

Spain Asking U.S. to Give Up Air Base in New Agreement

By Miguel Acoca

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MADRID, Feb. 23 — Spain is asking the United States to give up the Torrejon Air Base, the big former nuclear bomber installation on the outskirts of Madrid, as a step toward defusing opposition to renewal of the present defense agreement between the two countries.

A senior Spanish source said that Premier Carlos Arias's government has quietly suggested that the United States withdraw not only from Torrejon, but also from Moron Air Base, a mothballed facility in southern Spain, in current negotiations for an accord to replace the one which expires in September.

Other bases on Spanish ter-

ritory, jointly operated by the United States and Spain, would not be affected, the source stressed.

Eventual loss of Torrejon would make Zaragoza Air Base, now mainly used for bombing and gunnery training, the major U.S. air facility in Spain. There are 800 U.S. Air Force personnel at Zaragoza, midway between Madrid and Barcelona. The base was reactivated in 1969 after the loss of Wheelus Field in Libya.

It was not clear whether Zaragoza would be expanded to absorb functions at Torrejon, which is manned by 4,000 Americans and is used by KC-135 jet fuel tankers, F-4 phantoms, and cargo planes.

KC-135s based on Torrejon

refueled U.S. planes flying supplies to Israel during the 1973 Middle East war, even though Spain refused to permit other U.S. use of Spanish bases to help Israel. Spain, as part of its pro-Arab policy, does not maintain diplomatic relations with Israel.

The other major U.S. base is the nuclear submarine station at Rota, with 4,000 Navy personnel.

The Spanish source also disclosed that aides are pressing Arias to seek an invitation to Washington for talks with President Ford, Vice President Rockefeller, and Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger, but that Foreign Minister Pedro Cortina opposed a

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U.S. visit while the base talks are in progress.

As part of a new negotiating posture, the source explained, Spain has backed away from an earlier demand to upgrade the present accord to a mutual security treaty because the current mood of the U.S. Senate would preclude approval.

Reports that Spain wanted the United States to quit Torrejon were published in the closely-controlled Spanish press earlier this month following the third round of base talks in Madrid. Publication of the unattributed reports was considered a leak to prepare Spanish public opinion for the move.

Negotiations, which began in December, are being held alternatively in Washington and Madrid. The next meeting is to be held in Washington next month.

Recent Spanish opinion polls indicate that a majority of Spaniards oppose renewal of the military relationship on present terms. Apparently in reaction, U.S. officials have conducted an independent survey of Spanish attitudes toward the American military presence.

Under the 1970 "friendship and cooperation" agreement extending an anti-Soviet military alliance which began in 1952, the United States and Spain maintain the joint air and naval bases on Spanish territory, and the United States is granted use of all Spanish air fields without prior diplomatic approval.

The source said that if the United States withdrew from Torrejon, the base would become Madrid's second airport, also substantially lowering the American military profile at a time of growing political unrest.

The new official attitude toward the bases reflects fear that the U.S. presence could become a major political issue as the Arias administration is paving the way for the inevitable transition from Generalissimo Francisco Franco, 82, to his designated successor, Prince Juan Carlos de Borbon, 37.