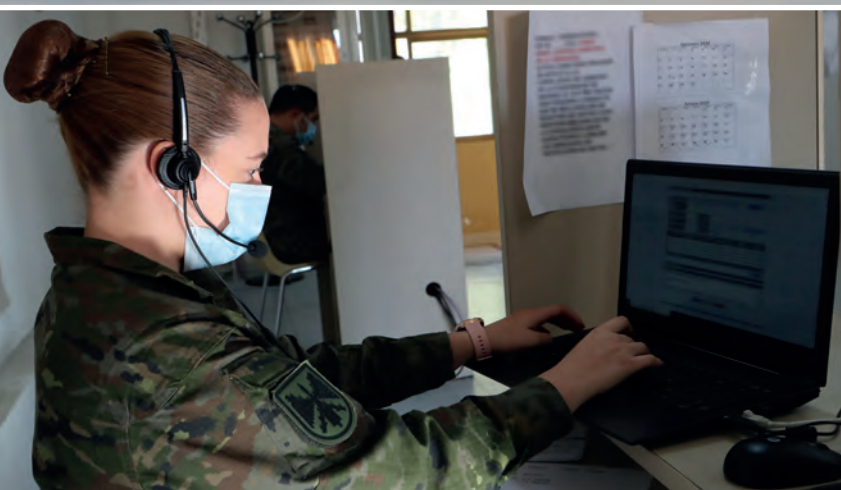


REVISTA ^{ESPAÑOLA} DE DEFENSA

The Spanish Air Force tests its new intelligence, surveillance and air reconnaissance capabilities

PREDATOR'S EYE VIEW

INTERVIEW
Lieutenant General
Braco, Commander of
the Operations Command



MISSION BALUARTE: A DEFENCE AGAINST THE PANDEMIC

Armed Forces trackers are working with Spain's regional governments to trace and notify potential new cases of COVID-19



REVISTA ESPAÑOLA DE DEFENSA

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about defence

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Protecting our health

THE Armed Forces continue intensifying their efforts to protect the health of the Spanish people with their new operation entitled *Mission Baluarte*. They are providing support to the Regional Governments in tracing the contacts of people who are infected with COVID-19 and in monitoring situations of self-isolation and quarantine. Furthermore, when their help is required, they contribute with other actions, in particular providing logistic and medical support and in disinfecting infrastructures.

The primary objective of this mission is to try to stop the spread of the virus and help save lives. This is what the fight against the coronavirus demands, a disease that in this second wave continues to cause, in Spain and around the world, a severe health, social and economic crisis.

In the course of their work, the nearly 3,000 military contact tracers already working in different parts of Spain, set a daily example of commitment, willingness to serve and, above all, humanity towards the people they phone, many of whom are worried about having tested positive for COVID-19 or having been in contact with someone who has the disease.

Mission Baluarte is demonstrating the high technical skills of the members of the Army, Air Force, Navy and the Military Emergencies Unit, as well as their immediate deployment capability throughout the national territory and their extensive expertise in emergencies. The Armed Forces are held in high esteem by the society they serve and this, together with their experience in dealing with the civilian authorities, is also a guarantee of success in coronavirus contact tracing.

Also worth highlighting is the quality of the training received by military trackers before joining the operation, as well as the work carried out by members of the Military Emergencies Unit to prepare the civilian contact tracers requested by Regional Governments.

Looking ahead, the establishment of a European military medical corps, endorsed by the French and Spanish defence ministers, Florence Parly and Margarita Robles, at their meeting in Madrid on 24 September, can improve the Armed Forces support to countries suffering from a pandemic or any other kind of public health crisis. Security is comprehensive and global, and requires solidarity and close cooperation within the EU, in order to provide more effective assistance to European citizens.

RED



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Cover photo: Pepe Díaz

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The pandemic has helped society to become aware of just how serious the deliberate propagation of false information can be.





Trackers from the Military Emergencies Unit in one of the rooms of the call centre set up in the unit's headquarters at Torrejón air base. Below, members of the Navy in their Regular Forces *Melilla* in the Technological Centre of that city, from where they call those who have tested positive for COVID-19 and th



Navy





Helène Gicquel

HQ in Madrid and a member of the 52nd Group of their contacts.

Armed Forces trackers are working with Spain's regional governments to trace and notify potential new cases of COVID-19, a crucial task in this phase of the pandemic to curb the spread and save lives

MISSION BALUARTE: a defence against COVID-19



City of Meilla

IN one of the rooms of the call centre located in the Headquarters of the Military Emergency Unit (UME), ten military members simultaneously phone people who have tested positive for COVID-19. After confirming that they have undergone a PCR test and that they know the result of this test, they are asked about their state of health, their ability to purchase food and medication and whether they are at risk as a result of previous pathologies or old age. After that, they are asked about their recent contacts, i.e. who they have been with, starting from two days before having any symptoms or, in

case of being asymptomatic, since they were tested. These contact persons have to be located and informed of their obligation to self-quarantine in order to break the virus transmission chain. Military members have become contact tracers and their mission is to prevent the disease from spreading without control. They know that their task, at this stage of the pandemic, is critical and that, the faster they act, the more lives will be saved.

While they make their phone calls, a lieutenant nurse approaches each of the workstations to answer their medical questions and help them with the most

sensitive individuals. Next to them, the head of the Epidemiological Surveillance Unit is in constant contact with the regional government of Madrid, which has sent two specialists to explain the functioning of the computer application they work with or any other questions about their job. It is 11 September, the soldiers' first day as trackers, and everything is going according to plan.

They are part of the operation *Mission Baluarte*, launched by the Defence Ministry and led by the new head of the Operations Command, Lieutenant General Francisco Braco. Once again, as with Operation *Balmis*, all the interventions of the armed forces are coordinated from the Retamares base in Madrid, including the work of the trackers.

Through the UME, the Defence Department, has trained some 7,000 soldiers as trackers, who have been offered by the government to Spain's



Ciudad Autónoma de Melilla

President of Melilla Eduardo de Castro shows interest in the work carried out by the military trackers at the city's monitoring centre.

regions and cities. Fifteen of these regions—all except Catalonia and the Basque Country—have accepted the offer and have been integrating military members into their health systems.

At the close of this edition, some 3,000 trackers requested by the regional governments were already working to try to curb the spread of the epidemic.

TRANSFER OF COMPETENCIES

The first trackers of the UME were the spearheads of *Mission Baluarte*. "As in Operation *Balmis*, in order to give the rest of the military units enough time to be trained and create their teams", explained unit commander, Lieutenant General Luis Manuel Martínez Meijide, on the first day of contact tracing. "We

> SERGEANT CHRISTIAN SEVILLA RICÓS / ARMY

"We are warmly welcomed when we say we are from the military"

SERGEANT Sevilla has found three different profiles among the people he has traced from the COVID Coordination Centre in Mallorca, where he works with civilian nurses. "There are those who cannot hold back their tears when they find out that a family member has tested positive, those who accept the result and are willing to do whatever it takes and those who are in denial". That is what happened to one lady and her daughter: "They claimed that they were fine and that they were not going to self-quarantine because they were afraid of losing their jobs". In the end, I managed to talk some sense into them and whenever I called them, for monitoring purposes, they were at home. If someone refuses to follow the rules, we apply the protocol: "We call 112 and then we report to the State Security Forces, who show up at their address and make sure they do not leave their home".

When he has to deal with difficult cases, he remembers the training received from the Defence Department and the Balearic Region where "we also worked with real cases". He is aware that his main tools as a tracker are his voice and a persuasive attitude. "Most people give us a warm welcome, in particular, when we tell them that we are from the Ministry of Defence and that we work for the COVID Coordination Centre".



are present throughout the national territory and we are capable of and used to dealing with civilian authorities. It has been very easy to place ourselves at their disposal”.

“But we also have our own missions: emergencies”, added Lieutenant General Martínez Mejjide in reference to the unit’s participation in the campaign against forest fires, in floods or heavy snowfalls. In fact, while trackers were being trained, they were involved in fighting four simultaneous fires. “The UME has made the initial effort and we are paving the way for those who come next with their khaki or blue uniforms. Then we will humbly step aside for them to take over. It will be done progressively”, he pointed out.

A few days later, the coordinating role of *Mission Baluarte* was transferred. There are Army, Air Force and Navy personnel participating in almost all the regions under the advice of the Military Medical Corps. To do this, in each



Army



Air Force

> **CORPORAL FUENSANTA LÓPEZ BELMONTE / AIR FORCE**

“We have to be aware of what is happening”

AT Alcantarilla air base in Murcia, Corporal Fuensanta López Belmonte has put her job in the communications office to one side to become a tracker. On her first day, she focused on closing some files that had remained open, “people who had tested positive and hadn’t picked up the phone for some time, but who had already completed the quarantine period”. In almost all her calls, she has been fortunate enough to find very cooperative people who had tested positive. “They even phoned us later on because they remembered some contact persons they hadn’t told us about”. This is the specific case of a 52-year-old woman who had to be informed that she had tested positive. “She was waiting for the phone call from her health centre, but when we told her that we were trackers, she imagined the result. She was very upset at first, but she was determined to give us all the information we asked for”.

Corporal López Belmonte is grateful for the training she has received, first online and then from the Region of Murcia. “I have really enjoyed it and it has taught me, among other things, that when I call individuals testing positive I have to deal with them step by step. I can’t just start all of a sudden and say: hello, good morning, you have tested positive for COVID-19”. She knows that her job as a tracker changes day by day, call by call. “So far everything has gone well, the people I phone are responsible and they self-quarantine. We all need to be aware of what is happening to stop this. Otherwise, it’s going to be a disaster”, she concludes.

Regional governments have some 7,000 soldiers at their disposal specifically trained for this task



> **CORPORAL ALEXIS DÍAZ RIVERO / MILITARY EMERGENCY UNIT**

“If we all cooperate, we all protect ourselves”

CORPORAL Alexis Díaz Rivero has encountered different situations in the phone calls he has made since he started to work as a tracker but, in most cases, he has found that citizens are very well informed about what to do if they test positive. “They know what quarantine is, what isolation is, when to be considered higher risk individuals, etc. They have all accepted my calls quite well; however, I had to notify the results of the tests to some of them because they hadn’t been informed yet”.

When individuals are more reluctant to provide information about their contacts, Corporal Alexis convinces them that stopping the spread is everyone’s responsibility. “I tell them that if they don’t cooperate, others can get infected. That if their neighbour did the same thing, they could be sick without even knowing it and transmit COVID-19 to their mother or grandparents. When you focus the problem on their loved ones, their attitude changes”. He claims that the training received in his unit makes it easier for him to deal with the people he has been assigned to monitor. “I like to communicate with people, but you have to know how to do it. It’s not the same with young people—with whom it’s more lively—as with older people, who are often alone, bored and only want to talk and talk”. “I wouldn’t say that people are anxious”, he points out, “but rather restless because they remember the first outbreak and wonder how is all this going to end”.

region that has requested trackers, they have established an Epidemiological Surveillance Unit (UVE) divided into sections. In Madrid, for instance, this UVE consists of five sections, two from the Army, two from the Air Force and one from the Navy.

“It is important for the trackers to be from the same area in which they make calls. Being called by someone who has the same accent as you and uses the same expressions as you creates trust”, says Nurse Captain Laura Osuna, one of the health workers in support of the trackers of the UME.

PROGRESSIVE INCORPORATION

The service members offered to the different regional governments have been progressively incorporated into contact tracing. “It is better to go slowly, but to be well prepared. We want to help, but to do so appropriately”, said Lieutenant General Martínez Mejjide



Mission Baluarte, like Operation Balmis, is coordinated from the Defence Staff’s Operations Command



Air Force

Some of the trackers selected by the Air Force, during the face-to-face training received at Torrejón air base (Madrid).

during the visit of the Deputy Minister of Public Health of the Region of Madrid, Mr. Antonio Zapatero, to UME headquarters on 11 September. Zapatero thanked the unit for their efforts and said that “the best way out of this situation is to work together. If all the institutions go hand in hand we will beat the pandemic. We

will defeat it sooner and we will emerge stronger”.

Health Minister, Salvador Illa, also wanted to gain first-hand insight into the work of the first military trackers in Madrid. Accompanied by Defence Minister, Margarita Robles, he was briefed about the work carried out by

the Armed Forces during Operation Balmis and the strategic lines of *Mission Baluarte*.

“I wish to highlight the professionalism, methodology and the very high level with which this and previous tasks are being carried out, and also stress that this is a resource that the Government is placing at the disposal of the Regional Governments, which are responsible for making decisions at this stage”, said Zapatero.

Regional governments are asking for trackers to meet the needs arising from the evolution of the pandemic. Requests are addressed in writing to the Health Ministry. There, at the Health Alert and Emergency Coordination Centre, requests are analysed and, after assessing them, they are forwarded to the Defence Ministry. “From there on, the Epidemiological Surveillance Units (UVE) establish initial contact with the civilian authorities, see what they need,



Navy

> SERGEANT FIRST CLASS JENNIFER JULIÁN BECERRO / NAVY

“I never thought I would take part in a mission like this”

In her first six days as a tracker, Sergeant First Class Jennifer Julián Becerro had made some 40 phone calls from the Cartagena Shipyard to individuals testing positive for COVID-19. “It’s not a lot, because I’ve also been training other co-workers. But I’ve already come across all sorts of people, from those who burst into tears as soon as they are told they have tested positive, to deniers who say they will continue going out because they have no symptoms. But most of them are being very collaborative”. She has also had to overcome some difficulties with the language. “In Murcia, there are many Moroccans and citizens from eastern European countries who work in the fields. We are getting by in French or communicating through other people who live in the same house and speak Spanish”.

She admits having faced some complicated situations caused by the pandemic. “If a parent is infected and has young children, they have to look after them and cannot self-isolate”. Or when talking to hospitalized patients. “They are alone. We have to listen to them, to assist them, but eventually we have to end the conversation because otherwise we cannot continue with our work, which is to prevent that person from continuing to infect others”. She has also encountered some irresponsible attitudes, such as parents with symptoms who left their children with their grandparents while they went for PCR testing. “I never imagined I would participate in a mission like this because I never thought I would live through a world-wide pandemic like this one”, states Sergeant First Class Julián.



Marco Romero/MDE

Defence Minister, Margarita Robles and Health Minister, Salvador Illa visited the trackers of the Military Emergencies Unit a few days after starting their job.

what logistic support they have, the infrastructure they can provide us with, whether we can use military means, monitor from the base, etc", explains Captain Nurse Osuna.

Contact tracing begins when an individual in the region tests positive. "That's the first person we call", explains UME Captain Pascual Galera. "Each call can last from 20 to 40 minutes, because besides showing interest in their case and reassuring them, we have to make sure they provide us with their close contacts, which we use to create a small database; we then start to call these contacts, ask them how they are and inform them that they need testing and self-quarantine".

The first call made by Corporal Jorge Laso was somewhat shorter. "It was a young man who already knew he had tested positive, because he had gone for the test after being in contact with another person who had also tested positive. He had self-quarantined, as had the rest of his household. They were very happy to receive a call from the UME, but I guess others won't be so happy". He admits that a large part of his job is to reassure people, "to let them know they are not alone, that we care about them".

In addition to the trackers, the Operations Command coordinates all the specific military support requested by regional governments to confront COVID-19. These tasks are basically disinfection and logistic and health support. "We have centralized the management of

Contact tracing begins when regions identify someone who has tested positive

these resources to be more effective and efficient", pointed out Lieutenant General Braco at the Operations Command headquarters on 1 October.

Most of the support is being provided in the Region of Madrid. Among others, setting up temporary triage tents in the parking lot of Madrid's Military Central Hospital *Gómez Ulla* to be prepared for a possible surge in COVID-19 patients.

At the close of this edition, they had also disinfected the *Lope de Vega* and *El Pozo del Tío Raimundo* cultural centres, in Villa de Vallecas (Madrid), and the *Navacerrada* municipal nursing home, establishments where antigen tests had previously been carried out to detect the virus.



Air Force

In Lanzarote, Air Force members met with civilian health workers shortly before beginning their work as trackers on the island.



Luismi Ortiz/JUNE

Disinfecting the Lope de Vega Cultural Centre in Puente de Vallecas (Madrid) where antigen tests were performed.

TRAINING

All military trackers have received previous training before starting their job. "We have been trained to deal with an elderly person or a child, and above all, they have insisted on legal issues, on data protection", says Corporal Laso. In fact, when they phone the contact person of an individual who has tested positive, they can never disclose the identity of the person who gave them the contact. "All trackers sign a confidentiality clause", explains Osuna. They take an online course, consisting

of five modules in which they are trained in the basics of the disease for effective contact tracing and providing assistance to those affected. "They also receive more in-depth talks on periods of isolation and quarantine, on how to differentiate what a close contact is or what the infection periods are", explains Captain Nurse Osuna. This training is completed by the respective regions to unify procedures.

As well as being able to communicate and having basic computer skills, trackers must above all be assertive with

the people they call, most of whom are worried, nervous and have doubts about what to do once confirmed positive for COVID-19.

The Armed Forces psychologists have therefore worked really hard with them, simulating the worst-case scenarios they may have to face at the other end of the line. Prepared for the worst, they find that in most cases those affected are very aware of the situation and willing to collaborate to help halt this pandemic as soon as possible.

Elena Tarilonte

Military members are trained to communicate effectively with those affected

Lieutenant General Francisco Braco Carbó, Commander of the Operations Command Spain

“WE WORK FOR THE SECURITY AND SAFETY OF ALL SPANIARDS”

He emphasises that operations are the “raison d’être” of the Armed Forces and claims that in operation *Mission Baluarte*, which he leads, “no military member will leave anyone on their own”

GENERAL Braco was appointed Commander of the Operations Command Spain (MOPS) on 22 September and, nine days later, on 1 October, when *Mission Baluarte* was activated, he took the lead of the new Armed Forces operation against the coronavirus from Retamares base in Pozuelo de Alarcón (Madrid). “Our soldiers are waging this war with generosity and courage”, says Lieutenant General Francisco Braco Carbó (Benirredrá, Valencia, 1960) who, as deputy commander and chief of staff of the Operations Command, closely monitored Operation *Balmis*, the first operation against COVID-19.

Those who know this member of the Air Force, who commanded the 45th Air Force Group and has been engaged in seven international

missions, praise his great working capacity and his ability to create a good atmosphere among those around him. “This is one of the objectives I would like to achieve the most, because when people feel comfortable and useful, their performance increases”, explains General Braco.

—“Don’t let me make any mistakes”, you usually say to the members of your General Staff.

—I truly mean it. It means putting my full trust in their hands, and it is also a way of demanding their loyalty. What I mean is that if they see that I am going to take a decision that might cause problems or is not the right one, they should warn me. The General Staff is in charge of dealing with problems and proposing solutions, and it is the chief of staff who takes

the decision. There is no room for individualism. I am not alone. I think the commander should not be a bottleneck and that the figure of an authoritarian boss is negative for organisations. In order to maximise and bring together all the working potential of the Operations Command Staff, you need to build trust.

—You have been in the Operations Command for more than five years, where you have been Deputy Chief of Staff Support; deputy commander and chief of staff; and now you are commander. Has your previous experience been useful for your current position?

—Certainly, since it has allowed me to be effective from the very beginning. It has helped me to gain an insight into every detail of our work in operations, both national and international, and it has also been good “training” to be able to lead from this position. Furthermore, the fact that the personnel in the Operations Command know me and understand my way of working has been important for all of us to adapt to this change.

—What will be your roadmap?

—The will to work in the most efficient and effective way for the security and safety of all Spaniards. We have a great responsibility in the Operations Command, since in addition to planning, monitoring, conducting and leading the sustainment of operations, we must specifically focus on the military personnel deployed abroad and in Spanish territory. Each mission entails monitoring and maintaining direct and constant contact with each contingent, so as to immediately respond to any difficulties.

I will continue in the line of work of my predecessor, Lieutenant General Fernando López del Pozo, who at all times demonstrated his commitment and his effort in enhancing the value of joint collaboration. Previously, when I was Deputy Chief of Staff Support, the commander was then Admiral Teodoro López Calderón, with whom I share the conviction that the Operations Command is the driving force behind the Armed Forces. Operations are



after all the *raison d'être* of the Armed Forces. As Defence Minister Margarita Robles so rightly put it, “the military is a shield that allows societies to develop in peace and freedom”.

—How is *Mission Baluarte* being carried out?

—The main focus of this operation is the management of all the military means made available to the civilian

authorities in the COVID-19 health crisis, with the purpose of being more efficient in the support provided. We should not forget that the Army, Air Force and Navy, together with the Military Emergencies Unit, were already providing the assistance requested by the competent authorities. In order to coordinate actions, we have activated our Joint Operations Centre (JOC), which remains operational

24 hours a day, seven days a week, because we are responsible for the men and women in uniform participating in the fight against the coronavirus.

—Have the lessons drawn from *Operation Balmis* been incorporated into this operation?

—The Operations Command is applying everything that has been learned and executed in *Operation Balmis*. It has now become evident that we need to train contact tracers and use them to confront the second wave of COVID-19. We take into consideration the effectiveness of our organization, based on a Component Command structure, which was rapidly activated and implemented in more than 20,000 interventions in 98 days. And this is thanks to the efforts of all the Armed Forces members, which is clear evidence of the military's commitment to our society.

I must highlight the great work carried out by the Component Commands. The Land Command provided society with a wide variety of its personnel and materiel, capable of evolving and adapting to each situation; the Maritime Command provided its own capabilities; and the Air Command provided all air transport, health and logistic capabilities. The Military Medical Command managed to combine its health capacity with military training, thus demonstrating its versatility. The Cyberspace Command, for its part, worked on a daily basis to prevent the collapse of the health system as a result of a cyberattack. All this was *Operation Balmis*, but now, through *Mission Baluarte*, we continue to be at the service of Spain in the fight against the coronavirus.

—In times of pandemic, is the operability of the Spanish contingents still satisfactory?

—All operations are currently conditioned to complying with the strictest health and safety measures required by the situation, both in Spain and in the various areas abroad where our soldiers, sailors and airmen operate. This demands greater effort on our part, and we face this endeavour with the confidence that we can defeat the virus sooner rather than later and convinced that, even



with the pandemic present all over the world, the men and women of our Armed Forces accomplish their tasks to guarantee the security, safety and well-being of our fellow citizens.

—Is it complicated to monitor the various international operations simultaneously?

—So far in 2020 we have been present in fifteen operations, involving over 2,000 service members, in addition to the 180,000 deployed abroad since the late eighties. Planning, monitoring, conducting and leading the sustainment of operations is a complex task, but the Operations Command has the necessary means and, above all, the committed and enthusiastic staff to manage them. We are aware of our responsibility, since international operations are one of the primary activities of our Armed Forces. In fact, their evolution since the first operation in 1989 has stimulated the growth and development of the Operations Command.

—In 1989, you participated in one of the first missions, the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia.

—I did so, when I was a young captain, as a pilot of a *C-130 Hercules*,

and I was the most junior Captain of all the crews that were deployed. This allowed me to see the operation from that humble position in which my only contribution was to do what I was told. Later, my role was in support of *Desert Storm* and *Desert Shield* in the Persian Gulf between 1990 and 1991, also with a *Hercules*. There, I was more experienced and I felt more useful. The last operation I was engaged in was as commander-in-chief of the Air Force detachment in Aviano air base, during the Balkan war.

This allowed me to gain experience, so now that I am in a position to give orders, I can think of how I would have liked to receive those orders. It is true

Our fellow citizens must know that they are protected, that their Armed Forces are present in Spain 365 days a year, 24 hours a day

that my approach has changed, and I now realise that I was not completely right in what I thought then. However, without any intention of bragging, having been promoted several times gives me enough moral strength to say that, if I don't do it better, it's not because I haven't had the opportunity to learn, but because we all have our own limitations.

—Do our fellow citizens sufficiently recognize the value of those permanent missions in the homeland conducted by the Armed Forces in surveillance of our areas of sovereignty and interest?

—Those who know us appreciate, admire and recognise our work. What is most important is that our fellow citizens know that they are protected, that their Armed Forces are present in Spain 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. And that is what permanent operations are. They are in charge of maintaining situational awareness and, if necessary, conducting and implementing operations required to react to any crises that may occur. While providing an appropriate level of deterrence, they help raise Spanish society's awareness of the Armed Forces' constant and permanent effort in the field of national security and defence.

—Is the Operations Command already consolidated?

—It definitely is and, as a result, we have full capability to adapt; that, in military terms, is to become effective. It's been sixteen years since it was established and we have achieved Full Operational Capability (FOC). We perform the operational planning at the operational level, conduct permanent operations in the homeland and monitor and lead the sustainment of fifteen international missions.

We have conducted Operation *Balmis*, which has been the largest deployment of our Armed Forces in national territory in peacetime and has been a litmus test for this Command. We are now in the thick of *Mission Baluarte*, in which no military member will leave anyone on their own, because this is how we prove our love for Spain.

Santiago Fernández del Vado
Photos: Pepe Díaz



Margarita Robles and her French counterpart, Florence Parly, at the meeting in the Ministry of Defence where they demonstrated the excellent relationship between the Armed Forces of both countries.

[international]

FRENCH-SPANISH cooperation

The Ministers of Defence of both countries are committed to strengthening European military healthcare

THE commitment to Africa, in particular to the Sahel, the role of the Armed Forces in delivering support to civilian society to confront the pandemic and the unwavering commitment to the European Union were some of the issues addressed by Defence Minister, Margarita Robles, in a meeting with her French counterpart, Florence Parly, held at the Ministry of Defence on 24 September.

“One of the greatest challenges today for the Europe of Defence is to be able to count on European Military Medical Corps”, said Minister Robles during the joint press conference on a project that had already been discussed within NATO and in which Spain, France, Germany and other countries are interested. The idea is that, if a country goes through a complicated health situation, the rest “can help it and work together”, explained Ms. Robles.

The Defence Minister underlined the Armed Forces’ “vital contribution”

to the efforts of the civilian authorities in their fight against the pandemic, as demonstrated by the provision of approximately 2,000 service members for contact tracing.

That morning, the French Minister had visited the premises of the Military Emergencies Unit (UME) at Torrejón air base and, according to what she conveyed to her Spanish counterpart, she was “very impressed, and even excited”. During her meeting with the Commander of the UME, General Luis Manuel Martínez Mejjide, Ms. Parly showed an interest in the details of Operation *Balmis*, equivalent to Operation *Résilience* in France.

CLOSE COOPERATION IN THE SAHEL

The two ministers began their meeting by reviewing the situation in the Sahel in the wake of the coup d’état in Mali, where it has become evident that the international community’s unanimous response in defence of democracy has been crucial. In this regard, Robles

underlined Spain’s commitment to supporting Mali and the Sahel as a whole, which is reflected in the decision to step up efforts through the European Union Training Mission (EUTM-Mali) by increasing the contingent and providing new airlift capabilities. “We understand that the battle against terrorism in the Sahel is a priority. We hope that once the new Malian government is in place, we can resume our training and advisory mission”, she explained.

For her part, the French Defence Minister welcomed the “very close cooperation” between Spain and France in that region. Parly underlined Spain’s “very active” contribution to the fight against terrorism within the framework of Operation *Barkhane*, and recalled that “one third of the transport in the Sahel is provided by Spanish military personnel”, referring to the *Marfil* detachment in Dakar (Senegal), which is equipped with two air carriers of the Spanish Air Force.

Another issue highlighted during the bilateral meeting was the projects on military capabilities in which both countries are involved. “We share the view of a robust operational Europe of Defence, which takes concrete action, and I would even add a final adjective: an ambitious Europe of Defence, in particular in the field of its capabilities”, said Parly, in reference to the future fighter programme, the Future Combat Air System (FCAS), in which both countries participate together with Germany.

The meeting of the defence ministers also offered them the opportunity to share views prior to the meeting of the European Intervention Initiative (EII) —in which 13 nations are involved— that was going to be held the following day by videoconference. This is a defence project conceived by French President, Emmanuel Macron, to form military coalitions to react to crises close to the European borders.

The French Defence Minister also took advantage of her trip to the Spanish capital to visit the European Union Satellite Centre (SATCEN), located in Torrejón. These facilities provide aerial and satellite images that contribute to decision-making in the context of the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

Editorial team

The complex reality THAT IS MALI

The recent coup d'état confirms the political instability of a country located in the heart of the Sahel, a victim of poverty and prey to the jihadist scourge

ONa quiet Tuesday in August, when everyone's attention was on the evolution of the pandemic and the US Democratic Party convention, news of an uprising against the government of Mali took us by surprise. Protests had been called that day against President Keïta's rule and the population was on high alert due to the jihadist insurgence, the economic crisis and the COVID-19 epidemic. Mali is not a very well-known country in Spain. However, it is a key piece in the jigsaw that is the Sahel, a region of fundamental importance for our country.

Sahel means strip, border, coast. The Sahel is the southern limit of the Sahara Desert, the line where vegetation begins to appear. A 6,000-kilometre-long strip that can be drawn between Dakar (Senegal) and Asmara (Eritrea), or almost 8,000 kilometres long if what is practically the region's only asphalted road —albeit in parts— is taken into account.

AN AFFLICTED COUNTRY

From Dakar to Bamako, the capital of Mali and the headquarters of the European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali), there are 1,200 kilometres. A long 20-hour drive or a 2-hour flight for the C-295 aircraft of the *Marfil* detachment, present since 2013 and providing air support to the entire region from its headquarters in the Senegalese capital. Sixty kilometres further along is the Koulikoro Training

Camp, where forces from Spain and other European countries endeavour to give the best training possible to the small Malian army (just over 15,000 troops for a country two and a half times the size of Spain).

The country has a fascinating history, intrinsically linked to the River Niger, the fluvial artery of the region that flows toward the north east from Guinea until it appears to grow tired, dissuaded perhaps by the desert, and turns back toward the south. In the 14th century Mali was an empire and Timbuktu was one of the main centres of Muslim learning. The same caravan routes that gave rise to its power are used today by traffickers of arms, drugs and people who are desperate to reach the shores of the Mediterranean.

The country's geography says it all: 90% of the population is concentrated in the south, in the less arid "green" area which is about the size of Spain. The rest of the country is an enormous

empty space that is barely touched by officialdom. Its population, mostly Muslim, is among the poorest in the world (less than 800 euros *per capita*) and is still a traditional one: demographic growth is very high. As in the rest of the region, women bear most of the workload and have an average of over seven children each.

Climate change and the advance of the desert continue to worsen the living conditions of a population that is still rural. Three ethnic groups represent the eternal dispute between farmers and livestock breeders, between sedentarism and transhumance. They are, on the one hand, the Bambara and Dogon peoples and, on the other, the Fulani herdsmen (the biggest nomadic group in the world with an estimated population of 40 million distributed throughout the Sahel). Competition for farming land and pasture in the increasingly reduced space left by the desert leads many to seek opportunities with terrorist groups operating in the region.

Grievances were aggravated when many of the Fulani joined jihadist groups and the Dogon set up "self-defence" groups. On 1 January 2019, a massacre of the Fulani in the village of Koulogon left 37 dead. In March, in Ogossagou, another village not far from Koulogon and close to the border with Burkina Faso, Dogon hunters killed 157 more people. And in February this year there was a repeat of the same episode in the same village, leaving 21 dead.

*Mali's Armed
Forces have barely
15,000 troops
in a country two
and a half times
the size of Spain*



Above: a group of soldiers are welcomed by a crowd in Bamako after the coup d'état on 18 August. Left: a street vendor in the capital. Bottom left: a group of Tuaregs in the north of the country. Bottom right: Spanish troops from the *Marfil* detachment on a strategic transport mission in support of the regional capabilities of the AFISMA countries and France to support Mali in its fight against jihadism.



The straight lines on the map that separate Mali from Algeria or Mauritania do not mean much to the Tuareg. In fact, many of them had moved to Libya during the Gaddafi era, but when the Colonel's regime fell in 2011 they took their weapons and belongings (theirs and any others they managed to loot) and returned home. Mercenaries by profession, they joined the *National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad* (MNLA). Azawad is a region located — *grosso modo* — on the desert part of the map.

Within months the Malian army was defeated and beating a retreat. In

Bamako, President Touré was toppled in a coup d'état and, in a matter of days, the MNLA took control of four cities in the north of the country and declared the independence of Azawad.

However, discrepancies also arose among the jihadists. The most radical faction of the Tuareg, comprising groups such as *Ansar-Al-Dine* or MUJAO (*Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa*), decided to impose Islamic or Sharia law in the territories occupied by them, thereby pushing out the moderate elements of the organization. Shortly afterwards, they were integrated into *Al-Qaeda in the Islamic*

Maghreb (now the JNIM). The United Nations responded to the Malian government's request for assistance and its Security Council, in Resolution 2085 in December 2012, provided for troops to be sent to the country and the regular army to be trained. This was an emergency measure that did not stop the Islamists from advancing until they were just 600 kilometres away from the capital.

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

France, a former colonial power, felt obliged to intervene and immediately deployed Operation Serval (in

reference to a wild cat from the region). A series of air operations managed to push the Islamists back and convince the moderate faction of the MNLA to reach a temporary peace agreement with Bamako, under which a share of the power was transferred to the northern regions in exchange for guaranteeing national unity and allowing pending elections to be held and, subsequently, continuing to fight the radicals together.

Over seven years later and after replacing Operation Serval with *Barkhane* in 2014, France is still present in the country. Spain has been supporting this effort all along with the aforementioned *Marfil* detachment. Despite everything, the situation is becoming even more complicated with

terrorist group, *Boko Haram*, in the north of Nigeria (and, increasingly, in Niger as well). It is difficult to know the exact number of deaths —civilian and military, local and foreign— being caused by this conflict. Numbers run into thousands every year. Villages sacked, women raped, men tortured, inexperienced soldiers ambushed, terrorist against terrorist, and the accidents, ever present, such as the French helicopter accident in which 13 troops lost their lives. The French soldier murdered on 24 July last was the 43rd victim of the conflict so far.

The average age of the Sahel's population is 16 (compared to 44 for Spain). Young people with no jobs or livelihood are forced to either join the terrorists and live from plundering or

Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and other countries, through the desert and as far as the Mediterranean. Along these routes, in camps in the middle of the desert, the French forces of *Barkhane* are fighting a war, not against the traffic but against the traffickers. A twenty-first century war which, except for the air conditioning, could be the war in *Beau Geste*, the 1924 novel (and subsequent film) about the Foreign Legion.

Despite the recent increase from 4,500 to 5,100 troops, *Barkhane* still needs reinforcements to at least stabilize the security problem in the Sahel. The three most affected countries (Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso), together with Chad and Mauritania, launched the *G5 Sahel* in 2014. This is a political initiative which aims to coordinate the efforts of the five countries in the fight, once again, against terrorism, drug trafficking and human trafficking.

Three years later, on the initiative of France, Germany and the European Union as a whole, the *G5 Sahel* Joint Force was created: five thousand troops spread over seven battalions with authority to operate in a 50-kilometre area on either side of the borders to facilitate pursuit and support. Spain is among the countries that contribute to financing this initiative. In addition, Spain also contributes to GAR-SI Sahel, rapid action surveillance and intervention groups whose training is, in part, the responsibility of the Spanish Guardia Civil rapid action group (GAR).



The aim of the European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali) is to train, educate and advise Mali's Armed Forces and the G5 Sahel Joint Force.

the permanent transfer of fighters from other fronts such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, etc.

The political situation in the capital has become complex once more, with a new president under fire, while the jihadist forces do not miss any chance to harass the army and the French troops. The conflict is expanding as far as the triple border with Niger and Burkina Faso and beyond, within these countries. There, it is already beginning to overlap with the operations of another notorious

else flee. In 2019 over 280,000 new displacements were reported in Mali alone (according to a recent report of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre), customers and victims for the human trafficking mafias that have been present in the region since time immemorial. The neighbouring countries also see many displacements, while five million people depend on humanitarian aid to survive.

The routes along which thousands of migrants escape from poverty and hunger run from the villages of

EUTM MALI

This mission was established in January 2013 at the request of the Malian government and following UN Security Council Resolution 2071. Since then, its mandate has been renewed four times, for two-year periods each time, the most recent renewal taking place in May this year. Part of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), the mission aims to provide training and education, advice and support to the Malian Armed Forces and the *G5 Sahel* Joint Force, although EUTM members do not participate in operations.

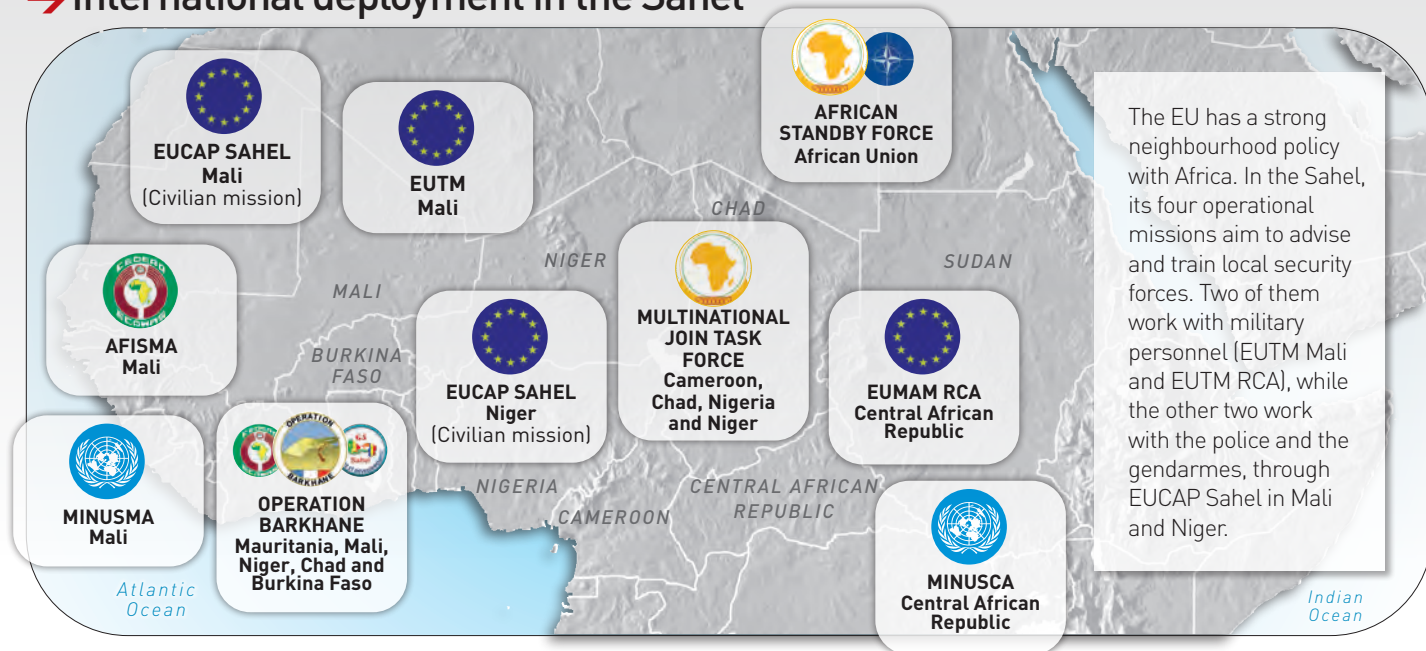
The team consists of just over 1,000 military personnel from 22 European

SECURITY FOR DEVELOPMENT

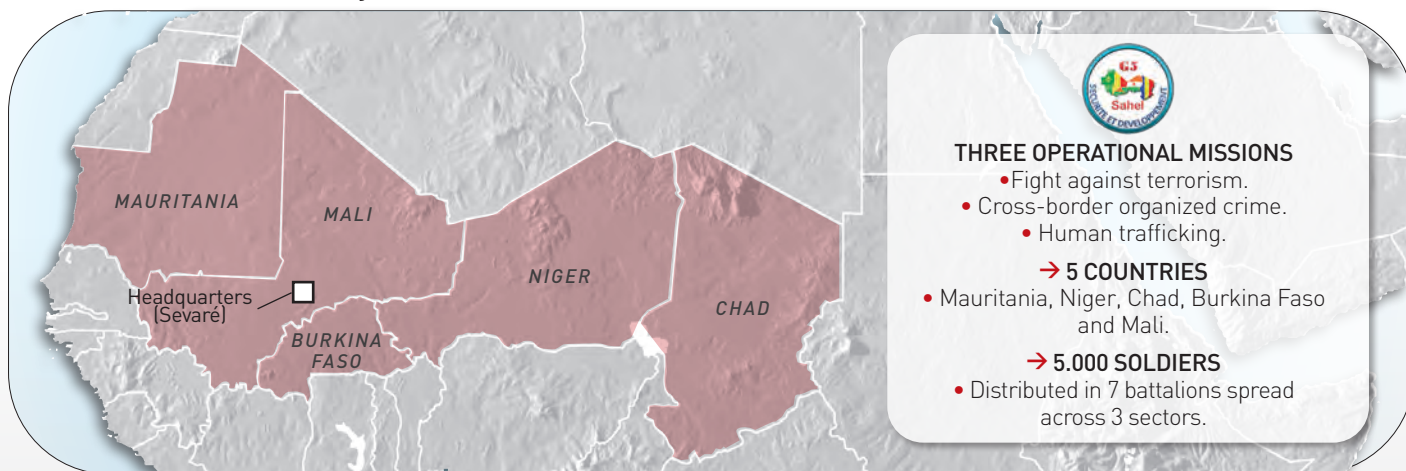
There can be no future without peace and development. To this end, both the international and the African communities have deployed several security missions while the G5 Sahel has also allowed five countries in the area to create a joint force to

tackle fanaticism and crime. This initiative has been reinforced with the **Coalition for the Sahel**, an instrument aimed at channelling development projects in key areas (education, agriculture, climate, governance and security).

→ International deployment in the Sahel

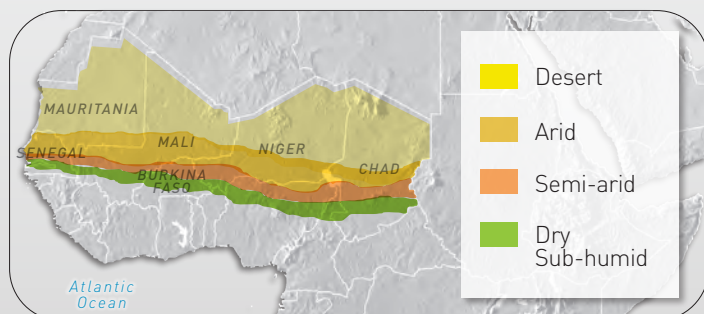


→ Joint Force for Stability (G5 Sahel)



→ The Sahel has a population of almost 140 million (with an average age of 16) which, according to UN forecasts, will rise to one billion by 2050.

• Climate zones



• Agricultural livelihood





STR/EE

An instructor from EUTM Mali with a group of Malian soldiers at the Koulikoro Training Camp.

Union countries and six non-EU countries. It is currently commanded from its headquarters in Bamako by General František Ridzák of the Czech Republic who, in turn, reports to the MPCC (the Military Planning and Conduct Capability, a permanent and non-deployable structure based in Brussels). Spain has led EUTM Mali on two occasions. In addition to advisory and training tasks, our Armed Forces have supplied a tactical group, providing the necessary force protection to allow other tasks to be performed.

In this endeavour, we should remember Marine Corps soldier Antonio Carrero Jiménez, who gave his life on 18 May 2018 when the Lince vehicle in which he was travelling on a force protection mission overturned. Also fresh in our memory is the outstanding intervention of the Spanish military personnel of the force protection unit that repelled a terrorist attack against the base in February last year, as well as the courage and resolve shown by Major Franco during the attack on Le Campement tourist resort.

Four forces report to the Headquarters in Bamako. The Advisory Task Force (ATF), located in the hotel that serves as its command post (and which suffered an armed attack in March 2016), provides advice to the personnel of the Malian Ministry of Defence and the commanders of the *G5 Sahel* Joint Force.

The Educational and Training Task Force (ETTF), based at the Koulikoro Training Camp (KTC), provides training to the local military personnel, both from a practical and theoretical perspective. The Medical Units and the Force Protection Units are also stationed in both locations. Since its deployment, among other activities, the ETTF has provided Staff and Officers courses to Malian and G5 forces. It has also collaborated in the training of the first cadets from the Military Academy and a Coordination Centre for Air Activities has been established.

TASK FORCE TAKUBA

The need for more active European participation in the fight against terrorist groups in the region, in addition to the training missions and Operation *Barkhane*, has become evident. To this end, Task Force

Takuba has been designed (*Takuba* is a type of ritual sword), again under French leadership. Its mission is to “accompany, assist and advise local forces”, a greater degree of involvement than hitherto.

Takuba will integrate special operations forces from Italy, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Belgium, Portugal, Greece, Estonia, the Czech Republic, Sweden, Norway and Denmark in what constitutes a clear message of solidarity from all over Europe with the region and French leadership. Spain will not take part in this mission for the time being, although it will strengthen — as will Germany — its presence in the missions in which it is already present (EUTM Mali and the Sahel Alliance, respectively). *Takuba* is scheduled to last for at least three years and the first contingents — about one hundred Estonian and French troops who will soon be joined by other Czech and Swedish ones — are already on the ground.

CURRENT SITUATION

At the time of writing, the situation remains unclear in Bamako following the arrest of President Keïta and Prime Minister Cissé by soldiers of the Kati barracks. The coup d'état has been condemned by regional organizations and adds uncertainty to the situation

*Some of the
major trafficking
routes run
through the
deserts of
the Sahel*

in the country although, perhaps, it could provide a way out of the permanent crisis in which it is mired. President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta of the *Rassemblement pour le Mali* (RPM) party, who came to power in 2013 preceded by a reputation for honesty and a very high degree of popularity, did not make much progress in his seven years in power.

Mali should not have to be a poor country. It is Africa's third largest gold producer and the tenth largest in the world. It has deposits of bauxite, manganese, iron, uranium and oil (production has obviously been highly mediatized due to the war since 2012). However, in his second term Keïta has not managed to maintain a minimum amount of control over the country and his government has been greatly challenged on the streets by some of the biggest demonstrations ever seen in Bamako.

The tensions are manifold. On the one hand, there is convergence in the country of *Al-Qaeda* and *Islamic State* franchises (some consider that this could be the region where they might try to regroup after practically disappearing in the Middle East), with their different interpretations of religion and, above all, of the way of implementing the Caliphate. On the other hand, tribal and ethnic hatred between sedentary and nomadic groups is being exacerbated by uncontrolled population growth and dwindling resources as the desert advances.

The desperation caused by poverty and violence pushes young people to join the most radical terrorist groups or to seek a way out with the human trafficking mafias which, like the slavers of yesteryear, cross the desert with their merchandise in search of the coast. Naturally, terrorists and traffickers share the same routes and often find synergies in their activities.

Mali needs help to develop its capabilities, but to do so it needs to regain a safe environment for business and life itself. However, much of the

central area of the country has become ungovernable due to the presence of terrorists and the number of internally displaced people has quadrupled in the past two years; this is in addition to the refugees in neighbouring countries and those who have decided to take the uncertain path towards the Mediterranean.

The approach to aid must therefore avoid creating dependency on donors, but rather provide a basis that allows Malian society to build its own future. A society that will have to rely on its women and young people and that will have to strengthen its traditions, as Senegal has done for example, to avoid becoming easy prey for radical movements.

The Malian Army, whose management some consider one-sided, has been



Perpetrators of the military coup against President Keïta on the streets of Bamako, 20 August.

overwhelmed in this mission. The European Union, led by France, has launched several initiatives to support it. EUTM Mali aims to provide training, the *G5 Sahel* Joint Force aims to eliminate cross-border impunity, and Task Force *Takuba* aims to involve European forces in accompanying the missions.

AFRICOM FORCES

The United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) forces have so far played their role in the region, but their continuity is being questioned by President Trump (there are an

estimated 1,400 US troops in the Sahel, which include special operations units and two drone bases in Niger). On the other hand, both Russia and China are increasingly present in an area that could become one of the poles of world competition in the medium term.

For Europe, however, the Sahel is not just another operation, nor is it some remote setting where battles are waged on the great geopolitical chessboard. The Sahelian strip should be among the Union's main concerns, as a collapse of the fragile local governance, apart from causing an immense humanitarian disaster, would provoke waves of instability that would break on the shores of Europe. It also represents a challenge to Europe's ability and willingness to assume greater responsibilities in security

and defence matters. Spain is on the front line and is therefore directly affected. There is a duty of solidarity and, of course, a duty to prevent threats to our security before they become uncontrollable. In this regard, on 2 September last the Spanish Minister of Defence, Margarita Robles, took part in the video conference meeting held by the member countries of the Coalition for the Sahel (France, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Canada, Estonia, Greece, Italy, Norway, Portugal and Sweden, as well as EU and UN representatives). The meeting focused on the crisis in Mali and, during

her speech, Minister Robles stressed "the importance of the international community sending a message of unity in defence of democracy" and after emphasizing "the danger that terrorist organizations operating in the area might take advantage of the situation by threatening peace and stability", she insisted on "Spain's commitment to the people of Mali", which is embodied in our contribution to the training mission that the EU is carrying out in this country.

Colonel Ángel Gómez de Ágreda

Head of Geopolitical Analysis Area
General Secretariat for Defence Policy (SEGENPOL)

PREDATOR'S eye view

The Spanish Air Force tests its new intelligence, surveillance and air reconnaissance capabilities in Talavera la Real air base (Badajoz)

SINCE the beginning of 2020, Talavera la Real air base (Badajoz) boasts experience and modernity. On the runway, under vinyl awnings and all lined up, stand the long experienced *F-5B* fighters of the 23rd Fighter Training Wing, which this year celebrate their 50th anniversary as trainer aircraft for future fighter pilots. Close to these highly experienced aircraft, next to the control tower, stands a huge mobile hangar housing the most advanced version of two *MQ-9 Predator* Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA). This plane weighs over 4,700 kilos at take-off, has a wingspan of 22 metres (14 metres more than the *F-5Bs*) and is eleven metres long between the propeller and a nose whose design recalls the head of a beluga whale. A synthetic aperture radar protrudes from its nose, while two electro-optical cameras and an infrared camera hang underneath. These cutting-edge sensors are the eyes

with ISR (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) capabilities used by the Air Force in the operational and strategic fields.

And not only during the daytime, but also at night, because the two *NR.05 Predator B* (Spanish military name) and the other two that are scheduled to arrive at the air base in Badajoz before the end of this year, are both operated via satellite.

This is the only kind of Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) in

the Spanish Armed Forces with this capability. A system that enables it to observe from thousands of kilometres away, while flight crews take turns on the ground for long periods of time, which might even exceed 24 hours. The images captured by the aircraft sensors from a maximum ceiling of 50,000 feet (15,240 metres) arrive in real time and are interpreted on the ground by analysts who may also be far away from the location where they are taken. Due to its take-off weight, range, endurance and altitude, the new Air Force *Predator* is a RPAS Class III aircraft and falls into the MALE (Medium Altitude/Long Endurance) category.

ISR CAPABILITY

Next to the mobile hangar, also in a temporary and deployable facility, the RPAS Air Force Group takes shape and grows. "A pioneering unit in the Air Force", as highlighted by its commander, Lieutenant Colonel Juan José Terrados, who goes back

*The images
captured by
the aircraft
are analysed
in real time by
operators*



The design of the *MQ-9 Predator* meets the concept of a motor glider, which makes it easier to control throughout the flight, but requires pilots to have greater skills during take-off and landing.



Inside the Ground Control Station, the NR.05 cockpit, where the pilot and the sensor operator work together —left and right, respectively— managing a large flow of information displayed on their screens.

in time to the period 1989-2002 to find a precedent in the Spanish Air Force. He refers to the role that the 123rd Squadron of the 12th Fighter Wing stationed at Torrejón air base (Madrid) played for thirteen years with the *Phantom II RF-4C*, a unit “exclusively dedicated to tactical reconnaissance tasks”.

These fighters operated at very low altitude and at very high speed (trying to avoid anti-aircraft artillery) for target designation or battle damage assessment after a strike. During one single mission, they would impress up to 100 metres of film that had to be developed for analysis after landing. The *Predator B* is also capable of target designation and damage assessment,

however, unlike the *Phantoms*, this RPAS interprets the images it takes in real time flying at low speeds, just like a propeller airplane. In fact, its design and construction meet the concept of a motor glider, with a maximum speed of 230 knots. “However, when we carry out ISR flights performing holding patterns we do so between 95 and 115 knots”, says Major Andrés Bello, commander of the 233rd Squadron and pilot of the aircraft. He argues that “in a reconnaissance, surveillance and intelligence mission, the key is what one has to see, and the longer we remain in orbit over the target and the closer, the better images we get”.

In addition to these capabilities are those offered by the *Predator's* targeting

systems: the MTS-B or Multi-spectral Targeting System module located under its nose. Colloquially called the “ball” by the members of the unit, “it contains three sensors, one infrared and two electro-optical, one of them with high light sensitivity, which enables us to see any light inside a house” points out First Sergeant Javier Fraile, also an aircraft sensor operator. He explains that optical and infrared images can also overlap or merge into one, “in such a way that we can see the colour of a car and its activity level based on the engine temperature”.

In addition to the eyeball sensors, there is a synthetic aperture radar, optimized to track moving targets. Commander Bello emphasizes that

The MQ-9 Predator aircraft flies almost every day for an average of six hours



Above, left, the aircraft's synthetic aperture radar. On the right, Master Sergeant Tenorio fixes an avionics system failure in the aircraft. Above and below, a pilot and a mechanic checking the aircraft during a pre-flight inspection.



The system consists of four aircraft and three ground control stations

“the rest of the Armed Forces’ RPAS do not have the capability to operate in such a wide variety of spectrums (visible, infrared and radar, day and night)”.

GROUND CONTROL

Like its predecessor, the *Phantom*, or its current “partner” at Talavera la Real, the *F-5B*, the *Predator* also has two crew members. However, they do not wear helmets or anti-g suits because the pilot and sensor operator of the *NR.05*

Squadron in Palma de Mallorca at the controls of a *Superpuma*. Next to him, at the Ground Control Station, is First Sergeant Alejandro Gutiérrez from Torrejón air base, where he worked in the Central Command and Control Group, known as *Pegaso*.

This speciality, Command and Control, and his status as a non-commissioned officer, with proven experience in Air Force units, define the profile of the first sensor operators of these aircraft. “Its handling is

Depending on the type of mission, the members of the basic crew may be joined by satellite communications and intelligence personnel (image analysts) or by those in charge of maintenance of the ground control station which, in the case of a conventional aircraft, would also be on board (for instance, a *P5 Orion* Maritime Patrol Aircraft). However, in the case of a RPAS such as the *NR.05*, it will be located in different places on the ground, and remotely coordinated.

JOINT OBSERVATION

What the pilot and the sensor operator see on the cockpit screens is viewed and analysed at the same time by specialists from the 47th Air Force Group at Torrejón air base (Madrid) or from the Armed Forces Joint Staff Intelligence Centre.

The *Predators* of the 23rd Fighter Wing are a means of joint observation that will preferably be used in purely military operations but also, as Lieutenant Colonel Terrados points out, “in other missions assigned to the Armed Forces in support of the state’s action”, such as fires, natural disasters, customs surveillance, control of illegal immigration or drug trafficking in collaboration with the state security forces, damage assessment, search for survivors, etc.

The Spanish *Predator* made its first flight on 30 January, after passing several tests on the ground, among others, the engine, generator and satellite link tests. Since then, it has been flying virtually every day for an average of six hours, carrying out the so-called system acceptance tests to verify that, as stated by Lieutenant Colonel Terrados, “the system assigned to this Fighter Wing meets all the technical and mission requirements”, in other words, its endurance, persistence, precision and discretion capacities.

José Luis Expósito
Photos: Pepe Díaz



The new remotely operated Air Force aircraft is an eleven-metre long turboprop with a wingspan of 22 metres, eight more than the *F-5B* trainer aircraft.

do not physically board the aircraft, but rather operate from inside the Ground Control Station (GCS). The Air Force has two of these centres, also deployable, and expects the arrival of another one before the end of the year.

The pilot and the sensor operator —an officer and a non-commissioned officer, respectively— make up the basic crew of a *Predator*. “This aircraft offers many flight prospects, this is why we have fighter, transport and helicopter pilots in this unit”, explains Captain Efrén Delgado, previously assigned to the 801st Search and Rescue

totally new to us”, says Gutiérrez. His speciality is very much focused on providing support to the pilot, since a lot of information has to be managed, such as flight parameters, air space conditions, communications with the ground, aircraft data update or assistance in case of emergency or during landing and take-off, the most critical phases of the aircraft. Contrary to what happens when the crew is on board, “*Predator* pilots learn to fly before taking off and landing the aircraft”, says Lieutenant Colonel Terrados.



The briefing and debriefing for the crews take place in the Current Operations Centre, from where they monitor, also in real time, the aircraft's performance in flight.

*The new RPAS
is capable of
operating in a
wide variety
of spectrums
(visible, infrared
and radar) day
and night*



A decade of EXCELLENCE

NATO's Counter Improvised Explosive Devices Centre of Excellence (C-IED CoE) celebrates ten years as an international touchstone in this field



NATO's Counter Improvised Explosive Devices Centre of Excellence (C-IED CoE) located in Hoyo de Manzanares (Madrid), of which Spain is the framework nation and main sponsor, celebrates its tenth anniversary on 16 November 2020. That same day in 2010, the North Atlantic Council approved the accreditation of this centre as a NATO CoE, as well as its activation as an International Military Organization. The Centre's mission is to provide subject matter expertise in order to support the Alliance, its Partners and the International Community in the fight against Improvised Explosive Devices

(IEDs). It cooperates to increase the security of Allied Nations and also all the troops and civilians deployed in theatres of operation, reducing or eliminating the threats from IEDs used or for use, in particular, by terrorist and insurgent networks.

Hoyo de Manzanares is one of the 25 NATO accredited Centres of Excellence, sponsored by one or several nations, that offers recognized expertise in this field for the benefit of the Alliance. These centres are not part of the NATO Command Structure (NCS), but their activities are coordinated through Allied Command Transformation, based in Norfolk, United States.

The headquarters of the C-IED CoE is a building on the same premises as the Army Engineer Academy and the International Demining Centre, the latter being the national benchmark in deactivation of explosive devices and ammunition and an international reference for humanitarian demining. They have a close relationship and share some common interests; however they fulfil very different functions and have distinct organisational structures.

The Engineer Academy provides external security and support services to the NATO Centre, facilitating its daily running and lightening its structure. In turn, having experts in the C-IED CoE



close at hand, including foreign military staff, allows the Army Academy students to learn new skills on a regular basis, and in English, which provides added value to their technical and language training.

ESTABLISHMENT

On 15 September 2007, during a visit to the International Demining Centre, the then defence minister, José Antonio Alonso, announced Spain's decision to offer NATO a Counter Improvised Explosive Devices Centre of Excellence. This proposal was formalised in December that year by the Chief of Defence (CHOD) through Allied Command Transformation (ACT). In 2008, ACT confirmed that the future CoE concept fully met with Allied principles, giving the green light to its establishment, which was approved by the Council of Ministers on 2 October 2009.

In June 2010, six countries signed the memorandum of understanding in Norfolk: Germany, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, and Spain as the framework nation. In October, Allied Command Transformation certified that the facilities, quality and level of readiness offered to the Allies matched NATO standards. The North Atlantic Council signed the final accreditation on 16 November, which is why that day is considered the foundation date of the Centre.

The six signatory countries were subsequently joined by six others —the United States, Greece, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Sweden and Turkey —, bringing the number of flags flying at the C-IED CoE facilities to twelve. One of the nations, Sweden, is not a NATO member, although it is a preferential partner.

Spain, as the host nation, has the largest number of posts allocated for experts in the fight against IEDs, 27 in total; 16 others are assigned to the other nations, and 13 are open to potential new members joining the C-IED CoE in the future. Spain also contributes with 19 staff members for administrative and support purposes.

STRUCTURE

Fighting against IEDs involves a comprehensive approach, facilitating the contribution to the Centre's activities

Facilities of the C-IED CoE in the town of Hoyo de Manzanares, northwest of Madrid. Above right, an information-gathering exercise after an IED incident and preparing a test to assess the damage caused by an explosive vest. Below, staff obtain data from a computer during a DOMEX course.



A daily struggle for security in theatres of operation



**Coronel
José Antonio
Cruz Moro**
Director
del CoE C-IED

AS Director of the C-IED CoE, I find it difficult to express in just a few lines the importance of our work, which, due to its necessary discretionary nature in terms of publicity, runs the risk of losing its true meaning. Our daily struggle is to deliver security to the military and civilian staff deployed or resident in any geographical setting where the presence of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) may represent a threat. It is a never-ending task, which we gratefully accept as a challenge.

As the framework nation, Spain took the right step at the right time. In the first decade of the 21st century, a large number of IEDs appeared and turned into a problem. They became a real military issue in all the theatres of operation in which NATO countries were deployed, since the mere existence of these devices prevented any other activity, such as providing security to unstable areas, due to the high risk of insurgent activity. Spain proposed the establishment of this Centre of Excellence to NATO, a Centre of which all its components, both Spanish and foreign, are particularly proud. Pride that I personally wish to share with the rest of the Spanish people. The Centre is not only for Spain, but it was only Spain that saw the need for the Centre. And we were right. We were right because IEDs are here to stay as a weapon of war. A weapon that is the main cause of military and civilian casualties worldwide in today's conflicts, only limited by human imagination to do harm with explosives.

But what is the C-IED fight? In the simplest possible way, I will define it as the integration of available information and intelligence on explosive devices and the human groups that use them, with the necessary actions to plan and execute operations aiming, where possible, to permanently eliminate the operational capability of these groups and reduce the direct effects of the explosions. The threat that is being fought against is not the device that explodes, but rather the entire networking structure that finances, constructs, transports, plants and activates explosive devices. It cannot be understood from a defensive perspective, since the C-IED fight is substantially offensive, with high demands on data analysis and a future perspective determining the centre of gravity of each of the terrorist and insurgent networks present in theatres of operation and their possible operational evolution once attacked.

The C-IED CoE has been present for ten years as an International Military Organisation. The first steps required clear guidance to avoid duplication when dealing with new activities. And it was no easy task. The experience of all that personnel deployed in theatres of operation as diverse as Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Mali made it difficult to provide new input to what had already been worked on, studied and analysed thoroughly, leaving little room for novelty or creativity. But that is part of "excellence"; perhaps not seeing what others see, but at least trying to do so, because there is always "something" to contribute.

There is no way to evaluate our work that scientifically correlates (qualitatively and quantitatively speaking) our efforts with results in the area of operations, nor is there a correlation between military exercises and the concept of global security. It is impossible to assess this, beyond the fact that what we have placed at the disposal of Allied nations, or countries we have worked in, has been used as

a reference or working tool in headquarters or units deployed. And those results exist. To mention just a few: generating the Human Networks Analysis and Targeting concept for NATO; Defence Capacity Building activities in nations such as Jordan and Iraq; open sources analysis of incidents and tactics used by terrorist and insurgent networks in different areas of the world; or technological projects such as PRINSE or BLADE for protection against explosions.

They are our only but satisfactory guarantee on the organizational level, but much more motivating on a personal level, since we are convinced that these tools and projects result in greater security for the personnel who experience IED attacks, regardless of the country they come from or wherever they are.

The multinational nature of the military personnel that make up the Centre, as well as the wide range of State Security Forces and Intelligence Agencies that participate in it, are basic to our work. In the C-IED CoE, there is no room for complacency because absolute excellence does not exist. However, trying to reach that level of excellence requires accepting our shortcomings and seeing them as an incentive to continue working and researching. When lives are at stake, excellence ceases to be a simple quality and becomes an attitude of service. This is the course of action that all the members of the centre, military or civilian, national or foreign, want to establish in our daily work, as has been the case for the last decade.

*IEDs are the
main cause of
military and
civilian casualties
in today's conflicts*

not only of military members, but also of state security forces, members of the intelligence community and civilians from the research and technological industry. In addition to the multinational nature of other NATO Centres of Excellence, this endows it with a marked inter-agency character.

The director of the Centre, who is always a Colonel of the Spanish Armed Forces, is currently Infantry Colonel José Antonio Cruz Moro. He is assisted more directly by a deputy director (a U.S. Colonel), two operations officers (a French major and a Dutch major), an executive officer (a Spanish Lieutenant Colonel) and a legal adviser. There are also three branches for each of the basic pillars of NATO counter improvised explosive devices: Prepare the Force, Attack the Networks and Defeat the Device. The structure is completed with the aforementioned Spanish administrative and support element.

The Prepare the Force branch deals with supporting the determination of requirements and objectives within the Alliance in multinational education, training and exercises, and supports the harmonisation of allied C-IED training activities. In coordination with HQ Allied Command Transformation and Allied Command Operations, it also develops advanced multinational courses for C-IED experts.

The Attack the Network branch focuses its efforts on countering terrorist and insurgent networks that allow for financing, propaganda, manufacture and other actions enabling the emplacement of a device. It develops initiatives in support of anticipatory analysis and effective planning for engagement of networks; tries to understand the complex nature of threat networks and their interaction with neutral/friendly ones; promotes a broader inter-agency (Military, Law Enforcement & Security) approach against multifaceted cross-boundary threats from networks; and encourages information exchange among the C-IED Community of Interest.

The Defeat the Device branch aims to assist in the detection, recognition and location of IED components, and in neutralising their effects; obtain information on C-IED techniques and technologies necessary to support the other two pillars of C-IED; provide protection for personnel, equipment and facilities; conduct concept development and experimentation; cooperate in R&D C-IED Projects; provide advice on standards for the development and/or evaluation of C-IED systems; promote the interoperability of C-IED electronic countermeasures; and support the NATO Defence Planning Process in the area of C-IED requirements;



One of the activities of the centre is Defence Capability Building (DCB) of non-NATO countries.

ACTIVITIES

The Centre in Hoyo de Manzanares coordinates the review of two NATO publications, STANAG 2294 and 2295, and provides support and advice to numerous working groups on the development of NATO's doctrine and concepts in connection with the fight against improvised explosive devices.

Courses include the C-IED Staff Officers Course (CSOC); the C-IED Awareness Course (CIAC) for non-NATO nations; the Weapons Intelligence Team Course (WIT and Instructor Training WIT T3); the Basic Field Exploitation Course (BIFEC); the Attack the Network Operational Course (AtNOC); the Document and Media Exploitation Course (DOMEX);

the Analyst Notebook Users Course (ANUC); and the online Advanced Distributed Learning Course (ADL C-IED). In addition, awareness-raising activities, such as C-IED seminars, are organised for key elements of the organisations, not only at national and international level but also for countries that collaborate with the Alliance.

The Centre has promoted various R&D projects, including the mathematical modelling of the effects of IED-explosively formed projectiles and the development of software for the processing and exchange of information on the subject. The Centre currently collaborates with various academic organizations in projects to improve the resistance of structures to IED explosion effects and to enhance IED identification and detection means (projects Prinse, Blade and Safedrone).

Likewise, the C-IED CoE provides advice to the NATO Science and Technology Organisation and cooperates with R&D agencies to ensure that future technology effectively combats current and potential IED threats. Every two years, it organizes a Technology Workshop aimed at promoting cooperation and information exchange among the C-IED Community of Interest: end-users, defence industry and R&D organisations.

Information is also collected from open sources on IED events, and regular or occasional reports are provided on specific issues or incidents. This is supported by the Interagency Workshop, which is regularly organized to bring together experts from the military, law enforcement and other agencies and organisations.

The Centre's mobile advisory and training teams also carry out visits and travel to other countries, either as part of NATO's activities for the benefit of nations included in one of the various cooperation frameworks, or at the request of these countries or their Defence or Interior Ministries.

Santiago Fdez. del Vado/ Photos: C-IED CoE



The rescue of ground crews is the most critical phase in CSAR missions.

BEHIND ENEMY LINES

First *master's* in aircrew rescue of the Tactical Leadership Programme (TLP)

MAYDAY, mayday! A fighter bomber has been shot down. Soon confirmation is received that the pilot and navigator have ejected into enemy territory. At this point, the priority of the coalition, in particular of its Air Force, is to rescue the two crew members by way of a CSAR (Combat Search and Rescue) mission. A similar situation was simulated in

Albacete at the beginning of July within the framework of the Tactical Leadership Programme (TLP), with the participation of top forces from the US Marines, the French special operations teams and the Spanish Air Force.

Once again, the TLP has been at the forefront of NATO's elite training by launching, for the first time in Europe, a master's to qualify air rescue mission

commanders in combat or hostile areas or CSAR. These missions bring a large number of action and support means into play, requiring very precise planning, coordinated by experienced professionals. Specifically, the course taught by the TLP organization from 29 June to 10 July was intended to serve the demanding CSAR programme approved by NATO to train and update its pool of instructors



Rubén Gallindo

A team from the Parachute Sapper Squadron (EZAPAC) in front of their “workhorse”, an AS-332B *Super Puma* helicopter.



Rubén Gallindo



Julio Maiz

MV-22B *Osprey* tiltrotor V/STOL aircraft. Above, one of the *Eurofighters* participating in the course. Below, the *Atlas* anti-aircraft station of the EADA.



Ejército del Aire

Certification as experts in CSAR missions is within the reach of very few Air Forces

specialized in leading these complex missions. The course is aimed at fighter crews, preferably those qualified with the TLP flight course. Its participants will graduate as NATO *Salty*, equivalent to the traditional US *Sandy*, and will return to their nations as trained and certified experts in CSAR missions, a specialty within the reach of very few Air Forces.

These rescue operations are of great psychological importance for the crews involved in air campaigns, knowing that, in the event of being shot down, they can rely on an effective CSAR service. In addition, this also deprives the adversary of an important source of intelligence and of a great propaganda opportunity, since global social networks would surely spread information about the captured pilots.

Initially scheduled for last spring, the course had to be postponed until the end of June due to COVID-19. It was designed in the preceding months by a small professional staff from various air forces assigned to the TLP, with the support of American instructors (CSAR experts) and Spanish specialists in SERE (Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape).

Among other skills, the course placed special emphasis on procedures for locating and protecting survivors, the use of air-to-ground weapons, the protection of rescue vehicles and the integration of all means involved in the mission (personnel recovery forces, controllers, rescue helicopters, etc.).

FLIGHT MISSIONS

In total, seven flight missions were carried out. Each day a different pilot led the mission as Rescue Mission Commander (RMC), using the *Salty 1* tactical callsign. In addition, their skills were tested as *Salty 3*, in charge of protecting the rescue vehicles during the mission, or acting as "wingmen" (*Salty 2* and *Salty 4*).

Four Air Force *Eurofighter* crews participated in this first edition,

specifically two from the 11th Fighter Wing and two others from the 14th Fighter Wing. With only four students, pilots were able to deal thoroughly with the most intricate details concerning communications, exercises and techniques used in conducting the mission.

The Spanish Air Force also moved two *AS-532B Super Puma* helicopters from the 803rd Squadron of the 48th Fighter Wing to Albacete. These rotary wing assets are a key action element in CSAR missions, as they are directly

Army (with NASAMS and *Skyguard* air defence systems), the Navy (whose Marines provided *Mistral* air defence missiles), and by observers from other NATO training centres.

There were also early warning aircraft, in this case provided by France and which also contributed to the mission with an *E-2 Hawkeye* turboprop and an *E-3F Sentry*. Also taking part in the course were the Marines of the SP-MAGTF-CR-AF, the US crisis response force in Africa based in Morón (Seville). They participated with their



A group of US Marines walk towards the two *MV-22B Osprey* stationed in the apron of Albacete Air Base.

responsible for rescuing shot down crews. During the exercise organized by the TLP, the special operations teams assigned to the rescue flew on board these helicopters. Such teams comprised personnel of the Parachute Sapper Squadron (EZAPAC) and French paratroopers. The *Armée de l'Air* (French Air Force) also contributed with two *EC-725 Caracal* helicopters.

The course was supported by other units of the Air Force (the Air Deployment Support Squadron, EADA; and the Command and Control System Headquarters), the

ground combat forces -specialized in rescue missions- and the *MV-22B Osprey* aircraft, which served to reinforce CSAR operations. Moreover, two of its *KC-130J Super Hercules* refuelling aircraft ensured the aerial refuelling of participating aircraft.

As in all TLP courses, they established an opposing force, or "Red", made up of aircraft, in particular *MV-22B*, and of anti-aircraft means of the EADA, the Spanish Marine Corps and the Army's Anti-Aircraft Artillery Command.

Julio Maíz



HQ NRDC-ESP

Bétera conducts the DEPLOYEX II/20 EXERCISE

Its purpose has been to complete its preparation as a Joint NATO Headquarters

THE NATO Rapid Deployment Headquarters in Bétera (Valencia) is engaged in the completion of the *Deployex II/20* exercise at the *Jaime I* base, located in the Valencian municipality. It started in early September with the assembly of an advanced command post (ICE, Initial Command Element) and ended on the 24th of that month.

Approximately 200 soldiers from 11 allied nations participate in this exercise, deploying more than 100 collective tents, many of which corresponded to the new tent with collective protection against NBC (Nuclear, Bacteriological and

Chemical) attacks, recently acquired by the Army. The high number of participants and the pandemic situation caused by COVID-19 meant that a strict protocol of sanitary hygiene and the maintenance of social distance was established in order to undertake a deployment which guarantees safety conditions.

With the *Deployex II/20*, both the Headquarters itself and the units which support it, Battalion Headquarters, Military Police Battalion and Transmissions Regiment n° 21, trained in the assembly of an advanced command post and its transformation

into a Main Command Post (MCP) with the ability to conduct any Alliance operation.

The purpose of this exercise has been to complete its preparation and verify its availability as a Joint NATO Headquarters (JTF HQ, Joint Task Force Headquarters), a role it has assumed since the 1st of January of this year. It will also have served to initiate its transition towards a new commitment with the Atlantic Alliance, assuming the role of Army Corps Headquarters for conventional combat operations (WFC Warfighting Corps) within the Alliance Forces structure in 2022.

This task will mean for the HQ NRDC-ESP, being in a position to command up to five divisions from various countries of the Alliance, in a high intensity operation, against an adversary of similar capabilities and advanced technology.

As such, with this exercise, the Bétera Headquarters continues its training to lead operational organisations and conduct operations of any kind; conventional, hybrid warfare or even to support civilian organisations, as has been evident following its participation in the *Balmis* Operation to fight the pandemic.

HQ NRDC-ESP



Military doctors treat the wounded after a road accident caused by the fall of a bus.

Ángel Manrique/DECE

[anniversary]

Fifteen years since THE SOLIDARITY RESPONSE TO PAKISTAN

Spain formed the core of NATO's first humanitarian mission outside its area of operations to assist the victims of the earthquake in October 2005



Development work for the Spanish contingent's operating base in Arja (above, left). Below, Pakistani people involved in rescuing the victims. A Spanish engineer working on the reconstruction of a building (right).

IT was the first humanitarian mission of the Atlantic Alliance outside the Washington Treaty's area of operations and it benefited from Spain's leadership and significant contribution: *Solidarity Response II* took place 15 years ago to help the victims of the earthquake in northern Pakistan. For three months, the Spanish Armed Forces performed an essential task of solidarity with the victims, including rebuilding various infrastructures.

The earthquake, measuring 7.6 on the Richter scale, occurred on 8 October 2005, just before the onset of the harsh Himalayan winter. The epicentre was located in the Kashmir region, about 95 kilometres northeast of Islamabad, Pakistan's capital, and shook areas of Afghanistan and India as well. This violent earthquake and the strong aftershocks that followed sowed desolation and death in the region. Muzaffarabad, the capital of

Pakistani Kashmir, and cities such as Bagh and Balakot, were partly reduced to rubble. 86,000 people died, 106,000 were injured and more than three and a half million lost their homes.

REQUEST FOR SUPPORT

In response to the request of Pakistani Prime Minister, General Pervez Musharraf, and to the express appeal of the United Nations, NATO conducted

The earthquake occurred just before the onset of the harsh Himalayan winter

a humanitarian aid operation in the affected area, by activating and deploying part of its Response Force 2005 (NRF-5), whose land component commanded, on a rotating basis, the High Readiness Force Land Headquarters (HRF(L)HQ) at Bétera (Valence).

According to Jan Egeland, the UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator at that time, the earthquake in Pakistan had become the worst nightmare ever faced by the organization. He believed it to be even worse than the tsunami of the preceding year in the Indian Ocean, due to the inaccessibility of some places located in very mountainous regions, and the prevailing bad weather, with temperatures dropping below zero degrees. "We — Egeland admitted — are humanitarian civilians who do not know how to evacuate people from the Himalayas, but the largest military organization in the world has to know how to do so".

A milestone in NATO's history

Lt. Col. Tomás Quecedo Estébanez

Commander of Military Information Activities at Bétera headquarters.

Former operations commander of NATO's land component in Pakistan

On 8 October 2005, a devastating earthquake struck the Kashmir region, killing 86,000 people and injuring up to 100,000. It destroyed villages, schools and hospitals, and caused landslides that blocked roads. Over 3.5 million people lost their homes. The Pakistani government requested assistance from NATO, not only for those injured during the earthquake, but also to prevent a second wave of deaths due to the lack of food, medical care and shelter as a result of the imminent onset of the harsh Himalayan winter.

The Alliance delivered assistance by activating and deploying four elements: the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Relief Coordination Centre (EADRCC) in Brussels —responsible for coordinating donations both from NATO allies and partner countries—, caught the air bridge flight from Turkey and Germany to Pakistan; a joint headquarters serviced by personnel from the NATO Joint Force Command (JFCL) in Lisbon, and reinforced by staff from NATO's Supreme Headquarters (SHAPE) —in charge of coordinating efforts at operational level in Pakistan—, was deployed to the capital, Islamabad; a forward air component led by France, consisting of a German helicopter detachment, a Luxembourg rescue helicopter and a fuel tank operated by a French unit in Abbottabad, was deployed to Islamabad.

The land component was led by NATO's Rapid Deployment Headquarters in Spain (HQ NRDC-ESP) and was deployed to Bagh, in the earthquake zone. It included a headquarters entirely built by the NRDC-ESP, assisted by a signals unit and a support unit, and reinforced with capabilities of the Spanish National Support Element (NSE); a multinational engineer battalion, led by Spain, consisting of two light engineer units in the Bagh district (one Spanish and one Polish), which were the first to be deployed; an Italian engineer unit with heavy construction equipment; a British engineer unit specialised in high-altitude relief efforts; four water purification teams; a multinational field hospital deployed in the Bagh area with inpatient and outpatient capacity, operated by mobile medical teams from the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, France, Portugal and the United Kingdom; and two civilian-military cooperation teams from Slovenia and France.

The engineers' primary activities included building 110 shelters for the population; repairing nearly 60 kilometres of roads; removing 41,500 cubic metres of debris, building health clinics and 22 schools, 13 of which were temporary; delivering 267 cubic metres of drinking water for the victims, and upgrading a permanent drinking water distribution and storage system capable of supplying up to 8,400 people a day.

NATO's field hospital treated up to 4,890 patients and performed 160 major surgeries. Mobile medical units treated 3,424 patients in remote mountain villages and contributed to the World Health Organization's immunisation programme for epidemic outbreaks.

Special mention should be made of the selfless work carried out by the National Support Element deployed by Spain as part of what was known as Operation *Solidarity Response II*. The professionalism and speed with which they built the military camp at Arja, housing the land component —except for the multinational hospital— and the medical support provided to all the forces deployed and the nearby population allowed all NATO engineers and the multinational hospital to entirely concentrate their efforts on helping the victims.

The land component was led by Bétera headquarters

While NATO Response Force elements had previously been deployed to support the 2004 Athens Olympic Games and provide relief in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in September and October 2005, the Pakistan earthquake relief operation was a landmark, as it was the first time the NATO Response Force land component was deployed, and outside its area of responsibility. The irony of the case is that the full operational capability of the NATO Response Force was not declared until 28 November 2006 at the Riga Summit, a year after the High Readiness Force Land Headquarters led the operation in Pakistan.

Fifteen years later, NATO's Rapid Deployment Headquarters in Spain remains on alert, constantly being trained and adapting to a highly dynamic security environment and to new concepts and doctrines. This adaptability, its willingness to operate at the forefront and the extraordinary professionalism of its members have forged the successes of the past and will guide its brilliant future.



Hélène Gicquel

Members of the Spanish engineer company rebuild a school in the town of Bagh, one of the most affected by the earthquake. Below, victims of the disaster and service members delivering humanitarian aid to the population.



Hélène Gicquel



MDE

Spain's participation in this mission was approved by the government on 26 October and ratified the following day, on 27 October, by the Congressional Defence Committee, with no votes against and the abstention of Izquierda Unida (United Left). This parliamentary requirement was not yet binding, as the Organic Law on National Defence, mandating

Congress to authorise the Armed Forces' intervention in missions abroad, was still under consideration in the Senate.

ACTIVITY

The Land Component of the NRF-5, commanded by General José Antonio Bautís Otero and made up of personnel from Bétera Headquarters, remained

in the area for 90 days. For the tactical command of the operations it had its own headquarters and the unit attached to it; an engineer battalion consisting of Bulgarian, Italian, Polish, British and Spanish companies, and a platoon from Lithuania; three Lithuanian water purification teams; a field hospital led by the Czechs and the Dutch; and French and Slovenian



Repair work on the damaged roof of a house.



Spain provided two sapper platoons from the Airborne and Parachute Brigades and an engineer vehicle and machinery platoon. Below, Pakistani men, women and children waiting to receive medical care.



*The land
component of
NATO's Response
Force remained
in the area for
90 days*

December 2020

civilian-military cooperation teams. A total of 1,000 military personnel, which included 370 Spaniards, were deployed in the cities of Arja, Islamabad, Lahore and Rawalpindi.

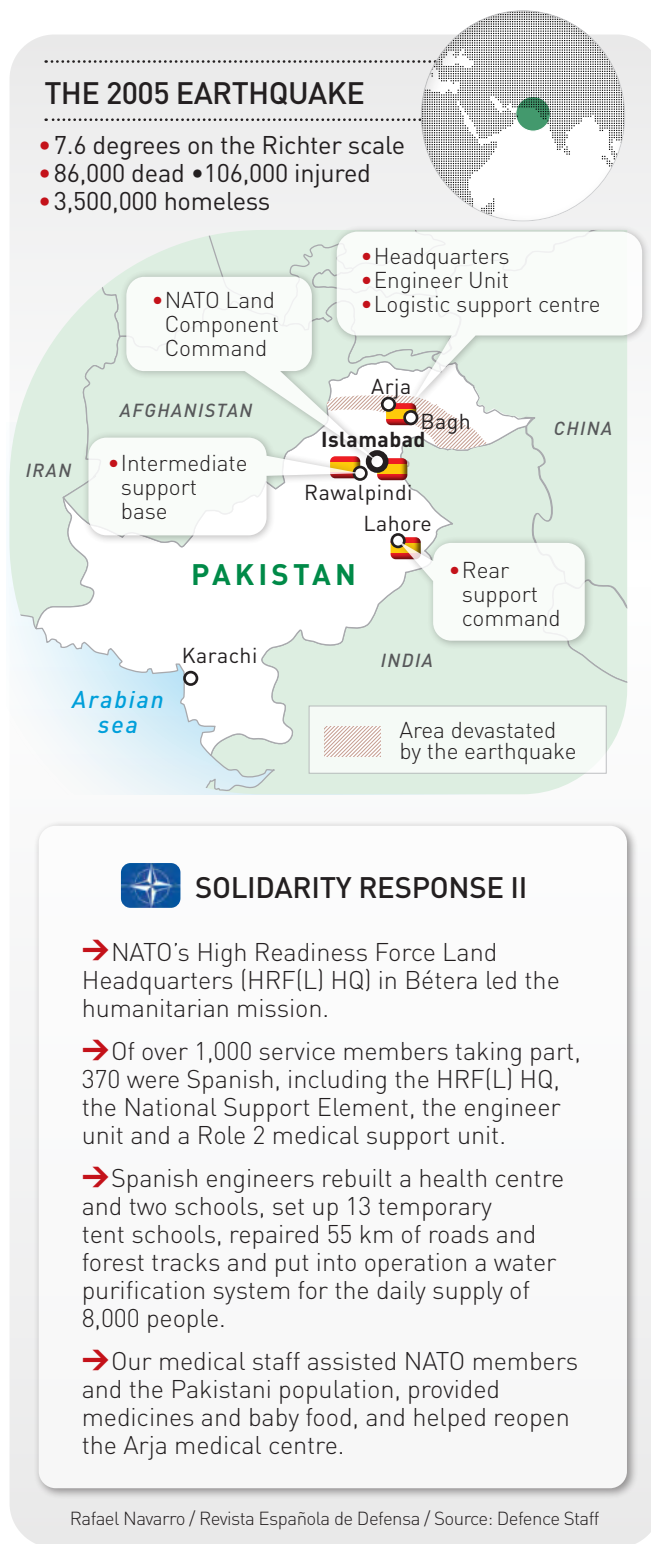
The multinational engineer battalion cleared roads of landslides and snow, and reinforced and improved eighteen retaining walls in very difficult-to-access areas with steep slopes. It also built eight semi-permanent modules to house schools and another one for a healthcare centre; 84 shelters to be used as medical clinics and schools; and a water tank and piping system to ensure the water supply of the people of Arjan. It also distributed 270,000 litres of drinking water and removed 41,000 cubic metres of rubble.

The Spanish company, which was part of this battalion —supported by troops from the United States, which provided the bulk of the helicopters and acted independently of the Alliance— consisted of 162 soldiers. Members of the Parachute Brigade (BRIPAC), the Airborne Light Brigade (BRILAT) and the 11th Specialist Engineer Regiment of Salamanca, rebuilt a healthcare centre and two schools, set up 13 tent schools, repaired 55 kilometres of roads and forest tracks and put into operation a water purification system for the daily supply of 8,000 people.

Logistic support was delivered by 50 service members from the 21st Logistic Group of Seville as well as other units, and the senior staff comprised 81 men and women stationed at the High Readiness Force Land Headquarters (HRF(L) HQ) in Bétera.

The Army's Forward Echelon of Medical Care (EMAT) was sent to Pakistan, forming a *Role-2* type medical

support unit, assisting members of the international forces and the Pakistani people. It also helped reopen the medical centre in Arja, donating medicines, baby food and vitamin supplements, according to the most prevalent health needs among the local population. The local people were particularly grateful for the assistance provided on 11 November to those injured in a road accident near the



[anniversary]

Spanish detachment, when a bus carrying civilians fell from a height of 30 metres. On this occasion, two stabilisation cells —each consisting of a doctor, nurse, driver and health worker— and personnel from the aid station arrived at the scene of the accident in less than ten minutes. There, they classified, stabilised and transferred ten injured people to the EMAT surgical team set up in the detachment.

In the last few days of the mission, Spanish soldiers handed out 5,000 folders with sheets of paper and pencils sent by the Ministry of Defence to the students of the boys' and girls' schools in Arja and Bagh.

WITHDRAWAL

In order to facilitate the return of our contingent, a service support unit was sent to Pakistan, made up of members of the 11th Specialist Engineer Regiment of Salamanca and the 13th Railway Regiment of Saragossa. Heavy equipment was shipped by rail from Islamabad to Karachi, and from Karachi to Spain by sea. The final military personnel flight, carrying the last thirty soldiers to withdraw, arrived at Torrejón air base on 16 February.

"Our service members are able to touch people's hearts. Although we were first welcomed with mistrust, they were now very happy with our presence", explained General Bautís Otero on 29 January upon his arrival at Manises airport (Valence). He also highlighted the difficulties in carrying out his mission, since "travelling ten kilometres could take several hours", and referred to the atrocious living conditions of the population. "Despite the hardship in which they live and the little they have, they offered you everything they had", said Sergeant First Class Anabel Rodríguez.

Santiago Fernández del Vado

The UN celebrates its 75th anniversary trying to cope with enormous global challenges within a changing international order

UNITED NATIONS, between heaven and hell

Pedro Rodríguez

Professor of International Relations. Comillas Pontifical University

THE second and tragically deceased Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Swede Dag Hammarskjöld, is claimed to have given one of the best definitions of this organization, which started seventy-five years ago in San Francisco: "It was not created to take mankind to heaven, but to save humanity from hell". At the end of June 1945, it did not take much gruesome imagination to conceive the worst of human nature. The tragedy of the Second World War had succeeded in opening the gates of hell: genocide, weapons of mass destruction, systematic violations of human rights and the confirmation of the indiscriminate cost of modern warfare.

On its 75th anniversary, the United Nations continues to stand between heaven and hell. Its anniversary coincides with enormous global issues within a changing international order. In fact, one could argue that the coronavirus pandemic has managed to leave the gates of hell ajar once more. So much so that the UN itself has warned that COVID-19 is the greatest challenge that humankind has faced since the Second World War. Renegades of the international liberal order have long insisted on questioning the relevance and viability of the UN, regardless of the fact that this organization is the result of an exceptional historic moment in which the United States and its allies attempted to learn from and rectify the traumatic lessons learnt during the inter-war period. Among other things, this international system built between San Francisco and Bretton Woods represents the will not to trip twice over the same stones of history, giving rise to a commendable effort

in the pursuit of collective security, the stability of the international financial system, free trade, solidarity between nations and the recovery of the defeated.

UNDERESTIMATED IMPORTANCE

The relevance of the United Nations is often questioned, in particular when the most powerful countries perceive this organization as an obstacle to their own interests. And the fact is that pressure for comprehensive reform has mounted, taking advantage of all sorts of scandals. Today, the lack of resources and the confrontation between the United States and China coexist together with the frustration of the developing countries and the growing suspicion that the world may be changing for the worse.

In the light of this long list of grievances and unresolved issues, authors such as historian Paul Kennedy (*The Parliament of Man: The Past, Present, and Future of the United Nations*, Vintage Books) argue that the United Nations should now be more valid than ever. According to Professor Kennedy, the future prospects of success of the UN lie in connecting with the most positive aspects of its history and with its achievements, which range from saving millions of lives to raising health and education standards around the world.

In practice, there are multiple United Nations, as Professor Kennedy insists. There is the UN of the Secretaries-General, with the opportunity to capitalize on their particular status as diplomatic celebrities who act as neutral mediators in conflict resolution. There



is also the UN of peacekeeping operations, an endeavour that is both costly and complicated, but that has ended up becoming an essential tool for world security. Furthermore, there is the United Nations of *soft power*, which is becoming increasingly relevant to drive its agenda forward. And we should not forget the UN that acts as a simple reflection of its Member States, despite the democratic mythologies insisting that the organization should work as a real global parliament or even a world government.

NEED FOR REFORM

With the mandatory challenge of having to be up to date for the 21st century, the United Nations has been confronting debilitating tensions between rich and poor countries. Members with more resources consider that the organization has an excessive and inefficient bureaucracy (including its own printing press in New York). In contrast, developing countries believe that the UN works as an exclusive and undemocratic club.

According to The Guardian's detailed analysis of the UN's budgetary developments, published on the occasion of its 70th anniversary, the UN's annual expenditure is forty times higher than it was in the early 1950s. In this rather expansive evolution, the UN has ended up generating a whole bureaucratic universe made up of 17 specialized agencies,

14 funds and a secretariat with 17 departments and more than 40,000 employees on the payroll.

The regular budget, agreed on every two years and used to pay for basic operating costs, amounts to \$2.87 billion for 2020. In this regard, the organization has a liquidity problem because its members owe more than a billion dollars. However, the regular budget, with its lion's share allocated to staff costs, represents only a small portion of the total expenditure. Another \$6.5 billion a year goes to peacekeeping operations, with about 110,000 Blue Helmets deployed in thirteen peacekeeping operations around the world.

The United States is the greatest financial contributor to the United Nations, providing about 22 per cent of its regular budget and 28 per cent of the additional budget for peacekeeping

*Peacekeeping
missions have
become essential
for global
security*

operations. At the same time, the US is also the organization's largest debtor. The list of defaulters also includes Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Iran, Israel and Venezuela. In addition to these payments, there are voluntary contributions made by individual governments and philanthropic tycoons to humanitarian aid, development and specialized agencies such as UNICEF or the World Health Organization. This funding channel has increased sixfold

P E R S P E C T I V E

over the last 30 years to almost \$30 billion, and yet some agencies insist that they are on the verge of bankruptcy. In comparative terms, total UN spending is equivalent to about half of New York City's municipal budget: \$75 billion.

DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT

Forged in the final stretch of the Second World War, the institutional design of the UN has had the ambitious goal of creating an effective international governmental organization devoted to guaranteeing peace and security throughout the world. It is based on the philosophy of collective security as well as on the combination of the two main theories that make up the sphere of International Relations: liberalism and realism.

From the standpoint of liberal idealism, the United States and the representatives of 49 other nations, who gathered in San Francisco in the spring of 1945, conceived the General Assembly with equal representation for all its members. At the same time, they established the Security Council with mandatory responsibilities and five permanent members. In a decisive concession to political realism, the aim was to overcome the inefficiency and lack of representation that hampered its forerunner, the League of Nations, during the inter-war period.

The Security Council, with ten non-permanent members elected for two-year terms, is a snapshot of the outcome of the Second World War. With the right of veto reserved for the winning powers: United States, Russia, Great Britain, France and, eventually, the People's Republic of China. The Cold War made sure that the Security Council was turned into a constant and sterile challenge for the antagonism between Washington and Moscow. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the new emerging international order, the major issue in all the debates about the future of the United Nations has been the need to reform the Security Council.

The most common argument is that if the Security Council does not include new permanent members —such as Germany, Japan, India, Brazil or South Africa— it runs the risk of becoming an anachronistic and irrelevant body, with its primacy in the security and peace field being questioned in favour of other institutions and entities. Accumulated failures in conflicts such as Syria and Ukraine, or the coronavirus pandemic itself, together with the abuse of the power of veto, are increasing the frustration that lies behind all the unmet requests for reform of the United Nations.

WORLD STAGE

In geopolitical terms, the best show in the world is the start of the discussion process in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). An event that is not usually disappointing when it comes to providing great moments for history. From Khrushchev's shoe banging incident to Fidel Castro's four-hour and 29-minute speech, to Arafat's dilemma (olive branch or gun) or President Hugo Chávez's diabolical sulphur.

Not to mention Gaddafi's hilarious address in 2009, literally mistreating a copy of the San Francisco Charter. The UNGA is the institution that represents the 193 Member States of the United Nations, all of which have the same weight. Its prerogatives include



approving the organization's budget and adopting global treaties. It can make recommendations, but its resolutions are not binding, unlike those agreed upon by the Security Council. The ministerial meeting in September is known as the general debate. These are days when New York becomes a security nightmare and an enormous traffic jam.

Due to the pandemic and the limitations of the so-called "new normal", the 75th anniversary event in Manhattan —which would have involved the participation of more than 150 world leaders and the organization of countless side events— will not be held in its usual format. UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, has admitted that it is logistically impossible to organize such a huge summit in a city as badly hit by the coronavirus as New York. According to Guterres "we are studying different alternatives that digital technology offers to enable us to hold this General Assembly which would correspond to the 75th anniversary of the UN, although it will be up to the Member States to decide".

THE MOST DIFFICULT JOB

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt saw the UN Secretary-General's role as that of a "world moderator". The San Francisco Charter refers to this position as the UN "chief administrative officer". And the Norwegian Trygve Lie, the first to hold this office since 1946, did not hesitate to call it the most difficult job in the world. An idea shared by each and every one of his eight successors. In an



increasingly complex world, all the UN Secretaries-General have performed their jobs within an institutional range that goes from bureaucratic grey to a more or less bright activism.

This visible position is also the most sought-after vacancy of all those created by the plethora of intergovernmental organizations operating around the world. Traditionally, its selection has been both opaque and disputed, despite an unspoken rule of regional rotation. Similarly, this process has not favoured the accession of women to this position in spite of the gender diversity expectations raised in 2016 to succeed the South Korean Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General supervises the United Nations Secretariat which, with a staff of 9,000 from 170 countries, is responsible for implementing UN operations.

Every Secretary-General has a certain leeway to organize his administration. One of his prerogatives is the recruitment of approximately fifty senior officials from the United Nations system, albeit with the obligation to achieve broad regional representations, which leads to constant negotiations with the Security Council and the General Assembly. The Secretary-General's responsibilities also include monitoring the complex United Nations peacekeeping missions.

The Secretary-General plays a renowned mediating role between the parties involved in conflicts. While he is obliged to use his "good offices", he must also draw on his prestige, independence and impartiality to prevent, redirect and limit the use of force. Since

1997, the salary of the United Nations Secretaries-General has been established at \$227,253 a year. However, this remuneration is supplemented by an additional budget for personal expenses, an official residence on the East Side of New York and a permanent security service.

2030 AGENDA

In the wake of its 70th anniversary in 2015, the United Nations adopted one of its most important commitments to the 2030 Development Agenda ("Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for a sustainable world", Resolution A/70/L.1). This is a roadmap for the next 15 years aimed at eradicating poverty and preserving a planet subject to global crises as threatening as the coronavirus pandemic itself. The document, which does not contain any contractual obligations, is based on 17 decisive goals and 169 targets.

These goals include the eradication of extreme poverty (living on less than \$1.5 a day) by 2030; free access to education including high school; elimination of discrimination and violence against women; access to clean and affordable energy; economic development (global economy will need to create 470 million new jobs from 2016 to 2030); the end of the growing inequality affecting 75 percent of the world's population; and the promotion of strong democratic institutions. In this regard, the United Nations estimates that corruption, misuse of public resources and tax evasion cost the world more than \$1.3 trillion a year.

VIRAL PARALYSIS

In addition to the accumulated global disruption of recent years, there is a health crisis —only comparable in scale to the wrongly named Spanish flu in 1918— with all sorts of troubling economic, social and political implications. And the United Nations, as part of that high-risk group of multilateralism and international cooperation, has also been unable to avoid the profound impact of the pandemic and the escalating conflict between the United States and China.

Instead of unity and cooperation, the pandemic is further encouraging the competition between Washington and Beijing. The People's Republic of China is attempting to turn the crisis into an opportunity, while the coronavirus is ruthless with the United States' weaknesses and contradictions. And of all the fronts (geopolitical, trade, technological, health), one of the most shameful battlefields would turn out to be the UN Security Council, chaired by China in March.

It took almost 90,000 deaths worldwide and infections in over 180 countries of the 193 UN members for the Security Council to finally meet online in May and discuss COVID-19. This viral paralysis reflects the extent to which the UN runs the risk of becoming irrelevant, particularly if it is unable to foster the international cooperation required to address the current crisis, which no country will be able to overcome alone.

In the light of the UN's 75th anniversary, the balance still offers many positive elements to justify the repeated cliché that, if it did not exist, it would have to be invented. All that is needed is to learn from the past because, like in 1945, there are too many challenges. ■



WOMEN, THE PO

TWENTY YEARS AFTER THE ADOPTION OF RESOLUTION 1325, ESTA
THE UN REVIEWS THE PROGRESS MADE



POWER OF PEACE

AMPLIFYING THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF WOMEN IN PEACE PROCESSES,
AND THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

Haroldane Dicko/UN



A Spanish lieutenant of ISAF—the mission NATO deployed in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2014—distributes information brochures to some women.

“WOMEN are essential to peace and progress for all. This has been a proven and undeniable reality over the past two decades. But there is still much to be done: I urge all those involved in global security to become more involved in building a feminine approach to peace. I think it is one of the best ways to achieve a better world”. United Nations Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, used the event on 29 October, at which the Security Council celebrated the 20th anniversary of the adoption of Resolution 1325, to launch another appeal and exploit the full potential of this historic resolution. Adopted unanimously, Resolution 1325 not only established a solid legal basis (ten other subsequent resolutions complement it), but also boosted it with a specific action plan: the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda. In other words, it gave visibility

to something that was invisible in order to condemn the suffering of women and girls in conflict (the majority of refugees are mothers with their children), the use of rape as a weapon of war and the accepted and ignored violence against women. And, at the same time, it confirmed the power of women as peacemakers and their essential and effective vital approach to achieving, building and maintaining stability: it is women who best understand that the only way to build a society allowing their

The Secretary-General has presented a “Call to Action” with new measures

children to live a better life is to provide them not only with food and land, but also with security, education, respect and equality.

Without doubt, progress has been very difficult and slow, but unstoppable. In that briefing, the Secretary-General submitted a report to the Security Council assessing these twenty years of work and reaffirming that, when women are present at the negotiating table, peace agreements are more likely to last 15 years or more. “The correlation between gender inequality and the propensity of a given society to civil or interstate conflicts has been well established”, claims the text presented by Antonio Guterres. Also, “institutions, organizations, companies, and governments work better when they include half of society, rather than ignoring it”. However, the fact is that “women lead only seven percent of countries, and decisions about peace agreements are still overwhelmingly made by men”. By July 2020, 85 countries (44 percent of UN members) had incorporated the

Women, Peace and Security Agenda into their national action plans, a sharp increase on 53 nations in 2015 and 19 in 2010, although only 24 percent of them included a specific budget to implement the plan.

The data presented by the UN also indicate that peace agreements with provisions on gender equality have only increased from 14 percent in 1995 to 22 percent in 2019 (of those signed between 2015 and 2018, only one in five contained gender-sensitive provisions). During the 2019 peace talks in the Central African Republic, 10 percent of the participants were women and, in Mali, 20 percent of the members of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission were women. On average, between 1992 and 2019, women accounted for 13 percent of all negotiators and 6 percent of all mediators. In 2019, women soldiers barely represented 4.2 percent of the personnel deployed in peacekeeping missions (a figure that, in the case of the Atlantic Alliance, rises to nearly 14 percent).

And the report's portrayal of sexual violence is devastating: "there are serious reasons to believe," it states, "that more than 50 parties to conflicts have committed or instigated systematic rape or other forms of sexual violence", and that one out of five refugee and displaced women experience sexual violence. Furthermore, the devastating effects of COVID-19 have been a setback and an obstacle to the most basic rights and, of course, those of women and girls.

But, as Guterres insisted over and over again, "we still have time to act". To this end, the Secretary-General presented an initiative (Call to Action) urging organizations and countries to implement a set of measures over the next decade. Amongst these, the one that stands out is designing and encouraging peace processes that include women from the very beginning, enhancing the role of local communities of women. Also, eliminating the digital divide so that the use of new technologies can increase the power of women in decision-making, as well as their participation in conflict and post-conflict resolution. At the same time, Guterres advocates increasing and strengthening the role of feminist movements as peacemakers (from women human rights defenders



Sylvain Liechi/UN

A solid legal basis

RESOLUTION 1325 of October 2000: claims that war and conflicts have a unique and disproportionate impact on women and girls; acknowledges that it is essential to enhance the presence of women as a key factor in the prevention and resolution of war and in peacebuilding; stresses the importance of the equal and full participation of women as active agents at all levels of peace and security decision-making. States and agencies are responsible for the implementation of this Resolution.

Since then, ten other Security Council resolutions have insisted on two of its main objectives:

1- Women's leadership in conflict prevention and peacekeeping

- **RESOLUTION 1889** of 2009: focuses on post-conflict peacebuilding and the participation of women at all stages.
- **RESOLUTION 2122** of 2013: establishes the specific methods to fight against the deficit in women's participation; acknowledges the need to address the root causes of conflict and security risks faced by women.
- **RESOLUTION 2242** of 2015: emphasises the importance of cooperation with civil society; calls for increased funding for gender-sensitive training, analysis and programmes.
- **RESOLUTION 2493** of 2019: urges Member States to facilitate the participation of women in peace processes.

2- Preventing and responding to sexual violence in conflict

- **RESOLUTION 1820** of 2008: condemns sexual violence as a weapon of war.
- **RESOLUTION 1888** of 2009: reiterates that sexual violence exacerbates armed conflicts and prevents international peace and security.
- **RESOLUTION 1960** of 2010: insists on the obligation to end sexual violence in armed conflicts.
- **RESOLUTION 2106** of 2013: urges that current obligations be made operational rather than creating new structures/initiatives; includes a text on the participation of women in the fight against sexual violence.
- **RESOLUTION 2467** of 2019: reiterates that sexual violence in conflict occurs continuously against women and girls.
- **RESOLUTION 2538** of 2020: encourages the UN, regional and subregional organizations and States to promote the participation and role of women in peacekeeping operations.

Spain, a committed and firm advocate

The Defence Ministry created the Military Observatory for Equality in 2005 and is one of the main advocates of Resolution 1325 in NATO and the EU

EVEN before it was adopted, Spain was one of the main advocates of Resolution 1325 and all that it implies. Spain was also aware that its effective implementation and the development of its transforming potential—along with that of the nine subsequent resolutions that complement it—require the commitment and firm will of the states. And Spain got down to work. Spain is absolutely committed to making the Women, Peace and Security Agenda a reality (it is one of the 85 countries that have officially taken it on board) and is involved in reaching all its objectives, both nationally and as agreed within the UN, NATO, OSCE and the European Union. It also led the way in adopting a National Action Plan to implement the WPS Agenda: the first one in 2007 and the second, in 2017, which will remain in force until 2023.

Moreover, in October 2019, Spain launched the so-called Commitment 2025 together with Finland, an initiative that establishes ten specific commitments for the States and five requests addressed to the United Nations to guarantee the full and effective participation of women in peace processes. The new National Defence Directive, passed last June, includes the WPS agenda as one of its principles and stresses that the contribution of women, both those from countries in conflict and those who serve in the Spanish armed forces, “may be an enabling factor in the

disruption of the conflict, which could stimulate its resolution by providing an innovative point of view”.

As far as the Armed Forces personnel are concerned and since the creation of the Military Observatory for Equality (OMI) in 2005, the Ministry has maintained an active gender equity policy, the fundamental objective of which has been to increase the presence of women in the armed forces and achieve equal opportunities in the development of their military career (full integration is a fact in matters such as balancing work and family life, and admission and promotion criteria). Today, women have access to all military corps and ranks and can hold any position, even in combat. As of December 2019, women made up 12.8 percent of all military personnel (the total number is 15,453). Of these, 4,625 women serve in special operations

266 Spanish servicewomen are deployed in operations; 8.4 percent of the personnel

units, and account for 10.9 percent of those serving in brigades, ships, wings and the Military Emergencies Unit. In addition, all service members who are going to be deployed in international missions are trained in the zero-tolerance policy with regard to possible reports of sexual violence and sexual assaults. The Spanish Armed Forces have implemented in all operations abroad the gender perspective in DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration) and SSR (Security Sector Reform) processes.

Since 2010, the Defence Ministry—through the Military Observatory for Equality (OMI)—has been working with the Institute for Women and Equal Opportunities in promoting the development of gender equality policies among military personnel. Within this framework, various training courses and seminars have been launched, both at national and international level, implementing different aspects of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. Among others, the ones that stand out are the international seminar held since 2011 as part of a Spanish-Dutch initiative for gender training in operations (*A Comprehensive Approach to Gender in Operations*), and the one held since 2013 in Nairobi (Kenya) with the collaboration of the Netherlands and the United States entitled *Gender in Peace Support Operations* (so far, over a thousand students from 75 nations, 26 of them African nations, have attended these courses).

In 2020, Spain has been in charge of organizing the Women's Defence Dialogues initiative (to be held in mid-November), a project launched by the NATO Secretary-General's special representative for WPS with the aim of gathering and mapping the ways in which women from different continents perceive these issues. It has been organised jointly by the General Secretariat for Defence Policy, the Women for Africa Foundation and the Gutiérrez Mellado University Institute.

The Ministry of Defence also actively participates in international forums on gender equality, especially in NATO and the EU. The Atlantic Alliance, in particular, has enforced good allied practices in the field of equality between men and women, and our country participates in the gender training provided in operations, with



Pepo Díaz

Spanish soldier of a medical evacuation team during an operation in Herat in 2012.

Spanish officers as gender advisers in various headquarters. Furthermore, on 8 October, a Spanish military officer, Lieutenant Colonel Alvaro Martínez-Villalobos, was elected vice-chairman of the Executive Committee of the NATO Committee on Gender Perspective (NCGP) for a two-year term. The NCGP is the military entity responsible for gender issues at the strategic level and the advisory body of NATO's Military Committee. It is specifically tasked to design, monitor and assess the implementation of the gender perspective in the military policies, programmes and operations of the allied Armed Forces. Spain is thus positioned at NATO's strategic level as a leading nation committed to gender issues, while it has achieved a position of influence in the development and implementation of allied policies on Women, Peace and Security.

Within the European Union, Spain's work as a reference in the defence of Resolution 1325 led the EU Military Committee to nominate Spain as

Discipline Leader (DL) for the Gender EU Military Training Discipline in 2016. From this position of responsibility, the Spanish Defence Ministry has conducted a Training Requirements Analysis (TRA) proposing three study plans (one aimed at gender advisers, another at commanders and strategic leaders, and the third at enlisted and deployed personnel) so that EU members can provide their military personnel with a common and uniform training on gender equality issues before they are deployed abroad. It has also promoted various courses, seminars, training workshops and meetings among personnel with experience in this field.

At bilateral level, Spain maintains exchanges of good practices in regulations and personnel management with almost one hundred countries, which favours the integration of women in the Armed Forces, as well as agreements for the elimination of existing barriers with a view to achieving effective equality.

to Blue Helmets, ex-combatants or women in security institutions). In this sense, he highlights the importance of incorporating female personnel in all arms control and disarmament processes and forums. Another proposed action calls on governments and institutions to allocate at least 15 percent of their programme budgets to gender equality and improve gender-mainstreaming in all areas of expenditure. Finally, Guterres encourages "starting a digital revolution so that gender issues related to Women, Peace and Security reach the general public, while, at the same time, this would reinforce our understanding of today's most pressing problems".

JOINT EFFORT

The link between security and economic stability has been more than proven, as has the fact that women's fragility is compounded by political instability. Therefore, all that has been achieved over these two decades has required constant and multidisciplinary work, most of the time a very complex and risky endeavour, which has required the involvement of civil society,



From 1992 to 2019, women represented 13 percent of the personnel involved in peace process negotiations



Eskinder Debebe/UN

Gladys Nqwepekeu, a Cameroonian officer stationed at the UN mission in the Central African Republic, teaches a lesson on gender-based violence at a school in Bangui.

humanitarian organizations, political managers, activists, anonymous women seeking a better world for their people, girls who are determined to study and, without doubt, the personnel deployed in humanitarian and peace missions. Aware of this, the UN has been progressively increasing the number and role of women in missions: experience has shown that the mere fact of seeing a woman soldier in the same conditions as men often opens the eyes of women and girls to a reality hitherto ignored, while cultural conditioning factors usually make it easier for military women to interact with local women. Action for Peacekeeping (A4P), launched by Antonio Guterres in 2018 as part of the UN reform, reiterates that the participation of women is essential to achieve and maintain an effective and sustainable peace.

The Women, Peace and Security Agenda includes as one of its basic tenets the incorporation of gender

Much has been achieved but the battle is not yet over

- **2000.** After years of feminist protests, the Security Council unanimously approves resolution 1325.
- **2001.** In peace talks on Afghanistan following the fall of the Taliban regime, four of the 36 Afghan delegates are women. The resulting agreement brings about improvements in the defence of the rights of women and girls and urges several ministries to be led by women.
- **2002.** The International Criminal Court becomes operational. Its statute, the Treaty of Rome, establishes that crimes against women are acts against humanity, war crimes and, in some cases, genocide. Its first effective conviction for sexual and gender-based violence will not come about until 2019. In 2020, the Court starts, for the first time, a trial for gender-based persecution.
- **2003.** Led by activist Leymah Gbowee, thousands of Liberian women, fed up with war, break into the peace talks and threaten to strip naked if an agreement is not reached. They succeed and, in the years that follow, women activists play a key role in building peace and promoting peaceful elections in 2005, which were won by Africa's first democratically elected head of state, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

- **2004.** Asha Hagi Elmi becomes the first Somali woman to sign a peace agreement. It was negotiated by five clans, all made up of men, and Elmi formed a "sixth clan" to ensure the inclusion of women. In the transitional government that was agreed upon, Elmi was appointed vice-president. Today, women hold 24 percent of the seats in the Somali Parliament.

- **2007.** An all-women police unit is deployed in a UN mission: they are Indian policewomen in the mission in Liberia. Their last rotation leaves the country in 2016, a decade in which, in addition to ensuring security, they have taught Liberian women self-defence techniques and trained local forces in how to respond to gender-based violence.



- **2008.** For the first time, a Security Council meeting is dedicated exclusively to sexual violence in conflict areas and highlights that it often goes unpunished.

perspectives in the guidelines and tools of the peacekeeping operations of all international organizations, in United Nations' agencies and in the national training and education programmes for military and police personnel of every state.

Both NATO and the EU have already included in their doctrines the UN's main lines of action and have developed specific action plans. The European Union has adopted Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2019-2024 and, furthermore, in September 2018 the European Council approved some conclusions reaffirming a Strategic Partnership with the UN for its Peace Operations and Crisis Management for the period 2019-2021 with the gender issue as one of its major points of reference. For its part, the Atlantic Alliance approved its Action Plan at the Lisbon Summit in 2010 (focusing on the principles of integration, inclusion and integrity) and has updated it several times, most recently in 2018. In 2012, the then Secretary-General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, created the position of the NATO Secretary-General's Special Representative for Women, Peace and



Pepa Diaz

A Spanish officer in the United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNPROFOR) treating a woman near the city of Mostar in 1993.

Security and, in 2019, the Atlantic Council adopted its first Policy on Preventing and Responding to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

The Defence Ministerial meeting held on 23 October aimed to commemorate the 20 years of the WPS Agenda, analyse all that has been achieved so far, and discuss the next steps to be taken. The

ministers adopted an Action Plan to combat sexual exploitation and abuse and expressed their intention to advance in the drafting of a Policy on Sexual Violence in Conflict and another Policy on Children and Armed Conflict, as well as to update the 2004 NATO Policy on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings.

Rosa Ruiz

→ **2010.** The United Nations General Assembly approves the creation of UN Women, a body whose specific goal is to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women. It strives to speed progress, which will lead to improved living conditions for women and girls and new hopes for the future.

→ **2011.** Three women activists receive the Nobel Peace Prize: Liberian politicians Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Leymah Gboewe and Yemeni Ta-wakkol Karman.



Loey Felipe/UN

→ **2012.** For the first time in the history of international and hybrid courts, women hold the most senior positions at the Special Court of Sierra Leone: president, registrar, prosecutor and defence. That same year, Faotu Benouda is appointed the first female Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court.

→ **2014.** The mass abduction of 276 female Nigerian students by the terrorist group Boko Haram draws worldwide

attention to something that is all too common in conflict situations: the abduction and abuse of teenagers and girls. That same year, thousands of women and girls from the Yazari minority in Iraq are sold at slave auctions after the attack by the Daesh terrorist group in the city of Sinyar. "I want to be the last girl in the world with a story like mine", said Nadia Murad—a teenage Yazari survivor and now a leading activist—at the General Assembly.

→ **2015.** The 193 UN states approve the Sustainable Development Objectives from 2015 to 2030. The agreed Agenda categorically includes women and girls as major players.

→ **2016.** A peace agreement is reached in Colombia putting an end to 52 years of conflict. One third of the delegates at the peace talks are women: the final agreement contains 130 provisions on gender issues and women's rights.

→ **2019.** The photo of Sudanese activist Alaa Salah manages to mobilize thousands of young women through social networks. Soon after, women play a key role in the fall of the totalitarian regime in the country, they outnumber men in the protests and lead most of the resistance committees.

The pandemic has helped society to become aware of just how serious the deliberate propagation of false information can be

DISINFORMATION

in times of COVID-19

Lieutenant Colonel Vicente Diaz de Villegas Roig

Private Office of the Undersecretary of Defence for Political Affairs

FEW events in recent history have highlighted the vulnerability and fragility of today's society so suddenly and ruthlessly as the COVID-19 outbreak. In just a few months, the virus has deeply transformed life all over the world. The scope of the challenge faced by our societies is unprecedented and the consequences of the pandemic are still being evaluated. The uncertainty generated by this new illness has brought about obligatory social isolation which, in turn, has given rise to economic insecurity, a perfect breeding ground for the manipulation of information. To cope with uncertainty, human psychology prompts individuals to seek answers that will help them understand what is happening. In the search for cognitive reward, human beings may take mental shortcuts and make errors of logic that lead them to draw false conclusions.

History shows that widespread disinformation is a common trait in pandemics, as happened at the beginning of the 20th century with the misnamed "Spanish flu". Information overload concerning COVID-19, be it true, false or inaccurate, makes it difficult for people to identify reliable sources of information. This "infodemic", as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), has spread as quickly as the virus itself.

SELF-SERVING MANIPULATION? ORGANIZED MANIPULATION?

It is important to acknowledge that most of this information is not disseminated with malicious intent. Although the main architects

of false narratives are often motivated by selfish reasons, such as personal gain or the desire for recognition, many of their acolytes are simply victims of the hoax who contribute to the propagation of this content on the basis of a genuinely erroneous belief. It is therefore important to distinguish the various forms of information manipulation (*disinformation*) from other forms of impartial disinformation (*misinformation*). Manipulation is morally reprehensible because it deliberately takes advantage of society's fears and vulnerabilities.

A considerable part of information manipulation, be it for political or economic goals, comes from or is sponsored by foreign powers. These disinformation campaigns require a high level of coordination among different areas to enable them to synchronize the messages broadcast by public channels in the dissemination of the official narrative with the messages transmitted, often in several languages, by "unofficial" networks.

However, such actions were undermined when the very countries generating the disinformation were affected by the pandemic, as the manipulation of COVID-19 content also had the potential to spread panic in their territories. The current trend is thus to reduce the most aggressive disinformation content, while allowing some conspiracy theories to be circulated, with a view to satisfying audiences that are traditionally loyal and receptive to this content.



RISKS TO HEALTH AND FREEDOMS

Disinformation on coronavirus has affected public health and, above all, individual freedoms. When anti-vaccination campaigns, bogus cures and conspiracy theories are propagated, the most notable effects are health-related. Fake messages about vaccines are part of the so-called “vaccination terrorism” theory, which often involves conspiracy theories alleging that governments will impose mass forced vaccination to control individuals, or that the vaccines are ineffective or directly harmful.

Claims about bogus cures or treatments are another particularly worrying and malicious category of disinformation. These allegations range from advice that is contrary to the guidelines provided by the health authorities, such as affirming that frequent handwashing does not help against the virus, to untested home cures. A BBC report indicated that more people died in an Iranian province from drinking industrial alcohol than from COVID-19 due to a false claim that this could protect against the virus.

The dissemination of messages purporting that 5G antennas facilitate the spread of COVID-19 can also be included in the section on health conspiracy theories. Such content has provoked many acts of vandalism against telecommunication

infrastructures in various parts of the Netherlands, Belgium and the United Kingdom.

Where individual freedoms are concerned, one of the most negative impacts has been the restriction of freedom of expression. Some countries, using the combat of COVID-19 information manipulation as an excuse, have violated media independence and imposed tight control over social media. Censorship of both traditional and social media has facilitated dissemination of the official message and prevented citizens from accessing relevant facts, such as the actual number of deaths and infections.

WHAT ARE SOCIAL MEDIA SAYING?

The European Union has been targeted by these types of coordinated campaigns, which aim to undermine the institutions and their response to the crisis. The main narratives against the European Union have focused on describing it as inefficient and divided in its response to COVID-19. Part of the manipulated information portrayed an organization on the verge of collapse, with the Schengen area closed due to the selfishness of its members who had betrayed their own values.

The United States has also fallen foul to manipulation campaigns. Disinformation

*Information
manipulation
techniques evolve
quickly.*

ANALYSIS

started with a theory about a virus that was manufactured by the United States and used as a weapon against China and its economy. Conspiracy theories have also played a significant role. One of the major disinformation flows points to COVID-19 as a global conspiracy, indicating alleged links between the pandemic and 5G as a pretext to establish world domination by the economic elite.

In the final weeks of the outbreak, many rumours about COVID-19 began to mutate. The initial claims that the virus was designed to attack only Asians disappeared, as contagion spread throughout Europe, the United States and Russia. The claim that non-democratic states are more prepared than democratic ones to fight the pandemic has also become a complicated hypothesis to defend.

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S RESPONSE

Aware of the risks posed to society by the manipulation of information during the pandemic, on 17 April last the European Parliament called on the European Commission to counter the disinformation campaigns that have been using the COVID-19 pandemic to undermine the EU.

On 30 April last, the European Parliament, with High Representative Josep Borrell in attendance, debated the latest update of the special report on the evaluation of narratives and disinformation in connection with the pandemic, prepared by the Strategic Communications Division of the European External Action Service. The report revealed that information manipulation and conspiracy theories continued to proliferate throughout the world with potentially harmful consequences for public safety, health and effective crisis communication. It also highlighted the growing number of coordinated campaigns to disseminate false information on health in Europe and in its partner countries.

Following the debate, the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, David McAllister, declared that "to counter negative narratives, it is particularly important to communicate about the EU's financial, technical and medical support in response to the pandemic, both between EU countries and to our other partners, among them China. Most acts of solidarity, by organizations, professionals or individuals take place far away from the gaze of cameras and reporters. But it would also be unfair to all the health workers, volunteers helping fellow citizens and people organizing the transport of crucial equipment to let the lies about a lack of European solidarity spread without effectively challenging them".

Another proposal of the European Union gave rise to the creation, on 11 June last, of a special committee on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, to provide a common, holistic, long-term approach to address evidence of foreign interference in the democratic institutions and processes of the EU and its Member States. Part of the analysis will focus on disinformation campaigns which, through traditional and social media, attempt to shape public opinion.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND CENSORSHIP

Is the censorship of social media a form of manipulation? How and by whom is the censorship process controlled? Can an entity organize a large-scale system to get users to report content, thereby removing content that goes against its interests?

In a move without precedents, the main social media platforms have adjusted their content policies in response to COVID-19 to raise the visibility of WHO and other authorized health content. However, there are several basic challenges to these new content restrictions, in particular with regard to the transparency of the rationale and the implementation of the rules.

Recently, there has been an improvement in detection capabilities regarding campaigns that disseminate

automatic or semi-automatic messages. However, where message content is concerned, several questions arise: Who appoints the content censors? Is it a mere question of the amount of content reports submitted about a certain publication? In the same way as 'likes' can be bought online, is it possible to orchestrate content reporting campaigns to censor different opinions?

THE MOST VISIBLE EFFECTS ON THE INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

The pandemic has helped society to become aware of the seriousness of disinformation. The fight against disinformation must tackle the vulnerabilities in society that facilitate the deliberate propagation of false information. As well as reducing the capacity to disseminate or countering false information campaigns, it is interesting to understand why these activities are such a success with some of our citizens.

Information manipulation techniques evolve quickly, as has been the case with COVID-19, where advantage has been taken of the psychological effects caused by uncertainty to convey more highly charged messages. ■



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