

SPANISH NAVY HADR mission in Turkey

The Spanish humanitarian assistance operation carried out by the Spanish expeditionary combat group "Dédalo 23" during the earthquake that occurred last February 6 in the SE of Turkey, has highlighted the versatility and agility of the naval and marine forces and their usefulness to react and face any situation in a matter of hours.

At that time, the "Dédalo-23" Group, composed of the LHD Juan Carlos I, the LPD Galicia -with a reinforced Marine Infantry Battalion embarked between the two ships-, the AOR Cantabria and the FF Blas de Lezo, was deployed in the Eastern Mediterranean in support of the deterrence and defense of the Alliance and international maritime security efforts in the region.

A few hours after the emergency occurred, the Group headed towards Iskenderun Bay, where, once coordinated with the Turkish authorities, it carried out an amphibious landing of its Marine battalion with its vehicles on a beach near the city, as its port was on fire. This amphibious capability was the key to being able to begin relief efforts barely 48 hours after the tragedy.

This rapid reaction of the naval force was decisive for the positive impact of the operation on the local population. First of all, priority was given to supporting the rescue work in the rubble providing 80 Marines who worked uninterruptedly in 12-hour shifts in four different locations. This effort saved two lives and dozens of lifeless bodies, easing the pain of their families.

The second priority was to boost the flow of humanitarian aid, which was piling up at Adana airport and the city's port but could not be unloaded due to a lack of means and personnel. In this sense, the work of the ships' sailors and marines unloading countless planes and two complete ships allowed the distribution to the population of 3600 tons of aid by organizing convoys with the battalion's trucks. They also contributed up to 80 tons of food and water from the ships' and battalion's own stocks for distribution to the victims through emergency mechanisms and local NGOs.

The third priority was to support the Turkish emergency authorities and international response teams in the area, with special attention to the 22 Spanish teams distributed throughout the region. They were provided with logistical support and food, first aid material and the Battalion also collaborated in the setting up of five camps for victims and in the setting up of the field hospital established by the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation on the outskirts of Iskenderun, the only one in operation during the first days of the tragedy.

In short, the "Dédalo-23" Expeditionary Group and, in particular, the 500 men and women of its Marine Battalion contributed greatly to alleviating the pain of the population most affected by the earthquake in the city of Iskenderun thanks to the fact that they were deployed in the region, their rapid response, their ability to act in an organized manner in situations of chaos and their vocation of service. It is no less important to note that all this was carried out without using local resources, which were in short supply in the initial stages of all emergencies.

Just five days after leaving Iskenderun, the "Dédalo-23" group began its participation in NATO's "Neptune Strike" enhanced surveillance activities, carrying out 22 air missions and conducting amphibious operations on the Alliance's eastern flank for 8 days. Undoubtedly, this abrupt change of activity illustrates the agility and versatility of naval forces.