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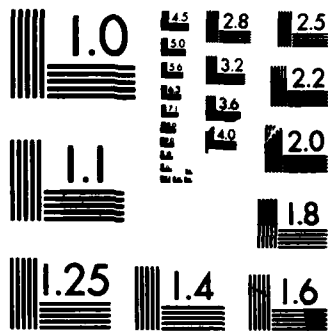
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CANARY ISLANDS (SPAIN): THEIR IMPORTANCE IN NATO'S STRATEGY

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL VICENTE G. CORRAL

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CANARY ISLANDS (SPAIN): THEIR IMPORTANCE IN NATO'S STRATEGY

An Individual Essay

by

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ABSTRACT

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In March 1986, Spaniards expressed in a national referendum their decision that Spain must remain in NATO. The entrance of Spain into NATO allows this organization to reinforce its southern flank. The Spanish Canary Islands are situated on the southern boundary of that flank. This essay attempts to give sufficient general data and basic ideas to get a possible answer to this question: Are the Canary Islands really important to NATO?

The subject is developed by connecting the Canary Islands with NATO through Spain's defense policy. The main aspects of the role of Spain in NATO are described, emphasizing that the military mission that country will have in the Alliance is still being negotiated. An overview with key points about the Canary Islands is provided, paying special attention to geopolitical issues and to the European personality of the Canaries. Finally, the essay gives an approach to defense strategy in the islands, linked to Spanish defense policy in general, to learn whether NATO's strategy should give particular attention to the Canary Islands' defense.

CANARY ISLANDS (SPAIN): THEIR IMPORTANCE IN NATO'S STRATEGY

ROLE OF SPAIN IN NATO

In May 1982, Spain firmly committed itself to the West and became NATO's 16th member. At that time the Spanish parliament and government were ruled by a center-right party. When the Socialists came to power in Spain in October 1982, all negotiations on integrating Spain into NATO's military structure were frozen. The government promised a national referendum on the issue of remaining in NATO.

Despite his 1982 electoral rhetoric, however, President Gonzalez became more pragmatic about his Socialist party's opposition to NATO. He accepted the view that Spain's democracy and political stability, as well as its commitment to Europe, would be best served if Spain remained inside of NATO. He considered it the "logical consequence" of Spain's entry into the European Economic Community, which took place on January 1, 1986. Nevertheless, in March 1986, he fulfilled his earlier promise to allow Spaniards to express their opinion in a referendum. This was the first time that a member of either NATO or the Warsaw Pact permitted a popular vote on continued membership.

Some polls had indicated that there could be a majority against remaining in NATO. To get better conditions for an affirmative result, President Gonzalez set the following special terms in the referendum's announcement:

- o Spain would not join NATO's integrated military structure.
- o It would not permit the entry into, or stockpiling of, nuclear weapons on Spanish territory.
- o Spain would negotiate a substantial reduction of the United States military presence in its territory.

Sensing that a "yes vote" would be interpreted as a great help for the Socialists, the opposition parties recommended abstention or, in the case of the Communists, rejection. The results of the referendum stunned many anxious observers: 52.5 percent voted in favor of continued NATO membership, while fewer than 40 percent voted for withdrawal. This backing of the government by the people continued when general elections were held in June 1986 and the PSOE (Spanish Socialist Party of Workers), Mr. Gonzalez' moderate and pragmatic brand of socialism, was reelected to a second four-year term. All these events have brought Spain closer to the West, democracy and stability than before. Spain had finally ended many years of isolation.

In October 1986, representatives of Spain and NATO began to meet in Brussels for discussions about the role of Spain in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, mainly on the key issue of Spanish military participation in the European defensive system. Military experts are continuing the talks according to schedule; the periodic conversations are expected to last not less than two years. This is because to get a solution is really difficult due to the conditions stated in the Spanish referendum about NATO, especially that of the Spanish Armed Forces not being integrated into NATO's military structure. The representatives are looking for an original solution that allows Spain to carry out military defensive responsibilities outside of NATO's military structure. Important issues to be considered during talks are:

- o Spain's recent statement that it will sign the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), extending the decision on this subject which was expressed during the Spanish referendum on NATO.

- o The renewal of the Spain-U.S. defense agreement which is now under discussion, with the key controversial point being a substantial reduction of

U.S. military presence in Spanish territory. The reduction will affect aviation units, as Spain wants certain NATO missions to be accomplished by its own Air Force when it receives the new F-18 fighters it has purchased from the United States.

- o The British colony of Gibraltar with an air naval base under NATO's command structure and mission. Talks are under way between Spain and the United Kingdom about sovereignty over Gibraltar, which is the main problem separating the two countries.

- o The current reorganization and modernization of the Spanish Armed Forces to allow them to meet NATO's quality standards as soon as possible, and to be able to receive military responsibilities in the Alliance's defense strategy. Spain is looking forward to having armed forces with high levels of efficiency, and is making a major effort to purchase the best weapon systems available in order to achieve that objective.

In Spain's potential contribution to NATO there are several important geopolitical aspects to be considered. Of considerable strategic importance is the fact that it has both Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts, long stretches of coastline with numerous good ports and large industrial cities. By virtue of its location, Spain dominates the Straits of Gibraltar, controlling the approaches from both East and West. Spain's Mediterranean presence is strengthened by the fact that the Balearic Islands are situated in the very heart of the Western Mediterranean; its Atlantic presence is reinforced by the Canary Islands situated less than 500 kms north of the Tropic of Cancer where NATO's area of responsibility comes to an end. Spain's position on the Straits of Gibraltar is underpinned by its sovereignty over the island of Alboran, in the western approach to the Strait, and over the cities of Ceuta and Melilla on the northern coast of Africa, although these are not included

in the Alliance's area of responsibility. Thus, Spain's geographical situation better enables NATO to ensure the safety of the sea lines of communication along which raw materials and industrial products come to Europe. If the need arose, these same sea lines of communication would be used for the transport of military supplies and reinforcements from South Atlantic ports, from North America or from the western coasts of Europe, destined to the Mediterranean; and for those shipments which must go in the opposite direction.

The territory of Spain constitutes an extensive land mass in the hinterland of a Europe whose fronts are dangerously narrow, an area which could serve as a platform for launching armed forces in a wide arc stretching, by land and sea, from the British Isles to the Italian peninsula. This capability to launch armed forces derives from the nature of its coasts which provide beachheads that have frequently been used by other Europeans fighting for supremacy in Europe.

The Iberian peninsula provides NATO with the capacity for "defense in depth." Spain's strategic position is enhanced by its considerable distance from the airfields of the Warsaw Pact states and its natural barriers to an invasion. Unlike France, which also has both Atlantic and Mediterranean coastal areas, Spain is shielded behind formidable mountain barriers. In the north, the Pyrenees and the Cantabrian Mountains bar the overland route from Europe. An amphibious invasion would face other and equally inhospitable mountains whether it was made from the Atlantic or Mediterranean Sea. Only from the West, through Portugal, is Spain's terrain open enough for invasion. Air distances from Eastern Europe to central Spain are on the order of 2,000 miles or more. Moreover, penetration of Spanish airspace would require Warsaw Pact aircraft to pass through NATO's missile and aircraft defenses beginning

in West Germany or Italy. Such a strategic redoubt could serve NATO as a staging point or as a base for military operations over Mediterranean Sea, Atlantic Ocean, into land mass of Europe itself, or even into Northwest Africa if it was necessary. In the event of calamity, Spain can be made a stronghold in whose expanse of land and numerous ports and airfields refuge could be found to reorganize and rebuild offensive strength from the remnants of NATO's European forces and U.S. reinforcements.

The political implications of Spain's membership are directly related to its geographical location. Warsaw Pact perceptions and calculations are undoubtedly affected by an Alliance that is nearly 20 percent larger in area, excluding North America and Iceland, and which represents a more completely united Western Europe. Furthermore, Spain provides a bridge to the African and South American continents and enhances existing ties between NATO and the Middle East. These political links clearly increase NATO's ability to deter war. Spain will be able to influence the way NATO deals with the rest of the world and the Spanish contribution can be useful in the dialogue between the Alliance and the external world.

Apart from its geographical and strategic importance, Spain brings to NATO substantial armed forces. On paper, the Spanish armed forces look impressive; with 330,000 men they rank seventh in NATO, and Spain's pool of reservists is second in size in the Alliance. But while some of Spain's military capabilities are indeed impressive, much of its equipment is a generation behind that of the principal NATO nations. An important effort is now under way as part of the reorganization of Spain's armed forces, mainly the Army, and new equipment and weapon systems are going to bring Spanish military modernization and efficiency to the level needed for carrying out defense missions in NATO's strategy.

In quantifiable terms, Spain provides few immediate gains to the war fighting capability of NATO, but in geopolitical terms there is no doubt about the benefits the Alliance receives. Spain's membership in the Alliance lets NATO appear to be a little more robust. The Alliance now also reflects a more united Europe and the strategic conditions, mainly depth, afforded by Spain improves the deterrence posture of NATO.

THE CANARY ISLANDS: GEOPOLITICAL OVERVIEW

A brief geopolitical overview may be useful to permit the interested reader to appreciate the value of this region. The archipelago, which is called in Spanish ISLAS CANARIAS, is situated in the North Atlantic Ocean off the northwestern coast of Africa, a bit more than four degrees north of the Tropic of Cancer and a little to the west of the zero meridian. The minimum distance of these islands from the Western Sahara, in Africa, is about 70 miles (113 kms) and from Cadiz, on the mainland of Spain, about 700 miles (1125 kms). Because of their position in the Atlantic, near the African coast, these islands are an important crossroads for lines of communication between Europe, Africa and America.

The archipelago comprises an area of 2,894 square miles (7,495 sq. kms) and is made up of seven main islands, forming a chain about 250 miles (400 kms) long, with six islets at the eastern extreme. According to the physical features of the archipelago, it is considered to be divided into two groups of islands. One is the eastern islands, made up of Gran Canaria, Lanzarote and Fuerteventura and the other, formed by Tenerife, La Palma, Gomera and Hierro is the western islands. The six islets are situated in the eastern group and they are called Graciosa, Alegranza, Montana Clara, Roque del Este, Roque del

Oeste and Isla de Lobos. The main and most populated islands are Gran Canaria in the eastern group and Tenerife in the western one.

All the islands are mountainous and of volcanic origin. The highest mountain of Spain, the Pico de Teide, in Tenerife Island, is 12,200 feet (3,719 meters). The other islands of the western group and Gran Canaria, have peaks ranging from 4,500 to 7,000 feet (1,370 to 2,130 meters) and Lanzarote and Fuerteventura, the islands closest to the African coast, do not exceed 2,400 feet (730 meters) in elevation. The coasts and volcanic slopes are generally steep, but weathering has formed some alluvial plains and good beaches, mainly in the eastern group of islands.

The subtropical climate, moderated by the trade winds, is mild and pleasant. Rainfall is limited near the coast but increases at greater heights. Each island, except Lanzarote and Fuerteventura, is divided into two faces, one to the north, exposed to the humid winds, full of vegetation, the other to the south, dryer and in some areas desert in appearance. Attention is called to the slight thermal oscillation between the different seasons: 42.8 F. between the averages of the warmest and coldest months. Its geography allows a thermal gradation with increased altitude which makes possible the presence of snow on some peaks. Its agreeable spring with an average temperature of 64.4 F., and its splendid summer, with 71.6 F. give these islands an incomparable climate in which one feels a constant sensation of well-being into an eternal spring, throughout the year. Contributing to the benignity of the climate is the so-called "Canaries Current," a branch of the "Mexican Gulf Current," which keep the temperature on the surface of the sea below that which corresponds to its latitude. The average temperature of sea water is 71.6 F. in summer and 66.2 F. in winter.

The landscape changes with altitude. The coastal areas are covered with drought resistant vegetation, of which one of the most significant is the dragon tree. In the middle altitudes, at 3,000 to 4,000 feet (910 to 1,220 meters), woods of laurel, many of them evergreen, once dominated, but today a great part of the land is under cultivation. Above the laurel and on the southern faces of the mountains are pine woods. On the crests, above 6,000 feet (1,850 meters) grow native shrubs; and higher yet, in the volcanic peaks, is found the "violeta teidea," the only kind of plant life in that area.

The economy of the islands is essentially based on agriculture and cultivation is adapted to different altitudes. In the coastal lowlands, the lowest and hottest zones, up to 1,000 feet (300 meters), subtropical crops are grown on land irrigated with water drawn from inside the mountains. Bananas are the most important of these crops, followed by tomatoes, sugar cane and tobacco. Higher up the climate is more Mediterranean and the woods have been replaced by farmlands where cereals, vegetables, tree fruits, grapes and tomatoes are grown. The prevalence of "minifundios," or small landholdings, has made difficult the mechanization of agriculture. Bananas, the leading crop, are protected in the Spanish market against foreign competition. Another major crop is tomatoes, exported in a big amount to European countries. Grape producing wines are grown in some quantity, but not enough to be an important export. Cereals must be imported. The cultivation of flowers and plants is a new industry, exporting most of the crop to Europe. The surrounding seas, mainly close to the Western African coast, are rich in fish and, as a result, fish salting and canning are major industries. Plenty of fish ships from several countries are in the area and utilize the good major ports of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and Santa Cruz de Tenerife as its fleet bases. These harbors are important fueling and supplying stations for

tankers, merchants and also tourist stops for pleasure cruises. There is little mineral wealth in the Canary Islands, although there are deposits of pumice stones, sulfur, mineral water, and granite. Oil refining is one of the major industries and oil products are one of the main exports, along with asphalt and the aforementioned agricultural products. Other exports are potatoes, winter vegetables, tobacco, salted fish and some lace and embroidery work. Imports generally exceed exports, thus creating an unfavorable trade balance. Tourism and income remittances, however, balance the deficit.

The service sector has benefited from the expansion of tourism, the peak season falling in winter. The climate, natural beauty, and moderate prices make the islands popular with tourists. There are many beautiful beaches and, aside from resort facilities, there are a number of points of historical interest. In Las Palmas and Gomera stand buildings where Columbus lived during his way to the New World. Another important consideration for tourism is that the Canary Islands are free duty ports with low taxes.

The Canary Islands, like the other Spanish regions, have an autonomous governmental entity, called "Comunidad Autonoma de las Islas Canarias," which comprises two provinces, Las Palmas is the easternmost province and consists of the eastern group of islands and islets. Santa Cruz de Tenerife is the other province and is made up of the western group of islands. Each main island is ruled by an insular council called "Cabildo Insular."

The Canaries Archipelago is linked by many air and sea lines to Europe, Africa and America, and especially to the Spanish mainland in the Iberian peninsula. The islands have two major international airports, located on Gran Canaria and Tenerife. There are also international airports on Fuerteventura and Lanzarote and local airports in La Palma and Hierro; La Gomera is the only island without an airfield because of its mountainous configuration. There

are ports and other small harbors in each island, but those of Las Palmas and Santa Cruz de Tenerife are particularly impressive. Las Palmas' port handles the largest volume of traffic, in total tonnage, in Spain. The communications among the different islands of the archipelago are served by frequent air and sea services, mainly between Gran Canaria and Tenerife. Traveling by ship between the archipelago and Spain's peninsula takes about 38 hours and the direct jet flight from Madrid to the islands is about two and a half hours long.

THE CANARIES: A EUROPEAN PEOPLE (FROM SPAIN) IN AFRICA

The origin of these islands is related by legend. They are identified with the legend about the lost continental ground between America and Africa called "Atlantis." These islands were known to the Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Arabs and medieval western Europeans. The Romans called them "Insulas Canarias," or islands of the dogs, because of the many canines found there. One of the traditional names applied to the islands was Isles of the Blest, or "Fortunate Islands," because of their pleasant scenery and climate. Other names given to the islands by the Greek and Latin historians and poets were "Elysian Fields" and "Garden of Hesperides." The birds known as canaries received their name because they abound in these islands.

The Romans learned of the Canaries through Juba II, King of Mauritania, whose account of an expedition (B.C.) to the islands was preserved by the writers Plutarch and Pliny the Elder. In 999 the Arabs landed and traded on the eastern islands. During the 13th and 14th centuries Genoese, Majorcan, Portuguese, and French navigators visited the islands. The modern history of the Canary Islands began in 1402 with an expedition sent by Henry III of

Castile (later Spain) and led by French explorer Jean de Bethencourt, who completed the conquest of Lanzarote, Fuerteventura and Hierro and was recognized as King of the islands by the Castile's King. Between 1420 and 1479 a Portuguese force subdued Gomera Island. The islands were claimed by Portugal, but that country finally gave up its claim in the Treaty of Alcacovas in 1479, thus recognizing Spanish sovereignty over the Canaries. Spain, under Ferdinand and Isabella, the Catholic monarchs, concluded the conquest of Canary Islands in 1496 and these have remained under Spanish rule ever since. In 1492, three Spanish ships, called "carabelas," commanded by Columbus on their way to the discovery of America, stopped at Gran Canaria and Gomera islands and from there sailed off to the great adventure across the mysterious sea. Soon after their conquest by Spain, the islands became important supply ports for the voyages of discovery and for West Indian, or America, trade. The port of Santa Cruz de la Palma, in the westernmost of Canary Islands was the second in rank, about naval traffic, of the whole Spanish Empire. The islands frequently suffered attacks by English, Dutch and Muslim pirates and Navy expeditions. In 1797 the famous English Admiral Nelson lost one of his arms in an unsuccessful attack on Santa Cruz de Tenerife, capital city of the islands, defended mainly by the civilian militia. The islands formed a single Spanish metropolitan province until 1927, when rivalry between the two port cities, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and Santa Cruz de Tenerife caused a division into the current two provinces. In 1936 the islands served General Franco as the first base for his nationalist rising against the Spanish republic. Under the current Spanish democratic political system, headed by King Juan Carlos I, the Canary Islands has demonstrated the strongest popular support in Spain for the new Spanish regime.

The native people, called Canaries (the term "Guanches," commonly used, really was applied only to the natives of Tenerife island), were of the white race and are believed to have been of Berber stock; their culture was Neolithic. They were not exterminated but fused with the Spaniards and other settlers who came to the islands. The population has more than quadrupled since 1900. Natural increase has accounted for most of the growth, with the result that the median age is well below the Spanish national average. Only one third of the population is economically active, reflecting the large number of children and the low participation of women in the work force. Castilian (or Spanish) language is spoken with a slight Andalusian accent very close to that of South Americans. The population is almost entirely Roman Catholic.

In 1985, the estimated population of the Canary Islands was 1.5 millions, with 800,000 people living in the eastern province of Las Palmas and 700,000 in the western one, Santa Cruz de Tenerife. In the eastern province the people are mostly concentrated in Gran Canaria island, where is situated the biggest city of Canary Islands which is Las Palmas, with almost 400,000 inhabitants. The western province has its population spread in the country side and the main city is Santa Cruz, in Tenerife island, with about 200,000 people. An important transient population is in the islands all year around, mainly in Las Palmas city, because of the large foreign fishing fleets in the area, other ships stopping there, and because of the tourists visiting the islands (mainly in Gran Canaria and Tenerife). About five million tourists visited the islands in 1986.

Spain has been accused by the OUA (Organization for the Unity of Africa) of being a colonialist country because of the Canary Islands. The OUA considered the archipelago to be an African colony. After representatives and

the president of the OUA visited the Canary Islands, however, to know "in situ" the characteristics of the archipelago, they reported to the OUA's main assembly that the Canary Islands have a European personality and were clearly a portion of Spain's national territory. The OUA's main assembly expressed the same sentiment, and on several other occasions the OUA has ratified that resolution. Moreover, the Council of Europe also has clearly stated that the Canary Islands are European, although geographically situated in Africa. The Spanish title to the archipelago is emphasized by the fact that most of the Canary Islands were part of the Kingdom of Castile before Spain was born by the unification of the Aragon and Castile kingdoms. The islands were Spanish at the same time that most of the other regions of Spain.

CANARY ISLANDS IN SPANISH DEFENSE POLICY AND NATO

Spanish defense policy, with the entrance of Spain into NATO, needs to be adapted to the new strategic situation and to enduring geopolitical realities. Spain's close links, political, economic, cultural and human, with Western Europe and North America mean that the defense of Spain must be seen not merely as the protection of its territorial integrity, but also in terms of the protection of its interests which coincide to very considerable extent with those of the other members of NATO. Now that Spain is part of the Alliance, collective defense must be the keynote of Spanish national defense.

To understand the main objectives of Spanish defense policy it is necessary first to know about what kind of threats Spain sees as most probable against its interests. Portugal is not considered by Spain as a threat due to the good relationship and respect between both Iberian countries, linked by a bilateral defense treaty, called the Iberian Pact. This is reinforced by the fact that they are now members of the same western organizations such as NATO

and the European Economic Community. A threat from the north, where most European western countries are linked with Spain by good relationships through EEC and NATO or bilateral agreements, is only seen, to exist in case NATO was defeated by the Soviet bloc. The United States, as a superpower, is considered in Spain not as a threat but as a friend and ally in NATO and in a bilateral defense agreement. A threat from the Mediterranean area could be possible against the Spanish Balearic Islands, Spain's eastern coast and the Straits of Gibraltar. In the Atlantic Ocean, the threat could be against the lines of communications, of vital importance for Spain and Western Europe, and for that reason against the Canary Islands, a strategic advanced base for observing and controlling the lanes between the North and South Atlantic areas. Toward the South, Spain is a bridge between Europe and Africa and traditionally maintains good links with North African countries, but the political situation in the Mogreb area is not usually stabilized and could change to give rise to a clear threat against Spain. The two Spanish cities in North Africa, Ceuta and Melilla, and the Canary Islands in front of Western Sahara, are sometimes considered to be potential military objectives because of the geographical situation of those cities and islands. Given the relative geographic isolation of the Iberian peninsula and Spain's long tradition of neutrality, most Spaniards have little sense of any classic cross border threat. Spanish history suggests they only have to fear internal violence and foreign powers meddling in internal disorder. When Spaniards do talk of external threats, the discussion is usually vague but the assumption is always that it could come from the south. In Spain there is the sense that the Soviet Union is too far away; Portugal and France are no longer credible as threats; but the south could be just the right size.

The ongoing talks between Spain and NATO's delegations, about the mission of the Spanish Armed Forces in support of the Alliance without being inside the military structure, are of maximum importance. The point is how to get a suitable coordination of NATO and Spain's zones of common interest. The Joint Strategic Plan of Spanish defense policy, now being adapted to the new situation of Spain in NATO, includes as an important mission the collaboration of Spanish Armed Forces in the defense of NATO's southern flank. It is clearly expressed in the Spanish Joint Strategic Plan that the main defensive axis for Spain is situated outside the Iberian peninsula. This vital axis is made up of Balearic Islands-Straits of Gibraltar-Canary Islands, so that the Spanish military strategy in case of war will be essentially one emphasizing air and naval forces. Spanish officials in Brussels stated during the talks with NATO about Spain's participation in the defensive plans of the Alliance that Spain will try to get as missions for the Spanish Armed Forces those of control over the zones of Balearic-Gibraltar-Canaries axis, as well as the Bay of Biscay in the Atlantic near Northern Spain. These responsibilities would have to be assumed by Spain outside of NATO's military command structure, but the Spanish officials consider it is possible that the Alliance will assign them those military missions using the indirect way of delegation. This method of delegation will require agreement with those NATO military commands affected by this solution and the permanent presence of Spanish military liaison officers in the main Commands of the Alliance. (Graph number 1, shows the super-position of Spain's zones of defense interest with those of NATO's responsibility.)

For the foreseeable future, however, it is thought that the Spanish Army would remain responsible only for the defense of Spain's national territory, including the Balearic and Canary islands and the cities of Ceuta and Melilla,

with the Air Force being responsible for the support of Spanish land and naval forces and for the defense of Spain's air space. For the time being also, the role of the Spanish Navy would be limited to the requirement to defend Spain's territory and coastal zones and to patrol and conduct antisubmarine warfare in areas adjacent to Spain as requirements of NATO. Inclusion in the NATO integrated air defense network also could be attractive for Spain, especially if the network were extended to include the Canary Islands. In a relatively short time, when the Spanish Armed Forces have completed their ongoing modernization, it is believed that Spain's air and naval forces will receive the mission of control over the strategic axis of Balearic-Gibraltar-Canaries in cooperation with some other NATO's forces. The Spanish Army, supported by the Air Force, will continue defending Spain's territory, but at the same time it could receive some missions as NATO's strategic reserve for reinforcing forward deployments, mainly in the Alliance's southern flank. Other missions that could be received by the Spanish Armed Forces would be to protect and facilitate the arrival on Spain's territory of United States and Canadian forces integrated in the operation called "Rapid Reforger of Europe," and to maintain Spain's mainland as a logistical base and a strategic redoubt.

The importance of the Canary Islands in Spanish military strategy, as we have seen before, is acknowledged by the fact that Spain has organized an independent Unified Command to defend the archipelago. The area of responsibility of the Unified Command of the Archipelago comprises the islands' territory and twelve miles of jurisdictional coastal waters, with corresponding airspace. The area of military interest is limited by 32° N., 20° N., 23° W. and to the east as far inside continental Africa as radioelectrical range. Overlapping with these areas there are those of IBERLAND (NATO), U.S.-Spain's bilateral defense treaty and France's zone of

interest. (All these areas are showed in graph number 2.) Furthermore, it is necessary to take into consideration the coastal waters' limits of Morocco, the Western Sahara and Mauritania, as neighbors of the Canaries. In the talks between NATO and Spain's representatives, an interesting issue is about the coordination of the Canary Islands' Command with IBERLAND (this under Portuguese Command) through Spain and NATO. The Alliance could consider the Spanish military command in the islands as a separate NATO command, due to the geopolitical value of the Archipelago.

The threats Spain sees against the Canary Islands in this context are the Soviet strategy in Africa and potential regional developments in the near northwestern African area. The Soviet's presence and influence in Africa are well known. For the Soviet Union, the Canary Islands have strategic interest because many Soviet ships, with supplies from America and Africa and vice versa, stop or go close to the islands. The Soviet Union maintains in the archipelago a fleet for fishing in the important bank close to Western African coast and Spain is giving to the Soviet ships supply and maintenance support through a mixed enterprise called Sovhispan. It is normal to see in the main harbors of the Canary Islands several Soviet merchantships, fishing ships and scientific ships, but not war ships, although it is known that Soviet submarines are sometimes operating in the archipelago's area. Spain occasionally has expelled from the islands some Soviet personnel because of spying activities. Cubans in civilian clothes, transported in Soviet ships, have stopped in Canarian ports on their way between Cuba and the Soviet Union or African countries. This Soviet and Cuban presence in the islands is permitted by the normal diplomatic relationship Spain has with the USSR and Cuba in accordance with Spain's foreign policy of having good relationships

with all countries of the world, whatever their political regimes, if mutual respect and nonintervention in internal issues exist.

If the threat by the Soviets could be called "global," there is more concern in the Canaries about the "regional threats" represented by those countries in Northwestern Africa. The decolonization of Western Sahara by Spain has represented for the Canary Islands the loss of a protective shield. Now the Canaries feel close to a continent where conditions could be easily changing and becoming more threatening to the archipelago. The Western Sahara is currently a conflict zone where Morocco's military forces and POLISARIO's guerrillas are fighting. The Saharan movement for liberation of Western Sahara, called POLISARIO, now is becoming stronger with the arrival of Soviet built tanks, support from Algeria and possibly from Libya; but it is confronted by a major Moroccan military presence. The conflict in the Western Sahara will probably endure because Algeria and Morocco are enemies, and a referendum which was promised to the Saharan people about the future of their country will not be accepted by POLISARIO and Algeria if it would take place without free conditions as expressed by the United Nations resolution. The instability in the Western Sahara could affect the security of the Canary Islands. A few years ago Algeria was supporting a violent political movement for the independence of the Canary Islands. This movement, called MPAIC, received little support in the Canaries and after Algeria's help stopped, because its relationship with Spain improved, that movement collapsed and now its ex-leader, Cubillo, is living in Tenerife Island as part of a Spanish political amnesty. Libya's leader Gadafi, on the other hand, recently has said that the Canary Islands have to be liberated and join Western Sahara, free of Morocco, to form a unique African country. Spain answered with a strong protest and expelled all Libyan officials working in the Islands, some

of them accused of spying. Mauritania is too weak a country to be considered as a potential threat. Morocco's and Spain's relationship has been in general good in recent years, but now is worse because of the Moroccan King's speech claiming sovereignty over the Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla. The Canaries feel that in the long term Morocco could be a real threat to the islands if it gets full control over the Western Sahara and joins efforts with other Mogreb countries.

Spain's defense policy considers the security of Canary Islands to be of first priority due to its geostrategical value and the existence of potential threats to them. This archipelago, as was mentioned before, is one of the key points of the Spanish strategical axis (Balearic Islands-Strait of Gibraltar-Canary Islands). The Unified Command of the Canary Islands has assigned to it Spanish Army, Air, Navy and Marine forces. The Army's strength is about one Light Infantry Division with two Brigade HQ's, nine Infantry Battalions (two of them are of the Spanish Foreign Legion), two Field Artillery Battalions, two Anti-aircraft Artillery Battalions, two Coastal Artillery Battalions, two Engineer battalions, two Signal battalions, one Helicopter battalion, Electronic Warfare Unit and several logistics units. The total combat strength of these forces is about 16,000 troops. The main air combat units are a squadron of jet fighters ("Mirage F-1") and another of medium transport planes. The Spanish Navy normally assigns to the Unified Command two or three destroyers and/or frigates and several patrol and logistical ships. The Spanish Marines have slightly less than a battalion in the archipelago. Spain has ready plans to reinforce the Islands' garrison with important ground, air, naval and marine units stationed on the Spanish mainland, and to protect the vital air and sea lines of communications between the archipelago and the Iberian peninsula. The mobilization of new combat units and logistical

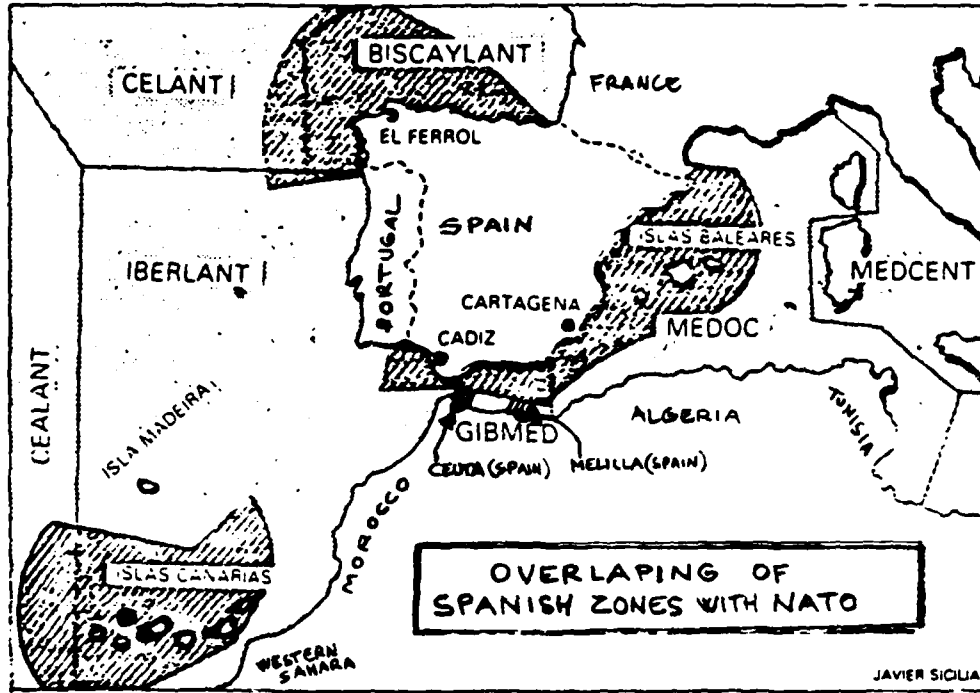
resources is fundamental to the long-term defense of the islands, where the number of young people is large and well motivated about the security of their own land, as Canaries have demonstrated against past threats of invasion of the archipelago. For Spain it is clear that the existence of a strong garrison in the Islands and the availability of Spanish forces on the Iberian peninsula ready to reinforce the archipelago as part of a sound decision to defend the islands, are the best means to deter and defeat a potential threat.

Spain considers that being in NATO as a member will increase the security of the Canary Islands, but other forces of the Alliance will reinforce those of Spain in the archipelago only when necessary. The opinion of the Canary people, expressed on different occasions, is that permanent NATO bases, other than Spanish ones, should not be allowed in the archipelago. It is important to remember that almost 55 percent of the Canaries' votes in the Spanish referendum about NATO were against the continuation of Spain as a member of the Atlantic Alliance. There are some people in the islands who support the status of neutrality or demilitarization for the archipelago, although most of population considers that status will create easy conditions for external and internal threats over the archipelago.

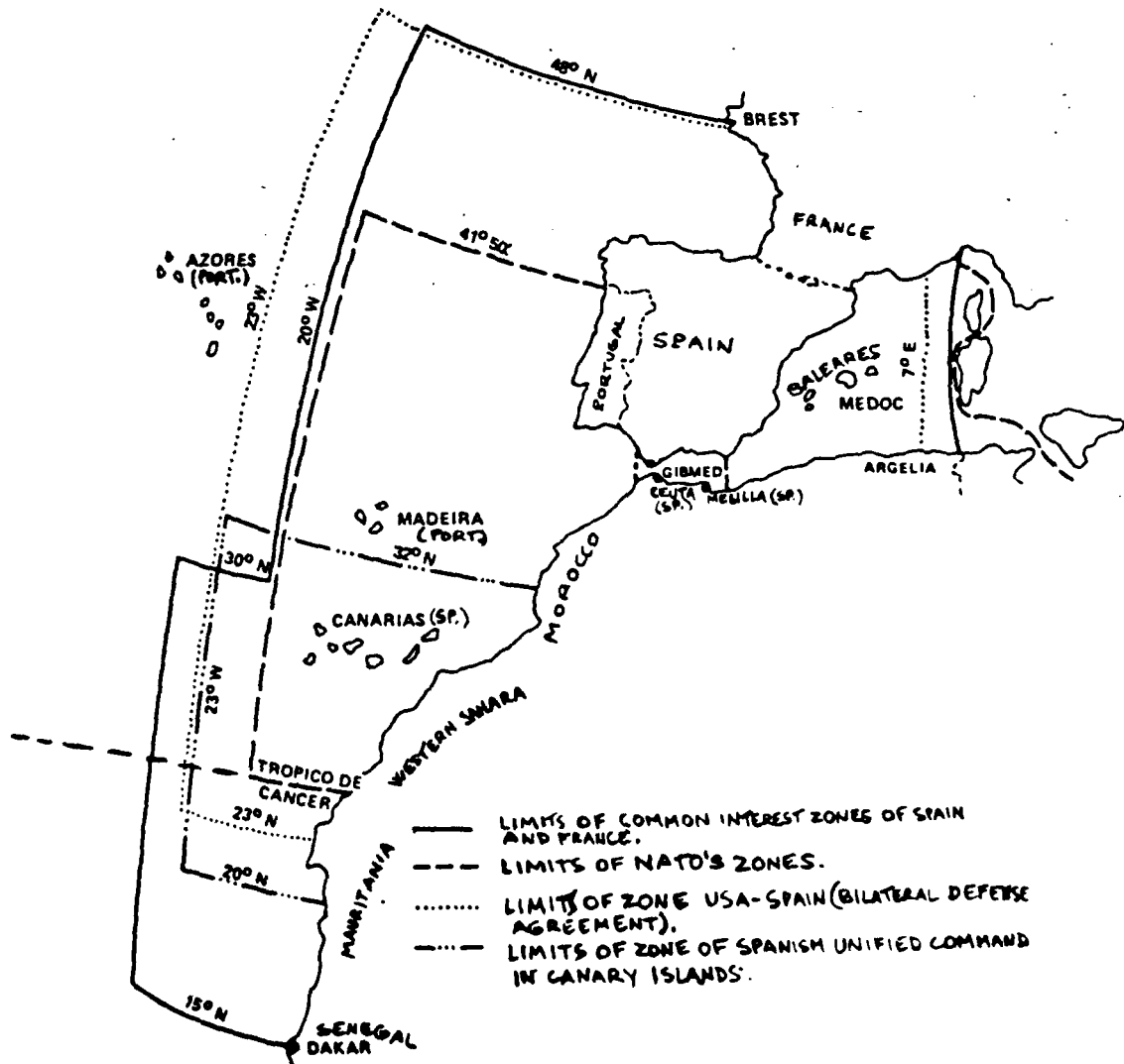
The Canary Islands are a vital point in the Spanish strategical axis (Balearics-Gibraltar-Canaries); they are also a component of the belt made up of Azores Islands-Madeira Island-Canary Islands, which represents a strategical line of security in the rear of NATO's European area. Furthermore, the Canary Islands can be called the southern land of Europe, a crossway linking America, Africa and Europe and a NATO sentinel guarding one of the southern doors of the Atlantic Alliance. Throughout the key questions: Are the Canary Islands really important to NATO's strategy? The answer may be

known when representatives of Spain and NATO, discussing now the role of Spain in the Alliance, find a solution to this issue.

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GRAPHIC NUMBER 2



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