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Future force, present decisions: defence planning as public policy

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Abstract:

Defence debates often stop at inventories and budgets. Yet what is truly decisive is defence planning: the mechanism that turns political guidance – always imperfect – into a coherent, usable and sustainable force. This opinion piece explains what it means to plan for defence and why it matters, outlines the logic of capability-based planning, and uses Spain as an illustrative case to show its real function. That function is not paperwork production, but governing scarcity: ordering priorities, sequencing decisions and, above all, institutionalising trade-offs between ambition and means. In the cycle opened by the 2022 strategic shock, tighter allied capability demands and Europe's defence-industrial turn raise the bar and leave less room for rhetoric.

Keywords:

Defence planning – capability-based planning – joint force – sustainment – defence-technological and industrial base (DTIB) – Spain.

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Introduction

In defence, most debates focus on what to buy and how much to invest; far fewer address the mechanism that turns political priorities into a force structure that is effective, sustainable, and aligned with the objectives of defence policy. That mechanism is defence planning: a public policy function that organises time (planning cycles), authority (who decides what), documentation (what is approved), and resources (what is funded) in order to translate politico-strategic guidance into credible military capabilities[1]. When the strategic and technological environment is stable, planning becomes a largely bureaucratic routine. When that environment accelerates, planning reveals its true nature: an institutional device designed to manage the gap between ambition and resources, between external commitments and domestic constraints, between the inherited force and the future force, and between modernisation and readiness.

Russia's war against Ukraine has restored the centrality of three debates that Spain cannot treat in isolation: (1) the redefinition of collective defence in a context shaped by burden shifting among Allies, the erosion of the transatlantic bond, and the pressure to field credible capabilities in quantity, quality, and at speed; (2) the European agenda on capabilities and procurement, which seeks to reduce market fragmentation, scale up production, strengthen the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB), and – at least in abstract terms – reduce Europe's strategic dependence on Washington; and (3) the growing social embeddedness of defence, whereby major programmes are justified not only in operational terms but also as technology policy, employment policy, territorial cohesion, and positioning within value chains. Spain enters this cycle with a planning architecture that is formally mature, yet shaped by familiar inertias: a weak strategic culture among political elites and society, recurrent budgetary

[1] Following allied practice, in Spain we understand a military capability as a bundle of components – Materiel, Infrastructure, Human Resources, Training, Doctrine, Organisation, and Interoperability (MIRADO-I) – whose combination makes it possible to generate a given military effect. That said, the decisive component of any capability is doctrine: it defines how means are employed, which effects are sought, how the force is organised and trained, and how it is integrated into joint and multinational operations. In practical terms, doctrine is the bridge that turns dispersed resources into usable military power; without it, modernisation tends to become an accumulation of equipment rather than a genuine transformation of the force.

constraints, persistent tensions between investment and sustainment, and the rising weight of industrial and social returns in programming[2].

What defence planning is and why it matters

Strictly speaking, defence planning is the process through which a state translates political ends into military means over time: it sets objectives, designs forces, prioritises capabilities, programmes resources, and evaluates outcomes. It is neither "neutral" nor linear. It bears little resemblance to the ideal public-policy cycle – formulate, implement, evaluate – because it must reconcile different horizons (short/medium/long term), rigid calendars (annual budgets), and long lead times (acquisition and system life cycles), while shocks – crises, wars, or a nascent revolution in military affairs—reorder priorities before programmes have time to mature. For that reason, planning functions less as a technique than as a form of meta-governance[3]: it establishes the rules, documents, forums, and routines that structure a distributive contest among availability, force structure, investment, and sustainment.

Here lies the key point: defence is not decided solely by the inventory of platforms; it is decided by the coherence between the level of ambition, the force design, and its sustainability. Effective planning compels actors to make assumptions explicit (through scenarios), to prioritise (by deciding what is postponed), and to match "strategic desire" to a concrete political economy. When planning fails, familiar pathologies appear: unrealistic wish-lists, oversized portfolios, programmes that absorb future fiscal room for manoeuvre, and a force that is modern "on paper" yet fragile in availability, readiness, and sustainment[4].

Since the end of the Cold War, many Western countries have framed these reforms[5] under the banner of "transformation": reorganising structures, rationalising functions, and

[2] Jordi Molas-Gallart (1998): "Defence procurement as an industrial policy tool: the Spanish experience". *Defence and peace economics*, 9 (1-2), 63–81; Francisco Pérez-Muinelo (2015): *El Gasto de Defensa en España: 1946–2015*. Madrid: Ministerio de Defensa.

[3] Magnus Christiansson (2018): "Defense planning beyond rationalism: the third offset strategy as a case of metagovernance". *Defence studies*, 18 (3), 262–278.

[4] Javier Jordán (2025): "La política de defensa en España desde el análisis de políticas públicas (I): contexto y actores". *Global Strategy Report*, 1/2025. https://global-strategy.org/politica-defensa-analisis-politicas-publicas-i/

[5] Guillem Colom-Piella (2016): "Transforming the Spanish military". *Defence Studies*, 16 (1), 1-19.

modernising capabilities in an environment marked by uncertainty, technological innovation, and political and budgetary constraints. In that context, planning is the epicentre, because it is the mechanism that carries change from an inherited force to a future force – ordering priorities, sequencing transformation, and avoiding the mistake of equating modernisation with mere weapons procurement[6]. Spain embraced this logic when it adopted capability-based planning in 2005, seeking allied harmonisation, internal rationalisation, and a portfolio of military capabilities better suited to the post-9/11 strategic environment[7].

From threat-based planning to capability-based planning

The shift from planning centred on specific threats to planning centred on capabilities reflects a structural change: when the environment is fluid and missions are diverse (collective defence, crisis management, forward presence, support to the state's comprehensive approach, and so forth), threats do not translate neatly into a single adversary and a single scenario. Capability-Based Planning (CBP) starts from a different logic: it defines a set of plausible scenarios, derives missions and tasks, identifies the required functions and effects (command and control, mobility, protection, fires, intelligence, logistics, sustainment, etc.), and from there builds a catalogue of capabilities that are versatile, interoperable, sustainable, and financially affordable[8]. Its virtue is that it forces decision-makers to speak the language of effects and functions rather than platforms; its limitation is that, without political and budgetary discipline, it can degenerate into a formally impeccable architecture that merely conceals a persistent gap between ambition and resources.

The literature – and the Spanish experience – suggests two uncomfortable lessons. The first is that procedural innovation does not substitute for governance: a capability-based model can align vocabulary and processes with Allies, but it does not by itself deliver multi-year funding (which would require statutory underpinning through a dedicated

[6] Félix Arteaga and Enrique Fojón (2008): *El planeamiento de la política de defensa y seguridad en España*. Madrid: IUGM.

[7] Guillem Colom-Piella (2011): "El proceso de planeamiento de la Defensa Nacional". *Revista General de Marina,* 260 (5), 833-842.

[8] Paul Davis et al. (eds.) (2002): *Analytic architecture for capabilities-based planning, mission-system analysis, and transformation*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.

appropriations law), sustained leadership, political prioritisation, or coherence between political and military agendas[9]. The second is that sustainability – systems' life-cycle costs and sustainment, stocks of ammunition and spares, personnel, and infrastructure – is not a "minor chapter" but the planning system's acid test; when modernisation is financed by pre-committing future budgets, flexibility shrinks and adjustment falls on the least visible lines, as was evident during the previous economic crisis[10].

The introduction of capability-based planning in Spain

In Spain, capability-based planning was institutionalised in 2005 through Ministerial Order 37/2005, in a context of convergence with the Atlantic Alliance, the consolidation of professionalisation, and military modernisation associated with major cooperative programmes. The Order codified the shift from threat-based planning to capability-based planning and, in doing so, aligned national planning cycles with those of Allies, reinforcing the notion that planning should deliver an interoperable and usable Joint Force across the full spectrum of operations. Although this grammar had been maturing since the 2003 Strategic Defence Review (*Revisión Estratégica de la Defensa*), the 2005 Order turned that language into procedure.

This point has clear contemporary implications: if 2005 represented an attempt to modernise the institutional "software" of planning – adopting a capabilities language, improving joint coherence, and bringing the national cycle closer to the allied one – the years that followed showed that the fiscal "hardware" remained fragile[11]. Modernisation relied to a significant extent on the Special Armament Programmes (*Programas Especiales de Modernización* – PEA) and their mechanism of deferred payments funded through industrial advances, which allowed major programmes to start without immediately reflecting their full burden in the annual budget. That solution made it possible to sustain ambitious portfolios under rigid budget ceilings and strong industrial

[9] Guillem Colom-Piella (2025): "Between ambition and constraint: Spain's defence planning from the democratic transition to capability-based planning (1977–2005)". *European Security*, 1-22. https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2025.2596009

[10] Guillem Colom-Piella (2019): "A new debt burden for Spain's defence planning". *The RUSI journal*, 164 (7), 32-41.

[11] Antonio Fonfría (2015): "La Adquisición de Sistemas y su Financiación: Problemas y algunas Soluciones". In: *Industria Española de Defensa*. Cuaderno de Estrategia, 175. Madrid: CESEDEN, 187-216.

incentives, but it left a legacy: multi-year payment tails that stiffened programming, weaker traceability of total cost (including life-cycle costs), and recurrent tensions between investment and sustainment[12]. In political-economy terms, the outcome was a "layered" adaptation: the procedure and vocabulary of planning were refined, yet the financing pattern was retained as a structural constraint on decisions – and as a source of rigidity in the face of shocks and cost overruns[13].

The 2015 revision: towards a unified, concurrent, and sustainable process

After three cycles (2005-08, 2009-12, and 2013-16) and in the aftermath of austerity, Spain updated the system through Ministerial Order 60/2015, which sought to make the process more flexible and systematic without breaking its underlying logic. The guiding idea was simple – though politically demanding: planning must ensure the capabilities required to meet defence policy objectives and, in particular, to define, deploy, and sustain an effective and sustainable Joint Force able to respond to an uncertain and changing environment. That emphasis on sustainability is not rhetorical[14]; at least at the normative level, it aims to impose tighter discipline on the link between strategic objectives, force structure, available resources, and life-cycle costs[15].

In practice, defence planning is a concurrent and iterative process in which the three planning authorities – the Chief of the Defence Staff (*Jefe de Estado Mayor de la Defensa* – JEMAD) as the lead for military planning, the Secretary of State for Defence (*Secretario de Estado de Defensa* – SEDEF) for material and financial resources, and the Undersecretary of Defence (*Subsecretario de Estado de Defensa* – SUBDEF) for human resources – interact from early stages. For pedagogical purposes, however – and so that

[12] Tribunal de Cuentas (2016): *Informe de fiscalización de la financiación extraordinaria de los Programas Especiales de Armamento y material para las Fuerzas Armadas, ejercicios 2012, 2012 y 2014*. Madrid: Tribunal de Cuentas.

[13] Guillem Colom-Piella (2021): "El planeamiento de la defensa en España. Navegando hacia el horizonte 2035 con una pesada mochila". *Documento de opinión del IEEE*, 121: 1-15. https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2021/DIEEEO121_2021_GUICOL_Planeamiento.pdf

[14] That emphasis was not new. Indeed, it was one of the pillars underpinning both the Joint Force concept and the Armed Forces Vision 2025. In this regard, see: Fernando García-Sánchez (2025), "Visión de las Fuerzas Armadas 2025 del JEMAD en el año 2012", *Cuadernos de Pensamiento Naval*, no. 41, pp. 15–52.

[15] Guillem Colom-Piella (2018): "Una revisión del planeamiento de la defensa por capacidades en España (2005–16)," *Papeles de Europa*, 30 (1): 37–53.

non-specialist readers can recognise it as a public-policy cycle—it is useful to describe it as a sequence of activities:

- First, politico-strategic direction sets the framework: documents such as the National Defence Directive (*Directiva de Defensa Nacional*) and the Defence Policy Directive (*Directiva de Política de Defensa*) establish the level of ambition, priorities, and general limits.
- Second, military planning translates that guidance into missions, reference scenarios, and a Joint Force employment concept. It defines the type of force required (structure, availability, deployment, rotations) and the critical functions (command and control, fires, manoeuvre, protection, intelligence, logistics, sustainment).
- Third, a capabilities translation produces the Military Capabilities Objective (*Objetivo de Capacidades Militares*)[16] (as well as a Long-Term Force Objective (*Objetivo de Fuerzas a Largo Plazo*) that guides transformation) and prioritised catalogues: gaps are identified and capabilities are ordered by urgency, criticality, and interdependencies.
- Fourth, resources planning "lands" the design in personnel, infrastructure, training, R&D – and above all in funding and sustainment: serious planning is the kind that internalises life-cycle costs, both material and human[17].
- Fifth, programming and acquisition translate objectives into concrete programmes: upgrades, procurement, sustainment, and logistic support. Here a structural tension emerges: the more the portfolio is loaded with major programmes, the more essential it becomes to protect the balance with availability, ammunition, spares, and maintenance.
- Finally, monitoring and evaluation should feed back into the cycle: if priorities change, costs rise, or industrial schedules slip, the system must be able to reprioritise without

[16] This objective defines and prioritises the capabilities that the Joint Force must be able to generate and sustain across the different horizons of the planning cycle. Its usefulness depends on two conditions: that it be tied to explicit scenarios and levels of ambition, and that it be connected to programming and budgeting – so that it does not become a mere wish list..

[17] As when we replace a car, purchasing it is only the beginning: the real cost lies in operating it, maintaining it, and planning to renew it years later. In defence, life-cycle costs – personnel, training, maintenance, spares, ammunition, infrastructure, and upgrades – often outweigh acquisition. That is why planning well means funding sustainable capabilities and ensuring that investment in platforms does not crowd out readiness.

"breaking" the force. Ministerial Order 60/2015 seeks to facilitate that flexibility, although its effectiveness depends on budgetary governance and the real scope of political discretion.

In other words, the value of the procedure lies not in producing documents but in turning strategy into binding decisions: prioritising, sequencing, and – above all – renouncing. The current framework matters because it makes explicit that planning is not about "adding programmes", but about designing and sustaining a usable Joint Force, with availability, personnel, sustainment, and life-cycle costs internalised. That is why it must now be read against two external vectors that narrow national room for manoeuvre: the tightening of allied capability targets and the industrialisation of the European defence agenda.

International constraints

The allied shift following Russia's invasion of Ukraine has re-centred NATO's Defence Planning Process (NDPP) as the mechanism through which deterrence-and-defence objectives are translated into concrete capabilities[18]. The NDPP is not a public shopping list; it is a system of burden-sharing, standardisation, and enforcement. It sets objectives, assigns capability targets, reviews progress, and applies pressure on structural shortfalls (air and missile defence, ammunition, logistics, mobility, sustainment, command and control, resilience, and so forth). In 2025, shortly before the Hague Summit, Allied defence ministers agreed a new package of capability targets, framed by the need to strengthen NATO's deterrence and defence posture and to implement the regional plans[19].

This development overlaps with a budgetary debate that, in Europe, has become a political signal. The logic is well known: if capability objectives expand, investment must follow, because the gap cannot be closed through marginal efficiency gains. In that context, the 2025 Hague Summit Declaration introduced a benchmark commitment for

[18] The NDPP is the mechanism through which NATO translates its level of ambition and its defence plans into capability objectives for Allies, reviews progress, and identifies shortfalls. It does not amount to "imposing purchases": it assigns outcomes to be delivered (targets) and leaves member states room to decide the "how", although that room narrows when shortfalls are critical..

[19] Capability targets are not a public list of programmes. They are quantitative and qualitative goals linked to the effects and forces required by the allied posture: readiness, force generation, logistics, stockpiles, air defence, command and control, and so forth. National implementation requires translating a "target" into units, personnel, sustainment, and multi-year funding.

2035 combining 3.5% of GDP for core defence requirements and 1.5% for defence and security-related investment, under an aggregate target of 5%[20]. Beyond the headline number, the key point is the message: the NDPP ceases to be a technical aspiration and becomes a political yardstick of allied credibility, with direct implications for national planning, programming, and industrial capacity.

For Spain, the effect is twofold. On the one hand, the NDPP and these commitments press for faster delivery of enabling capabilities and for real availability. On the other, they encourage Spain to embed its national modernisation effort (a process that began in 2018 and accelerated after the 2022 shock) within a convergence narrative—potentially reinforcing a domestic tendency to justify decisions through allied alignment rather than through an explicit internal debate about risk and priorities. Put differently: the external constraint provides legitimacy, but it does not replace the political decision about "what force we want" and "what we are willing to give up".

The European agenda on capabilities and procurement

In parallel, the European Union has re-politicised and accelerated its agenda on industrial capacity, joint procurement, and the strengthening of the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB). The diagnosis is not new; it has been clear for more than a decade: Europe buys in a fragmented way, cooperates below the thresholds it has set for itself, and retains critical dependencies in components, ammunition, and other strategic "consumables". Russia's war against Ukraine has exposed how far Europe's industrial structure fails to scale at the tempo demanded by high-intensity war[21]. That context explains the shift from emergency instruments aimed at immediate problems (ammunition, replenishment, incentives for joint procurement) to a more ambitious turn: the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) and the European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP), presented in 2024 to raise Europe's

[20] Beyond the domestic debate on percentages, figures (2%, 3.5%, 5%) perform a signalling function: they communicate credibility, willingness to shoulder burdens, and intent to close capability gaps. For planning purposes, the relevant issue is not an isolated percentage, but the composition of spending (investment versus sustainment) and its stability over time.

[21] Juan Mejino-López y Guntram Wolff (2024): "A European defence industrial strategy in a hostile world". *Bruegel Policy Brief*, 29, 1-19. https://www.bruegel.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/PB%2029%202024.pdf

military-industrial capacity and reduce fragmentation in the European defence market[22]. Above all, the White Paper on European Defence, together with the ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030, seeks to turn an industrial agenda into a readiness agenda, using financial levers to accelerate investment, aggregate demand, and sustain an EDTIB capable of producing, replenishing, and maintaining the capabilities required for the world that lies ahead[23]. The Security Action for Europe (SAFE) instrument – adopted by the Council to mobilise up to €150 billion in loans for joint procurement and the reinforcement of defence production – fits squarely within that logic.

That said, the process should not be idealised. Defence remains a national competence, and Europe's market is shaped by national inertias, sovereignty preferences, and heterogeneous procurement cultures. But the vector exists – and it already conditions planning – because it shifts the centre of gravity: as capability objectives rise (through allied pressure or strategic dynamics), the question ceases to be only "what to buy" and becomes also "where to produce", "with which partners", "which dependencies are acceptable", and "what security of supply can be guaranteed". In governance terms, Brussels is attempting to create the conditions for a more integrated market and a more robust EDTIB, in which demand aggregation, collaborative procurement, and industrial consolidation become instruments of defence policy rather than mere economic add-ons[24]. This affects the tempo and architecture of major programmes, but also the enablers that Ukraine has revalidated – ammunition, air defence, drones, resilience, and sustainment – because these require industrial scale, continuous replenishment, and secure logistics chains[25]. Spain, moreover, faces an additional planning constraint: the non-shared contingency, which obliges it to balance allied commitments with national requirements that cannot be fully externalised and therefore strains capability prioritisation.

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[22] Béatriz Cózar-Murillo (2025): *The Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) of the European Union: Means, Ways, Ends and Tempo*. Madrid: Ejércitos.

[23] Jana Wrange (2026): "Strategic autonomy: A 'quantum leap forward on' European total defence?". *European Journal of International Security*, 1-22. http://www.doi:10.1017/eis.2025.10034

[24] Carlos Martí (*2026*): "Impacto del rearme europeo sobre la base tecnológica e industrial de defensa española". *Revista del Instituto de Estudios Económicos*, 1/2026: 29-38.

[25] A complementary vision of the European perspective can be found at: Christian Villanueva (2025, 21 July): "Jaque al rey. Por qué la industria europea de defensa necesita un cambio de paradigma". *Ejércitos*. https://www.revistaejercitos.com/articulos/jaque-al-rey-por-que-la-industria-europea-de-defensa-necesita-un-cambio-de-paradigma/

The "social" dimension of defence: industry as a planning variable

At this point, one claim has become unavoidable: industry is not merely an instrument for acquiring equipment; it is also a planning factor[26]. Spain's 2023 Defence Industrial Strategy[27] states this with clarity: the national Defence Technological and Industrial Base (DTIB) is an indispensable asset to secure access to systems and services, sustain capabilities, and preserve freedom of action; it also aligns with the aim of strengthening national industry while contributing to a European DTIB. Within that framework, equipment acquisition programmes – and, more specifically, the Special Modernisation Programmes (*Programas Especiales de Modernización* – PEM) – are presented as the principal instrument for implementing industrial policy: they channel investment, develop strategic industrial capabilities, and act as a "tractor" pulling SMEs and supply chains along, reinforcing technological competences and productive capacity across the value chain[28].

This approach has an obvious political and economic logic. In a context of European rearmament, the gradual – if qualified – consolidation of a common defence market (with the well-known caveats stemming from Article 346 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), persistent bottlenecks, and technological competition, those who do not invest in their industrial base end up – at least in theory – paying more, waiting longer, and deciding less. Yet it also carries costs if not governed carefully. If industrial criteria become the dominant variable, planning risks subordinating operational needs to industrial timelines and turning the capability portfolio into an aggregation of "tractor programmes" rather than a coherent design for a Joint Force. This bias is well captured by the notion of the "iron triangle""[29]: a relatively stable coalition among the public decision-maker (who sets requirements and buys), industry (which produces and

[26] After Ukraine, industry is no longer an 'economic appendage': it becomes an operational enabler (capacity to produce and replenish), a strategic factor (technological autonomy and security of supply) and a political variable (social and industrial return). Integrating it into planning requires balance: using programmes as industrial drivers without subordinating the portfolio of capabilities to exclusively industrial criteria.

[27] Ministerio de Defensa (2023): *Estrategia Industrial de Defensa 2023*. Madrid: Ministerio de Defensa.

[28] Antonio Fonfría (2026): "Impacto económico e industrial del aumento del gasto en defensa en España". *Revista del Instituto de Estudios Económicos*, 1/2026: 39-45.

[29] Gordon Adams (1981): *The Politics of Defense Contracting: The Iron Triangle*. New Brunswick: Transaction Books.

structures returns), and budgetary-parliamentary actors (who authorise and protect funding), which tends to privilege programmatic continuity and workload over strategic flexibility. The literature on the Spanish case warns of this tension[30]: integrating industrial objectives can generate synergies, but it can also fragment inter-ministerial coordination and encourage a reactive uptake of NATO/EU objectives without a fully explicit internal reconciliation. The solution, therefore, is not to deny the industrial lever, but to institutionalise balance: planning should incorporate industry as both constraint and opportunity, while preserving the primacy of sustainability, availability, and life-cycle sustainment.

That balance also has a Spain-specific strategic implication: strengthening the national DTIB and inserting Spain into European value chains are not alternative goals, but complementary ones. A more robust Spanish industrial base improves European insertion by enabling Spain to contribute design, integration, critical subcomponents, and life-cycle support with greater weight; conversely, participation in European consortia provides scale, learning, and demand stability demand[31]. Indeed, Spain's Defence Industrial Strategy explicitly argues for contributing to "Europe of Defence" by reinforcing the national industrial base, consolidating a competitive DTIB, and sustaining international positioning, while emphasising the need for procedures to optimise investment and build greater corporate "muscle".

The European – and national – debate on strategic autonomy adds a further layer. "Autonomy" is often discussed as a slogan, yet the real bottlenecks lie in supply chains, critical components, talent, reserves, productive capacity, and sustainment. In that sense, the most convincing argument is not autarky – impossible and prohibitively costly – but a form of "networked autonomy": reducing critical dependencies, diversifying, building reserves, and ensuring sufficient European industrial capacity, within which Spain can position itself through high-value niches, consortia, and clusters.

[30] Molas-Gallart, *op. cit*; Pérez-Muinelo, *op. cit.*

[31] Zacarías Herández (2026): "El desafío del gasto en defensa y el desarrollo de capacidades militares en el actual escenario estratégico". *Revista del Instituto de Estudios Económicos*, 1/2026: 46-68.

Implications for Spanish defence planning

Against this backdrop, Spanish defence planning enters a phase in which external constraints do not merely "influence" decisions; they structure the decision space[32]. The NDPP pushes towards capabilities and readiness; the EU pushes towards industrial scaling, collaborative procurement, and reduced fragmentation; and domestic politics pushes towards legitimising defence through economic and technological returns. Within that triangle, four ideas should organise the debate – without inventing a "new" architecture, but by exploiting the existing one more effectively.

First, ambition, programming, and sustainment must be reconnected. The current planning model already declares sustainability as central, but the test is fiscal: if the investment increase is channelled primarily through major programmes, the risk is to reproduce crowding-out effects on availability, stocks, infrastructure, and system life cycles. Discipline means treating sustainment and readiness as intrinsic components of military capability, not as residual spending.

Second, the industrial vector must be used without allowing it to substitute for strategy. The Defence Industrial Strategy is right to elevate the DTIB as a strategic factor and to frame PEM as "tractors"; the risk is to turn the portfolio into a set of programmes with visible returns and insufficient attention to less "marketable" enablers. A practical answer is to introduce safeguards: yes to associated industrial plans, but plans tied to outcomes in availability, support, and real technological sovereignty (components, maintenance, ammunition, spares), not merely to workload.

Third, Spain should insert itself into Europe from national strength, not only through the safeguards provided by Article 346 TFEU. Spain needs to build industrial critical mass while positioning itself more effectively in consortia and value chains. That requires identifying niches where Spain can lead or co-lead (integration, sensors, unmanned systems, command and control, cyber, naval, sustainment) and building structures that facilitate the participation of SMEs and mid-caps, since that is where much of supply-chain resilience is decided.

[32] Guillem Colom-Piella (2022): "La defensa española tras Ucrania". In: Guillem Colom-Piella (ed.): *La guerra de Ucrania: los 100 días que cambiaron Europa*, Madrid: Catarata–Ejércitos: 128-161.

Fourth, allied objectives must be translated into a national debate. Convergence with NATO and the EU provides legitimacy; yet planning for a country that must also confront a non-shared contingency must explain – in terms intelligible to citizens – what risks are accepted, which missions are prioritised, what simultaneity is realistic, and what is being sacrificed. Without that, defence policy will remain trapped in a low-salience equilibrium: major announcements, little debate about trade-offs, and silent adjustments when costs rise or priorities change.

Conclusions

Defence planning is not a technical appendix; it is the politico-institutional core that determines whether Spain will turn external pressure and industrial opportunity into a modern, genuinely usable Joint Force – or whether it will reproduce a modernisation-by-aggregation dynamic with chronic tensions between ambition and sustainability. The current planning framework provides a reasonable architecture for ordering ends, means, and resources; but its performance depends on the link that has never been merely technical: sustained political leadership, credible programming, and a political economy capable of balancing the industrial lever with operational primacy. In this new strategic cycle, the question is not whether Spain "plans", but whether it plans with discipline – whether it converts external pressure into internal coherence and modernisation into real availability.

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