

The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters

Volume 47
Number 1 *Parameters Spring 2017*

Article 11

Spring 3-1-2017

The French Army at a Crossroads

Rémy Hémez

Follow this and additional works at: <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters>



Part of the [Defense and Security Studies Commons](#), [Military History Commons](#), [Military, War, and Peace Commons](#), and the [National Security Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rémy Hémez, "The French Army at a Crossroads," *Parameters* 47, no. 1 (2017), <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol47/iss1/11>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by USAWC Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters by an authorized editor of USAWC Press.

The French Army at a Crossroads

Rémy Hémez

©2017 Rémy Hémez

ABSTRACT: The French Army strategy to protect the people from terrorism and to remain involved in international stabilization efforts comes at a cost. This article identifies steps to balance the complexities through technology and force structure.

Between 2010 and 2025, French Army equipment will have changed more than it did between 1970 and 2010. But, this shift is not limited to fielding matériel, the French Army is also undergoing a major reorganization—the Scorpion modernization program. Since the Île-de-France attacks (January 7–9, 2015), the French Army’s overarching challenge has been to balance its interventions abroad, reassurance missions, and homeland security operations. Although a relatively stable equilibrium has been found, the model raises new questions regarding its long-term sustainability.

Choosing a priority between defending borders or projecting forces abroad has been a continuous struggle. Beginning with the French Revolutionary Wars (1792–99), France’s strategic culture has been predominantly defined by defending its northeastern border, which requires a large land force. This tendency was reinforced at the end of the Algerian War (1954–62), when colonial troops returned to France. The proliferation of nuclear weapons in the early 1970s caused the French Army to join the West’s deterrence mission; however, despite the assigned priority to defend the homeland against a Soviet invasion, a small projection force maintained an expeditionary culture.

This Cold War model defined by *levée en masse* (massive conscription) was applied until 1996, when the suspension of the practice was announced. Since then, strategic priorities have been inverted. The French Army has turned toward its expeditionary force to create a more compact and better equipped army, one in which all units are capable of intervening abroad.¹ This trend extended through 2013 with financial pressure causing a drastic reduction of the number of units and personnel.²

In 2015, budgetary and political constraints pushed the army chief of staff to redesign the service’s structure. This willingness to reform also occurred in a disrupted and changing security environment, which as of March 2017, compelled engagement in three domains: 7,000–10,000

The author’s views do not reflect those of the French Army.

1 Jérôme de Lespinois, *L’armée de Terre, de la défense du sanctuaire à la projection* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2003).

2 Between 2009 and 2013, army personnel were reduced by approximately 22,000, dissolving 21 battalions and 7 headquarters. See *Audition du général Jean-Pierre Bosser, chef d’état-major de l’armée de Terre, sur le projet de loi de finance pour 2015.2* (Assemblée nationale, October 15, 2014).

Major Rémy Hémez, French Army, is currently a military fellow at the Security Studies Center of the French Institute of International Relations.

soldiers deployed in homeland operations responding to a high-level terrorist threat; 10,000 participated in operations abroad driven by a jihadist threat; and 300 supported North Atlantic Treaty Organization Reassurance missions to Eastern European and Baltic states.

This article provides an overview of the French Army's navigation of these overlapping demands, and their influence on the service's structure, doctrine, and capabilities. Impacts of the renewed organization and equipment, the innovative tactical thinking, and the friction resulting from French forces' return from national and international commitments are also covered.

"Au contact"—Transitioning within the Median

On May 28, 2015, the French Army officially unveiled its new organization plan *Au contact*, meaning up close, which was drafted before the Île-de-France attacks that emphasized the plan's necessity and relevance. Implementation, including dividing the army into 13 commands, began in September 2015 and will be finalized in 2017. Although *Au contact* focuses on overseas interventions, it also rebalances the army's participation and visibility in terms of protection, particularly across French territory. The National Territory Command, created over the summer of 2016, intends to prepare for and facilitate military engagement in the area in the case of disaster relief or homeland security missions. Key army capabilities—such as special forces, airmobile combat (including a new airmobile brigade), intelligence, information and communication systems, and logistics—have also been reinforced and consolidated into new dedicated commands. Most combat troops have been regrouped into a Scorpion force composed of 47,000 soldiers and organized into the newly created 1st Division, headquartered in Besançon, and the 3rd Division, headquartered in Marseille. This organization was a notable comeback from the "brigadized" French order of battle in place during the late-1990s. These two divisions comprise six combined arms brigades: two armored, two median, and two light (airborne and mountain). These restructuring efforts prepare for the Scorpion program and offer better visibility for France's allies.

Concurrent with *Au contact*, the French Army is completing two important transition phases. The first increases the army's operational combat force from 66,000 to 77,000 soldiers by the end of 2016 and creates 33 combat companies within the infantry, armor, and combat engineer branches. President François Hollande decided to halt previously planned personnel cuts in the wake of the Paris attacks of 2015 and Nice attack of 2016 to meet the demands of the army's high operational tempo. This response marks a historic turning point after years of steady personnel reductions and implies a major recruitment plan: 14,000 new recruits enrolled during 2016 making the army France's leading recruiter.³

The second transition updates equipment the army needs to intervene abroad or to counter a high-end threat. The French Army is significantly renewing its equipment requirements for the fourth time since 1945, intending to replace such vehicles as the *Véhicule de l'avant blindé* (VAB) armored personnel carrier and support vehicle (1976); AMX-10

3 Ibid.

RC wheeled reconnaissance tank (1981); SA 341/SA 342 Gazelle multi-purpose, lightweight utility/attack helicopter (1973); and Aérospatiale SA 330 Puma medium transport/utility helicopter (1968). The new equipment (including 630 VBCI wheeled infantry fighting vehicles, about 20,000 complete *Fantassin à Equipments et Liaisons Intégrés* (FELIN) future infantry soldier equipment systems, 77 CAESAR 155-mm howitzers installed on 6x6 truck chassis, 60 Tiger attack helicopters, and 13 LRU multiple launch rocket systems) was widely used during operations in Africa's Sahel region.⁴ The French Army also intends to improve its drone capabilities by ordering 14 Sagem Patroller unmanned aerial vehicles.

In terms of equipment transitions, the Scorpion program intends to completely modernize the equipment of the French Army's key operating unit, the *groupement tactique interarmes* (GTIA) combined arms tactical group, which is a battalion level task force. All vehicles in the median segment, which is the French Army's hallmark, will be replaced. The army intends to own combat vehicles that can be easily projected onto distant battlefield theaters and can fight in high intensity conflicts. The first phase of the program, scheduled to begin in 2018, consists of delivering the initial 780 of 1,722 Griffon multirole armored personnel carriers that will replace the large fleet of 40 year-old VABs. The initial 110 of 248 Jaguar reconnaissance and combat armored vehicles to replace the AMX-10 RC, among others, are scheduled to be delivered around 2020. Scorpion also includes upgraded versions of the Leclerc main battle tank, with the first deliveries scheduled for 2020.⁵

Under this modernization plan, the French Army expects to deploy its first Scorpion battle group abroad by 2021 and to have a fully equipped Scorpion brigade by 2023.⁶ This renewal fills a critical need because vehicles are suffering from accelerated attrition due to ongoing operations abroad—French VABs average 1,000 kilometers per year in France; per month in Afghanistan; per week in Sahel.⁷ Nevertheless, funding this program through completion proves challenging; of the estimated €7–8 billion needed for the program, only €6 billion have been secured. Even if the mainstream presidential candidates for the 2017 election pledge to increase the defense budget (which was 1.77 percent of the gross domestic product in 2016) by 2 percent, the funding would not be enough to solve all capability gaps, especially if the increase is not realized before 2022.⁸ There is also a risk that the renewal of nuclear deterrence equipment will take away part of France's defense funds at the expense of the army's acquisition budget. Indeed, deterrence funding has been estimated at €6 billion per year by 2025, compared to €3.4 billion per year today.⁹

4 Pierre Chareyron, "Digital Hoplités. Infantry Combat in the Information Age," *Focus stratégique* n°30 bis (Paris: Institut Français des Relations Internationales [IFRI], December 2011).

5 For a good overview of the Scorpion program in English, see Nicholas de Larrinaga, "Enter the Scorpion: French Army Vehicle Fleet Modernization," *IHS Jane's Defense Weekly*, May 24, 2016.

6 "Armée de Terre, Père des ruptures," TTU, May 3, 2016, <http://www.ttu.fr/armee-de-terre-leru-ruptures/>.

7 Audition du général Jean-Pierre Bossier, chef d'état-major de l'armée de Terre, sur le projet de loi actualisant la programmation militaire pour les années 2015 à 2019 (Assemblée nationale, May 26, 2015).

8 Henry Samuel, "France Must Increase Defence Spending to 2pc of GDP by 2020 Warns Chief of Defense Staff," *Telegraph* (London), December 21, 2016.

9 Institut Montaigne, *Refonder la sécurité nationale* (Paris: Institut Montaigne, 2016), 142.

Tactics: Toward Collaborative Warfare

The upcoming launch of the Scorpion program has triggered interesting debates about the future of land combat, also labeled “digitally-enhanced collaborative warfare.” The underlying challenge here is strategic: the aim is to maintain tactical and operational superiority to counter both irregular actors in expeditionary warfare and state armies. In reality, most of the concepts used to revive the doctrine are not new—for instance, in early 2000, General Guy Hubin tried developing disruptive tactical concepts.¹⁰ But today, the French Army is engaged in a genuine experimental process before welcoming Scorpion’s equipment.

The introduction of the Scorpion command and information system (SICS), a new communications system replacing all the older equipment, creates a network for veterans—a real tactical “game changer.”¹¹ The system facilitates information sharing (with an update of shared information at least every 10 seconds), which enables a collaborative command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR); blue force tracking; and enhanced reality, permitting collaborative warfare after 2025. This concept suggests mutual support functions between all ground vehicles will be optimized due to *infovalorization*—disseminating automatic alerts that allow instantaneous response to calls for assistance among other things.¹² In other words, a vehicle detecting aggression can automatically transmit information to friendly forces in the area who can spontaneously direct their detection and firing systems on the target.

These new technologies should enable the army to accelerate the pace of combat since networked units will enhance information sharing and considerably shorten decision cycles. A 2005 RAND Corporation study comparing the attack of an urban area by a nondigitized infantry brigade with a Stryker brigade combat team demonstrated that digitization reduced the delay required for a brigade commander to make a major decision from 24 to 3 hours, thanks to the collaborative work between echelons.¹³ To focus on maneuvering speed and emphasize airmobile combat, French Army tactics also include the possibility of using attack helicopters and drone swarms.¹⁴ The introduction of beyond visual range firing capabilities at the battle group level is another possible tactical breakthrough. Medium-range *missile moyenne portée* (MMP) antitank missiles fired from individual posts or Jaguar strike fighters and Hellfire air-to-surface missiles fired from Tiger attack helicopters could help decompartmentalize the maneuver, contributing to fluidifying it.¹⁵

10 Guy Hubin, *Perspectives tactiques* (Paris: Economica, 2003); and *Les engagements futurs des forces terrestres* (Paris: Armée de Terre, 2010).

11 Nicolas Chaligne, “Le système d’information du combat Scorpion/The Command and Information System (CIS) of Scorpion (SCIS),” *Fantassins magazine* n°36 (June 2016): 48–50, <http://fr.calameo.com/books/000009779038ce32036ba>.

12 Hugues Perot, “L’infovalorisation dans Scorpion/The Scorpion Infovalorization,” *Fantassins magazine*, n°36 (June 2016): 42–46, <http://fr.calameo.com/books/000009779038ce32036ba>.

13 Daniel Gonzales et al., *Network-Centric Operations Case Study: The Stryker Brigade Combat Team*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2005); and Michel Goya, “Dix ans d’expérience des brigades numérisées Stryker,” *Lettre du Retex-recherche* n°16, Centre de Doctrine d’Emploi des Forces, May 16, 2014.

14 Armée de Terre, *Action terrestre future: Demain se gagne aujourd’hui* (Paris: Armée de Terre, 2016).

15 Brice Erbland, “Aérocombat et technologies avancées,” *Ultima Ratio* (blog), June 13, 2016, <http://ultimatio-blog.org/archives/7778>.

Agility, however, is needed to conduct swift maneuvers. To obtain agility, or the “continued ability to meet the scalability of a diverse, turbulent and uncertain environment,” the French armed forces must take the following factors into consideration.¹⁶ First, the intellectual capacities to understand the given environment and be imaginative when thinking about tactics are essential.¹⁷ Second, a new information and communication system through networked mode warfare, such as the Scorpion infovalorization, should permit fast reconfiguration of battle order and enable battle group flexibility.

Finally, not only technology but also command culture is key. The French Army has a long tradition of mission-command by objective. To take advantage of new technological advancements, however, the army must encourage more horizontal information exchanges and increasing subsidiarity. This transition will probably prove difficult for the army to undertake. Some small organizational models, particularly within the special forces community, offer us food for thought about the future of subordination.¹⁸ Whether we successfully apply their solutions to larger units, however, remains questionable.

The Challenges of Territorial Defense

Of course, the French armed forces’ priority has always been protecting its national territory, but since 1996, the French Army has devoted most of its attention to Opérations Extérieures—operations abroad. Consequently, 2016 marked the quest for equilibrium between interventions abroad and presence in the national territory.

As far as antiterrorism is concerned, the army has been engaged on national soil since responding to the 1995 Paris subway bombing under the Vigipirate homeland security program. The operational footprint has always been light with approximately 1,000 soldiers mobilized, mainly in Paris, since 2003.¹⁹ Three days after the Île-de-France attacks, a historic turning point occurred: 10,000 soldiers were deployed in the main French cities, which was the beginning of Operation Sentinelle. Although intended as a temporary measure, the deployment was extended after the attacks in Paris and Nice. As of August 2016, the number of deployed soldiers had been reduced to 7,000, half of which operate in and around Paris, and 3,000 soldiers became part of a quick-reaction force.

Since implementing Sentinelle, the distribution of soldiers’ time between foreign and domestic operations has changed tremendously. Before January 2015, a soldier spent 15 percent of his or her time in operations abroad and 5 percent on national soil. Since January 2015, however, the time devoted to operations abroad has not changed and soldiers spend an additional 35–45 percent of their time operating within France. Once the French Army reaches an operational force of

16 “Action terrestre future.”

17 Rémy Hémez, “Tactics Mandatory Imagination in #Leadership,” *The Strategy Bridge*, April 1, 2016. <http://www.thestrategybridge.com/the-bridge/2016/4/1/tactics-mandatory-imagination-in-leadership>.

18 Stanley McChrystal, *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World* (New York: Portfolio / Penguin, 2015).

19 Elie Tenenbaum, *La sentinelle égarée? L’armée de Terre face au terrorisme*, Focus stratégique n°68 (Paris: IFRI, June 2016).

77,000 soldiers in 2018, soldiers will dedicate no more than 20 to 25 percent of their time to domestic operations.²⁰

The Ministry of Defense report on the use of armed forces on national soil presented before the Parliament in March 2016 suggests the logic of projection on the national territory should be replaced by a persistent “land protection posture” concept.²¹ The French public supports this shift with 87 percent of the population having a positive opinion of the army and 77 percent supporting Sentinelle.²² In early 2017, soldiers were also praised for their swift and effective response in two major attacks against them: one at the Louvre museum in February and one at the Orly airport in March.²³ Even so, experts continue to doubt the *modus operandi*: the current legal framework limits responses to self-defense and does not allow soldiers to conduct intelligence missions, make arrests, or engage in kinetic counterterrorism operations on national soil.²⁴

Although Sentinelle predominantly entailed static guarding of sensitive sites between January and April 2015, all current missions are dynamic, with groups of soldiers patrolling the streets. Despite these factors, the debate about how to use armed forces on national soil remains heated, which is unusual for defense-related matters in France.²⁵ The operation is demanding for French soldiers; for example, some of them patrol 20 to 25 kilometers a day on foot.²⁶ Also, 50 percent of the operating force spends more than 150 days a year from their home to conduct Sentinelle and external operations; some soldiers even work 220 days.²⁷ This high level of engagement in homeland operations also affects the training cycle, which was the first variable reduced to meet requirements. On average, only 65 days were dedicated to operational training in 2015 and 70 to 75 days in 2016, compared to a goal of 90 days when personnel requirements are met. The impact of training deficiencies is somewhat offset by operations abroad, but the negative effect on readiness should not be ignored, especially in high-intensity conflicts.

Another way to alleviate pressure imposed on French troops is to use available reserve forces. Hence, France must consider increasing operational reserves from 16,496 members in 2016 to 24,334 members by 2019.²⁸ Rapid mobilization of these soldiers is not straightforward as a

20 *Audition du général Arnaud Sainte-Claire Deville, commandant les forces terrestres* (Assemblée nationale, November 17, 2015).

21 Ministère de la défense, *Rapport au Parlement relatif aux conditions d'emploi des forces armées sur le territoire national* (Paris: La Délégation à l'information et à la communication de la défense [DICoD], March 2016).

22 “Les chiffres clés des sondages de la défense,” Ministère de la défense, July 7, 2016, <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/portail-defense/mediatheque/publications/les-chiffres-cles-de-sondages-de-la-defense-juillet-2016>.

23 Lizzie Dearden and Caroline Mortimer, “Le Louvre Terror Attack: Man Shouting ‘Allahu Akbar’ Shot after Trying to Kill French Soldier with a Machete,” *Independent* (London), February 3, 2017; and David Chazan, “Radicalised Muslim Known to Security Agencies Shot Dead in Attack at Paris Airport – As Security Stepped Up at Stadium Where Duke and Duchess Watch Rugby,” *Telegraph* (London), March 18, 2017.

24 Tenenbaum, *La sentinelle égarée?*

25 Florent de Saint-Victor, “Débat stratégique français et opération Sentinelle—Quand la France est capable de débattre,” *Mars Attaque* (blog), September 1, 2016, <http://mars-attaque.blogspot.com/2016/09/debat-strategique-sentinelle-france-operations-territoire-national.html>.

26 *Audition du général Jean-Pierre Bossier, chef d'état-major de l'armée de Terre, sur le projet de loi de finance pour 2016* (Assemblée nationale, October 13, 2015).

27 *Audition du général Jean-Pierre Bossier, chef d'état-major de l'armée de Terre, sur le projet de loi de finance pour 2017* (Assemblée nationale, October 11, 2016).

28 *Refonder la sécurité nationale*, 118.

30-day notice period is currently required. This issue is far more complex regarding the secondary level reserve, which represents a significant capacity of at least 20,000 soldiers available to the army alone.²⁹

The secondary level reserve comprises soldiers who left the army in the past 5 years that can be recalled under a prime minister's decree. Although this disposal has never been evaluated on a large scale, it was tested in March 2016 when 46 percent of 3,600 veterans within two brigades responded positively to the call.³⁰ In fact, since the French Army's professionalization in 1996, administrative monitoring for secondary level reservists has been inconsistent. Concerns have also been raised regarding the lack of equipment available for reservists. To revive the operational reserves, France recreated a national guard in October 2016—which, unlike its American counterpart, primarily designates coordination authority. The aim is to constitute a force of 84,000 soldiers by regrouping police, gendarmerie, and reserves before 2018. Most importantly, incentives—mostly financial—have been introduced to attract interest and to accelerate recruitment in the reserves. The 2017 presidential elections also initiated a public debate regarding the reactivation of conscription in France that, if implemented by the future president, will drastically change the French Army model.

Hence, Sentinelle has largely defined the evolution of the French Army's new operational equilibrium between homeland and foreign operations, which will clearly have long-term effects and most certainly remain a controversial issue. The impact this strategic balance will have on foreign interventions is difficult to assess, but it could affect the French Army's operational readiness for high-end scenarios and hamper its ability to react swiftly to a strategic surprise.

Toward a New Model of Intervention

Despite the renewed commitment to homeland operations, the French Army remains heavily engaged abroad. Since September 2014, French troops have been engaged in Operation Chammal in Iraq and Syria to support operations against the Islamic State. In 2015, half of army personnel spent more than 200 days in operations with intense and continual activity. As of March 2017, 10,000 French soldiers are deployed outside France, mostly to counter terrorist threats, and 1,120 strikes have been conducted against the Islamic State, which represents about 8 percent of coalition strikes, the third largest contribution.

France also has three task forces dedicated to the training and mentoring mission of Chammal in Iraq. The first one is embedded inside the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service. The second task force, about 100 soldiers, is embedded inside Iraq's 6th Infantry Division, headquartered near Abu Ghraib. Finally, Task Force Wagram, comprising four CAESAR guns, has been dispatched to Iraq since summer 2016.

Operation Barkhane remains France's prime military deployment and strategic priority. This operation began in August 2014 after the end of Operation Serval (2013–14), a joint combat operation with Malian

²⁹ *Audition du général Arnaud Sainte-Claire Deville, commandant les forces terrestres* (Assemblée nationale, November 17, 2015).

³⁰ Ministère de la défense, *Exercice Vortex 2016, la réserve rappelle ses anciens* (Paris : Ministère de la défense, May 15, 2016).

government forces aimed at protecting the capital city of Bamako and retrieving militant held territory.³¹ Operation Barkhane partly reorganized French military forces that were already present in West Africa. As of March 2017, the French are deploying 3,500 personnel throughout five countries in the Sahel region: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. Due to its high level of engagement, France has been forced to curtail other nonpriority operations such as Sangaris in the Central African Republic (December 2013–October 2016). France also maintains forward presence forces of up to 3,800 personnel conducting long-term military assistance and training missions in allied countries such as Senegal, the Ivory Coast, Gabon, Djibouti, and the United Arab Emirates.

To cope with the high rate of external deployment and the demand for homeland security operations, France is to a certain extent looking to reform its intervention model by reducing operational durations. Since the war in Mali and Operation Sangaris, Paris has promoted the concept of “bridging operations.”³² The aim of such transitional operations is to stabilize a situation until other forces can take over the mission. According to this concept, a limited but decisive volume of force is used during the intervention phase to work towards the rapid deployment of United Nations forces and to transfer the authority to a multinational body.

The will to reduce the length of commitments abroad is largely driven by the fact that the size of the French Army has been drastically reduced since the end of the Cold War. Similarly, according to its operational contract, France should only deploy 15,000 soldiers to a main theater, and 7,000–8,000 soldiers to a secondary theater, for up to six months; however, an average of 7,500 troops have been deployed in overseas operations since 2008, not counting those operating in France under Operation Sentinelle since January 2015.

These harsh matériel and human constraints are coupled with a strong desire to not engage in lengthy stabilization missions, as experienced in Afghanistan. This perception is particularly true in a context where operations involving French soldiers are cumulative and rarely last less than 13 years. Operation Serval only lasted 18 months, but was continued as Operation Barkhane. Operation Pamir in Afghanistan lasted 13 years (2001–14) as did Operation Licorne in the Ivory Coast (2002–15). Moreover, this bridging model is far from an ideal solution: first, it is always difficult to transform tactical success into strategic effects, and second, United Nations forces are not always efficient.

Faced with major changes in its strategic environment, France must “renew the approach of military commitments” as mentioned in the army strategic vision.³³ The era of external operations that began in the 1970s when the French Army sought efficiency by undertaking quick military action at a low cost is questioned.³⁴ This “techno-professional

31 For a good analysis of this operation in English, see Christopher S. Chivvis, *The French War on Al Qaeda in Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

32 Rémy Hémez and Aline Leboeuf, Retours sur Sangaris, *Entre stabilisation et protection des populations*, Focus stratégique n°67 (Paris: IFRI, April 2016).

33 “Action terrestre future,” 15.

34 Michel Goya, “Les opérations extérieures,” in *L’action militaire terrestre de A à Z*, ed. Didier Danet, Ronan Doaré, and Christian Malis (Paris: Economica, 2015), 372–79.

compact Army” model is further challenged by four factors.³⁵ First, victory still requires the continued presence of forces on the ground. Second, the average level of the median threat is rising. Third, the risk of state-to-state conflict is reemerging. And fourth, the army is engaged afresh in France to protect the homeland.

Conclusion

The French Army is engaged in an extremely critical modernization process that includes Scorpion vehicles and information systems, which will renew the French battle groups’ equipment. Though, most important, the French Army is also beginning to encourage a revival of military thinking to adapt the doctrine and tactics for disrupted environments and the new equipment to maintain a tactical and operational edge in a changing strategic environment.

Tensions fostered by the deployment of 7,500 to 10,000 soldiers on the national territory following multiple terrorist attacks have triggered a quest for a new equilibrium between commitments abroad and homeland operations. As far as Europe is concerned, the necessity is specific to France, the only country to have so many troops deployed abroad. Germany has only 2,500 soldiers committed to interventions: that is 60 percent less than France. Even if some European countries, such as Belgium and Italy, have deployed soldiers in the streets of their cities to respond to terrorists threats, the size and duration of the French Army’s commitment to homeland security operations is exceptional. The French Army’s increased operational force from 66,000 to 77,000 soldiers is an answer, but will not be enough latitude for strategic response.

The revival of France’s reserve force will be a key factor in determining the nation’s ability to maintain balance between foreign and domestic operations and should be considered as the means to reconnect with the continental operational legacy of French strategic culture. Besides, it is no coincidence that mass—the “ability to generate and maintain sufficient strength ratio to produce strategic decision effects in the long term”—is coming back into the French Army’s gray literature. The return is necessary due to “demographic expansion in Europe’s southern flank,” “the proliferation of mega-cities,” and the importance of having a robust force when conventional deterrence is considered.”³⁶ The need for mass also highlights the problems raised by military resurgence and emphasizes, among other things, the requirement for a high rate of supervision within the orders to cope with the 118,000 soldiers and policemen that could be recalled under the second tier reserve principle.³⁷

With 77,000 soldiers in the operational force and the reforms carried out as part of *Au contact*, the French model is still viable even if the equilibrium between homeland operations and territorial operations continues. Moreover, because this equilibrium is driven by a political inclination to make the French feel safer and retain French status in the international system, reforms will prove difficult without a major shift

35 Christian Malis quoted in “Action terrestre future,” 15.

36 *Ibid.*, 37–40.

37 Guillaume Garnier, *Les chausse-trapes de la remontée en puissance*, Focus stratégique n°52 (Paris: IFRI, May 2014).

in the global security environment. It is worth noting, however, that this model will remain in tension and may have trouble reacting to a major shift in the strategic environment. It is difficult to always ask for more financial resources, especially in a country with budgetary problems, but as General Pierre de Villiers, the French chief of defense staff said: “The price of peace is the war effort.”³⁸

³⁸ General Pierre de Villiers, “Le prix de la paix c’est l’effort de guerre,” *Les Echos*, December 20, 2016.