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## COMMENTARY

Palaima: Flawed American policies cast long shadows

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Today is the 70th anniversary of the beginning of the bombardment of the city of Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War by the Italian battleship Eugenio di Savoia. The target was an airplane motor factory three blocks from the small apartment where my family is now living. None of the shells hit the factory. They hit residential areas instead, killing eighteen civilians.

Barcelona was the first modern European city to suffer what we euphemistically call "collateral damage." It also was first to suffer intentional bombardment of civilian populations, a practice later used widely by Axis and Allied governments during World War II. Barcelona was bombed 170 times between 1937 and 1939, leaving 2,500 people dead. Francisco Franco gave the German Condor Legion permission to practice terrorist bombing on the Basque town of Guernica in April 1937.

The newspaper La Vanguardia shows an aerial photograph of the Italian air strike on March 17, 1938, that leveled two city blocks of Barcelona. It was ordered by dictator Benito Mussolini in reprisal for the defeat of Italian ground troops elsewhere in Spain.

A city map in La Vanguardia shows where bombs hit. Two buildings on our block were blown up. A nearby stone building front still shows the damage of fragmentation bombs. Seven citizens reminisce in the newspaper about living for two years under bombardment as children. One said she still reacts with fear at ambulance or police sirens.

Residents here have vivid memories and reminders of the destructive force of war and of a fascist regime that violated the human rights of its own men, women and children. This may explain why the Spanish government is sensitive about events in Iraq and Afghanistan and concerned whether international safeguards for the protection of prisoners are being observed.

The newspaper El Pais recently reported that the U.S. government and military used Spanish bases at Roto, Morón and Torrejón to fly illegally detained suspected terrorists to Guantánamo. This violated international law and bilateral agreements with the Spanish government.

Popular political cartoonist Peridis played upon Spanish Roman Catholic tradition in a cartoon showing a seated man facing a seated woman. She holds a rosary. The woman sings the Latin response that I sang as a young altar boy: "Pray for us." The man sings the priest's part, but instead of the names of holy saints, he chants the names of unholy places: Rota - Guantánamo / Ora pro nobis. Morón - Guantánamo / Ora Pro Nobis. He then remarks, "All roads lead to Guantánamo." And she replies, "Wasn't it to Rome?"

The former president of Spain, who committed troops to Iraq in 2003, recently admitted there were no weapons of mass destruction. This prompted the current president, José Luis Rodríguez

Zapatero, to comment ironically, "Even now he is mistaken. There is a weapon of mass destruction in Iraq: war and the hatred it has promoted."

American policies cast a less than favorable light on the values of our society. Last week, Spain held a day of "blackout." Citizens and institutions did their part to conserve energy in a united national response to global warming. Even the lights of Barcelona's greatest landmark, the spires of Antoni Gaudí's famous church, La Sagrada Familia, were dimmed.

In 1997, the United States refused to sign the Kyoto Protocol, citing among its supposed flaws that it placed restrictions on developed countries that it did not place on developing ones. We continue to export our Hummer-SUV lifestyle. And I continue to explain to Spanish friends that Austin has no significant train or Metro systems.

Still, most baffling was our recent refusal to join in the proclamation made by 58 nations at a UNICEF-organized conference against the use of children as soldiers in combat. The European Union, Switzerland, Canada and Japan signed the proclamation, but - as was widely noted in the Spanish news - not the United States.

In June 2005, President Bush called upon longtime adviser Karen Hughes to help give the United States' image an extreme makeover. Whatever she did, if anything, sure hasn't worked.

Palaima is a University of Texas professor. This is the second in a series of columns from Spain.