

# The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters

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Volume 26  
Number 4 *Parameters Winter 1996*

Article 4

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11-7-1996

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### Recommended Citation

Frederic Drion, "France: New Defense for a New Millennium," *Parameters* 26, no. 4 (1996), doi:10.5554/0031-1723.1799.

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# France: New Defense for a New Millennium

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From *Parameters*, Winter 1996-97, pp. 99-108.

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French history texts of the next century will record 22 February 1996 as the beginning of fundamental changes in the nation's armed forces. On that date Jacques Chirac, President of the Republic and Chief of the Armed Forces, announced his intent to end France's tradition of conscription, and to reshape by 2002 the armed forces around volunteers. Additionally, M. Chirac decided to reduce the size of French military forces by 30 percent from current levels. His goal is to have the new structure settled, equipment fielded, and France's defense industrial base restructured by 2015.

These decisions were not taken hastily or without due consideration for the consequences. The process began in 1994 with the release of a "White Paper on Defense." Thereafter, a committee composed of senior military and civilian experts examined the implications of the proposed changes in France's defense posture from a variety of perspectives: cost-effectiveness of defense outlays, domestic requirements, peace dividends, and the part that the Defense Ministry should play in reducing the budget deficit. The latter is particularly important as members of the European Union prepare for the next steps in European integration.

The decision to change fundamentally French national defense structures follows an appraisal of the international situation and a geopolitical appraisal of key state-to-state relationships. France will meet her responsibilities in the new world that has emerged from the Cold War; planned changes in defense structures will not alter that long-standing commitment by the French people. France also is committed to joining the leading nations of the world in security matters, offering a balanced and unique view of world affairs. To support its first-tier status, France needs a strong currency, solid trade, a vigorous financial market, and social cohesion.

Most important to France--as to any state with global as well as regional responsibilities for collective security--is a modern, efficient, and respected system for national defense. This article uses the "ends, ways, and means" methodology to describe the future French armed forces, a smaller but robust and fully professionalized military.

## **The Ends: Post-Cold War Environment and Requirements**

The collapse of the Soviet empire, symbolized for many by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, produced a wide-ranging strategic appraisal in the West. The conclusion for France--the touchstone of all its subsequent inquiry and analysis--was that for the first time in its history there were no direct threats on its land frontiers. The implications were almost self-evident. Without the forces of the former Warsaw Pact poised to strike from a distance less than that between Washington, D.C., and Norfolk, Va., deterring a land assault was no longer a major consideration for sizing France's defense forces.

However, if the end of the bipolar world brought a breath of freedom to many nations, it is obvious that the realignment had two significant implications for strategists. The first is that solutions to disputes between nations would be more difficult to design and carry out. Second, the dissolution of some states, the emergence of new ones, and the resurgence of ethnic and religious tensions and conflicts created unpredictable and unbalanced situations that could conceivably lead to crisis or war, in Europe and elsewhere. Policymakers around the world are still struggling with the real-world consequences of these implications.

For France, the changes entail two principal requirements. The first is to enhance the reality of a "European security and defense identity," with the attendant requirement to prepare for commitment within the framework of NATO or WEU operations. The second is to promote the international security process, if necessary by contributing to

multinational operations for peace. In this regard, France has participated in peace operations in 25 countries within the last five years, including four years as the main contributor to UN forces in the former Yugoslavia.

Those charged with examining prospective regional and global requirements for the French armed forces concluded that the military had to be structured to support primarily two types of operations. The first type was a high-intensity commitment in Europe, particularly in the Mediterranean basin, possibly on short notice. The second type was identified as a moderate-intensity commitment, for instance (but not exclusively) in French overseas territories, to promote peace or to fulfill defense agreements signed with other nations, mainly in Africa.

As these concepts were emerging in political and military circles, it became increasingly evident that the most likely types of military operations would also determine the structure of the future armed forces. The first requirement of any sovereign nation is to protect its vital and strategic interests. Additionally, the French military would have to be ready to assume specific responsibilities anywhere in the world, a requirement almost uniquely associated with permanent membership on the UN Security Council. This process of evaluating strategic ends led to the determination of specific strategic functions which the French military would be required to support.

### **The Ways: Major Strategic Functions**

The types of threats described above and the possible missions of the military in responding to them both define and prioritize France's four major strategic functions: deterrence, prevention, projection, and protection.

#### *Deterrence, from One Era to Another*

France's post-Cold War assessment of its nuclear deterrent followed the concept described by President Chirac: "We must make the most of the respite offered by the present strategic situation in order to rethink our nuclear arsenal." [1] A major component of that reassessment, the final series of nuclear tests, is now complete. Test results will enable France to ensure the reliability and the credibility of this paramount means of deterrence. The tests also guarantee the capacity to update the arsenal through a planned transition to simulation, thereby eliminating the need for more tests.

Although the change in the threat allows a reduction in its nuclear arsenal, France remains committed to maintaining a credible deterrent, one that meets the definition of adequacy as defined by the President of the Republic. That force will rely on two complementary, modernized weapon systems. Together, these systems are capable of meeting all anticipated political and military situations requiring a policy of deterrence:

- A submarine-launched ballistic weapon, characterized by its power and its low vulnerability. The strategic oceanic force will be based on four nuclear-powered, ballistic-missile-armed submarines (SNLE) enabling, if required, the permanent maintenance of two SNLE at sea. Over the next 15 years, the improved M51 missile will progressively replace the present M45 missile.
- An airborne weapon, built around air-to-surface missiles, which will provide the versatility and diversification of penetration methods indispensable to 21st-century deterrence forces. This missile force and the associated aircraft will also be modernized: the Rafale aircraft, for example, will eventually be equipped with a new mid-range air-to-surface missile, the improved ASMP.

Other features of France's nuclear deterrent are similarly in transition.

- The strategic surface weapon system, located on the *plateau d'Albion*, is to be withdrawn from service by 1998.
- The Army's HADES surface-to-surface missile system will be dismantled by 1997, France having determined that such a nuclear capability is no longer required. The decision, which reflects France's intent to alleviate concerns expressed by some neighboring countries and allies, was reached following discussions between President Chirac and Germany's Chancellor Helmut Kohl.
- With the completion of the recent tests and French adherence to the South Pacific Denuclearization Treaty, the Pacific Test Center can now be closed. These measures are related to the treaty concerning the total prohibition of nuclear testing (CTBT); France is actively participating in its development.
- The atomic plants in Pierrelatte and Marcoule, which have been producing fissile materials, are to be closed. Reductions in requirements, the level of stocks, and the ability to recycle fissile material from dismantled

weapons permit closure of the two plants.

The intent of France's reassessment of its nuclear deterrent and the outcome of the process were summarized by President Chirac: "This ambitious program aimed at adapting and modernizing our deterrent is the proof of France's determination to continue to ensure our ultimate security in all circumstances. France's nuclear strategy is both deterrent and defensive. Any assailant that may want to affect our vital interests is to remain certain of our ability and our determination to protect them." [2]

### *Prevention, a New Priority*

The forces encamped close to France's borders for almost 45 years posed an immediate threat to the very survival of the nation. They have been replaced by widespread insecurity and multiple dangers in Europe and throughout the world. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is of particular concern for French security.

The concept of prevention seeks to avoid the return or emergence of threats to national interests or security, the outbreak of conflicts, or even the development of situations that could become major threats. For these reasons, France places a high priority on the two principal means of prevention: intelligence and the repositioning of forces.

*Intelligence* focuses on identifying and continuously monitoring emerging complex situations in order to anticipate the appearance of danger and prepare appropriate political or military responses to it. In this context, general intelligence organizations--the Military Intelligence Agency (DRM) and Foreign Security General Agency (DGSE)[3]--are to be enhanced, along with space-based intelligence means. Plans for the modernization and the reinforcement of DRM and DGSE are provided in the current law that embodies the five-year military program. New space programs that will be jointly developed with European allies include HELIOS II (a continuation of the HELIOS I program with Italy, Spain, and Germany), and the HORUS radar satellite with Germany and perhaps other European countries.

*Prepositioned forces*, appropriately configured, will be maintained in or near sensitive areas, both on land and at sea. Forward-deployed forces facilitate local analysis of the situation, response to low-level crises, and the receipt of reinforcements when required. Force designs are being examined to determine the appropriate mix of personnel, equipment, and location to support French policy in the sensitive regions. The right combinations of personnel and materiel of all the services--combined battalions, naval surface combatants, combat and transport aircraft--will demonstrate national resolve and enhance the ability of policymakers to solve potential crises by the judicious application of force early in a crisis.

### *Power Projection*

It is expected that French forces generally will be committed far from national territory. As President Chirac noted early in 1996, "Projection is the priority for classic forces." [4] There are two reasons for his conclusion. As noted earlier, for the first time in French history there is no direct military threat on the frontiers. Of equal importance, national security and defense will frequently begin on foreign soil, in Europe or in any other region where international responsibilities require a French presence. These conclusions indicate that French forces dedicated to power projection will have certain characteristics and operational standards:

- Anticipation and immediate control of complex situations must be possible.
- Any action may be situated within a national, European, NATO, or United Nations framework with a variety of partners.
- Neither the place, the type, nor the moment of action can be accurately foreseen.
- Action will require the projection of sophisticated armaments and equipment upon which operational superiority will partly depend.
- The appropriate forces must be immediately available.

This list of required capabilities points to the deployment of versatile forces capable of joint tailoring and combined operations. The deployed forces will have to adapt to the demands of any operation to which they are assigned.

The concept of projection places some common requirements and many specific ones on each of the military services.

The army will be deployed around four forces, each comprising about 15,000 men: one tank force, one mechanized force, one rapid intervention tank force, and one light assault infantry force.[5]

The major items of equipment to be used by these forces will be of very recent design and manufacture: the Leclerc tank, the future armored infantry combat vehicle (VBCI), the *Tigre* helicopter, new anti-tank missiles (the latter three weapon systems being jointly developed with Germany), the Horizon helicopter-borne radar, and the multiple rocket launcher, to name but a few.

The navy will have a naval air group and an amphibious force deployable on demand built around the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier equipped with the Rafale aircraft. This force will include landing-craft barges (TCD), airborne radar (Hawkeye), new anti-aircraft frigates (being co-developed by several European countries), and countermining ships. These and related capabilities will figure in the navy's power projection force.

The air force will be capable of projecting about 100 aircraft: fighters, air defense, reconnaissance, attack, and electronic war variants. The multi-purpose Rafale aircraft should progressively become the main element of this force. Air transport capacity will be maintained at present levels despite the general reduction in the size of the armed forces.

Projection also implies the deployment of theater combined forces headquarters (PCIAT) and modern satellite signal communication systems (SYRACUSE II). Both are interoperable with our allies, enabling independent assessment of the local situation along with French contribution to the command of the multinational forces within which the armed forces may be engaged.

### *Toward a New Concept of Protection*

The French armed forces have several permanent missions related to protection and security of France proper. They are surveillance and control of air and sea approaches to the country, support of public authorities, and at the request of those authorities, intervention in the event of a serious crisis.

At home, threats of a military nature have been replaced by violent threats to public security: terrorism, drug use, and all types of traffic in illicit substances. Thus, since these threats are not of a military nature, the notion of domestic security may be said to override at present that of defense. The air force will participate through use of an airspace detection and control network which is to be modernized (the new SCCOA system should be operational in the beginning of the 21st century). The surveillance of sea approaches and air security operations remain indispensable and continue to be carried out by the appropriate service using traditional methods.

Security of the territory of France itself is primarily in the hands of the Gendarmerie Nationale (National Military Police Force), which carries out security missions jointly with other (local) police forces. Thus it is that the strength of the Gendarmerie Nationale will increase in the future, despite the downsizing of the armed forces in general.[6]

When the contribution of the armed forces is deemed necessary, each of France's nine internal defense zones will benefit from the means available to the armed forces stationed in that zone. The increased mobility of land forces will improve their ability, where required, to transfer personnel and equipment between zones. Furthermore, the armed forces will continue to assist the local population, particularly in the event of natural catastrophes.[7]

New threats in the world, future requirements for the armed forces, and the determination of four major strategic functions will give the armed forces a new frame of reference, one that will produce a "new look" in each service. But the basic question is with which kind of personnel: draftees or volunteers?

### **The Means: Professionalization of the Armed Forces**

The French joint and service staffs, in conjunction with the *Chambre des Députés* and the *Senat*, now have to find the means to give substance to the plan. This will be done in two phases. The first, from 1997 to 2002, provides the resources to support the conversion to a professional force. The second (to 2015) will ensure that the services acquire the equipment needed to perform the four strategic functions of deterrence, prevention, projection, and protection. This law will also prescribe the model for the new French defense industrial base. Through all this discussion, however, the

most important issue is whether military personnel will all be volunteers, or whether a significant number will continue, as now is the case, to be conscripted annually.

When training to fight the Warsaw Pact during the Cold War, draftees represented a large part of the army (50 percent) and lower levels of the navy (25 percent) and air force (30 percent). Put differently, even during the hottest years of the Cold War, half of the enlisted ranks of the French army, three quarters of its navy, and 70 percent of its air force were volunteers. Thus the decision to establish an all-volunteer armed forces would not represent a significant break with current and recent past experiences for the navy and the air force but would be a real challenge for the army.

Analysis of the strategic environment in the first decades of the next century, reflected in the previous discussions of prevention and projection, identified requirements for immediately available forces, the ability to contribute rapidly to a combined or coalition operation in any region of the world, and the ability to master high-technology weapons and to carry out sophisticated operational techniques, the latter two being the keys to superiority. The fact that the navy and air force were the smallest users of conscripts during the Cold War indicates that even then they needed long-term commitments from most of their enlisted personnel because of the training and experience required to operate the equipment in each service. Those conditions now also apply in large measure to the total army.

The core problem that professionalization is intended to overcome is that the commitment of draftees to combat presently must be approved by the Parliament. Such an impediment to rapid deployment in the current operating environment--even before considering possible conditions in 2015--could severely hinder France's ability to participate in or support important collective security measures. The last time draftees went to war was in Algeria, between 1954 and 1962. To get around the current restriction today, only professional soldiers and those conscripts who enlisted for the duration of the commitment of their unit are serving with French forces in Bosnia.

The President's decision to end conscription and to recruit only volunteers into the French armed forces prompted concern from some individuals and groups. The most common objections were related to the idea that the draft was a manifestation of the will of the nation. Its low cost, the acquisition of knowledge and life skills it provided, and the social cohesion of all groups within each contingent of draftees were also frequently cited as reasons not to professionalize the military.

These protests overlooked the fact that for years up to 30 percent of each draft-eligible age group had official reasons not to serve in the military. With the downsizing, fewer still would actually be called to serve, thus widening the gap between those who would not be subject to active service and those who had no alternative but to serve. Additionally, there was some uncertain history involved in the opposition arguments.[8]

In the event, President Chirac's decision was based on new requirements related to crisis planning, rapid response of the military, new technologies, and multinational tactics, techniques, and procedures. The French armed forces will soon begin conversion to all-volunteer status. It is now up to those so empowered to identify the required capabilities, the size of each service, and the rate of change required to complete the conversion with the least possible loss of effectiveness.

## The Way Ahead

By 2002, the end strengths of the French armed forces (military and civilians) will be as shown in Figure 1 below.

	1995	2002
<b>Army</b>	271,000	170,000
<b>Navy</b>	70,400	56,500
<b>Air Force</b>	94,100	70,000
<b>National Military Police</b>	93,450	97,900
<b>Joint Services</b>	47,910	39,600
<b>Total</b>	577,360	434,000*

## Figure 1. Reductions in French Forces by 2002.

To develop this new organization, French political and military leaders and their staffs have to meet a number of challenges based on actual or perceived consequences of the decision to professionalize. They include:

- Determining the future of national service. Most arguments cluster around changing the system or abandoning the idea entirely.
- Transition from conscription to volunteers in the ranks without placing at risk important capabilities and interests.
- Creation of a new recruiting system.
- Funding the downsizing out of a special bill, as proposed by President Chirac.
- Changing and improving France's defense industrial base, while taking into account comparable changes occurring throughout Europe. France collectively will have to change its mind so as to conceive of its armed forces in a new structure entirely based on volunteers. The US armed forces were challenged with the same changes 25 years ago. We will take into account America's lessons as we develop our armed forces of the next century.

### The French Armed Forces in 2015

The strategic options behind the main characteristics of the new-style armed forces favor conflict prevention and projection of forces, with nuclear and conventional deterrence being maintained at a level of adequacy. Prevention implies the development of intelligence, especially space-based intelligence, and the prepositioning of forces. The importance of projection leads to the concept of compact, mobile, versatile armed forces, available at short notice, and equipped with modern equipment that will allow them to establish tactical and operational superiority from the outset of an intervention.

The goals of availability and versatility require professionalization. Further reduction in the duration of a conscript's military service is no longer compatible with the high degree of technical proficiency, tactical and operational training, and deep experience required of a competent military in the coming decades. The intention not to increase the size of the operational budget allocated to the armed forces implies a significant reduction in personnel.

The army is to undergo the greatest changes. With a proposed strength of 170,000 (136,000 military and 34,000 civilians), it will adopt a new organizational structure in order to reduce the number of headquarters and support organizations, allowing it to concentrate on operational tasks. Henceforth, the army will be deployed around a tank-heavy force, a mechanized force, a rapid intervention tank force, and a light assault infantry force. Balanced distribution of heavy and light tanks supported by a new generation of helicopters, along with an increase in the range and precision of long-range weapons, will be complemented by upgraded field surveillance and data processing equipment.

The navy's 56,500 personnel (45,500 military and 11,000 civilians) will continue to be largely a deterrent force equipped with nuclear-powered, ballistic-missile-armed submarines (SNLE) and associated equipment. It will continue its prevention tasks, through presence and surveillance missions carried out by its surface vessels and its sea patrol aircraft. It will maintain its power-projection capacities through a naval air group, an amphibious group, and nuclear assault submarines (SNA). The *Charles de Gaulle* aircraft carrier is to be equipped with advanced warning radar and Rafale aircraft.

The air force, with 70,000 personnel (63,000 military and 7000 civilians), will undergo a change in the size of its combat force, eventually comprising 300 modern, versatile aircraft of the Rafale type, capable of delivering the most innovative weapon systems, including cruise missiles. Military air transport also will be modernized, starting in 2003, to at least maintain present capabilities; its in-flight refueling capacities are also to be improved.

All these measures will lead to the closure or the reduction of units and military bases throughout France and abroad. The sole exception to the net reduction of armed forces personnel by about 30 percent will be the Gendarmerie

Nationale. Because of the emergence of domestic threats, the end strength of the Gendarmerie will increase to enable it to carry out increased responsibilities for the protection and security of the national territory.

A special effort will be made to ensure the complementarity of the armed forces. Furthermore, the ability of our military forces to act with those of our allies is to receive special attention, along with our means of combined command and communication projectable to regions outside of France itself. And we plan to join our European counterparts in looking for ways to cooperate in economizing on functions and materiel.

The French armed forces are on the threshold of a new era, marked by a reorganization such as they have confronted only a few times in this century. Six years will be required to complete the professionalization of the armed forces. The work will be carried out while maintaining the operational capacities of the military in full cognizance of the interests of the men and women, military and civilian, within the services.

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## NOTES

1. Jacques Chirac, 23 February 1996, The President of the Republic's speech, *SIRPA Actualité*, 9 March 1996, p. 34.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

3. The US equivalent of the DRM is the Defense Intelligence Agency; the US equivalent of the DGSE is the Central Intelligence Agency.

4. Chirac speech, *SIRPA Actualité*, p. 35.

5. Each "force" is a pool of assets from which an operational commander can draw units to tailor a task force.

6. Created in the 14th century, the Gendarmerie belongs to the Ministry of Defense. In peacetime, the Gendarmerie has mainly civilian territorial duties (intelligence, police) through the 3800 local teams spread throughout French territory. In crisis or war, the Gendarmerie's main mission consists of defending the territory against aggression, invasion, and terrorist actions. Moreover, as a military organization, the Gendarmerie takes part in French, European, international, and UN missions (such as in Haiti, Cambodia, and Bosnia).

7. Metropolitan France is divided into nine internal defense military subdivisions (CMD). In wartime, the general commanding each CMD is responsible for all of the territorial units in his subdivision. These units are primarily active units which are reinforced by the reserve component in order to defend the area, along with the Gendarmerie, under command of the joint staff.

8. Some perceive that compulsory service of one year creates a strong link between the nation and its military forces. The concept of universal conscription, however, is relatively new. Before the French Revolution (1789), the kings of France built volunteer armies, sometimes with foreign commanders. The crown called for *levée en masse* (requiring all youths to report for military duty) on only two occasions: in 1214 and again in 1712.

The leaders of the Revolution decided in 1798 to make military service compulsory, using the rationale that the armies had come to express the will of the nation, rather than the personal interest of the King. Universal conscription did not work very well, however. There were far more draftees than required by the size of the armies, which led to a form of lottery to see who would actually have to risk life and limb for the fatherland.

With the growing German threat at the beginning of the 20th century, the French government decided in 1905 to require universal service of two years for all young males. Current policies stem from that decision, not from any long tradition of conscription. Recent protests about the loss to the nation caused by professionalizing the armed forces appeared in sound bites in France as well as on CNN. They should be understood in the foregoing historical context.

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Reviewed 6 November 1996. Please send comments or corrections to [carl\\_Parameters@conus.army.mil](mailto:carl_Parameters@conus.army.mil).