



The Spanish Army of today and tomorrow

military-Earth thinking notebook

le Lieutenant-colonel Bertrand MENNESSON

Published on 26/05/2018

Expériences alliées

Les Cahiers is returning to the traditional Foreign Army News section. We are therefore leaving, and for the first time, on the other side of the Pyrenees for a two-part visit to the Spanish Army. This issue will be devoted to its general presentation and the transformation underway, while the June issue will focus on synergies and cooperation with the French Army. The Cahiers warmly thank Colonel Calvez, head of the Land Liaison Detachment, and the officers stationed alongside him, including Lieutenant-Colonel Mennesson, the main editor of this article.

L'Ejército de Tierra **these days**

With more than 77,000 men (20,900 cadres and 49,300 MDRs), the current Spanish Army (ET) is the result of a long process of transformation, moving from a territorial conscription army to a professionalized army since 1999, meeting NATO standards. This army is equipped with modern equipment, but has been hit hard by the economic crisis.

Its development has taken place against a background of continuing budget cuts, resulting in particular in a reduction in personnel and the disbanding of many units. Thus, for the period from 2006 to 2012, 22,500 posts have been abolished as well as a divisional staff, two brigade headquarters, six regiments with their subordinate battalions, 11 battalions and 28 miscellaneous units.

Nevertheless, the Army (ET) remains a medium-sized expeditionary force with the full spectrum of land skills, rustic, seasoned and rich in operational experience gained from recent engagements in the Balkans, Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Africa.

The Force (as opposed to the Force Support Structure) consists of an NRDC-SP MS (Cuartel General Terrestre de Alta Disponibilidad), equivalent to the RRC-FR, the Land Force (FUTER), the Canary Islands Land Command (MCANA) and the Operational Logistics Force (FLO) [1].

Since the "Army 2020-2025" plan, initiated in 2010 by the previous CEMAT (GA Coll Bucher), the Joint Brigade has established itself as the central maneuvering pawn around which all means are articulated.

Basically, the Land Force can rely on 10 specialized brigades, including eight BIAs (four light brigades, including that of the Canary Islands, and four heavy brigades). These follow the readiness cycle of four times six months, i.e. 24 months. The BIAs are all characterised by a specificity (BRILEG II Legion, BRIPAC VI paratrooper, BRIAC XII armoured, BRC II Cavalry Brigade, ...) with highly differentiated means. Two other units, integrated into the light forces, have neither combat support nor logistic support of their own. These are BRIL V and the Mountain Troop Command (JTM).

In addition, three overseas commands (Comandancia General) are governed by very different statutes. Ceuta and Melilla, with a force volume close to one BIA each, are pre-positioned and irremovable sovereignty forces, able to deal with "non-shared threats" directly on the national territory. The Balearic Islands Command now has only one light infantry battalion under its command.

With regard to versatility, a recurrent theme of the forthcoming transformation, the notion of reversibility (for example, a Leopard tank unit was deployed in Lebanon on BMR 6X6) and the concept of multi-role training for all land units, which is close to our MICAT concept, will be reinforced in the framework of the forthcoming reform.

The transformation of the Spanish Army:

- The organic multi-purpose brigades

As part of the major project to modernise and transform the Armed Forces, decided by the Minister of Defence and the CEMA in 2012, the Spanish Army (ET) has embarked on a major restructuring of its land force that will lead to the creation of eight organic multi-purpose brigades (Brigadas Orgánicas Polivalentes; BOP).

Validated by Directive 08-12 "Transformation of the **Army Force Structure**", signed on 9 November 2012 by the Chief of the Army Staff (JEME), this ambitious concept is above all realistic given the severe budgetary constraints linked to the crisis. Royal Decree 872/2014 on the basic organisation of the armed forces and Directive 02/15 on the transition plan for the ET force structure set the framework for the reform.

This land force transformation project will give rise to a homogenous and modernised land force that is fully projectable and interoperable, capable of responding to the ambitions and threats identified in the strategic framework described by the National Defence Directive 2012 and the National Security Strategy 2013. This commitment must be able to take place in a context of both national and international engagement.

- BOPs: an ambitious and realistic concept

In a general context of transformation of the structures of the armed forces, for which the Spanish Army has shown great responsiveness, the project for a multi-purpose brigade, drawing on examples in other armies, has been developed. The aim of the project for a multipurpose brigade, drawing on the examples of the other allied armies and in

particular the French, is to adapt the Land Force to make it more flexible and better able to respond to national ambitions and to all types of threats generated by future conflicts.

This transformation must be achieved by avoiding costly geographic transfers and by limiting as far as possible the impact on personnel, who are already hard hit by the freeze on pay and bonuses (reduction of 7 to 5% of pay depending on step and rank).

In order to carry out this project, an ad hoc structure called the "**Army Transformation Centre**" **was set up within** the staff in **January 2014**. Commanded by a Major General, this centre is placed directly under the orders of the SEJEME (the MGAT) and will be activated for the time necessary for transformation.

With the aim of achieving this new model by 2020, the project aims to structure the Land Force into an NRDC-SP staff, an FT staff, two projection-capable divisional staffs forming the core of an LCC for a multinational OPEX, and eight multi-purpose brigades. The aim is to build a median force model centred on a new 8x8 infantry combat vehicle, but also to improve the current cycle of readiness to four-phase availability cycle in order to be able to have large multipurpose units with a wider range of capabilities at their disposal at all times, or even with their own specific characteristics (paratroopers, mountains, tanks, etc.).

The principles of this transformation are as follows:

- The brigade remains at the heart of the land force system as a basic unit, as a capability integrator and for operational deployment,
 - Principle of reversibility (Alta reversibilidad) for all employment units, i.e. an increased ability to perform tasks other than those normally carried out,
 - The battalion remains the employment unit within the brigade.
-
- **A transformed Earth Force.**

Without waiting for the installation of new equipment (in particular that of the future VCI 8X8) and anticipating an economic context of crisis exit, the ET, in a concern of operational realism and economy, decided to rely on an ideal BOP model: strength of 5,000 men, five manoeuvre battalions, mostly equipped with VCI 8X8s.

Thus, the 10 current specialised brigades, mainly distributed within the Light and Heavy Force Commands, will be profoundly re-articulated to transform them into eight so-called "viable transition BOPs".

Two different BOP models have been selected. The first, known as the "median-wheel", which will consist of 4,300 men, will be made up of four manoeuvre battalions and its support and sustainment. The major equipment of these BOPs, intermediate and air-transportable, will be the VCI 8X8. Four BOPs will be formed from the current four light brigades, including the Canary Islands Brigade.

The second model of BOP, known as the "medium-track" BOP will consist of 5,000 men and will be made up of five manoeuvre battalions, one of which will be a tank battalion, with the same support and sustainment as for model 1. This type of BOP will be formed from the current five mechanised armoured brigades.

Finally, the paratrooper and mountain capabilities will be preserved, although reduced. Eventually, only the elements necessary for the formation of a parachute and mountain BOP should remain .

These two types of BOPs will be distributed under the orders of two divisional headquarters.

- The first one, Castillejos, located near Madrid, will regroup the light middle brigades: BOP II (Legión), BOP VI (parachutist) and BOP VII (air transportable). The BOP in the Canary Islands will be added to this brigade (which should have a vocation for combat in desert or semi-desert areas).
- The second one, San Marcial, located in Burgos, will have under its command the heavy median BOP model 2, BOP I, X, XI and XII.

1) The Operational Logistics Force, composed of a logistics brigade and a medical brigade, is, like the other major first-level commands, an independent command directly under the orders of the CLS.

A cavalry officer, having joined the Army with university qualifications in 1993, Lieutenant-Colonel Bertrand MENNESSON served in various Leclerc tank regiments. He participated in various operational missions, in Western Sahara as a UN military observer, and in Côte d'Ivoire at the head of an armoured squadron. He was also posted for two years in the United Arab Emirates as an instructor in a Leclerc tank battalion. He is a graduate of the War School, holds a Master's degree in International Law and a Master's degree in Geopolitics and International Relations, and subsequently served on the Army Staff. He is also a graduate of the Geneva Center for Security Policy in Geneva. He currently serves as a liaison officer in the Spanish Army.

Title :	le Lieutenant-colonel Bertrand MENNESSON
Author (s) :	le Lieutenant-colonel Bertrand MENNESSON
Release date	18/05/2018
