



THE MEXICAN NAVY: FIGHT AGAINST DRUG TRAFFICKING AND PERHAPS MORE?

With two maritime frontages (Atlantic and Pacific), 11,122 km of coastline and 3,149,920 km² of exclusive economic zone, Mexico is a country shaped by the sea. The *Armada de México* coastal navy is focused on action "on land, in the air and at sea"¹ to control and act in this space, and is now dreaming to move offshore.

NEUTRALITY AND ASYMMETRICAL THREATS

The theoretical range of missions of the Mexican navy is wide ranging, from prevention and intervention in the face of external threats, fight against internal disturbances, law enforcement in Mexican maritime areas, to supporting the population in the event of natural disasters. But Mexico has a long tradition of neutrality in international affairs: it has not been involved in any external conflict since 1945 and today does not have to face real sovereign threats. The armed forces have gradually concentrated on the fight against internal guerrillas and, from 2006, at the request of President Felipe Calderón, against the drug traffickers. The organisation of the navy and its employment doctrine are thus strongly oriented towards the fight against asymmetric threats at sea.

ORGANISATION OF THE MEXICAN NAVY

The armed forces have a budget of \$7 billion, i.e. 0.5% of the country's GDP, of which one third is allocated to the navy. The *Armada de México* comprises of 60,000 men and includes the navy, marine infantry, navy air force and the coast guard corps. It is placed under the authority of a dedicated Secretary of the Navy.

The protection of the territory against external threats is assured by two naval forces, the Gulf and Caribbean force and the Pacific one. Each constitutes a coherent set of complementary resources: ASM¹ destroyers, embarked helicopters, an amphibious infantry reaction force and a support fleet.

Apart from these two fleets, other resources of the navy are adapted to its fighting mission against the drug traffickers. The army headquarters have developed an adapted tactical doctrine called TRINOMIO, which combines the use of deep-sea patrol vessels and rapid interceptors, with the support of helicopters for interception as well as airborne and amphibious operations.

The national territory is divided into seven naval regions and 27 sectors, each with a fleet of two to six deep-sea patrol vessels (OPVs) or coastal patrol vessels as well as several interceptor vessels (in total, the navy has 27 mostly locally built OPVs, and 141 coastal patrol boats and speedboats). This distribution allows for a rapid response, full coverage of the territory and high efficiency due to joint training.

¹ "En la tierra, en el aire y en el mar."

² In all, six second hand American ASM frigates launched in 60s and 70s: four of Knox type and two of Bronstein type.

The *Infantería de Marina* corps is the amphibious force of the navy. It has a leading role on land in the war against cartels, in support of the civilian forces. It has grown significantly in recent times, from 15,000 men in 2012 to 24,000 in 2017!

The air force of 130 aircraft is also rapidly developing. It provides support, often embarked on board the OPV. It continues to modernize with the recent acquisitions of 3 E-2C *Hawkeye* airplanes in 2004, 7 Casa C-2012-200 marine surveillance aircrafts modernized in 2004, 6 Casa CN-235-300 maritime patrol aircrafts delivered in 2012, 9 transport aircraft and 65 helicopters.

A MODERN NAVY THAT WANTS TO GO OFFSHORE

Mexico is pursuing the modernization of its trio of intervention forces with the construction of 4 OPVs of 1,680 tons, the acquisition of specialist vehicles for naval infantry and the renewal of combat helicopters and maritime patrol airplanes of the navy air force.

Moreover, Mexico intends to develop offshore capabilities to participate in international operations, jointly with the United States or within the framework of the United Nations for humanitarian and peacekeeping missions (such as the United Nations Mission for Stabilization in Haiti). The planned purchase of two US frigates *O. H. Perry* was canceled in 2016, in favor of an acquisition of light frigates built locally but slow to be delivered. However, the renewal of the frigate component is imperative to maintain a credible conventional capability. It is even more necessary to allow the country's dream of an offshore marine become reality.



The offshore patrol vessel ARM *Independencia*.
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