



Ceuta, Spanish military authorized to use weapons for self-defense. But only one per patrol will have live ammunition

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A month after the start of the new migration crisis in Ceuta, the Spanish Ministry of Defense has authorized military personnel deployed in the autonomous city to use firearms for personal defense in case of serious threat to their safety.

The provision, however, introduces a limit that is destined to spark debate: according to denunciations by the Asociación de Tropa y Marinería Española (ATME), only one soldier per patrol will be able to carry the regulation weapon with live ammunition.

A choice harshly criticized by the association, which for weeks has been denouncing the operational difficulties and especially the legal framework in which soldiers deployed in Ceuta territory find themselves operating.

One armed soldier per four or five

According to ATME president Marco Antonio Gómez, until now military personnel engaged in patrols were unarmed or carried their weapons without ammunition.

The new directive from the Ministry of Defense partially modifies this situation, allowing one member of each patrol to have access to weapon and live ammunition.

A solution that Gómez described as "ridiculous", using a particularly effective comparison: it would be like having a group of five street cleaners where only one has a broom.

The measure would affect patrols generally composed of four or five soldiers. In the event of a serious assault, therefore, the responsibility for any use of the weapon would fall substantially on a single man.

The main issue remains legal

The problem, however, does not only concern weapon availability.

Since the start of the emergency, the ATME has been demanding that military personnel deployed in Ceuta be given a clearer regulatory framework, with attributions that allow them to effectively intervene during activities in the territory.

Currently some functions, such as identification of persons or detention, remain the prerogative of police forces and the Guardia Civil.

The association recalls that during the state of alarm related to the Covid-19 pandemic, Spanish military personnel had temporarily received the qualification of agents of authority within the scope of their assigned activities.

According to the ATME, the Ministry could have followed another path: employing personnel belonging to the Policía Militar, Policía Aérea or Policía Naval.

These are units specifically trained for military security and control tasks, which according to the association would have operational and legal tools better suited to the situation.

The request also stems from some assault incidents that, according to the ATME, would have affected military personnel engaged in patrols during recent weeks.

Stones and molotov cocktails: the problem of rules of engagement

One of the most delicate points raised by the association concerns the difference between the use of the Armed Forces in missions abroad and those on national territory.

In international operations, military personnel indeed operate through rules of engagement defined in relation to the mission and the operational scenario.

In Ceuta, however, the situation is completely different.

According to Gómez, military personnel must know precisely how to behave even in particularly violent situations, such as collective attacks with stones or incendiary bottles.

The ATME clarifies, however, that it is not asking for indiscriminate use of weapons. The use of force, the association emphasizes, must always respect the principles of necessity and proportionality.

The real question concerns rather what a military patrol can do if it is surrounded or attacked by numerous persons and their safety is genuinely in danger.

Enormous responsibility on the individual soldier

The new directive would also be accompanied by instructions relating to crowd management and personal defense.

However, a decisive question remains open: if only one member of the patrol has access to live ammunition, it will be precisely that soldier who must evaluate, possibly in just a few seconds, whether the conditions exist to use the weapon in defense of himself or his colleagues.

And it is precisely this one of the points most contested by the ATME.

According to the association, in the absence of sufficiently clear legal protection, there is indeed a risk of attributing to a single soldier an enormous responsibility: deciding whether a threat is sufficiently serious to justify the use of the weapon and taking all the consequences of any opening of fire.

The Ceuta affair thus brings back to the center a theme that goes well beyond simple individual armament: when the Armed Forces are deployed on national territory in security and control tasks, competencies, limits, responsibilities and rules on the use of force must be defined with extreme precision.

Without this framework, the risk is having military personnel formally present on the ground but with operational and legal tools not always adequate to the situations they may face.

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