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SPAIN: Reaction to Military Manifesto

The protest manifesto issued on Saturday by 100 junior and noncommissioned officers has heightened the concern of political and military leaders about their ability to contain military unrest over the longer term.

The manifesto supports those implicated in the coup attempt in February, attacks the press for maligning the armed forces, and accuses politicians of interfering with military autonomy. These sentiments are widely shared in the military,

The joint chiefs of staff have warned twice since Saturday that they would brook no support for the manifesto and have placed its signers under house arrest. Officers sympathetic to the manifesto apparently have been seeking more military backing before King Juan Carlos returns today from a visit to the Middle East. The King has been instrumental in placating the military and played a key role in suppressing the coup attempt.

Despite their opposition to the manifesto, senior commanders probably will urge the King privately to exert his influence to redress military grievances. The joint chiefs, in their first public statement after the manifesto, acknowledged that legitimate wrongs may have led to the protest.

The King will be constrained, however, by his limited constitutional role and by fear of becoming enmeshed in controversial civil-military issues. Prime Minister Calvo Sotelo also has limited options, because military restiveness is as ill focused as it is intense and cannot be easily addressed through specific actions.

Tensions will rise in the military when officers implicated in the coup plot are brought to trial, probably in midwinter. Hotheads in the middle ranks could again force senior generals to choose between their constitutional duty to civilian politicians they do not respect and their loyalty to their troops. The more frequently the generals are forced to make this choice, the more difficult it will become--particularly if there is a resurgence of terrorism or an acceleration of the movement toward regional autonomy.

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