



UNIVERSITY DEBATE SERIES - COAJE x UFV: INTERNATIONAL MILITARY ACTIONS INVOLVING SPAIN

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On Tuesday, November 29, COAJE held a new conference of the university debate cycle. This week, with the help of the Francisco de Vitoria University, we're talking about "International military actions involving Spain." On this occasion, we were joined by Ignacio Cosidó, a professor at Francisco de Vitoria University, and Lieutenant Colonel Francisco Elas of the Operations Command of the Defense Staff (Ministry of Defense).

The Lieutenant Colonel began by providing a technical explanation of the Armed Forces before providing an overview of Spanish activities abroad. First, he described how the JEMAD, a combined entity that lacks the resources to conduct operations but requests the ability to do so, serves as the focal point and chief of operations. Second, the operations command's operational structure consists of two branches: conducting operations on a national level and conducting operations internationally (follow-on operations in which Spain does not directly control its forces). The most operationally demanding operations are those of deterrence and defense or stability projection, which are also related to the level of operation intensity and the defense policy's goal.

Thirdly, the Lieutenant Colonel described the different kinds of operations before going into great detail on the overseas operations. On the one hand, ongoing operations serve to keep track of the environment and, if necessary, conduct and carry out actions required to respond to a low intensity crisis. These missions offer an acceptable level of deterrence and help raise Spanish society's awareness of the ongoing, persistent effort made by the armed forces in the interest of defense and national security. On the other hand, there are operations that promote civil society and provide temporary security, such as Operation Balmis to stop the spread of COVID-19.

It was then detailed how operations abroad are carried out when this distinction was made. They must be requested by the crisis-affected nation, the UNSCR, the OISD (NATO/EU), or both. They are not enforced. These operations must adhere to the UN Charter and international law and serve defensive, humanitarian, stabilization, peacekeeping, and peace maintenance reasons. The Spanish Council of Ministers must then approve the actions, approving the mission's maximum force strength and duration. The most recent one allowed was a Ukrainian military training operation in Toledo.

Spain takes part in stability-projection missions, such as the one in Latvia for the Baltic states, and deterrence and defense operations, like the one in Lebanon with UNIFIL.

Professor Ignacio Cosidó made his intervention in the second position. This intervention concentrated on the discrepancy between Spain's meager economic investment in defense and the performance of its armed forces. With only 3.5% of the total number of troops and 1.3% of the total military budget coming from Spain, NATO has about 3 million soldiers overall. Even so, Spain's contribution to NATO, EU, UN, and bilateral operations is the most substantial. This is a result of the Spanish Armed Forces' excellent interoperability and integration with any allied army, as well as their effectiveness, integrity, and moral value. The professor underlined that a country's foreign policy and defense are projected through its army.

On the other hand, the public's perception of the Spanish Armed Forces is favorable, making it possible to gradually raise the defense budget as a result of their visibility and stature.

Future missions will be focused on defense and deterrence, which will set us apart from peacekeeping operations. We are slowly turning away from missions requiring the use of force. We must also pay close attention to the significance of preventing the creation of a strategic void in Africa that would allow for the entry of other troops like the Russian or Chinese military.
