

# Portugal and Spain Sent Troops to Participate in Provocative Drills in Lithuania

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*Tensions are on the rise in the Baltics. Recent NATO military exercises in Lithuania show that the organization really plans to maintain a constant siege strategy, with no interruptions. Troops from the US, Canada, Portugal, and Spain participated in the last week of October in extremely complex military operations in that region, carrying out air warfare exercises in order to train Western forces for a possible war situation. Interestingly, the tests were conducted with discretion, having only been revealed in early November. The intense participation of Portuguese and Spanish militaries reveals a worrying process of adhesion of European countries without great defense potential to NATO’s anti-Russian speeches.*

On October 29, NATO war exercises were carried out in the Baltic Sea, with the participation only of American, Canadian, Portuguese, and Spanish military personnel and equipment. The main purpose of the operation was to carry out a comprehensive test of air policing and train tactics of “anti-surface” war, which is a modality of combat using air weapons against targets at sea or on land. Among the various points of the tests, the media was informed that the main ones were to strengthen techniques to integrate air and naval vehicles and weapons during combat situations, optimize location and identification procedures, and qualify NATO troops for the use of anti-surface weapons, which is still a less worked topic than direct naval combat or land warfare.

In addition to usual American and Canadian equipment and vehicles, the large-scale use of Portuguese and Spanish weapons surprised experts. The Portuguese Air Force F-16M fighters acted in combination with the Portuguese frigate NRP Corte Real F332 in operations simulating an air and naval war scenario. The NRP frigate is one of the most powerful weapons of the Portuguese Navy, having extensive electronic warfare and anti-missile systems, defense and long-range surveillance equipment, in addition to heavy artillery pieces, Harpoon and Sea Sparrow missiles and MK46 torpedo tubes. The frigate’s crew includes nearly 200 people and has Lynx Mk95 helicopters among its equipment.

The Spanish frigate ESPS Admiral Juan de Borbón also participated in the operation. ESPS’

F-100 class ships are among the most advanced weapons in the entire Spanish naval arsenal, having equipment similar to those of the Portuguese frigate. The USS Arleigh Burke DDG-51 and Canadian HMCS Fredericton FFH-37 frigates completed the drills' scenario.

Although exercises restricted to a few countries occasionally occur, in general, NATO tests, particularly those carried out in the Baltics, mobilize troops from many states. This test, however, seems to have been almost completely limited to the troops of the Iberian Peninsula, with a role of coordination and leadership operated by the forces of Washington and Ottawa. The case is quite curious because it reveals something beyond the mere intention of NATO to keep troops in the Baltics constantly, signaling a possible interest on the part of Lisbon and Madrid in maintaining an active participation in the European military scenario.

Obviously, it is the just for every state to want to expand its military participation in its regional space, but the situation must be analyzed taking into account the intentions behind such operations. It is a well-known fact that NATO attitudes in the Baltic States and across Eastern Europe are focused on provoking Russia, creating an atmosphere of tension and hostility, in addition to a policy of siege, in countries geographically closest to the biggest geopolitical rival of the US.

These measures are "justified" by the discourse of the supposed "Russian threat", which is increasingly recognized as fraud. The growth of a critical view of NATO's role in Europe is evident, with a diminishing interest on the part of the largest European states to participate in operations that attend only to Washington's strategic plans. Currently, France, which is the greatest military power in the European space, advocates the creation of a European military organization, independent from NATO. In contrast, apparently, smaller states with low military potential are acting in the opposite direction and seeking to expand their role in the Western alliance.

It is a natural process that with the decreasing participation of the greatest European powers in NATO, some weaker states seek to increase their role, in search of international status, expansion of regional influence and investments in the military industry by Washington. But it is clear that Portugal and Spain have more to lose than gain by getting involved in these disputes.

Historically, the space in which Portugal and Spain try to assert influence is North Africa, trying to maintain friendly ties with nations in the Mediterranean and without involvement in conflicts at the other pole of the European continent. Rivalries with Russia were never part of the Iberian reality. Portugal and Spain are historically neutral nations in major global conflicts, having even refused to participate in World War II. To attempt a more active role in NATO would be to break with a diplomatic tradition of neutrality and friendship that makes these countries great peaceful places on the European arena.

Furthermore, it is evident that these countries are unable to participate militarily in large-scale operations, considering that even their most advanced equipment - the frigates seen in Lithuania - are far below the current military technology of the great powers. So, indeed, Lisbon and Madrid think they are acting strategically, but they are being used and harmed by NATO.

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