

# REVISTA ESPAÑOLA DE DEFENSA

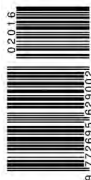
**SURVEILLANCE  
IN THE SEAS**  
Expeditionary Strike  
Group Dédalo 24

**Collective deterrence and defence**

## SPANISH FORCES IN EASTERN EUROPE



MINISTERIO DE DEFENSA







REVISTA ESPAÑOLA DE DEFENSA

# HABLAMOS de Defensa

36 años de información de calidad

## Focusing on the East and on the South

**S**PAIN is contributing firmly and significantly to the deterrence and defence of NATO's eastern flank through various operations. In two of them, Spain still is or has been in command of the operation. Up to mid-July, Standing NATO Maritime Group One (SNMG1), which operates in the waters of northern Europe, has been commanded by Rear Admiral Joaquín Ruiz Escagedo, aboard frigate *Almirante Juan de Borbón*. In addition, since July 2024, Spain has been leading a multinational brigade in Slovakia, while our country continues to be involved in the Baltic Air Policing mission and the enhanced Forward Presence mission in Latvia.

NATO's military presence in the eastern part of the Alliance is a key deterrent. It is defensive, proportionate, transparent and in line with the Alliance's international commitments and obligations. It represents a significant commitment by Allies and is a tangible reminder that an attack on one NATO Ally is an attack on all.

In order to assist Ukraine, our Armed Forces provide this invaded country with defensive materiel, humanitarian assistance and military training. Additionally, they support nations that are close to Russia but have small armies and reduced capabilities. They do this by contributing some 2,000 troops and weapons systems to collective deterrence and defence in an effort to prevent what is happening in Ukraine from spreading to other regions in Europe.

However, focusing on the East should not mean forgetting about the South, because there are challenges, risks and threats coming from this area that need to be addressed. This is crucial to Spain due to our geographical proximity to the Sahel region of Africa. Instability in the Sahel is one of our greatest concerns as it poses a threat to our security through the influx of irregular migrants, terrorism, and food and energy crises. It also directly affects the security of all Allies.

Although Ukraine, the Sahel and Iraq — where a Spanish general led the NATO mission for a year— are far from our country, the major conflicts that have emerged there end up being extremely close to us in today's globalised world. Our soldiers operate in these places to defend the civilian populations there, but also to ensure the peace and security of the world, as well as our own.

**RED**





#### Managing Editor:

María José Muñoz Estévez.

**Editor in Chief:** Víctor Hernández Martínez.

**Heads of section.** *International:* Rosa Ruiz

Fernández. *Art Director:* Rafael Navarro.

*Opinion:* Santiago Fernández del Vado. *Culture:* Esther P. Martínez.

*Photography:* Pepe Díaz. **Sections.** *National:* Elena Tarilonte.

*Armed Forces:* José Luis Expósito Montero.

*Photography and Archive:* Hélène Gicquel

Pasquier. *Layout:* Eduardo Fernández Salvador.

**Featured in this edition:** Eva María Ara,

Josep Borrell, Fernando Luis Morón, Juan

Pons, Ricardo Valdés and José Ignacio Ya-

niz. **Translators:** Fuensanta Zaballa Gómez

(chief) and Gráinne Mary Gahan.



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Email: [respdefe@mde.es](mailto:respdefe@mde.es)

Website: [www.defensa.gob.es](http://www.defensa.gob.es)

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The Defence Minister with the crew of frigate *Almirante Juan de Borbón* in the port of Helsinki (Finland) on 15 April 2024.

# AT THE FOREFRONT OF COLLECTIVE DETERRENCE AND DEFENCE

Margarita Robles visits Spanish units deployed in Finland and Slovakia on two NATO missions in Eastern Europe



## “Wherever there is a Spanish man or woman in uniform, we are always a little closer to peace”, said Robles

**S**PAIN is clearly committed to collective security and defence. Nearly 2,000 Spanish soldiers, with all kinds of land, naval and air assets, are engaged in NATO's deterrence missions in Eastern Europe to respond to Russia's attack on Ukraine. Defence Minister Margarita Robles once again highlighted this commitment by visiting two of these scenarios: the Baltic Sea and Slovakia. In her first visit, on board frigate *Almirante Juan de Borbón* in the port of Helsinki (Finland), she witnessed Spain's work in command of Standing NATO Maritime Group number 1 (SNMG1). In the second, in Slovakia, she learned about the multinational battlegroup mission that our country has been leading since 1 July 2023.

“In these difficult times, you are contributing to this task of deterrence and peace”, Robles underscored on 15 April 2024 to the 227 troops on board the ship. The Minister met with her Finnish counterpart, Antti Häkkinen, also on board the ship. “He has thanked us for Spain's presence and commitment to this mission”, Robles said after the meeting, in which both ministers stressed the importance of NATO's deterrent role.

Robles pointed out that missions such as this one are a basic tool for providing protection to countries bordering Russia, which “are really concerned about a potential escalation or expansion of the war zone. They are small countries, with small armed forces and small capabilities. That is why it is important for them to know that all NATO countries have a common goal, which is to ensure security and stability together”, the Minister said. Robles travelled accompanied by the Chief of Defence Staff, Admiral General Teodoro López Calderón, who, in his address to the ship's crew, insisted that, in the current state of affairs,

deterrence has become the *raison d'être* of the Armed Forces as it is the best way for them to operate without having to resort to an armed conflict.

Spanish frigate *Almirante Juan de Borbón* (F-102) took command of the multinational task force on 11 January 2024 and has since held this command for six months. Sailing in the North and Baltic Seas, alongside other ships from Germany, Norway, France and Italy, this frigate has conducted exercises while monitoring

the 750 Spanish military personnel who made up the contingent on 1 July 2023, the date on which the Czech Republic handed over to Spain the command of this multinational battlegroup, one of the eight task forces that reinforce NATO's forward presence on the eastern flank.

Upon her arrival at Sliač air base, Robles received military honours along with her Slovakian counterpart, Robert Kalinak, before travelling to Lešť, where the Spanish and Slovakian delegations held a meeting. There, the two countries confirmed their commitment to support Ukraine, and Robles expressed her appreciation for the “magnificent welcome” accorded to our soldiers in Slovakia. For his part, the Slovakian Minister thanked the Spaniards for their solidarity “which makes us feel more secure in these difficult times”.

Robles learned first-hand about the operation's situation from Colonel Andrés González Alvarado, commander of the Spanish contingent, made up mostly of the 1/29 Battalion *Zamora* of the 7th Brigade *Galicie*.

Addressing the soldiers, the Minister of Defence

stressed Spain's weight and role within NATO. “We are a reliable partner and our Armed Forces allow us to rise to any challenge”. “Wherever there is a Spanish man or woman in uniform, we are always a little closer to peace”, Robles pointed out. The Minister visited an exhibition that included some of the contingent's materiel. Spain provides around 250 combat vehicles, including several *Centauro* armoured reconnaissance vehicles, light HMTVs (high mobility tactical vehicles) and heavy VEMPARs (large armoured tactical and logistic vehicles), to which a further 60 were added in June.

The battlegroup is reinforced by the capabilities of other nations, up to a total of around 1,150 troops, including Portuguese



Margarita Robles and the Slovakian Defence Minister, Robert Kalinak, attending an exhibition of the Spanish contingent's materiel at Lešť military training area.

Russian vessels, and maintaining a continuous presence in these waters.

After being briefed about the first months of the deployment by the commander of SNMG-1, Rear Admiral Joaquín Ruiz Escagedo, and the ship's chief officer, Commander Raúl Alba, the Minister met with the personnel on board. There, she expressed the Spanish people's gratitude as well as her own because “wherever there is a Spanish ship or mission, something very important happens: the effort, responsibility, and spirit of service of its military personnel”.

### VISIT TO SLOVAKIA

The Defence Minister travelled to Slovakia on 2 May 2024. She met with over 600 of

# Spain is the framework nation for NATO's new multinational brigade in Slovakia

armoured and Czech mechanised units as well as forces from Slovakia and Slovenia. In addition to the personnel stationed at Lešť, there are 16 others at Kuchyna airbase. They are staff from NATO's High Readiness Land Headquarters in Betera, Valencia, and act as the Corps forward coordination element.

### DETERRENCE AND DEFENCE MISSIONS

The deployments in Slovakia and in the seas of northern Europe are just two of the multiple commitments Spain has

Likewise, the Air and Space Force participates in NATO's air policing rotations on the eastern flank. Since the end of March 2024, and for a period of four months, the *Vilkas* detachment with eight *F-18s* will be operating in Lithuania, while in Romania, the *Paznic* detachment, with five *Eurofighters*, reinforced surveillance in the Black Sea for two weeks. NATO airspace defence missions include a surveillance radar in Schitu, Romania, a NASAMS anti-aircraft battery in Lielvarde, Latvia and a *Patriot* anti-missile battery in Adana, Türkiye.

### AIR POLICING

The *Vilkas* tactical air detachment that takes part in the Baltic Air Policing (BAP) mission has completed the third of its four months of deployment in Lithuania. Located since the end of March 2024 at Šiauliai air base, 180 kilometres from the capital, Vilnius, it consists mainly of airmen from the 12th and 15th Wings and eight *F-18s*. This is the first time that two units using this type of aircraft have joined a NATO mission.

It also consists of an *A-400M* from the 31st Wing, to support air-to air refuelling tasks, as well as personnel from the Armament and Experimentation Logistics Centre (CLAEX), specialists in electronic warfare, which brings the detachment to almost 190 troops, all of them under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Pablo Estrada.

The BAP mission began in 2004 to address the lack of combat aircraft in the three Baltic states. In these 20 years, Spain has been one of the countries with the greatest presence, leading the mission on several occasions. In 2014, after Russia's illegitimate annexation of Crimea, a second air policing presence was established at Amari air base (Estonia), which has also had a Spanish detachment on various occasions.

On 28 March 2024, a ceremony at Šiauliai air base marked the handover of NATO's Baltic Air Policing mission in which the Belgian and French commanders handed the key to Baltic Air Space over to the Spanish and Portuguese commanders. The event also marked the 20th anniversary of the mission. It was attended by the President of the Republic of Lithuania, Gitanas Nausėda, as well as by military commanders from some NATO countries, including, on the Spanish side, the head of the Operations Command, Lieutenant General Francisco Braco, and diplomatic representatives, including the Spanish Ambassador to Lithuania, María Nieves Blanco.

In addition, five *Eurofighters* and 57 members of the 14th Wing spent two weeks in April 2024 at Mihail Kogalniceanu air base in Romania conducting missions as part of NATO's Flexible Deterrence



Marco Romero/MDE

Frigate *Almirante Juan de Borbón* has been deployed for six months in the seas of northern Europe. Pictured, members of the crew paying tribute to the Minister of Defence.

undertaken this year to reinforce NATO's eastern border. The longest-standing deployment is in Latvia, where the Spanish Army has been contributing since 2017 to the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) mission with a contingent of some 600 troops, within the Canadian-led multinational brigade. Our country is the second largest contributor in terms of personnel and the first in terms of combat power.

Also within eFP, a 250-strong Marine company-size task group is expected to join the French-led brigade in Romania in September 2024.

In addition to the command of SNMG-1 —with the participation of logistic support ship *Cantabria* from January to March 2024— the Spanish Navy has provided minehunter *Segura* to NATO Mine Countermeasures Task Group from March to June 2024 and often participates throughout the year in operation *Sea Guardian*, which ensures the security of maritime routes in the western Mediterranean. Frigate *Navarra* has recently been deployed to this mission, making eleven approaches, as well as friendly ones, to ships sailing in the area.



NEARLY 2,000 Spanish troops participate with land, sea, and air deployments in NATO's deterrence and defence missions in Europe.

Spain has also participated with other operational organisations in the series of exercises Defender Europe 24 and in surveillance activities to reinforce the security in the Mediterranean.



## NATO MARITIME FORCES



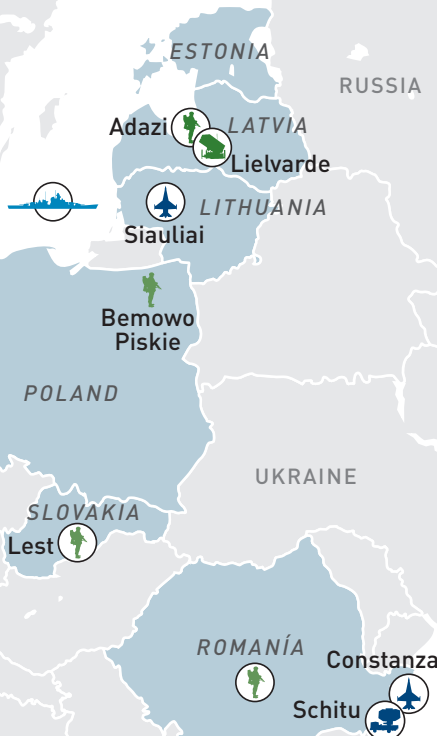
- Frigate Almirante Juan de Borbón. Flagship for Standing NATO Maritime Group number 1 (SNMG-1) from January to July. Crew: 200.
- Logistic Support ship Cantabria (contributed to SNMG-1 from January to March). 178 troops.
- Minehunter Segura, integrated into Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group in the Mediterranean (from March to June 2024). Crew: 46.



## AIR DEFENCE



- NASAMS anti-aircraft battery in Lielvarde (Latvia). 40 troops.
- Patriot anti-missile battery in Adana, Türkiye. 149 soldiers.



## ENHANCED FORWARD PRESENCE



- A mechanised company-size task group and field artillery, sapper, engineer and logistics units in Adazi, Latvia. 600 troops.
- A 750-strong contingent and 250 vehicles at Leš (Slovakia). Spain has been leading the multinational brigade since July 2023.
- Since September 2024, a company-size task group with 250 marines will be joining the French-led brigade in Romania.



## AIR POLICING



- Vilkas detachment, consisting of eight F-18s and one A-400M. In total, 190 soldiers from the 12th, 15th and 31st Wings at Šiauliai air base (Lithuania).
- Paznic Air Policing Detachment, consisting of 5 Eurofighters and 59 soldiers from the 14th Wing at Mihail Kogalniceanu air base, Romania, from 10 to 19 April 2024.



- Tigru detachment with an air surveillance radar and 40 soldiers at Schitu barracks in Romania.

## MULTINATIONAL EXERCISES



- During its deployment across the Mediterranean, the Dédalo-24 Expeditionary Battlegroup has participated in NATO's Neptune Strike "enhanced peacetime surveillance activities".



- The Spanish Army has participated with various units in exercise Steadfast Defender 24, alongside forces from 20 countries.



Two Spanish *F-18*s and three Spanish *Eurofighters* deployed in Lithuania and Romania respectively, fly together on a mission supported by an *A400M*.

Options (FDO), an activity also aimed at strengthening deterrence and defence on Europe's eastern flank, in this case over the Black Sea. Throughout these two weeks, the *Paznic* detachment trained with Romanian Air Force *F-16*s and British Royal Air Force *Eurofighters*. However, it also trained with the Spanish aircraft protecting Baltic airspace: the *F-18*s and *A-400M*s of the *Vilkas* detachment flew from Lithuania to Romania —over 1,500 kilometres— to carry out air combat exercises, thus demonstrating their agility to deploy rapidly anywhere in Allied territory, in this case in Romanian airspace.

The *A-400M*'s refuelling support was instrumental in extending the range of the fighter jets without having to land. NATO highlighted

this deployment in a communiqué from the Allied Air Command at Ramstein, Germany, underscoring “the capabilities, readiness and preparedness” of the Spanish soldiers and assets placed at the disposal of NATO's collective defence.

In addition to the fighter jets, Spain contributes to the control of Allied skies with the Combined Air Operations Centre (CAOC) at Torrejón air base (Madrid), in charge of patrolling the southern half of Europe (from the Canary Islands to Türkiye and from the Azores to Romania). A second CAOC located in Uedem, Germany, is responsible for patrolling the northern part of the continent. Both centres have a network of ground-based radars that alert air policing fighter jets when they detect potential threats. For the past year and a half, our nation has also provided support for this mission through the *Tigru* detachment in Romania. This unit is equipped with an early warning radar that has already performed over 12,000 hours of surveillance.

**Victor Hernandez**



Spanish soldiers in Slovakia train at the Lešt military training area together with other forces of the multinational battlegroup.



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**REAR ADMIRAL JOAQUÍN RUIZ ESCAGEDO,  
SNMG1 COMMANDER**

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# “THIS DEPLOYMENT IS FULL OF CHALLENGES”

Pointing out that this Allied fleet was the first to visit Sweden after it joined NATO, Adm. (OF-6) Ruiz Escagedo stresses the “excellent results” achieved in exercise *Steadfast Defender*

“A six-month deployment leading SNMG1 in the region of Europe closest to NATO’s eastern flank is, by definition and under the current circumstances, full of challenges”. This is the view of Rear Admiral Joaquín Ruiz Escagedo, who has concluded his term as commander of this standing NATO maritime group, which not only ensures security but also forges first-rate diplomatic relations. On board frigate *Almirante Juan de Borbón*, SNMG1’s flagship, he expresses his satisfaction with what he has achieved at the helm of this multinational force, projecting the constant and visible presence of NATO’s solidarity on the seas.

### —What is your overall assessment of these six months?

—Very positive. During these six months, eight ships from five Allied navies have participated in this naval group and together we have carried out presence and surveillance operations and conducted advanced exercises in nearly our entire area of operations, which covers the North Sea and the Baltic



Sea. Among our activities at sea, we have participated in major naval exercise *Steadfast Defender 24*. Furthermore, we have visited eight NATO nations in the region, including Sweden. Spain, which is currently commanding SNMG1, had the privilege of leading the first NATO force to visit Sweden just a few days after it joined the Alliance. A historic milestone that was warmly welcomed by the Swedish authorities and aroused considerable interest in the Swedish media.

### —What was it like to participate in *Steadfast Defender 24*?

—SNMG1 was the only naval group involved in the entire maritime exercise

*Steadfast Defender* series, from the first to the last day. The results have been extraordinary. First, in terms of deterrence, the participation of more than 50 ships in a fictitious scenario with the goal of recapturing territory from an Ally that has been the victim of an external aggression sends the strong message that NATO is united and ready to defend the territory, territorial sea and airspace of all its member states.

### —What does SNMG1 contribute to deterrence and defence on NATO’s eastern flank?

—The continued presence of a naval force made up of vessels from multiple Allied navies, with very high readiness, interoperability and training, operating permanently in the North Sea and the Baltic Sea, the waters closest to the eastern flank, rather than across the Atlantic as in the past.

### —What characterises these NATO groups?

—Since SNMG1 does not have a base, it is always available and remains at sea most of the time. It participates in major NATO exercises to maintain its training at a high standard and continuously monitors maritime activity in the area. The very nature of its structure enables the regular incorporation of allied vessels, ensures interoperability between ships from different navies and provides a command and Staff to which more units can be added and operational tasks immediately assigned if necessary, in the event of a crisis or conflict.

### —Does the *Almirante Juan de Borbón* work well as a flagship?

—Yes. This ship, like the other F-100 class frigates, has excellent command and control systems and is conveniently suited to accommodate and provide working space for a command and its Staff.

All this without undermining its extraordinary capabilities as an escort ship to operate with a shipborne helicopter, deploy for long periods with little or no damage, etc. These capabilities are highly valued in NATO naval groups.

**Santiago F. del Vado**





# WITH OUR ALLIES IN STEADFAST DEFENDER 2024

Spanish Army plays important role in the largest NATO exercise since the Cold War

**O**VER 1,500 Army soldiers have been deployed in recent months to various locations in Europe, mainly Hungary, Poland, Romania and Sweden, to participate in *Steadfast Defender 2024*. This is the largest NATO exercise since the Cold War in which the organisation is implementing its new plans to strengthen deterrence and defence in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

With over 90,000 troops from the 32 allied nations, this exercise began in January and continued until May. This military manoeuvre is split into two overlapping parts and each phase of the exercise includes a series of associated exercises hosted by different countries. The first part, which ran from late January through February, focused on the strategic deployment of US forces across the Atlantic to continental Europe, and included maritime live exercises and amphibious assault training in the North

Atlantic and Arctic seas. The second part was devoted to multi-domain exercises across Europe, from the High North to the Midwest and East, which also tested the rapid deployment capacity of troops and materiel across the Old Continent.

"*Steadfast Defender 2024* is a clear demonstration of our unity, strength and determination to protect each other, our values and the rules-based international order", said General Christopher G. Cavoli, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, at the presentation of the exercise.

## BRILLIANT JUMP

As part of the exercise *Steadfast Defender* series, exercise *Brilliant Jump 2024* took place in the last week of February. Led by the Joint Forces Command (JFC) Brunssum, it was conducted in the Drawsko



Spanish armoured  
vehicles in the  
Drawsko Pomorskie  
training area.







Pomorskie training area in Northern Poland. The exercise tested the Very High Readiness Joint Force (VJTF), which is the “spearhead” of NATO’s Response Force (NRF), made up of air and naval forces.

“It has demonstrated the high level of readiness of our NATO Allies to rapidly deploy, integrate and collectively deter and defend Alliance territory. The VJTF is trained, skilled and capable of responding to any threat at any time from any direction”, said JFC Brunssum spokesperson, Colonel Frank Warda. During the exercise, Allied Forces from

Albania, Poland, Spain, Türkiye and the United Kingdom, which make up the VJTF, honed their skills in rapid deployment, readiness and responsiveness. In total, over 3,000 military personnel and 700 vehicles were brought together in a multinational brigade.

“I am very impressed by the command, control and interoperability of the brigade and the way it has so effectively integrated the forces of the different countries”, said the Deputy Commander of JFC Brunssum, Lieutenant General Luis Lanchares, when he visited the training area on 26 February

2024. “It is a powerful force that is ready to fight”, stated the Spanish general.

The Spanish forces, which formed the armoured task group *Málaga*, arrived in Poland via plane and ship to join the Allies in this exercise. In total, 300 military personnel and 65 vehicles—including *Leopard 2E* battle tanks and *Pizarro* infantry fighting vehicles—were deployed, most of them coming from the 10th Brigade *Guzman El Bueno*, based in Córdoba, the 21st Logistical Support Group from Seville and the 1st Signal Regiment from Huesca. The vehicles, materiel and some of the personnel



Lieutenant General Luis Lanchares, deputy commander of JFC Brunssum, talking with members of the Spanish contingent during his visit to the training area.



Marcel Mankowski





Infantry units cross the Vistula river on engineer platforms. On the left, members of task group *Málaga* pulling oars across the river.

## The rapid deployment capacity of troops and vehicles across Europe has been put to the test

were carried aboard Ro-Ro ship *Blue Wave Harmony* to the port of Szczecin, from where a mechanised march began, covering a distance of over 20 kilometres through the forests of Poland to the Drawsko Pomorskie training area. "The rapid deployment from various bases in Spain to the north of the continent demonstrates the readiness

of our forces to support NATO allies in times of crisis anywhere in Allied territory at short notice", said Spanish Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Díaz Simón, the task group commander. "Exercise *Brilliant Jump* is an excellent opportunity to integrate our capabilities in a live exercise with our allies", added the Spanish officer.

Following *Brilliant Jump*, the VJTF moved on to the Korzeniewo area in the north of the country to participate in Polish exercise Dragon 24, another military drill in the *Steadfast Defender* series.

General Fernando Ruiz Gómez, the commanding officer of the 10th Brigade *Guzmán el Bueno*, visited the troops





A reconnaissance squad from the *San Quintín* Battalion in an urban warfare combat exercise during *Saber Strike 24* at Bemowo Piskie military base in Poland.

during this phase of their deployment in Eastern Europe and was able to see for himself the great work they were carrying out in Poland. On 5 March 2024, the troops gave a dynamic demonstration to those attending the Distinguished Visitors' Day. The key moment was a river-crossing operation on the Vistula, performed by infantry units on engineer platforms and supported by aviation, anti-aircraft artillery and long-range artillery. The event concluded with an exhibition of combat materiel and war-fighting assets from the various participating countries.

In the days that followed, the forces continued their exercise plan in the Bemowo Piskie training area. Task group *Málaga* was combat trained in forests and development sites and carried out operation Cohesion along with UK troops. In addition, other exercises of various types were conducted with the 11th Polish Armoured Cavalry Division, and US and French forces were integrated into NATO's battlegroup in Poland.

### **SABER STRIKE**

Another 600 Army soldiers redeployed to Eastern Europe to take part in the next phase of exercise *Steadfast Defender*, which consisted of three exercises: *Saber*

*Strike*, *Immediate Response* and *Swift Response*.

The first of these exercises was conducted until 29 April 2024 at the Bemowo Piskie training area in Poland —65 kilometres south of the Russian

enclave of Kaliningrad—. On this occasion, the Spanish contingent came from the Infantry Battalion *San Quintín* of the 7th Brigade *Galicia*, based in Siero (Asturias) and from the 54th Indigenous Light Infantry Group from Ceuta.

All of them had departed on 10 April 2024 from Asturias airport, while the materiel and vehicles were loaded in the port of Gijón, bound for Gdansk (Poland). Upon their arrival, they were integrated into a multinational force, led by the 5th US Army Corps along with soldiers from Croatia, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania and the United Kingdom.

### **SWIFT RESPONSE**

The Spanish Army once again played an important role in exercise *Swift Response* 24. Conducted between 13 and 18 May 2024 in various locations in Europe, this exercise sought to strengthen the Allied forces' interoperability and readiness to respond in crisis situations.

Over 5,000 troops from various nations took part, including 480 Spaniards from the 6th Parachute Brigade (BRIPAC) *Almogávares*, of the Army Airmobile Force (FAMET) and the 4th Unmanned Aerial Vehicles Group (GROSA IV) of the 1st Intelligence Regiment.



Storm troops board a FAMET *Chinook* in the area of operations in Romanian.





For the occasion, the Army Airmobile Force (FAMET) deployed five helicopters to Romania, including a *CH47 Chinook*, two *NH-90s* and two *Tiger* attack helicopters, and GROS IV provided a PASI (Autonomous Sensorised Intelligence Platform) flight unit. The latter was a milestone in the Group's history, as it was the first time it deployed its unmanned reconnaissance aircraft unit to a foreign country after returning from Afghanistan.

In addition to the aforementioned air units, the operations included airdrops from Papa air base in Hungary to the Turda area in Romania, and from Aviano air base in Italy to Hagshult in Sweden.

The highlight of the exercise for the Spanish troops was the jump in Turda alongside units from Germany, the United States, France and the Netherlands. In this area of operations, troops from the Forward Reconnaissance Company (CRAW) were inserted by means of a night-time HAHO jump with a travel distance of 9 kilometres.

In Sweden, BRIPAC paratroopers —specifically from the 2nd-4 Protected Infantry *Flag Roger de Lauria*— conducted military manoeuvres under combat conditions. Among other actions, they simulated Joint Forcible Entry operations, an action meant to take and retain control of an area against an enemy's armed opposition in order to facilitate the airborne landing of more units.

This phase of the exercise culminated in an exchange of "rokiskis" (airborne 'wings') with US paratroopers from the US 173rd Airborne Brigade, symbolising the strong camaraderie among the Allied forces.

An *A400M* of the Hungarian Air and Space Force, operating from the Hungarian air base, was one of the twelve or so aircraft in charge of the tactical airlifts and airdrops of personnel and materiel.

*Spring Storm 24*, the biggest exercise conducted annually by the Estonian Army with the goal of engaging with its Allies, was held in Estonia in the second half of May as part of this series of military manoeuvres. Ten countries took part in this edition, including more than 300 Spanish troops belonging to the 14th eFP contingent, deployed in Adazi (Latvia).

**Victor Hernández**  
**Photos: EMAD and SHAPE**



Spanish paratroopers jump alongside troops from Germany, the United States, France and the Netherlands.

Marcel Mankowski

# NATO's new training model

**Colonel José Ignacio Yaniz López (Marines)**  
Joint Defence Staff - Force Development Section

**T**HE growing geopolitical tensions and, in particular, Russia's invasion of eastern Ukraine and the ensuing open conflict in the region, have raised concerns about security and defence issues and, specifically, about Europe's own territorial integrity.

NATO is an international security and defence organisation that has just marked its 75th anniversary. As demonstrated by the recent membership of historically neutral nations like Finland and Sweden, NATO is a powerful alliance that is growing and gaining strength.

NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept reaffirms that the Alliance's key purpose is to ensure collective defence utilising a 360-degree approach. It defines three core tasks: deterrence and defence; crisis prevention and management; and cooperative security, with special emphasis on the need to strengthen deterrence and defence as the backbone of the collective defence commitment enshrined in Article 5.

NATO's deterrence and defence posture must be strengthened in order to prevent any chance of aggression from potential adversaries and this requires a significant and sustained presence on the ground of combat-ready, multi-domain forces, including a robust integrated air and missile defence (IAMD) and resilient and improved command and control systems.

Moreover, these forces must be complemented by an enhanced collective response capability (adequate readiness, deployability, integration and interoperability) that can rapidly reinforce any Ally. And all of this must be well-oiled through realistic training and exercises that put decision-making processes to the test, improve planning and enhance the effectiveness of the Alliance's crisis response system.

## PREPAREDNESS AND TRAINING

Derived from the Concept for the Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA), NATO approved SACEUR's AOR-wide Strategic Plan (SASP) in 2021. It includes the design of NATO's new Force Structure, the Allied Response Force (ARF) and the forces deployed in support of the Subordinate Strategic Plans (SSP) and Regional Plans (RP).

The ARF, an evolution of the enhanced NATO Response Force (eNRF), is a force that will act as SACEUR's strategic reserve, with high readiness, and its contribution from Allied nations is made on a year-to-year basis. The first of these forces is in its preparedness and training period and will be ready on 1 July 2024. Adaptation to this new force model is associated with a sequence of exercises in line with the plans derived from NATO's Deterrence and Defence Concept. This new exercise programme that has begun to be implemented in 2024 consists of a series of four major annual exercises, the basic characteristics of which are as follows:

**STEADFAST DETERRENCE (STDC):** A multi-domain, strategic and operational level CPX (command posts exercise) that seeks to train NATO's Command Structure and Force Structure in the

**With this new exercise programme, the Alliance is seeking a cyclical, systematised and credible training model**



execution of multi-domain operations against peer adversaries in crisis situations. The exercise is carried out in May and the scenario covers the entire NATO area of responsibility. It is used to evaluate the ARF command and control structure.

**STEADFAST DUEL (STDU):** A multi-domain, operational and tactical level CPX-type exercise in which one of the Regional Plans (RP) is evaluated annually in a crisis and conflict scenario against a peer adversary.

In 2024, this exercise will mainly take place in October in the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions. During the exercise, the ability of the Joint Force Command Naples (JFCNP) to plan and conduct defensive operations will be evaluated, as well as its capacity as a supported Command to implement Regional Plan South-East. In addition, and for the first time, it will have the chance to implement first level efforts for the benefit of this Regional Plan, including synchronisation with the national defence plans of NATO countries in the South-East region.

**STEADFAST DAGGER (STDA):** A multi-domain, operational and tactical level CPX-type exercise carried out in December in which the ARF will carry out a non-Article 5 response operation outside NATO's area of responsibility (AOR). This year's exercise will train the ARF in the planning and execution of operations against terrorist groups that challenge NATO and its partners, based on a scenario in the West African region.

This exercise will be the first of a range of exercises focusing on NATO's Crisis Prevention and Management, and Cooperative Security, outside SACEUR's area of responsibility, and in the context of the Concept for the Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area, in which both Allies and non-NATO partners and organisations participate.

**STEADFAST DART (STDT):** An ARF live exercise (LIVEX) —involving the deployment and employment of forces— in its stand-by period, aimed at testing and training its ALERTEX/DEPLOYEX/

EMPLOYEX (activation, deployment and employment) capability. It takes place in the first four months of the year at regional level and its main purpose is to optimise the deterrence capability and improve the minimum military requirements (MMR) of this force.

The exercise in 2025, which will involve the ARF-24, will be NATO's main LIVEX in the coming year and will take place in NATO's South-East region.

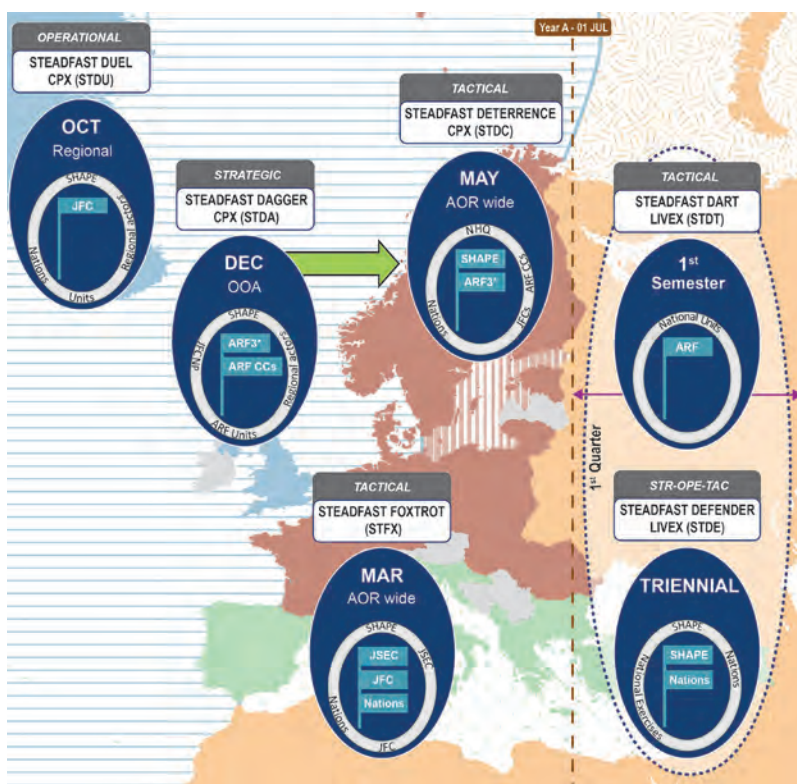
National contributions to ARF "A" (from 1 July of year A to 30 June of year A+1) will have to follow a preparation process that will start in their training period with exercises Steadfast Dagger (December of year A-1) and Steadfast Deterrence (May of year A) and will continue in their stand-by period with LIVEX Steadfast Dart (first quarter of year A+1).

This major exercise programme will be complemented by Steadfast Defender, a LIVEX taking place every three years, which combines national and NATO exercises. It is designed to ensure that forces are trained, able to operate together and ready to

deploy and respond to potential threats in any scenario, in an uncertain security environment. Steadfast Defender is NATO's main LIVEX in 2024, and includes a number of exercises, many of which involve the participation of Spanish forces. The LIVEX phase of the exercise began in February and was extended until the end of May. The next exercise of this range will take place in 2027 and is already in the planning phase.

Finally, Steadfast Foxtrot, a force projection and sustainment exercise led by the Joint Sustainment & Enablement Command (JSEC), will be conducted annually from 2024 to 2026 in support of the Regional Plans. It will reach its peak in 2027 as a LIVEX to project and sustain the forces involved in Steadfast Defender throughout NATO's area of responsibility.

In conclusion, with this new exercise programme, the Alliance is seeking a cyclical, systematised and credible training model, based on the Allies' strong commitment, which will contribute effectively to NATO's deterrence and defence.





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INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS

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# SURVEILLANCE IN EUROPEAN SEAS

Expeditionary Strike Group *Dédalo* 24 deploys in the Mediterranean and the Baltic to assist in the defence of the eastern flank





**T**HE unmistakable aircraft carrier *Juan Carlos I* sails slowly out of the bay of Souda, in Crete, silhouetted against the horizon and escorted by frigate *Blas de Lezo*, approaching on the port side. On the flight deck, five *Harrier* aircraft are positioned for take-off, awaiting the launch director's signal. One after the other, with an interval of just over a minute, they take off and leave the ship, thus initiating a new mission within

NATO's *Neptune Strike* surveillance activities.

Almost simultaneously, while an *Augusta Bell 212* helicopter hovers over this same deck, from which four marines descend by fast rope, two landing aircraft mechanised (LCMs) with the personnel and equipment needed for a land incursion head towards the coast. While this occurs, the other two ships of Expeditionary Strike Group *Dédalo 24*—amphibious assault ship *Galicia* and

frigate *Reina Sofia*—conduct exercises near Albania.

This Spanish carrier air group has been engaged in *Neptune Strike* during its deployment in the Mediterranean. It is its first exercise of the year and its third since its inception in February 2023. It has also carried out an intense surveillance activity in support of operation *Sea Guardian* to fight transnational terrorism. It has participated in exercise *Mare Aperto*, organised by the Italian Navy,



Two landing craft mechanised (LCM), with Marine material, approach LHD *Juan Carlos I*, the *Dédalo*'s flagship.



A *Harrier* lands on the deck of LHD *Juan Carlos I*, with F-103 *Blas de Lezo* at a short distance.



and has taken part in bilateral activities with the Greek and Turkish Armed Forces. ESG “Dédalo” has also led amphibious operations on the island of Sazan (Albania) and in Sardinia (Italy), together with Italian and Romanian units and special operations teams from North Macedonia and Albania.

The expeditionary group concluded its activities in the Mediterranean and proceeded to the port of Gijón to participate in Spain’s Armed Forces Day. At the time of going to press, the group was heading towards the Baltic Sea to take part in exercise Baltops 24. During this exercise, a helicopter from Sweden is scheduled to land on the Juan Carlos I. It will be the first time that a unit from this new NATO member has interacted with an allied ship.

Over the course of their three and a half-month deployment, the four Spanish vessels will travel a total of 13,000 miles

between Istanbul (Türkiye) and Helsinki (Finland). “The aim is to demonstrate Spain’s commitment to Allied deterrence, defence and security”, says Rear Admiral Gonzalo Villar, commander of the Fleet Amphibious and Force Projection Group, who leads ESG “Dédalo” along with his General Staff aboard the aforementioned

**ESG Dédalo  
consists of four  
ships, seven  
aircraft and several  
landing craft and  
helicopters**

aircraft carrier. Besides participating in NATO’s main exercises on the seas and coasts of Europe and other bilateral and multilateral exercises “with all the partners we meet along the way”, they will be interacting with some of NATO’s land and air forces deployed along the eastern flank, in particular with Spanish forces.

The first of these collaborations took place in mid-April, a joint patrolling exercise in Bulgarian airspace in which Harriers joined Spanish Eurofighters from the Paznic detachment that were operating in Romania. The objective was to demonstrate how aircraft carriers could contribute to enhancing security in the airspace along the Alliance’s eastern border.

“We are here to make NATO’s deterrent message as strong as possible and to ensure that there is no conflict in Europe”, says Rear Admiral Villar, pointing



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## INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS

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out that so far there have been no clashes with Russian forces. “In the Baltic, Russian units fly and sail frequently, but this is understandable because they have a coastline with this sea. So far, the conduct of both parties has been completely safe and professional”.

### ALLIED EXERCISE

Enhancing NATO's capacity to integrate carrier groups in support of its allied deterrence and defence strategy has been one of the objectives of exercise *Neptune Strike 24*, defined by the Allied Command as “unscripted, multi-domain enhanced vigilance activities”.

LHD *Juan Carlos I* joined Italian aircraft carrier *Cavour*, French *Charles de Gaulle* and Turkish *Anadolu* in this exercise, which involved a total of 21 vessels and 48 aircraft, including fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters, and two Marine Infantry battalions —one of them Spanish— with 150 vehicles. Altogether, there were more than 4,600 troops hailing from 15 countries, and 4 amphibious operations and more than 350 sorties were flown. The *Harriers* flew eight to ten sorties a day. “After take-off, we normally meet airborne with aircraft from other countries”, explains the commander of the air unit on board LHD *Juan Carlos I*, Commander Víctor

Esparragosa, while pointing at one of the aircraft about to take off on the ship's flight deck. “The launch director gives final instructions and the pilot makes a number of checks in the cockpit such as power and airworthiness”, he explains. “The pilot then applies full power and when the aircraft is almost off the ship he rotates the nozzles to achieve that characteristic Harrier climb that allows it to take off in such a short range”.

According to one of the pilots, Lieutenant Pablo Bayo, with three years' experience in the squadron, the *Harriers* are more manual than fourth- or fifth-generation aircraft such as the *Eurofighter*.



Two AB212 helicopters take off from Crete towards the *Juan Carlos I*. On the right, two marines handle a mortar; and staff working on the bridge of the carrier.

## INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS



From the air transit control tower of the *Juan Carlos I*, two operators remain in close contact with the aircraft while it flies and until it approaches the ship.

This allows them to continue fighting even if the aircraft suffers a malfunction: “We can control it better, because the electromagnetic or computer aids are not as important in this case. Basically, you feel more like a pilot”, he says.

When they are aboard, they remain on “alert 60”, i.e. they have to be airborne within an hour. “But we can be on alert 5, with the pilot on board and ready to fly while being refuelled with the aircraft’s engine running. That’s the kind of patrol we organise if we’re in an immediate war environment”. *Harriers* can cover about 600 miles without refuelling, but during *Neptune Strike* they flew three to four hours, refuelling both on the way out and on the way back.

The *Harriers*’ unique characteristic is their vertical landing. Lieutenant Bayo explains how they do this: “We reach 350 knots to have enough power, we position ourselves at a distance of one mile from the ship, set the nozzles at 60° to slow down but still be supported by the wings, we turn 180° to face the ship and set the nozzles at 90° to gradually decelerate and land on the ship”.

### FLAGSHIP

*Neptune Strike* was led by the Naval Striking and Support Forces, a NATO headquarters in Oeiras, Portugal.

Vice Admiral Tom Ishee, its commander and also the commander of the US 6th Fleet, used LHD *Juan Carlos I* as its flagship and embarked a forward command element for four days, certifying the Spanish vessel’s capacity to operate in the event of a contingency.

The 27,000-tonne, ten-storey carrier is 232 metres long, i.e. the length of two and a half soccer pitches. It carries seven *Harrier* aircraft, three AB212 transport helicopters, six *Supercat* high speed craft and four landing craft mechanised (LCM). “The great thing about this ship is its versatility”, says its commander, Navy Captain Ricardo Gómez Delgado. “It’s value for money and it looks good, in other words, we can do a lot of things at a very good price”, he adds.

Eight hundred people, 250 of whom are marines, live on the ship during this mission. Another 250 travel and operate from amphibious assault ship *Galicia*.

The marines play a critical role in the Expeditionary Strike Group. “Our mission is to be prepared for any scenario in which we have to project naval power over land”, explains Major Jaime Simón, second in command of the Reinforced Landing Battalion. To this end, they are equipped with rifle company’s specific armament, mortars, VAMTAC vehicles, sapper material, communications equipment, fire support control and coordination batteries and NBC materiel, among other capabilities. Personnel and material are transferred ashore in landing craft, which sail from a lower deck that is flooded to enable their exit. Aircraft carrier *Juan Carlos I* also has



Lika, a four-year-old Belgian Shepherd-German Shepherd cross-breed, accompanies the marines during the *Dédalo*’s deployment.





This deployment helps to ensure that “NATO’s deterrent message is as strong as possible and that there is no conflict in Europe”, says Rear Admiral Gonzalo Villar, commander of ESG *Dédalo*.

a *Role 2E* hospital, measuring 600 square metres, with two operating rooms —one for traumatology and the other for general surgery—, an ICU with eight beds, X-ray and a laboratory. It also has a hospitalisation area with 14 beds and a blood bank, and is integrated in a telemedicine network in direct contact with the Military Central Hospital Gómez Ulla.

Its medical staff provides health care to the rest of the ships forming part of the *Dédalo*. In addition to anaesthetists, intensivists, specialists in pharmacy and analysis, etc., there is a dentist and a physiotherapist, mainly to attend to the pilots, whose teeth suffer greatly from pressure changes and frequent contractures.

Throughout this deployment, they did not have to deal with any serious emergencies, just the evacuation of an NCO who broke his ankle.

#### REMEMBERING TÜRKIYE

This year, the *Dédalo* has resumed some of the activities it had to cancel in 2023. “We were on our way to Egypt to conduct an exercise with the Egyptian Navy when the earthquake in Türkiye struck”, recalls Rear

Admiral Villar. We cancelled everything and left at full speed to support the Turkish people”.

He remembers every minute of those days. “We saw the versatility and agility of a naval force that, in a matter of hours, became a force that provided humanitarian assistance to a population in need”. The commander of ESG *Dédalo* also points out that when they arrived they found the port on fire. “If we had been a conventional force, we wouldn’t have been able to deliver assistance. But because we are an amphibious force, we

dispatched our reconnaissance teams to find a beach that would allow us to be up and running, from the get-go”. Within four hours they had delivered ten tonnes of their own food and ten tonnes of their bottled water and had 80 marines working in the rubble. “We were lucky enough to have helped save a 7-year-old child and a 70-year-old adult, as well as recover dozens of bodies”.

They spent five days, sixteen hours a day, at Adana airport manually unloading trucks and planes. At the port of Limak, they unloaded boats carrying humanitarian aid and assisted in the distribution of 3,600 tonnes of food and other supplies. Five days later, those same marines who had been rescuing survivors from under the rubble were making amphibious landings on a beach in Albania as part of exercise *Neptune Strike 23*. “This shows that expeditionary nature that gives us our name”, points out Rear Admiral Villar, “that ability to conduct operations far from our homeland wherever we are needed and as swiftly as possible”.

Elena Tarilonte

Photos: Pepe Díaz

(Special envoys to the port of Souda)

**Spanish Navy  
flagship, LHD *Juan  
Carlos I*, has 800  
service members  
on board, 250 of  
whom are marines**

“The Army and Future Challenges” Conference 2024

# Cyberspace operations



**Major General Fernando Luis Morón**

Director for Research, Doctrine, Organisation and Materiel of the MADOC

**O**N 6 and 7 May 2024, the Training and Doctrine Command (MADOC) hosted the eighth edition of “The Army and Future Challenges Conference, entitled “The Army and Cyberspace Operations”, in the University of Jaén’s aula magna. At this event, prominent figures from various fields discussed the implications of this new cyberspace domain for military operations.

The conference was presided over by the Chief of the Army Staff, Army General Amador Enseñat, who, after the inauguration, gave the floor to the Lieutenant General commander of the MADOC and to the Rector of the University of Jaén. Both speakers discussed the geopolitical environment, which is defined by the pervasiveness of digital devices and our extreme reliance on them. They also talked about the opportunities and risks that new developments in cyberspace-related technology bring for security and how they affect military operations.

The conference programme was organised into three initial conferences and three round tables. Lieutenant General José María Millán, Director General of the Centre for Information and Communications Systems and Technologies (CESTIC), described the capabilities that this centre provides to the Armed Forces’ operational structure. These capabilities include hyperconnectivity, ensuring freedom of action in cyberspace, attaining information superiority and the development of multi-domain operations.

In addition to the previous strategic approach, in the second lecture, Vice Admiral Francisco Javier Roca, Commander of the Joint Cyberspace Command (MCCE), analysed the operational dimension provided by the current war in Ukraine, and the lessons that may be drawn from it. He stressed that in Ukraine we are

witnessing the most technologically advanced war in the history of mankind, due to the successful use of a new area of operations: cyberspace.

Major General Guillermo Ramírez Altozano, Head of Information Systems, Telecommunications and Technical Assistance (JCISAT), gave a lecture that concluded this initial transversal view. He focused on the tactical level and the Army’s specific role, sharing his view on the present and future of land operations in cyberspace and the effort the Army is making by maintaining 15 to 20% of its personnel specially trained to operate in the cyberspace domain while contributing with some 2,000 troops to the joint effort.

Following this complementary perspective from the three levels, strategic, operational and tactical, the first panel of speakers, moderated by cybersecurity journalist José de la Peña, focused on “Cyberspace as a New Operational Environment”.

Colonel Francisco José Oliva of the JCISAT, the first speaker, provided an introduction to cyberspace, a new global domain that has arisen with the popularity of the Internet. Its physical components are connected via the electromagnetic spectrum, carrying information that can have an impact on other physical and/or cognitive domains, constituting seamless unity.

**Cyberspace-related technologies pose security risks and have an impact on military operations**



Colonel Ignacio Javier Simón, the MCCE representative, provided numerous examples of the role played by cyberspace in recent conflicts. He mentioned navigation and positioning warfare, satellite communications, observation satellites and electronic warfare, the latter, for example, having proven to be a very effective means in the fight against unmanned aerial systems.

Colonel Bonifacio Gutiérrez de León of the MADOC continued his detailed explanation of how new disruptive technologies, mainly artificial intelligence, are revolutionising the operations space, particularly in cyberspace, in areas such as decision-making, situational awareness, and secure communications, enabling so-called multi-domain operations.

Manuel Medina, a Constitutional Law Professor at the University of Seville, concluded this vision of cyberspace as a new operational environment by introducing us to its legal framework. He highlighted how current regulations exclude security and defence systems from the safeguards of people's rights when using automated systems and AI. It is hence necessary to find an interpretation in international law, even though it precedes the rise of the cyberspace domain.

The second round table, Convergence of Cyber and Electromagnetic Activities, was moderated by María Teresa Martín, professor of ADP languages and systems at the University of Jaén.

The round table was opened by Manuel Lucena, a professor of computer science and AI at the University of Jaén. He approached the topic from the point of view of information security, whose protection mechanisms have evolved in tandem with the development of the technologies themselves.

Colonel Manuel Sasot of the JCISAT then spoke about the coordination between the two different types of operations, cyberspace and electromagnetic, thus introducing the CEMA (Cyber Electromagnetic Activities) concept. CEMA comprises the integration of the different activities for coordination and synchronisation in cyberspace and the electromagnetic spectrum, while access to such activities by the adversary is denied or degraded.

Following the conceptual framework, Colonel Victor Valero of the High Readiness Land Headquarters, clarified how the CEMA concept is developed in NATO, although there is still no unified doctrine on the subject. To conclude the round table, Colonel Miguel Ángel San Segundo, commander of the 31st Electronic Warfare Regiment, explained how military cyber defence is implemented at the tactical level.

And going from the general to the particular, Colonel Javier Bermejo of the National Institute for Aerospace Technology (INTA) moderated the last round table on "Disruptive and Emerging Technologies in Cyberspace", which focused on enabling technologies.

Lieutenant Colonel Carlos Herrero, from the Army's Logistic Support Command, provided us with a conceptual introduction to quantum computing and the threat it poses to our current cryptography.

Manuel Pérez, from GMV, explained the importance of positioning, navigation and timing (PNT) signals, and how their attack and defence has become a separate chapter of great importance in modern conflicts.

Roberto Amado, expert at S2Grupo, presented the security challenges posed by the growing convergence of the Internet of Things in information technologies and operational technologies. The advantages of hyperconnectivity and the unimpeded flow of data are countered by growing cybersecurity vulnerabilities, which we must mitigate with the use of tools such as AI.

Finally, the presentation by José Martínez, from Jaén-based company INNOVASUR, focused on the application of fifth-generation technologies



to the field of military communications and their usefulness in developing capabilities, such as the combat cloud in the tactical environment.

Lastly, before the closing remarks by the Lieutenant General commander of the MADOC, a summary of the conference's conclusions was presented. It emphasised that any successful operational activity now requires the deployment of increasingly complex, interoperable and resilient information and communications technology and systems capabilities, as these have become an essential enabler.

In conclusion, "The Army and Future Challenges" Conference is once again consolidating its position as the primary venue for thought, debate and foresight at the Army's academic level, in perfect synergy with the "Army, Business and Innovation Forum" (Foro 2E+I), which focuses on the technological environment and the industrial sector.





In these eleven years, the mission has trained over 20,000 Malian soldiers, enabling them to conduct operations aimed at restoring the integrity of their territory and reducing the threat posed by terrorist groups. Spain has had four generals in command and has carried out more than a hundred projects benefitting the local population, mainly to support the educational development of children and promote the future of women.





# EU MISSION IN MALI ENDS

### Defence Minister welcomes last troops of the contingent at Torrejón air base

**O**VER the course of eleven years, Spain has contributed more than 8,300 troops to the European Union's training mission in Mali (EUTM-Mali), where our nation has had four generals in command. The mission's objectives include training nearly 20,000 Malian soldiers and executing 110 projects benefitting the civilian population. The mission, which began in 2013, ended on 18 May 2024, after the EU-27 agreed not to extend its last mandate.

Upon arriving at Torrejón air base, Madrid, in the early hours of May 19, 2024, Defence Minister Margarita Robles thanked the last contingent, consisting of 116 Spanish troops and 16 soldiers from other European countries, for their hard work and dedication.

Robles pointed out that "it is a source of pride to have contributed to peace and development hand in hand with the men and women of the Armed Forces who, once again, have set the Spanish bar sky-high with their commitment, empathy and professionalism". "You can return home with your heads held high and with the satisfaction of having fulfilled your duty", the Minister said, and reiterated that "Spain and its Armed Forces are a benchmark wherever they go".

The Chief of Defence Staff, Admiral General Teodoro López Calderón, also congratulated them on their excellent



Margarita Robles greeting the soldiers arriving from Mali on the runways of Torrejón air base in the early hours of 19 May 2024.

work, stressing that, for almost a decade, our soldiers have been engaged in a mission that highlights their great capacity, rigour, and capability.

In turn, Spanish Brigadier General Santiago Fernández Ortiz-Repiso, the last commander of EUTM-Mali, expressed his optimism that the Malian Armed Forces, having received training over these years from European military personnel, "can and will be able to offer stability and guarantee peace in the country".

Margarita Robles, in a virtual meeting with her Malian counterpart, Colonel Sadio Camara, on 14 March 2024, thanked the Malian authorities for their "welcome and constant hospitality" to the successive Spanish contingents deployed and reaffirmed Spain's steadfast determination to continue assisting this African nation in battling the

terrorist threat and regaining stability.

EUTM-Mali's first mandate was approved by the European Council on 17 January 2013 in response to a call by the UN Security Council and a request for assistance from the Malian President.

The mission's primary lines of action were outlined in Article 1, which called for the provision of military advice and training to the Armed Forces in the south of the country to help them regain their military capacity. The objective was to enable the Malian Armed Forces to conduct operations aimed at restoring the integrity of their

territory and reducing the threat posed by terrorist groups. EUTM-Mali had no mandate to engage in combat operations.

#### TAKING STOCK OF THE MISSION

The first Spanish forces were sent to Mali on 1 April 2013 after Parliament's approval. On 18 June 2013, the Defence Commission authorised an increase of the contingent to 110 troops, along with the necessary support elements. On 24 January 2014, Parliament authorised an increase to a maximum of 280 troops in order to assume command of the mission.

Most of the Spanish troops were deployed in the town of Koulikoro, some 60 kilometres northeast of the capital, Bamako. This is where they trained the Malian soldiers who, after completing their initial training and instruction, were sent to the north of the country to fight the jihadist

Marco Romero/MDE

# INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS



ENMAD

On 16 April 2024, the contingent's CIMIC team, accompanied by the Spanish consul, donated food and supplies to the *Ashed* orphanage that takes care of 102 abandoned children.

groups that were still operating relatively freely in the area.

From 2014 onwards, the mission's mandates were further extended. In 2016, its scope of action was expanded to the *G5 Sahel*, with the aim of enhancing the interoperability of the Malian Armed Forces with the rest of the armed forces of that joint force.

The training programmes were suspended in April 2022 when the EU decided to focus on advisory tasks. This was due to the rapprochement with Russia of the military junta ruling the country since the last coup and to the presence of mercenaries from private company *Wagner*.

Following the closure of Koulikoro base at the end of May 2023, the mission's activities were centred in Bamako. The warm farewell from the Malians upon the closure of Koulikoro base demonstrated the excellent relationship between the various Spanish contingents and the country's civil society throughout those 10 years.

In the past year, Spain has participated with approximately 130 troops out of a total of some 160, making it the country

that has contributed the most personnel. Both the general in charge of EUTM-Mali, the main positions of his Staff and the Executive Officer have been Spanish, as has the entire Protection Force, which provided security for the HQ.

Together with the military contribution, the Ministry of Defence has enabled the implementation of 110 projects that will benefit the local population. These projects include helping children with their educational needs, putting policies in place to give Malian women a better and more prosperous future, providing basic



FAM

General Diarra, the MAF Chief of Staff, presenting a gift to General Ortiz-Repiso in appreciation for his work.

necessities like access to drinking water, or enhancing health services.

Additionally, our contingent has managed and delivered numerous Spanish donations of non-perishable food, clothing, and sanitary and hygiene supplies.

## APPRECIATION

On 11 May 2024, General Fernández Ortiz-Repiso and Major General Oumar Diarra, the MAF Chief of Staff, had a farewell meeting as a way for the Malian Armed Forces (MAF) to show their appreciation for this work. At the beginning of his speech, Diarra emphasised that, during their eleven years of working together to combat terrorism, Mali and EUTM had maintained an excellent relationship. He also praised the Spanish commander of the mission for his temperance, availability, and concern for the well-being of the Malian Armed Forces.

Two days earlier, General Fernández Ortiz-Repiso conveyed his satisfaction with the progress made during a videoconference from the Operations Command headquarters with the Defence Minister. "We can state that it has been a mission accomplished by all the soldiers who have worked here". "We must now stay by their side, asking them what they need, and making every effort to cooperate and support them as much as possible in the future".

Throughout these years, the mission in Mali has been supported by the *Marfil* detachment of the Spanish Air and Space Force. Currently based in Dakar, Senegal, it comprises some 60 soldiers and a C-295 aircraft from the 35th Wing, which also provides tactical airlift to the EU training mission in the Central African Republic (EUTM-RCA), which in turn receives nine instructors from Spain.

Likewise, in Africa, there are 21 soldiers in EUTM-Somalia and 2 observers in EUTM-Mozambique; a Navy ship is regularly integrated into the EU *coordinated maritime presences* to secure the seas of the Gulf of Guinea; and in the Indian Ocean, Spain continues to lead operation *Atalanta* against piracy.

**Victor Hernandez**  
**Photos: Pepe Díaz**



## Operation *Atalanta*

The frigate *Canarias* hands over six suspected Somali pirates



Eunavfor Atalanta

THE frigate *F-86 Canarias* has handed over to the Seychelles authorities in Port Victoria six suspected pirates who had been rescued from the waters of the Gulf of Aden. It appears that they may have been involved in the attack on a merchant ship on Friday 10 May.

The Spanish vessel received an alert on Friday 10 May of a pirate attack on the merchant vessel *MV Chrystal Artic* in the waters of the Gulf of Aden. At that time, the *Canarias* set an interception course at maximum speed as it was 55 nautical miles away from the position of the incident.

In the same alert, the *MV Chrystal Artic* explained how the attack was carried out by six pirates who opened fire on the vessel and that it managed to repel the attack thanks to the security team.

The Spanish frigate ordered the flight of the *SH60-F* helicopter of the 5th Aircraft Squadron to locate, as soon as possible, the responsible vessel for the attack. In the meantime, it continued to sail to the area at maximum speed. The helicopter reached the position of the incident in a short time and located the six alleged perpetrators of the attack at sea with significant injuries such as cuts and burns and with their boat on the verge of sinking.

Shortly afterwards, and after the pirate vessel had completely sunk, the helicopter launched two life rafts that served to ensure the survival of the suspected pirates until the vessel arrived in the area. When the *Canarias* reached the position, it lowered its boats and proceeded to take

the presumed attackers of the merchant ship into custody. This action was taken by the Special Naval Warfare Team (FGNE), which also collected the remains of material from the sunken vessel from the sea for later use as possible evidence of the attack.

Once on board, the suspected pirates were identified and recognised by the frigate's *Role-2F* medical team. One of them had to be treated urgently for his injuries and the medical team was able to stabilise him.

The frigate *Canarias* set course at maximum speed for the city of Port Victoria in the Seychelles, where the wounded man was evacuated and those in custody were handed over to the authorities. The Seychelles is a country with which Operation *Atalanta* has a legal agreement that allows for the surrender and subsequent prosecution of suspected pirates who intercept vessels involved in this EU operation in the Indian Ocean.

Participation in Operation *Atalanta* is part of Spain's firm commitment to the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy, in terms of providing a comprehensive European Union response to the phenomenon of piracy, while contributing to international stability and security. This is the fifth time the *Canarias* has taken part in this operation and it will remain integrated in EUNAVFOR until next June. In 2009, this frigate participated in the rescue of the Basque tuna boat *Alakrana*, also within the framework of operation *Atalanta*.



EMAD

## Fight against the IED Systems

**His Majesty King Felipe VI visits the centre of excellence against improvised explosive devices**

**H**IS Majesty the King visited the Centre of Excellence against Improvised Explosive Devices (C-IED COE), located within the facilities of the Engineering Academy Barracks in Hoyo de Manzanares, Madrid.

This visit represents an important milestone in the history of this NATO-accredited centre and reflects Spain's ongoing commitment to the Alliance, international security and the fight against terrorism.

The C-IED COE is one of the 29 NATO Accredited Centres of Excellence, and has an international staff composed of military personnel belonging to twelve nationalities, including members of the Spanish Armed Forces who, along with members of other military and civilian agencies, serve both in the international expert staff as well as in its support and administration element.

Its mission is to provide support from experts to NATO, to NATO partners and to the International Community in the fight against the IED System in order to increase the security of deployed troops by reducing or eliminating the IED threat, especially from terrorist and insurgent networks and from any emerging threats resulting as a result of the fast-evolving global scenarios.

Felipe VI, who had already visited the centre in 2012 when he still held the title of His Royal Highness the Prince of Asturias, was received on his arrival by the Admiral, Chief of Defence, Teodoro E. López Calderón, Colonel Juan Pedro Moral Albaladejo, Head of the *Academia de Ingenieros*

Barracks and Javier Corbacho Margallo, Colonel and Director of the Centre, and by representatives of the twelve nations that form part of it.

After the honours of ordinance, His Majesty received a presentation about the activities and global impact of the C-IED COE. The presentation highlighted the Centre's contribution to NATO's mission of enhancing international security through specialisation in prevention and response to improvised explosive devices.

Since its creation in 2010, the C-IED COE has emerged as a leading institution in the fight against improvised explosive devices, a significant element in NATO and allied nations' defence and security strategy. Employing personnel of twelve nationalities, the C-IED COE is dedicated to improving the interoperability and capabilities of allied forces, assessing and developing doctrines and validating concepts through experimentation, all in the field of C-IED combat.

Its organisational structure includes specialised groups in Attack the Networks (AtN), Defeat the Device (DtD) and Prepare the Force (PTF), reflecting the pillars of NATO Doctrine. Looking to the future, the C-IED COE strives to be the global reference centre on C-IED related issues, integrating capabilities across all operational domains, including cognitive and cyber, with the aim of responding to increasingly complex threats. Future challenges include improving the centre's international visibility and the expansion of its network of sponsoring countries.



## Protection of civilians

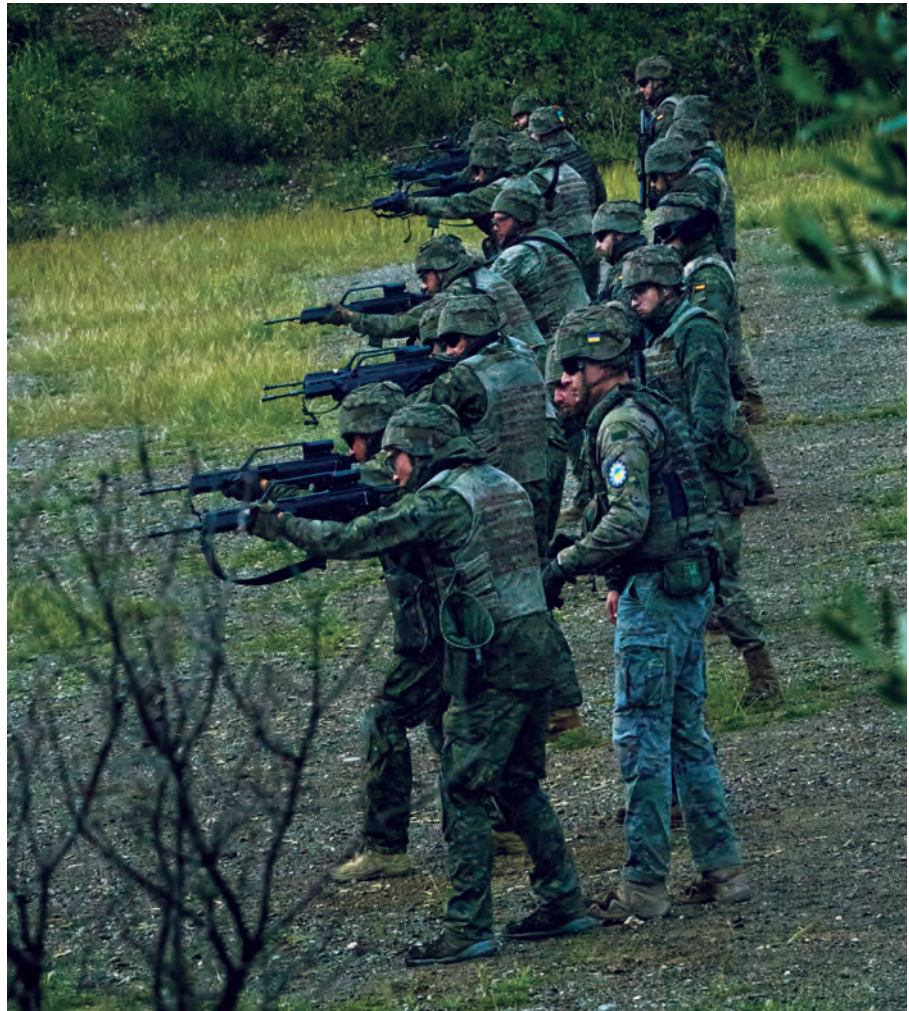
### A step towards safer humanitarian access in south Lebanon

Humanitarian UN Agencies, international and national NGOs and UNIFIL met to improve communication and situational awareness among humanitarian organizations operating in UNIFIL's eastern sector of its area of operations.

The meeting brought together three UN agencies (OCHA, UNHCR, and WFP), seven international NGOs (NRC, ACF, INTERSOS, DCA, World Vision, Premiere Urgence International, Save the Children, and AVSI), and four national NGOs (Caritas, NUSANED, Amel Association, and SHEILD).

Since 8 October 2023 the above humanitarian actors have mobilized to reach and assist the population of south Lebanon, particularly those most affected by the continuous exchanges of fire across the *Blue Line*. Various UN engagements with communities have indicated that the support is critical, especially for chronic disease medications, educational services for children, food security, and access to other basic services. UNIFIL stressed the importance of the protection of civilians and improved coordination to support this.

A key point raised by all was a higher level of coordination between all humanitarian actors and above all improved communication. The Commander of UNIFIL's eastern sector proposed regular security briefings to maintain this communication and enhance protection of humanitarian workers, to ensure continuous access and support to affected communities.



EMAD

## Ukraine leaders training

### This new module is taught by the 63rd Infantry Regiment *Barcelona*

**I**N the framework of the European Union Military Operation in Support of Ukraine (EUMAM UA), a new group of 40 Ukrainian military personnel have started, under the leadership of the *Cataluña* I/63 Motorised Infantry Battalion, the sixth specialised training module with the aim of acquiring the tactical, moral and leadership skills that will enable them to command light infantry platoon-type units. The module, which

lasts approximately 6 weeks, takes place at the training facilities used by the Battalion in Barcelona and at the *Álvarez de Castro* Base in San Clemente de Sasebas.

The experience and professionalism of the 63rd Infantry Regiment's instructors ensures that future platoon leaders can acquire critical skills and competencies that will equip them to meet the complex challenges presented by the modern battlefield.

Russia has been able to make the best use of terrorism, insecurity and lack of governance to increase its military and economic influence in a significant part of the continent

# AFRICA AND STABILITY

**Navy Captain Ricardo Valdés Fernández**

Security and Defence Coordination and Studies Division (DICOES)  
Head of the Geopolitical Analysis Division

**L**AST year, the DICOES' Geopolitical Analysis Division had the opportunity to delve deeper into two topics that have impacted, and continue to impact, the current state of affairs of the African continent and, therefore, its 1.2 billion inhabitants: Russia's presence in Africa and The coup epidemic in the Sahel, published in the April and December 2023 issues of the Revista Española de Defensa's English edition, respectively. In the first article, Spanish diplomat Fernando Villena stated that Russia's strategy to expand its influence in Africa was inevitable and would undoubtedly have a negative impact on Europe. In the second one, Colonel Carlos Latorre inserted a quote from Plato at the beginning of his article that is not far removed from the current situation in Africa: "Where leadership is coveted and contested there can be no good governance and discord will prevail". The epidemic of coups d'état appears to have subsided, but the fallout may still be felt because any power vacuum gives Russia a unique chance to exert its influence.

### THE SITUATION IN THE MAGHREB

As a preamble, here is a brief overview of that part of the African continent that is closest to us. Stability in the Maghreb, our border with Africa, has a direct impact on the European Union (EU) and is

contingent upon how issues resulting from the interplay between security, politics, and the socioeconomic situation are handled. Regional cooperation proves to be one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of any security threat. Forums in this area are essential and, thus, initiatives backed by Spain, such as the European Neighbourhood Policy, the Barcelona Process and the Union for the Mediterranean, are crucial. The 38th session of the Steering Committee for the 5+5 Defence Initiative was held in March 2024. This meeting marks the first important milestone of our Presidency, with the specific goal of promoting security in the Western Mediterranean by generating meeting points based on dialogue, collaboration, cooperation, empathy and mutual trust, fundamental for the stability of the two shores of the Mediterranean.

**The European Neighbourhood Policy and the 5+5 Defence Initiative are key to fostering stability in the Maghreb**





The Sahel is Europe's most remote border and has structural problems that take a great deal of strategic perseverance to resolve. These include the lack of prospects for its young population and weak government presence in some regions. A disenchanted youth is an ideal breeding ground for various terrorist organisations that take different approaches to the jihadist movement and also for criminal organisations, the latter having firmly established themselves in the area by exploiting institutional flaws.

Another Sahelian problem is the internal displacement of the population within and between countries, giving rise to migratory routes. These routes coincide with illicit trafficking routes of people, drugs, tobacco, arms, etc., which are also very dynamic: if the organisations in charge of controlling a route realise that it is unsafe, they immediately search for other options. One of these routes reaches both Guinea and Guinea-Bissau by sea from South America, carrying cocaine that is then distributed via Mali to Morocco and Libya, coinciding with the main immigrant arrival routes.

West African countries are dealing with a worsening internal security situation. Piracy is still the main criminal activity in the Gulf of Guinea, where three factors combine to fuel conflict: the

consolidation of organised crime networks; the expansion of the scope of pirate attacks; and the increased activity of terrorist groups. The approaches taken by global and regional actors to achieve stability in this regional situation, which has a continental impact, differ.

#### **DIFFERENT APPROACHES AND SECURITY CHALLENGES**

The African Union (AU) aims to be the most influential organisation on the African continent able to set its own agenda without interference from external geopolitical actors. It seeks to achieve this through political, social and economic development, although its 2063 time horizon is mainly threatened by political instability.

The second Russia-Africa summit (27-28 July 2023) brought together 49 of the 55 AU members. Seventeen of these were represented by their heads of state, a substantially lower number than at the first summit (Sochi, 2019). In the case of the EU, cooperation with African countries and the AU is based on partnership agreements with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states, and the Joint Africa-EU Strategy. As for NATO, which has a much smaller presence on the African continent, a group of independent experts has drafted a report on the southward strategy, recently

submitted to the Secretary General. Against this backdrop of approaches, early May saw the arrival of Russian military personnel at the airbase next to *Diori Hamani* International Airport in Niamey (Niger), which was hosting US troops. Following the previous year's coup d'état, the nation's ruling military members asked the US to withdraw its nearly 1,000 troops deployed in the country. Niger, and to a lesser extent Burkina Faso and Mali, have been key partners in Washington's battle against terrorists. It is still unclear what will happen to the US installations located in Niger when the troops withdraw. The airbase that is now also hosting the Russians has been used since 2018 to target fighters from the *Islamic State of the Greater Sahara* (ISGS) and *al-Qaeda* affiliate *Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen* (JNIM) with armed drones. In addition to the imminent US withdrawal from Niger, the Chadian Army is also threatening to terminate US operations following a meeting last January between Chadian interim president Mahamat Idriss Deby and Vladimir Putin. In the coming weeks, the EU will discuss a withdrawal plan and timeline with the Malian authorities, while French forces have already left Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso.

Almost coinciding with the arrival of Russian troops in Niger, two summits were held at which Spain was represented: the African Land Forces Summit 2024 in Livingstone, Zambia; and the African Maritime Forces Summit and Naval Infantry Leadership Symposium in Accra, Ghana. The first was hosted by the US Army Chief of Staff, and co-sponsored by the US Army Southern Task Force and the Zambian



Assane Auedrango/EEF

Army. The event brought together commanders of land forces from nearly 40 African countries, other partner nations, academic leaders and government officials under the theme "Regional Solutions to Transnational Problems". The summit organisers claim that there are clear parallels between Africa's security challenges in various nations, stemming from ethnic, regional and cultural issues that call for African solutions in collaboration with other cooperating nations. The main challenges faced by Africa were permanently on the table: "human trafficking, mass migration, environmental degradation and climate change, all of which transcend national borders, subvert sovereignty, go beyond jurisdictions and deplete national resources".

The second summit, hosted by Ghana, was attended by 41 countries, the US Naval Forces Africa (NAVAF) and the US Marine Forces Africa (MARFORAF). Overall, there was unanimous agreement that the only way to guarantee maritime security in African waters was for African countries

to continue working together at the regional level to combat and prosecute illicit maritime activities —from piracy to illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing—, fight terrorism, and raise awareness of maritime environmental issues.

### RUSSIA AND ITS INFLUENCE IN AFRICA

Russia is increasingly exploiting anti-Western sentiment to strengthen its influence on the African continent by forging closer relations with African nations, often relying on oligarchs to corrupt the political elite or control local leaders. It also openly uses hybrid



tools that promote disinformation campaigns by intervening in electoral processes, encouraging human rights violations or fostering militarised governance.

In its efforts to generate a 'multipolar' world order, Moscow presents itself to African countries, particularly those that were part of the former Soviet sphere, as an actor free of colonial baggage, and spares no effort in building trust in the diplomatic (portraying itself as a relevant stakeholder), economic (mining and energy) and military (presence in the Red Sea and the Mediterranean) spheres. In the United Nations, Moscow takes advantage of any chance it gets to exert pressure on African countries to vote in favour of or against resolutions on issues such as the war in Ukraine (the opinions of African nations on this matter differ greatly), discrediting UN peacekeeping missions or any other multilateral efforts perceived as a threat to multipolarity.

Russia takes advantage of chaos such as jihadist terrorism, anti-Western sentiment, inter-communal violence and coups d'état as a unique opportunity to establish itself by providing military support to unstable regimes. Russia's sphere of influence on the African geopolitical chessboard orbits around countries with social and governance problems. This is the case of countries like Libya or autocratic nations such as the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Angola, Zimbabwe and the Central African Republic; or under military authorities such as Niger, Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso and Sudan. Russia has also maintained relations with other countries since the Cold War, including Algeria, Egypt, Mozambique and South Africa.

Russian military support materialises through its military presence or through 'low-cost' mediators, such as the *Wagner* group (now Africa Corps) or its subsidiary Sewa. At least seven Russian private military companies have conducted a minimum of 34 operations in 16 African countries since 2005.

Their budget is not covered by the Russian administration, nor are they obliged to report casualties. This military support is part of a broader strategy that gives Russia access to various natural resources through concessions to the extractive industry (official, or unofficial in the case of *Wagner*) in exchange for, for example, the sales of arms, gold, uranium, oil, diamonds and critical minerals. In fact, Russia has signed military cooperation agreements with 43 African

countries since 2015, as well as nuclear cooperation agreements with 20 countries, which include the intention to build nuclear power plants in Egypt and Nigeria. South Africa already has an operational nuclear power plant thanks to Russian technology. Algeria and Egypt are its primary continental military customers, although the latter is seeking to diversify its acquisitions amid doubts that Russia will be able to continue exporting armament, despite Western sanctions and the ongoing war in Ukraine. In contrast to the mining sector, Russia's involvement in oil and gas projects is very low and more geographically diversified.

Although Russia has tried to establish its own military bases in six countries (Central African Republic, Egypt, Eritrea, Madagascar, Mozambique and Sudan), it now seems to be focusing only on the Port Sudan project. This port on the Red Sea would support Russia's continental presence and also allow it to project its influence in the Middle East beyond its current endeavours through OPEC+ (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) with Saudi Arabia.

## CONCLUSIONS

Africa's security and stability require a comprehensive, structural and long-term stance, contrary to the short-term approach that characterises Russia's African strategy. Russia's presence allows it to establish itself as a global power, a priority objective in its external projection. However, nothing has changed in terms of Africa's problems, which remain the same. Moscow does not usually offer economic support to African regimes, and the population hardly benefits from its activities on the ground. The profits from the extractive industry end up in the hands of private security companies or directly in the Kremlin. Ultimately, Russia's presence in Africa exacerbates existing civil conflicts

by openly siding with one of the parties or promoting activities that violate human rights.

On the African continent, Russia has managed to leverage jihadist terrorism, anti-Western sentiment, coups d'état and, in general, the lack of governance or control by Africans of their own countries. This has led Russia to position itself against its main continental competitors: the European Union, the United States and even China, which wants to distance itself from Russia's strategy. Moscow is using Africa as it pleases, thereby establishing itself as a relevant and influential actor, albeit at the expense of generating instability, something it appears to be comfortable with. The West will continue to keep a watchful eye on developments on the continent, providing constructive solutions with the security and development tools at its disposal.

# Russia has signed military cooperation agreements with 43 African countries since 2015, as well as nuclear cooperation agreements with 20 countries



Gun-firers from the Spanish helicopter unit during a flight from Al Assad airbase.





## REPORT

# ONE COUNTRY, TWO MISSIONS

Spain contributes to Iraq's stabilisation with 370 troops in Global Coalition against *Daesh* and NATO mission Iraq



Entrance to *Union III* base in Baghdad —NATO Mission Iraq's headquarters—, in which 25 allied nations participate.

**A** narrow road flanked by tall concrete boulders —the typical T-wall— covers the short distance between Baghdad's international airport and the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Centre (BDSC). This is one of the bases of the US-led Global Coalition under Operation *Inherent Resolve* (OIR), which was launched ten years ago to help the Iraqis defeat *Daesh* and prevent the revival of this terrorist group in their territory. Spain participates with special operations troops from the Army and Navy and a helicopter task force. Our country's contribution to the stabilisation of Iraq also consists of a

NATO-flagged mission —NATO Mission Iraq (NMI)—, created in 2018 at the request of the Iraqi government to help improve its institutions and consolidate more robust and lasting structures to guarantee the country's long-term security. Its headquarters are located 25 kilometres away from the BDSC, at the multinational *Union III* base, located within the so-called *Green Zone*, a complex that houses most of Baghdad's public institutions.

Spain has led this NATO mission for the past year, with Lieutenant General José Antonio Agüero at the helm of more than 600 troops from 25 allied nations and one partner

# REPORT



A Spanish special operations soldier accompanies an Iraqi counter-terrorism soldier in an indoor combat exercise.

country, Australia. The Spanish contingent consists of 180 troops, distributed in a Protection Force that supports the transportation of the mission's personnel, a National Support Element (NSE) in charge of logistics, and other staff stationed at the headquarters, including advisors to the Iraqi officials.

## SPECIAL OPERATIONS

The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service (CTS) facility is situated close to Baghdad's airport. A twelve-strong assault team is about to go into a building for a full 'mop-up'. Six are Iraqis from the first battalion of the first ISOF (Iraq Special Operations Force), and six are Spanish, from the Parachute Sapper Squadron (EZAPAC) of the Air and Space Force. "We don't know whether we will find enemy opposition inside or if they have hostages", explains Captain Potro, commander of the Special Operations Task Group 3 (SOTG 3) of the EZAPAC. "This is why they will split into two teams of six and, when they get into the house, they will split sideways to inspect the different rooms. They need to be closely coordinated because they work with live-fire and the walls don't always stop the shells". This Iraqi unit is the oldest in the CTS: "They have reached a high level of expertise and

are very safe to work with. This is good for our own training and helps them to keep improving", adds this officer.

This is one of the exercises usually carried out by the Spanish special operations teams along with the Iraqi battalions assigned to them within

Operation Inherent Resolve. "At the beginning of the mission, in addition to training, we conducted accompaniment and direct action tasks, supporting them in fighting targets", says Lieutenant Colonel Oscar Iván Lage, from the Special Naval Warfare Force and commander of the SOTG. "But we've been doing this less and less, and our role is increasingly relegated to the rear-guard, helping them to plan, and in logistical and intelligence processes, so that they can conduct operations safely and without risk. All of this is intended to make them self-sufficient, independent and capable of defeating Daesh on their own once and for all", he adds.

The CTS is the highest paid Iraqi unit. A soldier there can earn up to \$2,000 a month. However, it is also "the unit that suffered the most bloodshed to prevent Daesh from taking over Iraq. They weren't deployed as special operations, but as frontline shock forces in Ramallah and Mosul. If it hadn't been for them, Iraq would have fallen", says Lt Col Lage.

Military assistance is now more focused on intelligence analysis, and "that's where they fall down the most", he explains. "The Iraqi Army does not have the appropriate sensors to collect information or to convert that information into intelligence, which is so necessary to direct and conduct operations". This Spanish officer claims that



A break contact drill simulating a side attack on a vehicle while travelling and the reaction of the special operations teams to repel the aggression.





Spanish and Iraqi soldiers receive final instructions before the commencement of a live fire urban combat exercise.

while their training is more than adequate on an individual basis, “as we move up the ranks, the planning, command, coordination and control of subordinate units becomes less effective. The Iraqis have a single command system and centralise everything in the general and the unit commander. They give subordinates very little room for manoeuvre”.

Inside the base, another special operations group is engaged in a break contact drill. A vehicle in the middle of the city has been hit by side fire. Since it is stuck, another car needs to get as close as possible, door to door, in an attempt to transfer the passengers from one vehicle to another. “But they can’t do it, so they have to get out of the vehicle, react, respond to the fire and break contact”, explains Mercury, commander of the Army’s operational team.

Since you can never be sure at first of the type of attack you are under, we constantly prepare as though we are going to come under the biggest attack. We need to be ready for any situation.

In Operation *Inherent Resolve*, 189 Spanish troops form part of the Global Coalition of 3,500 soldiers, of which 2,000 are American. They are stationed at 25 different bases in Syria, Lebanon, Kuwait, Egypt, Jordan and Iraq, although Spain has only sent troops to Iraq, joining those from the US, Poland, and Italy.

“The current rotation is the first to have three operational teams, one from each service branch”, says Lt Col Lage. At Baghdad base, there is one from the Army’s Special Operations Command (MOE in Spanish) and one from the EZAPAC of the Air and Space Force, with a support unit. A third team from the Navy’s Special Naval

Warfare Force is stationed at Q-West, located near Niniveh, north of Iraq, together with an ISR (intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) unit, a dog guide, and a small personnel support detachment. Furthermore, there are Spanish personnel on the BDSC main staff, two other service members in Erbil — Iraqi Kurdistan —, which is the operation’s Parent Headquarters, a liaison officer in Camp Xiphos, Jordan and another one at NATO’s *Union III* base.

The Global Coalition could modify its mission or even call it off as a result of the crisis in Gaza. Strong pro-Iranian militias in Iraq reject the US for its direct support for Israel. They have given Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani a six-month deadline for the coalition to withdraw from the country. “And while the Iraqi administration is managing the timing because it wishes to continue with the presence of several nations there, including the US, which is the largest financial contributor, it is highly probable that the coalition’s days are numbered. Alternatively, it can shift to a different type of mission

## Coalition soldiers train Iraqi troops to prevent a *Daesh* revival





ISPU/HEL

Spain has a helicopter task force in Iraq as part of Operation Inherent Resolve. The unit also supports NATO mission Iraq with frequent flights between bases in Erbil, Al Assad and Baghdad.



Lt Col Oscar Lage, commander of SOTG, talks with Colonel Haydar Khadir Sheritan, commander of one of the battalions of the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service.

to continue cooperating under bilateral agreements, as is currently the case with France and Britain”, says Lt Col Lage.

Iraqi military commanders intend to keep relying on Spain's collaboration. “We would welcome whatever experience they may

provide to help us improve our capabilities. Furthermore, I believe that both teachers and pupils may learn from one another”, states Colonel Haydar Khadir Shehitan, commander of one of the battalions of the Counter Terrorism Service with which

the Spanish special operations teams directly work. “Even though we come from different countries, we are very similar, and whenever we have needed assistance, they have been there, just as we have tried to make them feel at home in our country and let them do their jobs as well as possible”, he adds. He believes that both parties have benefited: “Spanish soldiers have taught us a lot in terms of intelligence, and we have provided our experience as we have participated actively in the war”.

Colonel Haydar Khadir claims that his country still needs advisors. “We have become a single unit, because we are both soldiers and because we are all engaged in special operations”. For this reason, he believes it would be beneficial for his soldiers to visit Spain or any other coalition nation and see how they work and continue receiving the best possible training.

### HELICOPTERS IN AL ASAD

Al Asad airbase is located in western Iraq and is operated jointly by the Iraqis and the US. There, and also as part of Operation *Inherent Resolve*, Spain maintains Task Force *Toro*, a helicopter unit that provides airlift to coalition troops. It had four *HT-27*



# REPORT

*Cougars* from the Army Air Corps (FAMET in Spanish) that were replaced in April by three *CH-47F Chinooks*.

"Since we have had a Spanish lieutenant general at the helm for the past year, we have also provided our capabilities to NATO mission Iraq", explains Task Force *Toro* commander Major Francisco Javier Fernández Roldán. It consists of a main staff, a flight unit (which includes pilots and gun-firers), a maintenance unit, and a signal communications unit that maintains them linked to national territory and monitors the operations in the area.

Spanish helicopters do not always fly alone. They often fly alongside aircraft of other nationalities. "We are assigned a certain number of flight hours each month and we currently perform between five and six missions a week, which is quite a considerable amount considering that we are a small unit", says Major Fernández Roldán. By mid-April, they had flown over 9,300 hours.

"This mission is the climax of our entire training period on national territory", says the commander of the Spanish helicopter unit. After all, this is what we are trained for. And by putting everything we have learned into practice, we determine whether our procedures can be upgraded. Therefore, we are constantly updating ourselves because we have to be self-sufficient to navigate in the area of operations. Moreover, the unit commander highlights the importance of working with other countries. "This deployment allows us to be in touch with sister units that perform the same task. We learn a great deal from them and we contribute our experience".

He believes that one of the mission's challenges is that the aircraft travel far away from the command post, from which control must always be maintained. These helicopters are authorised by the Iraqi administration to operate from Baghdad to the north. "We can move freely in that area", says this commander, "although we usually do so in the triangle between Erbil, Al Asad and Baghdad".

The contingent receives 72 hours' notice before a sortie, although last-minute missions can arise. "We have even been



NATO soldiers from various NATO countries at NATO Mission Iraq headquarters, located within Baghdad Green Zone, along with other NATO institutions.

given four or five hours' notice, that is why the helicopters must always be available", he explains. When they return, whatever time it is, they go through maintenance until they are ready to take off again if necessary. Each flight hour requires three hours of maintenance. "We can proudly say that for almost two months now our aircraft have been 100% operational. This surprises the Americans because they don't achieve this", says Major Fernández Roldán, who participated in the first deployment in 2018 as an operations commander.

"We have demonstrated that we have the capacity to work with the Americans, and we have been adapting our procedures to the needs of the mission since the first rotations. In fact, a month ago, we received representatives from the unit that is going to replace us to assess on the ground if anything still needed to be adapted".

On 5 February, the Ministry of Defence's Official Gazette published a congratulatory message from minister Margarita Robles to all the members of the helicopter unit for their "unconditional effort and good work" in dealing with the various incidents at Al Assad airbase, where they were stationed during the missile and mortar strikes that took place in January. Since mid-October, other coalition bases had also been subjected to these attacks due to the escalation of the situation in the Middle East.

## ADVISING

The other part of the Spanish contingent, with 180 troops, is part of NATO Mission Iraq, whose headquarters is located at *Union III* base, next to the coalition's Forward Headquarters and



On 15 April 2024, Task Force *Toro* took delivery of the first of three *CH-47F Chinooks* that will replace the *Cougars* deployed so far.

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## REPORT

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Operations Command, commanded by an Iraqi general. It is situated in what is referred to as Baghdad *Green Zone*, an almond-shaped area that houses the essential government institutions. It is a specially protected area in which it is difficult to move around and with numerous controls and access restrictions. The reason for this is that serious suicide attacks have been recorded in this area, with up to 300 people killed in a single strike.

*Union III* is surrounded by the same type of grey concrete blocks. Inside, there is a constant movement of military personnel of more than 20 different nationalities. They live and work there and, regardless of where they come from, they speak the same language, English, and adhere to the same working standards, those of NATO. The number of people varies from one rotation to another, but it never exceeds 650, the maximum allowed by the Iraqi government. Of these, 180 are Spanish military personnel, most of them in the Protection Force. There are two company-size units, one entirely Spanish, made up of personnel from the 50th Infantry Regiment *Canarias*, and the other consisting of Dutch and Polish personnel. Spanish Major Alfonso Fontela is in command of all of them.

Their primary mission is to accompany and provide security for the advisors when they go from *Union III* base to the various ministries, barracks or military institutions to meet with the officials they advise.

Most of their vehicles are Toyota Land Cruisers and some personnel shuttle vans, all armoured and fitted with jammers. "We can carry up to 24 advisors, but we depend on the availability of vehicles", says Major Fontela.

Spanish advisors carry out advisory roles in three schools: the Armoured School, the Training Centre in Besmayah

and the Baghdad Training Centre. One of the advisors is Spanish Captain Darío Djaschni de Castro, who travels to and from the Armoured School escorted by the Protection Force. "I usually meet with the commanding general, one of his second-in-command or the heads of departments. They have their own training programmes and I advise them on how to improve them", he says. Typically, the Protection Force is notified 72 hours before any transport is required. Once they know the amount of passengers and, before the vehicles leave *Union III* base, they plan an official route and a backup route, in case the official one is blocked. They also find

of the security measures: the bullet-proof vest they have to wear during the trip, to fasten their seat belts, to have their helmets nearby and that there is a combat first-aid kit with a tourniquet inside. The doors can only be opened from the outside by me or a member of my team. We will first lower the safety cell, and in the event of an evacuation, they will follow my instructions.

The advisors are never left alone during their meetings with Iraqi officials. "We always maintain visual contact because I could receive an order to exit the building at any time". And for these situations, they have their own code words. "If we are leaving in ten minutes, I tell the advisor that

his general is calling him; if I say it's his colonel, we're leaving in five minutes, and if I refer to his captain, we have to leave immediately". Furthermore, if during the meeting the advisor feels uncomfortable for any reason, the code word is "I need my tablet". Then, the security cell arrives, they get into the vehicle and drive off.

Helicopters provide constant air support for convoys of the Protection Force; however, if flying is not feasible due to inclement weather, ground support is provided. In that case, an ambulance travels with them. Nurse

Captain María Dolores Mazarro is part of the emergency response team. "We are a stabilisation cell consisting of a medical lieutenant, myself and two medical orderly corporals, who are drivers", she explains. They have two ambulances and, in addition to supporting the convoys, they also attend to the personnel who come to the first aid station. "We usually provide assistance to Spaniards because there is already an American *Role 1* at the air base, but we don't refuse healthcare to any country", adds Captain Mazarro. *Union III* base also houses the National Support



Spanish Major Pedro Ángel Sierra and Nurse Captain María Dolores Mazarro at the multinational *Union III* base.

out if any of the checkpoints have been relocated or closed. They must also plan their interior route for when they arrive at the building: where the vehicles have to move, the location of the car park and as much information as possible about the entrance, number of floors and the meeting place.

### GUARDIAN ANGELS

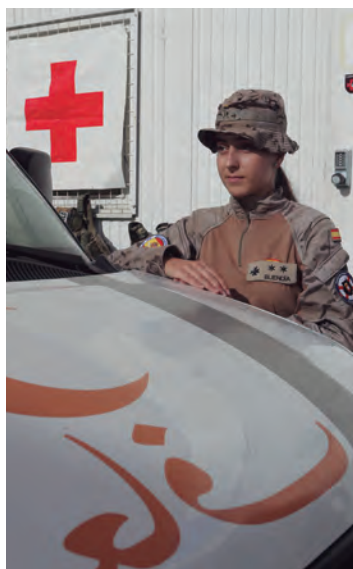
Those in charge of these preparations are known as guardian angels. One of them is Corporal David Santana. "Before the advisors step into the vehicle, I check their identity and blood type and remind them

## Spain, with 180 soldiers, is the largest contributing country to NATO Mission Iraq, which advises Iraqi officials





The Protection Force escorts the advisors on their journeys and during their meetings with the Iraqi officials they advise.



Before initiating a mission, members of the Protection Force are fully briefed on the route to follow. An ambulance accompanies them on their journeys.

Element (NSE). “We handle all the logistics liaison with the national area and in Iraq”, says its commander, Captain Ignacio Roldán, “We deal with everything related to arrivals and departures of equipment and personnel, classified information, movements between the airport and the bases and, since it is Spanish, we also organise the visits paid by the NMI commander”.

Typically, they travel between bases where there are Spanish service members. “Like when a team had to travel to Al Asad airbase to repair a generator or when a nurse who was at the BDSC had to spend some time with the helicopter unit”.

Throughout May and June, all military personnel posted in Iraq will have completed six months in the area and will be relieved. There will not be quite as many Spanish

troops in NATO mission Iraq since the Dutch will take over command. On the other hand, the US-led Global Coalition may decide to withdraw permanently from Iraq, where *Daesh* still operates in remote areas, such as the mountains and the desert, where it hides in caves and extorts the civilian population.

**Elena Tarilonte**

**Photos: Pepe Díaz**  
(Special envoys to Iraq)

# Europe's Demosthenes moment: putting defence at the centre of EU policies



**Josep Borrell Fontelles**  
High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs  
and Security Policy

**P**OWER politics are reshaping our world. With the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, the war that has flared up again in the Middle East, coups in the Sahel, tensions in Asia... we witness at the same time the return of 'old' conventional wars and the emergence of 'new', hybrid warfare characterised by cyberattacks and the weaponisation of anything, from trade to migration. This deteriorating geopolitical environment is putting Europe in danger, as I anticipated when presenting the Strategic Compass, the new EU Defence and security strategy, in 2022.

Four years ago, when we were facing the COVID-19 pandemic, many said that the EU was living a Hamiltonian moment because we decided to issue a common debt to alleviate the consequences of this crisis as Alexander Hamilton did after the US independence war. We are now probably entering a Demosthenes moment, in reference to the great Greek politician mobilising its fellow Athenian citizens against Macedonian imperialism 2400 years ago: we are finally becoming aware of the many security challenges in our dangerous environment.

What are we doing to address these multifaceted threats? The month of March marks two anniversaries: the third of the creation of the European Peace Facility (EPF) and the second of the adoption of the Strategic Compass. These tools have been central to our geopolitical awakening during the last years. It is the right moment

to reflect on what has been done and where we are heading on security and defence.

## **SUPPORTING UKRAINE MILITARILY IN AN UNPRECEDENTED WAY**

The European Peace Facility (EPF) is an intergovernmental and extra-budgetary EU fund. It was established in 2021 to allow us to support our partners with military equipment, which was not possible via the EU budget. We started with €5 billion, today the financial ceiling of this fund stands at €17 billion.

While it was not originally created for this purpose, the EPF has been the backbone of our military support to Ukraine. So far, we have used €6.1 billion from the EPF to incentivise the support to Ukraine by EU Member States and, with them, the EU has delivered in total €31 billion in military equipment to Ukraine since the beginning of the war. And this figure is increasing every day. Thanks to these funds, we sustained our military support to Ukraine. Among other actions, by this summer, we will have trained 60.000 Ukrainian

**“Europe is in danger; We have done a lot, but we need to do more and do it quickly”**





Román Ríos/EFE

European troops during exercise MILEX 23 held in Cádiz last October, an embryo of the Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC).

soldiers; we have donated 500.000 artillery shells to Ukraine and by the end of the year it will be more than 1 million. Additionally the European defence industry is also providing to Ukraine 400.000 shells through commercial contracts. The Czech initiative to buy ammunition outside the EU comes in addition to these efforts. However, it is far from being enough and we have to increase both our capacity of production and the financial resources devoted to support Ukraine

Last Monday at the Foreign Affairs Council, we decided to create a new Ukraine Assistance Fund within the EPF, endowed with €5 billion, to continue supporting Ukraine militarily. I also proposed last Wednesday to the Council to redirect 90% of the extraordinary revenues from the Russian immobilised assets into the EPF, to increase the financial capacity of the military support for Ukraine.

### **REINFORCING OUR GLOBAL SECURITY AND DEFENCE PARTNERSHIPS**

But the European Peace Facility does not only help Ukraine. So far, we have used it to support 22 partners and organisations. Since 2021, we have allocated close to €1 billion to operations led by the African Union and regional organisations, as well as the armed forces of eight partner countries in Africa. In the Western Balkans, we are supporting regional military cooperation, as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia. We are also supporting Moldova and Georgia in the Eastern neighbourhood, and Jordan and Lebanon in the Southern Neighbourhood.

Since the beginning of my mandate, we have launched nine new missions and operations under our Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The last one, Operation ASPIDES in the Red Sea and Gulf region to protect commercial vessels, has been set up in record time.

With operations Irini in the Mediterranean, Atalanta near the Horn of Africa and our Coordinated Maritime Presences in the Gulf of Guinea and the Indian Ocean, we are becoming more and more a global maritime security provider. We launched also last year two new civilian missions in Armenia and in the Republic of Moldova.

However, our missions in Niger had to be suspended due to the military coup and our military mission in Mali has been put on hold. We are currently reconsidering the form of the support we can offer to our partners in the region: in this context, we have set up last December a new type of civilian-military initiative to help our partner countries in the Gulf of Guinea fight the terrorist threats stemming from the Sahel.

We have also reinforced our cooperation with NATO in various key domains such as space, cyber, climate and defence and critical infrastructures. We have broadened and deepened our network of tailored bilateral security and defence partnerships with Norway, Canada, as well as countries in the Eastern neighbourhood (Georgia, Moldova), Africa (South Africa, Rwanda), Indo-Pacific (Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia) and Latin America (Chile, Colombia). The first Security and Defence Schuman Forum in March last year,

bringing together security and defence partners from more than 50 countries, was a success. We will build on this when we meet for the next Schuman Forum on 28 and 29 May.

## ENHANCING THE CAPACITY TO REACT TO CRISES ABROAD

One of the main deliverables foreseen by the Strategic Compass was the creation of a new EU Rapid Deployment Capacity to be able to quickly react autonomously to crisis situations, for instance to evacuate Europeans in case of an emergency like in Afghanistan in August 2021 or in Sudan in April 2023.

It will become operational next year, but to prepare for it, we organised the first ever EU military Live Exercise last October in Cadiz, in Spain. It involved 31 military units, 25 aircrafts, 6 ships and 2,800 personnel from Member States' armed forces. A second Live Exercise will take place at the end of the year in Germany.

A new Crisis Response Centre is also now operational in the EEAS to coordinate EU activities in case of emergencies, including the evacuation of European citizens. We are also strengthening our military and civilian headquarters in Brussels.

## INVESTING MORE IN DEFENCE TOGETHER AND BOOSTING THE EU DEFENCE INDUSTRY

At home, we need also to invest much more and help our defence industry to increase its production capacities. There is no other solution if we look at the magnitude of the defence needs for Ukraine but also for our Member States that need to replenish their stocks and acquire new equipment.

EU Member States are already spending significantly more on defence with a 40% increase of defence budget over the last ten years and a €50 billion jump between 2022 and 2023.

EU Member States are already spending significantly more on defence with a 40% increase of defence budget over the last ten years and a €50 billion jump between 2022 and 2023. However, the €290 billion EU defence budget in 2023 only represents 1.7% of our GDP under the 2% NATO benchmark. And in

the current geopolitical context, this could be seen as a minimum requirement. However, the global amount of our expenses is not the only figure we have to follow carefully. To use our defence expenses efficiently, we have also to take care of filling gaps and avoiding duplications. As I have already said on many occasions, we need to spend more but also better, and better means together.

In 2022, the European armed forces invested 58 billion in new equipment. For the fourth year in a row, it exceeded the benchmark of 20% of the defence expenses. However, only 18% of these defence investments are currently done in a collaborative manner, far below the 35% benchmark set by EU Member States themselves in 2007.

Since the start of the Russian war of aggression, 78% of the equipment bought by EU armed forces came from outside the EU. We are also lagging behind in our investments in Research and Development.

That is the reason why I presented earlier this month together with the Commission the first-ever European Defence Industrial Strategy. We need to incentivise much more joint procurement, better secure our security of supplies, anchor the Ukrainian defence industry in

Europe and organise a massive industrial ramp-up. We also need to catch up on new military technologies like drones or Artificial Intelligence. With its innovation hub, the European Defence Agency will continue to play a key role in these efforts.

To succeed, we will need to ensure much better access to finance for the European defence industry, notably by adapting the European Investment Bank lending policies. We should also foresee issuing common debt to help finance the major necessary investment effort in defence capabilities and defence industry, as we did to face the COVID-19 crisis. However, we have still a lot of work to do to reach an agreement on that subject.

Finally, we will also need to reinforce our defence when it comes to hybrid and cyber threats, foreign information manipulation and interference and resilience of our critical infrastructure.

As detailed here, a lot has already been done in recent years, however I am very much aware that a lot more remains to be done to match the magnitude of the threats we are facing. We need a leap forward in European defence and European defence industry.

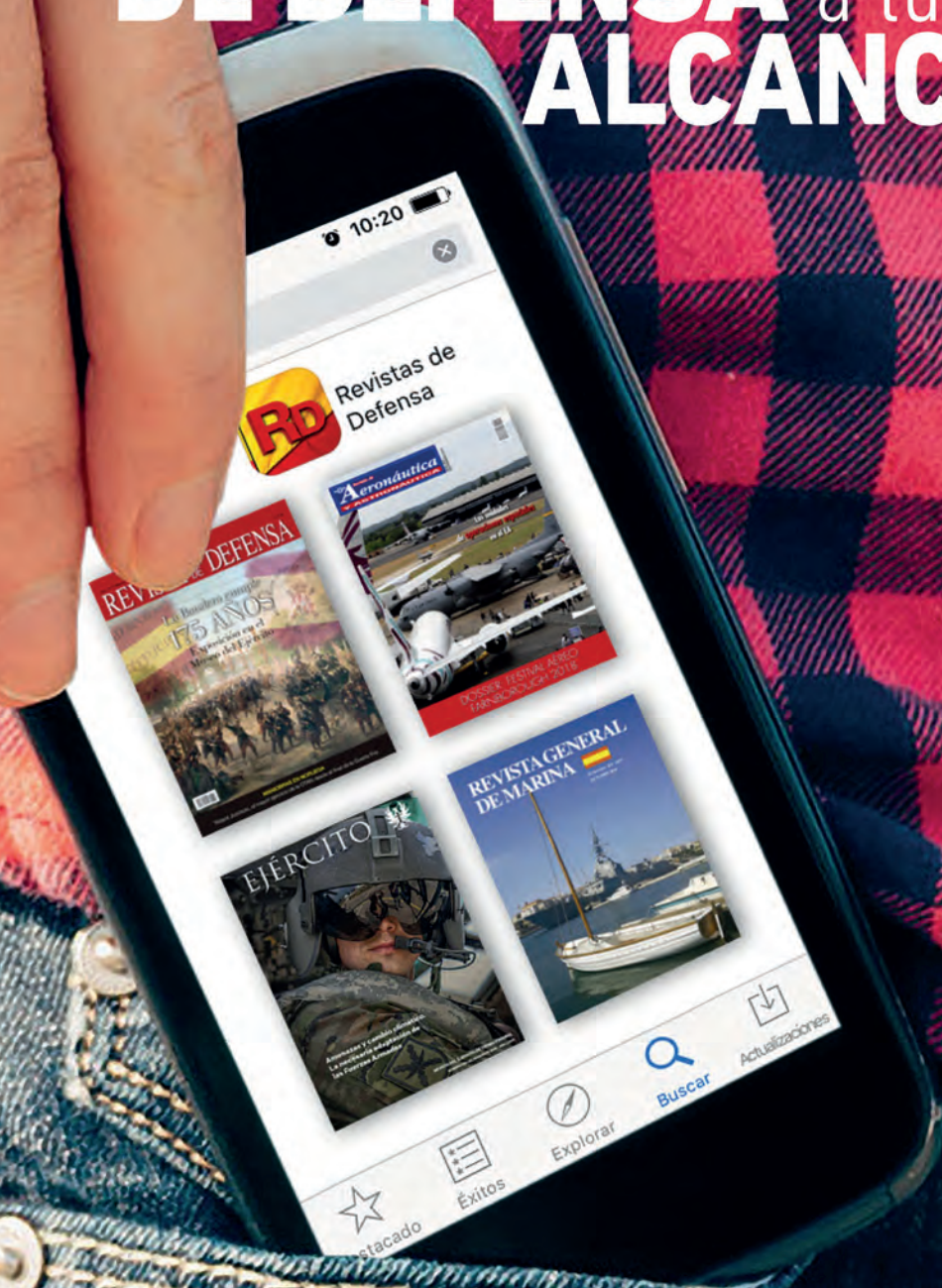


European Council

**“We need to encourage more joint procurement and guarantee supplies”**



# Las **REVISTAS** **DE DEFENSA** a tu **ALCANCE**



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The Safe Schools Declaration aims to provide safe and secure educational environments

# An essential measure to guarantee a fundamental right

**Lieutenant Commander Eva María Ara Montojo**  
Coordination Division for Security and Defence Studies  
Secretariat General for Defence Policy

**B**UILT in the fifteenth century, the Hospital of Innocents in Florence is considered the earliest orphanage in Western history. Its purpose was to protect the abandoned and orphaned children of the city. Today it houses one of UNICEF's headquarters. Not surprisingly, this iconic building was the venue chosen by the NATO HQ Human Security Unit to host the NATO Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) Policy Conference that was held from 7 to 9 February 2024.

This seminar provided a forum for discussion between NATO staff and experts from different civilian organisations on the protection of children in armed conflicts. With this meeting, the Alliance sought to determine the necessary steps to be taken at the operational and tactical levels and to draft an Action Plan.

The Children and Armed Conflict Policy, approved in July 2023, takes stock of eight years of experience in protecting children in Afghanistan and other NATO operations and activities. It also takes into account the principles and best practices contained in the Paris Principles, Vancouver Principles and Safe Schools Declaration and Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.

Although NATO staff are familiar with international humanitarian law, more emphasis should be placed on specific issues such as the Safe Schools Declaration. This would facilitate a more consistent implementation. Therefore, the conference featured a round table devoted entirely to this initiative with the participation of the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) —as the driving force of this Declaration—, to explain its content and

implications; the NGO *Save the Children*; and the Spanish Ministry of Defence to share our nation's best practices and procedures for its implementation.

### PROTECTING A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT

Education is a fundamental human right. As the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) warns, protecting education not only ensures the continuity of learning but also gives children and young people living in a country in crisis or armed conflict a sense of normalcy and the chance to choose a different future.

Attacks on education in situations of armed conflict have serious long-term physical and psychological implications for students, teachers and other staff members, and lead to higher dropout rates. Denying generations of children the opportunity to receive a safe education deprives them of the skills necessary to contribute to their nation's future.

The Safe Schools Declaration was drafted following a consultation process led by Norway and Argentina and opened for endorsement by countries at an international conference in Oslo, Norway, in May 2015.

**Spain endorsed the Declaration in 2015, the year it was adopted, and has played a leading role in its implementation**



Spain endorsed the Declaration and its Guidelines along with 70 other countries that same year. Thus far, 119 countries around the world have joined this international political agreement, including most of the members of the Atlantic Alliance. In its effort to advance and strengthen this tool, Spain hosted the 3rd International Conference on Safe Schools in Palma de Mallorca in 2019. The conference was organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation in collaboration with the Ministry of Defence, among other Departments.

The Safe Schools Declaration outlines a set of commitments to strengthen the protection of education from attacks and restrict the use of schools and universities for military purposes. Its ultimate goal is to ensure the continuity of safe education during armed conflict. By endorsing the Declaration countries commit to take concrete measures, such as collecting data on attacks on education, investigating and prosecuting alleged war crimes involving schools, and making sure that teaching activities resume as soon as possible when a school has been attacked.

When educational facilities are used by the military for the direct benefit of the mission, these centres run the risk of becoming military objectives and are exposed to potential attack and its aftermath. While the Guidelines recognise that certain uses of these facilities would not violate the laws of armed conflict, all parties should strive to make sure that the students' safety and education are not jeopardized, by acting responsibly.

Signatory States also commit to incorporate these Guidelines into their policies and operational frameworks so that they are taken into account in the operational planning process. These Guidelines are a non-binding practical tool that provide guidance on what to do in the event that schools, universities or their routes are located within our area of operations so as to help preserve the civilian character of these facilities.

Following the 3rd International Conference, the Spanish Ministry of Defence urged for the inclusion of the Declaration in its relevant defence policy documentation "Spain's defence policy is guided by the constant search for peace, stability and the promotion of Human



Security. In their operations abroad, the Spanish Armed Forces [...] will support the Safe Schools initiative" (National Defence Directive 2020). By including the Declaration in Spain's primary defence planning document, the Ministry of Defence is at the forefront of the signatory countries. The first consequence of this is reflected in the 2020 Defence Policy Directive, which proposes to enhance Spain's contribution to the Safe Schools programme and provide training to contingents involved in peace operations in this area.

As a result, the Army's specific publication, OR7-004 The Law of Armed Conflict, which was declared of joint interest, was revised. In its place, a joint doctrinal publication, PDC-02.01 *International Humanitarian Law* (IHL) in the Armed Forces, was issued in January 2022 and includes a more detailed version of the Safe Schools Declaration and its Guidelines. Its content should

be considered a code of conduct and a mandatory standard for the Armed Forces.

To ensure compliance with the National Defence Directive 2020, the Ministry of Defence has leveraged its international leadership in training to integrate gender perspectives into operations. Thus, the national course, *The Gender Perspective in Crisis Management*, organised by the Spanish Army's Training and Doctrine Command (MADOC), has included training on the Safe Schools Declaration and its Guidelines. The target audience for this course are members of the Spanish Armed Forces and Law Enforcement Agencies to be deployed in operations abroad. The online course on *Gender Consultancy in Operations* organised by the Permanent Secretariat for Equality, and the *Peace Observers Course* hosted by the Army War and Leadership College, both offer training in this field.

In conclusion, this conference organised by the Atlantic Alliance in Florence provided a forum for discussion amongst NATO staff and experts to support NATO's efforts to protect children impacted by an armed conflict in its areas of deployment. It also gave visibility to the commitments made in the Safe Schools Declaration and Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. Protecting children is, in fact, one of the requirements to ensure a peaceful and stable future in many areas currently affected by armed conflict.

# FIRST-EVER EUROPEAN DEFENCE INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

The document includes an ambitious set of actions to support competitiveness and proposes a long-term vision to strengthen defence industrial readiness

**T**HIS strategy was a long-held aspiration that was drastically incentivised after the shock of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Joint work in the defence industry needed a strong boost, it had to be done now and it had to be done well. Under the slogan “invest more and better”, the European institutions had been working for months to respond to current challenges and needs and, at the same time, to channel opportunities in order to capitalise the full potential and set out the guidelines for the next decade. On 5 March 2024, the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, presented the first-ever European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS), underpinned by a legislative proposal for the development of a European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP), together with a set of measures to ensure availability and supply.

“Russia’s brutal war of aggression against Ukraine has brought back high intensity warfare to Europe”, explained Josep Borrell. “After decades of under-spending, we must invest more in defence,

but we must do it better and together. A strong, resilient, and competitive European defence industry is a strategic imperative and a pre-condition to enhance our defence readiness. We must also step up our military support to Ukraine, including by supporting its defence industrial base. This Strategy marks a paradigm shift towards a Union that is a strong security and defence actor and a better partner, in line with the objectives of the Strategic Compass”.

In other words, Europe is more Europe with a defence that matches its needs and the role it can and should play in the world. The High Representative indicated at a

press conference following the presentation of the Strategy that the European Union “is not a military alliance, but the European Treaties express the will to build a Common Security and Defence Policy. And part of this Common Security and Defence Policy is to have a good and efficient industrial base”. Borrell also recalled that “two years ago, when presenting the Strategic Compass, I said that Europe was in danger. Well, I am sorry, I was right. Europe was in danger and today it is still even more in danger. Peace is no more a given, unhappily, and we must be prepared”. And being ready means more ammunition, more

and better capabilities and, consequently, more means to produce them, more research and more investment in the defence industry. Broadly speaking, the Strategy sets out a long-term vision —its implementation date runs until 2035— to consolidate industrial readiness, i.e. to have the defence systems and equipment ready when they are needed and in the quantities required that are needed. A clear and achievable objective for which Member States must invest more, better, together and among Europeans.

“We have to take charge of our security”, explained



The Future Combat Air System (FCAS), which connects a sixth-generation fighter jet with drones, is being developed between France, Spain and Germany.





Josep Borrell, EU Executive Vice-President Margrethe Vestager and Commissioner for Internal Market Thierry Breton present the Strategy.

EU Executive Vice-President for a Europe Fit for the Digital Age, Margrethe Vestager, adding that “now that defence budgets in all Member States are rising sharply, we should invest better, which largely means investing together. This will enable us to move from a crisis response mode, to one of structural defence readiness”.

Commissioner for Internal Market Thierry Breton explained that the Strategy and the regulatory documents that complement it “tables an ambitious instrument to start concretely implementing the Strategy. With the return of high intensity conflict on our continent, Europe cannot wait any longer to strengthen the European defence technological and industrial base’s ability to produce more and faster”.

#### INVEST MORE AND BETTER

The plans set out in the Strategy address the main challenges faced today by the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB) and aim at strengthening the industrial pillar of EU defence readiness. Defence industrial

readiness, today and in the future, requires more public and private investments across the full spectrum of needs, and greater defence industry responsiveness, in time and scale, to the needs of Member States. The Strategy therefore sets indicators to measure Member States’ progress towards industrial readiness and urges them to achieve three targets. First, that by 2030, they procure at least 40% of defence equipment in a collaborative manner between one or more EU countries

**By 2030, 40% of defence equipment will have to be procured in a collaborative manner**

(like all the programmes developed by the European Defence Agency under the Permanent Structured Cooperation, PESCO). Second, that they ensure that, by 2030, the value of intra-EU defence trade represents at least 35% of the value of the EU defence market. And third, that they make steady progress towards procuring at least 50% of their defence procurement budget within the EU by 2030, and 60% by 2035.

All of this —summarised in the slogan “Invest more and better” — is based on two axes. The first, obviously, urges Member States to invest more in their defence budgets. The Strategy does not determine an amount, but it does encourage greater spending by partners in line with the objectives set by the Atlantic Alliance. It should be noted that 23 EU countries (including Sweden, which is now an ally after Hungary’s approval) that are also NATO members have committed to increase their annual defence budgets up to an amount equivalent to 2 per cent of GDP. According to data provided by the Commission,



Pepo Diaz

The *Tiger* helicopter is one of the most ambitious European programmes.

## Concrete and coordinated measures

**I**n a clear example of pragmatism, on 5 March 2024, the Commission proposed a new regulation to start implementing concrete measures identified in the European Defence Industrial Strategy. It also aims to bridge the gap and establish once and for all the emergency measures taken to respond to the demands following the invasion of Ukraine. The European Defence Industry Programme is a legislative initiative that bridges from short-term emergency measures —adopted in 2023 and ending in 2025— to a more structural and longer-term approach to achieve defence industrial readiness.

The programme includes both financial and regulatory aspects. EDIP will mobilise €1.5 billion of the EU budget over the period 2025-2027, to continue enhancing the competitiveness of the European Defence Industrial and Technological Base. This financial support will extend and consolidate the two mechanisms put in place as a matter of urgency to assist Kyiv and restock its supplies: the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP) and the European Defence Industry Reinforcement Through Common Procurement Act (EDIRPA).

At the same time, the EDIP will also support the industrialisation of products stemming from R&D actions supported by the European Defence Fund. The EDIP budget may also be used to set up a Fund to Accelerate defence Supply chains Transformation (FAST).

In terms of its regulatory aspects, EDIP presents novel solutions. For instance, it will make available a new legal framework, the Structure for European Armament Programme (SEAP), to facilitate and scale up Member States cooperation on defence equipment, in full complementarity with the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) framework. It also entails an EU-wide regime for security of supply of defence equipment, which will ensure constant access to all necessary defence products in Europe and provide a framework to efficiently react to possible future supply crises of defence products. In addition, EDIP will allow the launch of European Defence Projects of Common Interest, with potential EU financial support. Finally, it proposes to set up a governance structure, where Member States are fully involved, to ensure overall consistency of EU action in this field.

member states spent 58 billion euros on military equipment in 2023, and reaching the Alliance's target would bring the total to 143 billion euros. The second axis is to better coordinate spending through joint procurement, inspired by the procurement of vaccines during the pandemic, and thus generate synergies and resemble a bloc, rather than having 27 spending items.

To achieve this goal, the Strategy presents six actions. First, to determine a more efficient expression of the Member States' collective defence demand, using existing instruments and initiatives, such as the Capability Development Plan (CDP), the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) and the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). In addition, it will be supported by incentivising Member States' cooperation in the procurement phase of defence capabilities. Second, to secure the availability of all defence products through a more responsive EDTIB, under any circumstances and time horizon. In this regard, investments by Member States and the European defence industry in developing and bringing to market tomorrow's state of the art defence technologies and capabilities will be supported. Measures are also proposed to ensure that EDTIB has at its disposal what it needs even in crisis periods, thereby increasing the EU's Security of Supply.

The third action included in the Strategy is to ensure that national and EU budgets support with the necessary means the adaptation of the European defence industry to the new security context. The fourth calls for mainstreaming a defence readiness culture across policies, notably by calling for a review of the European Investment Bank's lending policy this year. The next measure calls for developing closer ties with Ukraine through its participation in Union initiatives in support of defence industry and stimulating cooperation between the EU and Ukrainian defence industries.

The sixth measure expressly included in the Strategy involves further collaboration with NATO and our strategic, like-minded and international partners, and reiterates the need to cooperate more closely with Ukraine. In this last regard, Josep Borrell insisted during the meeting with journalists that, since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, "the EU has strived to help and has done a lot through the



## INDUSTRY AND TECHNOLOGY

European Peace Facility to supply and help with what we have and by creating, in record time, two emergency instruments to stimulate joint procurement (EDIRPA) and increase ammunition production (ASAP), respectively. Now we have to move from an emergency mode to a medium and long-term vision that strengthens our defence industrial readiness, to continue providing military support to Ukraine. It is no longer a matter of looking at the stocks but being able to produce a continuous flow of production”.

In an overview, the High Representative explained that we need a defence industrial policy “because the defence industry is unique”. There is a single buyer —the Governments—. And 27 states set the priorities based on the operational needs of each army. Hence the importance of this Strategy that tries to match supply and demand, through procedures to invest more, better, together and among Europeans: “Fragmentation has to be overcome by cooperation”, Borrell reiterated. Initiatives like PESCO, which have proven their value for years, must strive to overcome this fragmentation and get the capabilities we need when we need them, and spending better.

### ALL INVOLVED

The European Defence Industrial Strategy was one of the objectives presented by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen during the State of the Union 2023. The preparation work of this industrial Strategy has followed a comprehensive consultation process with Member States, defence industry, the financial sector and think tanks/academia conducted by the Commission services, together with the European External Action Service in coordination with the European Defence Agency. The consultations included a series of events, meetings and workshops as well as written contributions. In total, twelve workshops were held over a six-month period and 270 written contributions were received from over 90 different stakeholders. Furthermore, in



Pool Moncloa/Diego del Monte

Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez and Defence Minister Margarita Robles met on 18 March 2024 with the leading Spanish companies in the sector to thank them for their engagement and to promote their role in the new European Strategy.

order to consider how best to integrate Ukrainian industry considerations into EDIS, a dedicated meeting was organised with Ukraine’s representatives.

Once drafted, the goal is to advance the collaboration of stakeholders while increasing the participation of institutions, governments and the civilian sector. To this end, the Strategy, built on existing EU

defence initiatives, will propose a range of measures and agencies. In addition to the new European Defence Industry Programme, the Strategy includes creating a Defence Industrial Readiness Board bringing together the High Representative, the Head of the European Defence Agency and the Commission to provide for a structured approach to programming and procurement.

The EDIS also plans to create a European Military Sales Mechanism to increase awareness of the availability of defence products and facilitate their acquisition, including through government-to-government purchases.

For Ukraine in particular, the EU will host an EU-Ukraine Defence Industry Forum in 2024 to bolster cooperation, and will open an Innovation Office in Kyiv to ensure matchmaking between the Union’s start-ups and innovators and Ukraine’s industry and armed forces.

**Rosa Ruiz**



EDA

Cap Tech Ground Systems supports countries in developing technology for the land systems of the future.

# NEW ELECTRONIC EYES IN FLIGHT

SIRTAP, the first military aeronautic system completely developed in Spain since the *CASA C-295*

**S**IRTAP (High-Performance Tactical RPAS System) is set to be the first Class II/III unmanned aerial system designed, developed and produced in Spain to provide service to the Spanish Armed Forces. The system includes a flight com-

ponent —a fixed-wing aircraft— and a ground segment for command and control, both currently under development. The Spanish Council of Ministers approved its acquisition in July 2023, and on 29 November 2023, the Ministry of Defence and Airbus Defence and Space (Airbus DS),

the prime contractor, signed the manufacturing contract for nine complete systems.

Each system consists of three unmanned aircraft and a ground control station, involving the production of 27 aircraft and 9 command, control, and image reception centres. The initial



The system's aircraft will be manufactured and assembled at Airbus DS facilities in Spain.



contract is valued at €500 million and includes two simulators for crew training.

The substantial difference between SIRTAP and other domestically produced military aeronautic systems is its complete development within Spain, promising to be a showcase of national technological capabilities, according to Airbus. The European industrial corporation assures that the system as a whole is a “technological milestone”, whose capabilities “will strengthen national sovereignty”.

In addition, SIRTAP is designed to integrate with other “systems of systems” and operate in conjunction with other platforms. For example, it will provide essential expertise and capabilities to the national industry in the field of the so-called Remote Carriers of the European next generation fighter programme (NGWS/FCAS).

New technological advancements will include navigation, autonomous flight, modular avionics with the latest generation processors, communication systems, ground control stations, carbon fibre components, and new electrical systems.

## GROWTH CAPABILITY

As the prime contractor for the programme, Airbus DS is responsible for integrating all aircraft and ground stations. As a result, one of its tasks is overseeing and managing the systems, subsystems, and equipment from a supply chain of 68 national suppliers.

According to the Staff Requirements, SIRTAP will be developed for ISTAR missions —intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance—.

All aircraft will be manufactured and assembled at Airbus DS facilities in Spain, including prototypes. The first flight is scheduled for 2025 and the first complete system is planned for delivery to the Directorate General for Armament and Materiel (DGAM) starting in 2027, with progressive deliveries until the end of 2030.

Airbus’ industrial plan, approved by the DGAM, anticipates a 70% national participation rate, aiming to maximise domestic contributions. Currently under study is the viability of nationalising the different capabilities, both present and future.

### SIRTAP

The next-generation tactical RPAS for advanced intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance missions.

Endurance	MTOW	Range	Ceiling	Payload
20 hours	750 kg	2.000 kilometres	6.400 metres	150 kg

Designed to fly in the most adverse weather and operating conditions, both on land and at sea, the UAV will be capable of conducting day and night operations, take-off from short, unpaved runways, and will be certified to operate in segregated airspace.

Rafael Navarro

**The first flight is scheduled for 2025 and the first complete system is planned for delivery in 2027**

be able to integrate hardware and software equipment in line with the rapid technological evolution that has characterised the first half of the 21st century. The aim is to support and enhance the national capability for a complete aeronautic system lifecycle, from design, development, certification, production and in-service support.

Further advancements are underway, including a second advanced configuration featuring national systems and equipment. One of the fields for improvement is the electronic warfare component, in line with technological evolution.

## A CLOSER LOOK AT SIRTAP

What is SIRTAP’s internal and external configuration like? And what are its main characteristics and specifications? SIRTAP is designed to bolster the tactical capabilities of the Spanish Army and Air and Space Force and conduct advanced surveillance, intelligence and reconnaissance missions under the most demanding conditions, day and night, on land and at sea. SIRTAP is 7.3

## SIRTAP will bolster the tactical capabilities of the Spanish Army and Air and Space Force

metres long, has a wingspan of 11 metres and a maximum take-off weight of 750 kilos. It must be able to accommodate equipment and payloads of over 150 kilos and has been designed to have a range of more than 2,000 kilometres and an endurance of up to 20 hours in the air. Another requirement is that it can be easily dismantled to allow transportation of two SIRTAPs in standard containers of a tactical-transport aircraft like the Airbus C295 of the Spanish Air and Space Force.

Its maximum flight altitude will be 20,000 feet, its power plant must be able to attain a maximum speed of over 100 knots, withstand temperatures of between 50 and -40 degrees Celsius, and be able to take off and land on unpaved runways 800 metres long with crosswinds of up to 20 knots.

### MULTI-PURPOSE

The DGAM wants it to be a multi-purpose system, initially certified to fly in segregated airspace and capable of performing a wide range of tasks in all weather conditions.

To achieve this, the aircraft will be equipped with a synthetic aperture radar for target detection and location, as well as a state-of-the-art electro-optical sensor equipped with an infrared camera, the models for which have not yet been revealed.

It will also be equipped with satellite communications for the transmission and reception of aircraft command and control data, as well as for the exchange of data with on-board systems in accordance with the available bandwidth. The initial configuration plans to integrate an on-board encryption system manufactured in Spain. The structure of the initial version will have hard spots or tie down points under each of its wings to allow the installation of underwing loads.

The components and equipment that will make SIRTAP a reality will not be subject to the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) under the US Export Act, which controls and limits the defence-related or dual-use items, products and services that can be exported to third countries.

### INTEREST OF SPAIN AND COLOMBIA

Airbus DS and the Colombian administration have signed an agreement (MoU) to carry out a number of projects, the first of which is linked to the acquisition of SIRTAP systems. Other nations have also shown an interest, and some have even made their intentions known officially.

SIRTAP's first steps date back to 2017 and were the result of the shared interest between Spain and Colombia, whose

from Israel Aircraft Industries in 2007 and all of them have been modernised since 2018.

However, for the time being, SIRTAP is a national programme. Colombia's acquisition remains unclear and, therefore, no formal agreement is in place. Should the Colombian administration officially participate in this initiative, work packages that may be taken on by its industrial fabric would be through the Colombian Aeronautical Industry Corpo-



A model of SIRTAP at the Airbus chalet during the third edition of the International Defence and Security Exhibition (FEINDEF) in May 2023.

Armed Forces were already considering replacing their respective tactical drones, also known as RPAS (Remotely Piloted Aerial Systems), by the middle of this decade.

The Colombian Aerospace Force (FAC) has to replace its Hermes 450, acquired in 2012 from Israeli company Elbit and currently in service. The Spanish Army has six Searcher Mk IIIs, known as Sensorised Autonomous Intelligence Platforms (PASI in Spanish). The initial units were procured

ration (CIAC) as an Airbus supplier. The public entity CIAC has more than 66 years' experience in the maintenance of piloted aircraft, the manufacturing of aeronautical components and the production of RPAS, such as the Quimbaya, an unmanned observation aircraft weighing 74 kg, measuring 4 metres in length, a wingspan of 5 metres, and a maximum flight time of 8 hours.

**Juan Pons**  
Photos: Airbus



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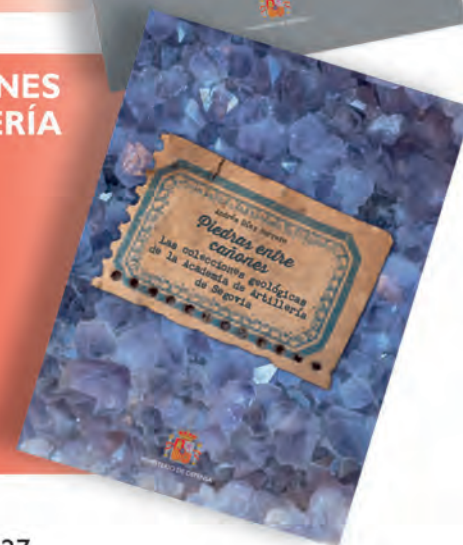
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