



THE SPANISH NAVY

A CRUCIAL FACTOR FOR NAVAL OPERATIONS IN THE ATLANTIC AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

NAVAL FORCES: Admiral, as it happened only recently on July 18th, let me congratulate you on behalf of our world-wide readership for having been promoted to Almirante General and appointed as Chief of Staff Spanish Navy - our team wishes you 'fair wind and following seas' for your tenure in this most important post at the helm of your Navy.

Let me begin by discussing the new international tasks of your Navy: In the Mediterranean, several cooperation activities are underway, especially to fight illegal migration. Could you please inform which impact this international task has had on your Navy?

ADMIRAL MANUEL REBOLLO GARCÍA: The use of the sea for illicit activities has suffered a dramatic increase in the last decades; just to mention two issues, we are very concerned about the drama of illegal immigration and about the proliferation of piracy. As a consequence, there is a growing concern about its security. Navies have placed a high priority on understanding the maritime domain and on developing a specific capability to conduct Maritime Security activities. This has also been the case in Spain, as one of the first outcomes of our transformation process was to adopt a capability-based force structure in which Maritime Action, understood as the Navy's contribution to the overall national effort in ensuring the governance of the seas, is a core element. Consequently, maritime security activities have become a two-pronged routine task: collation and fusion of information from diverse sources, both civilian and military, to build our Maritime Situational Awareness (MSA), and maritime surveillance and presence activities, or Maritime Security Operations (MSO), to feed information into the MSA cycle or to react to cueing produced by it. We consider international cooperation as a focused activity embedded in this comprehensive effort.



NAVAL FORCES: The modernization of your Navy continues at an amazing pace, may be not in numbers but clearly in terms of quality. Is the recent emphasis on the amphibious component, with commissioning the largest ship of your Navy, SPS "Juan Carlos I", and the launching of the enormous transport ship BAC "Cantabria" plus the two RoRo vessels "El Camino Español" and "Martín Posadillo" crewed by the Navy indicative for power projection and strategic transport having taken a central role in your Navy?

ADMIRAL REBOLLO: Our capability-based force structure is built around two core capabilities, Power Projection and Maritime Action, which drive our modernisation and procurement programmes. Power Projection represents the Navy's capability to apply naval power on land and constitutes the hub of our expeditionary cadre. It is true that the Navy's modernisation has focused on this capability in the last years with projects such as the LHD "Juan Carlos I", the upcoming modernisation of the carrier "Príncipe de Asturias", the purchase of "Piranha III" combat vehicles or the upgrading of the AV8B aircraft to the Plus version. However, our main effort will now shift to Maritime Action with the new Maritime Action Ship, designed to operate in the low intensity operations that characterise most of the activity of the Navies today and in the foreseeable future. These ships, of 2.500 tons, will be able to contribute to Sea Control and Interdiction Operations over prolonged periods of time in distant scenarios, and will be manned by a small crew thanks to the extensive use of state-of-the-art technologies in platform control, sensors and command and control systems. Strategic Transport is dealt with at the joint level; the navy has no dedicated assets for this purpose but the Army owned "Martín Posadillo" and "El Camino Español".

NAVAL FORCES: The aircraft carrier SPS "Príncipe de Asturias" and amphibious vessels SPS "Juan Carlos I", "Galicia" and "Castilla" need frigates and submarines for their support, and here again your Navy is well



positioned, with four of five F100 AEGIS frigates in the fleet already and the S80 submarine project with AIP seemingly progressing well. The role of the F100 is clearly area air defence for major units – will the planned BAM relieving the “Descubierta” class become the “work horses” of the Navy, together with the “Santa María” class, and will there be more than the four units budgeted for so far?

ADMIRAL REBOLLO: The Maritime Action Ship, or BAM in its Spanish acronym, will be able to perform a wide range of tasks related to maritime security both in home waters and in expeditionary operations; those tasks will include, among others, maritime surveillance, maritime security operations, protection of maritime forces and infrastructures in littoral scenarios, and support to special forces. The BAM series is to replace over twenty assorted patrol vessels of different sizes and military value. To meet this objective successfully, the BAM incorporates the latest technological advances, including UAVs in due time, but also needs to be procured in sufficient numbers. The first series of four will be followed by three more units in the mid term. There are also plans under consideration to develop a family of ships to fulfil specialist roles; three types have been identified so far: BAM-SR for salvage and submarine rescue, BAM-RA for fleet support, and BAM-IO for oceanographic investigation.

NAVAL FORCES: What will the planned midlife upgrade programme for the six “Santa María” class frigates look like?

ADMIRAL REBOLLO: The upgrade is currently undergoing at NAVANTIA Shipyard facilities in Cadiz. The midlife modernization pursues several objectives, though the main one is to upgrade the combat systems to new and more advanced technology. This includes achieving combat system commonality amongst the Navy’s combatants using common technology, scalable designs and shared knowledge and experience to repair, improve and reutilise technology. The upgrade affects weapons, radars, electronic countermeasures, navigation systems, communications and information



systems and machinery. There is another ingredient in this midlife upgrade, which is the improvement of the crews' living conditions through a complete refurbishment of their living quarters, including a special attention to females' privacy.

NAVAL FORCES: How many AGOSTA's, which received a modernisation in the last decade, will remain in service when the S80 come in, assuming that both DAPHNE's will be decommissioned?

ADMIRAL REBOLLO: First of all, I would like to mention that all of the Daphne Class submarines were already decommissioned in 2006. The four S-70 Class submarines have undergone a thorough modernization process during the last years, particularly regarding SATCOM/CIS capabilities, that allows them to accomplish their present missions in the most demanding operational scenarios. When the S-80 submarines join the Fleet, the moment will come to focus our effort and resources in this new generation of submarines and to start decommissioning the S-70s with the satisfaction of having taken all the best out of them.

NAVALFORCES: Will any of the small fighting vessels (nine "Bergantin" class, five Lürssen TNC 36, four "Alcanada" class, and two "Formentor" class) built during the seventies and eighties be replaced or is this a 'dying species'?

ADMIRAL REBOLLO: It is a reality that those classes you mentioned are 20-25 years old; however, some of them are immersed in a main propulsion overhaul to extend their lives for some more years. Notwithstanding this, the Navy has planned to replace these vessels with the newer and more modern Maritime Action Ships, the "Meteoro" class. These units will reach a high degree of automation and the mission concept is to operate in medium to low intensity operations such as maritime interdiction operations, anti-human trafficking, counter narcotics, or protection of merchant and fishing vessel. Their operational range will reach 3500 nautical miles.



NAVAL FORCES: Is it still planned to augment the intelligence collection vessel SPS "Alerta" by a modified BAM variant?

ADMIRAL REBOLLO: Intelligence collection is a joint effort in which the Navy plays the leading role in the maritime environment. The main asset is "Alerta" and it is foreseen to procure a new unit, designated BAM-AGI, in the years to come.

NAVAL FORCES: The aircraft carrier SPS "Príncipe de Asturias" was planned to be replaced around 2015 by a new yet undecided design, pending the availability of the LIGHTNING II F-35B STOVL joint strike fighter, but we have not heard any news on this programme. What is the situation here?

ADMIRAL REBOLLO: The Spanish Navy will indeed have to consider the future of the "Príncipe de Asturias" in due time, but our priorities in the short and mid term are others and we are acting in that direction, which includes a mid-life upgrade of the carrier.

NAVAL FORCES: The Naval Fleet Air Arm operates 20 HARRIER EAV-8B(+) V/STOL fighter bombers onboard the aircraft carrier, and 12 SEA HAWK SH-60B, nine Agusta-Bell AB-212, eight SEAKING SH-3D, three SH-3D AEW and 10 CAYUSE 369-HM(500M) helicopters, plus three Cessna 550 liaison aircraft. All AB-212 and SH-3 aircraft were planned to be replaced by NH-90 helicopters, while the SH-60 were all equipped at the beginning of this decade to fire PENGUIN or HELLFIRE missiles. What is the status of the Fleet Air Arm modernisation programme?

ADMIRAL REBOLLO: All SH-3 helicopters are planned to be replaced by 11 NH-90 helicopters, while the SH-60 were all equipped at the beginning of this decade to fire PENGUIN and HELLFIRE missiles.

We have just finished the upgrade of all SH-60B helicopters, improving the capabilities of this aircraft in anti-surface warfare. The SH-3 will be replaced



by the naval version of the NH-90. We are planning for extending the life of the AB-212 up to 2020, undertaking an upgrade programme.

The remaining four AV-8Bs are being upgraded to a AV-8B(+) version.

Spain also partakes in a working group of the European Defence Agency (EDA) where the requirements for a Maritime Tactical Unmanned Aerial System (MTUAS) have been defined; this system will be employed on board as an integral part of the ship's weapons system, ready for immediate use by the commander at the tactical level.

NAVAL FORCES: The Spanish Air Force operates two P-3A and five P-3B ORION aircraft for maritime surveillance. They started modernisation between 2002 and 2006, but further upgrading was planned to include Link 11, radar, IFF, ESM and communications equipment. Is this modernisation programme ongoing, or will more EADS-CASA CN-235M come in as maritime surveillance aircraft?

ADMIRAL REBOLLO: As far as the Spanish Navy knows, the Spanish Air Force P-3 are undergoing a modernisation process which runs parallel to the conversion of some CN-235 aircraft to surveillance role.

NAVAL FORCES: The Guardia Civil Servicio Marítimo patrol boats were originally subordinated to the Spanish Army. As the Guardia Civil now has been given responsibility for port security and anti-terrorist activities, do they come under the Ministry of the Interior or do they report to you?

ADMIRAL REBOLLO: The Guardia Civil is a constabulary force responsible for border control and for the prosecution of crimes, as described in national legislation, within territorial waters; as such, it is answerable to the Ministry of Home Affairs. Notwithstanding this, cooperation between the Guardia Civil and the Navy is smooth, both in operational activities and information exchange. The Spanish Navy considers that a very close coordination amongst all the national agencies with responsibilities in the maritime



domain is the only possible way to ensure that the maritime spaces of national interest remain safe and secure. That's the reason why we created our Maritime Action Force structure under a single commander, the Maritime Action Admiral (ALMART).

NAVAL FORCES: Finally to education, training and personnel availability. Like all armed forces, you will have to compete with industry for qualified personnel- do you get the personnel in the right numbers and with sufficient qualification to man the modern units?

ADMIRAL REBOLLO: Although we have faced some personnel recruitment shortfalls in the recent past, the situation is clearly improving nowadays. In any case, it is important to mention that we do not have at the moment any system to validate the military studies with the Spanish general education curriculum, so basically our personnel are educated by the navy to work just in the navy. However, as a result of the implementation of the new Military Career Law, in the near future we will have an accreditation system for all our personnel. The new education system establishes that all the personnel will get a civilian qualification within the military education system. Subsequent regulations are presently under development, and this challenging aspect of the law is being seriously considered by my staff. In this line we will probably face some competence with industry.

NAVAL FORCES: Admiral, thank you very much for providing your frank answers so shortly after having taken over the top post in your Navy, which will be greatly appreciated by our world-wide readership. We again wish you 'fortune' at the helm of your Navy and we will be glad to hand you over your personal copy of the edition with this interview during MAST in Cádiz.