

ENTRY OPERATIONS AND THE FUTURE OF STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

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Focus stratégique

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Abstract

The ability to penetrate remote and contested theaters of operation is a crucial asset for any expeditionary military power. France's ambition to autonomously conduct entry operations is central to its defense policy and singular among Western countries. This stems from an array of historical, political and military factors, among which the will to attain strategic autonomy was and remains critical. During recent operations, France demonstrated the extent to which it has a set of unique capabilities and know-hows, even amongst European states. These assets increase French freedom of action during foreign operations and strengthen its leverage in multinational campaigns. However, the spread of increasingly sophisticated weapon systems, such as anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities, undermines the French ability to operate autonomously. Hedging against this trend requires increased resources and tailored capability developments, in order to prevent France from losing strategic credibility, leverage, and autonomy.

Résumé

Pour toute puissance militaire expéditionnaire, l'aptitude à pénétrer un théâtre d'opérations distant et contesté par l'adversaire est déterminante. Cette capacité à entrer en premier tient une place unique dans la politique de défense de la France, pour des raisons historiques, politiques et militaires renvoyant notamment à l'ambition nationale d'autonomie stratégique. La France a démontré au cours des opérations récentes qu'elle possédait des savoir-faire et capacités rares, voire uniques en Europe dans ce domaine, qui lui ont offert une liberté d'action extérieure considérable et un fort levier pour l'action multinationale. Toutefois, l'avantage militaire qui fonde cette liberté d'action subit un processus d'érosion sous l'effet de la diffusion de moyens sophistiqués de contestation, notamment des capacités de déni d'accès. Il convient dès à présent de prendre la mesure du défi posé à la France afin de pérenniser sa marge de manœuvre extérieure, et de se prémunir par là même contre une perte de crédibilité, d'influence et d'autonomie.

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Introduction

Today, France is one of the few expeditionary powers in the world capable of projecting armed forces on short notice, with near total autonomy, over a distance of several thousand kilometers¹. Force projection is a difficult task that relies on a broad collection of complex and costly capabilities – expeditionary logistics, deployable command structures, ISR² assets, satellite communications, precision strike, amphibious capabilities, etc. Successful reforms implemented in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War after a series of shortcomings had been brought to light³, enabled France to become one of the expeditionary powers that has accumulated the most operational experience.

The autonomous conduct of a projection operation involves the ability to perform *first entry*⁴. This entails reducing the threat level posed by the adversary while concurrently deploying a joint force (naval, air, land) onto a remote theater of operations; capable in a later phase, to carry the day. The entry phase – a critical phase of force and power projection⁵ – mobilizes a wide variety of capabilities, sometimes long before the start of actual combat, and leads to an encounter with an adversary that has not yet

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1. The United States, the U.K. and, to a lesser extent, Russia are also capable of projecting forces by combining responsiveness, reach and autonomy.

2. *Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance*.

3. See *La participation française à la guerre du Golfe – Actes de la table ronde du CEHD du 2 février 2001*, Paris, Les Cahiers du Centre d'études d'histoire de la défense, no. 21, Ministère de la Défense, 2004.

4. In this English translation of the original French document, the term “first entry” is used to denote the French concept of “entrée en premier”. As discussed in this report, the specific characteristics associated with the French concept mean that the existing English-language concepts are usually too broad (*entry operations*, *initial entry*) or too narrow (*forcible entry*). See also notes 25 and 32.

5. Force projection involves deployment on the ground, whereas power projection is performed directly from the sea or from the air, e.g. thanks to a strike group formed around the *Charles de Gaulle* nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, or around one or several *Mistral* class amphibious assault ships.

been debilitated. Accordingly, as entry operations require a high-level of commitment in regards to capabilities, they are difficult to carry out on a purely national basis.

In the course of operations in Libya (2011) or Mali (2013), France proved that it was capable of taking part in a first entry operation and even of conducting it alone when in a theater scarcely contested by an opponent. The 2008 and 2013 *White Papers on Defense and National Security*, as well as the 2017 *Strategic Review of Defense and National Security*⁶ stated France's ambition to possess capabilities for first entry in all domains – air, land, sea – and French debates on defense policy, strategy and budgets increasingly refer to first entry as a crucial factor. In many respects, the ability to conduct entry operations is a pillar supporting France's ambition of strategic autonomy and its political-strategic credibility, and holds in French foreign policy a central role, more so than in other countries.

Despite its key importance, few studies have yet dealt with first entry operations and their requirements. There are many reasons why this analytical shortfall needs to be addressed. First, France is both an expeditionary power and an interventionist power: it combines the capability and the willingness to resort to armed force to resolve crises or defeat its adversaries – as shown by the number of overseas operations conducted in recent years. Though the terrorist attacks on France have highlighted the strategic importance of homeland security and domestic operations⁷, they will not, as things stand, put an end to interventions. On the contrary, these attacks merely underline the necessity of intervening abroad to weaken and even eradicate the jihadist proto-State and its multiple emanations, particularly on the African continent⁸. The Islamic State is just one of the many threats facing France. For several years, due to the initial effectiveness of the expeditionary way of war adopted by the United States and its allies⁹, potential adversaries have been showing

6. The French version of this paper was published in November 2016, before the 2017 *Strategic Review of Defense and National Security* was conducted by the Ministry of the Armed Forces. The Review itself, released in October 2017, strongly emphasizes the centrality of strategic autonomy for France and outlines a vision of the concept and requirements of *first entry* very similar to the ones presented here. See in particular *Revue Stratégique de Défense et de Sécurité Nationale*, Paris, Ministère des armées, 2017, p. 82-83.

7. É. Tenenbaum, "La Sentinelle égarée ? L'armée de Terre face au terrorisme", *Focus stratégique*, No. 68, Ifri, June 2016.

8. J.-Y. Le Drian, *Qui est l'ennemi ?*, Paris, Les éditions du Cerf, 2016.

9. Although this way of war did not enable the West to achieve sustainable success, it was the key to demonstrations of force in Iraq (1991, 2003), Kosovo (1999), Afghanistan (2001) and Libya (2011), which revealed a conventional superiority that could be applied to other regime change operations.

increasing interest in capabilities designed to contest the freedom of action of expeditionary forces. The development and proliferation of Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) capabilities raise questions as to France's ability to preserve its current advantage, which provides it with the capacity to conduct or participate in first entry operations.

The increasing importance of this issue calls for a closer look at political-strategic, operational, capability and budgetary considerations. This is all the more necessary in view of persistent confusion in France as to the meaning and scope of first entry, while U.S. visions of the problem appear to be of limited relevance from the French perspective. This report seeks to understand the unique position of first entry operations in the French strategic debate and to offer a definition of the concept. It subsequently examines the nature of the operational and capability challenges posed by those operations and the critical skills and capabilities needed for their successful execution. While European cooperation appears to be unable to help France meet the increasing challenges facing its expeditionary power over the coming decades, it is essential to define a national level of ambition for the future as well as identify the efforts required to achieve it.

A French ambition

Within the space of a decade, the preservation of a first entry capability has become one of the most adequate concepts to define the core of France's national ambition in preparing and conducting overseas interventions. Although the formula intuitively alludes to a number of operational and strategic properties coveted by decision-makers, its origin seems to be more political than doctrinal. No doubt because of its political origin, the concept has followed an unusual path, at once central to strategic thinking and subject to conflicting interpretations. Accordingly, it is important to first make sense of this lack of conceptual clarity in order to better understand the nature and specificities of this ambition.

The national ambition and its ambiguities

The concept of first entry ("*entrée en premier*") appeared relatively recently in the French strategic debate and in official documents. The ability to enter a theater of operation became a tangible concern for the French defense community in the aftermath of the Cold War and is evident in the 1994 *Defense White Paper*, which draws lessons from the Gulf War and acknowledges the new importance of force projection missions. Though it does not yet use the concept of "first entry", the document already identifies the top-priority capabilities (intelligence, command, strategic mobility, quick reaction forces, etc.) to be developed in order to guarantee French freedom of action¹⁰.

Though it is difficult to pinpoint when the exact term was first coined, it was increasingly used in the 2000s to describe the French level of ambition within multinational operations. The French political-military elites were then marked by the events of NATO's Operation *Allied Force* in Kosovo in spring 1999. The strictly U.S.-U.K. planning of cruise missile strikes, to the exclusion of France and all other countries which did not possess these weapons, the repeated revelation of the technology gap between the U.S. and its European allies, and finally the dependence of the latter on the former in

10. *Livre blanc sur la Défense*, Paris, La documentation française, 1994, p. 77-83, 87-90.

crucial areas (intelligence, targeting, SEAD¹¹, etc.) left a mark on a defense community strongly attached to national independence¹². Thus the emergence of the issue was first tied to the desire to possess the necessary military capability to play an autonomous and influential role in multinational operations and, above all, to conduct an operation without allied support if circumstances so require. Certain capabilities, given their rarity within the Atlantic Alliance or their critical or decisive nature, were thus considered to secure France with the potential to carry weight in the planning and conduct of operations and therefore exert influence on major strategic orientations, operational choices or targeting plans.

Thus, the capability for first entry in a theater of operations became increasingly prominent in the French debate, as it was associated with the – separate, but complementary – desire to possess the capability to assume the role of a “framework nation” in the context of a large-scale international intervention. The 2008 *White Paper on Defense and National Security* expressed this ambition well:

When taking part in *large-scale operations*, France will have the specific staff capabilities at the highest level – “framework nation” capabilities [...] – to take on multinational joint command responsibilities at theatre level [...].

France will possess the skills inherent in the critical phases of a major operation, whether at the launch phase, i.e. for its forces to have “[first] entry” capability in a theater of action, or during the transition from a coercive operation to a stabilization operation, then to one of peace consolidation.¹³

The French ambition was defined in more detail in the 2013 *White Paper*, which explicitly stated the link between strategic autonomy and the capability for first entry in a theater of operations. Strategic autonomy, consubstantial with deterrence, has to be established on a permanent basis, and

[...] must allow France to take the initiative in operations that it may deem necessary to preserve its security interests and, where applicable, federate the action of its partners, particularly within the European Union. This principle requires us to preserve the resources that give us freedom of assessment, planning and command, while also favoring the critical capabilities that form the

11. *Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses*. The set of actions to prevent air defense systems (fighter aircraft, air defense missiles and artillery, airborne early warning, etc.) from providing surveillance and protection of airspace.

12. X. de Villepin, *Premiers enseignements de l'opération “Force Alliée” en Yougoslavie : quels enjeux diplomatiques et militaires ?*, Paris, Sénat, Rapport d'information No. 464, June 30, 1999.

13. *Défense et sécurité nationale : le Livre blanc*, Paris, La documentation française, 2008, p. 211.

basis of our freedom of action. These capabilities are essential to defending our vital interests and allowing us to take the initiative in simple, predictable operations (joint force command, intelligence and targeting capabilities, special forces, combat resources in contact with the adversary) or operations linked to our capacity to play an important role in a coalition in order to preserve our independence (ability to perform deep precision strikes, independent capability for first entry in a theatre of operation, command capability enabling us to assume the role of framework nation in a medium-scale inter-allied operation or an influential role preserving our sovereignty in a multi-national operation). These capabilities must, in particular, enable us to play a full role within the European Union and assume all our responsibilities within the Atlantic Alliance and NATO command structures.¹⁴

This level of ambition acknowledged the existence of scenarios in which France would face threats originating in distant theaters, particularly in the South, against which it would have few willing and capable allies. Thus the *White Paper* identified a set of critical and decisive assets designed to give France the capacity to retain its independence of decision and action, regardless of the circumstances, and linked this ambition to the needs identified at both national and transatlantic levels, particularly within the framework of the NATO Response Force (NRF). In a major multinational operation (corps-level or equivalent¹⁵), France aims to be in a position to make a sufficiently substantial contribution to influence the preparation of plans and their implementation. In a medium-scale multinational operation (division-level or equivalent¹⁶), France should have the ability to act as a framework nation, i.e. assuming command of the entire force, while supplying most of the military assets, including capabilities that other allies cannot provide. Finally, should the situation so require, it should be able to independently conduct a more limited operation on a strictly national basis. In these three types of scenario, the entry capability and associated command, combat, and support assets would constitute the cornerstone of the French contribution, ensure its credibility, and guarantee its influence on operational and strategic planning.

The ambition to nationally possess capabilities for first entry operations – at the nexus between the quest for autonomy and a desire for influence – has gained substantial value among French political decision-makers over the past 15 years. The importance attached to this capability is

14. *Livre blanc sur la Défense et la sécurité nationale*, Paris, Ministère de la Défense, 2013, p. 88-89.

15. Major Joint Operation (MJO) in NATO parlance.

16. Smaller Joint Operation (SJO).

fully justified, considering both the redistribution of military power, particularly the proliferation of anti-access/area denial capabilities (see below), and the unfulfilled promises of multinational military action¹⁷. However, this growing political interest has been accompanied by increasing confusion about the scope covered by this term. The ambiguity surrounding the concept has led the term to be used, and to be associated with, a list of increasingly precise and varied capabilities: modern multi-role fighter aircraft¹⁸, amphibious and airborne capabilities¹⁹, in-flight refueling, nuclear-powered attack submarines, carrier battle group, strategic and tactical transport capabilities (by air and sea), Special Forces, health support²⁰, heavy²¹ and/or multi-role²² brigades, UAVs (mainlyUCAVs²³), strategic, operational and tactical C4ISR systems²⁴, etc. The large number and wide variety of capabilities considered as essential for first entry are not in themselves surprising: it refers to a complex, joint know-how that logically implies a broad spectrum of capabilities. Nonetheless, the associated list is rarely the same twice and often reflects a doctrinal or bureaucratic vision of the concept specific to each organization or branch of the armed forces.

Thus the use of the term “first entry” has lacked consistency across the French defense community, and even amongst allies, resulting in ambiguities about the scope of the missions involved, and an unstructured and mostly incomplete view of the required capabilities. These two limitations are detrimental to a finer understanding of the issues tied to entry operations and, therefore, to effective preparation for the future. As a result, this paper seeks to clarify the nature and scope of first entry operations from a joint force perspective.

17. The link between the emergence of A2/AD capabilities and the need for first entry capabilities is also made by the 2017 Strategic Review. Cf. *Revue Stratégique de Défense et de Sécurité Nationale*, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

18. *LBDSN 2013*, *op. cit.*, p. 95-96.

19. *L'emploi des forces terrestres dans les opérations interarmées*, Paris, Centre de doctrine et d'emploi des forces, DFT 3.2, Tome 1, 2015, p. 24.

20. *Projet de Loi de programmation militaire 2014-2019 – Dossier thématique*, Paris, Ministère de la Défense, 2014, p. 16, 46.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

22. *LBDSN 2008*, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

23. *Emploi des systèmes de drones aériens*, Paris, Centre interarmées de concepts, de doctrines et d'expérimentations, Réflexion doctrinale interarmées, June 6, 2012, p. 18, 28.

24. O. Cahuzac and P. Goetz, “Le système d'information des armées (SIA)”, *Les notes stratégiques*, Compagnie européenne d'intelligence stratégique, December 2013, p. 9.

What are the main features of first entry operations?

The notion of first entry refers to profoundly different operational and strategic situations depending on its use. Certain historical examples are naturally associated with the concept of first entry, particularly amphibious operations such as Gallipoli in 1915, the Allied landings in Normandy in June 1944, or the landing by the U.S. Army's X Corps at Inchon in September 1950 in South Korean territory controlled by North Korean forces. Should the same concept be used to describe the German invasion of Western Europe in May/June 1940? Was it a first entry operation when the coalition deployed in Saudi Arabia in the fall of 1990 to conduct *Desert Shield* and prepare *Desert Storm*, or when the French task force *Serval* penetrated into the Adrar des Ifoghas, in Northern Mali, in February 2013? These examples, among all those cited in declarations by officials and experts, reflect the persistent ambiguity and confusions concerning the nature of first entry as a concept.

The Joint Centre for Concepts, Doctrines and Experimentation of the French Ministry of Defense published a document in 2014 that seeks to define first entry. It describes it as:

[...] the range of operations conducted in the three physical domains, and in a non-permissive or semi-permissive environment. The objective is to openly enter a foreign territory and/or spaces under sovereignty, without a prior deployment of friendly elements, and to conduct decisive actions. It implies the notion of conflict and usually requires the seizure of a maneuver space to guarantee the freedom of action necessary to the unfolding of the following phases of the campaign.²⁵

As of today, this definition is the most complete and nuanced presentation of the nature of a first entry operation by a French institution. It marks a significant step forward, in that it spells out several crucial aspects of first entry: the non-permissive nature of the environment in which it is conducted, its joint nature, the specific capability needs, etc.

However, it does not dispel all ambiguity when adopting a definition that is at times overly inclusive. Notably, choosing to include operations targeting a neighboring territory within the concept, rather than solely focusing on force or power projection operations (that involve elongated

25. *Initial Entry*, Paris, CICDE, Joint Doctrine Note, April 1, 2014, p. 16.

postures and usually a transition between two physical domains) ultimately blurs the boundaries of first entry operations in the document. If the operation is directed at neighboring territory, how can the concept of first entry be distinguished from an offensive, an invasion or a conquest? The impact of this choice in the definition extends far beyond the conceptual framework, in that force projection operations have unique requirements. By over-extending the scope of the term, there is a risk of diluting the specific aspects of the mission, of losing sight of the specific operational and capability needs and ultimately of reducing the effectiveness of military preparations for this type of action.²⁶

As it seeks to achieve an outcome on a territory controlled by an adversary, a first entry operation is inherently offensive. However, not every offensive may be considered as a first entry operation. The added value of the concept resides in its capacity to grasp a unique reality: the problem of initial action over a long distance in a non-permissive environment. This problem – which refers to the Western model of force projection and strongly echoes French strategic ambitions – merits separate consideration, due to its key importance. Thus, like the U.S. doctrine on *Entry Operations* – the concept that comes closest to the French notion of *Entrée en premier* – it appears crucial to limit the latter to expeditionary missions with objectives located in an uncontrolled environment²⁷. A first entry operation, therefore, requires strategic and operational mobility from the homeland or from a prepositioned base, enabling armed forces to form an initial echelon of combat and support units.

A contested environment

The targeted territory during a first entry operation is not controlled by friendly forces, as opposed to other operational environments marked by the absence of opposition. This constitutes a second specificity of the

26. *Ibid.*, p. 20. The inclusion of neighboring territories is all the more surprising as almost all of the document seems to refer to first entry only as a sequel to a force projection operation (seizing and delivering a deployment zone, role of strategic transport, prepositioning, etc.).

27. The *Joint Concept for Entry Operations* defines *entry operations* as: “The projection and immediate employment of military forces from the sea or through the air onto foreign territory to accomplish assigned missions.” *Joint Concept for Entry Operations*, Washington D.C., Department of Defense/Joint Chiefs of Staff, April 7, 2014, p. A-1. Joint Doctrine JP 3-18 *Joint Forcible Entry Operations* defines *forcible entry* as the “seizing and holding of a lodgment in the face of armed opposition,” and *lodgment* as “a designated area in a hostile or potentially hostile operational area that, when seized and held, makes the continuous landing of troops and materiel possible and provides maneuver space for subsequent operations.” *Joint Forcible Entry Operations*, JP 3-18, Washington D.C., Department of Defense/Joint Chiefs of Staff, November 27, 2012, p. GL-5.

concept. The existence of a known or potential threat changes the nature of the action performed, transforming it from a theoretically benign deployment to a complex maneuver. The nature of the adversary and of the forces at hand may call for a longer, in-depth preparation of the action. It also results in numerous constraints in terms of tactical and operational discretion, the number and trajectory of penetration pathways into the target territory, and the volume and composition of the assets that have to be initially involved, due to the need to include protective elements of varying degrees of sophistication – special forces, CBRN defense units, air and missile defense, etc. Thus the existence of a threat results in specific operational constraints, which can be more or less drastic depending on how permissive the operational environment is. It is useful to distinguish between semi-permissive environments (scattered, unsophisticated opposition, limited to a risk of terrorism, ambushes, and harassment) and non-permissive environments (certainty of encountering a well-equipped opposition, which may result in high-intensity combat or the involvement of CBRN capabilities)²⁸.

The degree of permissiveness of a given theater naturally varies depending on the domain (land, air, sea, electromagnetic): a theater can be permissive in the air but semi-permissive (Mali 2013) or non-permissive on the ground (e.g. a hypothetical first entry operation in 2014-2015 against Islamic State positions in Raqqa). If the adversary is equipped with air defense or anti-ship systems, the non-permissive environment rapidly extends from the ground to the air and naval domains. It can easily include the territory's immediate vicinity (coastal zone, lower airspace²⁹). Contestation can extend even further in the case of anti-access postures, particularly those that could be adopted by Russia or China, which are capable of presenting interdiction threats extending over several hundred

28. The Joint Glossary of Operational Terminology defines the non-permissive environment as an “environment in which friendly forces expect to encounter obstruction or interference in the course of their operations.” It does not offer a definition of “semi-permissive”. *Glossaire interarmées de terminologie opérationnelle*, Paris, Centre interarmées de concepts, de doctrines et d'expérimentations, December 16, 2013 (version amended on June 1, 2015), p. 64.

29. Concerning the immediate vicinity, broadly speaking, relatively unsophisticated short- and medium-range air defense systems can theoretically cover a zone extending up to 30 kilometers on the ground and 15-20 kilometers in altitude from the adversary's territory. The evaluation is necessarily less precise for naval interdiction systems (anti-ship missiles, naval mines, missile boats, etc.), whose area of action can be extensive due to their intrinsic mobility and the range of the platforms. On air aspects, see C. Brustlein, É. de Durand and É. Tenenbaum, *La suprématie aérienne en péril. Menaces et contre-stratégies à l'horizon 2030*, Paris, La documentation française, 2014, p. 88-89. For an evaluation of short-range contestation capabilities for each domain, see B. R. Posen, “The Command of the Commons. The Military Foundation of U.S. Hegemony”, *International Security*, vol. 28, No. 1, summer 2003, p. 22-42.

kilometers in the air and more than one thousand kilometers at sea or on land (see below).

A2/AD capabilities³⁰ are designed to render first entry into a theater of operations difficult or costly – or even to prevent it altogether – by constraining freedom of action during the approach, deployment to, and securing of the area. Thus, the first entry concept is a logical reflection of the growing concern of Western defense establishments with regard to the proliferation and reinforcement of interdiction capabilities, particularly in States like China, Russia, North Korea, Iran and their customers. In addition to non-permissive environments, first entry operations should be able to be conducted in less-contested (but probably more frequently encountered) environments involving advanced irregular or hybrid tactics³¹.

Certain air-land operations that do not fall within an expeditionary framework share some features of first entry operations when conducted in the face of strong opposition. In the event of a Russian aggression against Poland, or the Baltic States, NATO forces – acting under the principle of collective defense – would face similar problems to those encountered in first entry operations, due to the distances involved and mostly to Russian air, sea and land interdiction capabilities. In order to overcome such obstacles – e.g. exposure of critical infrastructure and units to conventional precision strikes or CBRN strikes or difficulties to collect tactical and operational intelligence – NATO forces would need to acquire naval, air and electromagnetic superiority in-theater.³²

A key step towards the decision

First entry operations have an enabling function, by making it possible – and, as a minimum, less risky – to commit forces to the theater with a view to achieving the major effect of the operation and, if necessary, the decision through the use of force³³. This enabling function essentially occurs in two

30. *Anti-access* consists of preventing or disrupting the entry of an expeditionary force into a theater, while *area denial* consists of limiting the freedom of action of this force once it has penetrated the theater. *Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC)*, Washington D.C., Department of Defense, January 17, 2012, p. 6.

31. For example, a first entry operation conducted in 2014-2015 in territory held by Islamic State would be strongly contested on the ground.

32. E. Colby and J. Solomon, "Facing Russia: Conventional Defence and Deterrence in Europe", *Survival*, vol. 57, No. 6, December 2015-January 2016, p. 21-50; S. Frühling and G. Lasconjarias, "NATO, A2/AD and the Kaliningrad Challenge", *Survival*, vol. 58, No. 2, April 2016, p. 95-116.

33. Decision is used here according to Beaufre's definition: "a *psychological event* that one seeks to provoke in the adversary: *convince him that it is futile to start or continue the struggle*".

ways: 1) the decrease of the immediate threat level facing naval, air and ground forces reaching the theater of operations; 2) the establishment of a secure zone (installations, logistics, C3, etc.) on a distant, uncontrolled territory for the arrival of a second echelon of forces, whose purpose is to expand the secure zone and subsequently conduct decisive operations against the adversary, or at least achieve the main strategic effect intended when the operation was initiated. When facing the highest level of opposition, this space must be not only secured but well and truly conquered by forcibly seizing and establishing a bridgehead in enemy terrain.

Both dimensions – reducing the threat and establishing a reception and staging echelon – must be combined if the operation has a land component, as was the case, for example, in Mali in 2013. On the contrary, if the involvement of ground forces is excluded, as in Libya in 2011, the goal of the initial step will only be to reduce the level of threat, either by attrition or by neutralizing the most critical air defense capabilities. In such a case, the first entry operation will be followed by a sustained air campaign tailored to the goals being pursued (support for allied ground forces, destruction of the military, economic and industrial potential or of the strategic forces, decapitation or coercive pressure targeting the political and military leadership, etc.).

A first entry operation establishes a first direct contact between expeditionary forces and the threat they face and thus initiates a phase of direct confrontation – which may mark the start of a war (Libya 2011, Mali 2013) but which can also occur at a later stage (Inchon in September 1950, *Overlord* in 1944, etc.). To limit the risks associated with first entry operations at the lowest possible level, a very demanding intelligence maneuver must be conducted during the days and weeks preceding the operation, in order to evaluate the real state of the enemy's defenses and preparedness and identify priority targets. First entry operations thus constitute a critical step towards decisive effects for two reasons: first, it marks the end of an expeditionary maneuver and initiates contact with the adversary, generally in the context of a domain change; second, it creates the conditions on the terrain allowing the desired strategic effect to be achieved in a second phase.

In this report, first entry will be understood as the aptitude of an armed force, at the strategic and operational level, to penetrate a contested

Général A. Beaufre, *Introduction à la stratégie*, Paris, Pluriel, 1998 [1963], p. 35. Emphasis by the author.

foreign territory and reduce the threat level in order to enable decisive operations to be conducted in a second phase³⁴.

A pillar of autonomy and influence

The French concept of “*entrée en premier*” does not have an exact translation in English and does not seem to carry, in any other country, a weight comparable to that which it holds in the French strategic debate³⁵. The concept brings together in a unique way two main elements: an ambition combining strategic autonomy, reactivity and political influence, and the capability to project a force to a non-contiguous territory, the control of which is contested by the enemy. The first element reflects particularly well the national strategic culture; namely that French interests abroad can be exposed to threats. It further refers to the idea that, as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, the country has a responsibility to respond to security crises that can lead it to resort to armed force³⁶. The second element follows on from the first and reflects the concerns of a limited number of States that have sized their military for expeditionary operations, including on a strictly national basis, not only for peacekeeping purposes but also for coercion and war.

The 2013 White Paper’s unprecedented focus on the concept of first entry reflected its strong political value in the eyes of French decision-makers, whose deep origins recall the central role attached to strategic and military independence since the 1960s until today. The aptitude to perform first entry operations, like the requirements to maintain a credible nuclear deterrent, calls for capabilities that make it possible, on a purely national basis, to assess the threat, make a decision and safeguard national interests, if necessary by actual use of force. Like nuclear deterrence, this aptitude relies on the Constitution of the Fifth Republic and the prerogatives and flexibility it confers on the President in defense matters,

34. This definition is very close to the one retained in the 2017 *Strategic Review* : « First entry refers to the the ability to penetrate [contested] spaces and reduce the threat level to be able to conduct military operations ». *Revue Stratégique de Défense et de Sécurité Nationale*, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

35. The CICDE translates *entrée en premier* as “initial entry”. This choice, however, is debatable as this term, used in NATO and EU terminology, qualifies initial entry operations in all types of environment, permissive or non-permissive, even though the definition of *entrée en premier* proposed by the CICDE focuses on non-permissive environments.

36. On French interventionism, see for example J.-B. Jeangène Vilmer and O. Schmitt, “Frogs of War: Explaining the New French Military Interventionism”, *War on the Rocks*, October 14, 2015, accessible at: warontherocks.com/.

allowing, for example, rapid decision-making and, consequently, a rare degree of reactivity³⁷.

First entry is an operational aptitude of high direct and indirect political and strategic added value. It is of direct value because, by giving France the capability to assess a situation and undertake autonomous military action, it reduces its exposure to the cumbersome procedures and external pressures that could otherwise constrain its freedom of action. It reduces national dependence on allies that might be reluctant to act despite the urgency of a crisis situation. It can also support a French foreign policy that would need to be autonomous due to divergences among allies, allowing France to override them, e.g. if they disapprove of a French initiative, or to remain on the sidelines, such as the refusal to participate in the Iraq war in 2003.

At a collective level, the added value of this aptitude is huge, providing France a capability to play a strong leading role among allies while reinforcing European strategic autonomy. Considering the uncertainties surrounding the future of U.S. involvement in world affairs and the long-term consequences of the U.K. leaving the European Union, France's aptitude to perform first entry operations guarantees that certain critical skills and capabilities will be preserved within the EU³⁸. In a significant turnaround from the situation in Kosovo in 1999, France today possesses extremely rare force projection capabilities which, combined with the country's political credibility and its wealth of operational experience, give it unique weight and influence. Those could come into play not only in the framework of an operation without the U.S. and U.K. but also within a coalition including both of those allies.

Finally, more indirectly, an aptitude for first entry in contested territories reinforces the credibility of both the French deterrent posture and the security guarantees offered by France to its allies within NATO or under bilateral defense agreements. It concurrently confers credibility to threats issued by France on a preventive basis as part of a coercive campaign (*intimidation stratégique*) – which could even allow the desired strategic effect to be achieved without the need to actually conduct decisive operations. To this extent, this aptitude especially constitutes a key asset of naval diplomacy.

37. A. Dumoulin, *Opérations militaires : entre prise de risque, solidarité, souveraineté et "entrée en premier"*, Bruxelles, Institut Royal Supérieur de Défense, 2015, p. 99-100.

38. On this point, see the last section of this report.

France's nuclear deterrence posture has always been one of the drivers for efforts to achieve a first entry capability. For example, it was due to the requirements imposed on the Strategic Air Forces (*Forces aériennes stratégiques* – FAS) and the Tactical Air Force (*Force aérienne tactique* – FATAAC) to perform a nuclear mission that the French Air Force developed at an early stage the necessary skills to penetrate defended airspaces and conduct deep strikes, and invested in electronic warfare: electronic intelligence (ELINT) capabilities to locate and evaluate the characteristics of enemy air defense systems, onboard radar warning receivers, electronic countermeasures for self-protection, offensive jamming pods and anti-radiation missiles to suppress enemy air defense systems³⁹... While the FAS dependence on such capabilities has been reduced by the transition from gravity nuclear bombs to the ASMP, then ASMP-A, stand-off cruise missiles, these domains remain crucial today, and the skills acquired for first entry operations continue to directly benefit the credibility of France's conventional action and of its nuclear deterrent. The same applies in the Navy, where the skills and technologies developed in response to the requirements of the Strategic Oceanic Force (*Force océanique stratégique* – FOST) (acoustic stealth, anti-submarine warfare, mine warfare, etc.) have proved to be crucial assets in order to conduct first entry operations.

Ultimately, the possession of the political, organizational and operational capabilities to perform first entry operations gives France a freedom of action that reinforces its credibility across the full spectrum of operations. The ability to conduct first entry operations is thus both a key element of a State's power and of its military capacity, and a level of ambition that is all the more demanding for its armed forces as it relies on complex skills whose effectiveness are continually challenged by the adversary.

39. On the link between the FAS and electronic warfare, see, for example, P. Wodka-Gallien, "L'univers de l'électronique", *Forces aériennes stratégiques 50 ans – 1964/2014*, September 2014, p. 41-47.

Complex skills for contested environments

First entry operations are a particularly demanding form of use of armed force. Performed at long distance and in the presence of an adversary, they rely on a set of capabilities that few States possess. Projecting forces over a long distance, thereby waging war against a distant enemy, is one of the most symbolic incarnations of military power. Due to its central role in the West's defense planning in the post-Cold War period, force and power projection became an urgent concern for several States anxious to avoid a fate similar to that of Iraq or the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Thus the repeated demonstrations of force by the West, and by the U.S. in particular, between 1991 and 2003 provided an incentive to strengthen and proliferate interdiction capabilities, intended to reduce the West's military freedom of action in or near foreign theaters of intervention⁴⁰. The renewed interest in interdiction capabilities and, more generally, the reinforcement of the adversary's ability to challenge force projection highlight a growing tension between the requirements specific to entering non-permissive environments and an increasingly uncertain Western military advantage.

The spectrum of military challenges

The degree of permissiveness of a theater of operations determines the “barriers to entry” – in terms of capabilities as well as risk taking – required in order to penetrate this theater. Thus a finer understanding of the nature of the challenges is a crucial step towards a) identifying the critical capabilities that must be possessed in order to have an autonomous capability for first

40. On the rise of anti-access capabilities and strategies, the most comprehensive study is T. K. Kelly, D. C. Gompert and D. Long, *Smarter Power, Stronger Partners, Volume I. Exploiting U.S. Advantages to Prevent Aggression*, Santa Monica, CA, RAND Corporation, 2016, particularly Chapters 2 to 4. See also S. J. Tangredi, *Anti-Access Warfare. Countering A2/AD Strategies*, Annapolis, MD, Naval Institute Press, 2013, p. 32-74. In French, see C. Brustlein “Toward the End of Force Projection? I. The Anti-Access Threat”, *Focus stratégique*, No. 20bis, Ifri, July 2011, and “Toward the End of Force Projection? II. Operational Responses and Political Perspective”, *Focus stratégique*, No. 21bis, Ifri, September 2011. On lessons learned from the Gulf War by different countries around the world, see P. J. Garrity, *Why the Gulf War Still Matters: Foreign Perspectives on the War and the Future of International Security*, Los Alamos, NM, Los Alamos National Laboratory – Center for National Security Studies, 1993.

entry depending on the adversary's means, and b) determining the theaters where multinational action is indispensable, or even those where a first entry operation would be impossible, in view of its prohibitive cost.

French doctrine makes a distinction between permissive and non-permissive environments based on the expected degree of obstruction⁴¹. Usage and practice have resulted in the emergence of a third type of environment, known as "semi-permissive". Though not defined in the doctrine, it *de facto* describes an intermediate situation characterized by the existence of a risk of sporadic obstruction, which may be either irregular (terrorism, armed groups, etc.) or conventional. The level of obstruction varies according to the enemy's resources⁴² and determination to oppose the expeditionary power – e.g. in the case of a peace operation, where intervention forces are not necessarily seen by local forces as the main adversary.

In reality, while the distinction between semi-permissive and non-permissive environments makes it possible to identify different classes of challenge, it hides two types of nuance that are perhaps more relevant: (1) the degree of permissiveness varies according to the domains in which the maneuver is conducted; (2) within the full range of non-permissive environments, there can be an extremely diverse set of challenges. Consequently, permissiveness should not be viewed in a binary way; rather it should be approached in the form of a spectrum of military challenges, ranging from small-scale irregular forms to the most sophisticated regional interdiction options (cf. Table 1 below).

The desire of any group or country to negate the freedom of action of expeditionary powers on, or in the vicinity of, its home territory is neither surprising nor recent. Every State aspires to ensure respect of its sovereignty and thus to acquire the means to assert itself on its territory – in particular by preventing a foreign power from entering or flying over its territory without authorization. Historically, however, this aspiration has generally been impeded by the existing balance of power.

41. *Glossaire interarmées de terminologie opérationnelle, op. cit.*, p. 64.

42. Whether one considers means in general or those present in the theater.

Table 1. Properties of environments as a function of permissiveness

	Permissive environment	Semi-permissive environment	Non-permissive environment
Type of opposition	No obstruction or interference expected	Residual/sporadic obstruction or interference expected	Direct/heavy obstruction or interference expected
Characteristics of the threat	Deemed inexistent or negligible, as too weak	Risk of terrorist attack on bases or convoys Weak or diminished defenses Possibly directed at a third party	Risk of high-intensity combat Coherent and operational defenses Long-distance strike capability, beyond enemy territory
Entry territory	Agreeing country	Destabilized agreeing country Enemy country (weak capabilities)	Agreeing country threatened by enemy means or occupied by enemy forces Enemy country (significant capabilities of its own or provided by an external power)
Examples of theaters (and domains concerned)	Mali 2013 (air), CAR 2013	Mali 2013 (land), Libya 2011 (sea/air)	Iraq 1991, Syria 2013 ⁴³ , Iran 2018 (hypothetical), Baltics 2018 (hypothetical)

The vast range of options to contest the freedom of action of an external power has emerged in all its diversity on numerous occasions during the past century, particularly during the world wars and the Cold War, which no longer opposed expeditionary powers and materially weaker adversaries but the major powers themselves. The building and deployment by Nazi Germany

43. The assessment here concerns the degree of permissiveness of the Syrian theater during preparations for the air raid in response to the August 2013 chemical attack by the Al-Assad regime.

of a vast submarine fleet, the reinforcement of its defenses along the Atlantic coastline, and its attempts to counter Allied strategic bombing campaigns, as well as Japan's response to the U.S. power buildup in Asia, both constitute attempts to create contested environments above their own territory, as well as over occupied territories and neighboring maritime areas⁴⁴. Likewise, from the 1960s onwards, the Soviets sought to implement an interdiction strategy in the Atlantic in order to cut off NATO forces in Europe from reinforcements coming from Continental U.S. This strategy involved strengthening surface and nuclear-powered submarine fleets as well as establishing a space and airborne oceanic surveillance network designed to detect, track, and target U.S. ships sailing for Europe, where their firepower and the forces they carried were needed to regain the advantage⁴⁵.

Rivalries between the major powers faded in the early 1990s, allowing Western expeditionary powers to recover – all the more strongly – a significant military advantage, bolstered by the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA⁴⁶). Since 1991, freedom of action above and near enemy territories in expeditionary operations has been rapidly secured during phases of first entry. The adversary, although at times possessing a plethora of capabilities (Iraq 1991), repeatedly proved ineffective and was outgunned in every case.

The conventional imbalance that made it possible to project forces with limited risk seems to be diminishing today⁴⁷. Two factors are contributing to the development of contestation capabilities: the shrinking economic gap between the West and the rest of the world and the resulting convergence of budgets, and the strengthening of interdiction capabilities. The economic dynamism of some regional powers and their efforts to become military powers contrast strongly with the downward trend of defense spending in the West over the same period.

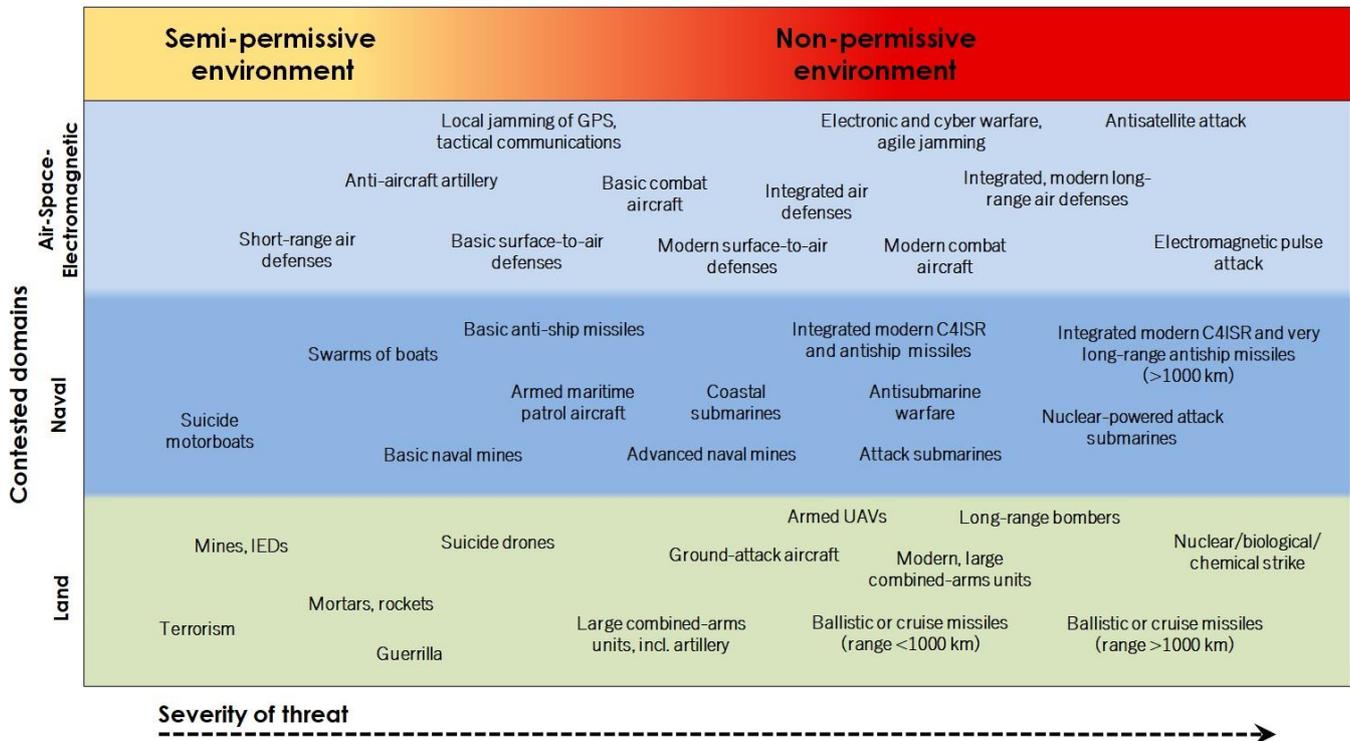
44. For an analysis of these campaigns with an emphasis of access and anti-access aspects, see Tangredi, *Anti-Access Warfare, op. cit.*, p. 135-149.

45. On Russian efforts and capabilities in this area, see N. Friedman, *Seapower and Space*, Annapolis, MD, Naval Institute Press, 2000, p. 129-172.

46. On the RMA, see É. de Durand, « Révolution dans les affaires militaires : 'Révolution' ou 'transformation' ? », *Hérodote*, No. 109, 2003, p. 57-70. On the way in which the technological innovations on which the "RMA" was based (ISR, precision targeting, stealth, etc.) emerged during the Cold War as part of the rivalry with the Soviet Union, a major adversary, and were subsequently used against regional or local actors, see R. Tomes, *US Defense Strategy from Vietnam to Operation Iraqi Freedom. Military Innovation and the New American Way of War, 1973-2003*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2007.

47. A similar diagnosis can be found in the French Army's future vision, recently set forth in *Action Terrestre Future*, which anticipates the end of "operational comfort". *Action Terrestre Future. Demain se gagne aujourd'hui*, Paris, État-major de l'armée de Terre, September 2016, p. 13-15.

Illustration 1. The spectrum of military challenges



The gap in military power, which seemed to have reached an unprecedented level in the 1990s, is also narrowing due to the export of certain Russian and Chinese technologies. Meanwhile, actors seeking to oppose the West have sought to understand the strengths and weaknesses of its expeditionary way of warfare and altered their strategies to curtail its freedom of action. As a result of these two trends, some capabilities that had long been monopolized by the major powers have become more accessible – coastal submarines with increasing autonomy, drones of increasing size and payload capacity, modern, long-range air defense and air-to-air missiles, surface-to-surface strike weapons with increasing range and precision, coastal defenses, etc.⁴⁸.

Depending on the reach of potential adversaries and on the risks they are prepared to take, the freedom of action of the interventionist powers is likely to be denied across all the segments of a force projection operation – be they upstream or downstream. It is considerably more complex to carry out a precision strike on a base several thousand kilometers away than it is to

48. For a general overview of these developments, see C. Brustlein “Toward the End of Force Projection? I. The Anti-Access Threat”, *op. cit.*, p. 19-25, and T. K. Kelly, D. C. Gompert et D. Long, *Smarter Power, Stronger Partners, Volume I, op. cit.*

challenge the landing of an amphibious force⁴⁹. Thus the number and variety of contestation options declines naturally with distance, and on the contrary increases rapidly in the immediate vicinity of enemy territory, and even more so on and over that territory.

However, options for early disruptions are not solely accessible to major military powers such as Russia and China. First, major powers offer for export systems whose range and quality would make them excellent components of an interdiction strategy pursued by a regional or local actor, including long-range air defense missiles (Russian S-300/S-400 family and their Chinese variant, the HQ-9) and anti-ship or land-attack cruise missiles (export versions of the *Club* 3M14/3M54⁵⁰). Anti-ship or land-attack weapons can be carried by numerous mobile platforms (fighters, bombers, UAVs, surface ships, submarines, unmarked platforms, etc.) capable of expanding the threat envelope by several hundred kilometers thanks to their own operational range. In this way, and by also relying on irregular tactics, adversaries considerably less advanced militarily than Russia or China can hope to disrupt a projection operation at a very early stage⁵¹.

49. On defense against amphibious landings, see G. Garnier, “Le pari de l’amphibie. Risque tactique, influence stratégique”, *Focus stratégique*, No. 46, Ifri, September 2013, p. 27-28, 35-38.

50. On modern air defense missiles and their proliferation, see C. Brustlein, É. de Durand and É. Tenenbaum, *La suprématie aérienne en péril*, *op. cit.*, p. 73-82. On anti-ship missiles, see P. E. Pournelle, “The Deadly Future of Littoral Sea Control”, *Proceedings*, July 2015 ; K. Saylor, *Red Alert. The Growing Threat to U.S. Aircraft Carriers*, Washington D.C., Center for a New American Security, 2016.

51. For an analysis discussing practices according to their position in the projection sequence, as applied to the air domain, see C. Brustlein, É. de Durand and É. Tenenbaum, *La suprématie aérienne en péril*, *op. cit.*, p. 120-121.

Table 2. Contesting the freedom of action of expeditionary powers: desired effects and practices

Segment	Desired effects	Capabilities and practices
1 – Home territory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Paralysis of command systems - Logistical disruption - Weakening of the offensive capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cyberattack - Terrorist raid on defense infrastructure (command centers, operational bases, depots) or civil logistics infrastructure (ports, airports, rail transportation nodes) - Limited conventional strike
2 – Strategic mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attrition of transport capabilities and disruption of the projection - Denial of overflight rights by third countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Blackmail using the threat of terrorism or strikes, potentially including using CBRN warheads - Diesel, air-independent or nuclear-powered attack submarine - Attacks on maritime chokepoints (mines, anti-ship missiles, terrorism, etc.)
3 – Regional posturing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Destruction, suppression or weakening of offensive capabilities - Denial of stationing rights by the host nation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Blackmail - Regular (air, surface-to-surface or ship-to-surface strike) or irregular (classic or unconventional terrorism) attack on host country military infrastructure (operational bases, depots) or civilian infrastructure (ports, airports, rail network nodes)
4 – Maritime and air approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keep naval fleet and air forces as far as possible to reduce their operational effectiveness - Attrition or disruption of (naval/air) projection forces - Dissuasion or denial of amphibious landing - Dissuasion or disruption of ISR gathering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anti-air bubble (modern integrated radars, air defense, air-to-air and surface-to-air capabilities) - Naval interdiction bubble (over-the-horizon C4ISR, anti-ship ballistic missiles, submarines, underwater mines, patrol boats, coastal anti-ship batteries, maritime patrol aircraft, anti-submarine warfare, etc.) - Antisatellite attack
5 – Entry territory (adversary or third party)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dissuasion or disruption of ISR gathering - Attrition and disruption of expeditionary forces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anti-air and ground interdiction bubble - Electronic warfare - Deception - Conventional capabilities (including large combined arms units) - Irregular capabilities (terrorism, guerilla, IEDs)

The degree of challenge to the freedom of action of the interventionist powers will likely increase in the future in Asia, as well as in Europe and the Middle East due to the combined effect of the shifts in military power at a global and regional scale and to the strengthening of the capabilities of potential adversaries⁵². While until now many States were at best only able to defend themselves, the proliferation of interdiction capabilities will give regional reach to an increasing number of actors, allowing them to create contested zones extending well beyond their own territory. This capacity to render a foreign space non-permissive, like the interdiction bubbles that Russian capabilities have created around Crimea⁵³ and Syria⁵⁴, carries heavy implications. It increases the vulnerability of the traditionally prevalent sequential approach to force projection, according to which a first entry operation is preceded by the movement and in-theater deployment of the joint forces required to conduct decisive operations in a second phase. The absence of enemy obstruction at theater level made such an approach possible in preparation for operations in the Gulf and the Balkans. If the entire theater of operations is contested by the adversary, the nature of the challenge changes: operations paving the way for entry must be adapted, e.g. by modifying their tempo, by the deployment of air and missile defense capabilities and the hardening of theater bases to strengthen resilience, by reducing the reliance on fixed facilities (flexbasing, aircraft carriers, etc.), by blinding the adversary (deception, anti-ISR kinetic and non-kinetic warfare, etc.), or even by operating only from standoff range. The United States is currently confronted with all these challenges as it prepares for a possible future confrontation with China⁵⁵.

52. T. K. Kelly, D. C. Gompert and D. Long, *Smarter Power, Stronger Partners, Volume I, op. cit.*, p. 43-64. For graphical representations of the intensification, between 1996 and 2017, of China's interdiction threats (surface-to-surface strikes and anti-ship capabilities, expanded air defense) against the United States, see E. Heginbotham *et al.*, *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard. Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power, 1996-2017*, Santa Monica, CA, RAND Corporation, 2015, p. 51, 109, 176, 180.

53. Air-defense systems, including long-range systems (*S-300 PMU2* and *S-400*), modern interceptors (*Su-30SM*, *Su-27SM2/3*), coastal defenses, Black Sea fleet ships equipped with air defenses, antiship and land attack missiles, ASW platforms, submarines, etc. See *Military Balance 2016*, London, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2016, p. 175, 198, 202; K. Weinberger and F. Holcomb, *Russian Build-Up in and around Ukraine: August 12, 2016*, Institute for the Study of War, August 12, 2016.

54. See in particular J. Altman, "Russian A2/AD in the Eastern Mediterranean. A Growing Risk", *Naval War College Review*, vol. 69, No. 1, Winter 2016, p. 72-84.

55. The ability to operate *only* from very long distances, from bases located outside the threat zone, depends not only on capability considerations but perhaps first and foremost on the political-strategic context: in certain cases, such as alliances, it is politically impossible for an expeditionary power to put an end to its regional presence. In the Asia-Pacific region, for example, and as long as the existing alliance relationships exist, the United States has no other option than to make its

Although not universal, the trend toward the intensification of the ability of potential adversaries to create contested space exists, and needs to be taken into account by France. By increasing the constraints on the freedom of action of joint expeditionary forces, this trend could compromise the French aptitude for first entry. The latter relies on the possession of certain comparative advantages and capabilities that it is important to identify and preserve over the long term.

First entry operations in practice

Like any operation plan, the form of a first entry operation has to be adapted according to a number of criteria, which can be related to the country projecting the force (its capabilities, prepositioned assets, acceptable degree of risk, allies...), the targeted adversary (its capabilities, degree of presence in, and control of, the theatre, stakes and propensity to take risks, allies...), the nature of the theater of operations (distance, accessibility, vicinity, climate/domains involved...) or the state of the crisis (urgency, diplomatic constraints...). The relative weight of each factor varies depending on the planned operations. Although both entry operations in Afghanistan, following September 11, 2001, and in Mali in January 2013 were carried out in a hurry and in distant and poorly accessible theaters, they took on radically different forms due to their respective terrain, context, state of local forces, and resources of the interventionist powers. These variations are both normal and irreducible, however first entry operations still share certain resemblances, such as similar general features and operational and strategic priorities that guide the action.

General principles

A first entry operation is an offensive operation, generally conducted over long distances. It establishes a direct contact between an attacker operating in a distant location and a defender with more or less solid control of the terrain. The degree of control of the adversary on the theater of operations is crucial: it reflects its defensive power, and thus its ability to capitalize on the advantages stemming from the being on the defensive, whether at the tactical (familiarity with the terrain, ability to conceal, disperse, harden its positions

presence in South Korea and Japan more resilient against Chinese capabilities. For a recent overview of the Chinese anti-access capabilities and of U.S. responses in the 2030-2040 timeframe, see S. Biddle and I. Oelrich, "Future Warfare in the Western Pacific. Chinese Antiaccess/Area Denial, U.S. Air Sea Battle, and Command of the Commons in East Asia", *International Security*, vol. 41, No. 1, Summer 2016, p. 7-48.

and forces, lower costs of defensive weapons...), operational (shorter lines of communication, ability to trade space for time) or strategic level (support from the population, capacity to endure...⁵⁶). To have a chance of gaining the upper hand despite these defensive advantages, the joint force conducting the first entry must be qualitatively superior to the adversary. This qualitative edge relies not only on a material advantage (sophisticated, better-maintained weapon systems, better support, etc.) but also on superior tactical skills, guaranteeing the performance and adaptability of the force. The more the adversaries are powerful, solidly entrenched or possess sophisticated niche capabilities able to level the military playing field, the more the qualitative superiority of the expeditionary force must be backed up with quantitative parity or even superiority. By contrast, it is possible to enter a theater weakly held by the adversary – or held by a non-significant adversary – with smaller, qualitatively superior forces, without even requiring latest-generation equipment.

For any first entry operation, the strategic geography of the theater constitutes a decisive factor. It comprises two dimensions: firstly, the physical environment surrounding the targeted terrain and, secondly, the architecture of political and diplomatic relations in the region, particularly in the direct vicinity. Each of these two elements plays an important role to determine possible approaches to the adversary.

The physical geography of the theater of operations naturally plays a prominent role in multiple ways, affecting freedom of action and directly or indirectly affecting the capability requirements for the first entry operation. Thus the existence of one or more maritime façades determines the size – although not necessarily the employment – of naval and, to a lesser extent, naval aviation assets. Similarly, the quality and density of land communication routes in the region, which vary depending on the nature of the terrain and the degree of development of the neighboring countries, shape ground logistics (volume and speed of transportation of land forces), and to some extent, the degree of predictability of the itineraries. The number of theater air bases and carrier battle groups available in the vicinity of the adversary affects the volume of air sorties. The distance between these air bases and the adversary, combined with available air refueling capabilities, determines the scale of the air campaign by influencing the time spent on zone by combat and ISR assets. Existing forward based forces or prepositioned equipment stocks in the region significantly increase the ability

56. See in particular Posen, “Command of the Commons”, *op. cit.*, p. 23-24.

to react swiftly with ground units, while access to port installations will ultimately be required to deploy heavy ground forces over long distances.

The second determining factor relates to the diplomatic positions of the States in the region. Combined with the physical characteristics of the theater, the alignment of neighboring countries can heavily impact available operational and strategic options to deploy on the theater, as illustrated by the refusal of the Turkish government to authorize U.S. forces to transit across its territory to open up a second front in northern Iraq in 2003. Whether as a result of alliances or due to momentary tensions related to a specific operation, a country is naturally free to deny expeditionary forces the right to transit through its airspace or to use facilities located on its territory to conduct or support air, land or naval operations⁵⁷. Evidently, sustaining the widest possible network of partners in the various regions of interest constitutes an important asset for expeditionary powers in order to discourage hostile initiatives and to offer, if needed, invaluable flexibility in the context of a first entry operation⁵⁸.

A first entry operation can be broken down into three phases: (1) the deployment of a set of *enabling capabilities*, (2) the *expeditionary phase* and (3) *establishing freedom of action in the contested zone*. These phases open one after the other; they do not replace each other, but combine. Ultimately they comprise the three pillars on which any first entry operation relies. The nature and number of required capabilities will be heavily dependent on the theater of operations and the adversary's assets. The more the environment is contested, the more the range of capabilities will have to be comprehensive, modern and sustained in time and in numbers – at a national or collective level.

Enabling capabilities

Deploying *joint enabling capabilities* must be the priority during the first phase of a first entry. This category includes both C4ISR and logistics capabilities for the operational and strategic levels, which make it possible to autonomously conduct the missions needed to penetrate a contested environment. The means involved are mobilized far in advance of combat operations in order to perform the intelligence missions and planning

57. On these factors and their sensitivity to the political context, see C. Brustlein, "Toward the End of Force Projection? II. Operational Responses and Political Perspectives", *op. cit.*, p. 25-33. See also S. L. Pettyjohn and J. Kavanagh, *Access Granted. Political Challenges to the U.S. Overseas Presence, 1945-2014*, Santa Monica, CA, RAND Corporation, 2016.

58. See in particular Tangredi, *Anti-Access Warfare*, *op. cit.*, p. 76-85.

required prior to the commencement of hostilities. Yet, these capabilities continue to play an enabling role throughout the operation and can support both national and collective combat operations. They include multi-sensor intelligence, joint operational and strategic command and control structures and systems⁵⁹, and logistics support at operational and strategic levels⁶⁰. It is on such capabilities that expeditionary powers rely when the first echelon of forces starts to operate in a remote, contested environment. Since the French ambition is to be able to conduct first entry operations on an autonomous basis, it is crucial that these capabilities be preserved at national level.

The French ambition to be able to conduct first entry operations against a significant adversary requires possession of interoperable command structures, capable of integrating allied contributions into an overall maneuver under French command, as part of a division-level multinational force, thus reaching a volume of force required to overmatch the adversary that would be unachievable on a strictly national basis⁶¹. Under the most demanding scenarios, interoperability of these enabling capabilities allows the division-sized force under French command to be integrated into a higher strategic command structure that will plan and conduct large operations.

Intelligence is the second pillar of these enabling capabilities. Here too, the French ambition to be able to assess tactical and strategic situations on a national basis implies possession of a wide range of capabilities, such as human intelligence, communications intelligence capabilities, or sensors carried by UAVs (tactical or MALE) or manned platforms (E-3F AWACS for airborne early warning and C2), including maritime patrol aircraft. The less permissive the environment, the more comprehensive the coverage will have to be and the more complex and risky the intelligence-gathering missions will become, since it will then have to be performed from stand-off distance (*C-160 Gabriel* for SIGINT), from space (*HELIOS*, then *MUSIS* IMINT satellites, *CERES* SIGINT satellites) or complemented by ISR systems capable of

59. France also considers important to be able to command a first entry operation either from home territory or from the theater of operations, and thus to be able to switch from one to the other. This ability strengthens resilience against aggressions targeting C2 nodes and the risk of operational overload as a result of simultaneous operations in several theaters.

60. Numerous elements are set forth in RDIA 2014-002, *Entrée en premier*, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

61. This corresponds to a *Smaller Joint Operation* (SJO), as defined by NATO, i.e. a force of 15-23,000 men. See LCL Chênebeau, *Éléments d'appréciation sur le niveau opératif et comparaison avec le modèle américain*, Paris, Centre interarmées de concepts, d'études et d'expérimentations, January 10, 2014.

penetrating contested airspace and tracking – or even destroying – high value targets such as mobile ballistic missile launchers⁶².

The expeditionary phase

A first entry operation is rarely performed solely from home territory. Though certain actions may initially be conducted from France to ensure greater reactivity or to maximize the element of surprise, operating over longer distances require bases located in the vicinity of the theater. Thus, force projection targeting a contested territory involves units coming directly from home territory and others operating from bases in-theater or from surface ships – in the case of France, the carrier battle group and the *Mistral* class amphibious assault ships.

Air missions conducted from home territory generally involve very significant distances. Such missions – which are possible thanks to the preservation of a skill required for the Strategic Air Forces to perform their nuclear deterrence mission – were performed in the early stages of the operations in Libya in 2011 and Mali in 2013⁶³. Whether they are used at the beginning of an operation to produce a shock effect on the adversary, due to the urgency of the situation, or whether they operate from French bases for the duration of the operation due to the relative proximity of the theater (Libya 2011), these extended-range missions rely on air-refueling assets, either from the French fleet (16 tankers in 2016) or from allied fleets⁶⁴.

Because the use of air assets at extended range alone will rarely suffice to achieve the desired effect, expeditionary forces must be deployed in the theater of operations, close to the territory where a first entry is planned, thanks to the strategic mobility offered by maritime (LHDs, roll-on/roll-off ships) and strategic airlift assets. The volume of transit and supply capabilities not only affects the speed with which forces can be deployed, but also heavily influences their sustainable volume in-theater. The numbers of such assets within the armed forces must be correlated with strategic ambitions in terms of desired effects to be produced in-theater on a national

62. Though this type of UAV does not appear to be operational today, it corresponds to requirements that have long been identified by the U.S. to break down anti-access postures and could thus emerge in the U.S. Navy or U.S. Air Force during the coming decade.

63. On March 19, 2011, around 10 *Rafales* and *Mirage 2000s* (2000D or 2000-5) took off from France (Saint-Dizier, Nancy, Dijon) to strike Libyan loyalist forces which were threatening the city of Benghazi. In the night of January 12-13, 2013, four *Rafales* flew from Saint-Dizier to strike AQMI forces in Mali.

64. On March 19, 2011, six tankers were mobilized at the start of the operation in Libya. See J.-M. Tanguy, “For OUP Tankers Only”, blog *Le Mamouth*, March 29, 2012.

basis (number of air sorties per day, size of the ground force and its support elements, etc.) – the smaller the “pipes”, the slower the force buildup in-theater and the weaker the pressure applied to the adversary.

In the context of a first entry operation, the projected joint force must ultimately be able to generate itself the air, sea and land power tailored to the adversary’s capabilities and the objectives of the operation, both for offensive and defensive purposes. The defensive component ensures the protection and resilience of the force against the various threats present in the theater and thus involves surveillance of the area around the theater bases and the establishment of security perimeters designed to detect potential attackers and make their task harder (in a semi-permissive environment), as well as deployment of air and missile defenses against ballistic or air-breathing targets, and CBRN detection, protection and decontamination systems (for a non-permissive environment⁶⁵). Adversaries possessing substantial long-range strike capabilities (notably China and Russia) call into question the survivability of forward deployed forces and of regional bases, which could quickly be rendered inoperative. These forces and installations would not be removed as they continue to hold strong political value. Yet, such concern does once again raise the issue of hardening installations and/or deploying active defense systems against the adversary’s strike capabilities. Due to the cost of such measures, alternatives to ensure an in-theater expeditionary presence must be considered, whether by increasing reliance on naval aviation and, in the case of the U.S., sea-basing, or by using a more diversified network of infrastructures in-theater, to offer greater resilience in the face of potential attacks⁶⁶.

Meanwhile, defensive options include protecting the fleet taking part in the operation, whether a carrier battle group, an escorted LHD or a frigate, so that it can ultimately contribute and support the first entry operation. Anti-

65. Numerous studies have focused on air bases. See, for example, C. J. Bowie, *The Anti-Access Threat and Theater Air Bases*, Washington D.C., Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2002, p. 37-51 ; and A. J. Vick, *Air Base Attacks and Defensive Counters. Historical Lessons and Future Challenges*, Santa Monica, CA, RAND, 2015, p. 19-37.

66. *Sea-basing* is a U.S. Navy and Marine Corps concept based on possessing the means, including support capabilities, to conduct operations inland directly from the sea. Both services are also interested in the possible deployment of vertical/short takeoff F-35Bs from unprepared airfields to strengthen their security through dispersal and surprise. Another approach, being pursued by the U.S. Air Force, consists in developing partnerships and capabilities during peacetime to allow deployment of U.S. Air Force units on various types of infrastructure (allied air bases, disused facilities, civil airports, etc.) in the event of a crisis. For these different options, see R. Work, *Thinking about Sea-Basing: All Ahead, Slow*, Washington D.C., Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2006 ; M. Gunzinger and J. Stillion, *Sustaining America's Precision Strike Advantage*, Washington D.C., Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2015, p. 31-34 ; M. W. Pietrucha, “Making Places, Not Bases a Reality”, *Proceedings*, vol. 141, No. 10, October 2015.

submarine warfare, mine warfare and air defense capabilities, along with self-defense means (point defenses or electronic countermeasures) against anti-ship missiles all play a full role in this defensive dimension. They are particularly critical if the fleet has to operate in the vicinity of the adversary against which a first entry operation is planned⁶⁷.

Gaining freedom of action over enemy territory

Though protection of the projected force provides some degree of resilience, it is important when facing major adversaries to move ahead rapidly with the third phase of the operation: the offensive action itself. The main objective of this phase is to seize freedom of action in the air, at sea and in electromagnetic and cybernetic space, then on land. Preparatory measures can be implemented to increase the element of surprise, whether by deception or by infiltration of special forces or undercover units. The latter can obtain more detailed intelligence, provide targeting support, sabotage critical targets or create diversions, and therefore play a critical role in the first entry, however contested the environment.

In semi-permissive environments, particularly those where air supremacy is not contested, ground forces (light units) or special forces may be immediately deployed from the outset to seize and secure key points (port or airport infrastructure, communication nodes, main routes), prior to utilizing these for coercive action. A rapid deployment capability – through air transport, amphibious ships or through pre-positioning – is in this case essential.

In a non-permissive environment, the offensive phase first requires that the adversary's long-range interdiction capabilities' be neutralized, notably those which contribute most to leveling the playing field and/or are the most dangerous, in an effort to minimize the vulnerability of deployed forces in-theater and to maximize the vulnerability of the adversary. If the adversary possesses air defense capabilities (air-to-air or surface-to-air), even older-generation systems, it is crucial to conduct SEAD/DEAD⁶⁸ missions in order to render airspace more permissive. To achieve this, the French Air Force today combines self-protection (SPECTRA on *Rafale*) and ground attack

67. On the principles and options for defending surface ships against anti-ship missiles, see R. Kumar, *Defence of Surface Ships Against Anti-Ship Missiles*, Monterey, CA, Naval Postgraduate School, Thesis, 1990.

68. DEAD (*Destruction of Enemy Air Defenses*) aims to destroy the adversary's air defense system while SEAD only seeks to suppress, sometimes temporarily, the components of the system, particularly its radars.

capabilities, while the U.S. forces rely not only on self-protection but also on offensive jamming pods, anti-radiation missiles and low-observable fighters and bombers (F-22 and particularly B-2) capable of approaching targets and destroying them with precision-guided munitions. In the face of more modern air defense capabilities – whether short- and medium-range (*Buk-M1/2/3*) or long-range (HQ-9, S-300 PMU1/2, S-400) – the use by France of the same traditional capabilities for destruction or suppression of air defense systems would be more risky, or even impossible. France would thus need to acquire new offensive capabilities (agile electronic attack using modern jammers or cybernetic weapons, longer-range air-to-surface missiles, unmanned combat air vehicles, etc.⁶⁹). While the West retains a significant lead in air-to-air combat, France's ambition to maintain its aptitude for first entry makes it imperative to preserve this advantage, whether through more demanding training, the procurement of longer-range air-to-air missiles, the modernization of SPECTRA, the development of resilient multi-domain connectivity, or some investments in R&D to enhance the capabilities of the *Rafale's* AESA radar (RBE2 AESA).

Deep strike weapons (notably air-launched and sea-launched cruise missiles) have an essential role to play in first entry operations, supporting efforts to seize freedom of action in the air by disabling enemy runways and aircraft on the ground, tilting the quantitative balance of power favorably in the early hours of conflict. Meanwhile, they can also strike critical elements of the enemy's defenses: anti-ship capabilities (radars, launchers) that could pose a threat to the surface fleet, WMD storage infrastructure and potential means of delivery (ground and airborne platforms), C3 centers and electronic warfare systems...

As the enemy's most sophisticated systems are progressively put out of action and as freedom of action in the different domains increases, offensive efforts can turn to initial attrition of enemy forces best suited to hinder a potential phase of the operation led by ground forces: heavy and elite ground units, surface-to-surface firepower, etc.

In the 2013 *White Paper*, two brigades (the 2nd and 7th armored brigades) within the French Army are identified as being elements "trained for first entry and coercive combat against heavily armed adversaries.⁷⁰" In a remote, non-permissive environment characterized for example by a heavily

69. For a detailed discussion of the future of air defense destruction and suppression missions in the presence of modern SAM systems, see C. Brustlein, É. de Durand and É. Tenenbaum, *La suprématie aérienne en péril*, *op. cit.*, p. 152-175.

70. *LBDSN 2013*, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

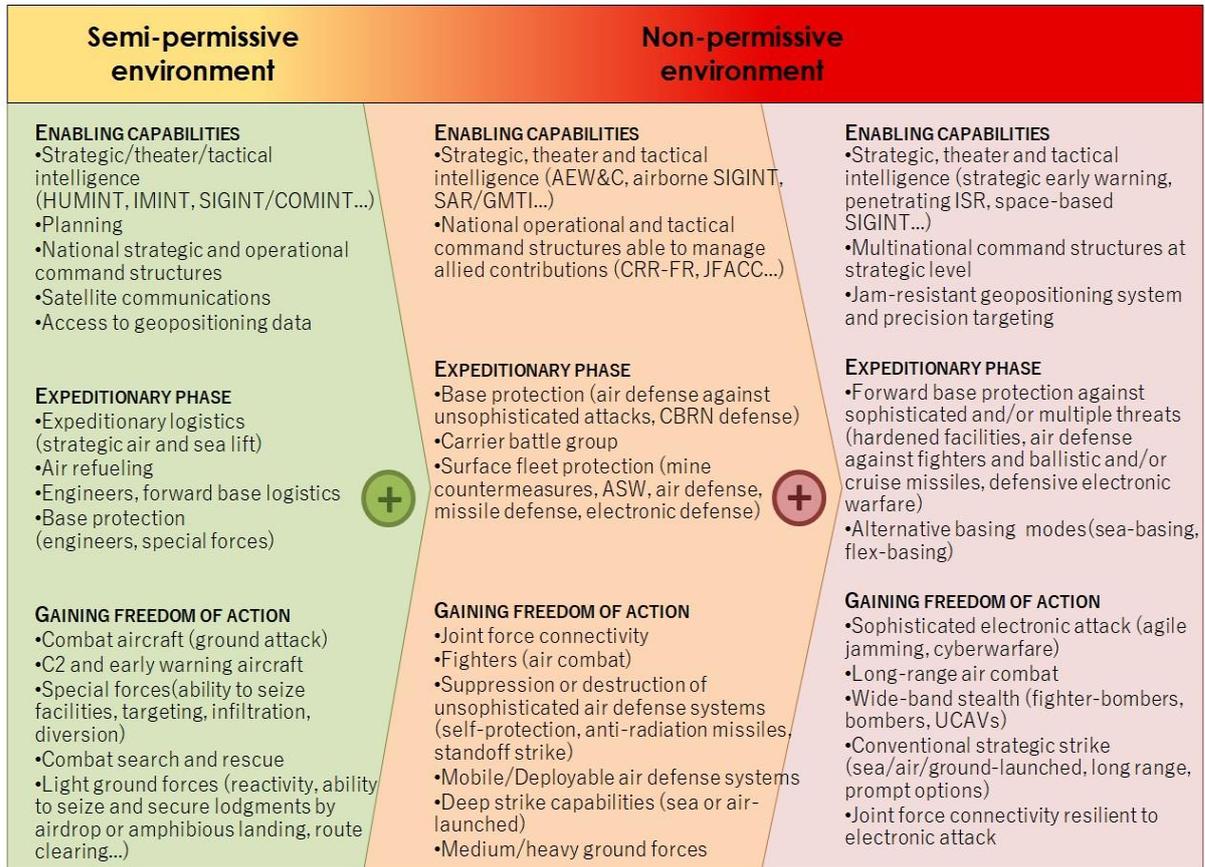
contested airspace, e.g. following aggressive sanctuarization⁷¹, it may be necessary to deploy combined-arms battlegroups drawn from those two heavy brigades (combining *Leclerc* MBTs, VBCI IFVs, LRU guided MLRS unitary rockets, etc.) as part of a first entry operation. For example, their mission could be to destroy enemy assets that cannot be destroyed or suppressed from the air or to disrupt enemy defenses⁷². In most scenarios, however, such heavy units are not seemingly intended to play the central role in the first entry phase as defined in this report (the initial phase to gain freedom of action in enemy territory). They are likely to play only a secondary role in the initial phase due to constraints inherent to their format – e.g. time required for long-distance transportation and their limited operational – although they may take on a more crucial role in the second phase, acting directly against the enemy’s center of gravity and securing victory.

In contrast to the heavy units, other elements of land forces and special forces could be needed in all first entry scenarios, at the very least to protect theater bases, or to rapidly undertake a maneuver to destabilize the adversary and keep him on the defensive while the force build-up continues in the theater: special forces, light (11th parachute brigade and 27th mountain infantry brigade) or medium-weight brigades, Army helicopters operating from land or from an LHD, etc. – multiple components could be called on for a first entry operation due to their unique added value and skills (route clearing, rapid runway repair, airdrops, amphibious landing, tactical UAVs, etc.). The suppression of critical long-range capabilities, deception and attrition of the enemy forces should tip the balance of power in favor of the expeditionary force. As phase of first entry comes to an end, expeditionary forces have reduced the threat level and established a secure presence either in the theater or directly on enemy territory. This phase thus sets the stage for the second one: either the conduct of an air campaign aiming, in coordination or not with foreign forces on the ground, at achieving a decisive effect on the enemy, or the deployment of a joint force, including a more substantial ground component to pursue offensive operations in order to secure a decisive victory.

71. On the concept of aggressive sanctuarization, see C. Brustlein, “À l’ombre de la dissuasion : la sanctuarisation agressive”, *Les grands dossiers de Diplomatie*, October 2013, p. 12-16.

72. Their action would not be intended to achieve the decision but to prepare it. Otherwise, this would no longer be a first entry but a decisive offensive operation.

Illustration 2. Critical capabilities depending on the degree of permissiveness of the environment



A strategic and capability imperative

First entry in a contested theater of operations requires such an array of capabilities that only a few States have developed or maintained them. In the case of NATO, the end of the Cold War and the increasing focus on stability operations have resulted in the rapid erosion of the types of skills required in the face of major adversaries, even though these very adversaries now play a leading role in the diffusion of anti-access strategies and capabilities. While the means to create contested environments are becoming more widespread and reinforced, France needs to take note of these collective shortcomings when defining its capability development strategy and priorities for the coming decades.

Europe and entry operations: coping with scarcity

The intrinsic difficulty of first entry operations and the requirements imposed by the most demanding scenarios in terms of volumes of forces naturally raise questions concerning options of multinational action, particularly within the Atlantic Alliance and the European Union. Over the past 25 years, following the lessons learned from the Gulf War and Kosovo, Europe's armed forces have been transformed in order to move away from collective defense needs and focus instead on overseas interventions⁷³. On paper, such a change could have set the scene for a global strengthening of the West's first entry capability and a better burden sharing among allies. In practice, the transformation took place amid shrinking military budgets and suffered from a blatant lack of political-strategic and operational ambition. It favored peacekeeping, stabilization and coercive diplomacy, and reflected a preference to act within a coalition in a quest for international legitimacy rather than strategic effectiveness across the entire

73. T. Terriff and F. Osinga, "Conclusion: The Diffusion of Military Transformation to European Militaries", in T. Terriff, F. Osinga and T. Farrell (dir.), *A Transformation Gap? American Innovations and European Military Change*, Stanford, CA, Stanford Security Studies, 2010, p. 187-209 ; T. Edmunds, "A New Security Environment? The Evolution of Military Roles in Post-Cold War Europe", in T. Edmunds and M. Malesic (dir.), *Defence Transformation in Europe: Evolving Military Roles*, Amsterdam, IOS Press, 2005, p. 9-18.

spectrum of operations. During the transformation process, the armed forces of Europe have drastically downsized and chosen to specialize, thereby reducing their capability to operate across the full spectrum of operations⁷⁴. Furthermore, they have highlighted interoperability and capability developments (equipment and doctrine) generally tailored to requirements for missions at the lower end of the spectrum (stabilization in the Balkans, Afghanistan, counter-piracy) or in support of a larger operation mainly carried out by the U.S., and thus benefitting from the latter's conventional superiority.

The increasing specialization of most European militaries in some operational areas is problematic for at least two reasons. First, the severity of military challenges in the European neighborhood is increasing, and expected instability on a regional scale in the Middle East and North Africa seems likely to fuel this process in coming years. By significantly raising the cost of entering a theater of operations, the proliferation of anti-access and area denial capabilities is thus liable to modify the set of assets needed to conduct interventions by refocusing on the higher end of the spectrum, thus increasing the degree of dependence of European forces on the U.S. military.

Second, as the degree of European dependence tends to increase, deep uncertainties remain about the future of U.S. commitment to its European allies. U.S. forces continue to be the best equipped and trained to conduct force projection operations in the most contested environments. However, the military rise of China and North Korea is increasingly challenging, imposing increasing needs in terms of deterrence, defense and reassurance of local allies, and creating potential trade-offs between regions⁷⁵. Even though the Ukraine crisis and the strategic resurgence of Russia, along with chaos in the Middle East, have led the U.S. to reinforce its military presence in Europe and slowed the implementation of the pivot to Asia initiated by the Obama administration, the long-term ambition to rebalance seems widely shared in the U.S., as is the desire to see Europe become more involved in ensuring the security of its own environment.

In the European capability landscape, the position of France, once again, reflects its strategic culture and national ambitions, which have led it to develop force projection capabilities that are autonomous and credible against major adversaries. Although the majority of skills required for first entry operations reflect the West's relatively recent interest in overseas

74. C. Mölling, M.-L. Chagnaud, T. Schütz and A. von Voss, *European Defence Monitoring (EDM)*, Berlin, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, January 2014.

75. K. M. Campbell, *The Pivot. The Future of American Statecraft in Asia*, New York, NY, Hachette Book Group, 2016.

interventions, some European allies had already acquired high-end capabilities suitable for this kind of missions during the Cold War – special forces, suppression of enemy air defense, naval combat aviation, long-range air defense, anti-submarine warfare, etc. Like the rest of European military capabilities, these specific skills have undergone significant cutbacks, or have even disappeared, over the last two decades.

True, European naval fleets have sometimes made qualitative progress, for example in air defense or deep strike from surface ships or submarines (*Tomahawk* missiles). Yet, this has also prompted a loss in numbers, weakening both their ability to build up forces in case of a major crisis and their capacity to cover multiple theaters simultaneously. In particular, capability reductions have impacted the submarine fleets, as well as sectors such as anti-submarine warfare⁷⁶, mine warfare, amphibious and naval aviation capabilities – all crucial capabilities to conduct force or power projection by sea in a contested environment⁷⁷.

European air forces have followed a similar trend in terms of numbers⁷⁸. Shortcomings have also been noted on several occasions in areas such as ISR, air refueling, strategic transport, strategic bombing or suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD), where dependence on U.S. capabilities is at its highest. In the critical field of SEAD, only Italy and Germany have chosen to renew their capabilities through the acquisition of AGM-88E anti-radiation missiles for their *Tornados*⁷⁹. In the complementary domain of signals intelligence, which is essential to keep track of the order of battle of the enemy's air defenses and ensure the

76. For a recent analysis of the issues associated with NATO maritime patrol capabilities, see *Alliance Airborne Anti-Submarine Warfare. A Forecast for Maritime Air ASW in the Future Operational Environment*, Kalkar, Joint Air Power Competence Centre, June 2016. For a recent review of ASW capabilities in Northern Europe, see K. Hicks *et al.*, *Undersea Warfare in Northern Europe*, Washington, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2016, p. 20 ff.

77. B. McGrath, "The North Atlantic Treaty Organization at Sea: Trends in Allied Naval Power", in G. J. Schmitt (dir.), *A Hard Look at Hard Power: Assessing the Defense Capabilities of Key U.S. Allies and Security Partners*, Carlisle, Strategic Studies Institute, 2015, p. 67-94.

78. C. F. Anrig, *The Quest for Relevant Air Power*, Maxwell Air Force Base, Air University Press, 2011, p. 340.

79. Until 2014, the U.K. possessed dedicated SEAD capabilities thanks to its ALARM anti-radiation missiles, which were withdrawn from active service without being replaced. See R. Beckhusen, "Here's Another Thing the British Military Can't Do Anymore", blog *War Is Boring*, January 23, 2014, accessible at: warisboring.com/; "Air Weapons: Learning from Failure in Serbia", *StrategyPage*, January 17, 2016, accessible at: www.strategypage.com/.

protection of allied combat aircraft, only France and the U.K. currently possess significant capabilities⁸⁰.

In the land forces, finally, despite an emphasis on overseas operations, European armies did not maintain force levels likely to meet the expectations required for first entry. Though most European armies can deploy forces in significant, albeit often limited (battalion or above), volumes, there are much fewer contributors in specific areas required for first entry, such as special forces, amphibious operations (landing, logistics, rotary wing combat), airdrops and engineering (route clearance, base protection, deployment support, runway repairs, etc.⁸¹). Thus, while the NATO Response Force (NRF), supported by rotations among NATO member countries, is supposedly capable of performing first entry, this gives a misleading impression as to the reality of capabilities possessed at a European level: if intervention is to take place in a non-permissive environment, the number of partners likely to contribute to operations should be expected to drop sharply.

In many respects, the main European partner for France in the conduct of first entry missions is the U.K. Though its armed forces experienced a crisis at the end of the 2000s⁸² due the country's substantial involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the budgetary impact of the financial crisis in 2008, London is currently reviving its defense effort. Thus, the 2015 *Strategic Defence and Security Review* (SDSR) expressed the ambition to respect the commitment to devote at least 2% of GDP to defense expenditure and to increase the defense budget in real terms every year⁸³. Meanwhile, British forces remain focused on expeditionary missions, while preserving, like France, a capability covering the full spectrum of operations. The creation of a Franco-British *Combined Joint Expeditionary Force* (CJEF) under the *Lancaster House Treaty* of 2010 thus reflects a convergence of French and British objectives concerning

80. The reconstruction of such a capability, following the retirement of the SIGINT *Atlantiques* in 2010, is still possible in Germany but its form remains unclear at present. Following the fiasco surrounding the acquisition of the *Euro Hawk*, a variant of the *Global Hawk* with a SIGINT payload, several avenues are being explored to install the SIGINT payload on other platforms, manned or not. See D. Corbett, "Germany Seeks to Revive Euro Hawk Program", *Defense News*, January 16, 2015, accessible at: www.defensenews.com/.

81. For a recent analysis of capability trends in European land forces, see G. Lasconjarias "The North Atlantic Treaty Organization's Land Forces: Losing Ground" in G. J. Schmitt (dir.), *A Hard Look at Hard Power*, *op. cit.*, p. 231-255.

82. P. Chareyron, "Les armées britanniques. Un modèle en crise", *Focus stratégique*, No. 23, Ifri, July 2010, particularly p. 25 ff.

83. *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015. A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom*, London, HM Government/Cabinet Office, November 2015, p. 27.

expeditionary missions: the CJEF can rapidly project a joint force and is supposed to be capable of performing first entry in a contested theater of operations⁸⁴.

Despite major capability cutbacks since the end of the Cold War, the U.K. still possesses advantages that make it a unique partner in Europe. As well as having strategic ambitions that are not only compatible but often convergent with French ambitions, London has a range of capabilities relevant to first entry operations that is comparable in many respects to that of France (4.5th generation combat aircraft, deep strike using *Storm Shadow* or *Tomahawk* cruise missiles, air defense frigates, nuclear attack submarines, ASW, logistic ships, amphibious and airborne forces, etc.). Moreover, the country plans to reinforce this capability segment in the coming years: the 2015 SDSR confirmed the target to acquire 138 F-35s for the *Royal Air Force* (F-35A) and *Royal Navy* (F-35B) for its two *Queen Elizabeth* class aircraft carriers, the first of which should become operational around 2020. The rebuilding of a robust maritime patrol aircraft capability (P-8 *Poseidon*) and the *Future Combat Air System* (FCAS), a joint project with France, confirm a special British emphasis on the kind of air and naval capabilities that are particularly relevant to first entry operations⁸⁵.

Therefore, within the foreseeable future, and unless the country swings towards a more isolationist foreign policy, the U.K. appears likely to reinforce its role and its potential contributions to such missions⁸⁶. To capitalize on this orientation, which is unique in Europe, France needs to continue to reinforce bilateral cooperation to ensure that the two armed forces can operate jointly in non-permissive environments. Cooperation between the *Rafale*, the F-35 and the UCAVs resulting from the FCAS program, technical and tactical interoperability of rapidly deployable land forces, multi-sensor intelligence-sharing and the renewal of deep strike systems all constitute areas of cooperation that should be developed or maintained to best preserve freedom of action in contested environments⁸⁷.

84. *Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (CJEF) User Guide*, Shrivenham/Paris, Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre – UK Ministry of Defence/Centre interarmées de concepts, de doctrine et d'expérimentations – Ministère de la Défense, 2012, p. 1-2.

85. *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015*, *op. cit.*

86. The Chilcot report on U.K. involvement alongside the U.S. in the 2003 invasion of Iraq is extremely critical of Tony Blair's decisions and could thus weigh heavily on future British decisions to participate in external operations.

87. This is a reference to the *future cruise/anti-ship weapon (FC/ASW)* due to replace the SCALP-EG/*Storm Shadow*, *Exocet* and *Harpoon* missiles in the 2030 timeframe.

France's isolated position in relation to the requirements of first entry operations could, in theory, vary depending on the theaters and scenarios involved. Russia's military resurgence, particularly Moscow's ability to implement an interdiction strategy that would weaken the capacity of NATO members to mutually support each other⁸⁸, generates renewed interest in Eastern and Northern Europe for high-end capabilities, including force projection capabilities (modern fighters, air defense, etc.). If this effort is sustained, it could lead in five to ten years to a reinforcement of capabilities that could provide further credibility to the Atlantic Alliance defense and deterrence posture by protecting NATO forces from Russia's most threatening conventional capabilities (long-range air defense, surface-to-surface or anti-ship missiles, etc.⁸⁹).

However, the benefits of such a strengthening could ultimately be limited to European contingencies. Due to the strategic geography of the continent and the resulting diverging threat perceptions among European countries, the willingness of the latter to participate in a first entry operation in the Middle East or Africa seems unlikely to grow. On the contrary, Russia's military resurgence and provocations in Europe could lead most EU and NATO countries to focus on the collective defense of the continent and to reduce the importance given to expeditionary missions in their defense planning, procurement and training. Thus, although countering A2/AD capabilities is becoming an important component of the Alliance's collective defense and deterrence posture, this will not necessarily provide Europe with a capability for first entry that can be mobilized on external theaters, and thus alleviate the relatively isolated positions of the U.K. and France.

What future for the French way of entry operations?

The aptitude of the French forces to perform first entry is founded on a series of mutually reinforcing factors. Capability and technology assets combine with political-strategic advantages. France is fortunate to be able to rely on a political and military system designed for rapid decision-making, a strategic culture that is favorable to the use of armed force to defend national or collective strategic interests while accepting a certain

88. See, for example, the Kaliningrad case: S. Frühling and G. Lasconjarias, "NATO, A2/AD, and the Kaliningrad Challenge", *Survival*, vol. 58, No. 2, April-May 2016, p. 95-116.

89. L. Simón, "The 'Third' US Offset Strategy and Europe's 'Anti-access' Challenge", *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 39, No. 3, 2016, p. 417-445.

degree of risk, an advanced network of pre-positioned forces and permanent bases, particularly in Africa and the Middle East, and allies and partners prepared to support French action.

First entry plays today a fundamental role in French defense policy and, therefore, in support of its foreign policy. If this strategic asset is to be preserved, it is of the utmost importance to define a credible level of national ambition, which can then be broken down into strategic, diplomatic and capability-related focus areas.

It is not France's ambition to possess an aptitude for autonomous first entry in all environments whatever the adversary. Although its armed forces possess a broad spectrum of capabilities, their freedom of action would significantly reduce if facing enemies of increasing sophistication and power⁹⁰. Its level of ambition, therefore, does not define an absolute limit beneath which freedom of action would be total and above which any action would be impossible. Instead, it should be understood as a succession of thresholds of opposition at which the degree of strategic autonomy substantially changes. While a low degree of opposition would offer France maximum autonomy and room for maneuver for first entry operation, scenarios at the high end of the conflict spectrum would require accepting partial, or even critical, dependence on allies, particularly the U.S., in the least permissive environments (cf. Illustration 3). Considering the long-term trend towards the reinforcement of potential adversaries and the proliferation of sophisticated A2/AD capabilities – beyond those countries that currently possess them – the French ambition should be to limit the erosion of its military advantage in order to preserve the greatest possible freedom of action in view of its resources and national interests.

Today France enjoys a high degree of autonomy in areas where opposition is weak or moderate. Theaters of operations meeting these criteria are essentially located in Africa where France holds a variety of strategic interests. It remains one of the few countries prepared to risk involving itself in conflicts in the region, in which it would carry responsibility for most of the coercive phase. The added value of the French national commitment to African security and the importance of the issues at stake make it necessary to preserve such freedom of autonomous action in this type of semi-permissive environment.

90. J. Gautier, D. Reiner, J.-M. Bockel, J. Lorgeoux, C. Perrin and G. Roger, *Rapport d'information sur le bilan des opérations extérieures*, Paris, Sénat, Commission des affaires étrangères, de la défense et des forces armées, July 13, 2016, p. 126.

In theaters characterized by medium-intensity opposition, France possesses multiple levers, stemming both from its own (combat and support) assets in the three domains and from its intelligence and C3 capabilities which render multinational action possible. For an operation at the higher end of the conflict spectrum, collective action, in whatever form, is the norm: France can be the leading country, gathering allied contributions through its command structures, a major contributor among others (e.g. in a joint operation with the U.K.) or a secondary contributor. These levels of ambition should be considered not only with respect to the degree of opposition in the theaters of operations involved, but also the importance of the interests at stake. By the years 2020s to 2030s, certain major interests could bring France to conduct a strictly national intervention in a non-permissive environment: coercive diplomacy against a State exporting terrorism to France, strategic raid against a local power with expansionist aims, etc. It is therefore crucial that France retains the capabilities necessary in order to both be one of the pillars of a large-scale operation and to preserve its autonomy even at the high end of the conflict spectrum if justified by the issues at stake⁹¹.

Finally, the strategic resurgence of Russia requires France to include within its defense planning scenarios opposing it to Moscow, including some in which interdiction capabilities would play a key role⁹². In such scenarios, French forces would in principle fight alongside NATO allies for the purpose of collective defense. A first entry operation would here take the form of a defensive counter-interdiction operation, rather than in a more traditional form of first entry. Although the two types of operation rely on the same type of skills and capabilities, the strategic dynamics are different. Indeed, a counter-interdiction operation under Article 5 of the North Atlantic treaty would aim first and foremost to reinforce NATO's freedom of action in the territory of its member countries in order to protect them and would probably involve only limited actions aimed at Russian territory to reduce the risk of escalation.

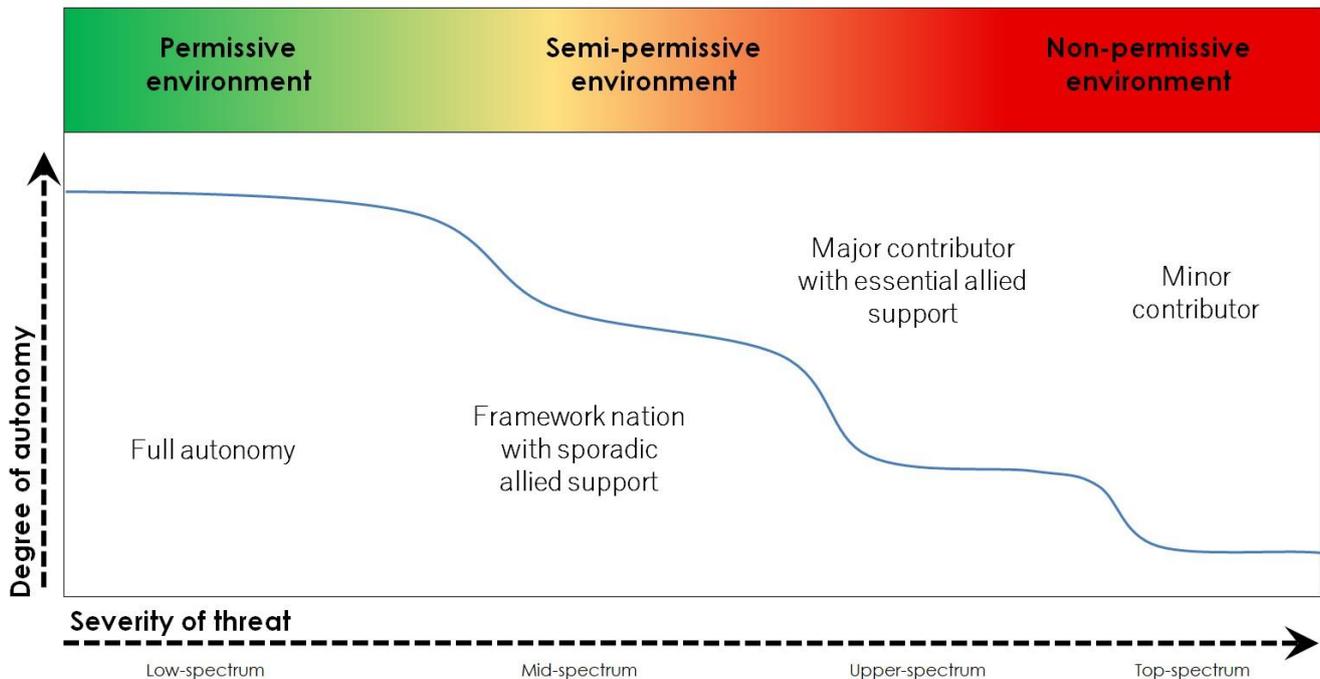
Achieving this level of ambition will be a demanding task, particularly in view of the other security and spending challenges faced by France, including the fight against terrorism and radicalism or the renewal of the

91. If France had to conduct a first entry operation in a non-permissive environment in total autonomy, the risk, the operational tempo and the nature of the objectives to be pursued after the first entry phase, would be heavily impacted.

92. For examples, see in particular S. Frühling and G. Lasconjarias, "NATO, A2/AD, and the Kaliningrad Challenge", *op. cit.* ; L. Simón, "The 'Third' US Offset Strategy and Europe's 'Anti-access' Challenge", *op. cit.* ; T. K. Kelly, D. C. Gompert and D. Long, *Smarter Power, Stronger Partners, Volume I, op. cit.*, p. 106-108.

nuclear deterrent. The task can be broken down into focus areas which define priorities in terms of training and operational preparation, equipment, R&D, budgets, regional positioning and partnerships.

Illustration 3. French autonomy as a function of contestation



Protect and develop high added-value capability areas at the higher end of the spectrum – France’s possession and mastery of rare capabilities and of critical skills required for highly contested environments constitute the primary lever to preserve at least partial national freedom of action and autonomy even at the top end of the conflict spectrum. Furthermore, the rarity of these capabilities gives the country that possesses them a leading role with greater influence within coalitions. While the U.S. has been pursuing the *Third Offset Strategy*⁹³ for several years in an effort by the Pentagon to maintain U.S. technological superiority in conventional warfare, France needs to invest more in the capability segments allowing it to act in contested environments. Unlike the U.S., France has neither the ambition nor the resources to seek global military superiority against any type of adversary. It can, however, preserve existing upper-spectrum capabilities – which have often been the first targeted by budget cutbacks – or even increase their numbers (combat

93. B. Work, “The Third U.S. Offset Strategy and its Implications for Partners and Allies”, Washington D. C., January 28, 2015, accessible at: www.defense.gov/; see also P. Gros, “La Third Offset Strategy américaine”, *Défense & Industries*, no. 7, June 2016, p. 17-19.

aircraft, frigates, etc.) and invest or re-invest in technologies enabling it to partly make up for lack of volume or limited capability gaps. The following is a non-exhaustive list of areas where efforts could be made:

- ▀ Develop and diversify ISR sensors that can be operated from SSNs, including by deploying UAVs;
- ▀ Sustain SIGINT capabilities in all domains, including space, and more generally, sustain the set of strategic, operational and tactical ISR systems ensuring autonomous threat characterization and situational awareness;
- ▀ Extend offensive and defensive electronic warfare capabilities in all domains;
- ▀ Acquire a limited number of low-observable ISR, or even combat, UAVs under the FCAS program;
- ▀ Increase the number of LRU guided MLRS unitary rockets and 155mm guns of the land forces, acquire a more robust version of the CAESAR⁹⁴ and put an end to the continuous reduction of heavy land units since the end of the Cold War;
- ▀ Reinforce land- and ship-based air defense systems against cruise missiles and aircraft, including UAVs (radars and appropriate interception systems);
- ▀ Assure its capability to take decisions and to act in a contested electromagnetic environment, through technology (connectivity, autonomous systems) and doctrine (decentralized command);
- ▀ Exploit the potential offered by unmanned surface and underwater systems, in particular to preserve the lead in anti-submarine warfare and mine warfare.

Maintain a sustained forward-presence – Today France has a forward-based force of around 11,000 pre-positioned troops (presence forces and sovereignty forces), a large part of which is located in Africa⁹⁵. The permanent presence of forces in a foreign country has a non-negligible cost and can generate local tensions while also directly exposing forces to threats. Nonetheless, forward basing forces tailored to the local threat level

94. For example, the 8x8 version unveiled in September 2015. E. H. Biass, "Nexter Comes to DSEi With a Loud Bang – No, Two", *forcesoperations.com*, September 15, 2015, accessible at: <http://forcesoperations.com/>.

95. Y. Fromion and G. Rouillard (rapporteurs), *Rapport d'information sur l'évolution du dispositif militaire français en Afrique et sur le suivi des opérations en cours*, Assemblée nationale, July 9, 2014. See in particular the first part of the document.

is a considerable asset in maintaining an autonomous first entry capability⁹⁶. Pre-deployment of forces, particularly light land units, offers the crucial reactivity necessary to perform first entry in a semi-permissive environment stripping the adversary from the time to harden its defenses, as was the case in Mali in 2013⁹⁷. Pre-positioning also facilitates intelligence gathering, reinforces cooperation with local armed forces and helps to rapidly buildup forces in the theater of operations.

Reorient France’s main military partnerships around first entry missions – As one of the most demanding combat missions performed by modern militaries, first entry should constitute one of the pillars of partnerships between France and its main allies. Established in peacetime, like the trilateral initiative between the U.S., British and French air forces⁹⁸, these partnerships offer a means to achieve convergence in the analysis of common challenges, to identify problems and best practices to solve them, and to reinforce interoperability between the forces. As each category of partner has its own added value, these partnerships should be differentiated depending on the type of cooperation expected:

- Perform a multinational first entry operation in contested or semi-permissive environments. Beyond cooperation with the U.S. and U.K., the objective would be to give a boost to an increasing number of partners so that they are able to participate in first entry in at least one capability area – destruction or suppression of air defenses, suppression of coastal firepower, deep air raid⁹⁹, securing and defending a base exposed to ground-to-ground strikes, etc. Increasing the number of participating countries in one of these capability areas appears to be one of the main ways for NATO to keep or regain a quantitative advantage over its potential adversaries;
- Reinforce cooperation in order to facilitate the transition from first entry to decisive operation. Some partners may have the political will to act rapidly and accept risk, while lacking the capabilities required for a first entry. Thus, in order to achieve the maximum benefit from the

96. J. Gautier *et al.*, *Rapport d'information sur le bilan des opérations extérieures*, p. 89-90, 118.

97. Pre-positioning can also reduce the need to conduct a first entry thanks to its contribution to deterrence and crisis-prevention.

98. P. Goldfein and A. Adamson, “The Trilateral Strategic Initiative. A Primer for Developing Future Airpower Cooperation”, *Air & Space Power Journal Africa & Francophonie*, 1st quarter 2016, p. 5-13.

99. For example, exercises like *Swift Response* led by U.S. Army Europe, in which airborne units from several armed forces conduct forcible entry operations by airborne assault. See 7th Army Joint Multinational Training Command, “Swift Response 16 highlights allied airborne capabilities”, *army.mil*, June 8, 2016, accessible at: www.army.mil/.

“enabling” role of a first entry mission, allied militaries should train in peacetime to combine efforts to reduce the threat level while concurrently building up allied contributions, to mobilize a greater numbers of forces;

- Receive allied back-up for support functions (intelligence, air refueling, strategic and tactical airlift) for a French first entry operation. Further structural partnerships would be established during peacetime in order to ensure French-led operations benefit from reactive and effective support in crisis time, while limiting the partner’s political and military exposure.

Adopt a strategy of capability-based specialization – When preparing for future action in contested environments, it appears insufficient to solely prioritize quality or quantity: on the contrary, it is vital to devise a strategy of capability-based specialization that seeks to combine quality and quantity in the French armed forces as a whole. Such a strategy should identify the functions for which the emphasis needs to be kept on quality, even if this means relying on small numbers of platforms or systems (airspace penetration, nuclear deterrence, carrier and airborne battle groups, SIGINT gathering, etc.), and those for which it is less important to improve quality than to maintain, build up or acquire large numbers of systems or units (non-stealthy armed UAVs, long-range sea-launched and air-launched missiles, main battle tanks, artillery and infantry fighting vehicles, precision-guided weapons, modern decoys, etc.)¹⁰⁰. Such specialization would enable a better allocation of available military resources as a function of the degree of permissiveness of each theater and ensure sophisticated assets are not deployed in theaters where there is little or no substantial opposition. Moreover, a renewed, selective emphasis on quantity could increase France’s capability to prevail by relying on attrition and saturation against particularly sophisticated or numerous defenses.

Prepare for tomorrow’s joint maneuvers in contested environments – France and its allies have long enjoyed exceptional freedom of action due to their qualitative, or even quantitative, advantage over their adversaries. However, as this margin of superiority narrows, practices favored up until now must be reevaluated. The West has used its information advantage (intelligence and communication) to heavily weaken, or even destroy, the adversary from standoff range, reducing the

100. G. Garnier, “Les chausse-trapes de la remontée en puissance. Défis et écueils du redressement militaire”, *Focus stratégique*, No. 52, Ifri, May 2014, p. 29-30.

role played by surprise and deception in its operational plans¹⁰¹. Such efforts can, for example, be pursued by technological means: stealth technologies minimize the visibility of airborne or naval platforms and systems and reduce or eliminate the warning time allowing the enemy to activate its defenses¹⁰². This type of option would be worth pursuing under programs like FCAS, provided that the resulting constraints (connectivity, low internal payload capacity, interoperability, etc.) and costs (R&D, acquisition and maintenance) do not upset the format of the air forces. Meanwhile, electronic warfare systems such as the *Miniature Air-Launched Decoy*¹⁰³ can be used to deceive enemy radars, creating confusion about the actual lines of approach and the volume and nature of the expeditionary forces involved.

Retaining an operational advantage in a contested environment is not necessarily attained only through technological adaptation, but can also be secured through organizational or doctrinal adaptation¹⁰⁴. It is thus crucial to set up a vast program of doctrinal thinking and service or joint force experimentations as soon as possible to analyze the challenges posed by non-permissive environments facing French practices and doctrines and to identify weak points in the current model. The program will further aim to set forth the operational principles that will make it possible to preserve freedom of action and tactical, operational and strategic effectiveness in a contested environment. Additionally, the contribution of deception techniques must not be neglected as they are likely to play an increasing role in future warfare as the qualitative gap between the West and its potential adversaries narrows. Advances in simulation seem to be particularly promising here, both to test current concepts and equipment in future, unprecedented operational situations and to experiment with new systems. Maintaining a high-level of operational readiness – of special

101. For an analysis of some available options for air forces, see C. Brustlein, É. de Durand and É. Tenenbaum, *La suprématie aérienne en péril*, op. cit., p. 202-205.

102. Surprise can also be the result of an “opaque” environment that enemy ISR sensors are unable to penetrate: urban environment, dense vegetation, mountainous terrain, or the undersea domain, from which surprise attacks can originate during first entry operations.

103. The MALD is a small drone with a range of more than 900km launched from an *F-16 C/D* fighter or, in swarms, from a *B-52-H* bomber. It carries an electronic warfare payload that sends back to enemy radars a signature equivalent to that of an actual manned platform (fighter, bomber, unmanned aircraft, etc.) to provoke enemy defenses. A second version of the MALD carries an offensive jammer. See R. Hughes, “Raytheon Contracted to Develop ‘MALD’ Demonstrator”, *Jane’s IHS*, July 10, 2016; *Director, Operational Test and Evaluation FY 2015 Annual Report*, Washington D.C., Department of Defense, January 2016, p. 343-344.

104. At a tactical level for the land forces, see for example the possibilities explored by R. Hémez in “L’avenir de la surprise tactique à l’heure de la numérisation”, *Focus stratégique*, no. 69, Ifri, July 2016, p. 38-42.

forces, light brigades with specific first entry skills (airborne and amphibious troops), combat aviation, etc.), preserving detailed, up-to-date knowledge of physical and human domains, and widely resorting to practices such as *red teaming*, also play a major role to try to maintain the qualitative advantage enjoyed by French forces in operations.

Increase the defense budget, including the devoted to investments – Pursuing these different lines of effort and preserving strategic autonomy and freedom for maneuver are not feasible without an increased financial effort. The combined effects of the recent terrorist attacks, the general deterioration of the strategic environment, and the level of operational commitment of its armed forces have propelled France to increase its defense budget in an unprecedented fashion since the end of the Cold War. Although this change in trend has brought an end the chronic under-funding of the French military¹⁰⁵, it might remain insufficient in ensuring the challenge facing the French expeditionary power is successfully addressed, as other major components of France's defense policy, such as the renewal of the deterrent, will undoubtedly weigh heavily on the next military program law (*Loi de programmation militaire*). A dual increase of the overall budget envelope and of investment spending (R&D and procurement) seems essential in order to maintain the skills that today lie at the heart of France's first entry capability.

105. M. Foucault, "Les budgets de Défense en France, entre déni et déclin", *Focus stratégique*, no. 36, Ifri, April 2012.

Conclusion

The capability to perform first entry has become a key element of the French strategic posture over the past few years, as the number of external interventions has increased and the security environment in the European vicinity has deteriorated. The limited ambitions and modest capabilities of European countries in terms of force projection seem to indicate that France will continue to possess a military that is unique in Europe in its capacity to cover the full spectrum of conflict, its underlying strategic autonomy and the potential leadership role imparted by those two strengths.

The ability to conduct a first entry operation is a critical asset, a pillar of modern military power that makes it possible to defend strategic interests in distant theaters in increasingly contested environments. Though it is an essential mission whose requirements bolster the whole of the defense apparatus, it should not alone dictate the future needs of the armed forces. First entry remains an opening phase that lays the foundation for a second phase of decisive action against the enemy's centers of gravity. Yet, for this latter phase to be successful, France still needs to possess the required means, in volume and over time, to achieve the desired outcome on a national or multinational basis. Maintaining the capability for first entry at all costs would be insufficient, and could even be counter-productive, if it requires neglecting other pillars of national defense (deterrence, homeland protection) or the very conditions enabling a country to project its forces (naval and air dominance, independent space assets, etc.); if it means giving priority to quick response action at the expense of the longer-term ability to build-up forces qualitatively and quantitatively; or if it does not translate into a collective dimension, which alone can give it its full meaning in the most demanding scenarios.

Necessary but not sufficient, the first entry capability will endure as one of the conditions for freedom of action and national and collective strategic autonomy. This capability, which is already costly, will require increasing investments as our potential adversaries' ability to challenge us are reinforced. The focus areas presented here, which do not claim to be complete, should at least allow France to take advantage of the assets it possesses today, to preserve them and to halt the process of erosion of its freedom of action which seems to be taking shape as enemy strategies adapt and increasingly sophisticated weapon systems proliferate. The

protection of national interests, therefore, entails not only maintaining the existing margin of superiority in semi-permissive environments, but also reinforcing the capability to operate in non-permissive environments, the number and dimensions of which could grow strongly in the 2025-2030 timeframe. Failure to do so will leave no other alternative but to accept increased dependence on third countries – particularly the U.S. – as France’s margin for maneuver in the face of existing and future threats continues to decrease.



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