



RESPONSE AND DETERRENCE

Spanish Armed Forces contribute to various operations on NATO's eastern flank

MORE than 1,100 Spanish military personnel, one-third of those deployed on international missions, have been involved in recent months in NATO operations aimed at deterring any aggression against allies on the eastern flank. A mechanised company task force and two anti-aircraft systems of the Spanish Army; eight fighter jets and a surveillance and control radar of the Spanish Air and Space Force; and two Navy ships contribute to these defensive deployments aimed at preventing what is happening in Ukraine from spreading to other parts of Europe.

After six months patrolling Romania's skies, the Spanish contingent ended its *Enhanced Air Policing* mission on 8 June 2023. The *Viespe* detachment, which consisted of 130 soldiers and eight *F-18* fighters from the 15th Wing, started its mission on 1 December 2022.

Subsequently, on 1 April, the change of command took place and the assets were replaced by seven *F-18*s from the 12th Wing and 133 troops. During this time, more than 1,200 flight hours have been flown in air policing missions.

NATO's air shielding mission was set up in 2014, following Russia's annexation of the Crimean peninsula. The primary objective is to defend allied airspace from intrusions by Russian aircraft violating

**Eight fighter jets
and a surveillance
radar reinforce
NATO's air shielding
in Romania**

airspace regulations, without a flight plan, or ignoring radio identification requests.

The deployment of the *Viespe* detachment has been carried out in conjunction with the Romanian, Italian and French Armed Forces to ensure the round-the-clock protection of the Eastern airspace.

Since 2006, Spain has also regularly contributed several fighter jets to the *Baltic Air Policing* mission through the *Vilkas* detachment in Lithuania and the *Ambar* detachment in Estonia.

SURVEILLANCE AND CONTROL

As part of NATO's enhanced air policing mission, Spain has also deployed a surveillance radar of the Mobile Air Control Group (GRUMOCA) in Romania. The *Tigru* detachment's radar arrived in the area of operations on 20 October 2022 and, since then, it has operated outside Spanish territory for more than 4,000 hours. The

INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS



Mechanised units of NATO's battlegroup in Latvia during exercise *Crystal Arrow* in early April.



A Spanish *F-18* and an Italian *Eurofighter* patrolling Romanian airspace.

Security personnel of the *Tigru* detachment next to the AN/TPS43M air surveillance and control radar.

INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS

The detachment in Latvia is the largest, with more than 600 troops in a multinational battlegroup



Minehunter *Tajo* sails in waters of the Mediterranean as part of the Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group.

data detected by the radar are received at the Combined Air Operations Centre (CAOC) in Torrejón, which is responsible for directing air and missile defence on NATO's southern flank.

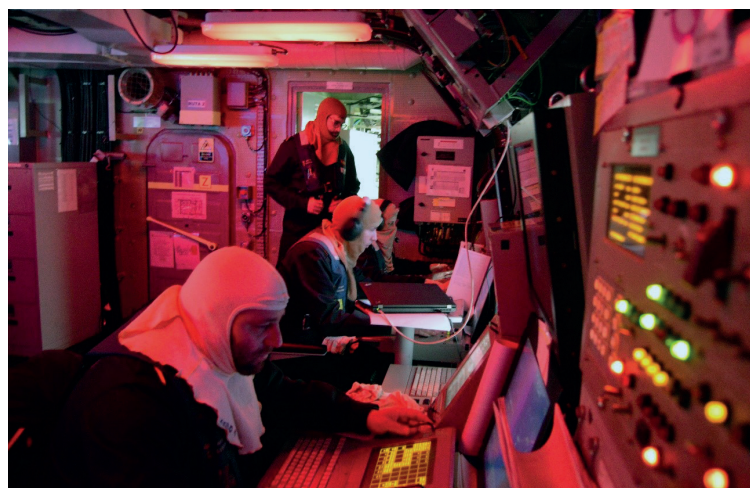
BALTIC COUNTRIES

At Camp Adazi, located 20 kilometres from Riga and some 120 kilometres from the Russian border, around 600 Spanish soldiers make up the multinational battlegroup deployed in Latvia as part of NATO's enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) mission.

Primarily comprising soldiers from the 12th Brigade *Guadarrama*, the twelfth contingent joined the mission on 13 January 2023 and has been deployed there until mid-June, when it was relieved by members of the same unit. The contingent participated in exercise

Crystal Arrow 2023 in early April, seeking to enhance cooperation between the armed forces of allied nations and certify the eFP's multinational battlegroup.

The Spanish Army has also had an Air Defence Unit (ADU) of NASAMS surface-to-air missile systems in operation for more than a year at Lielvarde air base, Latvia.



Training of the *Álvaro de Bazán's* crew during multinational exercise *Joint Warrior 23* in the Norwegian Sea.

Its task is to reinforce the protection of Latvian airspace against threats at medium altitude, i.e. between 3,000 and 8,000 metres, particularly cruise missiles and armed drones. According to Major Juan Luis Rodríguez Lahore, commander of the first contingent, who was relieved in mid-January after a six-month mission, these are a crucial capability for the Alliance, as demonstrated in the conflict in Ukraine. The NASAMS battery can neutralise this type of threats thanks to its homing guidance AMRAAM 120 C5 missiles ("fire-and-forget" type), which are effective up to eight kilometres in altitude with a range of another 25 kilometres.

In such a short time, its responsiveness depends on its *MPQ-64 Sentinel* radar, responsible for detecting and identifying targets. It covers a radius of 75 kilometres and is capable of handling 80 blips at a time.

Another NASAMS battery of the 73rd Anti-aircraft Artillery Regiment of Cartagena, which is stationed at Amari air base in Estonia for an initial period of four months, joined this endeavour last April. The system, which arrived by sea to the Estonian port of Paldiski, will provide the Baltic country with air defence capabilities until it takes delivery of the systems of this type that it plans to purchase.

Along with other anti-aircraft units from allied countries, including the US *Patriot* and French *Mamba* batteries, the Spanish ADUs in Latvia and Estonia are part of NATO's Integrated Air and Missile Defence System under NATO's Allied Air Command (AIRCOM) headquarters at Ramstein, Germany.

MARITIME GROUPS

Frigate *Álvaro de Bazán* has been integrated in the Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 (SNMG1), fulfilling its mission in operation *Brilliant Shield* as part of the Very High Readiness



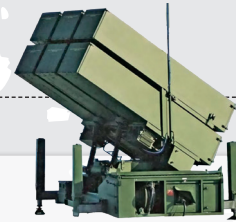
SPANISH TROOPS ON THE EASTERN FLANK



ENHANCED FORWARD PRESENCE



- A mechanised company task force and field artillery, sapper, engineer and logistic units at Camp Adazi (Latvia). **600 troops.**



AIR AND MISSILE DEFENCE



- A NASAMS battery at Lielvarde air base (Latvia) and another at Amari air base (Estonia). More than **80 troops.**



ENHANCED AIR POLICING



- *Viespe* detachment, consisted of eight *F-18* aircraft and **130 soldiers** of the 12th Wing at Fetesti air base (Romania).



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



NATO MARITIME FORCES



- Frigate *Álvaro de Bazán*. has been part of the Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 (SNMG1) in the North Sea. **Crew: 200.**



- Minehunter *Tajo* has been part of the Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group in the Mediterranean. **Crew: 46.**



Rafael Navarro / Revista Española de Defensa / Source: EMAD and RED.

Joint Force (VJTF). It sailed in the North Sea, carrying out enhanced surveillance and naval presence activities, and also undergoing training with the other ships of the allied maritime task force in exercises such as *Joint Warrior* and *Baltops* in the Norwegian Sea and the Baltic, while remaining available to carry out tasks according to the guidelines of the Allied Maritime Command (MARCOM).

After a four-day stop in the Norwegian port of Trondheim, this frigate set sail again to participate in exercise *Dynamic Mongoose 23*, organised by NATO and focused on training in anti-submarine warfare procedures.

The Spanish vessel, led by Commander Jesús Viñas, began its deployment in mid-

January and has been deployed there until the end of June. It features a 200-strong crew on board, including an airborne unit (equipped with an *SH-60B* helicopter), and an operational security team belonging to the Marine Brigade.

Frigate *Álvaro de Bazán* has remained in the SNMG1 until mid-June

In addition, minehunter *Tajo* has sailed as part of the Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group, which it joined at the end of February.

In recent weeks it has patrolled the waters of the Mediterranean to ensure freedom of navigation, contributing to the multinational exercises carried out by this naval task force specialised in detecting and neutralising mines.

In turn, the *Tajo* participates in operation *Sea Guardian* seeking to combat illegal activities at sea, while securing national and international maritime spaces. Its crew, which is supported by a team from the Mine Countermeasures Diving Unit, is made up of 46 people.

Víctor Hernández/Photos: EMAD