

Spanish ruling elite lays out imperialist ambitions in new National Security Strategy

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11 December 2017

Almost unnoticed due to the crisis enveloping Catalonia, Spain's Popular Party (PP) government recently passed a new National Security Strategy.

The strategy replaces the previous version published in 2013 and has the full support of the Socialist Party (PSOE).

The collective effort of academics, the Ministry of Defence, the intelligence services, police and the military-industrial complex, the strategy reflects a ruling elite of a former colonial power battered by international crises and internal opposition to austerity and militarism, desperately attempting to reassert its claim to global markets and spheres of influence.

The strategy document foresees the “uncertainty” of a world with “increased geopolitical tensions,” “different pressures on the multilateral system” and a “complex” security environment becoming “accentuated in coming years.” It warns, “various crises of different natures will be easily triggered and will become almost a constant of this era. The distance between situations of normalcy and crisis is getting smaller.”

According to the report, the Spanish ruling class faces major threats and challenges, including secessionist movements like that in Catalonia, an ageing population, rising inequality, lack of “quality jobs” and unemployment.

Externally, Spain's major threats include “oil dependency” from unstable sources, “new actors challenging the multilateral system (an unveiled reference to Russia and China), droughts, floods and forest fires” caused by climate change, economic protectionism, terrorism and cyber-attacks.

Beset by these threats, the ruling class is seeking to extricate itself by projecting outwards. Acting as if it was still controlling the Spanish Empire of the 16th and 17th centuries, the document declares “the following areas are of special interest for National Security: Europe, North

Africa and Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, North America and Asia-Pacific”—basically everywhere!

Spain is currently involved in no fewer than 19 military operations on four continents, under the aegis of one imperialist alliance or another—all of which are presented as “non-combat” or peacekeeping missions.

Under the umbrella of NATO, Spanish forces have been dispatched to the Baltic States and to the Black Sea region on air patrol missions and exercises threatening Russia. Hundreds of soldiers and civil guard advisors have been deployed to Iraq.

Spain has deployed 149 military personnel to operate Patriot missile systems on the Turkey-Syria border, and is considering a renewed troop deployment in Afghanistan at the request of the US—two years after Spanish forces officially left the country after spending €3.7 billion and sacrificing the lives of 99 soldiers and two interpreters.

The document strongly emphasizes Spain's special interest in North Africa, where it still retains two enclaves—Ceuta and Melilla—from its colonial empire, and the Sahel, an area of strong “potential economic and commercial interest” and an important area of oil and gas on which Madrid depends.

Since 2013, Spanish armed forces have been involved in European Union military missions and supported French and US imperialist interventions in Africa. Currently, they are active in 10 land, air and naval missions on African soil, including Mali, Somalia, Senegal, Djibouti, Central African Republic and Gabon.

Another area is the oil rich Gulf of Guinea in West Africa, a region stretching from Gabon to Liberia, which includes eight oil producing states and may hold as much as a tenth of the world's oil reserves. The strategy document describes this area as “a source of important energy resources for Spain, investments in infrastructure, and agricultural, industrial and fishing interests.”

Here the main “threats” to Spain include piracy, illegal fishing, and illicit trafficking in persons, narcotics and weapons—all possible pretexts for future intervention.

The ruling elite is clear that the main threat to its geopolitical ambitions is the Spanish population’s traditional hostility towards the military, which emerged in response to the brutal colonial adventures at the beginning of the century in North Africa and the decades-long dictatorship of General Francisco Franco. The Aznar PP government was brought down in 2004 primarily for its support for the US-led war on Iraq.

To overcome this, the document describes how the population is to be bombarded with militarist propaganda. It states, “The Government will promote channels that facilitate knowledge in society about the effort of the actors and organisations involved in their daily safeguarding of National Security, in areas such as National Defence, the fight against terrorism, cybersecurity or citizen security. It will also encourage awareness of current threats and challenges, and raising awareness regarding collective responsibility in its preservation.”

Only days after the strategy document was published, the Minister of Defence, María Dolores de Cospedal, announced that her department will soon present a new weapons programme investment cycle for the Spanish army.

Cospedal made this announcement while participating in “The Defence Industry, New Budgetary Scenario” conference organized by the *El Economista*, where she defended the need to build a stronger national weapons industry. “We cannot be mere buyers of external services,” Cospedal declared.

Aware of the unpopularity of the increase in military expenditure, Cospedal claimed that it creates jobs, insisting, “every euro we invest in the defence industry is one euro that we invest in our future and for the benefit of citizens.”

This year’s military budget officially increased by 32 percent, primarily because years of budgetary trickery—aimed at hiding from the public the true extent of the country’s spending on arms and preparation for war—was ended by the Supreme Court in 2015, forcing the Spanish government to openly include it in the national budget.

A report by the Barcelona-based Delàs Peace Studies Center, “The Absurdity of Military Spending,” details how Spain’s Finance Minister Cristobal Montoro has taken a page from the US playbook in hiding spending on

arms and war, by using “special appropriations” and other anonymous-sounding budgetary items.

As a result, real military expenditure is more than double the amount officially appropriated to the Spanish Ministry of Defence, amounting to €18.8 billion, which is €51.4 million a day or €404 a year for every man, woman and child in a country not officially at war.

The 2017 budget now includes massive offensive weaponry such as EF-2000 fighter jets, the A400M transport planes, the NH-90 helicopter and the development of the Pizarro II tank.

The US has been demanding for years that European NATO states boost their defence budgets to two percent of GDP, to share more broadly the costs of preparing for potential war with Russia and China. The strategy report shows that Spain is on the road toward meeting that goal, as its defence budget is now equal to 1.64 percent of GDP.

At the same time as the report is calling for increased military expenditure, it reveals that there has been a catastrophic decline in spending elsewhere since 2008—job stimulus (-28 percent), infrastructure (-63 percent), culture (-34 percent), education (-14 percent), and health care (-8 percent).

The new National Security Strategy and Cospedal’s announcement have received no opposition for what passes as the “left” in Spain.

The main criticism of the pseudo-left Podemos is that it was not invited to participate in the strategy document’s preparation. General Secretary Pablo Iglesias bleated, “They have not even called us,” which was, he added, a “scandal” and a “very serious” attack on democracy for excluding “8,000,000 citizens outside such important agreements.”

To cover for Podemos’ constant search for a political alliance with the PSOE, Iglesias maintained that he could not understand why “the Socialist party is following all of [Prime Minister] Rajoy’s plans.” He concluded his press conference by stating that he would not comment on the National Security Strategy because Podemos had supposedly only received the document that day and needed time to study it. Podemos remains silent.



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