



CENTRO DE EXCELÊNCIA JEAN MONNET JEAN MONNET CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

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Executive summary

Participation in international missions has become one of the strategic axis of Portuguese foreign policy and an important way for pursuing the national interest. The latter has been gradually emphasizing the affirmation of Portugal's presence in the world, in a logic of solidarity and cooperation in the context of the network of alliances and international organizations of which it is part, in order to contribute to the promotion of international peace and security. In this context, the Portuguese Armed Forces and, here in particular, the National Detached Forces (FND), play a fundamental role in the affirmation of Portugal as a co-producer of international security. However, the complex articulation of objectives, priorities and capacities, as well as Portugal's international commitments, have made it difficult to understand the contribution of the FND, as part of an articulated and coherent foreign policy effort, limiting the perspectives and opportunities generated by the participation of Portugal in peace missions. It is essential that Portugal, within the constraints arising from its geographical and operational limits, works on the articulation and integration of all its lines and instruments of foreign policy. Without this articulation, the sectoral strategies for asserting Portugal in the world and for fulfilling the national interest, become insufficient. They reveal limits in generating a coherent whole, thus contributing to the understanding that the options taken regarding the FND are dispersed and do not comply with a clear policy strategy. Furthermore, it is essential to improve aspects related to communication between various actors and political dimensions, but also with epistemic communities and civil society more broadly. This effort is essential to generate an integrated strategic space that facilitates the prioritization of different geographic contexts, a better understanding of opportunities generated by the FND, a greater articulation effort for benefiting from these same opportunities, but also for greater recognition and legitimacy of the importance of the Armed Forces for the accomplishment of Portugal's national interest.



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Portugal's participation in peace missions: objectives, priorities and capabilities

The mapping of the participation of the Portuguese Armed Forces in international missions highlights the existence of different cycles of deployment of the FND, here understood as a subsystem of national defense policies, and denotes the prioritization of responsibilities according to areas considered to be of strategic interest to Portugal, in conjunction with its international obligations. This prioritization has allowed Portugal to increase its participation in missions and operations developed within the scope of the United Nations (UN), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), either through the number of troops on the ground, of the budget supporting the investment and reinforcement of resources and capacities, or of the type of functions that the FND have performed in different contexts. This has resulted in Portugal's assertion in different regions, mostly coinciding with the national and Euro-Atlantic security spaces and with the European advanced line of defense (with emphasis on the Mediterranean and Africa), but also in different security dimensions, including regional security, maritime security, enforcement, intelligence, training, and special operations. The investment in the production of international security has, therefore, allowed Portugal to develop a comprehensive foreign policy approach, which would be difficult to articulate in isolation, given its dimension, resources and capacity for international projection.

Nevertheless, important challenges remain in terms of articulating responsibilities arising from Portugal's international commitments with limited resources, managing the efficiency and balance of the deployment of FND and other subsystems of national defense policy, as well as other foreign policy instruments and, finally, the consideration of risks and opportunities that participation in international missions entails for national politics.

First, the national interest defined as the affirmation of Portugal's presence in the world, in a logic of solidarity and fulfillment of its international responsibilities, seems to clash with a more realistic vision of national interest, as well as an individualistic approach to the management of international affairs. This tension results in the difficulty of understanding Portugal's strategic preferences, in terms of the diversification of geographic spaces in which it intervenes, as well as the management of the FND's differentials. Despite the redefinition of the country's strategic areas to better match to the area of influence of its alliances and which justify the commitment of FND in contexts as diverse as the Mediterranean, sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East or the Indian Sea region, there are weaknesses at the level of political and strategic communication for civil society. This raises doubts about whether this commitment to diversification does not, in practice, result in a disadvantageous dispersion for Portugal in terms of taking advantage of existing capacities and resources, as well as the opportunities generated from the commitment of FND in international missions.



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Second, regarding Portugal's contribution to the production of international security, its involvement has been evident in international missions of a hybrid type, with variable geometries depending on its mandate, nature of the crisis in question and assessment of the context on the ground. This results in a logic of concerted approach to security and development, in such different dimensions, as armed conflicts, humanitarian aid, climate issues and the protection of human rights. However, and although Portugal tends to privilege soft power mechanisms in its participation in this type of international missions, it is not clear that this reflects on the type of security that Portugal is helping to produce. In this regard, the need for a clearer contribution from Portugal is highlighted, not only for the production of security, but also for the active definition of what type of international security should be produced and at what cost. Increasing the commitment to the approximation and involvement of local communities, taking advantage of and maximizing the profile and symbolic capital that Portugal has obtained by virtue of its distinctive role in managing the process of self-determination in Timor-Leste, as an example, seems evident.

Third, the results and opportunities generated from the deployment of the FND in conjunction with other instruments and axis of Portuguese foreign policy is an essential dimension to the coherence and effectiveness of foreign policy, holistically considered, and also in maximizing the benefits arising from the deployment of the FND. The need for better articulation between foreign policy instruments, under the purview of other Ministries, is underlined here, in order to clearly identify the criteria underlying the deployment of the FND, and to generate dividends in a more civil dimension, namely in post-conflict and/or post-intervention scenarios. Currently, the deployment of the FND is important for Portugal's affirmation as a co-producer of international security, but there is ample room for maneuver in terms of the legacy of opportunities for the national interest. For these opportunities to generate returns, a clearer commitment to communication and inter-ministerial relations, civil-military cooperation and the protection of civilians is essential. This will allow dividends to transcend the security dimension, contributing also to the country's economic, social and industrial growth.

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