

## French Armed Forces in 2008: A Continuous Process of Adaptation

The French armed forces are undergoing a reform process resulting from a double impetus of our President. The first stimulus, which aims at a re-determination of our strategy, is the result of far-reaching deliberations made with the goal to adapt our defence system to the new challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Following a thorough debate with experts of different areas and nations, this work led to the publication of a new White Paper on National Defence and Security in June 2008.

The aim of the second one, which comprises all state authorities, is to rationalize France's public spending and to improve the efficiency of the state and administrative system. This reform is related to the "Modification of the Public Budgetary Practices", a comprehensive project in which the Ministry of Defence is involved just as all the other ministries. Although they are of different nature these two processes can no longer be separated from each other. In view of the scope and significance of the changes that will result from that it makes sense to take stock first. It is to get a better judgment and overview of the extent of the challenges the French armed forces have to meet in the years to come.

### Far-reaching Reform

In order to adapt to our strategic environment, our armed forces have been carrying out radical reforms since the beginning of the 1990s already. At first we have drawn conclusions from the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, then from the lessons learned from our mission in the first Gulf War in 1991. Finally, in 1996, we have undertaken the conversion into a professional Army. These successful and successively initiated adaptation measures have allowed us to enhance our capabilities in the core area of the deployment of operating forces.

And on top of that we have now to learn the lessons from the globalization. It is regarded as a real break and turns the balance of power upside down. From an operational point of view we should primarily take account of the following developments:

- Firstly, today we are being confronted with more diffuse threats which are increasingly blurring the then clearly drawn boundary between interior and exterior security
- Moreover, we are observing a shift of the areas of tension (hot spots) to a crisis arch which extends from the Atlantic (south of Europe) up to the Indian Ocean
- Furthermore, we are noticing an aggravation of conflicts in our areas of operation; and sometimes especially the appearance of non-



General Jean-Louis Georgelin Chef d'état-major des armées.  
Picture: French MoD

governmental actors who — by means of efficient control of certain technologies — have an equalizing power

- Finally, we have to draw all obvious conclusions from the twofold — European and Atlantic — prospects of our country for the future.

In order to take account of these changes, the 2008 White Paper defines new development directions for the operational mission of our armed forces which, among other things, is characterized by the following aspects:

- Primary focus on intelligence (including reconnaissance and collection of information)
- Enhancing of the capabilities for protecting the population, territory, and institutions
- Modification of our crisis prevention system
- Reorganization of our mission capacities.

The chosen option of the versatility of all employable units/formations has been corroborated. They will thus continue to prepare themselves for operations in the entire mission spectrum ranging from missions in large-scale conflicts up to relief services for the indigenous population. In addition, the already effectively initiated interservice, joint dynamism be strengthened even further.

These decisions are made at a point in time where all ministries/departments are undergoing a very challenging reform process in connection with the "Modification of the Public Budgetary Practices". As for the Ministry of Defence, this dynamism will entail a rational-

ization of the areas "Support" and "General Administration" that was never experienced before. All these measures will cause a reduction of the personnel strength. 54,000 civilian and military jobs/billets are planned to be eliminated within a period of seven years. This reduction in force will mainly affect the supporting elements and not the operating forces, of course. This reform aims indeed at ensuring our operability and capacity to act. In seven years from now the total personnel strength of the armed forces (soldiers and civilian employees) is to come to 225,000 women and men of whom 131,000 will serve in the Army, 50,000 in the Air Force, and 44,000 in the Navy.

In addition, these reforms will involve large financial expenditures. The defence budget will be maintained at two percent of the gross domestic product and will thus continue to be the second-largest individual schedule in the state budget. Moreover, the savings achieved within the scope of the implementation of the "Modification of the Public Budgetary Practices" in the Ministry of Defence will be completely re-invested in that ministry. By 2020, a total of 377 billion Euros will thus be appropriated for the defence ministry, with 200 billion Euros in the investment field of equipment.

The French armed forces will therefore have a clearly determined schedule for the next 15 years. It is to allow us to successfully complete the necessary reforms and, at the same time, to continue to fulfill the tasks entrusted to us.

### A Comprehensive Strategy

Our main efforts in the field of defence were traditionally focused on three fields of action:

- Protection of our co-citizens and/or our interests from real and imminent threats
- Contribution to combating instability by crisis prevention and/or missions abroad in land or sea areas where different forms of endemic violence and/or political unrest are prevailing
- Capability to deal with each and every sudden deterioration of the international situation, which could jeopardize the security of our country.

These three fields of action, which actually point into the same direction, form a kind of "strategic triangle" whose three poles are closely related. The new White Paper on National

Defence and Security aims at increasing the balance in this triangle by five strategic functions, i.e. deterrence, strategic reconnaissance and early identification of crises, protection, prevention, and military intervention.

- The function “**deterrence**” will continue to be the basis of our strategy in the first place. It is the maximum guarantee for our security. Based on two components, a maritime and airborne one, this function serves to protect us “from any kind of state aggression against our vital interests, no matter which origin and which form it may have” (speech of the President on the occasion of the launching of the nuclear submarine “Le Terrible” in Cherbourg on 21 March 2007).
- **Intelligence and early identification of crises** form a new function, which is considered to be of priority. The independence of this function expresses the necessity to strengthen the capacities for assessing the situation for the decision-makers. For our armed forces it will essentially be about putting a new focus on intelligence. Already after the end of the first Gulf War in 1991, this area was given special attention. This had then led to the development of strategic intelligence which today is based on the collection of monitoring and imagery material (IMINT from Helios satellites and airborne platforms as well as HUMINT from human information sources). We have also developed operational reconnaissance means, especially drones. Finally, with the establishment of the “Direction du renseignement militaire (DRM)” (Directorate General for Military Intelligence) in the Ministry of Defence the principal focus was put on capabilities for evaluating and processing information.



French President Nicolas Sarkozy (left) and General Jean-Louis Georgelin (right) in a Military Parade in Paris on the Occasion of the French National Day on 14 July 2008. Picture: dpa

The priority set today on the “strategic reconnaissance and early identification of crises” function will not only be characterized by the rationalization of intelligence within the armed forces, but also on national level. In this respect, the establishment of the position of a coordinator directly subordinate to the President is particularly worth mentioning here. As far as the armed forces are concerned, this dynamism will affect a significant increase in the budgetary position

for intelligence. The doubling of the budgetary funds for space-based intelligence is an eloquent example for that.

- Also corroborated in the White Paper is the function “**protection**” which aims at protecting the nation and the national territory from serious crises, e.g. in connection with terrorist threats. The significance attached to this function represents one of the major innovations of that document. The 2008 White Paper is the first one that defines a compre-



French Soldiers Patrolling the Streets in Downtown Mitrovica/Kosovo.

Picture: dpa

hensive approach of our security interests without limiting them exclusively to defence issues. Our armed forces are already involved in this protection function by the constant surveillance and securing of our maritime access routes and our air space both in France and in our overseas territories. In cases of emergency, natural disasters or assassination attempts of greater extent, these forces and means will be significantly enhanced from now on and e.g. complemented by units of the medical service and NBC defence corps. In the strict sense this area is the one where the employment of our armed forces is imaginable in an interministerial scope only. The

voir of forward deployed forces is planned to be changed. On the one hand it has to be considered that our bilateral defence agreements are inevitably going to be modified and, on the other hand we want to selectively deal with the strategically important regions, which are located in the crisis arch from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. We could perhaps provide step-by-step for the maintenance of one main base each on the western and eastern coast of the African continent and substantiate our presence in the Gulf region at the same time as it is underscored by the setup of a military base in Abu Dhabi.

sea surveillance it is to allow to enhance the nation's capacity to act by the deployment of up to 10,000 Army soldiers and the increase of the air defence assets (by up to six alert sections) as well as by the maritime security component (with one frigate and one maritime patrol aircraft each on the three coasts of France).

- The operational task “intervene” will ensure the capabilities for “first entry”, “framework nation” and “rapid response”: It is about being able to employ 30,000 Army soldiers, the carrier group with accompanying means — among them the nuclear-powered assault submarines as well as up to two naval task groups for seaborne or land-based operations and/or for the protection of shipping traffic — and 70 fighter aircraft of the Air Force in distances of up to 8,000 km within six months and over a time period of one year. Furthermore it is also essential to have independent rapid reaction forces that can be employed on short notice — within one day or so — and in national or international scope. These forces encompass units of the ground forces (up to 5,000 soldiers), of the air and naval forces as well as all forward deployed troops and/or forces stationed in foreign countries (within the scope of defence agreements) and in the French overseas territories and provinces (“départements”). They, too, have air assets and maritime task forces as well as capabilities that serve the activation of our bases in foreign countries.



French Troops on Vehicle Patrol in N'Djamena/Chad in February 2008.

Picture: spa

## Reflections on the Current Operations/Missions

At present, approximately 12,600 servicewomen and servicemen are employed in 29 different operations of which 70 percent are conducted within multinational scope. The number corresponds to the average rate of our missions, which amounts to about 12,000 personnel annually since the beginning of the 1990s. Depending on the situation this number varies between 10,000 and 15,000 and can, in exceptional cases, reach a total of 20,000 men.

Today, five areas of operation are regarded as particularly important. Their significance depends on the following factors: on the strength of the forces employed (at least 2,000 soldiers), on that what is at stake, and on how critical the respective situations are. It is about the operational areas on the Ivory Coast, in Kosovo, Chad, the Central African Republic, in Lebanon, and in Afghanistan, of course, where 3,300 servicewomen and servicemen are being employed since the end of June 2008.

The missions in which we are involved are characterized today by their length, their greater and greater distance from our national territory, their diversity and, without any doubt, by the fact that we are being confronted with adversaries who act much more resolutely and vigorously. Such missions differ thus from

search for a better coordination between the forces and means subordinate to the Ministry of the Interior (“gendarmérie”; the “gendarmes” will be assigned to the Ministry of the Interior as of 01 January 2009 without losing the military status; in addition regular police forces and civil defence personnel) and those of the Ministry of Defence is thus becoming a matter of priority. In order to avoid any kind of confusion, such complementary employment will, of course, require a clear distribution of roles and a specification of the scope in which each of these components is to be engaged.

- The function “prevention”, which means to act at an early stage to avert any threat and/or increase in danger for our security, has also been reconfirmed. It is naturally based on a networked approach, which goes beyond the purely military scope. The importance of our preventively advanced units was corroborated, however. Nevertheless, our present reser-

- Finally, the function “intervene” remains, of course, a keystone of our strategy. It clearly expresses our contribution to international stability and is a sign of our solidarity with our alliance partners. This function, which corresponds to a long culture of projection, is reaffirmed by the approach of capability development specified in the White Paper.

Resulting from these defined five strategic core functions is a fresh operational task. For the armed forces, the following numerical data are of relevance:

- With its two components, a maritime and an airborne one, the deterrence mission of the French armed forces remains unchanged. It must be pointed out, however, that the extent of the airborne component will be reduced by one third in order to satisfy the principle of strict sufficiency of the means.
- The operational task of the “protection” function is now expressed in numbers. In addition to the permanent mission of airspace and



France Presents its New Nuclear Submarine in March 2008.

Picture: dpa

peacekeeping operations whose model had prevailed over the years and which followed right after the end of the Cold War. This reality raises new questions and confronts us with new challenges.

In retrospect it not difficult to state that the missions/operations conducted by the Western armed forces were marked by two approaches since the beginning of the 1990s:

- Firstly, “suffocating” which means launching peacekeeping missions whose goals and objectives consist of exploiting the fatigue of the enemy. This was the case in Bosnia, but also in Africa as e.g. on the Ivory Coast.
- The second method is “suppressing” which is based on sudden action and which is to achieve quick success. Suppressing was applied both in Kosovo and in the first phase of the operation in Afghanistan.

Both methods have long served as a frame for the preparation of our armed forces. This clearly delineated scope allowed a differentiation between operations of “high intensity” and missions for the “management of violence”. Now, this conception is clearly cast doubt on. On the one hand it is getting more and more difficult to suppress/suffocate an enemy who is determined to fight to the end and who considers the duration of a conflict to be a condition of his success. On the other hand, the operations geared to suppression have shown where their limits are. The quick destruction of governmental military instruments is no longer a guarantee for the end of combat actions.

Today it is about a play of infinitely more complexity. The meshing between low intensity and extreme state of violence is always given. We can also establish that terms of victory and defeat become blurred and that an adversary who is often not possible to seize has replaced the traditional enemy. They are now replaced by less clear concepts such as failure, status quo or success. Aside from that we are

now permanently employed in operations of long duration that take place in distant areas in which the survival of our nation is not directly endangered — despite an increasing intensity of the risks.

Finally, the military knows that it is no longer the only actor of crisis management and conflict settlement, respectively. As a consequence, we have to pursue a comprehensive approach, which requires an interministerial dimension on national level, but also a cooperative strategy with both international and non-governmental organizations. Incidentally, the success or the failure of the respective mission will depend on the quality of this cooperation.

In order to take account of these realities, the President has reaffirmed the significance that we attach to the multilateral approach when he introduced the White Paper on 17 June 2008.



French Soldiers on UN Mission in Lebanon.

Picture: dpa

In that meaning, he has given priority to two orientations, which complement each other:

- The first one consists in augmenting the buildup of the European defence. For one thing only the European Union has the total military, political, and financial instruments, which can make a permanent stabilization of crisis-torn regions possible. On the other hand Europe offers a suitable international framework that allows to progress on the way of a joint and combined employment of forces and means.
- The second orientation could be the reshaping of our relations to NATO to allow us to take our place in the new strategic landscape in a fully legal way. In this respect the President has clearly said that the 2009 summit in Kehl-Strasbourg could represent a milestone.

## Coherent Reform

The French armed forces are undergoing an extensive reform process whose goal is the management of the strategic challenges of the globalization and the necessary rationalization of governmental work process. This double impetus initiated by the President as Commander-in-Chief of the French Armed Forces is expressed in an adaptation of the strength of our armed forces and in the re-determination of our military mission as defined in the new White Paper on National Defence and Security. In consideration of the strategic ambitions of our country and our financial capacities it is a coherent reform, which will enable France to continue to fully perform its role and meet its international commitments. ■

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