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There is not a distinctive threat to maritime security facing Spain, or a situation where the assets of the different national agencies with responsibilities in the maritime domain focus their effort. In fact, maritime security is such a complex challenge that it requires a comprehensive, proactive, and long-term approach; not a reactive posture to a single particular menace, which could jeopardize the understanding of the real magnitude of the problem. In other words, we need to look wide and far to establish a well-structured and coordinated response in terms of doctrine, assets, and operational procedures.

The complexity of the issue is increased by the large number of administration departments involved in maritime affairs within their areas of responsibility: Defense, Agriculture and Fishery, Home Affairs, Finance, Public Works, Foreign Affairs, and even the Autonomous Communities. Obviously, with this framework, the only possible way to tackle the problem is through very close coordination among all.

This is why the navy created the Maritime Action Force under the command of the Maritime Action Admiral, the naval authority entrusted with the management of these relationships. To this end, the admiral promotes diverse coordinating activities and organizes a yearly exercise—FAMEX—that combines all agencies involved in the maritime field.

In this context, we drafted a document, "The Spanish Navy Maritime Security Concept," recently revised, that shapes our doctrinal basis. This paper highlights the need to achieve a thorough understanding of the maritime domain, so as to be able to develop effective maritime security measures without affecting traditional freedom of navigation.



With this aim, the Spanish Navy has made a clear effort to advance maritime situational awareness and to have the modern and dedicated naval assets for subsequent action at sea.

Regarding maritime situational awareness, a new Maritime Coordination and Surveillance Center is already operational at the Maritime Action Force headquarters, which collates huge amounts of information, from both civilian and military sources, into a single picture to discriminate normal maritime activity from possible threats.

Concerning action at sea, the Spanish Navy takes part in a considerable number of maritime security operations. At the international level these include NATO's Active Endeavour, the new EU-led Operation Atalanta to fight piracy off the Horn of Africa, yearly fishery surveillance campaigns with European Union inspectors on board, and different activities with neighboring countries to fight illegal trafficking and migration.

At the national level, we collaborate with other agencies, such as frequent cooperation with the Home Office against illegal trafficking, and Operation Noble Centinela, aimed at preventing illegal migration, where we have maintained at least one ship permanently at sea since June 2006.

More important, the Spanish Navy is always there at sea. This is the way to understand maritime surveillance as our permanent mission. This capacity of remaining for long periods at sea "where things happen" is what makes our ships different from those belonging to other national agencies involved in the maritime domain.

Finally, looking to the future, the construction of the first batch of the new Maritime Action Ship is under way, and by 2010 the ships will perform a wide range of tasks related to maritime security, both in home waters and in distant areas as part of expeditionary operations.