume that the disposition to intervene in the Armed Forces will be a function of several external and internal factors. The chapter will focus specially on the role played by different actors in the two events, mainly the Crown, the Armed Forces, the Political Parties and Mass Media and Public Opinion. The conclusions drawn from the case studies show some of the social triggers, institutional and individual obstacles accounting for the failure of civilian authorities to control military intervention during the first stage of the transition to democracy, that at the same time account for the failure of the attempted coup, paying special attention to the role of the King, who through a kind of military-civilian leadership acted as a surrogate of civilian control. The second event can be seen as the foundation for civilian supremacy for the young Spanish democracy, representing the importance of cultural factors such as the moral loss for the Armed Forces implied by delegitimation and disunion brought about by the outcome of the trial. Both events support my relatively optimistic diagnosis of a civilian control of the military in current Spanish democracy and throw light on its somewhat paradoxical achievement. The analysis draws on standard primary and secondary sources to examine major trends in both events. On the basis of that interpretation some theoretical conclusions are drawn and some practical prescriptions advanced about civil-military relations, partly based in the teachings of the Spanish case.

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Introduction¹

‘It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things. For the reformer has enemies in all those who profit by the old order, and only lukewarm defenders in all those who would profit by the new’.

Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chapter 6.

Stepan (1988, p. xi) wrote some time ago: ‘the military has probably been the least studied of the factors involved in new democratic movements’. As a result, civilian control of the military has been a crucial but neglected topic in the studies on democratic transitions and consolidations as Przeworski (1991, p. 29) exemplifies: ‘Obviously, the institutional framework for civilian control over the military constitutes the neuralgic point of democratic consolidation’. As far as is known, the admired Przeworski does not develop that argument in that work or in his many other books and articles, which is intriguing. It is therefore no wonder that he deems the success of Spanish transition as ‘a miracle’ (Przeworski 1991, p. 8). Here a more secularised interpretation is attempted.

Following Agüero (1995, p. 47), civilian supremacy is defined as ‘the ability of a civilian, democratically elected government to conduct general policy without interference from the military, to formulate and conduct defence policy, and to monitor the implementation of military policy’. The intervention of the armed forces in the political arena is a cumulative process of societal conditions, and the disposition of the military towards such intervention occurs in a similar way to the military withdrawal from power (Finer 1976, Finer 1985, pp. 16-30).

According to Stepan (1988, p. 122), a democratic pattern of civil-military relations is one in which there is low contestation by the military of the policies of the democratically elected government, and where there is military acceptance that they have low prerogatives or reserve domains. Put in a different way: the ends of government policy are to be set by civilians, the military is limited to decisions about means; it is for the civilian leadership to decide where the line between ends and means

¹ Thanks to Hans Born, Jürgen Kühlmann, Salvador Parrado, for their comments and especially to César Colino whose detailed advice enabled me to clarify and improve my argument.

is to be drawn. The principle of civilian control requires not only that the military just be a policy implementer but also that they are not seen (nor see themselves) as a separate constituency whose interests are to be considered in policy debates (Kemp, Hudlin, 1992, pp. 8-9).

Based upon these definitions, two critical events have been selected: The failed *coup d'Etat* of February 23rd, 1981; and the trial of the *golpistas* from February to October, 1982. In my view the coup brought forth a turning point triggering the momentum for civilian control. But we should have to wait to the socialist government to see these things evolve as a tendency. The exposition proceeds as follows. Firstly, the disposition the Spanish Armed Forces uses to intervene is analyzed. Secondly, the two critical events are examined with some detail and the results interpreted in the light of different approaches. Finally, some implications are drawn.

The Coup of February 23rd 1981 as a Mnemonic Catalyst of Civil War for Public Opinion

The Armed Forces' disposition to intervene was a joint product of its interaction with different kinds of environments: the international environment,² the institutional setting, the weight of the past, and the professional and political belief systems of the military. The main turbulences from the international environment that influenced remarkably the Armed Forces were the decolonization of Spanish Sahara, since then a Moroccan province under UN monitoring; the special relationship with the United States; and, a certain international climate favourable to military intervention in politics through *coups d'Etat* of different political ideologies. The combined consideration of the internalization of the Civil War as victory or as defeat, and the attitude toward the dictatorship of the General Franco, as supporter or opponent, characterised the belief systems of the actors.

The characteristics of the Spanish transition include (Maravall, 1995, p. 109): The Francoist system was a long-lasting dictatorship (1936-1975); the liberalization of

² The whole array of international actors cannot be mentioned here, but see Powell, 1993, pp. 37-64, the only author to touch upon this issue during transition; and Gillespie, Rodrigo, Story, 1995, for an overview.

the authoritarian regime failed; the mobilizations ‘from below’ took advantage from the cleavages in the regime, which in turn implemented reforms ‘from above’, so there was an intense interaction between reformers and moderates; there was a decisive leadership exerted by the Crown; the process was guided by transaction among elites and consent by the population (1977-1979); it must be stressed that there were no provisional governments; there was an electoral predominance of the centre-right (1977 and 1979); there were antidemocratic military threats since the beginning of the process; the presence of micro nationalist political forces in the Basque Country, with terrorists branches, and in Catalonia was perceived as a threat by the military; and there were stable rules of the game from the initiation of the new democratic regime.

The rising micro nationalists³ were perceived by the military as a threat to the unity of the Fatherland. So the military looked with suspicion towards the self-government of the regions granted by the new Constitution and exerted through the Autonomy Statutes. Many Spaniards thought that democracy would end terrorist Basque nationalism and ETA (*Euzkadi eta Askatasuna*) [Basque Homeland and Freedom], but this belief has proved mere wishful thinking. The pattern of terrorist activity during transition increased by the number of deadly attacks perpetrated. The terrorist Basque nationalism became more and more virulent as democratic change gained momentum. A bloody escalation got underway in 1978 and culminated in 1980. It remained at levels not quite as high, but no less alarming, until 1986, at which point it began to decline even more sharply. The number and length of kidnappings by ETA follows a similar pattern, with a peak of kidnappings occurring in 1979 and 1980

On 21 July 1978 ETA killed General Sánchez Ramos-Izquierdo and lieutenant colonel Pérez Rodríguez while the project of a democratic Constitution was being debated in the Congress.⁴ That implied a change of tactics: the military was now a target for the terrorists who were against the new born democracy. But the main target was the

³ The terms micro nationalist are used to describe nationalist sentiment in a region of a pre-existing state which has also claimed to be a nation-state. The term thus applies to political and cultural movements in regions of the old nation-states of Western Europe: France, Great Britain, and Spain. Joffe employs neoneationalism and Aron mininationalism, in this case just to describe the demands for cultural or linguistic autonomy, see Joffe, 1992, p. 67, n.6, Aron, 1974, p. 655.

⁴ General Sánchez was the first general of the Armed Forces killed since Civil War. The first military killed by ETA was major Imaz Martínez on 26 November 1977.

Civil Guard (*Guardia Civil*), a security force of military nature, which took the burden of fighting ETA and was inflicted heavy casualties. In fact, the Armed Forces and the Security Forces (Civil Guard, National Police) would carry the heaviest casualties of the total in the transition (1976-1982). It is not strange that the military perceived the threat posed by terrorist Basque nationalism because they were being killed by it in large numbers. What is really surprising is the recognition by ETA that it did not want to provoke the *coup*. It seems that ETA used the assassination of military to force the government into accepting the terrorists' demands, to be acknowledged as a belligerent, and open political negotiations (Domínguez Iribarren, 1998, pp. 225-231). It did not realize the effects of its own actions which says much about its isolation from reality.

The political transition implied an attenuation of the institutional presence of the Armed Forces, in terms of Burk (2001, pp. 247-274, especially pp. 249-253). The military were central in the Francoist political system, both in its actual or substantive presence as an actor in society, and its moral presence as an important institution in the normative order due to its role as socialization agent of male youth through compulsory military service. But the new political system also brought about a change in this presence. Gradually the military were not morally integrated with society, and were not substantively salient to society anymore; they had become alienated or isolated from the changing society, encapsulated from general societal change. There were more significant actors in the scene and the emergent normative order questioned military values. Therefore political and social change produced a kind of resentment toward democracy in the Armed Forces especially against the press who scrutinized its behaviour for the first time in forty years.

The cumulative effects of the political instability and economic crisis, the rising micro nationalists considered as a threat to Spanish unity, the extreme right propaganda campaign, and finally the terrorist Basque nationalism as formal alibi, as the trigger that launched the coup, were the societal conditions which catalyzed the military's disposition to intervene. But this disposition would not have materialized without a motivation to do so. The motivation was rooted in the lack of persuasion about civilian supremacy and the mechanisms of civilian control due to the socialization in the military academies during Franco's dictatorship. This socialization precluded these

notions and reinforced the legitimacy of military intervention in politics,⁵ as happened in the military coup in 1923, which gave way to the Dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera, or in 1936 which was the origin of the Spanish Civil War.

In fact, *golpismo* was a menace to repeat the Civil War during transition, and the memory of the agonic crisis of the Second Republic and the coup of 1936 (De Andrés 1998, p. 300, n. 20) were well present in the military of the eldest generations. It must be stressed that both Lieutenant General Milans del Bosch and Brigadier General Armada, the military leaders of the coup, participated actively first in the Civil War of 1936-1939, and then in the Russia's campaign with the Blue Division in 1941-1944 in the German Army. The edict of Milans in 1981 copied literally several paragraphs from another one issued in 1936.⁶ Lieutenant Colonel Tejero had been in the Basque Country where the *Guardia Civil* was suffering the terrorist offensive in the beginning of the transition. He sent a telegram in January 1977 to Vice President and Minister of Defence, General Gutiérrez Mellado, to the minister of the Army and to the Minister of Interior asking what kind of military honours should be rendered to the recently legalized Basque nationalist flag. Later on, he ordered to dissolve a legal demonstration in Malaga. He had published an open letter to the King asking for counterterrorist legislation in August 1978. Finally he had planned the *Operación Galaxia*, an attempted *coup de main* to seize the site of the Presidency of the Government, kidnapping the weekly meeting of the ministers, in order to ask for a National Salvation government. Though he was court-martialed, the punishment was so light that he was free with his accomplice by 1979.

Lieutenant Colonel Antonio Tejero entered in the Congress of Deputies – the low chamber of Spanish parliament – in command of 288 civil guards⁷ armed with machine guns at 18.20 p.m. on February 23, 1981. He stopped the second voting for the

⁵ The leftist UMD (Military Democratic Union) produced a document entitled ‘Las condiciones de legitimidad de las intervenciones militares’ [Conditions of legitimacy of military interventions], incorporated later to the ‘Informe sobre las Fuerzas Armadas en agosto de 1976’ (Report on the Armed Forces, August 1976). It is important to stress that military intervention in politics was considered legitimate from the left to the right in the Armed Forces against every normative theory on civil-military relations in democratic regimes.

⁶ De Andrés, 2001, p. 70, the texts in De Andrés, 2001, pp. 117-119 (1936) and 186-187 (1981).

⁷ It must be stressed that members of the *Guardia Civil* who committed the coup were not conscripted military servicemen but professional men voluntarily recruited. The *Guardia Civil* is an all-volunteer paramilitary force.

nomination of Leopoldo Calvo Sotelo as the second President of the Government of Spanish democracy, seized the chamber and kidnapped the cabinet and the deputies. At the same time, Lieutenant General Jaime Milans del Bosch, Captain General of the III Military Region,⁸ rebelled and seized all the powers, issuing a decree that militarized all the civil officials, implemented military jurisdiction and martial law, and forbade labour strike and lock-outs, and the activities of political parties.⁹ The main radio stations in Valencia were occupied and transmitted this decree and classical music, what could be tuned in Madrid. The population was terrified and there were explicit orders from political parties and unions of the left to do nothing (De Andrés, 2001, p. 82, n. 47). The reason for this behaviour is to be found in the trade-off between the Communist Party and the centre-right government which guided their exchange in the transition. When the communists were legalized they committed tacitly to disorganize and to demobilize the social movements of opposition to the dictatorship under their control. It would be very unusual to expect a change of this policy in an extremely critical situation with their main leaders under arrest by the *golpistas*.

The tactical move was a mixture of *coup de main*,¹⁰ the seizure of the Congress by Tejero and his civil guards to kidnap the government and the parliament, plus a classical *pronunciamiento*¹¹ of Spanish nineteenth century, Milans del Bosch's edict decreeing his seizure of power in the III Military Region, deploying tanks and armoured vehicles in the city of Valencia, asking tacitly for support to Captain Generals from the rest of Military Regions.¹² The culmination of the coup would have been the presence of General Armada in front of the kidnapped government and deputies, invoking the power vacuum and offering himself as President of the new government. That is a kind of soft coup like the one conducted by De Gaulle in 1958. These three different strategic lines clashed instead of converging because there was a lack of planning and coordination, a

⁸ The III Military Region included the provinces of Valencia, Castellón, Alicante, Albacete y Murcia with important installations of the Navy and the Air Force.

⁹ It is surprising that Schmitter, 1986, p. 5, attributed the leadership of the coup to the *Guardia Civil* ignoring apparently the role played by different generals of the Army.

¹⁰ Action carried out by an armed force with surprise and audacity.

¹¹ Coup d'Etat by proclamation.

¹² In 1874 Captain General Pavía assaulted the Congress in a similar vein, ending the I Republic. The cover of the weekly *Heraldo Español*, 7-13 August 1980, depicted a drawing of a horse, and the heading 'Who will ride this horse? A general is wanted', in the corresponding article the example of Pavía was invoked and the name of general Armada was mentioned.

lack of military professionalism, so to speak, in the political intervention. This hastiness has been attributed by some to Suárez's dismissal,¹³ which somehow precipitated the coup because of the opportunity window offered by the election of the new president in the Congress. Tejero did not accept the authority of Armada when he appeared at the Congress. Milans was not able to lead the Captain Generals of the remaining Military Regions. The entire operation was finally a failure (Busquets 1982; Colomer, 1990; Fernández López, 2000).

The Crown

The control modus of the Armed Forces in the Franco regime lay primarily in the personal leadership of the dictator, the winner of the Civil War, the *generalísimo*, and, secondly, in the existence of three different ministries, one for each service, where there were no civilians at all and the military made every decision (Olmeda, 1988). With the death of Franco and the beginning of transition, King Juan Carlos was the heir of this leadership as supreme commander of the Armed Forces, as he had been proved in the Sahara in 1975, both in a symbolic sense, and due to his personal relationships with the military established when he studied in the three military academies (1955-1960). This fact would be of extreme importance for the outcome of the coup.

The active role as supreme power, and arbitrator played by King Juan Carlos made the monarchy much more relevant an institution than intended by Franco, who understood it as a continuity device. The monarchy became a democratic rallying point and unifying factor perceived by the vast majority of Spaniards as a nonpartisan national symbol. His leadership was functional to the control of the Armed Forces during the coup due to his role in the military as ‘successor of the *Caudillo* (Franco)’. In fact, the first decision made after Franco's death was to designate the then Prince Juan Carlos as Captain General and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, days before his coronation as King. King Juan Carlos acted later to reign in the potentially seditious military, for example in January 6, 1979, calling for discipline on the celebration of Military Christmas, after grave incidents that resulted in the death of General Ortín,

¹³ Adolfo Suárez was the first President of the Government after the democratic elections of 1977.

killed by ETA, where many militaries asked for the resignation of Vice President and minister of Defence, General Gutiérrez Mellado (translation by Agüero, 1995, p. 248):

‘A soldier, an army that has lost discipline, cannot be saved. He is no longer a soldier; it is no longer an army. The spectacle of the undisciplined, disrespectful attitudes born in passing emotions which unleash passions that fully disregard the poise demanded of every military is frankly shameful’.

The King spoke to the Armed Forces as its commander in chief. This permitted him to gather their frustrations and to air openly its fears. At the same time, as the King of Spain, he was aware of the hopes and demands from civil society, and he could transmit them to the Armed Forces, who would have not admitted that from a civilian. This double role permitted the King to employ alternatively understanding and persuasion depending upon the circumstances (Powell, 1991, p. 274).

The actions of the King against the coup were directed to terminate it as soon as he could. First, he ordered the Joint Chiefs of Staff to meet in permanent session and to check the chain of command of the regional branches and the main units (Armoured Division, Paratroops Brigade). After that, he tried to talk with all Captains Generals, and in the first round of communication with the Military Regions there were four favorable to the coup (II, III, VII, VIII), one dubious (V), and six against it (I, IV, VI, IX, X y XI).¹⁴ Secondly, he ordered to re-establish the civilian government through the second level political authorities of the civil administration. And, last but not least, he made a direct appeal to public opinion through a TV message aired at 01.15 a. m. February 24, seven hours after the *coup de main* against the Congress (Agüero, 1995, p. 276):

‘The Crown, symbol of unity and permanence of the Fatherland, cannot in any way tolerate actions or attitudes of persons which attempt to interrupt by force the

¹⁴ Surprisingly apparently misinformed Schmitter, 1986, p. 5, says, some years after the facts, that ‘In Spain, by the time Franco died, the military were securely, if not shabbily, confined to barracks. This demobilization has not precluded their playing a threatening role – witness the events of February 1981– but it is perhaps relevant that the leading elements in that conspiracy to arrest democracy came from the Guardia Civil, not the regular armed forces’.

democratic process which the Constitution approved by the Spanish people determined in referendum?.

It must be stressed that the expression ‘in the name of the King’ was used by the *golpistas* as well as by the loyalist to democracy which proves the importance of his leadership. Save rare exceptions, nobody invoked the new Constitution and the democratic order for justifying their actions but obedience to the King (Powell, 1991, p. 308). From my point of view, this was not an exercise of pure civilian control but, to be more precise, something one could refer to as monarchical civil-military leadership, as is revealed by his decisions and his own appearance on TV in the role of Captain General of the Army’s uniform, firmly addressing civilian authorities once, and twice the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The supreme commander had spoken, public opinion breathed with relief.

Government

Civilian supremacy was not at the top of the agenda of political change at the beginning of transition because there were too many other urgent problems to solve, for example, the legal-constitutional means to pursue the political change. There was a certain lack of will to ensure civilian control because president Suárez’s idea was to get the support and advice of a high military chief to obtain the understanding and acquiescence and loyalty of the Armed Forces. The effects of the appointment of General Gutiérrez Mellado in 1976, after the resignation of General De Santiago, as a Vice President of the government and Minister of Defence were twofold, toward society and toward the Military Institution. The presence of a man in uniform in the cabinet was intended to guarantee a strict observance of legal provisions and peaceful change. He needed to convince his comrades-in-arms of the righteousness of political reform and of military modernization. These aims would mean only a partial fulfilment of the requirements of civilian supremacy and were based on an erroneous analysis of the balance of power inside the institution. This view was defined by opponents of change (*inmovilistas*),

namely the elder generation of military officers.¹⁵ It was not until March 1979 that a civilian Minister of Defence was appointed, still being the only civilian in the department when he ceased in 1981.

In addition, several crucial additional mistakes were made, some out of the decisions made and some out of the political circumstances. Firstly, Gutiérrez Mellado pledged to discuss the political measures of the government with his comrades-in-arms in the barracks before president Suárez had made his decisions public as such.¹⁶ Secondly, seniority was complemented with loyalty and competence as criteria of promotion for the high posts of a military career. Third, there was a lack of criteria to implement civilian control through the organizational design of the new politico-military organs like the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Minister of Defence and his department, the President and Vice President of the government, the Committee of National Defence and the King. Fourth, an Intelligence Service to inform to the Minister of Defence, reporting with priority to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had been created by Gutiérrez Mellado within the new ministry of defence and has remained in fact a military prerogative until today.¹⁷ Fifth, the numerous undisciplined actions of the conspiring military hardliners were not severely sanctioned. In practice the government chose to deal with the problem by muddling through, rather than making decisions in principle. Finally, the obscure resignation of Suárez as prime minister provided a formal alibi for the coup, triggering the plans for it. At least such was declared by the accused in the military trial that followed, although it can be said that ‘military explanations do not explain military interventions’ (Huntington, 1968, p.194).

For politicians to make sound political and strategic judgments, information about military intentions is required – information often not available from an organization that is exceedingly guarded about its priorities. The resources of the

¹⁵ A note from the Intelligence Service (CESID), dated 20 September 1978, stated that 45 or 50 per cent of the officers were remarkably rightist or ultra rightist and they were supported by the ultra rightist press. At the same time, a confidential survey to civil population revealed that a 58 per cent opined that the position of the military was in the barracks but a 37 per cent approved of their intervention to ensure ‘order and prudence’, see Puell, 1997, pp. 196-197.

¹⁶ See his General Report 1/76, September, as Army Chief of Staff in Gutiérrez Mellado 1981, pp. 41-58.

¹⁷ Royal Decree 2.723/1977, November 2nd. Its creation had been announced by Royal Decree 1448/1977, July 4th.

government varied because its political and economic performance was not good enough, its defence knowledge and civilian supremacy doctrine was extremely weak, its electoral mandate and popular legitimacy was low, the cohesion of his supporting party was faltering, and the opposition launched a confidence vote against the president of the government on May 1980. The government was a fortress under siege.

The Armed Forces

According to Burk (1999, pp. 447-461), the four crucial elements of military culture are discipline, professional ethos, ceremony and etiquette, and cohesion and esprit de corps. Discipline is regarded as the essential factor that differentiates the Armed Forces from an armed mob. This is the reason why the emergence of the *Unión Militar Democrática* (UMD) [Democratic Military Union] was so devastating for Spanish military culture. The fragmentation of the cohesion of the Armed Forces due to the contacts of the UMD with democratic opposition implied the breakdown of discipline, and a remembrance of the organizational climate and the uprising in which the civil war originated. Therefore this initiative was self-defeating by its own content and the international and domestic political juncture it faced. The military command was impelled to act. However, the arrest and court-martialing of the few members of the UMD put an end to the deterioration of the discipline and the unity of the ranks by the tiny left wing of the political spectrum of the military. Finally, the Court-Martial sentenced one major and six captains as guilty of being ‘conspirators for military rebellion’.

But the main problem was going to be at the other side, the extreme right, very active and influential inside the Armed Forces during the transition. The military from this political persuasion played a threatening role and protested in the more crucial moments of the transitional process, among other examples: the Lieutenant General De Santiago resigned as Vice Prime Minister because of the legalization of the unions in September 1976; Admiral Pita da Veiga resigned as Minister of the Navy because of the legalization of the Communist Party in April 1977; finally the constitutional debate produced growing tensions which crystallized in conspiracies such as ‘Operación

Galaxia’ (Operation *Galaxia*) conducted by Lieutenant Colonel Tejero in November 1978, his first public appearance as a first actor for this political force.

Several sectors of the Armed Forces cautiously considered Suárez’s voter appeal and the centre right’s government legitimacy before contemplating threatening action. Strategic options depended on the civil-military balance of power reached at that particular historical juncture. Some of these sectors decided to carry out a *coup d’Etat*. The military’s threshold to talk about a disposition to intervene was smaller than the threshold to actually intervene and join the ongoing coup. There was a growing number of insubordinate actions by the military and a passive response by the government. Thus, the King had to exert a vigorous leadership to oppose them as the coup arrived.¹⁸ We can assess four main political lines in the Armed Forces, although everybody shared certain resentment toward democracy for different reasons. The different sectors ordered by the growing proportion of this resentment and, therefore, by the diminishing threshold for joining the coup, would be as follows:

The left who was a tiny minority and had lost its main leaders in the sentence of March 1976 because of breaking the unity of the Armed Forces just before the beginning of the political change.

The majority line, the conservatives who kept the discipline and obeyed orders, was resentful towards democracy because of terrorist Basque nationalism, but were also conscious of the danger of losing military career by a failed coup.

The Intelligence Service (CESID) who played an important but ambiguous role as is usual in this kind of service everywhere every time. Several members of this

¹⁸ But as Granovetter, 1978, pp. 1421-1422, has underlined ‘knowing the norms, preferences, motives, and beliefs of participants in collective behaviour can, in most cases, only provide a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the explanation of outcomes; in addition, one needs a model of how these individual preferences interact and aggregate’. This concept of threshold is adapted for explaining the coup and its failure. The threshold is simply the point where the perceived benefits to an individual of doing the thing in question (here, joining the coup) exceed the perceived costs. Different individuals require different levels of safety before entering a coup and also vary in the benefits they derive from joining the coup. A military’s threshold for joining a coup is defined here as the proportion of the Armed Forces he would have to see join before he would do so. *Golpistas* or instigators have a threshold of 0 per cent. Radicals will have a low threshold, and conservatives will have high thresholds: the benefits of joining the coup are small or negative to them and the consequences of arrest high since they are likely to be ‘respectable citizens’ rather than ‘known rabble-rousers’.

service were active players in the development and final failure of the coup, merging the three different strategic lines favouring the coup.

The extreme right. The fragmented hardliners held military interpretations about the civil war and the Franco's regime that were based on deeply held beliefs. These interpretations persisted despite political and social changes in the environment, or because of them, otherwise they would have challenged their arguments and beliefs. These militaries clung to an idealized past rather than adjust their mentality to a changing world. However, the eldest and rightist military generation with the lowest threshold to join the coup finally did not follow their leaders but obeyed the King, the supreme commander.

Political parties

There was an acute lack of political responsibility in the two biggest national parties (UCD and PSOE¹⁹) due to their immaturity as political organizations, lack of programmatic principles of civilian supremacy, and lack of a defence policy doctrine in general. The already factionalised UCD increased its factionalism. The case of the socialist party was especially critical because it has been accused by qualified observers to have frivolously connived at one of the possible operations against the legitimate government, the so called 'soft coup'. This accusation is based on a lunch among General Armada, then military governor of Lérida, the socialist mayor of that provincial capital and two high leaders of the party, Múgica and Reventós in October 1980, and several conversations by Múgica.²⁰ The rumour of sables roared.

¹⁹ Unión de Centro Democrático (UCD) and Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE).

²⁰ Powell, 1991, p. 290, citing words of Suárez criticizing the socialist posture before some journalists. The accusation affected sectors of both biggest national parties (UCD and PSOE), and has been supported by two independent journalists of *El País* Prieto, Barbería 1991, pp. 90-100, and by two prominent socialist scholars Juliá, 1997, pp. 558-560; Preston, 1986, pp. 206-209.

Mass media and public opinion

The intent of engaging the Armed Forces in a *coup d'Etat* to stop the political reforms had begun with the death of Franco and the transition. The lack of electoral support for the extreme right in the General Elections of 1977 and 1979 abandoned its strategy to return again to office by legal means. The ways employed to attain this goal were the conspiracy and the propaganda²¹ campaign against the legitimate government. The campaign was carried on by rightist newspapers – *El Alcázar*, *El Imparcial* – and magazines – *Heraldo Español*, *Reconquista*, *Fuerza Nueva* – which were circulated and much commented on in the barracks. By way of example, as early as on 20 October 1979, a letter by Lieutenant General de Santiago, former Vice President, was published in *El Alcázar*, that pled for a military intervention.

Due to the characteristic of the *coup de main* against the election of the President of the government in the Congress of Deputies, there was a live TV and radio coverage of the parliamentary voting for his investiture. As a result, many Spaniards could either contemplate the indelible images of Tejero and his men shouting, bullying and shaking Vice President General Gutiérrez Mellado, and firing at the ceiling of the chamber, or could listen with awe to all this disorder on the radio. This was a very important fact because these sounds and images provided emotionally powerful lessons against military intervention and in favour of civility and respect for the democratic rules of the game. Also very important was the publishing of the daily *El País* on the night of the attempted coup, with a front page entitled: ‘Coup d’Etat: *El País* with the Constitution’. Most of the other media were also against the coup. For public opinion the coup was a mnemonic catalyst of its worst nightmare, the civil war, and its reaction was paralysis by fear: there was no mobilization that day, except minor pickets protesting at the surroundings of the Palace Hotel where all the press was waiting. On 27 February, pro-democracy marches and demonstrations filled the streets of major cities.

²¹ Propaganda is used in the sense defined by Lasswell: ‘It refers solely to the control of opinion by significant symbols, or to speak more concretely and less accurately, by stories, rumors, reports, pictures and other forms of social communication. Propaganda is concerned with the management of opinions and attitudes by the direct manipulation of social suggestion rather than by altering other conditions in the environment or the organism’, cited by Janowitz 1970, p. 217.

The Trial of Military Accused as an Institutional Symbolic Loss

The military possess a variety of resources: organizational (personnel, cohesion and unity in the ranks, financial), symbolic and normative (self-abnegation, altruism, honour, courage, discipline, loyalty), societal (status), and historical (earned reputation by past interventions, both wars against different enemies and coups and *pronunciamientos*). After the failed coup, the trial of military accused brought in a symbolic loss due to the spectacle of mutual accusations and lack of courage to accept their responsibilities.²² The hardliners lost their honour and despised their Supreme Commander, the King. The self-image of the military before the Spanish people would not recover until 1994 after the humanitarian and peacekeeping operations implemented by the Armed Forces, though more fine-grained analysis of public opinion from 1986 to 1999 may reveal that in comparison with other political institutions such as the cabinet, the military were highly valued.

The process of trials lasted from February 18, 1982 until June 3, 1982. The differences between the petition of the prosecution, the decision from the Supreme Council of Military Justice, and the final judgement by the national Supreme Court were very significant. It was very important that the military accused were first judged by their own comrades-in-arms. But much more significant was the decision made by the government to appeal to the Supreme Court to get a sentence in accordance with the petition of the prosecution for the military leaders of the coup. The civilians would therefore have the last say.

The Crown

The King summoned politicians the same afternoon of their liberation to recommend against an open and hard reaction, and a heavy hand towards the Armed Forces as a whole, asking for reflection on past mistakes and union among political forces.

²² Symbolic loss is used here as implying a diminution of legitimacy of the military institution, impeding its function more or less effectively. This lack of agreement or consensus of beliefs about the Armed Forces and their proper role implies a diminution of the moral presence of the institution in the normative order of society and a loss of status of its members.

Afterwards, he tried to re-establish trust between civil society and Armed Forces, showing always to the latter his democratic convictions. With his decisive intervention the King became a target for a new propaganda campaign of the extreme right. The version against the King, accusing him of changing sides during the coup is inconsistent with his behaviour as the pilot of political change and with his familiar political experience. It seems that general Armada, who had been professor of the young prince and Secretary of his House, utilised this personal relationship to present himself as a ‘royal ambassador’ and aspiring President of the future government originated by the coup.

Government

The government formed after the coup was the first without any military member since the beginning of the civil war, quite a record for the Spanish political scene. The aim of this government was to establish civilian supremacy and its decisions pursued this goal, putting finally civilian control at the top of the governmental agenda. The government cleaned the image of the King as much as it could due to the extreme right campaign against him. The Minister of Defence reassured the military about the goodness of regional autonomy for the unity of the Homeland in the new democratic regime. The NATO entrance in May 1982 by the vote of the majority of the parliament was an excellent incentive for the more professional sectors of the Armed Forces, especially the Navy and Air Force. The unity and cohesion of the Armed Forces was preserved by limiting the number of military accused of involvement in the coup, reducing the amount of military accused, and diluting responsibilities for the lower hierarchical echelons. There was a general change of attitude in the government about things military. There was a quick reaction against a move favourable to the military accused called *Manifiesto de los cien* (Manifiesto of the hundred), by middle- and lower-ranking officers protesting press treatment of the military and arguing that the military ‘in order to better fulfil their mission, do not need to be professionalized, democratized, or purged’.

The Intelligence Service was also reformed, including among its missions the barrack's surveillance,²³ taking this capacity from the three military intelligence services, and reporting subsidiarily to the Joint Chiefs of Staff; finally it was decided that it would depend functionally on the prime minister and organically on the Ministry of Defence.²⁴ Legislation on budgetary appropriations for investment in the Armed Forces was promulgated in order to guarantee a minimum cumulative purchase power of 4.432 per cent of the final allocations of that year.²⁵ In May 1981, a new law called ‘Law for the Defence of the Constitution’ was passed, including a more ample definition of terrorism to cope with the violent efforts to secede from the Spanish Nation. The Armed Forces were given a role in fighting terrorist Basque nationalism deploying troops to control and waterproof the frontier with France, the sanctuary of Basque terrorism since its appearance in 1968. With respect to the trial, legality was complied with. Firstly, military jurisdiction was executed, and then when the sentence was deemed too soft by the government, it was appealed to the civil jurisdiction.

The Armed Forces

During the trial the Armed Forces were judges, sitting on the Supreme Council of Military Justice and judged the persons of military accused. There were some minor incidents but the majority of the military kept the bearing taken in February 24 at dawn, obeying the orders of the King, accepting the judgment of the trial. However the soft sentences of the Supreme Council of Military Justice implied a new blow against the public image of the Armed Forces. The trials and imprisonment of the military rebels was complete by 1982. After the trials there was a steady realization among large numbers of officers that democracy was there to stay and that the military ought to accommodate itself within it. All these facts plus the cultural and socio-economical developments in Spanish society created a situation whereby the Armed Forces lost their status of a central institutional position in Spain. The change of Spanish male youth's attitude to compulsory military service would be some years later the most

²³ Royal Decree 726/1981, March 27.

²⁴ Ministerial Order 135/1982, September 30.

²⁵ Law 44/1982, July 7.

salient expression of the changes that had taken place in the national security ethos and in the status of the Spanish Armed Forces in society.

Military Accused

The loss of professional self-image, the loss of the shared feeling for good and bad, for honour and dishonour, for loyalty and treason, this was the military accused theme. After the failed coup these persons could not function as arbiters of right and wrong because they themselves could not distinguish between right and wrong anymore. In their loss of professional identity due to their political intervention they had lost all values except those associated with power, and their intent to seize it had failed. So the military show in the trial was anything but virtuous. The accused asked for the recovering of the centre of the stage for the Armed Forces, as an autonomous political power in front of the executive and the legislature. They invoked strange reasons for explaining why they had not disobeyed openly illegal orders. They accused the media of disregarding military life, not listening to the military opinion about problems of political life in those days. Finally they accused reciprocally one another of treason and cowardice. This behaviour made a negative impression on public opinion. In this fashion, the trials helped to consolidate democracy because they showed how bereft of an alternative agenda the military really was. The most important hard-liners were defeated, disgraced, and jailed. To conclude, it should be stressed that Tejero, Armada and Milans del Bosch were sentenced to thirty years in prison which is exceptional in the treatment got by coup makers in other states around the world.

Political Parties

The extreme parties (the right and the communist) were among the losers in the aftermath of the coup. The communists stressed the role of the King in stopping the intent, in the words of its leader ‘If the King does not stop the coup, nobody would have done it. Had we had a President of the Republic in the Zarzuela Palace, instead of Don Juan Carlos, democracy would have been crushed’ (Carrillo 1993, pp. 718-719).

Political parties were not adequately performing their functions of articulation, aggregation and representation of interests. The centre-right party accelerated its dissolution as such. The socialist party (PSOE) incorporated a moderated micro party from this origin. Since moderation seemed easier than paying the price of power, the PSOE made a tactical move offering its participation in a possible coalition government. In the meantime, they reached some bipartisan accords with the governing UCD in order to channel some problematic national issues: contra terrorist legislation, NATO entrance (with PSOE objections), and regional decentralization legislation. The PSOE won his victory in 1982 and achieved the tolerance of its once intransigent foes by dint of deradicalization, in the words of Giner (1986, pp. 11-44).

Mass Media and Public Opinion

It must be mentioned that the Church did not play a very active role in the defence of democracy; its behaviour was tended to be ‘wait and see’. It did not react to the coup until the following day, issuing a very brief declaration in support of the Crown, the Constitution, and harmony among Spaniards. Some weeks after this declaration, the Church issued a longer text, soon questioned by the Basque bishops with an alternative document, openly sympathising with terrorist Basque nationalism again, according to some observers, due to its equalling between the legitimate government and ETA. The President Calvo Sotelo called the Vatican’s ambassador and the leaders of the political parties rejected this involvement in the political scenario²⁶

Media soon adopted the style of critical, attack or investigative journalism, in the sphere of defence they continued from this trial as a mobilized press. This change is a cultural pattern characteristic of contemporary democracies and contributes to the decline of public trust towards institutions of government in general and to the grievances of the military in particular. Public opinion believed that the sentences of the trial would be softer than the final result obtained by the government. But both events involved an acute loss of prestige for the Armed Forces in public opinion. Finally, the

²⁶ *Salvar la libertad para salvar la paz* (April 1981) [Save freedom to save peace] and *Amenaza a la normalidad constitucional: llamada a la esperanza* [Threat to the constitutional order: a calling for hope]. See the text of the Basque bishops in Villacastín, Beneyto, 1981, pp. 130-134.

public behaviour of military accused in their trial drove the nail into the coffin of *golpismo*. The consolidation of Spanish democracy had begun. The new socialist government, coming out of the general elections of 1982 won by majority, would find its way paved for the implementation of civilian control of a more comprehensive and democratic type.

Conclusions

There is a very important distinction between authoritarian Spain and those regimes in Communist Europe with strong totalitarian or solid post totalitarian features. In the latter, the weakness of both civil society and political society before the transition started and during the course of transition made all the difference to the former. It seems to me, for the same reason, that the Armed Forces had an organizational culture more prone to autonomy in Spain than in the countries of Eastern Europe because of the important role played there by the communist parties. However, the military in Spain was highly present in the Francoist political and administrative structures, but it did not define or monitor government policy, and was well under the control of the dictator. Because of this the military did not participate in the elite that made the core decisions for the transition. This political exclusion, a very first stage in civilian control, increased the resentment towards the new democratic regime because they felt they were guardians of the past. The civilian leadership should have addressed these grievances implementing the subordination of the military, appointing a civilian as Defence Minister.

In the first critical event, the failed coup, we witnessed a growing military insubordination to the general policy of democratically elected government due to the weakness of civilian leadership. At this stage we could not speak properly of the existence of defence policy. Public opinion was fearful of a military intervention, and the press did not pay attention to things military with some important exceptions like appointments to the generalship. There was no civil control but monarchical leadership because the chain of command over the Armed Forces was full of anomalies and ambiguities, unable to clearly establish that the civilian head of the government was at

the same time the commander of the military. The King played this latter role in a formal and ceremonial way. There was a reactive strategy in military policy. The government was more worried to appease the military in general political matters than to implement civilian control in defence policy-making. The behaviour of the Armed Forces was also reactive. It perceived political change as a menace towards its prerogatives and autonomy, because its organizational culture values military intervention in politics and disregards civilian supremacy. What is bound to happen when strong civilian control is unable to curb military contestation, is what happened in Spain: a coup is planned and attempted.

In critical event II, the trial of military accused, the elected government began to formulate and conduct defence policy (NATO, budgeting), appointing a civilian Minister of Defence and eliminating military presence in the cabinet; the undisciplined military actions were quickly sanctioned. Public opinion was disillusioned with the Armed Forces because of the trial, the media adopted the style of advocacy journalism, and the military experienced a loss of prestige and some of them saw themselves as a separate constituency. Civilian control began. The strategy of the new government was active and based on imposition to curb the military opposition and contestation.

Monarchical civil-military leadership reminds us of the old dictum from Prussian public law *Der König ist der Staat*. The King unifies in his person both the civil and the military parts of the State under his high command, which is mainly of a symbolic nature, but could be employed as such in a critical situation as the attempted coup. But this is a predemocratic device, a vestige of the past, nor an innovative type of civilian control. The idea of the sector of the Armed Forces in favour of the coup was to intensify this direct relation to the King, as its *Kriegesherr*. As a result the proper democratic civilian control mechanisms, those pertaining to the polity, were weakly implemented, especially parliamentary control. This led perhaps to a more active role in several instances of civil society and the public sphere, opening a political opportunity structure to mass media, public opinion, conscientious objectors, and anti-military social movements. The trade off seemed to be the lack of a strategic culture shared by civilian and military elites and in the words of Pierre Lellouche ‘the lack of danger and threat perception’ in Spanish public opinion.

It is difficult to assess the meaning of the coup after all these years but I would like to stress that it meant the definite end of the temptations of military intervention. The attempted coup implied the break down of social and political isolation of the Armed Forces, being incorporated into the new regime. However, from the point of view of democratic control two reserve domains are still in military hands after all these years: military education and intelligence service which still depends on the defence ministry.

A good collection of guidelines for democratizers to curb military power and promote military professionalism partly based in lessons learned in the Spanish case, among others, is offered by Huntington (1991, pp. 251-253). But some further advice is added:

It is important to incorporate the military into the new regime, giving them a sense of belonging, breaking any real or imagined isolation, building an organizational vision and new objectives.

Direction and leadership must be exerted by civilians at the beginning of transition. The chain of command over the Armed Forces must be clarified and consolidated. Ambiguities and anomalies must be removed. In this direction it is good to establish direct relations between the military and the politicians.

There is always need of a betterment of the relationship between journalists and military men. There are very few specialist defence correspondents, and there is generally a low level of understanding of military affairs. There is a tendency to stereotype military operations, which can be problematic. In order to work effectively with the media, you have to understand the demands they are under. Often, journalists are prepared to accept ‘plausible facts’ – which may not necessarily be entirely accurate, but are believable. If you cannot supply the information, others will be able to do so. There is specialist training to develop the skills needed to work with the media.

It is necessary to improve the civic education in military academies, developing the beliefs in civilian supremacy. At the same time it is important to introduce Security and Strategic Studies in regular universities’ curricula.

Clearly most of this advice was the opposite of the guidelines followed in the Spanish transition so it is a sort of paradox that finally there was a happy end, the

beginning of civilian control, a miracle for Przeworski who was right in the end, but as Walter Hallstein said: ‘Anyone that does not believe in miracles in European affairs is no realist’.

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