



The Spanish Armed Forces in 2035

Looking Ahead: An Overview of the Country's New Military Strategy and New Capabilities Planning Cycle

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Much has happened in the field of security and defence in the last few years. This is due largely to the global spread of a new era of great-power competition, hybrid threats, international terrorism and other forms of instability, all of which demand new types of responses and a strong commitment from the international community.

This strategic scenario has sparked a debate within the numerous international security and defence organisations and the different 'ad-hoc' coalitions that have emerged as a result of new political and military initiatives and projects. This includes the NATO Deterrence and Defence Concept, the EU Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), and one of the most successful coalitions in recent history - Operation Inherent Resolve / Coalition against DAESH.



Photo: Ministerio de Defensa

Introduction

In recent decades, the Spanish Ministry of Defence has chosen a multilateral approach for its political and military activity. We have demonstrated a huge commitment and contribution to international missions and operations with an average overseas deployment of 3,000 troops. Our participation in the hectic political and military discussions within the international community and our operational experience in the field, have provided us with useful guidelines to be taken into account as we adapt our military strategy.

In fact, a new Defence Planning Cycle was initiated in June 2020 through the enactment of a National Defence Directive (NDD), signed by the President of the Government, followed by a Defence Policy

Directive (DPD) approved by the Minister of Defence. Both documents underline the importance of multilateralism in the current strategic context, and where NATO has returned to the collective defence approach, the European Union prefers a framework to promote peace and stability on our southern flank (Africa), with the United Nations remaining the key reference for international legitimacy.

The NDD and the DPD also provide the Armed Forces with clear guidance on how to develop suitable strategies to face new threats and to improve military support to civil authorities. This has been proven to be a great success during the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the Spanish Chief of Defence Staff (CHOD), one of my main responsibilities is to determine and prioritise current and future military capabilities. The Spanish Armed Forces' capabilities must be completely intertwined with those of NATO and

the EU, in order to achieve a fully integrated planning process.

Although some priorities may be different among our allies and partners, those processes are completely aligned because we share the same strategic objectives.

This alignment is further cemented using the common mechanisms agreed upon by the member states. In the following paragraphs, I will outline the Spanish planning process.

Taking different studies into consideration, and the political guidance regarding our planning process, we receive inputs from three different sources: national, NATO and the EU.

Besides addressing the issue of resources, the planning process needs to integrate many other aspects such as new concepts, digital transformation, emergent and disruptive technologies, industrial aspects and European and NATO cooperation initiatives. All these references are key to designing our future Armed Forces and to building the roadmap of our procurement process.

This integration of information is carried out during the two-year definition phase that ends once the "Long Term Force Objective" and the "Military Capabilities Objective" are approved by the Minister of Defence. The definition phase is followed by a six-year execution phase which includes an annual review.

But before diving into the details of our military strategy and our planning process, I will briefly describe the results of this 'Foresight Analysis'.

Foresight Analysis: Operating Environment 2035

Current trends identified globally show that we are moving towards a new era. The think tank of the Spanish Ministry of

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Defence, the "Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos", wrote a timely and interesting report entitled "Horizon 2040". This document is mainly focused on the identification of global geopolitical trends and their future possible impact on Spanish politics and society.

The publication of the "Operating Environment 2035" (OE 2035) represents a step forward. This paper not only highlights a security and defence perspective, but also informs about the military planning process as a consequence of the new planning cycle, which began in 2020 following the prime minister's guidelines. From the very beginning, this study clearly states that the new planning cycle must design innovative and transformative initiatives. Here, the challenge lies in how to prepare the "Joint Force" for new combat standards and different combat modalities in a multi-domain operating environment.

OE 2035 shows how the current trends interact with national interests and are able to create situations that will shape the future operating environment. In spite of all the difficulties involved in an unpredictable future, we can unequivocally state that the Armed Forces will continue to be one of the main instruments available to democratic states to influence in conflicts, guarantee collective and national defence, protect national interests, contribute to international stability and provide security and well-being.

However, the changes that lie ahead are of such magnitude that it is difficult to predict how we will operate in the future and what we will require to adapt to those changes. It also refers to our geographic position, located in a very complex area where security challenges are highly relevant. Nevertheless, Spain is the natural bridge between Africa and Europe that allows Spain, NATO and the EU to interact with our African partners.

Consequently, the main purpose of the OE 2035 is to describe the possible operational scenarios for the Armed Forces and the changes involved in successfully adapting to that uncertain, complex environment.

The first section analyses the challenges of the future operating environment, summarising them as the risks, vulnerabilities and threats that compromise national security; the main concerns are international armed conflicts, failed states, organised crime, terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns.

The most decisive features that will characterise the OE 2035 include the upsurge of crises and conflicts with a diverse number of players who have the ability to exert in-



Photo: Ministerio de Defensa

Spanish Navy frigate CRISTOBAL COLON

fluence both regionally, as well as internationally.

Other key features of the OE 2035 are: the conventional and hybrid strategies merging into complex scenarios; changes in military organisations; technological developments in command and control systems; the predominant use of cyber and cognitive domains; densely populated urban areas as preferred sites for confrontation; varied access to anti-access and aerial denial (A2/AD) systems; the militarisation of outer space; and the technological development as a transversal factor in a full operating spectrum.

On the other hand, the report also underlines the exploitation opportunities in this environment for the Armed Forces such as technological innovation, internal and international cooperation initiatives and the ability to understand the situation, which will allow us to prevent conflicts or to react and resolve them efficiently. The main sources of strength will be the cooperation within NATO and the security pillar of the EU.

The second section provides the Operational Scenarios (OS) for the Armed Forces during the next decade. The Armed Forces will continue to protect national security interests. It is therefore predicted that in 2035 such interests will be similar to those of today, namely those relating to national sovereignty, those linked to achieving a stable international order in peace, security and respect for human rights, and finally those that affect the safety, well-being and prosperity of the citizens. The current COVID-19 pandemic has clearly shown that the Armed Forces are one of the most useful and resilient tools to face such a global crisis, both inside and outside our borders.

The third section concludes how the Armed Forces should successfully perform in meeting those challenges and threats by 2035: agility, feasibility, sustainability, efficiency, flexibility, a strong information management capability, credibility and resilience, strategic mobility and interoperability have been identified as the most desirable characteristics.



Photo: Ministerio de Defensa

PIZARRO Infantry Fighting Vehicle of the Spanish Army



The Spanish Armed Forces must achieve a balanced application of innovative changes in order to become an agile, flexible, and adaptive force for the future.

This section also shows a set of changes that have been identified as priorities to be implemented: improving strategic agility, reducing the logistical footprint, optimising the costs of operations, improving knowledge and talent management, committing to technological superiority, upgrading capabilities in cyberspace, cognitive domain and outer space, enhancing interoperability with state and non-state actors and, finally, designing organisational and structural improvements.

The key word 'agility' showed up as an outcome when the DOTMLPF-I (doctrine, organisation, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities and interoperability) approach was taken to identify the main characteristics that the Spanish Armed Forces should have in 2035. Due to the rapid evolution of societies and technologies, a strengthened relation with civil authorities, as well as the digital transformation, are essential to lead us to 'Structural Agility'. On the battlefield, our forces need 'Operational Agility' to understand the scenario where they act or are going to act, through a rational intel-cycle where all services work together to provide the right information, and at the right time in order to make rapid decisions which should be followed by a credible force to deter or act when needed, and to maintain an influence in support of the strategic lines of effort. This decision-making process has to be incorporated at all hierarchical levels. To achieve operational agility, we should be more agile in incorporating and managing new capacities. The speed of technological evolution demands a huge effort to provide affordable solutions from our national industry. In this sense, international cooperation is a must.

Finally, the Spanish Armed Forces are committed to the necessity of shaping those who will be part of us in the years to come: 'Human Resources Agile Management'. Recognising that automatisations will relieve humans from a huge amount of current activities, it is also a reality that future soldiers will need to be prepared to deal with technologies that are still unknown today. The Spanish Armed Forces have opted to renew themselves, to keep up with present and future demands, so that in 2035 we will continue being a solid contributor to national security and international stability. The next milestone is this year's approval of the National Military Strategy, called 'Concept of Employment of the Armed Forces (CEFAS 21)'.

The Spanish Military Strategy

According to our National Defence Doctrine, the political guidance contained in the DDN and the DPD has to be translated into a military strategy through the so-called Concept of Employment of the Armed Forces (CEFAS 21). This basically defines how the Armed Forces will accomplish their mission within a particular strategic scenario. As I write these lines, the Spanish Joint Staff finds itself in the final phase of defining the CEFAS 21 which will set the foundations for the subsequent Force and Operational Planning for this new planning cycle.

It is not easy to summarise in a few pages how we have faced the challenge of creating a military strategy model that could at the same time comply with the political guidance and be able to tackle the complex strategic scenario around our borders. But I can at least say that we were very clear on three of the features we would definitely like to see in this construct: interconnectivity, pragmatism and alignment.

Interconnectivity tries to ensure that all strategic-military processes of the Spanish Armed Forces are designed in such a way that they can be perfectly coupled with those of the rest of the Administration and the international community in a two-fold approach. On the one hand, interconnectivity is about using a common terminology to facilitate mutual understanding and, on the other hand, it implies developing strategic lines of action that can be seen as "plug and play" by the rest of the ministries and by our allies and partners.

Pragmatism in turn, aims at developing a military strategy that can really define how the Spanish Armed Forces plan and carry out their missions and operations, avoiding an academic model disconnected from reality or from the day-to-day routine.

Alignment between the planning processes of NATO and the EU with our own process is essential to achieve our common objectives and to maintain the interoperability of the armed forces of our allies.

CEFAS 21 Model

Something we have maintained from previous planning cycles is the idea of defining different Strategic Lines of Action to achieve the strategic military objectives. However, this time we have selected some that foster coherence between our military strategy and the concepts developed within the main international security and defence organisations to which Spain belongs.

With that in mind, we have come up with the following three Strategic Lines of Action:

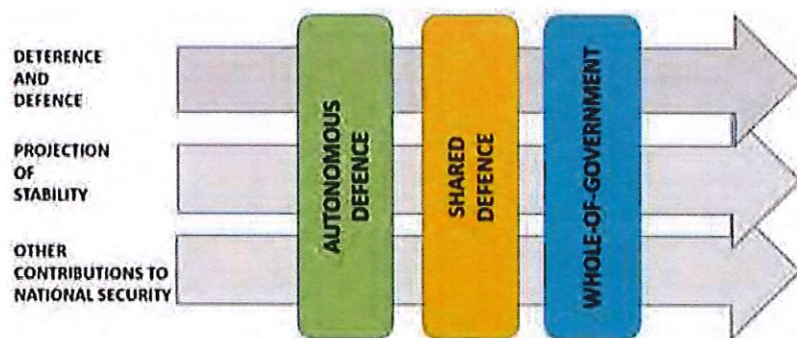
- Deterrence and defence;
- Projection of stability;
- Other contributions to national security.

Admittedly, this decomposition of the activities of the Armed Forces is somehow artificial as the three Strategic Lines of Action are in reality intertwined with each other; still and for practical reasons, there is merit in considering them separately. What is important, however, is the fact that the three altogether completely cover the missions assigned to the Armed Forces by the Spanish Constitution and the National Defence Law, while using a similar structure, concepts and language to those we have developed together with our allies and partners to fight the threats and challenges posed by the current strategic context. This relates especially to those derived from the great power competition, international terrorism and other risks that are not necessarily of a defence nature but where the Armed Forces can provide a valuable contribution.

In order to achieve the desired connectivity, each of these Strategic Lines of Action are defined across three different strategic scenarios:

- Autonomous defence;
- Shared defence;
- Whole-of-government.

As a result, the paradigm of Spain's military strategy contained within CEFAS 21, is defined by the matrix shown in the graphic below (Figure 1).



Military strategy objectives



Photo: MCCE

The Spanish Joint Cyberspace Command (MCCE) is responsible for the planning, management, coordination, control and execution of operations to ensure the armed forces' freedom to act in the cyberspace field. MCCE ensures CHOD's authority over the Defence Comprehensive Information Infrastructure (I3D).

This basically illustrates how each of the three Strategic Lines of Action has implications for the national defence, for our participation in the international community and for our relations with the rest of the Spanish Administration, yet all of them constitute part of the same strategic process facilitating overall coherence. We can see some of the benefits of this approach by examining what it means for each of them.

Deterrence and Defence

As stated before, Spain's collective defence rests mainly on NATO which implies an important effort to assume contribu-

tion responsibilities to its Command and Force Structures, the NATO Response Force (NRF), the Assurance Measures, the missions and operations, etc. At the same time, the Spanish Armed Forces are there to safeguard deterrence and defence against non-shared threats and, considering the existence of a single set of forces at national level, the immediate benefit of having both dimensions - national and international - under the same heading, can be easily inferred.

Furthermore, important synergies can be obtained between national and allied activities during peacetime as most of them - intelligence, indications and warnings, surveillance, exercises - can be oriented

towards both autonomous and shared defence at the same time, from the moment of their initial planning and during their execution. This approach provides unquestionable political, military and financial efficiencies.

Additionally, in a context dominated by the proliferation of hybrid threats, it is extremely important to have the whole of government connected to both autonomous and shared defence scenarios. Indeed, deterrence and defence cannot be achieved without an effective national crisis response system and a real interagency resilience approach that must include the necessary coordination to deal with certain crosscutting issues such as cyber-attacks or the protection of critical infrastructures, to name a few.

Projection of Stability

The violent wave of international terrorism that has spread within and around our borders during the last decade has generated a great deal of activity oriented both to fight the threat and address its root causes. The same can be said about other criminal activities like piracy, human trafficking and weapons smuggling that have contributed to the creation of a wide range of instability, especially in the southern part of our periphery.

In this case, the need to incorporate the three scenarios: autonomous defence, shared defence and whole-of-government under the same process, is even more evident and important. Projection of stability entails different types of response, ranging



Photo: Ministerio de Defensa

Spain is set to receive new EUROFIGHTER combat aircraft to augment its existing fleet and to begin the process of replacing its Boeing EF-18 HORNET fleet.



Spanish soldiers undergoing specialist training in a simulated urban environment

from simple Cooperative Security activities to more sophisticated forms of Defence Capacity Building and all the way up to medium-intensity military operations to neutralise powerful terrorist organisations. All these need to be taken on nationally and internationally, including the creation of ad-hoc coalitions and a high degree of civil-military cooperation that together demand the transversal type of approach that CEFAS 21 tries to exploit.

This is exactly the idea under the C-VEO (Counter Violent Extremist Organisations) initiatives that try to obtain maximum synergies of the efforts carried out by all the national, international, civil and military stakeholders across the globe involved in the fight against these types of threats.

Other Contributions to National Security

The Spanish Armed Forces have a long-standing tradition of supporting civil authorities. The Military Emergencies Unit has been instrumental in this regard, having become an extraordinary tool to support our citizens in the event of natural disasters and calamities. More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the Armed Forces can provide other types of support in a short period of time and in a very efficient manner.

All these activities are normally taken forward under the whole-of-government approach, but they can acquire an international dimension if any type of support is requested by another nation, as frequently happens.

Even though supporting other civil authorities, whether national or interna-

tional, is not the main mission of the Armed Forces, nor the most demanding, the experience shows that a proper planning and a dedicated process is essential in order to be in position to provide an expeditious response when required, thus becoming the third and last Strategic Line of Action.

Pragmatism through Strategic Planning

The CEFAS 21's paradigm would not be of much use if it only offered an academic model. This would not provide real added value and definitely would not be pragmatic. To this effect, we need to ensure that the three Strategic Lines of Action become real processes and change the way the Spanish Armed Forces' activities, missions and operations are planned and executed.

To this end, our Joint Staff has come up with the idea of developing one Strategic Plan for each of the three Strategic Lines of Action, plus one General Strategic Plan to guide the other three and organise those activities, like joint intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance or cyber defence, that are common to them all.

A Deterrence and Defence Strategic Plan will for instance put our deployments to NATO's enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in Latvia in the same context as our normal peacetime operations and exercises and our whole-of-government coordination to improve national resilience. All of them would take place without strategic planning anyway, but there is no doubt that a common approach to all of them would definitely improve the coherence and the synergies of our effort.

A General Strategic Plan will in turn allow us

to rebalance the priorities among the three Strategic Lines of Action, foster advanced planning and obtain synergies of certain transversal tasks like JISR, thus permitting a more efficient use of some critical enablers. In summary, CEFAS 21 will allow a new type of approach to our military activity that increases the coherence, flexibility, efficiency and strategic agility, something we consider extremely important in the current strategic context.

Last but not least, we believe that this new concept will also have an intrinsic pedagogical value for all the members of the Spanish Armed Forces as it will transmit the importance of developing an interconnected mentality, where our military strategy is oriented by default to improving our capacity to work with our community of interest, both at a national and international level.

A New Planning Cycle for Spanish Defence

Once CEFAS 21 is approved, the next task is to further refine the planning scenarios to identify and prioritise the capabilities best suited to achieve our objectives. These capabilities are listed in two documents; the OFLP (Long-term Force Objective) and OCM (Military Capabilities Objective). The first shows the capabilities required in the long term (beyond 15 years) taking into account the evolution of the future operational environment (EO 2035), the industrial trends and the emergent and disruptive technologies (EDTs) that are expected to play a major role in that timeframe. Once the OFLP is approved, it is necessary to streamline the procurement activities for the next years in the OCM (3-6 years).



At the beginning of this article, I emphasised how the commonality among the political and strategic perspectives of Spain, NATO and the EU constituted a good starting point to ensure coherence in their capabilities. However, some additional measures are needed to ensure a degree of integration consistent with the "single set of forces" principle. Although the Spanish and NATO/EU cycles are different, eight versus four years, our yearly review gives us the opportunity to include NATO targets or High Impact Capability Goals (HICG) from EU military planning.

Besides our commitment to the EU HICG, we put a great deal of effort in contributing to the defence of Europe through the EU's three main defence initiatives. With regard to PESCO, we are participating in 32 of the 46 current projects. But PESCO commitments go much further than the projects. In spite of our budget constraints, we are the second country in terms of contributions to CSDP missions and operations. With regard to the defence investment, we meet the investment related benchmarks in major equipment and research and technology.

As for the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), we are satisfied with our alignment with the focus areas of the last CARD report and, in terms of complying with the principle of the single set of forces.

Within Europe, international cooperation in major equipment projects is yielding fruitful results. We lead two important projects such as the Airborne Electronic Attack and more importantly, the Strategic Command and Control for CSDP missions and operations which aims at providing a state-of-the-art solution to the long-standing problem of command and control measures of the European External Action Service. Furthermore, in the 4th PESCO call we will present the project Essential Elements of European Escorts (E4) which in a few years' time will offer a family of systems based on cutting edge technology that may be incorporated to any European naval platform. With regard to NATO, we have achieved a similar degree of integration between our national planning and the NATO Defence Planning Process.

It is true that our economic situation, particularly after COVID-19, makes it very dif-

ficult for us to reach the Cardiff Pledge by 2024. On the other hand, we meet the 20% benchmark of investment in major equipment.

In general terms, the Spanish commitment to "the Europe that protects" can be checked by the permanent contribution of Spanish forces to EU missions and operations. Moreover, Spain is also one of the most committed allies with NATO deterrence and defence forces. This commitment needs to be based on a coherent planning effort. In this article, you have seen how the decisions on capabilities are consistent with the European vision of our government and how the NATO and EU military planning targets and goals are taken into account to determine the priorities for our weapon systems.

Furthermore, you have also seen how our Armed Forces work simultaneously in the NATO, EU and national planning processes and initiatives to ensure the maximum degree of coherence in the full implementation of Spain of the "single set of forces" principle. We think Spain is a good example of military capabilities planning integration both with NATO and the EU. ■

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