
ARMED FORCES

PRESENCE AT SEA

The Spanish maritime group
during its second deployment
this year in Mediterranean
waters.



The 'Dédalo' Expeditionary Strike Group demonstrates Spain's naval power and its commitment to NATO deterrence and defence



FOR the third time in 2025, the Spanish Navy deployed the 'Dédalo' Expeditionary Strike Group, which operated in Atlantic waters from 28 August to 24 October 2025, with the purpose of underscoring our commitment to international maritime security, reinforcing interoperability with Allied navies and contributing to collective deterrence and defence. Led by Rear Admiral Antonio González-Tánago, commander of the Fleet's Amphibious and Force Projection Group, this battlegroup was made up of amphibious assault ship LPD *Galicía* (L-51), and frigates F-102 *Almirante Juan de Borbón* and F-86 *Canarias*. During the Atlantic passage and return, the 'Dédalo 25-3' was supported by a combat supply ship (CSS), the *Cantabria* being the CSS utilised for the first part of the voyage.

This was the third and final deployment of the 'Dédalo' Expeditionary Group in 2025. The first one took place from 30 January to 14 March 2025, marking a milestone with its participation in Steadfast Dart 25, NATO's main exercise this year. The second one took place from 17 June to 9 July 2025 in Atlantic and Mediterranean waters. In the third deployment, the Dédalo reached the east coast of the United States to take part in exercise UNITAS, one of the longest-running multinational maritime exercises.

ALLIED EXERCISES

During the second phase, the units of the battlegroup carried out various operations in highly complex scenarios, both within the framework of the Alliance and jointly with the Spanish Army and Air and Space Force, and in bilateral activities with France and Portugal.

This second phase involved 1,800 members of the Navy, all from LHD *Juan Carlos I* —the flagship of the 'Dédalo'—, which transported fighter jets and helicopters; F-103 *Blas de Lezo*, with improved anti-aircraft defence capabilities; LSS *Cantabria*; a reinforced landing battalion; and an airborne unit. Some of the exercises involved the participation of S-81 *Isaac Peral* submarine, amphibious assault ships *Gali-*

cia and *Castilla*, and F-110 *Santa María*. In terms of materiel and equipment, the participation of the Harrier AV8B+ aircraft, the SH60B, SH60F and H135 helicopters, the Marine Corps vehicles and the landing craft of the Naval Beach Group were particularly noteworthy.

On 26 and 27 June 2025, the battlegroup joined the Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO (STRIKFORNATO), based in Oeiras (Portugal), to carry out joint operational activities Neptune Strike 25 in the Tyrrhenian Sea. During these activities, the ships comprising the 'Dédalo' carried out long-range live-fire strikes from the central Mediterranean on training areas in Croatia, Slovakia and Romania. In this context, the flight missions of the ship-board fighter jets that took off from LHD *Juan Carlos I* were supported on shore by multinational joint terminal attack controllers (JTACs) in the three aforementioned countries.

JTACs are qualified to direct the actions of military aircraft involved in close air support and other offensive air operations from a forward defence post. In the case of Slovakia and Romania, the JTACs were Spanish military personnel from the NATO missions deployed in both countries. Furthermore, since these exercises also exploited the airspace of several countries, a crucial part of these missions was in-flight refuelling using multipurpose tanker aircraft provided by the air forces.

"The transfer of authority from our task force —emphasises Rear Admiral González-Tánago— highlights Spain's ongoing commitment to NATO's deterrence and assurance measures". He also believes that "our forces' increased capabilities are a result of the recent successful process of improvement and adaptation to new global security challenges", and emphasises that "combined and joint multi-domain operations with Allies promote interoperability and mutual trust".

During this activity and while crossing the Strait of Gibraltar, personnel and equipment from the Army's 4th Artillery Regiment (RACTA IV) aboard F-103 *Blas de Lezo* were integrated into the 'Dédalo', providing its surveillance and control sensors. Thanks

Three deployments were scheduled for 2025, lasting a total of five months

to this contribution, the maritime task force was able to monitor the passage through the strait and thus ensure its security in this navigation area.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

The 'Dédalo' Expeditionary Strike Group carried out various activities with other units of the Spanish Armed Forces, including the training of pilots of the Army's AB212 helicopters from the 4th BHELMA Battalion —integrated in the Canary Islands command—, which landed on the flight deck of LHD *Juan Carlos I*. These helicopters had recently been transferred from the Navy to the Army.

Furthermore, the 'Dédalo' carried out operational activities with F-18 aircraft from the 46th Wing, based at Gando, in Las Palmas (Canary Islands). This coordination involved various tactical actions between the Air and Space Force fighter jets and the AV8B+ Harriers, as well as the participation of a SAR Super Puma heli-



A soldier from the Spanish Marine Brigade signals an LCM-1E landing craft from the Naval Beach Group carrying two tactical vehicles.

copter, also based at Gando air base. As part of the joint actions with the Air and Space Force, the AV8B+ aircraft carried out a mission over land, executing long-range air interdiction flights to engage protected targets without being detected.

In addition to operating with a Portuguese maritime patrol aircraft, the 'Dédalo' collaborated with French destroyer *Chevalier Paul* in surface warfare exercises, aerial combat, replenishment at sea and external assistance to CSS *Cantabria* by crewmembers of the French ship.

LAND PROJECTION

In this edition, the *Dédalo* deployed its capability to project the maritime force from sea to shore, with the Marine Corps units playing a very prominent role. In the Balearic Islands, they carried out an amphibious raid with a landing to take up positions ashore, and, in early July, amphibious, air, naval and land operations were conducted in the Atlantic for three days.

During those days, the 'Dédalo' Landing Force carried out a joint forcible entry exercise with an amphibious force in a high-intensity environment, subsequently confronting an opposing force that was in a defensive position and using drones. The amphibious operation involved the projection of a landing force via surface and air vectors. The primary objective was to secure a beachhead to capture critical infrastructure, enable the landing of larger forces, and ultimately ensure the acquisition of targets at greater depth.

Spanish and US marines conduct amphibious operations on Onslow Beach, Camp Lejeune, during exercise Unitas.



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Spanish ships are being deployed in highly complex scenarios to reinforce Spain's naval presence abroad and support collective allied deterrence.



The S-81 *Isaac Peral* submarine, which participated in certain exercises during the *Dédalo*'s second annual deployment, sails on the surface. On the right, Three Harrier fighter jets on the flight deck of the *Juan Carlos I*. In the background, the city of Ceuta.



This operation, carried out from the *Galicia* and the *Juan Carlos I*, involved marines, ship manoeuvring personnel, vehicle drivers, assault shipping, landing craft and command posts, as well as the Headquarters that coordinated the actions. It was used to fine-tune the Landing Force for offensive action.

On 8 July 2025, the day before the 'Dédalo' returned to Rota naval base, this force performed a landing demonstration on La Malagueta beach, Malaga, in front of numerous spectators. In the presence of the *Juan Carlos I* and the *Galicia*, two Harriers took off in a simulated hostage rescue scenario in which two Spanish aid workers had been kidnapped by a paramilitary group.

Members of the Naval Beach Group then arrived at La Malagueta on board SH60F and H135 helicopters, along with the craft responsible for transporting land vehicles.

Prior to deployment, 'Dédalo' units participated in Sinkex 25, an exercise in which live ammunition was used to neutralise and sink a decommissioned ship. This type of exercise allows the Spanish Navy to test the operational effectiveness of its weapon systems, coordinate joint fire between ships, aircraft and other platforms, and train crews in an environment realistically simulating a naval combat situation.

UNITAS 25

The 'Dédalo 25-3' Expeditionary Strike Group departed from Norfolk Naval Base in Virginia, USA, and travelled across the Atlantic Ocean for seventeen days before reaching Spain on 24 October 2025. The maritime units that made up the group — amphibious assault ship *Galicia* and frigates *Canarias* and *Almirante Juan de Borbón* — sailed together for most of the journey, until the last few days, when they separated to enter different ports. The first two ships docked at Rota naval station, whereas the third did so at Ferrol naval base. The 1,100 sailors and marines who embarked on 28 August 2025 for the third and final phase of this year's deployment of the 'Dédalo' had previously spent two months working hard at sea. This de-

1,100 Spanish sailors and marines trained alongside military personnel from 25 different countries

ployment allowed them to train side by side with units from 26 different countries in Unitas, the world's oldest international maritime exercise, organised by the US Navy and the US Marine Corps.

During these months, the 'Dédalo' crossed the Atlantic twice, reaching the east coast of the United States, demonstrating its capability to "project an expeditionary force far from our country for an extended period of time", says the commander of this third activation of the Expeditionary Strike Group, Rear Admiral Antonio González-Tánago. "This capability —he adds— offers the Spanish administration a wide range of options for military response and defence diplomacy".

A few days after arriving in Rota, the head of the 'Dédalo 25-3', aboard the *Galicia*, was "very satisfied" with how the deployment had been carried out. It had three objectives, he explained. "First, to promote interoperability with friendly and Allied countries. Second, to cooperate in the deterrence and defence of the Atlantic Alliance and that of our own country. And third, to contribute to more secure seas through maritime and air surveillance".

In addition to the aforementioned maritime units and their crews, the deployment included a Marine Corps reinforced landing battalion, two operational security teams from the Spanish Navy's Shield Force, as

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Formation of a multinational surface action group in Atlantic waters during exercise Unitas. On the right, Spanish marines train at Camp Lejeune.



Jorge Borjas/USMC



Franco Levis/USMC



EMAD

Spanish marines wait on the deck of the *Galicia* ready to board an SH-60F helicopter.



Eduardo Delatorre/USMC

Demonstration of US logistics drones. On the left, an LCM-1E prepares to go ashore.

The 'Dédalo' Expeditionary Combat Group combines naval power, air projection and land-landing capabilities

well as SH-60F troop transport helicopters and SH-60B anti-submarine and surface warfare helicopters. The ships did not need to make an intermediate stopover in the Atlantic because the combat supply ship *Cantabria* supported them logistically on their way back to Spain. It carried out three fuellings at sea (FAS), supplying more than 1.2 million litres of diesel, and also conducted communications and replenishments at sea (RAS).

INTERNATIONAL EXERCISE

One of the objectives of this third deployment of the 'Dédalo' was to reach the US

coast and participate in the 66th edition of exercise *Unitas* alongside 25 other countries, most of them American. However, before reaching the area of operations, the 'Dédalo' carried out an intensive training programme on the high seas, involving air-naval operations, and escort and maritime interdiction exercises, among others. It also refuelled at sea with replenishment vessel *USNS Leroy Grumman*.

Once on the US coast, the marines first landed at Camp Lejeune training area in Jacksonville, North Carolina, where they worked bilaterally with the US Marine Corps and multilaterally with the oth-

er American countries. They carried out various amphibious operations, ranging from live fire and urban combat activities to close air support.

While the marines remained at Camp Lejeune, the Spanish ships headed for Naval Station Mayport (Florida), where they carried out fraternisation activities with all the countries participating in *Unitas*. Back at sea, the ships sailed for fifteen days. Each of the frigates joined a group, and Rear Admiral González-Tánago, aboard the *Galicia*, assumed command of the amphibious force, which included the Guatemalan ship *Quetzal*, the Mexican



Hunter-Kuester/USMC

A US marine holds a safety briefing prior to urban combat training.



EMAD

Spanish marines disembark from a US Osprey aircraft at Camp Lejeune.



EMAD

Mortar firing exercise on a mobile platform, one of the drills carried out by the US Marine Corps.



Combat supply ship *Cantabria* refuels frigates *Canarias* and *Almirante Juan de Borbón* on their return journey.

Navy ship *Papaloapan*, and USS *Arlington*. Once in the area of operations, Spanish and American marines re-embarked to conduct a landing operation from the sea with a tactical objective.

The 'Dédalo' Group led the planning and execution of the ship-to-shore movement involving more than 300 marines and 30 vehicles. The action started from the Galicia, which projected its LCM-1E class amphibious mechanised landing craft and SH-60F helicopters; from USS *Arlington*, with its air cushion vehicles and Osprey aircraft; and from the *Papaloapan*.

"It has been a great opportunity to show the capabilities of the Spanish Navy to numerous countries that we are not used to working with", said the commander of the 'Dédalo'. "Although, we often work with the United States and the Alliance, dealing with other American navies is not that easy. However, we are united by extraordinary bonds of friendship and history, which have helped us to establish a very special relationship of affection that we have all enjoyed immensely", he added. In his opinion, sharing a common language makes their job easier. "Furthermore, the procedures, tactics and techniques used by sailors around the world are very similar", he continued.

The exercise ended with a ceremony aboard aircraft carrier USS *Harry S. Truman*, presided over by the commander of the US Fourth Fleet, Rear Admiral Carlos Sardiello, who emphasised that *Unitas* "is a legacy of naval camaraderie that we have built, thanks to the maritime forces of partner nations coming from distant places". He also highlighted the significance of this exercise, particularly this year, as it is the 250th anniversary of the US Navy.

Representing Spain was Fleet Admiral José Enrique Delgado Roig, who met aboard the *Galicia* with the commanders of the international group and the deputy commander of the NATO Joint Force Command Norfolk, Admiral James Morley.

DEFENCE DIPLOMACY

During their deployment in the United States, crew members of the 'Dédalo 25-3' paid tribute to leading seamen José Charlín Bouza and José García López, and to Marine private Jaime Doltre Folgueres, all of whom died in the naval battle of Santiago de Cuba in 1898 and are buried at Portsmouth Naval Hospital. "It was a very touching event —said the Group commander— as they are part of the Spanish military men who have given their lives for Spain in many parts of the world".

The homage ceremony was part of the defence diplomacy or strategic communication activities organised in this kind of deployment, which include high-level relations with local authorities, receptions for ambassadors and participation in cultural events.

Admiral González-Tánago highlighted the efforts and dedication of the sailors throughout this deployment. "We have amazing ships, however ships are nothing without their crews who work tirelessly, sometimes in very harsh weather, leaving their families behind on shore". "Without these families —he concluded— without their support from afar, it would be very difficult to do our job, to defend Spain from the sea".

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Photos: Spanish Navy



Rear Admiral Antonio González-Tánago with the deputy commander of the NATO Joint Force Command Norfolk, Admiral James Morley.