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# France's Return into NATO

## French Military Culture and Strategic Identity in Question

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Anne-Henry de Russé

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# Introduction

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More than 40 years after the unilateral decision by General de Gaulle to withdraw French forces from NATO's integrated military command, President Sarkozy decided that France would reintegrate the Atlantic Alliance's military structure, based on "full and complete participation".<sup>1</sup> The decision was endorsed by Parliament and has generated little debate in France, while a majority of French people appear to approve of it.<sup>2</sup> The implementation has already begun. In 2009, around 200 French officers joined the general staffs in Norfolk, Mons, Naples and Lisbon. Their number will rise to 500 in 2010. This decision is actually a rather logical culmination of a process of "normalization" *vis-à-vis* NATO, which began in the 1990s with operations in Bosnia and Kosovo, and France's return to the Military Committee in December 1995. French officers generally favor "reintegration", seeing it as the end of an uncomfortable position in technical and operational terms. It will also provide career opportunities at a time when reductions in the armed forces' size have greatly reduced periods of responsibility and command.

Yet it would be wrong to ignore the potential consequences of such a shift for the military culture of France's armed forces. Indeed, the "cultural" effects could be especially important for the army, as it has retained a specific culture, modeled by its historical preeminence in France's armed forces, and by the nature of current NATO operations in Afghanistan. Previous alliances were dictated by circumstances and the power politics of the 19th century and first half of the 20th century (the coalitions against Napoleon, the Triple Alliance, the Triple Entente or even the Grand Alliance against the Axis). In contrast, NATO as a political and military alliance is not just about coordinating several national armies in a conflict. It also tries to bring uniformity and standardization to the equipment and procedures of countries with different military cultures.

It is therefore important to question whether this movement will lead to "NATO-isation", i.e. the progressive replacement of French military culture by a NATO culture, which itself is strongly marked by the practices, habits and preferences of US armed forces.

Numerous articles have analyzed the political consequences of France's "return" to NATO. This study, instead, seeks to examine more

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<sup>1</sup> The official expression. For simplicity, the author uses "return" and "reintegration" as synonyms of "full and complete participation".

<sup>2</sup> IFOP opinion poll, conducted on March 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

cultural, doctrinal and operational issues, and hence aims to look at the whole range of possible consequences of this decision. Should it lead in the end to a standardization of French military culture, then the political and strategic repercussions of reintegration could be quite negative. In this regard, by focusing on the supposed loss of strategic-political independence brought on by reintegration, France's strategic debate is probably off-target.

The present study begins by going over the major phases in France's relationship with NATO since 1949, stressing military concerns and the operational experiences specific to the French army. This overview makes it clear that the history of French military institutions has created a particular *military culture*, which is different from NATO's military culture, itself largely influenced by the American model. This purely military dimension, which has evolved over time, has often been ignored. Yet it is crucial to examine how the return to NATO's integrated structures will affect France's national military culture. Accordingly, scenarios are developed to measure its impact at the technical, doctrinal and operational levels. This analysis concludes that a poorly managed reintegration at the "technical" and military levels is likely to entail negative strategic and political implications. It could imperil the intellectual and policy autonomy which France has preserved until now.



# NATO and French Military Culture since 1949

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By studying relations between France and NATO since 1949, it is possible to measure how French military culture has been influenced by doctrinal standardization and the normative values of the Alliance. It is not so much membership of an integrated organization, but rather joint operations, which have led to a convergence of strategic and military cultures.

## ***Diverging Operational Experiences***

France's integration into NATO from its creation through to General de Gaulle's departure did occasionally enrich French military thinking. But closer analysis shows that French armed forces were not that much implicated in the defense of Central Europe. They were mainly focused on Indochina and subsequently Algeria, which saw French forces develop doctrines to fight guerrillas and "revolutionary" wars. These strongly shaped France's military experience.

## **France and the Creation of NATO**

Foreshadowed by the Treaties of Dunkirk (1947) and Brussels (1948), the Treaty of Washington that inaugurated the Atlantic Alliance was signed on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1949. It gave France a political and military guarantee by the United States, originally against Germany, but then against the Soviet threat. The Treaty is strictly defensive, only entering into force in the face of an "armed attack". By virtue of Article 6, its application is restricted to a precisely-defined geographical area (Europe, America and the Atlantic Ocean, north of the Tropic of Cancer).<sup>3</sup> The Europeans subsequently strove to integrate the Americans into a defense organization, in order to bind them more strongly in practice than they were in the Treaty. As a result, the Americans have held a dominant place in NATO command structures and general staffs, and have been provided all necessary facilities to station US

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<sup>3</sup> French negotiators would have preferred formal and automatic engagement by the Americans, comparable to Article 4 of the Treaty of Brussels. But the US Administration, concerned about preserving its freedom of action and not wanting to open up difficult debates with the Senate where traditional American isolationism remained important, did not accept such engagement on principle. Thus, Article 5 of the 1949 Treaty states that in case of attack on one of the parties, "each of them [...] will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith [...] such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force". See Général Beaufre, *L'OTAN et l'Europe*, Paris, Calmann-Levy, 1966.

troops in Europe.<sup>4</sup> Thus, between 1949 and 1952, France accepted the progressive creation of NATO as set out in Article 9, as well as its evolution into an integrated military organization, as the extra security provided by the Americans far outweighed any possible risks to sovereignty. Faced with the Soviet threat (the Prague coup in 1948, and the Korean War in 1950), the Fourth Republic was aware of its powerlessness and the deficiencies of its military means.

France was thus fully “integrated”, though the term deserves clarification, given the extent to which it affected and continues to affect relations between France and NATO. In fact, “integration” has never been an official expression within the Alliance, and covers multiple and often ambiguous realities. Frédéric Bozo has identified two principal meanings of the expression.<sup>5</sup> The first is political and military and designates the structure itself, responsible for “preparing the unified defense of the Treaty’s zone, thanks to the bodies in charge of its definition at the political and military levels”, under the authority of the North Atlantic Council (NAC), the supreme body of the Alliance whose decisions are taken unanimously. The second meaning of integration is military and operational, and relates to the command structures and procedures adopted within NATO. However, here too, the term is a little misleading since forces “assigned” to NATO remain under the control of national general staffs during times of peace. In times of crisis or war, forces assigned by Member States only come under the operational command of NATO at a certain level of alert, which varies considerably from one allied country to another. But it very quickly became clear that the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), set up in 1951 at Rocquencourt, was establishing its primacy over the Standing Group and the Military Committee.<sup>6</sup> This challenged the subordination of military integration to political bodies. The military logic of integration thus overrode the letter of the Treaty, which did not provide for common defense based on integrated military structures.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the workings of the political-military alliance and the integrated military commands were dominated by the Anglo-Americans, and so outside French influence. In total, the United States held seven commands, while the United Kingdom held five subordinate commands. France held only one, though it was the most important, namely the Allied Forces Central Europe (AFCENT), led by Marshal Juin, in 1953.<sup>8</sup> That said, France participated actively in the transatlantic strategic debate, with personalities such as General Beaufre, Admiral Castex or even Raymond Aron.

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<sup>4</sup> See Général Beaufre, *L’OTAN et l’Europe*, *op. cit.*, p.32.

<sup>5</sup> See Frédéric Bozo, *La France et l’OTAN. De la guerre froide au nouvel ordre européen*, Travaux et recherches de l’Ifri, Paris, Masson, 1991, pp. 35-36.

<sup>6</sup> The Standing Group was created at the same time as the Military Committee, and included a representative of the general staffs of France, the United Kingdom and the United States. It acted in permanent session as the executive body of the Military Committee. This permanent Group was dismantled in 1966 and its powers transferred to the Military Committee. It was established in Washington and had a secretariat, exercising daily executive authority over the Regional Planning Groups and the Military Commands which succeeded them.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>8</sup> See Général Beaufre, *L’OTAN et l’Europe*, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

While this military organization was dominated by Anglo-Americans, the coexistence of French officers with their American and British counterparts in the corridors of SHAPE at Rocquencourt did enrich French military thinking, especially nuclear strategy. In fact, there was a kind of agonizing split in French military thinking between the theorizing of "major wars" and the actual experience of "revolutionary wars".

### **“Major Wars” Versus Counter-Guerrilla Operations**

In the 1950s, France experienced a revival of its military thinking. The intellectual richness of this period was manifest in the number of leading strategists (Pierre-Marie Gallois, Charles Ailleret, Jean-Etienne Valluy, Raymond Aron, André Beaufre, Lucien Poirier, Camille Rougeron and many others), as well as the quality and number of professional military journals: *Revue de la défense nationale*, *Forces aériennes françaises*, *Revue des forces terrestres*, *Revue militaire générale* or even the *Revue militaire d'information*.<sup>9</sup> Being totally integrated within NATO, France was fully associated with military thinking of the time. In 1953, Colonel Pierre-Marie Gallois, who later became one of France's preeminent theorists of nuclear deterrence, was called on by General Norstad, Air Deputy to SACEUR, to participate in a small working group (the New Approach Group), responsible for establishing a new NATO doctrine for tactical nuclear weapons, in case of a head-on battle in Central Europe with the Warsaw Pact. In 1955, Gallois even attended a nuclear test in Nevada. It was within this framework that he forged his conviction of the need for an independent French deterrent.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, he stressed to SACEUR the fact that if the Soviets were to have long-range ballistic missiles capable of reaching the US (which finally happened in 1960), then the American nuclear commitment to the Europeans could become uncertain. General Norstad approved of Gallois' vision and even encouraged him to draw the attention of the French government to it. He was probably preceded by Charles Ailleret, the forerunner of the "strategy of the means". Yet it was Gallois, "encouraged by the Anglo-American heads of NATO",<sup>11</sup> who succeeded in convincing French Prime Minister Guy Mollet to start France's nuclear bomb program. In November 1956, the Mirage IV program was launched and assigned to Dassault.

In parallel to this pivotal experience for the French military, the armored corps was defending France' eastern borders, within the framework of NATO. Indeed, from 1955 onwards, German rearmament and the creation of the *Bundeswehr* made it possible to move the defense line forward, closer to the Iron Curtain. Henceforth, for SACEUR, the French corps stationed in Germany, reduced to two divisions, no longer had the

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<sup>9</sup> See Christian Malis, "La renaissance de la pensée militaire française après la seconde Guerre mondiale", *Défense nationale et sécurité collective*, No. 8-9, August-September 2009, p. 125.

<sup>10</sup> See Christian Malis, *Pierre Marie Gallois. Géopolitique, Histoire, Stratégie*, Paris, L'Age d'Homme, 2009, pp. 358-398. Interviews with the author.

<sup>11</sup> See Pierre-Marie Gallois, "Entretien avec le général Pierre-Marie Gallois", *défense nationale et sécurité collective*, special issue, July 2009, pp. 27-29, available at: <http://www.defnat.com/pdf/HS-PENSEE.pdf>.

training and logistics needed to play an effective role on the frontline.<sup>12</sup> Yet, this "continental" component of France's armed forces, made up mainly of conscripts, was not dominant in the institution anyway.

Indeed, though France was fully integrated into NATO's Command Structure when created in 1949, it was also involved in decolonization conflicts, developing its own military experience in irregular warfare.

Military commitments in Indochina up to 1954, and subsequently in Algeria in 1956 (with the use of conscripts), led to very significant reductions in France's contribution to NATO. After the traumatic defeat of 1940, France in some ways took "the low road" out of the business of major, interstate war. As of 1945, France got involved in a number of wars against non-state adversaries. The conflicts in Indochina and Algeria led Colonels Hogar, Lacheroy and Trinquier, or even Ximenès to analyze "revolutionary war" in depth, and how to respond to it, especially through psychological operations (psy-ops).<sup>13</sup> Galula, who was published in the United States after the end of the Algerian war, may of course be added to the list.<sup>14</sup> French officers were among the first to read Mao, to try to understand him. They were also the heirs to France's colonial experience at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and especially the pacification techniques pioneered by Marshals Galliéni and Lyautey. These involved the "combined action of force and politics", which was based on the concept of "organization on the march", better known as the "oil slick" method (*tache d'huile*).

We can see here the historical origins of France's two military traditions: the continental school, embodied by Foch or Joffre and the "colonial" school developed by Lyautey and Galliéni. The former was dominant from the 1870 war until the interwar period. The situation then reversed after World War II, as non-conventional operations became the norm (apart from deterrence and the battle of Dien Bien Phu, the last conventional, high-intensity engagement fought by the French army). These ranged from the counterinsurgency of the 1950s, to the peace operations of the 1990s.

Clearly, this historical French specificity has not been without consequence for doctrine and training. More profoundly, it has influenced the mind-set and traditions, in short, the culture of France's armed forces. At this point, it is useful to define more precisely French and American (as well as NATO) military cultures and how they interact.

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<sup>12</sup> See Kenneth Hunt, "NATO Without France: The Military Implications", *Adelphi Papers*, No. 32, IISS, Londres, 1966.

<sup>13</sup> Ximenès is the pseudonym of two French generals, Maurice Prestat and Saint Macary, who set out the principles of revolutionary war in a special issue of *Revue militaire d'information*, 1957.

<sup>14</sup> See Etienne de Durand, "France", in Thomas Rid and Thomas Keaney, *Understanding Counterinsurgency, Doctrines, Operations and challenges*, New York, Routledge, 2010.

## Diverging Military Cultures

Operational experience and doctrinal thinking combine to produce strategic and military cultures which, though not completely rigid, nonetheless bear out a degree of continuity, as well as characteristics and recurrent traits. The notions of strategic culture and military culture were born in the 1970s, in response to disenchantment with rationalist, strategic conceptions that were rightly or wrongly discredited by the Vietnam War.<sup>15</sup> They have generated debate about their relevance and explanatory powers. They should therefore be used with care and without overstating their reach, since no stable and permanent, national character really exists that can be used to make hard predictions concerning military behavior and performance. However, these notions remain indispensable for identifying the traits characterizing an institution, a group or a nation over time, and with respect to others.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, Bruno Colson defines strategic culture as: “the set of attitudes and beliefs professed within the military concerning the political aims of war, as well as the most effective strategic and operational methods for achieving them.”<sup>17</sup> The present study mainly uses the notion of military culture, which refers to doctrinal traditions and the general orientation of a military institution, as observed over time. The culture of a military institution, which is an important part of a strategic culture, includes several distinctive traits: traditions, doctrinal preferences,<sup>18</sup> concepts on how operations are conducted (for example, “maneuverist” or “attritional” styles),<sup>19</sup> methods of planning, as well as the relationship to technology.

From this perspective, French and American military cultures during the 1950s, when NATO was being put in place, seem to have been largely divergent. We have seen that French military culture in the 1950s was “split” between a nascent nuclear policy – the participation in NATO defense planning process, and therefore in thinking on “major war” – and the experience of “small” wars, that is, revolutionary or counter-insurgency wars. In contrast, the United States was essentially facing the problems of

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<sup>15</sup> Strategic and military cultures cover notions such as history (past experiences, traditions of aggression or neutrality), geography (island or continental States, which may or may not have strategic depth), the organization and balance of political power, civil-military relations (freedom of operational commanders, subordination of policy to military commanders in Prussia), or even beliefs and value systems. See Alastair I. Johnston, “Thinking about Strategic Culture”, *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3, Winter 1994-1995.

<sup>16</sup> See Colin S. Gray, *La Guerre au XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, Economica, 2007, and Lawrence Sondhaus, *Strategic Cultures and Ways of War*, New York, Routledge, 2006.

<sup>17</sup> See Bruno Colson, “Culture stratégique”, in Thierry de Montbrial, Jean Klein, *Dictionnaire de stratégie*, Paris, PUF, 2001, p. 52. The definition given relates generally to strategic culture, which the author distinguishes later in his analysis from military culture *per se*, p.87.

<sup>18</sup> Doctrine sets out the bases on which forces should act and be coordinated in different types of operations, in order to fulfill successfully the missions given to them. Its nature is evolving and oriented to the short term. Doctrine also draws on lessons learned, and covers a large spectrum at both the operational and tactical levels. Interview at the EMA, March 2010.

<sup>19</sup> See R.A.D. Applegate and J.R. Moore, “The Nature of Military Culture”, *Defense Analysis*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1990.

limited, conventional wars (the Korean War) and above all nuclear deterrence. It was only later, in Vietnam, that the US faced the issue of counter-insurgency head-on. By then, France had exited such conflicts, but this did not prevent numerous informal contacts, including on counter-insurgency.<sup>20</sup> The US officer corps is strongly steeped in the European tradition of “major wars”, first with its study of Napoleonic methods, then following the Prussian school after the German victory in 1870. The founding experience of the US Civil War and the influence of Jomini came together to shape US military culture dominated by the “Grant paradigm”: i.e. the search to annihilate the enemy in a decisive battle, pitting strength against strength, so as to obtain complete surrender.<sup>21</sup> Traditionally and until the rediscovery of maneuver warfare in the 1970s, American “operational art” has not sought surprise, nor an adversary’s weak spot, but has been based primarily on material superiority and massive firepower.<sup>22</sup>

This is not a simplified generalization. There is, in fact, a widespread tendency to contrast succinctly American strategic culture which favors the use of force and the systematic resort to technology, and a European strategic culture which is more measured and “political”. This, however, ignores the fact that the US Army has actually applied the “Napoleonic-Prussian” approach, by focusing on the search for decisive engagement.<sup>23</sup> French and American military cultures thus seem to have been largely convergent during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. To be sure, it is possible to identify certain characteristics specific to military institutions and to their operational preferences over time: for example, the omnipresence of material and technical factors in the American case. But it is also necessary to take into account changes that shift a military culture from one paradigm to another. In other words, it is important to understand that French and American military cultures have converged or diverged at different moments in history, according to certain formative operational experiences.

Contrary to the French military culture at the time, which was still marked by expeditionary forces and decolonization conflicts, NATO was fully engaged in preparing for the defense of Europe, within a framework of very high-intensity nuclear war. Furthermore, given the size, the capacity of technological innovation and the experience of US forces, NATO orthodoxy was strongly marked by US military and operational culture, which dominated NATO general staffs as early as 1950.<sup>24</sup> This was the culture of a massive and static army, bent on territorial defense, and which gave

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<sup>20</sup> See Elie Tenenbaum, “L’influence française sur la stratégie américaine de contre-insurrection. 1945-1972”, IEP/Sciences Po Paris dissertation, supervised by Pierre Melandri, Paris, June 2008, 201 p.

<sup>21</sup> See Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1973.

<sup>22</sup> See Etienne de Durand, “Maneuver warfare, entre Vietnam et Transformation” and Michel Goya, “Culture militaire française et manœuvre”, in Christian Malis (ed.), *Guerre et manœuvre*, Paris, Economica, 2009.

<sup>23</sup> See Etienne de Durand, “L’interarmées aux Etats-Unis: rivalités bureaucratiques, enjeux opérationnels et idéologie de la *jointness*”, *Focus stratégique*, No. 3, Ifri, November 2007.

<sup>24</sup> The SACEUR was also the commanding general of US troops in Europe. See Général Beaufre, *L’OTAN et l’Europe*, *op. cit.*, p. 56.



great prominence to preparation, planning, and solid logistics. Belonging to integrated structures further reinforced the role of the American model, via a shared organizational culture and common sets of references. This permanence of the American influence on NATO ran through to the end of the Cold War, for example in the AirLand Battle doctrine – very Jominian in inspiration – which was applied during the first Gulf War and which is characterized by the massive and in-depth use of air power to neutralize the adversary prior to air-land maneuver.<sup>25</sup> Finally, the recurring American inability to understand and carry out counter-insurgency, along with the French habit of improvisation and “capability gaps”, which typically arise as experience in “major wars” recedes, resulted partly from different historical experiences and hence different military cultures. These examples show that a military culture, whatever its primary causes, has profound effects: the experience and habits of an institution during a given period of time are not neutral, but instead tend to become preferences. They exert a durable influence and so shape the military institution in question, to the point of having strategic and political implications. As the former US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld stated, “you go to war with the army you have”.<sup>26</sup>

While the complete integration of France into NATO was instructive for French military thinking to a certain extent, French military culture was still strongly marked by colonial wars and was very independent of US military culture, and so that of NATO. From a political point of view, the failure of the Suez operation in autumn 1956 became a catalyst of French disaffection with NATO and was a shock to France's political and military leaders. Summarizing this state of mind, Christian Pineau, then Foreign Affairs Minister, felt that “the Atlantic pact was the principal victim of the affair [...]. If our allies can abandon us in difficult, if not dramatic, circumstances, they would be capable of doing so again should Europe be threatened in turn”.<sup>27</sup> As early as 1956-58, with the country moving towards autonomy, especially in nuclear arms, a shift in French defense policy took place, which heralded General de Gaulle's decisions in 1966.

### ***Political Break-Up and the Preservation of Operational Links***

France's exit from NATO's integrated organization in the midst of the Cold War may feel like a divorce. But it occurred more at the political than operational level. The break-up was indeed real, in political and symbolic terms, but never took place as far as operational cooperation between NATO and France's armed forces was concerned. The end of the war in Algeria also brought theorization about revolutionary wars to an end: nuclear deterrence then took center stage in France's strategic debate. Military agreements at the highest level maintained operational links between France and NATO. Nevertheless, French military culture is also characterized by operations in Africa, which proliferated as of the 1970s.

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<sup>25</sup> See Bruno Colson, “Culture stratégique américaine”, in Gérard Chaliand, Arnaud Blin, *Dictionnaire de stratégie militaire*, Paris, Perrin, 1998, p.143.

<sup>26</sup> William Kristol, “The Defense Secretary We Have”, *Washington Post*, 15 December 2004, available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A132-2004Dec14.html>.

<sup>27</sup> See Maurice Vaïsse, “Aux origines du mémorandum de septembre 1958”, *Relations internationales*, Vol. 58, Summer 1989, pp. 253-268.

### **Secret Agreements to Maintain the *Status Quo***

General de Gaulle's return to power in May 1958 marked the redefinition of France's position in NATO. While pursuing the development of France's own nuclear deterrent, the Debré government decided to withdraw France's Mediterranean fleet from NATO command, in March 1959. It went on to refuse US stockpiles of tactical nuclear weapons on French soil, and ended France's participation in NATO's integrated air defense. On March 7<sup>th</sup>, 1966, de Gaulle wrote to US President Lyndon Johnson to inform him of the French decision to withdraw French air and land forces deployed in West Germany from NATO command. This decision led *de facto* to the simultaneous withdrawal from the two integrated command structures of these forces, namely SHAPE and the Central European Command, with their headquarters being moved to Belgium.<sup>28</sup> Yet France remained in the Alliance, continued to participate in the North Atlantic Council, in which all political decisions were taken, and set up representative military missions at Allied command headquarters.

By accepting to maintain the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army Corps (AC) in West Germany, Bonn raised the issue of French participation in common defense.<sup>29</sup> The Ailleret-Lemnitzer agreements between the French Chief of Staff (CEMA) and the SACEUR allowed the 2<sup>nd</sup> AC to intervene alongside the Allies. The size of French participation thus remained the same after 1966 (i.e. an army corps), and French forces shifted from integration to cooperation, since the automatic commitment of French forces was henceforth excluded and their possible participation could only take place under national command. In 1974, the Valentin-Ferber agreements provided greater flexibility in the potential use of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army Corps based in France. Clearly, the 1966 decision did not prevent a measure of continuity with the period of integration: French forces switched from a marginal mission of second-echelon, localized defense, to a role as counter-attack reserves in the forward defense of NATO. While the military and operational break-up was limited, it was more profound from a strategic and political point of view. France's possible "non-belligerence" in case of conflict, or conversely early nuclear escalation were both worries within the Alliance, up to the Ottawa declaration. Lastly, the 1966 decision seemed for the Allies to challenge US hegemony, which de Gaulle had often denounced, and hence risked undermining the American guarantee.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Beginnings of Doctrinal Rapprochement: "Maneuver Warfare" and the Creation of France's FAR**

As of the 1960s, France's operational air-land strategy was integrated, if not subordinated to its deterrence strategy. This would seem to have "relegated any in-depth thinking on the evolution of conventional systems not linked to nuclear deterrence".<sup>31</sup> During the 1970s and 1980s, France

<sup>28</sup> See Maurice Vaisse, "La France et l'OTAN : une histoire", *Politique étrangère*, Vol. 74, No. 4, 2009, p. 864.

<sup>29</sup> Michael M. Harrison, *The Reluctant Ally: France and Atlantic Security*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981, p. 154.

<sup>30</sup> See Frédéric Bozo, *La France et l'OTAN, De la guerre froide au nouvel ordre européen*, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-103.

<sup>31</sup> Interview at the Ministry of Defense, January 2010.



pursued its commitments to defending the Alliance alongside the Allies. The Biard-Schulze agreements of 1978 consolidated French-NATO cooperation in the Central Front, by establishing common procedures in case of French engagement (itineraries, transmissions especially with the use by Allied forces of the RITA system of battlefield data communication) and by developing interoperability which was indispensable for the implementation of operational planning.<sup>32</sup> Thus, even during the Cold War, France opted for compatibility between its equipment and procedures with NATO standards. In the aviation sector, agreements between France's tactical air forces (FATAC) and Allied Air Forces Central Europe (AAFCE) provided for the possibility of FATAC engagement in support of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army or Allied ground forces.

In the 1980s, East-West tensions were again on the rise and the USSR seemed more threatening. Given the increased mobility and the numerical superiority of Soviet forces, NATO had to develop more operational depth, using air power to neutralize second echelon Soviet units. In this context, the Americans adopted the "AirLand Battle" doctrine, which was quickly transposed to NATO in a slightly different way, under the term "Follow on Forces Attack" (FOFA), also known as the "Rogers doctrine". These developments were in line with the "maneuver warfare" school, which marked the US strategic debate from 1976 to the Gulf War. Inspired by German infiltration tactics (Hutier tactics) experimented in 1917,<sup>33</sup> maneuver warfare concentrates on human factors (men, leadership and psychological effects) rather than technology and attrition. It seeks surprise, so as to create panic and thus the collapse of the enemy. In terms of organization, maneuver warfare relies on the initiative of subordinates, summarized by the expression *Auftragstaktik* (i.e. mission orders or directive control). The maneuverist style is applicable to the three levels of military action. At the tactical level, a sequence of movements places the opponent in an exposed position, thus maximizing available firepower. At the operational level, in-depth penetration and successive envelopments disrupt the enemy system (as occurred in the German *Blitzkrieg*). Finally, at the strategic level, maneuver warfare requires playing on surprise and speed, aiming at the enemy's weaknesses, according to the "line of least resistance" and the "line of least expectation", as theorized by Liddell Hart. If such warfare seems to have challenged the "traditional" US military culture as defined above, the maneuver school actually reconnected with the American "major war" ethos. The eagerness with which the US Army returned to the Fulda Gap and concentrated on NATO's Central Front looks

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<sup>32</sup> The technical characteristics of weapons (bombs, missiles, means of transmission) as well as the common procedures that govern their use, are defined by the Standardization Agreements (STANAG), a framework document that defines NATO standards area by area.

<sup>33</sup> In offensive, these tactics try to bypass points of resistance and aim at the enemy's rear. When defending, the enemy is allowed to advance so as to channel its progress and launch prepared counter-attacks.

like a psychological repression of Vietnam and counter-insurgency more generally.<sup>34</sup>

France's Rapid Action Force (FAR) was created in this context in July 1984, and included airmobile units (4<sup>th</sup> DAM).<sup>35</sup> To some extent, it reflected a degree of rapprochement between France's and NATO's traditional doctrines. The fact that the FAR was to be made available to Allied forces in case of engagement in Central Europe was a continuation of the Ailleret-Lemnitzer agreements, giving "more credibility to a possible French commitment".<sup>36</sup> Large-scale joint exercises between France and NATO in 1986 (exercise "Frankischer Schield") and in 1987 (exercise "Moineau hardi", in which 20,000 French soldiers were deployed) both indicated that the logic of integration was far from being overlooked at operational levels.

Nevertheless, the French Army continued to have two cultures: a continental and a colonial tradition. Although a degree of operational rapprochement with NATO was taking place, professional units also carried out overseas operations in former French colonies, particularly in Africa (Chad, Mauritania, the Central African Republic, Djibouti, Congo, and Comoros). The FAR, which was rapidly deployable to external theaters of operations in case of sudden crises, participated largely in these operations. In the process, it gained experience in decentralized command and initiatives by subordinates on a small scale. French officers were immersed in cultures far removed from their modes of thought and action, with the aim of imposing peace and security, as well as protecting populations. The lieutenants and captains of this era, characterized by national operations conducted with great flexibility and freedom of action, are the generals of today. This era also exemplified one feature of French military culture, namely decision-making autonomy and versatility, which thrive under the wide-ranging freedom of action given to subordinate officers, once the letter and spirit of missions are set. Thus, French military culture and experience "favor versatile training of cadres, right down to the lowest combat echelons".<sup>37</sup>

Despite the 1966 decision and the development of interventions in Africa from the 1970s onwards, French armed forces maintained operational links with the Allies, which were reaffirmed with the end of the Cold War.

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<sup>34</sup> See William S. Lind, "The Theory and Practice of Maneuver Warfare", in Richard D. Hooker Jr (ed.), *Maneuver Warfare. An Anthology*, Novato, Presidio Press, 1993, pp. 142-190.

<sup>35</sup> 4<sup>ème</sup> DAM, 6<sup>ème</sup> DLB, 9<sup>ème</sup> DIMa, 11<sup>ème</sup> DP, 27<sup>ème</sup> DA.

<sup>36</sup> This first doctrinal rapprochement was illustrated by the appointment of General Fricaud-Chagnaud as head of the French military mission at the Central European Command of Brunssum from 1978 to 1983. He also played an important role in the development of the FAR. See Frédéric Bozo, *La France et l'OTAN, op. cit.*, p. 126.

<sup>37</sup> See CDEF, "Se préparer aux interventions extérieures. L'expérience française", *Doctrine*, No. 9, June 2006.

## **Doctrinal Proximity and Operational Convergence since 1991**

The disappearance of the Soviet threat led to both the end of the quasi-automaticity of engagement and a very substantial reduction in the volume of forces deployed by NATO. The political and strategic arguments which had motivated the 1966 decision lost some of their relevance. From being a defensive alliance in Europe, NATO transformed itself into an expeditionary intervention force. Accordingly, French armed forces confirmed their doctrinal rapprochement of the previous decade, for reasons linked as much to geostrategic upheavals, as to identified operational requirements, be they interoperability or "capability gaps". This occurred despite the political stance on national independence.

### **The Gulf War Wake-Up Call**

Even if it was not a NATO operation, the first Gulf War was a full-scale test for France's armed forces, in a high-intensity conflict carried out jointly with its allies. The war also marked the start of ever-deeper operational and doctrinal rapprochement between French and NATO forces. In this respect, the example of the French Air Force is significant. Operation "Desert Storm" highlighted a number of weaknesses in French equipment regarding technology and interoperability. French combat aircraft did not have the Identification of Friend or Foe system (IFF Mode IV), night-vision capabilities, nor even frequency-hopping radio.<sup>38</sup> At the doctrinal level, French training and doctrine emphasized low altitude attack, because of the imperatives of nuclear deterrence, which turned out to be counter-productive. American experts point out that "French casualties came from Iraqi fire, but more fundamentally were the result of indecision in Paris as to whether or not to join in the allied air attacks following the failure to develop effective tactics in advance."<sup>39</sup> In response, French pilots turned to an "all NATO" approach at the doctrinal level, informally adopting the dogma of Air Power – the primacy and autonomy of air power, following the American model – as well as the thinking of John Warden, the theorist of strategic bombing. Given the lack of a formalized, national doctrine until 2008, along with the multiplication of joint air operations (Bosnia, Kosovo), the French Air Force immersed itself in the culture of NATO, and through it, the culture of the US Air Force.<sup>40</sup>

As for the French Army, the first Gulf War also revealed tactical shortcomings and interoperability problems with allies. The *Daguet* division, with 12,500 men, was integrated into the US XVIII Airborne Corps. It was only able to provide a single, 155 mm artillery regiment, which was

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<sup>38</sup> See Etienne de Durand and Bastien Irondele, *Stratégie aérienne comparée*, Les documents du C2SD, Centre d'études en sciences sociales de la défense, No. 83, 2006, p. 142.

<sup>39</sup> All French aircraft engaged in the attack on the Al Salman airport, on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1991, were damaged by Iraqi anti-aircraft fire. See Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, *The Generals' War*, New York, Little, Brown and Co., 1995, pp. 172, 221.

<sup>40</sup> See Etienne de Durand and Bastien Irondele, *Stratégie aérienne comparée*, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

insufficient to support planned maneuvers in good conditions. The Americans consequently detached more than an artillery brigade to the French division.<sup>41</sup> For air-ground support, Daguet depended exclusively on forward air controllers from the U.S. Army. Finally, French troops were subordinated to the Americans for intelligence. Beyond the tactical lessons, the French Army found that the consistency of a coalition makes the interoperability of doctrine, procedures and equipment mandatory, so as to enable different armed forces to work together.<sup>42</sup>

With Operation Desert Storm, the French Army rediscovered the conditions of high intensity conflict in a multinational framework. This need for interoperability was to intensify during the 1990s.

### **Capacity and Operational Integration**

With the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in July 1991, the strategic context became far less constraining than it had been during the Cold War. Between 1950 and 1990, the proper functioning of the Alliance resulted in each state, except the United States, agreeing to renounce part of the sovereignty over its armed forces. NATO defense plans were part of a strategy which underwent two major developments, initiated mainly by the United States (MC 14/2, MC 14/3), whose own doctrinal changes were transposed to NATO. However, though exceptionally long and remarkably effective, NATO's "first age" ended with the demise of the Soviet threat. The automatic employment of forces stopped too. The very heart of the integrated military structure, namely automatic military planning linked to the partial surrender of sovereignty, was no longer justified, and each Member State recovered its military sovereignty in full.<sup>43</sup>

From being an instrument of collective defense, NATO became a reservoir of forces, retaining its role in the integration, exchange and definition of military standards. At the Rome Summit in November 1991, NATO abandoned "forward defense" in favor of "non-Article 5", crisis management missions. Thus, the original mission of the Alliance disappeared, but the Organization remained the only multilateral instrument focused on military effectiveness.

Since the late 1990s, the United States has worked to reform the military capabilities of the Allies and adapt them to new forms of conflict, rather than seeking a political consensus on the usefulness of the Alliance. While American experts recognize that Europeans have real know-how in terms of peacekeeping, they deplore their lack of means for conducting really demanding modern military operations. European forces are too focused on territorial defense, and are not sufficiently projectable. It is in this context that the Americans launched the Defense Capacity Initiative

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<sup>41</sup> See Robert H. Scales, Jr., *Certain Victory : The US Army in the Gulf War*, Dulles, Brassey's, Potomac Books, 1993, p. 139.

<sup>42</sup> See CDEF, *Enseignements tactiques*, Cahier de la réflexion doctrinale, 2005, p. 30.

<sup>43</sup> See Yves Boyer and Nicole Vilboux, *Vision américaine de l'OTAN*, Fondation pour la recherche stratégique (FRS), January 2010, p. 5.

(DCI) at the Washington Summit of April 1999. The DCI aimed to improve the capacity of European armies in deployment, mobility, logistics, as well as command and control.<sup>44</sup> The transformation of European armed forces was viewed in Washington as a precondition for further, effective transatlantic cooperation.<sup>45</sup>

This was the context of the reorganization of command structures. The Allied Command Europe was replaced by the Allied Command Operations (ACO), headed by SACEUR. The ACO includes three Joint Force Commands, in Brunssum, Naples, and Lisbon. At the Atlantic summit in Prague in 2002, Jacques Chirac agreed that France would participate in the NATO Response Force (NRF), with several French units being certified.<sup>46</sup> He also agreed to the new Allied Command Transformation (ACT), located in Norfolk, Virginia. Coupled with the US Joint Forces Command, ACT is supposed to be the ideal vehicle for the dissemination of transformation concepts among Allies favoring "lethal, deployable, and sustainable forces".<sup>47</sup> This search for capability integration was to be found at the operational level.

As in 1994, at the Brussels NATO summit, France accepted the creation of the Combined Joint Task Forces (CJTF), groups of forces that can be placed under NATO Command or European Command. For Paris, this acknowledged "the sustained role of the Alliance, while encouraging the latter to recognize the actual existence of a European role".<sup>48</sup> The Bosnian conflict was NATO's first military engagement in its history.<sup>49</sup> To ensure the implementation of the Dayton Agreement, signed in December 1995 between Serbs and Bosnians, NATO deployed an intervention force (IFOR) and then a stabilization force (SFOR) of more than 60,000 soldiers in Bosnia Herzegovina. France was widely associated with these actions, and deployed on average 7,500 men.

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<sup>44</sup> See the "Report on Allied Contribution to the Common defense", US Department of Defense, Washington DC, Mars 2000, Chap II, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> In the area of ground fire support, for example, France is part of the Artillery System Coordination Activities (ASCA), which includes the artillery of the five NATO members with an automated system for managing and coordinating artillery fire. The firing of French artillery can be integrated into jointly-managed artillery fires, along with other members of ASCA and with the same processing speed found under national control. See Laurent Fromaget, "Le feu dans le modèle de guerre occidentale, de l'intégration tactique aux dommages collatéraux", *Focus stratégique*, No. 17, Ifri, June 2009, p. 25.

<sup>46</sup> Joint Forces of 25,000 men, that can be projected at five-days notice and are sustainable for at least 30 days. In 2006, SACEUR presented the NRF as "the main vector of transformation" of the Alliance. See General James L. Jones, Commander, United States European Command, "Statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee", March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2006, p. 43.

<sup>47</sup> Jim Garamone, "NATO Ministers Okay Sweeping Command Changes", *American Forces Press Service*, 12 June 2003, p. 41.

<sup>48</sup> See Dominique David, "La France et l'OTAN : une affaire d'images", *Revue Etudes internationales*, Vol. 50, No. 2, June 2009, p. 294.

<sup>49</sup> At the request of the UN, the Alliance provided close air support to the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) on the ground, and carried out air strikes to protect the safe areas designated by the UN.



In Kosovo in 1999, the *armée de l'Air* and a French carrier group were placed under the operational control of NATO, during the air operation "Allied Force": France was the second largest contributor and carried out 10% of all sorties.<sup>50</sup> For reasons of operational effectiveness, French forces were placed under direct NATO command for the first time.<sup>51</sup> Eager to take into account the need for coordination and interoperability, France's Chief of Staff (*CEMA*) negotiated an agreement with the SACEUR in 2004, to organize the assignment of French officers to the permanent command structures of NATO, especially SHAPE. Between 2004 and 2009, France had approximately 131 officers "inserted" in NATO command.<sup>52</sup>

Since 2003, France has been participating in NATO operations to stabilize Afghanistan (French forces in ISAF numbered 3,750 troops in 2010).<sup>53</sup> Finally, on top of crisis management operations, the French Air Force has repeatedly assured the protection of airspace over Iceland and the Baltic countries, since 2007. For the first time since 1966, it has been not Paris but the NATO command that could give French combat aircraft orders to fire.<sup>54</sup>

This post-Cold War operational and doctrinal rapprochement, particularly noticeable for the French Air Force, suggests that the issues generated by the return of France to the integrated NATO command are mostly military and operational.

### **The Reversal of Traditional Concerns**

The historical study of relations between France and NATO shows that shared operational experience has been at least as important as membership of the integrated structures. The idea that French strategic autonomy is threatened by integration has lost some of its relevance today. Additionally, historical concerns over the use of nuclear arms are no longer an issue. This is true for the problem of compatibility between NATO's "flexible response" and France's "final warning" (*ultime avertissement*), as it is for the fundamental issue of decision-sharing over the use of nuclear weapons, which had been at the heart of the divorce between de Gaulle and Kennedy. Full participation in NATO "does absolutely not impinge upon the sovereignty of France over its deterrent force, whose use ultimately remains in the hands of the President of the Republic."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Among the NATO countries participating in the operation, British, Canadian and French aircraft used laser-guided bombs, alongside the US Air Force.

<sup>51</sup> As part of the Alliance's stabilization mission in Kosovo (KFOR), the French Army has been contributing up to about 2,500 men and has assumed permanent command of the Multinational Brigade North. Two French generals commanded the entire NATO mission in Kosovo (up to 40,000 men), respectively in 2002 and 2004.

<sup>52</sup> Interview at the French General Staff (EMA), February 2010.

<sup>53</sup> The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).

<sup>54</sup> See Louis Gautier, *La défense de la France après la guerre froide*, Paris, PUF, 2009, pp. 132-141.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

More generally, why should France remain outside an organization that, by becoming "modular" and with a "variable geometry" (as shown, for example, by the caveats or restrictions on deployment in Afghanistan) has come closer to what de Gaulle was seeking? NATO at work is indeed anything but an integrated alliance.<sup>56</sup> The distinction between integrated forces and non-integrated forces has become obsolete given the new missions of the Alliance. This holds true for the reform of its commands and the force generation process, which is based on decisions by sovereign Member States to make units and equipment available to NATO or not, be they in reserve or in operation.<sup>57</sup>

Finally, the French decision to remain outside the integrated structures appeared to some analysts as politically disadvantageous. It prevented France from exercising an influence within the Alliance commensurate to its contribution. Also, it discredited French wishes to strengthen the ESDP in the eyes of several European partners, who naturally regarded it as a "Trojan horse" designed to undermine NATO.<sup>58</sup>

The traditional concerns of autonomy are being reversed: France's "full participation" in the integrated military structure of the Alliance seems, in the short-term, to have implications that are less political than military. Should we then fear the "NATO-isation" of French forces, leading to a loss of intellectual and doctrinal originality, or even the dilution and standardization of France's military culture? Could this lead to a weakening of French capabilities and of France's industrial and technological base? Judging by the defense policies and more broadly the attitudes of some European countries, "NATO-isation" may indeed produce adverse effects ranging from intellectual impoverishment to downward pressure on budgets, though the example of the United Kingdom proves that such effects are not automatic. That said, technical and operational concerns could indirectly and ultimately affect political considerations. It is therefore necessary to analyze the potential impact of France's return to the NATO fold, by envisaging several hypotheses with divergent outcomes.

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<sup>56</sup> Interview with Frédéric Bozo, 29 January 2010.

<sup>57</sup> See Pierre Lellouche, *L'allié indocile. La France et l'OTAN de la guerre froide à l'Afghanistan*, Paris, Editions du moment, 2009, pp. 241-242.

<sup>58</sup> See Jeremy Ghez and F. Stephen Larrabee, "France and NATO", *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 2, April-May 2009, p.78.





# Possible Scenarios for France's Military Culture

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Given that the operational and military issues are far from being secondary or “technical”, and may condition strategic and political issues, this article seeks to establish “scenarios” to evaluate the effects of France’s return to the integrated military structures. For clarity, these possible outcomes have been deliberately grouped together into three distinct hypotheses. In reality, these are not exclusive and may overlap.

## ***A Question of Image***

The return of France to NATO’s integrated structures could remain largely institutional and not have any impact on French military culture, given the doctrinal and operational rapprochement that has taken place since the 1980s, and which was confirmed after the Cold War; the permanence of military cultures shaped by centuries of confrontation; and the distance between the two sides of the Atlantic.

## **Between Political Distancing and Doctrinal Rapprochement**

Since 9/11 in particular, the Alliance seems to have become a framework lending political legitimacy to Washington, rather than a military tool. This was illustrated by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2003 after the deployment of ISAF. The famous paradigm of Donald Rumsfeld, according to which “the mission determines the coalition” and not vice-versa, has left a lasting impression.<sup>59</sup> Transatlantic defense issues today are ever-more limited in Washington’s intellectual and political world. NATO has virtually disappeared from research programs within US think tanks, in favor of topics like terrorism, Homeland Security or the crises in Central Asia and the Middle East. Similarly, hearings on NATO in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee have become rare.<sup>60</sup>

Operationally, it may be said that reintegration has already taken place. As of 1995, France actually agreed to return to NATO for reasons of efficiency. At the end of Jacques Chirac’s presidency in 2007, France’s cooperation with NATO in operational military matters had developed to such an extent that France could have been considered as a *de facto*

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<sup>59</sup> See Hubert Védrine, “La France et la mondialisation : rapport au président de la République”, *La Documentation française*, September 2007, p. 41, available at: <http://lesrapports.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/BRP/074000535/0000.pdf>.

<sup>60</sup> See Yves Boyer and Nicole Vilboux, *Vision Américaine de l’OTAN*, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-43.

member of the integrated command. For “technical” services like the Air Force and Navy, returning to NATO is the confirmation of daily practices and of a doctrinal rapprochement that has been going on for a long time. In recent years, young Army officers have worked together with their allies in foreign operations. In the current intervention in Afghanistan, a French brigade is under US command, as part of NATO, which has also strengthened this operational “integration”. The younger generation therefore considers this “return” as natural, whereas “their elders remember their efforts to rebuild national, military autonomy”.<sup>61</sup>

At the doctrinal level, American ground forces have been engaged in numerous conceptual, organizational and operational reforms, since 2003, so as to adapt to operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is still too early to measure the extent to which these experiences will impact on US military culture. However, the suspicion of American military institutions *vis-à-vis* “irregular warfare”, and their traditional resistance to “counter-insurgency” methods have mostly been overcome, at least temporarily.<sup>62</sup> Thus, the new doctrinal manual for the US Army and US Marine Corps – FM 3-24 *Counterinsurgency* – emphasizes the complementarity between military and pacifying actions, as well as the importance of dealing with local populations and its corollary of “winning hearts and minds”. The ideas of David Galula, the French counter-insurgency theorist, have greatly inspired the main authors of FM 3-24: David Petraeus, John Mattis and John Nagl. The success of the Surge in Iraq in 2007 and recent directives by General McChrystal in Afghanistan show a new awareness among the American military: the use of military force in asymmetric warfare leads at best to the establishment of conditions enabling strategic success, nothing more.

This new direction in American military thinking is quite close to the counter-rebellion doctrine adopted by the Doctrine and Training Centre (CDEF) of the French Army. For the French, counter-rebellion is seen as a tactical mode of action that fits into an overall operational scheme, combining different modes of action for controlling areas and protecting populations, with different forms of civilian action in support (development, education, reconstruction).<sup>63</sup>

Even if many units of the US Army have retained a “conventional” combat culture on the ground,<sup>64</sup> doctrinal convergence between US ground forces with the French and British armies has accelerated in the last five years. Assuming that this operational and doctrinal convergence continues, then France’s return to the Alliance’s military structures should not affect its national military culture. Indeed, the Atlantic Alliance, as a grouping of sovereign nations, has not systematically transformed European strategic and tactical cultures, shaped by centuries of confrontation: despite its

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<sup>61</sup> See Dominique David, “La France et l’OTAN, une affaire d’images”, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

<sup>62</sup> See David Ucko, *The New Counterinsurgency Era, Transforming the US Military For Modern Wars*, Georgetown, Georgetown University Press, 2009.

<sup>63</sup> See CDEF, *Doctrine de contre rébellion*, Paris, January 2009.

<sup>64</sup> Dependency on fire and the culture of war at a distance.

proximity with the American Army, the British Army still retains a very specific military culture and “way of warfare”. The British doctrine stresses the initiative of lower ranks, as the best way to reach the enemy’s centre of gravity, as opposed to the historical American approach which is based on attrition and a very marked obsession with “force protection”. With its recognized counter-insurgency expertise linked to its colonial past, the British Army also stresses the progressive use of force in crisis management.<sup>65</sup>

Though some of the above phenomena could very well materialize, this scenario brings relatively little new to the debate. However, the following scenarios may help identify potential changes we need to look at, in order to measure the impact that a new “NATO-ised” French military culture may have at the political level.

### ***Between Doctrinal Enrichment and Cultural Influence***

If French armed forces succeed in reintegrating NATO structures technically (with appropriate human resources and a proper analysis of how general staffs function), then French military culture may be enriched, and a new European strategic culture could even emerge within the Alliance.

### **Between Stimulation and Influence: French Doctrinal Renewal Reinforced**

The participation of French officers in NATO working groups, which will soon be significant, could boost doctrinal and strategic thinking, similar to General Galois’s views on nuclear weapons, forged in the 1950s in the corridors of SHAPE. Meanwhile, the increased participation of France in the development of NATO’s doctrinal corpus is expected to influence the conceptual choices of the Alliance. The general staff of the French forces (EMA) thus set up a working group in July 2009, aimed at reforming French doctrinal manuals. The ambition has been to “reorient conceptual and doctrinal production to NATO standards, in order to obtain reliable, comparative information”.<sup>66</sup> While maintaining a national capability in military thinking, France is counting on drawing on the British example by injecting French thinking into multinational working groups. The British often hold key positions, including in the definition of Allied Joint Publications (AJPs), where they lead a real concerted policy at the highest level of the military hierarchy. The study of the development of national doctrines of the major Member States is interesting in this regard, since their approaches differ in many ways, as shown in the following Table:

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<sup>65</sup> See Pascal Vennesson, “Is There a European Way of War?”, European University Institute, Robert Schuman Center for Advanced Studies, Vol. 35, No. 4, July 2009, pp. 634-635.

<sup>66</sup> The doctrinal corpus includes all Allied Joint Publications (AJPs) and Allied Tactical Publications (ATPs), as well as their national equivalents.

| NATO MEMBER STATES | FORMULATION OF NATIONAL DOCTRINES |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| UNITED STATES      | Without NATO                      |
| UNITED KINGDOM     | Influence NATO                    |
| GERMANY            | Transmit NATO concepts            |
| ITALY              | Adopt NATO doctrine fully         |

France is seeking to introduce advanced, national conceptual thinking within multinational working groups. But, it is also striving to merge its national doctrine with NATO's, even though some important documents are expected to have national supplements. Once ratified by the Member States of the Alliance, the documents "will be part of the doctrinal corpus immediately usable in an operational environment that is often marked by strong needs of interoperability." It should be noted that this reform is carried out primarily at the inter-army level.<sup>67</sup> The doctrines of the armed forces (Allied Tactical Publications – ATPs) will therefore continue to be drafted, essentially, at the national level.<sup>68</sup>

After this first phase of upgrading the national doctrinal corpus, the goal will then be to learn new NATO processes and to take responsibilities. This requires mastering exchanges within the Alliance (practicing English and understanding the Anglo-American culture which is the basis of NATO's military thinking). Finally, in the medium-term, the challenge will be to occupy senior positions in order to influence directly the doctrinal choices of the Alliance, based on work developed in France and which is acceptable to NATO. It will then be used to provide input into national organizations in Brussels, Mons and Norfolk, by focusing on relations with officers posted via the Senior National Representatives (SNR).<sup>69</sup>

The presence of a French general as Supreme Allied Commander for Transformation (SACT) represents a major opportunity for the dissemination of French ideas. Indeed, until 2009, the Americans had the unique power to influence doctrinal and conceptual thinking, given the merger of the SACT and COMUSJFCOM posts,<sup>70</sup> as well as US dominance of NATO, both politically and militarily. At the same time, the proximity of ACT in Norfolk with the US JFCOM should facilitate close monitoring of US

<sup>67</sup> Via the Joint Forces Center for Concept Development, Doctrine and Experimentation (CICDE), which will thus see its coordinating role enhanced, in order to guarantee that army doctrines participate in the same collective work.

<sup>68</sup> Interview at EMA, January 2010.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with the French Military Representation (RMF) at NATO, Brussels, February 2010.

<sup>70</sup> US JFCOM: US Joint Forces Command; the inter-army command of the transformation responsible for the definition of inter-army concepts, capacities and training.

military Transformation. All these factors can portend an acceleration of the French army's doctrinal renewal initiated in 1995. It should also make it easier to influence NATO's doctrinal thinking.

Along with this potential enhancement of doctrine, the significant return of French officers to NATO general staffs should lead to a better acquisition of planning procedures, French military culture being traditionally more focused on tactical control.

### Acquiring a "Planning Culture"

If interoperability focuses primarily on material and equipment, especially information and communication systems, it also depends on the fluency in English of French personnel at general staffs, and above all on the harmonization of planning procedures. The Reasoning Methods used at strategic and operational levels for joint planning and force generation are quite similar, irrespective of national military cultures. The process of the Guidelines Operational Planning (GOP) used in NATO is quite similar to its French equivalent, the *Méthode de Planification Opérationnelle* (MPO). These two methods are very alike and perfectly interoperable: maneuvers progress along functional lines of operation, from decisive point to decisive point, to converge on the center of gravity, whose attainment is akin to achieving the desired end state.<sup>71</sup>

However, it is undoubtedly advisable to retain national methods of reasoning at certain levels of planning. Tactical units, especially divisions and brigades, feel a need for using national methods of reasoning. For the French, this is the method of developing operational decisions (MEDO), formerly known as the Tactical Reasoning Method (MRT).<sup>72</sup> It emphasizes the concept of "major effect" (the desired end or commander's intent -"I want to..."- expressed in space and time), which is an essential condition for the success of the mission. The "NATO estimate" is the result of a compromise and could eventually become a common method for Allied ground forces. But it has a number of important differences with the MEDO, as it typically substitutes the notion of "major effect" with a listing of tasks to be executed.<sup>73</sup> In order to preserve subordinates' freedom of action, it seems preferable to favor "major effect" or "idea of maneuver". These are both specificities of French reasoning, which prefers indirect logic to a direct approach, based on the logic of "strength and mass".<sup>74</sup> In Afghanistan, the two French battalions of the Lafayette brigade under US

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<sup>71</sup> See Denis Opplert, "De la pertinence d'une méthode nationale de raisonnement militaire", *Le Casoar*, available at: <http://www.saint-cyr.org/cyr-2100.php?ArtID=70&SID=79537b533281e9890f173d152460ce36>.

<sup>72</sup> The MEDO allows the general staff to analyze a mission and all the factors involved in its execution, while significantly shortening analysis and decision-making time.

<sup>73</sup> Interview at France's Rapid Reaction Corps (CRR-FR), Lille, January 2010.

<sup>74</sup> See Jean-Pierre Gambotti, "De la conception des opérations", *Objectif doctrine*, No. 40, available at: [http://www.cdef.terre.defense.gouv.fr/publications/Objdoc/objdoc40/article\\_fr/art16.pdf](http://www.cdef.terre.defense.gouv.fr/publications/Objdoc/objdoc40/article_fr/art16.pdf).

command regularly use this national method, without this interfering in the conduct of operations.<sup>75</sup>

More generally, the systematic use of English in planning, though inevitable, should not take precedence over tactical thinking. Overstated concerns of interoperability may sometimes lead to the wish to retain good military English in operation orders that are then too complete and tactically inept. Missions confined to subordinates should be expressed clearly for all to understand and be coherent with units' capacities (TTA 106). They should not be lists of components. General Leclerc's operations order to take Paris in August 1944 was limited to two pages, and the missions of the tactical battle groups to two lines.<sup>76</sup> And yet, the 2<sup>nd</sup> DB (Armored Division) was a model of interoperability with the Americans. Lastly, from a more conceptual point of view, it may be asked whether French forces are able to appropriate fully concepts developed in another language, while French remains the working language at the national political level.

### **Towards a European Strategic Culture within NATO**

By resuming its full place in the commands and obtaining a degree of Europeanization for them, France could facilitate the development and convergence of European contributions to the Alliance. This is an opportunity to be seized in order to nurture a European strategic culture within NATO. French normalization could remove the remaining hesitations of certain European partners, and for example, favor the formulation of a common strategic vision between France and Germany, balancing the Anglo-American bloc.

French views are thus closely studied in SHAPE. Power is "to be taken", as the Americans seem to be increasingly distancing themselves from NATO, while the British are weakened by their massive engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>77</sup>

US support for France's return to the integrated military structures was essential to France securing two major command posts. Indeed, the SACT and JFC Lisbon posts were ceded by the Americans. France was not expecting to obtain the SACT post permanently, but the Americans imposed this decision on the British and Germans. This marked level of confidence shown to France by according it such highly visible posts is also found within the command structure. France has obtained the post of general Assistant Director to the International Military Staff, as well as the deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Policy within SACEUR's staff.<sup>78</sup> The attribution of posts for officers and NCOs to France is taking place without major ructions, and more quickly than expected. 1,150 posts were agreed to by other Member States. France's goal was to obtain 1,250 posts in the integrated structure, in other words "25 stars" for posts held by French

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<sup>75</sup> Interview at EMAT, March 2010.

<sup>76</sup> CDEF, *Enseignements tactiques*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>77</sup> Interview at SHAPE, Mons, February 2010.

<sup>78</sup> Interview at EMA, February 2010.



generals. The process is being carried out over a three-year cycle, beginning in 2009 and ending in 2012.<sup>79</sup>

It is to be hoped that this positive scenario will unfold. Yet there is a risk of it leading to a trivialization of French military culture, which in turn could have negative strategic and political implications. It is therefore appropriate to present these risks in order to anticipate them better or even avoid them.

### ***Cultural Uniformity and Strategic Dependence***

The successful return of French forces to the integrated military structures is conditioned by a proactive policy on human resources, maintaining a relatively sustained defense effort, and a rapid appropriation of the complicated NATO defense planning processes. Finally, since the capability approach has implications for doctrine and so ultimately for military culture, this analysis looks at the industrial hazards posed by the goal of systematic interoperability with the "Great Ally".

### **Significant Human Resource and Financial Consequences**

In terms of staffing, full and complete participation will have a clear impact on the volume and quality of officer resources available to meet the needs of national general staffs. Secondments to NATO will siphon off a pool of human resources which is already being reduced as part of France's General Reform of Public Policy (RGPP). This raises problems of managing human resources and the careers of high-potential military personnel. Specifically, French officers have to lose their inhibitions in using English, which is insufficiently practiced. NATO career paths have to be better valued, while high-potential officers have to be appointed in key posts relating to doctrinal thinking within the ACT, and within operational general staffs, to help pass on information upwards to the Senior National Representatives (SNR). This objective raises cultural issues, and the question of maintaining competencies within France's own general staff at strategic and tactical levels.<sup>80</sup>

To influence NATO doctrine, it is probably advisable to enhance career paths within the CICDE. In parallel to rendering the national doctrinal corpus coherent with NATO, the general staff will have to participate in the doctrinal studies underway in the Alliance, which is likely to be "costly in time and personnel".

In budgetary terms, full and complete participation will generate extra spending of at least €650 million between 2010 and 2015. This will be mainly due to salary costs, estimated to run to €70 million per year for compensation and expatriation expenses, once normalization has been completed. A further €30 million will be required to finance France's annual

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<sup>79</sup> The Army is set to occupy 50% of posts, about 750 in 2012. Concerns for balance, however, seem to have complicated achieving this because the tactical air commands are an important part of the whole. Interview at EMA, January 2010.

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Louis Gautier, *Cour des comptes*, December 2009.

contribution to NATO (€170 million).<sup>81</sup> These are important sums of money that have not been accounted for in the Military Planning Law (LPM) for 2009-2015, and risk being taken out of other programs in the defense budget.

In truth, France will gain influence within NATO only if it and other European countries uphold substantial spending efforts. Yet, spending levels and military capabilities among European NATO members have clearly fallen significantly on average in recent years, continuing a strong trend which started before the 1990s.<sup>82</sup> Some American military leaders believe that “significant inter-army operations with other NATO members are more and more difficult to conduct and risk being impossible soon”.<sup>83</sup>

If the human and financial impact of France's return to the integrated command cannot be neglected, the same is true for defense planning, whose impact on the capability format of French forces is still difficult to measure.

### **Defense Planning**

One of the key provisions of France's reintegration into NATO is its return to the Defense Planning Committee. France will henceforth participate in defense planning and in particular in the Forces Planning Process (FPP). The latter's aim is to provide the Alliance with the forces and capacities it needs to carry out the full range of its missions, in accordance with the Strategic Concept of the Alliance. Such planning aims to ensure the availability of modern forces that are deployable and interoperable. It also seeks to harmonize defense efforts between Allies and to streamline the defense capability of individual Member States. The FPP is a structured, integrated and politically binding process based on a four-year cycle, with a ten-year planning horizon. It involves five successive stages.<sup>84</sup>

- Formulating the Policy Directive, which is derived from the Strategic Concept and endorsed by the Heads of State and Government of the NAC. The Directive defines the Level of Ambition (LOA);
- Identifying the needs by measuring the necessary capacities and Priority Shortfall Areas (PSA); and establishing a single list of recommendations (the Minimum Capacity Requirements - MCR);

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<sup>81</sup> Interview at France's Military Representation (RMF) at NATO, Brussels, February 2010.

<sup>82</sup> See Yves Boyer and Nicole Vilboux, *Vision Américaine de l'OTAN*, *op. cit.*, p. 36

<sup>83</sup> See Ted Galen Carpenter, “NATO at 60 – A Hollow Alliance”, *Policy Analysis*, CATO Institute, No. 635, 30 March 2009, p. 1, available at: [http://www.cato.org/pub\\_display.php?pub\\_id=10067](http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=10067).

<sup>84</sup> Interview the French Military Representation (RMF) at NATO, Brussels, February 2010.



- The distribution of objectives, which assigns a “Capacity Contract” to each Ally;
- Implementation, which facilitates the realization of effective capacities;
- Reviewing the results by examining collective and national efforts to meet the LOA. This review includes the NATO Capability Survey (NCS) – formerly the Defense Planning Questionnaire (DPQ) – a comprehensive inventory of military and civilian capacities which measure the spending efforts of each country, as well as multilateral assessments in which Members States have a say.

France has taken part in the NCS since June 2010. A new four-year planning cycle will begin in 2011, following the adoption of the New Strategic Concept. France's integration in defense planning will require a considerable initial investment, as France has to show its credibility in its first reply to the NCS. This new participation also represents a major challenge since France will have to develop a response strategy and a permanent national organization aimed at preparing the NCS and negotiating capacity objectives. Lastly, it will be necessary to ensure coherence between national capabilities, and those of NATO and the EU.<sup>85</sup> As far as relations between NATO and the EU are concerned, it may be feared that this could compete with the capacity process of the European Defense Agency (EDA), which would not be without strategic and political consequences. The development of common capacities within a fixed budget could necessitate giving up certain national capabilities and oblige France to specialize in its defense efforts. It will be difficult to pay for small Member States while maintaining national means. This could eventually lead to capacity “holes” in France's armed forces, undermining its strategic autonomy.

France's return to the Planning Committee of NATO therefore has significant capacity implications. The same holds for the standardization of the equipment used in coalition interventions: it will determine the pace of operations, the modes of tactical and operative actions, and hence potentially, existing habits and preferences; in short, the military cultures of contributing nations.

#### **Increased Interoperability or Technological Competition?**

Achieving compatibility with the latest standards of the US armed forces has always been somewhat of a quest for the Holy Grail, within NATO integration. US standards evolve more quickly than those of the Alliance, and repeatedly raise the problem of a “technological gap” emerging between the central superpower in operations and its allies. From this point of view, the recent acquisition of the American ROVER system by the Allies, especially the French army in Afghanistan, typifies the challenges of standardization in a coalition. By establishing norms drawn from their own

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<sup>85</sup> Interview at the EMA, January 2010.

modes of action, the Americans often trigger crash programs – or Urgent Operational Requirements (UOR) – among their Allies, who have no other choice but to acquire systems without which operational efficiency is jeopardized. NATO is supposed to be the forum of ordinary, normative, transatlantic discussion, but is sometimes left aside in favor of US standards. Trust between the Allies can only exist if Member States are associated in preparing for the future in terms of interoperability, and hence standards and norms. Assuming that the force which structures operations is also the one which sets combat standards, it then becomes necessary for those European countries which still have a defense industry to be “politically capable of planning operations upstream, at the highest level”.<sup>86</sup>

More generally, the requirements of interoperability between allies mean that technology plays a central role, which may sometimes lead to “technology-ism”, i.e. the primacy of technology over strategy and policy. Such technology dynamics dominated the forty years of the Cold War. Since the dissolution of the USSR, the technological imperative has still prevailed within the Pentagon through the “capabilities-based approach” (which has replaced the previous “threat-based approach”): given strategic uncertainty, it is necessary to prepare for all threats.<sup>87</sup> This may even lead to the negation of strategy as a “dialectic of wills”, as if the weaker side were condemned to “take the blows” without being able to respond.

Standardization and interoperability are necessary for present operations carried out in coalition, under the auspices of NATO. Yet the logic of capability could *de facto* lead to doctrinal and operational subordination, and, ultimately, to cultural and political subordination, *vis-à-vis* the Americans. In this respect, it is particularly important to analyze the impact of France's return to NATO's integrated military structure on weapons procurement.

### **Industrial Capabilities and National Independence**

These capability implications play a role in the participation in shared equipment (Capability Package – CP): AWACS, C-17 transport aircraft or arms programs, such as the Alliance Ground Surveillance (AGS) program.<sup>88</sup> It may be legitimately asked how France will henceforth participate in such specific spending. By favoring the NATO framework, there is perhaps a danger to new EU projects. It could even lead to difficulties concerning links with programs in which France wishes to retain control for reasons of sovereignty. For example, mastering what the 2008 White Paper on defense and national security calls the “knowledge and anticipation strategic function” conditions the autonomy of decision-making.<sup>89</sup> Concerning the replacement of the SCCOA air defense system, it may be asked whether a French component should be kept, if France

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<sup>86</sup> See Olivier Zajec, “Le paradigme Rover ou les paradoxes de la standardisation en coalition”, *Défense et Sécurité Internationale*, No. 57, March 2010, pp. 36-41.

<sup>87</sup> See Vincent Desportes, “Armées : ‘technologisme’ ou ‘juste technologie’?”, *Politique étrangère*, Vol.74, No. 2, 2009, pp. 404-405.

<sup>88</sup> Only some parts of these programs are shared (infrastructure and support). The situation is different for multinational initiatives.

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Louis Gautier, Cour des comptes, December 2009.

decides to enter a NATO program.<sup>90</sup> More generally, there is a risk that France may favor participating in shared equipment for budgetary reasons, thereby giving up on a more demanding defense effort. Ultimately, the risk of forsaking certain capabilities required to exercise full sovereignty may materialize in numerous ways.

From an industrial point of view, France's return to the NATO command, combined with mounting pressure on defense spending, may have consequences for the preservation of France's and Europe's industrial and technological defense base (ITDB). On the whole, leading industrialists in the defense sector favor a return to NATO, since French companies will henceforth be able to bid for tenders within the Capability Package framework. French firms expect to get NATO contracts, at a time when French and European defense budgets are stagnating or being cut back. This is despite the fact that NATO's budgetary constraints (described above) give priority to operations at the expense of major, structural programs.<sup>91</sup>

It is nevertheless already possible to identify two factors which are potentially threatening to the preservation of France's future ITDB. First, industrialists will favor NATO standards and specifications upstream, over their national equivalents, so as to be better positioned in bidding for tenders by the Alliance acquisition agencies. This may, however, be seen as an advantage in strengthening the export competitiveness of French arms, a point on which the Ministry of Defense's Directorate General for Armaments (DGA) has called for progress by French industry. Second, for reasons of interoperability, immediate operational performance and cost, the DGA could be tempted to choose NATO-referenced equipment more systematically. In this respect, the DGA is conscious of its mission to support France's national industrial base by facilitating, for example, access of French small- and medium-sized enterprises to NATO tenders. Consequently, the DGA is working on a strategy aimed at maintaining the French ITDB. This so-called "competitive autonomy" strategy is by no means new. But, it needs to be reinforced, for example, by favoring national or bilateral programs for major military equipment, and the free play of market forces for non-strategic equipment.<sup>92</sup> Ultimately, French and European defense industries must remain capable of designing and being the lead systems integrator for weapons programs in segments at the high end of technology .

In truth, the technological and industrial capabilities available to a country determine not only its military effectiveness, but also its diplomatic room for maneuver and therefore its autonomy of decision and action. Hence, France's full and complete participation in NATO does carry real risks that should be taken into account.

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Interview with EADS, January 2010.

<sup>92</sup> Interview at the DGA, February 2010.



# Conclusion

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If France's return to NATO's integrated military structures has been largely commented on in political and strategic terms, the purely military and operational aspects have often been neglected. This "micro-strategic" dimension in fact includes technical issues which are often difficult to apprehend. Besides, numerous civilian and military experts consider that the rapprochement, and perhaps even the operational integration between France and NATO, has been occurring progressively since the mid-1990s. Yet, a detailed analysis of the technical issues involved in France's reintegration into NATO suggests that some scenarios may alter the military culture of French armed forces, one way or another. This could eventually have strategic and even political implications.

The significant presence of French officers in the corridors of SHAPE may certainly enrich France's military culture, as it did in the 1950s. Meanwhile, France's actual participation in the Defense Planning Committee should weigh on the future capability choices of the Alliance. Similarly, the greater presence of French officers at the Transformation Command in Norfolk should enrich NATO's doctrine on the basis of French experience and expertise. Ultimately, this could even lead to a "Europeanization" of NATO's military culture, under French and British influence.

The success of such an enterprise is, however, conditional on a number of determining factors, especially a proactive policy on human resources, the preservation of a fairly significant defense effort, and the rapid appropriation of the complex process of defense planning. Concerning France's military capabilities and defense industry, it is vital to monitor the development of interoperability, so as to avoid systematically adopting the dominant standards of the "Great Ally". Given the escalating costs of modern weapon systems, such conformity could undermine the operational coherence of French force structures (the *format capacitaire* or Force Planning Construct), whenever operations are conducted outside the transatlantic framework. An appropriate solution would consist in disconnecting technically the European and American pillars of the Alliance, by "differentiating between necessary NATO standards and those American standards which are not".<sup>93</sup> Beyond technological aspects, this raises issues of military culture since the European approach questions the limits of Transformation, by avoiding technological drift.

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<sup>93</sup> See Vincent Desportes, "Armées : 'technologisme' ou 'juste technologie'?", *op. cit.*, p. 417.



Such a paradigm shift is likely to be difficult, as NATO's structure remains tightly connected to, and controlled by, the United States. It may nonetheless be hoped that the New Strategic Concept of the Alliance, to be adopted in November 2010 in Lisbon, will lead to a sufficiently radical overhaul of the military structure, especially in terms of modularity. This could allow a real opening up of NATO, which would take full account of France's interests and military culture.

# Appendices

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## ***Appendix 1: List of NATO acronyms***

ACO: Allied Command Operations

ACT: Allied Command Transformation

AJPs: Allied Joint Publications

ATPs: Allied Tactical Publications

AGS: Alliance Ground Surveillance

CJTF: Combined Joint Task Forces

CP: Capability Package

DCI: Defense Capabilities Initiative

DGA: General Direction for Ordnance (*Direction Générale de l'Armement*)

DPQ: Defense Planning Questionnaire

FAR: Rapid Action Force (*Force d'Action Rapide*)

FIAS: Force Internationale d'Assistance et de sécurité (see ISAF)

FOFA: Follow On Forces Attack

FPP: Force Planning Process

GOP: Guidelines Operational Planning

IFOR: Implementation Force

ISAF: International Security Assistance Force



ITDB: Industrial and Technological Defense Base

JFC: Joint Force Command

LOA: Level of Ambition

MC: Military Committee

MCR: Minimum Capability Requirements

NAC: North Atlantic Council

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NCS: NATO Capability Survey

NRF: NATO Response Force

PSA: Priority Shortfall Areas

SACEUR: Supreme Allied Commander Europe

SACT: Supreme Allied Commander Transformation

SFOR: Stabilization Force

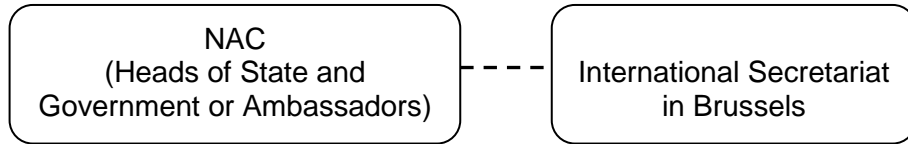
SHAPE: Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe

SNR: Senior National Representatives

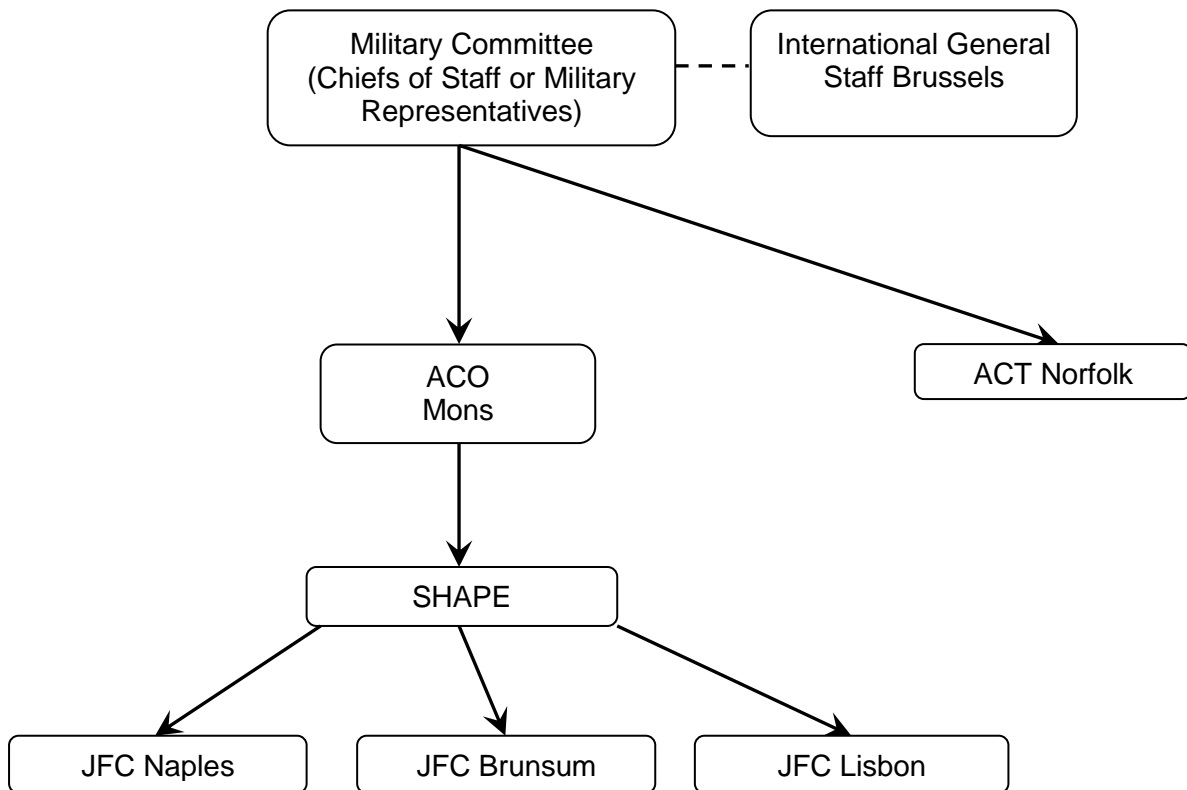


## Appendix 2: The Organization of NATO

### Political



### Military





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