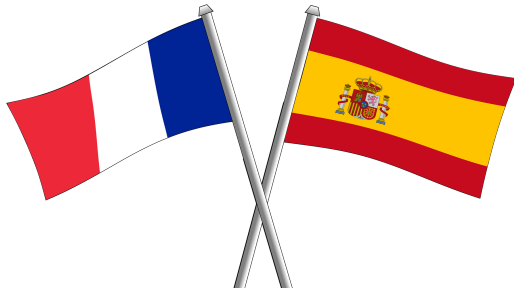


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## SPANISH- FRENCH DEFENSE AND SECURITY COOPERATION IN AFRICA

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In many ways, Spain and France share common interests and priorities in the field of security and defense. At different levels, both countries collaborate in the field of defense and security in Africa, in operations against terrorism and drug trafficking. As members of the EU and NATO, they share a similar "advanced border".

Although the level of cooperation is already high, especially in matters of shared intelligence, such cooperation could be increased and intensified in those areas where a common understanding of security and political threats prevail.

Nevertheless, our interests diverge on certain issues. France has important historical and economic ties with its former colonies and protectorates in Africa. On the other hand, apart from Spain's energy interests, especially in Algeria, Nigeria and the Gulf of Guinea, Madrid has a particular relationship with Morocco, which has been a point of friction with its northern neighbour. Considering the post-Coronavirus economic crisis and the internal crisis in the EU, such cooperation is more important than ever.

### 1. Context:

#### Operation Barkhane and fight against the threat of terrorism:

French military operations in Africa aimed at stabilizing fragile states, and fighting illegal trafficking and terrorism, are strongly supported by Spain. France is the most engaged country on the Sahel region, with the task force Sabre, special forces present in Ouagadougou since 2008, the Serval Operation launched in January 2013, which evolved in the Barkhane Operation in 2014 (still active). In February 2020, 5 100 French military personnel are deployed in the region. From the beginning of the operation, France demanded logistical support from multiple European and NATO allies. Spain then became the largest contributor of intra-theatre transport needs of Operation Barkhane<sup>1</sup>, EUTM Mali and G5 Sahel Joint Force, covering in 2019, 23% of the personnel transport and 20% of the material transport.<sup>2</sup> France also rely on the "Marfil" Detachment, which is composed of 58 Spanish military personnel and on Spanish air support (two C-295 aircraft) that operates from the French airbase of Yoff in Dakar<sup>3</sup>.

Although difficult times lie ahead for all defense budgets, **Spain must continue to support France logistically and to respond to its calls for help to continue fighting jihadist terrorism in Africa.** In fact, Al-Qaïda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM/JNIM) and the Islamic State of the Grand Sahara (ISGS), the two main jihadi groups active in Sahel, directly threaten not only European citizens and companies living in the region but could soon extend their reach to the European continent. Al-Qaïda and the Islamic State' Sub-Saharan branches might use its uprooting and strong territorial basis in Sahel as a breeding ground to conceive and launch large-scale attacks in the European Union and, simultaneously attempt to attract European recruits to this new jihadist' Eldorado. There are already weak signals suggesting that this worrying dynamic is already in motion. In both scenarios, France and Spain are primary targets. Their cooperation in addressing the rising terrorist threat in West Africa becomes

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<sup>1</sup> BARKHANE: L'engagement des pays alliés et européens. Ministère des Armées. 2019. [www.defense.gouv.fr/](http://www.defense.gouv.fr/)

<sup>2</sup> In 2017, those proportions were at their highest level: 34% and 30%.

<sup>3</sup> The Spanish Air Force withdrew from Gabon at the beginning of 2020 to concentrate all its resources in Dakar. Spanish personnel cannot take part in the hostilities, their mission being limited to transport and refuelling activities.

therefore a common vital security priority.

In addition to bilateral cooperation, Spain also collaborates with France through several European missions, such as EUTM-Mali<sup>4</sup>, EUTM-RCA, EUTM-Somalia and the recent EUNAVFOR MED IRINI operation<sup>5</sup>. France and Spain are also joining forces on other initiatives aimed at training the security forces of different countries in the Sahel. For example, the GAR-SI Sahel project, inspired by the Spanish GAR, aims to train and equip rapid action units in the G5 countries in Senegal, in order to meet the specific security needs of the countries in the region. In these states, hybrid and cross-border threats make it more difficult to differentiate between external security (defense) and internal security. Led by the Spanish Guardia Civil, together with the French Gendarmerie, the Italian Carabinieri and the Portuguese Guarda Nacional Republicana, the GAR-SI Sahel<sup>6</sup> aims to provide the mechanisms for fragile states to fight irregular migration, organized crime and terrorist groups within their borders. One of the major objectives is to achieve real coordination and interoperability between the countries of the Sahel.

Spain and France are also involved in the G5 Sahel and on the 5+5 Defense Initiative<sup>7</sup>, created in 2004, as a forum for multilateral security cooperation. Bringing together Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, France, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain, it constitutes a preferential framework to promote mutual knowledge and exchanges on common security issues in the 5+5 area (in particular terrorism, migration flows and trafficking). The stability of the Sahel region is also a vital issue for the security of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. Consequently, **cooperation with the countries of North Africa and the deepening of Franco-Spanish defense and security cooperation must remain a priority to ensure the stability of the region.**

### **Drug trafficking in West Africa and the Franco-Spanish response**

France and Spain also face a common threat in the rise of the criminal networks operating via and from West Africa, notably to conduct large drug operations. The arrival of cocaine in West Africa has reportedly revolutionized organized crime in the subregion. Increasing seizures in the Caribbean in the late 1990s forced South American cartels, such as the Colombian Norte del Valle cartel, and European cartels (Galician, Italian, French, etc.) to open a new route for the passage of cocaine between Latin America and Europe, due to the large increment of consumption. In recent years, large volumes of cocaine are still regularly transiting through West Africa and the flow isn't decreasing<sup>8</sup>. The major cocaine trafficking networks have benefitted from reliable logistical bases along the entire West African coast, from Dakar to Lagos, for over twenty years. In particular, they have managed to obtain secure and protected access to the airport and port hubs linking the region to the European markets, to which 95 % of the product is destined<sup>9</sup>.

**Not only does drug trafficking pose a regional threat but also an international security challenge.** The drugs transshipment goes from America to West Africa and into their final destination, Europe. In particular, due to their geographical strategic location, southern European states play a crucial and unique role in the illicit drugs chain, as the gateway to a larger consumer market.

**International cooperation, therefore, becomes essential to fight against organized crime and drug trafficking.** Many efforts have been done, primarily, through bilateral cooperation, at information sharing level, and in the fields of judicial and police collaboration; as well as through joint maritime operations, which take part in drugs seizure and removal and act as deterrence measure.

At the European level, the Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre – Narcotics (MAOC(N)), acts as a platform for multilateral cooperation, coordinating "maritime and aviation intelligence, resources and trained personnel". The unit, founded in 2007 and based in Lisbon, relies on ships and personnel provided by France, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Netherlands, Portugal and the UK to impede the trafficking boats to reach the European coast.

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<sup>4</sup> French participation is very limited due to the existence of Operation Barkhane.

<sup>5</sup> Operation EUNAVFOR MED IRINI (former SOPHIA, launched in 2015 as part of a comprehensive approach to migration) has been launched in March 2020, so as to enforce the UN arms embargo in Libya as part of a new Common Security and Defense Policy.

<sup>6</sup> The Guardia Civil leads the GAR-SI Sahel. Guardia Civil, Madrid, 2016.. <http://www.interior.gob.es>

<sup>7</sup> Initiative 5+5. DGRIS. <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/dgris/action-internationale/environnement-proche/initiative-5-5>

<sup>8</sup> CESONI M.L. « Les routes des drogues: explorations en Afrique subsaharienne » in Drogues et développement Tiers-Monde, t 33 n°131, 1992, pp. 645-671

<sup>9</sup> Examples such as a record of 9,5 tons seized in February 2019 off the coast of Cape Verde or the seizures in Guinea-Bissau of more than 800 kg of cocaine in June 2019 illustrate the importance of cocaine flows and the power of criminal organizations in these regions.

Only in 2019, over 30 tons of cocaine were seized, which were being mainly carried in sailing vessels<sup>10</sup>.

In addition, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), constitutes an important tool for the cooperative control of European external borders. As an illustrative example, Spain has a Guardia Civil patrol boat based in Dakar to reinforce the control of sea routes. Among other joint operations, on a bilateral level, Spain and France have jointly worked on training West African navies, a task that the SNS *Audaz* is currently carrying out<sup>11</sup>. In addition, during 2020 they are participating in international military exercises with US and Portugal, namely, “Obangame Express 2020” and “Grand African NEMO 2020”<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, Operation Corymbe,<sup>13</sup> established in the 1990s and now undertaking its 150 mission, is a French initiative to combat maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea region, which coordinates for 6 months a year with the Spanish Navy among other partners. **However, cooperation is usually done only at operational level, and a political common strategy is lacking.** Despite the fact of seizing illicit drugs and prosecute arrests, there is still a challenge to put on trial the criminal networks<sup>14</sup>.

### **Point of friction: Morocco's relationship with Spain and French response**

Although Spain is Morocco's main trading partner, the relationship between both countries has always been characterized by some tension. The conflict in Western Sahara, the lack of recognition of Ceuta and Melilla as Spanish cities, Morocco's attempt to extend its territorial waters and the use of illegal immigration by Morocco as a tool to put pressure on Spain when needed, are the main sources of friction. The relations between France and Morocco are not hampered by these issues and, therefore, Spanish and French policies on the Maghreb present some differences that weaken them.

In some cases, Spain has even got the impression that France was more interested in keeping its privileged relation with Morocco than in supporting its partner in the European Union. One example was the Perejil crisis, in 2002<sup>15</sup>. The most sensitive question is probably that of Western Sahara. More than 40 years after Spain's withdrawal from the territory, the conflict remains unresolved, as the resignation of the last UN secretary-general's personal envoy has recently proved.

While Spain, as the ancient colonial power, remains committed with a solution that could be accepted by the Sahrawi people, France openly supports Morocco. French veto power in the Security Council, guarantees Morocco that the international community will never be able to impose a solution and hardens its bargaining position.

### **Horn of Africa: successful cooperation between France and Spain**

Horn of Africa and Indian Ocean are areas of critical interest for both countries. France and Spain dedicated strong means to EU Naval Forces Atalanta since the very beginning of this operation in 2008 and always have showed high interest in mutual co-operation. As an example, we should mention that French Air base located in Djibouti provides strong permanent support to Spanish Maritime Patrol Aircraft P3-C dedicated to Atalanta. The successful and confident relationship between these two key partners has been demonstrated by the achievement of the relocation of OHQ Atalanta from Northwood to Rota and Brest (MSC HoA) in March 2019. By this moving supported by France, Spain obtained important recognition.

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<sup>10</sup> Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre (MAOC). Who we are. <https://maoc.eu>

<sup>11</sup> Due to Covid-19 crisis, SNS *Audaz* shortened her mission in GoG and sailed back to Spain in April 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Purpose of the mission. OPV 'AUDAZ' (P-45). Armada Española. Accessed on : [armada.defensa.gob.es](http://armada.defensa.gob.es)

<sup>13</sup> Cols Bleus Marine Nationale. Corymbe- Le 150 e Mandat. 6 Mars 2020. Accessed on : <https://www.colsbleus.fr/articles/11976>

<sup>14</sup> *To address security threats more effectively, the annual African-led integrated military and law enforcement exercise, Flintlock, helps to strengthen key partner-nation forces throughout North and West Africa as well as Western Special Operations Forces since 2005. Led by the United States, it counts on the participation of both France and Spain. United States Africa Command - Flintlock.* <https://www.africom.mil/what-we-do/exercises/flintlock>.

<sup>15</sup> While Moroccan gendarmes tried to take an Spanish islet by force and former president Chirac suggested to Aznar "the surrender (to Morocco) of all the Spanish craggy rocks of the Moroccan coast and also of Ceuta and Melilla". The relations between the two countries cooled down during this period.

## 2. Recommendations and pathways to cooperation:

Although in different proportions, France and Spain are the countries most involved in the Sahel, so it is in the interests of both countries to share strategies, capabilities and intelligence to deal with common threats. **In the area of cooperation against terrorism in the Sahel, Spain must continue to support France to the best of its ability.** France has so far asked for help when it needs a capacity that it cannot provide, and Spain has usually responded positively, nevertheless, since 2017, France has sent to Spain several other requests of support in Sahel such as participation of heavy helicopters (CH-47 Chinook) and participation of Special Forces in Task Force Takuba to counter and degrade terrorist resilience in Eastern Mali. These two capacities are still pending and critical issues. **Bearing in mind that Spain will not contribute with a large number of troops on their mission, Spain can continue to provide the help that France needs,** sharing intelligence and sharing its expertise in counterterrorism. On the other hand, **Spain and France should promote initiatives such as 5+5, and France could count more on Spain in the G5 Sahel initiative.**

Regarding drug trafficking, despite the fact that there is collaboration between both countries, the Gulf of Guinea is a region where Spain and France have carried out their actions most of the time separately, but cooperation improved quite well during past two years. Spain has always had a strong presence in the region, because of its proximity to the Canary Islands and because of its numerous fishing vessels operating there. France considers also this area as a strategic one since decades and deploys their naval units all the year, supported by Dakar French naval station. As mentioned above, the Gulf of Guinea is the largest drug hub in Africa, so control of the routes is crucial for Europe. **France and Spain should continue and strengthen their already existing cooperation by, for example, creating joint naval forces that safeguards our strategic interests.** Furthermore, the close relationship they maintain with their African and Latin American partners, respectively, should serve as platform to develop complementary police agreements among those countries; and thus, **enhance further coordination in the surveillance of the trafficking routes from their departure in the American coast to their destination in Africa.** In following months, Coordinated Maritime Presence (CMP) initiative will be implemented by the EU in the Gulf of Guinea. France and Spain should take advantage of this project to strengthen their cooperation.

Finally, in order to improve cooperation in North Africa, **France and Spain should reach an agreement on the guidelines for a common Franco-Spanish policy in the Maghreb.** A comprehensive package including a new plan for the Sahara that could be accepted by Morocco, the guarantee of European-NATO borders, and the commitment to delimitate territorial waters according to the recognized principles of international law, should be negotiated. We are convinced that by coordinating our policies we will strengthen our cooperation and become more effective in the defense of our common interests.

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Directeur de la publication : Alexandre Malafaye  
Comité éditorial : Xavier Marchal, Jean-Marc Schaub, Laura Schaub, Joséphine Staron