

AIR POWER IN SPAIN: EJÉRCITO DEL AIRE

During the first “post-Cold War” years, Air Power enjoyed a tremendous success and prestige, endorsed by events like the 1st Gulf War, in which the new dimension on the precision of air weapons played a fundamental role in the quick outcome of that conflict. Thus, the doctrine of “decisive employment of air power” was validated. Later on, the Kosovo War gave a new boost to the supremacy of Air Power as an increasing number of all-weather and precision guided munitions were used against selective targets, thus minimizing collateral damages and enemy casualties, applying the concept of force proportionality, ensuring operational lawfulness and, finally, forcing the adversary political leaders to reconsider their behaviour.

However, the terrorist attacks in New York, Madrid and Beslan have made it clear that, on the face of the new risks and threats, the traditional military superiority is not an efficient deterrent, nor it guarantees greater security automatically. The new strategic situation and the challenges we must tackle in our fight against terrorist organizations, which do not employ conventional military power, have somehow put into question Air Power actual capabilities. For the first time since the end of the Cold War it is becoming necessary to find a new orientation for the Air Power doctrine, one in which our capabilities in terms of deployment, surveillance and reconnaissance, strategic airlift and special operations would take on a new dimension.

Among the most probable threats to the security of the western world we could see those derived from ethnic conflicts, humanitarian crises and other situations that may take place near or far from our borders. The effects of globalisation dictate that a nation’s interests are increasingly dependent on events occurring anywhere in the world. Air Power has no frontiers and can be employed in every type of scenario, anytime, anywhere. Its precision, range and speed make it the most valuable and flexible military / political tool for improving security and stability to face the new risks.

Air Power assists in the solution of humanitarian crises by providing strategic and tactical airlift and air recce. However, airlift and reconnaissance are not the only capabilities on hand, because it could be possible to employ other Air Power capabilities to achieve, in the framework of the joint action, an adequate level of area control and protection to ensure safe transit ways into and from the theatre of operations.

In conflict-prevention or peacekeeping operations, Air Power’s great mobility, continuous surveillance and precision are important factors of deterrence and represent a major support for intelligence missions.

Air Power is a decisive tool for the achievement of diplomatic and political objectives in peace-building and peace-enforcing operations. Across the spectrum from conventional war to asymmetric conflicts such as terrorism or ethnic problems, Air Power can provide with proper fire power, measured out to impose peace on the fighting parties. Air superiority is an absolute pre-condition for force deployment as it provides the proper level of protection to friendly forces, and it frequently allows the

resolution of a crisis with a minimum deployment of surface forces. Aerospace platforms can also provide logistic and recce support.

The Ejército del Aire (SPAF), the main embodiment of Air Power in Spain, is responsible for the permanent surveillance and control of our sovereign national airspace. This mission has lately acquired a new dimension as the traditional concept of defence against external threats has been supplemented with the permanent fight against the terrorist threat (Renegade) and the establishment of special security operations in relevant occasions. This mission is framed in the European context through the full integration of the SPAF air defence assets in the NATO Integrated Extended Air Defence System (NATINEADS). The SPAF participates also in the NATO Airborne Early Warning and Control Force (NAEW&C).

The SPAF takes part as well in expeditionary operations for both the preservation of international peace and stability and humanitarian relief. The SPAF contributes its personnel, material assets and organisation, its expertise and, above all, its willingness to be the spearhead of the Spanish efforts to export peace, stability and welfare wherever they may be required.

Lastly, in its contribution to the State Action from the Air, the SPAF carries out various missions supporting the security and welfare of our citizens. This includes, among others, Search and Rescue missions, for which the SPAF is responsible in the airspace assigned to Spain in accordance with international agreements, Fire Fighting and Senior Government Officials air transport. The SPAF also conducts missions in support of the State Security Forces, mainly in the fight against terrorism context. As required, the SPAF may also carry out the evacuation of Spain citizens' abroad.

Looking ahead, the goals for the Ejército del Aire over a fifteen-year horizon are those established by our 2002 Strategic Defence Review in which, our core objective is to consolidate our expeditionary capabilities. To be able to deploy simultaneously to various remote scenarios with sundry geographic and climatological situations and with different levels of risk will demand an effort of which the SPAF is fully aware: an effort for transformation both in terms of weapons modernisation and also in evolution of doctrines and structures. But, above all, it will demand a change of the SPAF members' mindset. Our presence in Afghanistan, where the SPAF leads the construction of the Herat-based Forward Support Base, represents our most important expeditionary challenge of the modern times, and the SPAF is dealing with it brilliantly. The FSB provides the support required to the 4 PRTs (Italy, Lithuania, United States and Spain) in western Afghanistan.

UAVs play a major role in in/out-theatre operations thanks to their permanent capabilities for surveillance, reconnaissance and targeting. UAVs have a precision level that was unimaginable a few years ago and help to reduce the sensor-to-shooter time to a minimum. The SPAF has been considering for some time the procurement of a MALE –Medium Altitude Long Endurance– system that would be used mainly within the ISTAR architecture of the Armed Forces. In addition to including such acquisition in modernisation plans, the SPAF participates in UAV forums and work groups. Being the Service that will lead the introduction and integration process of these systems into the Spanish Armed Forces, the Ejército del

Aire is fully aware of its important responsibility. The application of the Air Force's expertise, knowledge and structures to the UAV integration in the Armed Forces will contribute greatly to the joint action.

As for the command and control resources, it could be said that the SPAF's C2 System, once completed and being fully integrated in NATINEADS, will rank among the NATO best, providing the Alliance with an outstanding capability for airspace surveillance and control, as well as with the best characteristics for a successful air defence.

The entry into service of the Eurofighter will provide us with a highly efficient weapons system. Requirements met by the aircraft upon FOC (Final Operational Clearance) include short/medium range A/A missiles, which will turn the Eurofighter into a top aerial platform for air defence missions. It is also planned the use of all kinds of air-ground armament, including multipurpose bombs, targeting equipment and laser-guided and GPS precision bombs.

The F-18 Mid-Life Update is under way. It began in 1999 and its completion is planned for 2008, with the objective of adapting the aircraft's systems to the requirements of multinational operations. Moreover, the MLU will extend the F-18's life, now approaching 20 years, until the late 2010s, when it will be replaced with a combat system whose definition of characteristics has already begun. The main advantage of our F-18s is not the number of units in inventory, but rather their quality and the cutting-edge systems integrated in the aircraft.

The SPAF model for air armament upgrade includes participation in the Meteor and IRIS-T programmes and the procurement of long-range A/S missiles like the "Taurus" or the all-weather guiding kit "Enhanced Paveway II" for conventional armament. This will ensure the Eurofighter and the F-18 a precision all-weather, air-surface attack capability that will enhance aircrew's safety and reduce the risk of collateral damage.

The F-5 upgrade currently under way will meet training needs until 2020. However, the SPAF is reconsidering the future of the F-5s and C-101s and the traditional training systems for combat pilot as a result of the increasingly multinational nature of advanced training activities in our modern air forces. To that end, the SPAF participates in the AEJPT (Advanced European Jet Pilot Training) multinational training programme.

In the other hand, the SPAF's updated F-5s are equipped with Glass Cockpit and can simulate the cabin symbology of aircraft such as the F-16, a weapons system that is present in many allied European Air Forces. This circumstance, together with a potential surplus in flight hours, could be beneficial to reach agreements with other nations with a potential deficiency in terms of combat pilot training.

The swift transformation of the current strategic environment and the nature and scenarios of today's military operations have turned strategic airlift into a major piece of the military power structure. In order to alleviate the shortcomings that have been identified in that field, the nations have taken various initiatives, of which we

could highlight the A400M cargo, a programme in which Spain has participated since day one. There are plans to acquire 27 units, which will come into service during the next decade. The arrival of the A400M in late 2011 will mean a number of major improvements in the SPAF's airlift and deployment capabilities. It will mean, too, a better support to the Spanish Armed Forces' other Branches. The expected upgrade in air-to-air refuelling capability will not be forgotten.

Likewise, there are plans to procure a new squadron of C-295 aircraft to complete the rationalisation process of SPAF's assets. Thus, fulfilling the new dimension required by in-theatre airlift capability, it will permit us to devote other assets to other types of missions for the benefit of the welfare of our citizens.

As for the procurement programme of NH-90 helicopters for the Spanish Armed Forces, the SPAF should have to purchase 28 helicopters for the phased replacement of the existing Pumas and Superpumas, in order to carry out SAR/CSAR and VIP transport missions. These helicopters will ensure the successful achievement of CSAR and air policing missions required in the current strategic environment, in addition of course to missions assigned for the benefit of the citizens' security and welfare. On top of that, they will provide the joint action with an improved capability for medical evacuation, personnel recovery and special operations.

All in all, the traditional expeditionary spirit that has always stimulated the Spanish aviators should now be embodied in a new Air Force in which deployment capability will be inherent in the very existence of the Units. To that end, we are now working for a Spanish Air Force that will be even more mobile, flexible and interoperable with other national and allied Services. In this way, together with an exceptional air command and control system, with efficient and precise weapons systems and with the assets dedicated to operations that contribute to the welfare and security of the populations, the expeditionary air force will represent the heart of the Spanish Air Force in the XXI century.

June 16, 2005

Air General Francisco José García de la Vega
Spanish Air Force Chief of Staff