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THE WANING POWER. AN ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY FRENCH DEFENSE POLICY

Abstract

The article analyzes the evolution of French defense policy from the Cold War to the present day. After presenting the country's strategic outlook during the Cold War, the article studies the White Papers drawn up by France to adapt its national defense and military organization to the changing domestic and international situation. Viewed as a whole, they show the profound transformations French defense policy has experienced over the last decades.

KeyWords

France, Defense policy, Military policy, transformation, White Papers.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Since the reign of Francis I, the search for supremacy in the European sphere, the attainment of safe borders, and, since the conquest of Algeria, the construction of a colonial empire, have constituted the axes of France's foreign policy. Nonetheless, the country has repeatedly failed in its attempts to reach the first objective, as the experiences of Francis I, Louis XIII, Louis XIV and Napoleon show. The attainment of safe borders had incomplete success: even though the border with Spain was stabilized in 1659, it failed in the border with Germany, as the invasions of 1870, 1914, and 1940 would reveal.

The French victory in the First World War paid such a high human and material price that it sunk the country into a moral and social crisis that would last until the German aggression in 1940. In 1945, France rose again among the victors, but its role as a power had been seriously eroded due to the minor role played by the French armed forces in the war and liberation of its own territory.

Perhaps weakness in the immediate aftermath of the World War can explain the French obstinacy to retain the two jewels of its colonial empire, Indochina and Algeria. The French determination in Indochina led to a war that continued until its defeat in the battle of Diên Biên Phu (1954). Despite suffering a failure of such dimensions, Paris repeated the experience in Algeria, until its withdrawal in 1962.

In any case, these failures forced Paris to reconsider its position in the world, its relations with the territories in its colonial empire (particularly with those in French-speaking Africa), its situation regarding NATO, and the scope of its role as a power.

Starting with this situation, this paper will review the configuration of contemporary French defense. Assuming that the defense policy is the dimension of national security responsible for establishing the aims, determining the objectives, and providing the necessary means for defense, the article will analyze the evolution of defense since the Cold War until the present. To do so, after presenting the French strategic conception during the bipolar world, the White Papers elaborated to adapt its national defense policy and its military organization to the changing domestic and international situation will be studied, and, taken as a whole, they show the deep transformations their defensive architecture has experienced in the last decades.

2. FRANCE DURING THE COLD WAR

The defense policy during the Cold War was divided into two long periods: 1945-56 and 1957-89, with the Suez Canal crisis as a pivot. After its inclusion in the Atlantic axis with the signing the Treaties of Brussels (1948), and Washington (1949), and its impulse into the failed Defense European Community (1952), the allied reluctance to expand the operational area included in Article 6 of the North Atlantic Treaty, the North American rejection of the French proposal to create a tripartite council together with the United States and Great Britain, or the Suez events had a great impact on the French strategic conception in the bipolar world. Since then, the Elysée Palace focused on consolidating its foreign autonomy through a progressive separation from the North Atlantic Alliance and the United States.¹ In 1958, the Mediterranean fleet left the allied command structure, and the presence of American nuclear weapons was banned in French territory. A year later, Paris detonated the first atom bomb, and approved the first *Military Programme Law* (1960-64)² to acquire the necessary tools to guarantee its strategic autonomy, and, finally, in 1966, it abandoned the allied military structure.³

It is in this context that the wager on its own nuclear power should be understood; an objective on which they were already working since the approval of the first nuclear plan in 1952, but that would be reinforced in 1954 with the creation of the Commissariat for Atomic Energy dedicated to military applications for the atom, and that would obtain practical results in 1960 with the first successful military test. In fact, throughout the sixties, a well-known and continued effort in the field of nuclear weapons was boosted, which ended up absorbing a significant part of the resources allocated to the purchase of materiel and equipment for the armed forces.

1 DUBURG, Robert, “L'évolution de la politique de défense et la stratégie militaire générale de la France”, («*The evolution of the defense policy and the general military strategy in France*») in PASCALON, Pierre (dir.): *Les armées françaises à l'aube du XXI siècle: L'Armée de Terre*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003, pp. 53-66.

2 National Assembly, *Program Law n° 60-1305 of 8 December 1960 regarding specific military equipment*, Paris: Documentation Française, 1960.

3 Nonetheless, by virtue of the Valentin-Ferber (1974) and *Biard-Schulze* (1978) confidential accords, France was participating in the allied contingency plans (in fact, the First French Army participated in the counter-offensives of the projecting of the Fulda and the Danube), and in case of war, would coordinate its conventional air attacks, and would allow NATO to use its air space (RUIZ-PALMER, Diego; “The NATO-Warsaw Pact Competition in the 1970s and 1980s: a Revolution in Military Affairs in the Making or the End of a Strategic Age?”, *Cold War History*, vol. 14, n° 4, 2014, pp. 533-573).

The construction of a nuclear force was conceived as a very relevant priority, since nuclear capacity was not only one of the cornerstones of French exceptionality, but was also fully independent from the outside. In contrast to the United Kingdom, whose missile-launching submarines used American vectors and depended on the consent of the President of the United States for their use,⁴ in France, nuclear weapons, its launching missiles and associated equipment were designed and manufactured domestically.

The first step of the reorganization of the French defense took place in 1959, with the approval of the Ordinance for the General Organization of the Defense, which meant updating the regulations that dated from the period between wars.⁵ The document required the distribution of competences among the Cabinet of Ministers, the Prime Minister, and the Ministry of Defense.⁶

Nonetheless, in spite of the modernizing effort of the armed forces and the launching of a deterrent nuclear capacity of their own, codified in subsequent *Military Programme Laws* for the periods of 1965-70, and 1971-75,⁷ there was no strategic conception defined to sustain the defense policy being put into practice since the end of the war of Algeria. It was necessary to wait until 1972 –during the presidency of Georges Pompidou– for the first explicit formulation of the principles, objectives, capacities, and means of French defense to see the light with the publication of the first *White Paper* on Defense and Security.⁸

This roadmap recognized that the defense policy was the tool needed to guarantee the continued independence of the country and the nationalistic feeling of its population.⁹ Drafted surrounded by the rejection to the policy of aligned blocs, and

4 By virtue of the accords for the acquisition of the *Polaris* and *Trident* missiles, the British doctrine of usage was based on nuclear interdependence, understood as the joint planning between the United Kingdom and NATO, to select objectives and the British option of unilateral use in case of national emergency. Nonetheless, it should be remembered that the choice of objectives for its strategic bombers was a national prerogative, the same as the eventual use of tactical nuclear devices as multiplier of the conventional capabilities. (TETRAIS, Bruno, *A comparison between US, UK and French nuclear policies and doctrines*, Paris, Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique, 2007.

5 Presidency of the Council of Ministers, *Ordinance n° 59-147 of 7 January 1959 including the general organization for the Defense*. Paris: Documentation Française, 1959.

6 DUBURG, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-64.

7 National Assembly. *Programme Law n° 64-1270 of 23 December 1964 regarding certain military equipment*, Paris: Documentation Française, 1964 and *Programme Law n° 70-1058 of 19 November 1970 regarding military equipment of the period 1971 to 1975*, Paris: Documentation Française, 1971.

8 Ministry of Defense, *White Paper on National Defense 1972*, Paris: Documentation Française, 1972.

9 There are authors who consider that the basic design of defense was the work of the government of De Gaulle, and that the White Paper was limited to updating and sistematizing the Gaullist inheritance. (LESPINOIS, Jérôme, “*The Army: from one White Paper to another*”, in PASCALON, *op.*

the non-alignment of the country, the precise definition for foreign commitments and the effort of international collaboration in favor of a détente, the roadmap had the following priorities: security of the French territory and its population, the participation in the security of Europe, security and defense of the Mediterranean front, and the compliance of the commitments with the countries in French-speaking Africa. The attainment of these objectives demanded a conventional force capable of delaying an atomic escalation, and a national nuclear force as last guarantor of the integrity of the country.

The equipment of the armed forces was an area reserved for domestic industry because the government linked the definition of the needs of the arms industry with the industrial policy to satisfy their requirements, with the aim of guaranteeing the autonomy of the military industry, avoid the dependence on foreign suppliers, and boost the scientific-technological advance, economic development, and territorial balance of the country.

The achievement of these objectives was based on planning and programming. As for planning, needs were assessed with a time horizon of fifteen years, including setting the objectives, the steps to reach them, and the required measurements. The programming was done within a framework of five years through the Military Programming Laws, which had been submitted to the National Assembly since 1960, and included the objectives for equipment, and the budget forecast.

The *White Paper* supported a global outlook for the security and defense of France. The definition of the defense policy, the description of the main weapons programs, the evaluation of the future needs of materiel and equipment, the analysis of the validity of compulsory military service, the budget demands, the industrial policy of the defense sector, the organization of the armed forces, the education of the commanding officers, and the scientific and technological research within the scope of defense provided a very complete and comprehensive trajectory for all the pieces which, conveniently gathered, justified the why and wherefore of the defense of France. Consequently, its publication established the basis of what has been until now a demand for all governments, regarding transparency in the elaboration and management of the French strategy, and its defense and security policy was laid with its publication.

Nonetheless, in subsequent years, significant changes were implemented in the defense policy, as a result of the provisions stated in the *White Paper*, but also due to government decisions in response to the events in the international scenario, and to the changes in the defensive needs of the country.

The first noteworthy change took place as a result of the arrival of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing at the Elysée Palace in 1974. The new government had the perception that France's defense had been weakened, and lacked the autonomous capacity for foreign intervention. Thus, a reform process in the ground forces was initiated, based on the reduction of troops, the unification of the territorial and operational command structures, the restructure of the army corps, and the reinforcement of its logistic support, the reduction of the size of the divisions, and the creation of the first helicopter combat regiments. Likewise, the defense budget was increased, the modernization of weapons was continued and, consistent with the program objectives of the government, foreign interventions were increased (Congo, Chad, Mauritania, or Lebanon).

The Socialist victory in 1981 and the investiture of François Mitterrand started the gradual deterioration of the capabilities of the armed forces, especially of the Army, due to budget cut-backs included in the *Military Programme Law* (1984-88),¹⁰ with new reductions of troops and units, and the interruption of the modernization process.¹¹

This deterioration occurred because the governments in the eighties placed emphasis on the idea that the advances in détente, the weakness of some European Communist regimes, and the reforms in the Soviet Union were easing international tensions and permitted the reduction of France's defensive capacity, without endangering the security of the country. However, the feasibility of this policy was based on the fact that Washington, with the support of London, had substantially increased its military expenditure, and was forcing Moscow to launch an arms race, which finally led to its collapse. Furthermore, French foreign policy during that period was focused on structuring a French-German axis, and on the European construction, which contributed to defense not being one of the governmental priorities.

3. THE POST-COLD WAR AND THE WHITE PAPER OF 1994

The end of the bipolar order meant the restructure of French security policy: the disappearance of the threat on which the defensive framework had been built, and the apparent global stability permitted the country to collect the *dividend of peace*, and to reduce the size, capabilities, and means of its army.

The government of Edouard Balladur as Prime Minister, and François Mitterrand still as President of the Republic, presented a new *White Paper* on Defense in 1994 to

¹⁰ National Assembly. *Programme Law 83-606 of 8 July 1983 including approval of military programming for the years 1984-1988*, Paris: Documentation Française. However, this law would be abolished in 1987 with the approval of a new law for the period 1987-91.

¹¹ LESPINOIS, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-89.

adapt the architecture of French security to the post-Cold War, and to set the bases for the defense of the country for the 21st century.¹²

Two types of national interests were recognized: the vital interests (territorial integrity, maritime and air accesses, free exercise of sovereignty, and the protection of the population), and the strategic ones (peace in Europe, the Mediterranean basin, and the Middle East; security of the energy supplies, and commercial imports and exports from outside Europe, responsibilities derived from the international position of France, especially as member of the United Nations Security Council).

To guarantee the international role of France, a European dimension of security and defense would be promoted through the revitalization of the Western European Union, and the support to initiatives such as the Euro corps or the creation of an aero-naval joint force among France, Spain, and Italy. The North Atlantic Alliance was considered an essential pillar of European security, and the achievement of the transatlantic bond; thus, assuming new responsibilities. Nonetheless, the principles adopted in 1966 were still valid: non-integration in the military structure, free readiness of the armed forces, and the independence of nuclear power. Finally, the role of France in the United Nations pivoted around its membership in the Security Council, and the support to peacekeeping operations, as long as the latter would not come into conflict with national interests.

Nuclear deterrence was considered essential to the vital interests and the political independence of the country, although it was recognized that in the years to come, its importance would have to decrease in national defense. Likewise, the Elysée Palace was willing to participate in the elaboration of a European nuclear doctrine as long as the full atomic autonomy of the country was kept.

Conventional forces needed an in-depth revision because the model inherited from the Cold War was obsolete. From then on, they should be prepared to prevent conflicts through cooperation and military assistance, and keeping the units pre-positioned; to attain technological, tactical, and doctrinal superiority, and to undertake a wide range of tasks, from support to peace to high intensity actions in a multinational environment, and the protection of the national territory, of its air space, and its accesses.

Six scenarios for the use of the armed forces were outlined, of different dimensions and different levels of military involvement:

- A regional conflict that would not affect France. The intervention would be carried out within a multinational framework, as a *projection of power* with advanced weaponry and special operational forces, or as a *projection of forces*, with ground units.

¹² Ministry of Defense, *White Paper of Defense 1994*, Paris: Documentation Française, 1994.

- A regional conflict where French interest would be threatened. France would use its conventional forces as well as its nuclear deterrence.
- An aggression against French overseas territories, to which Paris would respond regardless of the international reaction.
- The compliance with the defense treaties with countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In case of crisis, there would be a rapid and limited military response, but susceptible to being prolonged for months.
- Crisis management and imposition of peace. The participation would be carried out in a multinational environment and with clear objectives to avoid prolonging the mission or its spread to other territories.
- The resurgence of a threat against Western Europe. Although considered unlikely, but if it were to occur, France would respond with preemptive and nuclear deterrence measures.

The international atmosphere, the environment of risks and threats, and the national defense objectives should define the future capabilities of its armed forces, besides setting the bases of the *Model for the Armed Forces 2015*, which established the main guidelines for military programming.

Consistent with this forecast, three priority capabilities for the French armed forces were also established: *Information*, essential in the defense strategy, for the prevention of crises, and for the evaluation of potentially conflictive situations. The troops and the means of electronic observation, vigilance and reconnaissance would be increased; the *Command*, able to be projected and harmonized with allied systems, with a deployable General Staff and operational command; *Projection*, essential capability for all armed forces units, based on modular forces with lighter means and logistical requirements, and a fleet of strategic transport aircraft and projection ships.¹³

These approaches would determine the entity of the force. One or two ground brigades and one or two combat aircraft squadrons would be available for limited crises. For the enforcement of bilateral defense treaties, and for cases of aggression to the sovereign territory outside the metropolis, an airborne brigade and three fighter-bomber squadrons would be deployed. In case these three scenarios took place simultaneously, three land brigades, from three to six combat aircraft squadrons, ten in-flight refueling aircraft, and about sixty medium transport aircraft would

¹³ This emphasis on the projection was due to the fact that the experience in the Gulf War was far from being satisfactory. Even though the Army had 290,000 troops, it could only deploy 13,500 men, particularly because of the political cost it would have meant sending replacement soldiers. However, the serious lack of materiel in reconnaissance and transport means, or a notable insufficiency of capabilities of special operations, became evident. (MERCHET, Jean Dominique, "Les transformations de l'Armée française", *Hérodote*, n°116, 2005, pp. 63-81).

be available, in addition to an aircraft carrier and various landing means. To face a regional conflict, the pivot of military action would be the light-armored brigade that could be reinforced with a heavy-armored brigade, and air and aero-naval support. Should there be an aggression against Western Europe, France would rely on nuclear deterrence, and the use of all its entire conventional forces.

A mixed model of human resources based on universal conscription and a professional militia was defended. Mandatory military service was justified because a professional model could mean two restrictions: an insufficient number of volunteers to cover the staff, and a very high cost in detriment of expenditure for armament and materiel. On the contrary, a mixed model would allow the professionals to concentrate on projectable forces while the recruits would be assigned to support tasks, and to the units deployed in French territory. Nonetheless, this approach had an ephemeral life since, only two years later, in 1996, universal military service was abolished, which shows the lack of consistency with the approaches of the political authorities at the time.

Regarding the defense industry, the White Paper upheld the supervisory authority of the Ministry of Defense over the industrial sector, subordinating it to the defense strategy, and to the foreign objectives of the State. The insufficient capacity of the domestic market to absorb most of its own industrial production, the intensification of the competition in international markets, and the greater complexity of technology, and its increasing costs, rendered advisable the design of a new policy for industry, and for weaponry. In nuclear armament, France should maintain its technological self-sufficiency in delivery missiles, guidance systems, warheads, and means of command and control. Two objectives would be covered in conventional armament: the preservation of the capability of its own design and manufacturing, and the commencement of cooperation programs with allied countries.¹⁴

Regarding the budget framework, this road map placed a horizon of 2010 as a limit for its budget. Between 1965 and 1982, French military expenditures rose to 4% of GDP, and since then, a gradual decrease to 3.4% in 1994, which affected the objectives of power, the catalogs of capacities, and the plans of acquisition of weaponry and materiel.¹⁵ The *White Paper* ruled out the increase of defense expenditures, but argued for the need to increase the expenditures on weaponry, for the integration of new technologies as well as for the need to renew all the obsolete materiel. This modernization would require difficult decisions regarding several industrial sectors, as the purchases were suspended or cut back if they did not respond to the guidelines of the new model of armed forces to be shaped throughout the decade.¹⁶

14 CONZE, Henry. "France's defense procurement strategy: looking to the future", *The RUSI Journal*, vol. 140 n° 2, 1995, pp. 48-51.

15 AUFRANT, Marc. "France and its allies: A comparative study of defence spending trends since 1985", *Defence and Peace Economics*, vol. 10 n°1, 1999, pp. 79-102.

16 HÉBERT, Jean-Paul. *The strategic debate about weaponry 1992-2005*, Le Mesnil-sur-l'Estrée, CIRPES-Groupe de Sociologie de la Défense de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2006.

It is also worth highlighting that this *White Paper* saw the light with the birth of the *Revolution in Military Affairs* (RMA).¹⁷ In the nineties, the French armed forces were immersed in two parallel though interrelated processes: the debate and the integration of the RMA into French strategy, and the activation of the objectives established in the *White Paper*.¹⁸

The debate about the RMA in France crystallized with the elaboration of the first manual for joint doctrine, and the creation of forums for intellectual reflection and the analysis of lessons learned, for the elaboration of doctrinal documents, and the education of military commands.¹⁹ Some examples of this are the *Center for Doctrine and Higher Education of the Army* (1998), substituted in 2004 by the *Center for Doctrine in the Use of Forces*, and the *Center for Higher Education of the Army*; and in particular, the *Joint Center for Concepts, Doctrines, and Experimentation* which, founded in 2005, under the command of the Chief of Defense, constitutes the main organ of the French military as it undertakes work for strategic prospective, joint doctrine, development and experimentation of concepts, or generation of military capabilities.²⁰

Nonetheless, the French military did not limit themselves to importing American concepts about the RMA and transformation, but rather, regardless of the criterion, they elaborated their own original doctrines.²¹ In fact, the vision of the centers of thought regarding the binomial Revolution-Transformation has always been very

17 An RMA (Revolution in Military Affairs) constitutes a change in the form of combat which, motivated by the exploitation of new weapon systems, operating concepts, doctrines of use of force or ways to organize and administer military means, renders the former military style obsolete. In the decade of 1990, this idea designed the international strategic analysis since it was assumed that this revolution – made possible by information technology, based on the attainment of a full knowledge of the battlefield, and configured around the generation of a joint force capable of dominating the ground, naval, air, space, and cyberspace spheres – would allow the increase of the military gap between the countries that conquered it, and those which didn't. (COLOM, Guillem, *Entre Ares y Atenea, el debate sobre la Revolución en los Asuntos Militares*, Madrid: Instituto Universitario General Gutiérrez Mellado, 2008).

18 PASCALON, Pierre. *Quelle politique de défense pour la France à l'aube du XXIème siècle?* (*What defense policy for France at the dawn of the 21st century?*) Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001.

19 Army Staff, *Concept interarmées d'emploi des forces en opération*, Paris: Ministry of Defense, 1997
Army Staff, *Doctrine interarmées d'emploi des forces en opérations*, Paris: Ministry of Defense, 2002.

20 Since its foundation, the *Centro de Doctrina de Empleo de Fuerzas* (CDEF) (Center for the Doctrine of the Use of the Forces) has been giving support to a wide and varied series of specialized publications: since 2003 *Doctrine Tactique y Cahiers de la Recherche Doctrinale*, in 2005 *Héraclès y Cahiers de la Réflexion Doctrinale* came out, and more recently, *Cahiers de la Recherche Opérationnelle*.

21 TERRIFF, Terry, "NATO military transformation: challenges and opportunities for France", *European Security*, vol. 19 n° 1, 2010, pp. 61-78.

critical of the American model,²² considering it much too oriented to conventional war, and putting too much emphasis on the technological advantage as a decisive variable, which subordinates political action to military capacity, and coming from a strategic culture different from the European one.²³ Consequently, France has questioned the convenience that its armed forces imitate the American forces.²⁴

Along the same lines of self reflection, in 1997 the Ministry of Defense started the *Prospective Plan for thirty years*, to explore the future needs of the defense, and to orient studies in different fields.²⁵ Starting from the strategic environment, the crises and deployment scenarios of the French armed forces, the evolution of military technology, the current and future capacities (network operations, deterrence, command, control and communications, observation, reconnaissance, projection and mobility, in-depth attacks, air-ground or air-sea, and aerospace capacity), and established a catalog of risks and threats foreseen, and of detailed proposals for equipment and materials.

Despite these efforts for intellectual reflection and for doctrinal elaboration, and the objectives presented in the *White Paper* of 1994, the capabilities of the armed forces of the country continued to erode, in particular those of the Army. The abolition of compulsory military service without having forecasts based on a professional army led many units to be below adequate staffing levels, reducing its operating capacity. In addition, the divisional structure was replaced by another structure based on brigades without analyzing its operating implications, and numerous regiments were eliminated without clear criteria, ignoring seniority or the personnel record. The territorial distribution of the units integrated in the brigades was characterized by its territorial dispersion, reducing internal cohesion, and complicating the command's tasks. The reduction of training due to the decrease in the frequency of the maneuvers, the lack of ammunition for training, and the obsolescence of numerous weapons systems, which reduced the rate of readiness of ground, naval, and air means, also contributed to diminish operating capacity from the armed forces.²⁶

22 The then Chief of the CDEF, General Vincent Desportes, made it perfectly clear in an interview: "La Transformation en difficulté: vers l'adaptation, nouveau paradigme?" ("The transformation in difficulty: towards adaptation, a new paradigm?") *Défense et Sécurité Internationale*, n° 20, 2006, pp. 15-21.

23 For a detailed and critical analysis about "technologism" of American military thought, see: *La technologie militaire en question. Le cas américain*. Paris: Economica, 2008.

24 Centre de Doctrine d'Emploi des Forces, "La «Transformation»: jusqu'où?", (The "Transformation", how far?) *Héraclès*, n° 4, 2004, pp. 16-18.

25 Ministry of Defense, *The prospective plan for 30 years*, Paris: Ministry of Defense, 2005.

26 BOYER, Yves. *Organization of the French armed forces. National Army, Air Force, and Navy. Major structures, implementations, units and equipment*, Paris: Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, 2002.

Nonetheless, the enactment of the *Military Programme Law 2003-2008* tried to stem the loss of military capacities.²⁷ After many years of budget reductions, the law presented an increase in expenditures and investments, particularly in weapons and materiel: nuclear deterrence means, air and sea transport, antimissile defense, and defense in space, and means of in-depth attacks. In other words, Paris intended to reinforce its decision-making autonomy by modernizing the arsenal and capabilities of its forces²⁸.

The experience acquired in international missions (the Balkans, Afghanistan, Ivory Coast, Congo, Iraq or Lebanon) produced valuable insights, in particular to the Army. Among other lessons learned, it was observed that the ground units should not be so specialized since they were required multi-functional capabilities on site (armed action, stabilization or humanitarian aid);²⁹ capabilities for urban combat were developed, and medium armored forces were boosted in detriment of those for heavy forces, and the operating cycles abroad were revised.³⁰

4. A NEW CHANGE OF DIRECTION IN FRENCH DEFENSE: THE WHITE PAPER OF 2008

The publication of the *White Paper of National Defense and Security* of 2008 substantially altered the guidelines drawn up in previous years.³¹ In its Preface, President Nicolas Sarkozy spoke of the need to boost a national security strategy that would include the defense, domestic security, foreign and economic policies, and that would provide France the necessary means to count on freedom of action and decision-making autonomy.³²

27 Assemblée Nationale. LOI n° 2003-73 of 27 January 2003 regarding military programming for the years 2003 to 2008, Paris: Documentation Française, 2003.

28 BOURDILLAU, François. "Evolutions de l'Armée de l'Air vers le modèle Air 2015", ("Evolutions of the Air Force towards the model Air 2015") in PASCALON, Pierre (dir.). *Les armées françaises à l'aube du XXI siècle -L'Armée de l'Air (The French armed forces at the dawn of the 21st century- the Air Force)*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003, pp. 241-259.

29 Ministry of Defense. *The prospective plan in 30 years. Syntheses and Annexes*, Paris: Ministry of Defense, 2005.

30 KLEIN, Michel. *Armée de Terre: armée d'emploi*, (The Army: a professional force). Paris: Foundation for Strategic Research, 2007.

31 Ministry of Defense. *National Defense and Security. White Paper 2008*, Paris: Odile Jacob, 2008.

32 ARTEAGA, Félix. "The concept of national security in the White Paper of French National Defense and Security", *Analysis of the Royal Elcano Institute*, n° 133, 2008.

Positive elements were enumerated in the international scenario, such as the spread of democracy throughout the world, the reduction of poverty, greater international cooperation, and the decrease of war conflicts; but the negative elements were also mentioned, such as the increase in sources of instability which escaped the control of the States, the expansion of territories that remain on the margins of globalization; the environmental deterioration; the tensions for the provisioning of material of strategic interest, or the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and of missiles. Underlined as well was the evolution of the forms of violence, with a quantitative and qualitative leap of terrorism,³³ of the proliferation of irregular and asymmetric conflicts, and of the growing privatization of violence.³⁴

Although Western technological and military supremacy were recognized, with the US at the center, a warning was also given about the progressive loss of the Western demographic and economic weight, and the violent answer to its cultural values. The preoccupation for the Asian situation was obvious, with the strength of China and India, and the absence of a collective security system in the area. As a whole, it was not considered that the post Cold War world was more dangerous than the previous bipolar order, but in fact, more unstable and less foreseeable, which could require more foreign interventions.

Regarding the most important risks and threats for France, the *White Paper* defined them in their connection with specific geographic areas, a new notion in relation with previous documents. The first was the arc of instability that stretches from the African Atlantic coast to the Indian Ocean, with risks as heterogenous as the rivalry between Sunnis and Shiites, jihadism, State fragility, conflicts due to access to resources, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Despite its natural resources, and its development potential, sub-Saharan Africa was still burdened by high population growth, food shortage, and the combination of corrupt governments and unresolved conflicts, turning it into another source of risks. In the third place, the Maghreb, due to its potential destabilization because of demographic pressure, uncontrolled emigration, political conflicts, and jihadist activity. In the case of Asia, the main worry lay in the possible conflicts among three States with common borders and having nuclear devices: China, India, and Pakistan.

The risks that could hover over France, and over Europe, would include terrorism (conventional or with weapons of mass destruction); attacks with ballistic and cruise missiles; cyber attacks; transnational criminal activities; pandemics (spread through

33 The terrorist threat had already been specifically discussed in a previous document. Prime Minister, France in the face of terrorism. *White Paper of the Government regarding domestic security in the face of terrorism*. Paris: Documentation Française, 2006.

34 In this respect, see the similarities of these approaches with the prospective analysis that the Ministry of Defense published a year earlier. Ministry of Defense, *Preparing future commitments for 2035*, Paris: Ministry of Defense, 2007.

the international mobility of people and merchandise); effects of climate change; natural and industrial catastrophes, or aggressions to French citizens abroad. As a whole, these analytic variables provided a much more ample and varied strategic vision than in any previous official document, but precisely that breadth of focus tended to diffuse the precise role that the armed forces should carry out in the new strategy. The military instrument was left out regarding some of the threats, which would be more the responsibility of public health or civil protection services than of the armed forces. Thus, defense became another instrument in the framework of the security policies designed by the government.

Consequently, the new national security strategy established that the aim of defense was to guarantee the integrity of the population, the territory, and the republican values, and to contribute to European and International security. The instruments to guarantee these aims would be the defense policy, the internal and civil security policy, foreign policy, and economic action.³⁵ The *White Paper* established a set of strategic functions as the bases for foreign, security and defense actions:

- *Knowledge and anticipation*, with the preparation of the means for defense and security, reinforcing the intelligence services, and creating a National Defense and Security Council with the participation of all ministries involved in security.
- *Prevention*, through the improvement of the collective security system to reduce the risks and peacefully solve international controversies during the crises and post conflicts, cooperating with the work of stabilization and reconstruction. Disarmament, preventive diplomacy, integration of security in the aid to development policies, follow-up of fragile situations, or the reinforcement of the local capacities of crises prevention.
- *Deterrence*, of a nuclear nature, and conceived as the last guarantee for the integrity of the territory, the population, and the institutions of the country. It would be built on four missile-launching submarines and two squadrons of attack aircraft based on land and on board. Likewise, the necessary scientific, technological, and industrial resources needed to support and modernize the nuclear capacity would be kept.
- *Protection*, with the aim of neutralizing attacks against the territory and the population; coordinating the internal security, civil protection, and the armed

³⁵ Furthermore, this strategy would be based on anticipation and reaction, or the capability to operate on strategic surprises (unforeseen events that alter world security), and on strategic ruptures (events that radically modify the security of the States), in a preventive manner, and, in any event, modifying its evolution; resistance or the capability of public powers and society to face the consequences of a catastrophe or of an aggression, restoring as soon as possible normal life, and the escalation of power, understood as the capacity to respond to each situation with flexibility, depending on the entity of the threat and its evolution.

forces; modernizing aero-spatial surveillance; and strengthening the capability to react of the public powers.

- *Intervention*, autonomously in case of threats to French citizens living abroad, since in all other cases, the interventions would take place in a multinational framework. The intervention would concentrate on three geographical axes: Atlantic Ocean-Gulf of Oman-Indian Ocean, Mediterranean Sea-Western Africa-the Antilles, and sub-Saharan Africa, with the pre-positioning of the forces on the African-Atlantic front, in the Arabian-Persian Gulf, and in the Indian Ocean.

The document also set forth the military capabilities, and the entity of the armed forces, which should be able to carry out the following tasks: to project 30,000 troops in a period of six months, and give them support during one year, simultaneously keeping 5,000 soldiers on alert for other missions. The spearhead of the air force would be the *Mirage 2000* and the *Rafale* combat aircraft, being able to project up to seventy units –at a high performance rate in the coercive phase, and backed up in the stabilization phase– at distances of up to 8,000 kilometers from French territory. The Navy should be in proper conditions to deploy an aero-naval group -made up of an aircraft carrier, escort frigates, and nuclear attack submarines- and an amphibious group.

According to the road map, these force objectives will be reached between 2015 and 2025. The effort of the equipment would focus on the improvement of the protection of the force (armored, personal equipment, counter IED systems, NBQR (nuclear biochemical) defense, and electronic war); correct maintenance of the ammunition reserves; strengthening programs with direct impact on operational coherence (such as the amphibious capacity); cyber war; strategic and tactical air transport; modernization of tactical air support; the control of the submarine environment and of the coastal waters; the increase of attack systems at a distance (submarine and air launched cruise missiles); or the capacity to undertake network operations.³⁶

The document outlined a force detailing that the Army would have 88,000 projectable troops, organized into twelve brigades with their support units; the Navy would have an aircraft carrier, eighteen frigates, four amphibious assault ships, six nuclear attack submarines, and four missile-launching submarines; and the Air Force would keep three hundred combat aircraft, fourteen refueling aircraft, and seventy strategic and tactical transport aircraft.

Likewise, the document stated that French foreign and security action would be integrated in the international security structures. In this sense, Paris bet on giving

36 Ministry of Defense. *Modernization of Defense. For an advance Defense*, Paris: Ministry of Defense 2008.

an impulse to the Common Policy for Defense and Security, codified in the Lisbon Treaty (2007-9) with the organization of the Permanent Structured Cooperation, the creation of a joint Operational General Headquarters, the reinforcement of the interoperability of the European armies, the collaboration in intelligence, the creation of a competitive defense industry in the international market, and the establishment of a single and integrated command for European civil and military operations.

The traditional French ambivalence was maintained regarding the North Atlantic Alliance. On the one hand, it underlined the importance for the country of the cooperation between the EU and NATO, of the role of the Alliance to address new threats, and of a new balance between the United States and the European partners, in favor of the latter. But, even though the French collaboration with NATO has increased, particularly after its integration in the military structure and the attainment of the leadership of one of the two strategic commands, the *Transformation Allied Command*, Paris continued being outside allied organizations such as the Defense Planning Committee, or the Nuclear Planning Group, to keep its decision-making autonomy.³⁷

The change in the nuclear doctrine and in the entity of the force de frappe was highly important. Since the *White Paper* of 1972, the first to define the doctrine of the use of its nuclear power, its content had suffered no significant changes: deter a potential aggressor, defend the vital interests of France -even though they were never defined with sufficient clarity- and maintain its technological self sufficiency of weapons as well as of its launch missiles. Nonetheless, since its origins, the French nuclear doctrine presented a special characteristic which made it different from the Anglo Saxon doctrine: the preparation for a first strike, ruling out a flexible response or escalation. The French authorities gave nuclear weapons the role of last defense barrier; but, if the need arose, they ruled out gradualism, and affirmed their readiness for a decisive attack.

Neither was it ever specified what type of objectives (military, industrial, population areas, etc.) would be attacked nor with what priority, thus making uncertainty an integrating element of the deterrent capability.³⁸

Throughout the decade of the 1990s, when France began to bet on nuclear disarmament more decisively than previously, reducing the number of atomic warheads, and decreasing the budget allocated to these devices. In 1996, it committed to suspending nuclear tests, to dismantling its installations for the production of fissile material, to eliminate its nuclear land capacity, to reduce one third of its fleet

37 PESME, Frédéric. "France's return to NATO, implications for its defence policy", *European Security*, vol. 19, nº 1, 2010, pp. 45-60.

38 ARTEAGA, Félix. "French nuclear deterrence according to President Chirac: reform, rupture or a reminder?" *Analysis of the Real Instituto Elcano*, nº 11, 2006.

of missile-launching submarines and, since 2008, to reduce its nuclear missiles by 33%, and its nuclear warheads by 50% relative to the number in 1991.³⁹ In 1997, the fixed nuclear targets were deprogrammed, and the policy of selection of objectives toward any potential aggressor with nuclear weapons was reoriented, regardless of their entity. In 2001, under the presidency of Jacques Chirac, it was announced that the French nuclear capacity could also be directed against regional powers and states that developed or had weapons of mass destruction, and not only nuclear capacity. In 2006, a new change was introduced by including, among the reasons that would justify a nuclear attack, the defense of strategic supplies for the survival of France and the defense of allied countries.⁴⁰ In conclusion, the doctrine of the use of the *force de frappe* came close to the Anglo Saxon postulates, despite the fact that Paris still keeps the political and strategic independence of France in resorting to nuclear weapons.⁴¹

In spite of that, it is necessary to highlight that these reductions have gone along with the modernization of missiles as well as of available nuclear weapons. Since 2010, *M45* submarine launched ballistic missiles are being replaced by the new *M51*, with longer range and greater precision. The air missiles are also being modernized: since 2009, its *Mirage 2000N* aircraft are being substituted by the new *Rafale F3*, and the *ASMP* air-to-ground missiles are being replaced by the more modern *ASMP-A*, of longer range, greater stealth, and a broader array of flight paths. Thus, it seems obvious that the French governments, regardless of the political color, and the public debate about the cost of the nuclear arsenal, are not willing to relinquish nuclear weapons or to limit its capability of attack, understanding deterrence as the fundamental pillar of the survival of France as a relevant power in the international scenario.

In relation with conventional capabilities, since 1996, with the abolition of the universal military service, and in spite of the recruitment of professional volunteers, the reduction of troops had continued in subsequent years. The decrease of the troops came with the adaptation of the organization and operation structure: between 1996 and 2007, fifty regiments, ten General Staffs, and over two hundred organisms of different nature were eliminated from the organization chart of the Army.⁴²

39 These decisions would take place after a strong public debate about the deterrence capability of France. In this regard, see the numerous contributions included in PASCALON, Pierre and PARIS, Henry (dirs.). *French nuclear deterrence in question(s)*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006. On the other hand, a synthesis of these reductions can be found in: Commission for National and Armed Forces Defense. *Rapport d'information relatif à une revue capacitaire des armées*. Paris: Assemblée Nationale, 2014.

40 DEBOUZY, Olivier. "French nuclear deterrence doctrine: an aggiornamento". *European Affairs*, vol. 7, n° 1, pp. 1-22.

41 TETRAIS, Bruno. *A comparison between US, UK and French nuclear policies and doctrines*, Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 2007.

42 The 53 active duty infantry regiments in 1996 ended up being 20 in 2010; in the same time period, the cavalry and armored brigades went from 25 to 12; artillery from 28 to 12; engineers from

The proposals in the *White Paper* of 2008 were not exempt from severe criticisms, especially from within the military. The self-denominated *Groupe Surcouf* made its evaluation public in an article in the French press,⁴³ of which some issues are worth mentioning: a direct criticism of the French defense industry, which was accused of imposing its interests above the needs of the armed forces, with technologically well advanced but very costly equipment, which did not satisfy the operating requirements, and mortgaged the finances of the Ministry of Defense; a strategic evaluation which did not prioritize among the different threats, and the excess of military interventions abroad which, carried out without clear criteria, caused an excessive burnout of the troops and of the materiel, and undermined the training.

Nonetheless, the forecasts in this *White Paper* had an ephemeral lifespan. A few months after its presentation, and within a context marked by the economic crisis that lay ahead for the country, the Elysée Palace started the *General Revision of Public Policies* to rationalize and reduce the French public administration decreasing public expenditures. In the Ministry of Defense, its implementation made the attainment of the expense objectives detailed in the *Military Programme Law 2009-14* impossible, since from the 377 billion Euros initially forecast, they were revised down to 340 billion Euros, negatively affecting the plans to modernize weapons and materiel.

The application of this revision was also evaluated severely by the analysts and the military in charge. Among the arguments highlighted was that the reduction of troops -particularly in the Army- did not conform with the objectives of presence and intervention abroad outlined in the *White Paper*; that the outsourcing of maintenance to private companies was too costly for the available budgets; that the primacy of the civil servants pushed the military to the role of secondary technicians, or that the costly nuclear arsenal was irrelevant to face the current or foreseeable conflicts.⁴⁴

From an official position, such as the one embodied by the *National and Armed Forces Defense Commission* of the National Assembly, the implications of the failure to comply with the budget allocations of the *Military Programme Law (2009-2014)*⁴⁵ have been analyzed in detail. The balance between the objectives set in 2008, and its compliance in 2013 was considered satisfactory only in the fields of nuclear deterrence and cyber defense. In the area of land weaponry, even though the acquisition of high technology materials (*Felin* individual equipment, *Caesar* self-propelled artillery, *Tiger*

19 to 7; and communications from 17 to 5.

43 Groupe Surcouf: "Livre Blanc sur la défense: une espérance déçue", (White Paper on defense: a disappointing hope") *Le Figaro*, 19 June 2008. The authorship of the article was attributed to General Vicent Desportes, at that time Director of the Centro Interejércitos de Defensa.

44 THOMANN, Jean-Claude. "Threat to our military capability", *Le Monde*, 13 May 2008 o BRANCA, Eric. "Where is the French Army going?", *Le Spectacle du Monde*, February 2011.

45 National Assembly. *Law n° 2009-928 of 29 July regarding military programme for the years 2009 to 2014 and including several dispositions concerning defense*, Paris: Documentation Française.

attack helicopters, or *VBCI* infantry armored vehicles), had been increased, the pace of its deliveries had also been delayed, not complying with the deadlines forecast. Furthermore, the oldest equipment (trucks, *VAB*, *AMX-10RC*, and *ERC-90* armored vehicles) could not be substituted, due to the growing and serious delay of the *Scorpion*, *VBL*, and *PPT* programs.

In the case of naval weaponry, even though decreasing the number of *FREEM* frigates, from seventeen units initially foreseen to only eleven, the compliance of the delivery dates of the first units and of the *Horizon* frigates, projection ships, and the naval version of the *Rafale* was confirmed, while simultaneously ratifying the cancellation of the second aircraft carrier, the excessive delay of the start of operations of the *NH-90* helicopters, and warning of the fragile situation of maritime surveillance, due to the loss of means and capabilities.

In the aeronautic sphere, meeting the delivery dates and the amounts foreseen of the *Rafale* aircraft, and of the *SCALP* missiles was positively evaluated, but attention was drawn to the suspension of the modernization of the *Mirage 2000D* and, especially, to the serious deterioration of the capacity of air transport, with the delays of the *A-400M*, and the ageing of the *C-160* and *C-130* fleet. In fact, the report called the capability of air-mobility of the armed forces a “black mark”.

Furthermore, the failure of the program of acquisition of drones, and the dependence on American models was defined as a very significant flaw, due to the operating and information rights they entail.⁴⁶

5. FRENCH DEFENSE IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD: THE WHITE PAPER OF 2013

In July, 2012, President François Hollande commissioned a new revision of defense to a committee presided by Jean-Marie Guéhenno. The initiative was officially due to the changes in the world strategic situation, with the increase of international terrorism, and to the economic events in recent years. The result would be the *White Paper* of 2013.⁴⁷

In its presentation, leaving aside the justifying rhetoric about the need of a revised outlook of the world, and of the risks and threats for France and for Europe, the

46 Commission for National and Armed Forces Defense. *Information report about the control of the execution of defense credits for year 2013*, Paris: National Assembly, and *Information report regarding a capabilities review of the armed forces*. Paris: National Assembly.

47 Ministry of Defense. *White Paper. National Defense and Security 2013*, Paris: Ministry of Defense..

admission of the weakness of public finances and the pressure to preserve the essential elements of defense to guarantee its sustainability is very significant.⁴⁸

In strategic approaches, evaluation of risks or defensive priorities, the document is continuous with respect to the *White Paper* of 2008, except for two outstanding new features. The first one consists of the attempt to resolve the growing breach between the persistence of the risks and threats with the reduction of the resources to address them in the budget of the Ministry of Defense. Thus, the government foresees keeping constant the expenditures for the period 2014-2019, and increasing it slightly beginning in 2020. Therefore, it admits that the pace of equipping and modernizing will be slower than initially planned in 2008, but the modernization of the critical material for the three priority functions must be guaranteed: deterrence, information, and projection of strength. A new multi-functional army model, featuring the concentration of forces, must be adjusted to the new scenario. Last, France will rely on re-launching European defense, and on its presence in the North Atlantic Alliance.⁴⁹

The second new feature is in the military strategy which has a very relevant change with respect to the previous *White Papers*, as it abandons the hypothesis of a possible high-intensity confrontation in favor of two scenarios: coercion operations and crisis management operations. The emphasis placed on the “mutualization” of defense, understood as the multi-faceting of high technology materiel within the French armed forces should be highlighted, and as the collaboration within the European framework in operational capabilities such as transport, in-flight refueling, naval aviation resources, satellites, or drones. These changes probably can only be explained with the reduction of defense expenditures, which makes scenarios of greater entity unfeasible, and puts limits on the capability of the country to independently acquire high-technology equipment, at a very high cost.

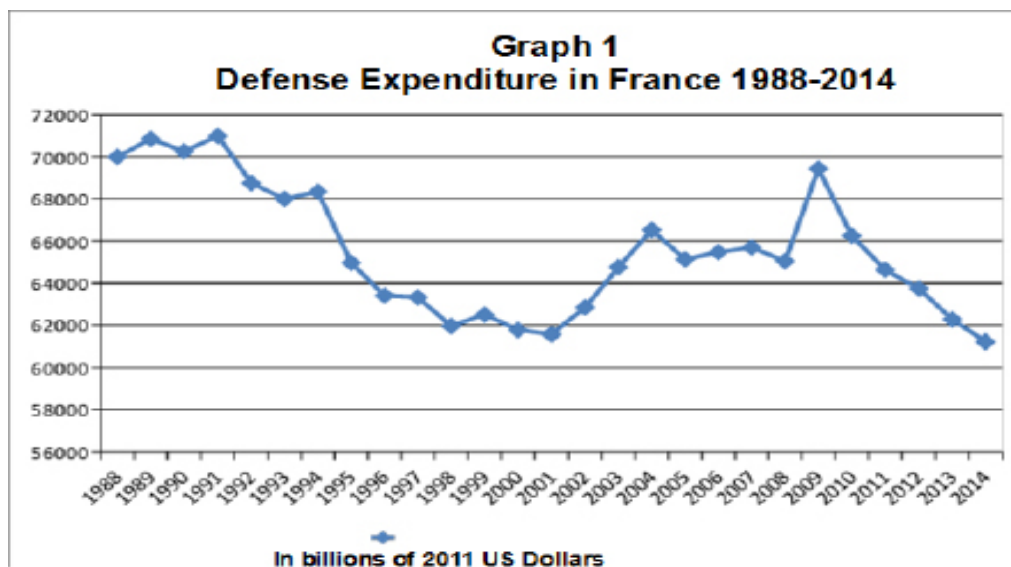
The new model for the armed forces should be capable of assuming three types of operations: the protection of the territory and the population through the deployment of up to 10,000 land forces; the participation in multinational crisis management operations, with a maximum of 7,000 troops, a naval group around a projection ship, and twelve combat aircraft; and an operation of coercion that would need up to 15,000 land troops, forty five combat aircraft, and a naval aviation group.

The size of forces needed to carry out these missions would be, in the case of the Army, 66,000 troops comprising seven brigades (two heavy ones of coercion, three

48 GUIBERT, Bathalie. “White Paper of Defense. France prepares the wars of tomorrow with its ambitions reduced.”, *Le Monde*, 29 April 2013.

49 An interesting analysis in this respect can be found in: LASCONJARIAS, Guillaume. “Rentrée dans le rang? France, NATO and the EU, from the Védrine report to the 2013 French White Paper on national security and defence”, *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, vol. 12, n° 4, 2014, pp. 418-431.

multi-faceted medium ones for *stabilization*, and two light ones for intervention),⁵⁰ plus three more for support (one for information, one for communications, and another one for support to the command, logistics, and transportation). The naval forces should include an aircraft carrier, six attack submarines, three projection amphibious ships, and fifteen frigates, in addition to patrol ships, anti-mine war equipment, and maritime patrol planes. As far as the air force, the plan is for two hundred and twenty five combat aircraft, fifty for tactical transport, twelve for in-flight refueling, twelve strategic drones, and seven surveillance aircraft. Furthermore, the special operation forces, the cybernetic capabilities, and the observation, reconnaissance, and aerospace surveillance will be enhanced.



Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2014.

The new *Military Programme Law* (2014-19), which details the capabilities of the new model for the armed forces, the equipment of material and the budget allocations to reach its objective,⁵¹ was passed in December 2013. For the period of 2014-16, defense expenditures are expected to stabilize at 31.38 billion Euros yearly at current prices; while, beginning in 2017, a mild increase up to 31.78 billion Euros in 2018, and 32.51 billion Euros in 2019. As moderate as inflation may be during the coming years, it is obvious that we may in fact be discussing a freeze as budget objective, although not explicitly expressed (Graph 1). From this total of 190 billion Euros, 54.5% will go to

50 The so-called “coercion” brigades correspond to armored brigades; the multi-faceted ones are infantry brigades of armored vehicles on wheels, and of the light type, one is air transported, and the other for mountains.

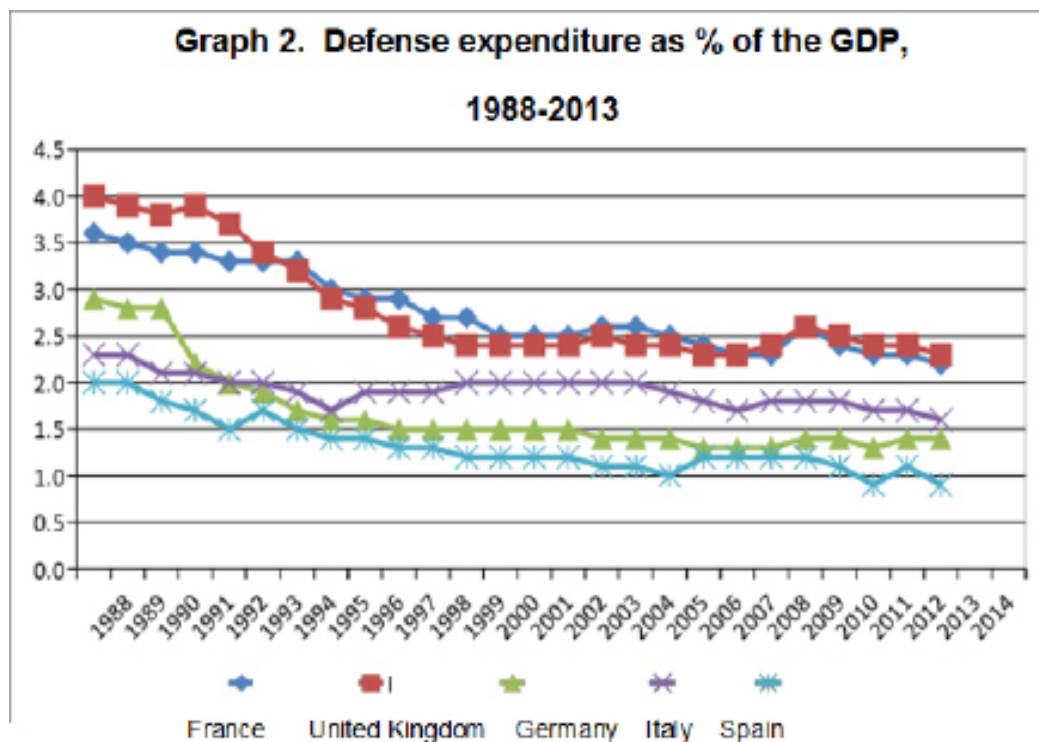
51 National Assembly. *Law n° 2013-1168 of 18 December 2013 regarding military program for the years 2014 à 2019 and including several dispositions regarding national defense and security*, 2013.

equipment, which at the same time will be distributed into 47.5% in weaponry and conventional equipment, 19.9% to training material, 5.9% to infrastructure, 4.2% to future plans, and 22.5% to nuclear deterrence.

There is no doubt that the contents of the *White Paper* 2013 as well as those of the *Military Programme Law* do no more than consolidate the tendency initiated with the *General Revision of Public Policies*; in other words, a progressive but sustained reduction of the size of the French armed forces, which affects all areas of defense: personnel, weaponry and materiel, infrastructure, training, modernization plans, etc. The official rhetoric that impregnates these documents cannot hide that this endless process of budget restrictions leads to the inevitable reduction of the operating capabilities of the three services.⁵² If until 2008, the forecast regarding the projection of the armed forces mentioned up to 50,000 troops, and one hundred combat aircraft, in the *White Paper* 2008 the objectives were reduced to 30,000, and seventy, respectively, and in the *White Paper* 2013, limits them to a maximum of 15,000 troops, and forty five combat aircraft.⁵³ The reduction of the total military troops has gone in the same direction: f in 2009, it was 240,966 men and women that served in the French armed forces, in 2014, they were 215,019, and new cut backs are foreseen until 2019. Furthermore, lowering the defense budget is a trend that comes from long ago. As Graph 2 shows, the gradual loss of weight of military expenditure with respect to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has been taking place since the last years of the Cold War, becoming steeper since 1995, except for a slight upturn in 2009. In other words, even in periods of prosperity for public finances, the Ministry of Defense has gradually become one of the “less wealthy cousins” of the French administration. Although it is true that the evolution of French defense expenditures is coherent with the persistent collection of the “peace dividend” linked to the end of the Cold War, and it can be framed into a generalized movement among Western countries in the same direction (see Graph 2), the growing imbalance among the traditional aspirations of all the residents of the Elysée Palace to carry out the role of major power and the allocation of resources to its armed forces cannot be avoided.

52 In May 2014, President Manuel Valls announced a new budget cut back of 50 billion Euros for the whole public administration; the Ministry of Defense should assume a reduction of between 3,000 and 6,000 million between 2014 and 2017, so that instead of the initial freezing initially planned in the *Military Programme Law* 2014-2019, there would be a reduction (BARLUET, Alain. “Les armées craignent un budget amputé”, *Le Figaro*, 15 May 2014).

53 FOUCHET, Antoine. “Interview with General Vincent Desportes”, *La Croix*, May 2013.



Source: Author's elaboration using the SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2014. The data about Italy for 2007-2012 are estimates.

In this sense, it is not strange that military high commanders have emphasized the serious problems that these successive financial cut backs are creating. In fact, in the last annual report of the Army, the Army General Jean-Marie Faugère, who writes the prologue to the document, highlights that since the publication of the *White Book* of 2013, the predominance of the short-term analysis is impeding the long-term planning of the Army model; he questions an outlook of risks and threats that goes no further than the generalities, and that, behind the rhetoric of “adaptation to capabilities”, hides a “reduction of capabilities”. The same document includes the testimony of the Army Chief of Staff, General Jean-Pierre Bosser, in the National Assembly, where he warns that the Army alone should mobilize 22,000 troops in operational cycles of four months, of which 8,000 are for foreign deployment, 6,300 are located outside the metropolitan territory, and another 8,000 are ready to be deployed in the metropolitan territory itself,⁵⁴ which means a notable burnout of all the units involved. He also insists on the urgent need of resources for training, enlisting, and maintenance of materiel, besides drawing attention to the urgency of the Scorpion program, and of the tactical drones, which should be considered priority.⁵⁵ Although many of these

54 It must be taken into account that, regardless of the interventions abroad, France has 7,200 soldiers deployed in the extra-metropolitan sovereignty territories. (the Antilles, Guayana, Reunion, New Caledonia and Polynesia) (Ministry of Defense. *Les chiffres clés de la Défense*, Paris: DICOD, 2014).

55 Ministry of Defense, *Grand Rapport de l'Armée de Terre 2014*, Paris: État-Major de l'Armée de Terre, 2014.

warnings were validated by the French armed forces during Operation Serval in Mali (2013-14), it was necessary to wait until the jihadist attack against the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in January of 2015, and the emergency deployment of 10,000 troops to metropolitan territory for the Elysée Palace to reconsider its decisions. Last May, President Holland showed his determination to increase the military expenditure to guarantee the security of the country against international terrorism⁵⁶; and two months later, the legislative power passed an update of the Military Programme Law (2015-19)⁵⁷ which included an increase of 3.8 billion Euros in war expenditure for the period of 2016-19. With this additional sum, Paris intends to have a permanent force of 7,000 troops for the security of the French territory, increase the ground maneuver force from 66,000 to 77,000 soldiers, pay the operations in Africa, the Middle East, or the Sahel, protect 18,500 jobs in the Ministry of Defense, of the 34,000 that were initially intended to amortize, and finance the purchase of new equipment (seven Tiger helicopters and six *NH-90*, refueling aircraft *A-330 MRTT*, a new *B2M* corvette, or laser designation equipment), or the modernization of the existing ones (drones, aircraft, or frigates). It remains to be seen if these emergency measures will be effective, or if the Elysée Palace will be able to reduce the huge breach that exists between the national defense objectives, and the means allocated to achieve them.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In spite of the trauma from the Second World War –or precisely because of it– the subsequent French governments have opted to continue boosting a powerful foreign policy. In spite of the configuration of the bipolar world, France was able to reach and retain its relevant position in the international sphere of the Cold War. The Suez failure acted as a sharp shock to promote and consolidate a new design of its power policy, based on independence from a policy of blocs, the possession of a nuclear arsenal of its own, and the maintenance of a large capacity of foreign intervention to guarantee its role as the *gendarme* of French-speaking Africa.

Consistent with this persisting ambition, the French armed forces have experimented consecutive transformations since 1945: first, the specialization in colonial wars (Indochina and Algeria); next, the adaptation to the bipolar world, and the capacity to repel – in cooperation with the North Atlantic Alliance in spite of its exit from the

56 HOROBIN, William. “France to Increase Military Spending to Counter Terror Threat”, *Wall Street Journal*, 29 April 2015.

57 National Assembly. Law n° 2015-917 of 28 July 2015 updating the military programme for the years 2015 à 2019 and including several dispositions regarding defense, Paris: Documentation Française, 2015.

integrated military structure of the sixties – a hypothetical invasion of Western Europe and, since the end of the Cold War, a deep reform of its entity and organization, along with the incorporation of military capabilities linked to the *Revolution of Military Affairs*, and of a growing projection abroad. In this sense, it is interesting to highlight that the French strategic culture has repeatedly shown its independence of thought and of doctrinal elaboration, to the point that it can be affirmed that the French armed forces are the most autonomous in this area of all those integrated in the allied and the European frameworks. Likewise, this French uniqueness also rests on a technological and industrial capability in many defense sectors which is incomparable in Europe. France is politically, strategically, and militarily autonomous because it has an industrial structure that allows it, as its stance in the allied and European frameworks repeatedly reveal. In this sense, for a mid-size power such as Spain, the lessons from our neighbor should be a source of study and inspiration, more so if we consider that our axis of security is not in the North of the continent but in the Mediterranean area, in the north of Africa, and in the Sahel.

Nonetheless, not all are good news for French defense. The *peace dividend* linked to the end of the Cold War considerably reduced military expenditure, and opened a breach between the strategic objectives, and the means to satisfy them, which have only grown. Even though the *White Paper* of 2008 tried to renew the pillars of French national defense, the economic crisis that was looming ended up jeopardizing its execution and forced it to draw up a new road map. Conditioned by the financial situation of the country, the *White Paper* of 2013 –and the *Military Programme Law* that went along with it– continued with the unstoppable reduction of the size and capabilities of the French armed forces, and deepened the breach between the traditional aspirations of the Elysée Palace to perform the role of major power, and the allocation of resources to its armed forces.

In spite of the innumerable warnings regarding the erosion of the military capabilities of the country, it was necessary to wait until the events of Charlie Hebdo last January for France to redefine its decisions. The prominence given to the budget adjustments over any other strategic consideration, and the effects of the economic crisis on the finances of the country made it difficult to imagine a different scenario. Nonetheless, these terrorist attacks have mediated so France modified the *Military Programme Law*, increased the defense expenditure, increased the size of land forces, and showed determination to combat international terrorism with weapons.

Although this change of trend is very significant, in real terms this increase in the budget of 3.8 billion Euros for the next three years is estimated to be insufficient, as the Gaullist opposition warned. Perhaps, if important international events of great impact took place –a generalized conflict in Europe (something that the *White Paper* of 2013 rules out based on Russian assertiveness, or a systemic crisis in the north of Africa– and they were perceived as a direct threat to the security of France, and of its most vital interests, a significant increase in French military expenditure could be

considered. Even in this case, the recovery of the capabilities lost or eroded throughout all these years would demand not only additional resources but, especially, time. And time management in the field of defense and security is not always within the reach of governments and political cycles.

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