

The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters

Volume 20
Number 1 *Parameters* 1990

Article 23

7-4-1990

SPAIN'S SECURITY POLICY AND ARMY IN THE 1990s

Diego A. Ruiz Palmer

Follow this and additional works at: <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters>

Recommended Citation

Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, "SPAIN'S SECURITY POLICY AND ARMY IN THE 1990s," *Parameters* 20, no. 1 (1990), doi:10.55540/0031-1723.1568.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by USAWC Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters by an authorized editor of USAWC Press.

Spain's Security Policy and Army in the 1990s

DIEGO A. RUIZ PALMER

© 1990 Diego A. Ruiz Palmer

For nearly a decade, Spanish political elites and public opinion have been debating security policy in a welcome demonstration of the robustness of democratic institutions. In time, membership in the Atlantic Alliance, the continued security partnership with the United States, and participation in West European defense cooperation—via the Western European Union and the Independent European Program Group—have been settled to the satisfaction of all parties. Of course, such progress has not come without difficult compromises, such as the withdrawal from Spanish territory of the US Air Force 401st Tactical Fighter Wing and Spain's acceptance of nuclear deterrence as the core concept of Western strategy.¹ The Spanish Government's "Decalogue" on security policy, first formulated in 1984, has been brought to a successful conclusion.

But while Spain's formal security policy debate has run its course, security policy in Spain has become "trivialized" and the debate self-perpetuating. The more Spanish security policy became internationalized in the 1980s, in connection with membership in NATO and the Western European Union (WEU), the more it became a matter of local politics and a societal issue. Witness the controversy over the air force bombing range at Anchuras, the residual public hostility to a US military presence in Spain, the political debate over conscription, and the concern in the military establishment regarding the future place of the armed forces in Spanish society.²

Presumably, as Spaniards get accustomed to being full-fledged citizens of Europe—and the completion of the European Community's "internal market" on 1 January 1993 ("Europe 1992") will undoubtedly accelerate the process—they will come to accept as normal what has been standard practice for 40 years in neighboring countries (including France): that an effective national defense

posture implies a collective defense effort; that the latter requires national defense planning to be adjusted to the scale of Western Europe; and, therefore, that the common security afforded by Western membership in alliances such as NATO and the WEU implies the sharing of its burdens, including the presence of foreign troops, the regular use by allied forces of military facilities located on Spanish territory for purposes of NATO training, the participation by Spanish military formations in bi- and multilateral exercises within and beyond Spain's "zone of strategic interest," and so on.

The internationalization of Spain's security policy and, increasingly, defense posture—which is influencing virtually every aspect of Spanish defense planning, from command arrangements and force structures to armaments procurement—is likely to be further accelerated by still another external factor—arms control—which until recently had been almost totally foreign to Spanish defense planning. Spain is a participant in the negotiations on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) currently underway in Vienna, and its territory is situated, according to the NATO proposal, within the so-called "4-1 zone" encompassing the Iberian peninsula. Not surprisingly, NATO's proposal is crafted in such a way as to preserve the alliance's collective combat potential in central Europe (the so-called "4-4 zone") opposite the Warsaw Pact's greatest concentration of forces, whereas the Pact's proposal would dilute NATO forces in central Europe. The two proposals have substantially different implications for Spanish forces in terms of collective force reductions across the five weapon categories addressed by the CFE negotiations: main battle tanks, armored troop carriers, field artillery, combat helicopters, and combat aircraft.³

Any reductions in Spanish army and air force holdings as a result of a CFE agreement in Vienna could help defuse residual domestic political opposition to Spanish membership in NATO by demonstrating the usefulness of alliance membership as a vehicle for Spanish participation in collective disarmament. They might also ease budgetary pressures on the procurement of new military equipment. But they are also likely to give a new impetus to the lingering debate over the wisdom of abandoning conscription in favor of an all-volunteer army in the context of a reorganization of the Spanish army into a smaller, more mobile, and better-equipped body of forces.

Diego A. Ruiz Palmer is Director of the NATO Studies Center at BDM International, Inc., McLean, Va. During the 1989-90 academic year, he was a Research Associate at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in London, where he prepared an *Adelphi Paper* on French security policy. He holds a diploma in political science from the *Institut d'Etudes Politiques* in Paris and an M.A. in defense policy studies from George Washington University, and he is a graduate of the Program for Senior Executives in National and International Security at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. Mr. Ruiz Palmer has written extensively on NATO and European security matters.

The Contemporary Spanish Army

The modern Spanish army has undergone two reorganizations, in 1965 and in the early 1980s. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the latter may have been a necessary, transitional step toward the kind of army that West European nations (at least those belonging to the WEU) could be forced to adopt in the wake of a CFE agreement and its sequels. This new model army might include a larger proportion of armored cavalry and motorized infantry units, equipped with wheeled armored fighting vehicles, as well as airmobile and air-transportable forces.

The 1965 reorganization of the Spanish army—a milestone in its development into a relatively modern force—superimposed a mobile strategic reserve force (*Fuerzas de Intervencion Inmediata*), with a limited capability to deploy across Spanish territory, over a territorial defense structure (*Defensa Operativa del Territorio*), structured as a spiderweb linking Madrid to nine regional military headquarters. The strategic reserve comprised an army corps headquarters maintained in cadre status in peacetime, several separate brigade- and regiment-size units (including a parachute brigade, an air-transportable brigade, an armored cavalry brigade and a corps-level field artillery brigade), and three divisions (one armored, one mechanized, one motorized). The territorial defense forces in turn were composed of nine home-defense brigades (one per military region), one mobile infantry brigade, two mountain divisions deployed in the Pyrenees, and the garrisons in the Balearic and Canary islands and in the North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla.⁴

The 1965 structure was influenced to a considerable degree by the French army, which, having just withdrawn from Algeria, was itself planning a major reorganization of its forces stationed in France and in the Federal Republic of Germany. Between 1963 and 1967, the French army was reorganized into three bodies of forces: the First French Army for operations in Central Europe; territorial defense forces; and forces for overseas intervention.⁵ There is certainly an intriguing parallel between the French territorial defense forces, structured into seven military regions, and the Spanish version, structured into nine military regions. French military thinking has also influenced its Iberian neighbor, with writings by Generals de Gaulle, Gallois, Beaufre, and others being standard texts among Spanish army officers. Also, bilateral relations between the French and Spanish armies have been particularly close since the early 1960s, involving such cooperative efforts as the annual combined exercises, nicknamed *Galia* and *Iberia*, between the French 11th Airborne Division and the Spanish Parachute Brigade, and procurement by the Spanish army of the French AMX-30 tank (about which the Spaniards, like the Greeks, have expressed some misgivings).⁶

But despite the intent of modernizing the Spanish army, through the creation of the strategic reserve and the procurement of US-designed equipment such as M-48 main battle tanks, M-113 armored personnel carriers, and

M-108 self-propelled howitzers, it remained essentially a static garrison force with a very slow peacetime tempo of operations. Only the long-drawn-out war in the Spanish Sahara provided officers with the opportunity to escape from the monotony of military life in the metropole. The existence of separate ministries for each of the three services precluded effective cooperation, and joint exercises were rare. And while the Spanish navy and air force had been exposed to NATO operational concepts and procedures well before Spain joined the alliance—as a result of their regular participation in exercises with US and French forces—the army remained virtually isolated from any such cooperation. Not until 1979, on the occasion of the bilateral exercise *Crisex 79*, did Spanish army formations train with US forces. Against this background, the reorganization of the Spanish army initiated in 1984 represents a conceptual and operational turning point in the postwar evolution of the army. The resulting plan introduced a number of important innovations:

- Abandonment of the former distinction between the strategic reserve and the territorial defense units in favor of a single, streamlined body of forces. One consequence of this measure was the disbanding of the nine home-defense brigades, bringing the frontline strength of the Spanish army from the 1965 total of 24 brigades down to the present 15.

- Reduction in the number of military regions from nine to six and establishment of three major logistical commands in Madrid, Seville, and Zaragoza.

- Consolidation of 11 brigades into five divisions: one armored, one motorized, one mechanized, and two mountain divisions. All have two brigades except for the mechanized division, which has three.

The remaining four brigades (two armored cavalry, one air-transportable, and one parachute) are separate and can operate independently. Additional units continue to include the garrisons in the Balearic and Canary islands and in the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, the Spanish Legion, the army's light aviation corps, and several smaller commands directly subordinated to the army staff.⁷

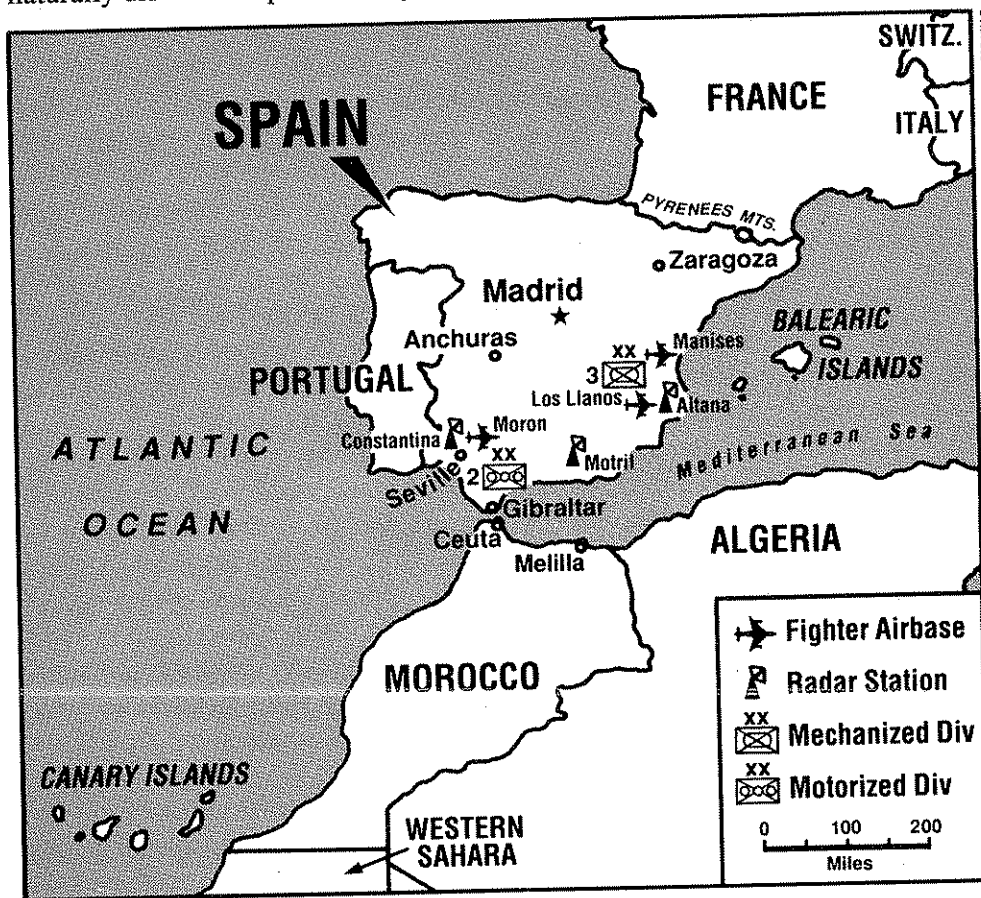
In parallel with the reorganization of maneuver forces, the Spanish army has launched an ambitious infrastructure plan to consolidate previously scattered units into several large, brigade-size garrison facilities. Unfortunately, delays and budgetary constraints have considerably slowed progress and only a handful of such units are stationed in modern installations. Unit readiness and cohesion are thereby adversely affected.⁸ Finally, the reorganization has involved a reduction in overall Army strength from 250,000 men in 1965 to approximately 200,000 men today (of which some 35,000 are volunteers and 165,000 are draftees).⁹

The emergence of genuine jointness in the form of a unified Ministry of Defense and Joint Staff and the establishment of major operational commands for each service have had a profound effect on the readiness and effectiveness

of the armed forces by emphasizing common employment concepts and interoperability.¹⁰ This is particularly so for the once operationally isolated army. The conduct of joint operations with elements from all three services was first tested on a large scale in 1985, during exercise *Tartesos 85* on the Spanish mainland, and again in 1989, during exercise *Canarex 89* in the Canary archipelago.¹¹

Spain and NATO: Convergence or Compromise?

At the very time the Spanish army was carrying forth an extensive internal reorganization intended to bring it on a par with other West European armies, the development of Spain's first joint strategic plan and Spain's membership in NATO placed the army in a totally new operational context. The joint strategic plan, anchored on a strategic axis extending from the Canary Islands to the west through the Gibraltar Straits to the Balearic Islands to the east, pulls the Spanish army's center of gravity in the Iberian Peninsula toward North Africa. Membership in NATO, even if outside the alliance's integrated military structure, naturally drives the Spanish army to look toward continental Europe.



The joint strategic plan identifies two main threats: a menace from the Warsaw Pact, which Spain shares with the other NATO member nations, and a menace specific to Spain which originates in North Africa.¹² The former is seen as the most dangerous but also more remote, while the latter is relatively less serious but more probable. The stationing of two of the Spanish army's three heavy divisions—the motorized division and the mechanized—and the concentration of airbases (Moron, Los Llanos, and Manises) and early warning radar stations in southeastern Spain reportedly conforms with the joint strategic plan's preferential emphasis on North African contingencies (see map). The establishment of a new armored cavalry brigade and a new fighter wing at Zaragoza—equipped with the latest F-18 fighters—suggests, however, that European contingencies are not being ignored.

NATO's endorsement of the missions proposed by the Spanish government to the alliance in January 1988—all of them centered, to some degree or another, on the Iberian Peninsula—undoubtedly represents a tacit acceptance by the allies of the central Spanish defense concept embodied in the Balearic/Canary islands axis, even if for good measure the axis has been expanded to encompass the entire Iberian Peninsula and not merely the Gibraltar Straits.¹³ And to that extent, the NATO missions which the Spanish armed forces may undertake in times of tension or war comfort the Spanish navy and air force in their role as the linchpin of Spanish defenses as well as the primary instruments of Spain's contribution to the common defense.¹⁴

However, the formulation of a Spanish "zone of strategic interest," extending well beyond the Balearic/Canary islands axis, and Spain's commitment to its WEU partners to assist them militarily in the defense of *their* borders in case of aggression, places the role of the army in Spanish defense planning in a new light. The tacit acceptance by the allies of the Balearic/Canary islands axis as the center of gravity of Spanish air and maritime operations would entail a corresponding tacit acceptance by Spain of the possibility, in times of tension or war, of projecting power forward—including Spanish ground forces—into and even beyond the Spanish zone of strategic interest.¹⁵ The participation of a Spanish navy carrier task group in the NATO maritime exercise *Sharp Spear 89* in the eastern Atlantic illustrates such a possibility, even though it does not in itself constitute a commitment to do so in wartime. Formally, Spain like France reserves for itself the decision of how its military forces might be employed in support of the common defense. Thus, the peculiar but pragmatic military relationship established between Spain and NATO would owe less to political compromise than to strategic convergence.

NATO, WEU, and CFE

Such factors as the long-term defense planning imperatives of NATO membership, the WEU commitment to defend forward, and the impending CFE

force reductions may combine to drive the Spanish army toward a smaller, more versatile force, configured for strategic movement (by road, rail, air, and sea) across Spanish territory as well as into continental Europe. Already, following the examples of the French *Force d'Action Rapide* and the Italian *Forza d'Intervento Rapido*, the Spanish army has been developing its own concept of a rapid-reaction force (*Fuerza de Intervención Rápida*, itself part of a larger joint-service rapid-intervention force (*Fuerza de Acción Rápida*) directly subordinated to the Chief of the Defense Staff.¹⁶ An ad hoc, task force-oriented rapid-reaction force—combining elements of the parachute brigade, the Spanish Legion, army aviation, the naval infantry, the navy, and the air force—was tested for the first time in 1988 during exercise *Firex 88*.¹⁷

Although there is too much uncertainty involved at this time in attempting to predict with confidence the future shape of NATO's conventional defense posture in the wake of a still hypothetical follow-on CFE agreement, given that an initial CFE agreement has yet to be secured in Vienna, it is not too early to speculate on the operational features that could characterize allied ground forces in the next decade and beyond. A lower density of in-place, forward-deployed forces in the Federal Republic of Germany (or the western regions of a unified Germany) in peacetime may place a premium upon the development of highly maneuverable armored cavalry, motorized infantry, and airmobile forces, capable of intra-continental rapid deployment over long distances.

The likely transition of the Soviet army to a force of smaller, strategically mobile, logistically self-contained combined-arms units, as well as the emergence of potential military threats on the southern periphery of Western Europe, also militates for the development of allied units with the capability to deploy on short notice to anywhere in Western Europe.¹⁸ Such units already exist in the shape of the French army's 4th Airmobile Division, 6th Light Armored Division, and 9th Marine Division, as well as the British army's 2d Infantry Division. Others are in the process of forming, such as the Franco-German brigade and the Italian army's new motorized brigades.¹⁹ By consolidating its wheeled armored fighting vehicles within an armored cavalry brigade and a motorized infantry brigade and converting its air-transportable brigade into a heliborne unit akin to the British army's new 24th Airmobile Brigade, the Spanish army could give its fledgling rapid-reaction force a genuine rapid deployment capability and substantial combat power for a relatively modest investment.

The proliferation among the armies of WEU member nations of relatively similar rapid deployment units would encourage the harmonization of force structures and the development of common operational procedures in order to facilitate combined operations, should governments decide to exercise such an option in a crisis.²⁰ The expanding network of rapid transit highways and railways in Western Europe, including Spain, represents a strategic mobility bonus which should be exploited.²¹ In the instance of Spain,

this would argue for strategically positioning its rapid-reaction units equipped with wheeled armored fighting vehicles along highways.

But light, rapidly deployable land forces are not a panacea. They generally have little staying power and are thus not well configured to mount a firm defense or perform counterattacks to repel an invading force. Wherever Spain may decide to meet a hypothetical aggression—east or west of the Rhine, north or south of the Pyrenees, north or south of the Gibraltar Straits—the Spanish army will still need a corps-size armored force using tracked vehicles, though, admittedly, not necessarily as large as the present three heavy divisions.

Thus, a light rapid-reaction force and a heavier, corps-size armored force—some nine to ten brigades total, to which would be added two mountain brigades—could represent an optimized force structure goal. Ideally, brigades belonging to the rapid-reaction force and to the corps would be compatible, in order to permit the creation of force packages configured to the requirements of specific contingencies. The five existing divisional headquarters could be disbanded, to accommodate manpower and budgetary constraints, in favor of a corps/brigade structure. And, in this remodeled Spanish army, a larger role might be given to professional soldiers and to conscripts voluntarily serving for some two years, on the model of the French army.

The convergence of mutual defense commitments, CFE force reductions, and ever-present budgetary and manpower constraints will probably accelerate the internationalization of Spain's security policy. It is a virtually irreversible process. The prospect of a comprehensive conventional arms control regime in Europe requires that NATO members anticipate the long-term defense planning implications of such a regime, and nowhere is the need greater than among allied land forces.²² At the same time, the prospect of a relatively more fluid European security landscape, with lower force densities at the line of contact between the two opposing alliances, and chronic instability in the Mediterranean basin militate for the development of power-projection capabilities versatile enough for war prevention in Europe and for out-of-area crisis management.

NOTES

The author wishes to thank the Spanish Strategic Studies Group (GEES) for its assistance in the preparation of this article.

1. For useful background information on the various dimensions of the Spanish security policy debate in the 1980s, particularly in regard to Spain's membership in NATO, see *España dentro de la Alianza Atlántica* (Madrid: Instituto de Cuestiones Internacionales, 1986); a long series of articles published in *El País* between 16 and 25 February 1986; and Gregory F. Treverton, *Spain: Domestic Politics and Security Policy*, Adelphi Paper 204 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, Spring 1986).

2. Marife Moreno, "Anchuras, un blanco difícil," *El País*, 24 July 1989; Juan Mendez, "Protesta en Morón contra la ampliación de la base militar," *El País*, 4 December 1989; Harry Debelius, "Spanish youth wooed with draft alternatives," *The Times*, 11 October 1989; and Miguel Gonzalez, "El jefe del Estado Mayor de Ejército reconoce que existe ansiedad y tensión entre sus subordinados," *El País*, 16 November 1989.

3. See Carlos Yarnoz, "España eliminará decenas de carros de combate al concluir la negociación sobre desarme en Europa," *El País*, 2 January 1989; and Ignacio Cembrero, "La negociación sobre desarme otorga a España un papel más relevante en Europa," *El País*, 28 November 1989.
4. Xavier I. Taibo, "The Spanish Army Today," *Armies & Weapons*, no. 28 (15 October-15 November 1976), pp. 38-44; and "Die spanischen Landstreitkräfte," *Soldat und Technik*, August 1984, pp. 422-25.
5. On the evolution of the French army since the end of the war in Algeria, see Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, "France," in *NATO-Warsaw Pact Force Mobilization*, ed. Jeffrey Simon (Washington: National Defense Univ. Press, 1988), pp. 269-316.
6. On bilateral defense cooperation between Spain and France, see: Jean-François Daguzan, "La Coopération Militaire avec la France: Première Rupture du Monopole U.S.," *Le Système de Défense de l'Espagne, 1939-1984*, Thèse pour le Doctorat d'Etat de Science Politique, Tome II (Paris: Université de Paris-Sud, March 1986), pp. 632-41. On bilateral exercises between the Spanish and French armies, see "Galia X," *Armées d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 110 (May 1986), p. 14; and "Galia-X-86," *Europäische Wehrkunde*, June 1986, p. 346.
7. "Spain Sidles Into NATO," *The Economist*, 23 November 1985, pp. 37-38; and Xavier I. Taibo, "The Spanish Army Approaches its Future," *Jane's Military Review*, 1986 (London: Jane's, 1986), pp. 53-68.
8. Carlos Yarnoz, "El Ejército ha reducido los generales de 250 a 143," *El País*, 19 December 1988.
9. Carlos Yarnoz, "Defensa pretende una segunda reducción del Ejército, pese a la oposición de los generales," *El País*, 4 December 1988.
10. Francisco L. de Sepúlveda, "Restructuring Spain's Defense Organization," *International Defense Review*, 17 (October 1984), 1431-37.
11. "Tartesos 85," *Reconquista*, no. 419 (November 1985), pp. 32-33; and Alfredo Florensa, "Prueba a gran escala de los mandos operativos," *Revista Española de Defensa*, no. 21 (November 1989), pp. 16-21.
12. Carlos Yarnoz, "El nuevo Plan Estratégico será el primero en referirse a la aportación a la OTAN," *El País*, 14 February 1988.
13. See José Uxo Palasi, "El eje Baleares-Estrecho-Canarias como principal lineamiento de la defensa española," *España dentro de la Alianza Atlántica*, op. cit., pp. 47-63; and José Uxo Palasi, "El espacio estratégico español, hoy," *Política Exterior*, 1 (Spring 1987), 208-22.
14. On the Spanish missions, of which there are six, see Juan Vicente Boo, "Ojeda: 'La URSS sigue realizando un rearme general,'" *ABC*, 2 June 1988; and "Spain's Military Role within the NATO Alliance," *International Defense Review*, 21 (July 1988), 771-72.
15. Carlos Yarnoz, "El Gobierno acepta que soldados españoles intervengan en misiones de la OTAN fuera del territorio nacional," *El País*, 24 February 1988; Carlos Yarnoz, "Serra distingue entre 'tránsito' y 'escala' al hablar del paso de armas nucleares por territorio español," *El País*, 20 April 1988; Carlos Yarnoz, "Serra dice que no se enviarán soldados españoles a Centroeuropa," *El País*, 21 April 1988; and Carlos Yarnoz, "El ingreso en la UEO amplía la posibilidad de que el Ejército actúe en Centroeuropa," *El País*, 26 May 1988.
16. José Uxo Palasi, "Concepto de la Fuerza de Despliegue Rápido," *El Debate Estratégico y Táctico dentro de la Alianza Atlántica* (Madrid: Instituto de Cuestiones Internacionales, 1989), pp. 65-80; Roman David Ortiz Marina, "Una Fuerza de Despliegue Rápido para España?" *ICE-Revista de Economía*, no. 668 (April 1989), pp. 177-90; and Carlos Yarnoz, "La Fuerza de Intervención será la aportación de Tierra a la OTAN y podrá actuar fuera de España," *El País*, 9 December 1988.
17. Carlos Yarnoz, "La influencia de la futura Fuerza de Acción Rápida (FAR)," *El País*, 4 December 1988.
18. On Soviet force restructuring, see Kenneth M. Keltner and Graham H. Turbiville, Jr., "Soviet Reinforcement in Europe," *Military Review*, 67 (April 1987), 34-43; and James Sherr, *The Impact of Current Developments in Soviet Defence Policy* (RMA Sandhurst: Soviet Studies Research Centre, December 1988).
19. On the French *Force d'Action Rapide*, the Franco-German brigade, and British reinforcement concepts, see Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, "Countering Soviet Encirclement Operations: Emerging NATO Concepts," *International Defense Review*, 21 (November 1988), 1413-18; and Mr. Speed, *State of European Security-Intervention Forces and Reinforcement for the Centre and the North*, Document 1183 (Paris: Assembly of West European Union, 26 April 1989), pp. 14-17.
20. A vehicle for pursuing interoperability among rapid deployment forces might be the FINABEL Coordination Committee. The committee, established in 1953, comprises the army (land forces) chiefs of staff of the WEU members. Its mission is to develop common armaments specifications and operational procedures. Jean Laimay, "FINABEL Coordination Committee," *NATO's Fifteen Nations*, 27 (August-September 1982), 86-88.
21. See, for example, *Proposals for a European High-Speed Network* (Brussels: Community of European Railways, January 1989).
22. The need for considering the future shape of the Spanish army was recently conceded by the Spanish Minister of Defense; see "Serra considera necesaria la reestructuración del Ejército," *El País*, 29 November 1989. A reorganization of the Spanish army along lines similar to those proposed in this article is discussed in: Andrés Ortega, "Ejércitos, ¿para qué?," *El País*, 25 March 1990.