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## INTERVIEW

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### GENERAL GUILLERMO GARCÍA FERRER, DIRECTOR OF MANAGEMENT AT NATO'S JOINT FORCE COMMAND BRUNSSUM (JFCBS)

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# “ADAPTABILITY IS KEY”

“Current operations, in scenarios that are often unpredictable, require greater agility from NATO headquarters”

**F**OR the past year, General García Ferrer has been stationed in Brunssum, a Dutch town near the German border, as Director of Management at NATO's Joint Force Command, and during that time he has seen how “incredibly well prepared” our Armed Forces are to face any challenge. “A soldier never stops learning”, says Brigadier General Guillermo García Ferrer, “and in these postings outside our comfort zone, working through other languages and with countries that have different cultures to ours, it is a real privilege to exercise the committed and close leadership that is so typical of us Spaniards”.

Born in Madrid in 1970, with close ties to Murcia and Mallorca, General García Ferrer has been posted in the Balkans, Lebanon and Afghanistan. He says that he has thoroughly enjoyed his assignments with the Paratroopers Brigade, and that having helped to create the UME “from scratch” —a unit that has already celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary— was a real challenge. “My time in the Operations Command helped me to get to know and understand other service branches, and my time as a colonel in Murcia helped me to combine operability with the management of barrack services and interact with the civilian society we serve”, he adds.

**—What does this experience mean to Spanish soldiers stationed at this headquarters?**

—They consider it a privilege both pro-

fessionally and personally. Our colleagues from other nations greatly appreciate the commitment, generosity and friendliness of the Spanish soldiers. I would like to draw attention to the recognition of our culture, as evidenced by the numerous social events that each contingent organises for the entire community, and thanks to which our military personnel and their families integrate into this headquarters almost immediately. Furthermore, the population in the south of the Netherlands, where Brunssum is located, shares many common traits with us, which facilitates such integration.

**—The Joint Force Command Brunssum (JFCBS) is one of the three operational commands in NATO's military structure. What distinguishes it from those in Naples and Norfolk?**

—Our headquarters leads NATO's primary effort on the eastern flank. This is where the threat is perceived to be closest and where deterrence effects are most important. It is a huge responsibility that we take on with full commitment and dedication. We are aware that we cannot let society down and we do our best to be prepared for any scenario.

**—Why is the position of Director of Management becoming so important in the various NATO institutions?**

—Our headquarters' role is to plan and conduct military operations focused on Central and Eastern Europe. This is ca-

ried out through the traditional directorates for operations, planning and support. However, it is crucial to ensure that we can plan and conduct operations regardless of the circumstances, and this is achieved through Enterprise activities, which are basically in charge of implementing organisational changes throughout NATO's structure. This headquarters is taking the most important steps in order to establish this structure, which is crucial not only for change but also for the transformation of the entire unit.

**—What are those Enterprise activities that fall under your responsibility?**

—They are the ones that not only enable us to plan and conduct operations, but also all those central policies aimed at transforming the headquarters. As I mentioned before, this endeavour encompasses all the responsibilities that have a cross-cutting impact on the headquarters.

The list of responsibilities is extremely varied. They range from the implementation of NATO's core transformation processes, such as warfighting, multidomain operational environment, resilience, innovation and digitalisation, to others of minor scale but equal importance: the drafting of general directives, governance, knowledge and information management, infrastructure, security, protocol, base services, morale and welfare, relations with local authorities, formalities with the international school, etc.



**—What is the meaning and scope of the term ‘warfighting’ established in NATO in recent years?**

—This is perhaps one of the most important responsibilities I have to promote. The term ‘warfighting’ encompasses many aspects, from adopting a mindset focused on being prepared for any scenario to implementing resilient systems that ensure the continuity of our critical processes in the event of a physical or cyber attack.

The key to success has been to take a pragmatic approach with multiple options at the ready so that the JFCBS commander can determine the best course of action to deal with any incident or circumstance, even in a preventive way. The key to current operations is not so much the preparation of complex scenarios as the agility and adap-

tability of the entire headquarters to respond to scenarios that are often unpredictable.

**—How important is the word ‘innovation’ at NATO headquarters?**

—We are seeing how new technologies,

**General García Ferrer is responsible for all activities aimed at transforming the Allied headquarters**

especially disruptive ones, are currently progressing. This will not stop, and neither will we. It is very important to connect users (warfighters) with innovative companies and academia so that we can leverage cutting-edge technologies in artificial intelligence, protection and situational awareness. These three areas will really give us an edge in decision-making.

Therefore, we have already organised several events with key NATO players, from companies and academia, with very good results, and we are developing a digital platform that will allow us to facilitate and maintain contact with them so that we can always keep abreast of the latest developments. This is how we make innovation one of our commander's priorities.

### **“The JFCBS headquarters is a first mover in NATO in the implementation of artificial intelligence tools”**

**—The multidomain operational environment is another concept that has gained relevance in the Alliance. How does it affect operations?**

—The real added value of an operational headquarters like ours is to produce effects by conducting multidomain operations. Basically, we are the ones who ensure that the desired effects are obtained in order to achieve the objectives of the military campaign. We carry out this task by converging the actions of subordinate commands associated with both traditional domains of operations (MARCOM, LANDCOM, AIRCOM) and non-traditional domains, such as space and cyberspace. We also make sure that the actions carried out by countries and different sectors of civil society complement and converge with these effects.

A very good example of the complexity of this task is the counter drone protection on the eastern front. It is our responsibility to make sure that the effect of denying

access into our airspace is translated into different actions such as early detection, denial of spectrum access, infrastructure protection or even using force to shoot down a drone. All these measures require multi-level coordination, with JFCBS as the main conductor.

**—Managing transformation is also part of your remit. What is being done in this area?**

—Transformation is one of the main lines of effort of this headquarters and is included in the commander's operational directive. In other words, transformation seeks to change the very nature of this headquarters. Disruptive technologies or multidomain operations cannot be integrated without bringing about profound changes in the way we work. The key to success is knowing how to manage that change so that all the members of our unit feel part of the same project. Therefore, it is important to have good communication

and for everyone to be aware that transformation needs to be addressed urgently. In Brunssum, we hold mass meetings to inform analysts and get feedback on how to improve and speed up the transformation process.

**—What positive developments are being made in the use of cutting-edge digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence?**

—The JFCBS headquarters is a first mover in NATO in the implementation of artificial intelligence tools. Specifically, we are adopting several features of the MAVEN system, which is utilised at numerous Allied nation headquarters. A huge effort has been made to determine which work processes can benefit from this system by using existing databases. For instance, tasks, such as the targeting process, that used to take hours or even days to complete can now be carried out in minutes. This represents a significant advantage in decision-making, as this process will become faster and more accurate.

**—One of your tasks is to manage support with the framework nation in operations under JFCBS command. How does this work in the case of the Spanish-led NATO Multinational Brigade in Slovakia?**

—One of the reasons why Spain opted for the position I am now holding is because it has about 2,000 troops deployed on the eastern flank. I therefore believe that my main responsibility is to protect Spain's interests as the framework nation of the forces stationed in Slovakia. My post allows me to take part in the decision-making process of the JFCBS, and my opinion is heard, not only as Director of Management but also as a national advisor. During my recent visit to the forces deployed in Slovakia, I was able to see first-hand the challenges and needs on the ground.

**Santiago F. del Vado**  
**Photos: EMAD**

