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Spain Agrees to Increased US Military Presence

By Alejandro-Lopez

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Spain has signed a new bilateral defence agreement to allow the United States military permanent use of the Morón air base in Seville, with increased numbers of troops and aircraft.

Under the new agreement, Washington will be able to deploy up to 2,200 soldiers (up from 850), 36 aircraft (up from 17) and another 800 military personnel during times of crisis. The base will

also house the Special-Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force Crisis Response-Africa, which will be subordinated to the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) and can be deployed to anywhere in Africa in nine hours.

Two additional destroyers equipped with the Aegis radar system will be stationed at the Rota Naval Base, bringing the total to four. They will be part of the Missile Defence System, which forms an essential component of the Pentagon's plans for fighting an offensive nuclear war against Russia and China, aimed at neutralising their military's capacity to respond to a US nuclear first-strike.

Popular Party (PP) Defence Minister Pedro Morenés justified the agreement saying, "Given the worsening situation in further areas close to our territory, we have reached an agreement for the US to expand its capabilities in Morón and make it permanent ... strengthening bilateral cooperation in defense, increasing the capacity to protect the citizens of the United States, Spain and our allies and effective support for regional stability and common mechanisms of peace in Africa, southern Europe and the Middle East."

This argument turns reality on its head. The worsening situation he talks about is entirely due to the series of imperialist wars and regime-change operations led by the US and its European allies, among whom Madrid was one of its greatest cheerleaders and collaborators. The destruction of Iraqi, Syrian and Libyan societies has destabilized the region, turning millions into refugees, and strengthened Islamist groups.

The chaos that has ensued is being exploited by the imperialist powers to further subordinate and plunder their former colonies in the Middle East and Africa under the guise of dealing with "security threats" and "solving the refugee problem."

Rather than protect Spanish citizens, the new agreement increases the military threat to the 1.5 million people living around the Morón Air Base and the 300,000 near Rota—especially as the US and its European allies recklessly escalate the confrontation with nuclear-armed Russia and China.

The history of these US bases is tied up with Spain's geo-strategic location in case of war with Russia. Under the 1953 Madrid Pacts, agreed with the dictator General Francisco Franco, four US military bases were constructed in exchange for economic and military aid, and de-facto international rehabilitation after years of isolation following the Second World War, when Franco tacitly backed Nazi Germany, although formally neutral. Spain was integrated into the Western defence system aimed at the Soviet Union without becoming a member of NATO.

After Franco's death, the Socialist Party (PSOE) government, having previously pledged to oppose NATO membership, called a referendum in 1986. Despite a huge media campaign and near-unanimous support from the political parties, only 52.6 percent voted in support of membership.

The growing importance of Morón and Rota bases for the Pentagon is part of the imperialist powers' new "Scramble for Africa"—a major goal to thwart China, which has emerged as the continent's leading trade partner, eclipsing the US.

Since the US-NATO led overthrow of Libya's Colonel Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, Western interventions on the continent have multiplied. The US now has a military presence in Congo, Central African Republic, Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Uganda. In Djibouti, its military base now has 4,000 troops. France, the UK and other former colonial powers have also intervened on the continent.

Madrid is anxious not to be left out of this new re-division and plundering of Africa. Last year, the state-aligned think tank Real Instituto Elcano published, "Towards a Strategic Renewal of Spanish Foreign Policy," insisting that Spain "has to elaborate an integral strategy of action in the area of Sahel, from the Gulf of Guinea to the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa ... considering that the business ties between Sub-Saharan Africa and Spain are intensifying rapidly."

A further publication from the Institute, "Spain looking South: from the Mediterranean to the Sahel," examined the threats, interests and opportunities in the region. It declared that the "pivot to the South has been justified on the basis of the risks that dominate the region. However, we should debate how to take advantage of economic opportunities in this turn."

After detailing the abundant mineral, oil and other resources on the continent, the authors bemoan the fact that Spain's position "is precarious," with only 1.5 percent of its exports and 3.7 percent of its imports coming from sub-Saharan Africa. The document spells out the need for a National Security Strategy to increase Spain's economic interests in the area and for Spain to stop acting in Africa within the framework of "other actors" such as NATO, the EU or France, and establish "its own network of influence, both in the civil and the military plane."

Against the backdrop of growing militarism and threat of war, the pseudo-left has reacted with silence, or even support.

Podemos, a party that has become a key part of the political establishment, and now, as a result of last month's elections, governs regions, cities and towns across Spain, alone or in coalition, is heavily promoting patriotism and courting the military. It boasts of having its own "circles" (affinity groups) within the armed forces. Its leader, Pablo Iglesias, has stated that the army is necessary to maintain national sovereignty and that if he had to increase the Ministry of Defence's budget, "I would do it." Last October, the local branch of Podemos in Rota refused to join the annual protest outside the naval base, claiming that the facility "creates jobs in all the neighbouring towns and economic activity in the region."

The Stalinist-led United Left (IU) has criticized the new bilateral defence agreement with the US because it "does not respond to Spain's interests" and accused the government of "complete submission" and "shoddy patriotism."

Rather than expressing the hostility of the Spanish workers to war and militarism, the Stalinists aim at giving Spain a more independent role in its pursuit of imperialist aims, rather than direct

alignment with the US. This is in line with growing voices for Spain to have its own military influence outside the European Union and NATO.