French Forces for the 21st Century

Keeping an eye on Sarajevo.

EOPA

By JEFFREY B. JONES

Despite the fact that it is not integrated into the NATO military structure, France is a pivotal security partner for the United States. While its defense policy is marked by independence, its military capabilities complement those of the Alliance. With their role in dissuasion, prevention, projection, and protection, the French armed forces are global, nuclear, conventional, and unconventional, and are being transformed to become significantly smaller, restructured, and more professional.

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An Engaged Ally

France plays an important role in defending Western interests and also compares favorably with other allies in terms of defense policies—which support those of the United States—as well as levels of spending sufficient to maintain a capable and credible force.

Perhaps most noteworthy is the considerable involvement of France in peace operations and commitment to an effective nuclear and conventional defense posture as part of its strategy and that of the Atlantic Alliance. Despite often distinctive views on collective defense and international security, Paris has consistently demonstrated a solid political and military

Republique Française

Defense Budget: Estimated at $27 billion for 2000; the gross domestic product in 1999 was $1.4 trillion ($24,000 per capita).

Manpower: With a population of 59,425,000, France has a total of 6,241,000 men between 18 and 32 years of age. Active military strength is 294,430 (including 18,920 women) for the army, navy, and air force, plus members of the central staff, *Service de santé*, and *Service de essences* (the National Gendarmerie is also part of the armed forces; see separate listing below). In 1999 Reserve forces, which are currently undergoing reorganization, total 419,000—army, 242,500; navy, 97,000; and air force, 79,500.

Armed Forces: France has an army of 169,300 soldiers and some 834 main battle tanks; a navy with 49,490 sailors and 11 submarines, 35 principal surface combatants, 40 patrol/coastal craft, 21 mine warfare vessels, a force of 2,000 marines, and naval aviation with 3,500 personnel and 52 combat aircraft; and an air force with 60,500 members and an inventory of 517 combat aircraft.

Paramilitary Formations: A total of 94,950 personnel (including 4,970 women) serve in the national gendarmerie—a paramilitary police force—which is comprised of territorial and mobile forces as well as naval and air forces gendarmeries, an anti-terrorist unit, the Republican Guard, and other specialized units.

Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 2000–2001* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2000).

Les Champs Elysées.

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commitment to allies and security partners, most recently in the Balkans, but also in Cambodia, Haiti, Rwanda, Somalia, and the Persian Gulf. It backs a European Security and Defense Identity (ESDI), which one day could enable Europe to react to regional crises in which the United States is not engaged.

Beginning in 1996, France embarked on the most intense effort to redefine its relationship with the Alliance since President Charles de Gaulle withdrew from the integrated military structure thirty years earlier. In 1998 President Jacques Chirac and the Socialist government under Prime Minister Lionel Jospin gave considerable impetus to this effort. France is continuing to work with allies to implement intermediate measures while pressing for a larger European role in the Alliance. Paris remains an active participant in the political consultative process and an overall supporter of Alliance goals and objectives. Its considerable nuclear and conventional capabilities contribute to the NATO deterrent posture and have been a force for stability worldwide, particularly in Africa.

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France is arguably a global power, with over 46,000 military personnel outside its borders or in its territories. Troops serve as sovereignty forces in overseas departments and territories and bilaterally under defense agreements with African states. Prepositioned forces in Africa and the South Pacific have sought to provide stability and military assets in those areas where American presence is modest. France is proud to be one of the top three peacekeeping nations in the world. Its First Armored Division and Franco-German Brigade are assigned to EUROCORPS, which would come under the command of Supreme Allied Command Europe in time of war. Troops in Germany have been drawndown as part of overall restructuring of forces, though some 9,500 remain.

Paris collaborated closely with Washington on the diplomatic, political, and military levels to achieve a cessation of hostilities in Bosnia under the Dayton Accords and to implement a viable peace settlement. Its diplomatic and political leverage was instrumental in gaining the cooperation of the warring parties. It was the largest troop contributor to the earlier U.N. Protection Force (UNPROFOR) and subsequently became one of the largest contributors to Implementation Force (IFOR). When IFOR was succeeded by Stabilization Force (SFOR) in 1997, France remained a primary contributor of manpower, resources, and leadership and continues to work closely with the United States through diplomatic avenues to enforce full compliance with the Dayton Accords. A French general officer currently is in command of the multinational division in south Bosnia.

Kosovo

France joined with the United States and other nations during 1998 to constrain violence in Kosovo by political means. At the end of that year, with the international community mobilized to enforce a cease-fire and the decision

Le Triomphant.

ECPA

AUF–1 self-propelled howitzer near Mostar.

55th Signal Company, Combat Camera (Brian Gavin)

by the Alliance to use force, it agreed to act as the lead nation, contributing 800 soldiers to the NATO-directed Kosovo Extraction Force ready to intervene should monitors require protection or evacuation. During air operations conducted in March–June 1999, it was the second largest contributor, deploying ground attack, surveillance, combat air patrol, and refueling aircraft as well as unmanned aerial vehicles. With almost 8,000 troops on the ground, its commitment was significant.

The French learned many lessons during Operation Allied Force. Politically, for the first time since the Cold War, Europeans intervened in a major crisis; and the majority of ground forces were European. Paris had an important voice in operational matters and maintained control of its forces. Thus a predominant political theme from its perspective is the need to construct a European defense identity. Militarily, the French saw the Kosovo experience as validating their technological sophistication, acquisition policies, and reorganization plans.

Another reinforced lesson was the need for interoperability. In addition to its role in the bombing campaign, France was the only European nation to deploy a range of intelligence and surveillance platforms: Helios satellites, reconnaissance aircraft, heli-borne air-ground radar systems, electronic collectors, and drones. Throughout the campaign France had to synchronize these assets with the capabilities of other coalition forces.

There were also a number of deficiencies, although many had already been programmed for correction. The French noted problems in the acquisition, integration, and exploitation of real-time intelligence, tactical transportation, aircraft identification, satellite navigation of weapons, precision strike munitions, air defense suppression, and bomb damage assessment. They knew that gaps in technology must be overcome for a better balanced coalition effort with the United States.

Fundamental Change

The French programming law for 1997–2002 began a period of change that will transform the military into a professional force capable of rapid

force projection. In 1997 the total number of personnel in the defense establishment was slightly over 574,000, of which 305,627 were career, 169,520 were draftees, and 98,969 were civilian.

Though France is committed to maintaining the unilateral capacity to meet national interests, it acknowledges a growing requirement to project expeditionary forces and provide corresponding theater joint command resources to work with allied forces. Toward that end defense policymakers have identified the following priorities:

- commanding/conducting joint operations in a national or multinational framework
- intelligence, protection, and strategic mobility
- surveillance and protection of national territory
- force projection and support
- rebuilding additional forces should a major threat reappear.

Standing guard in Ferizaj, Kosovo.

55th Signal Company, Combat Camera (Milton H. Robinson)

Army

France is currently downsizing, restructuring, and professionalizing its army and expects to meet most of its self-imposed deadlines by the end of 2002, with complete reorganization by 2015 when an entire new generation of systems should be fielded. The goal is acquiring the capability to rapidly deploy either a force of 50,000 for NATO non-article V contingencies or a force of 30,000 to high-intensity regional conflicts for up to a year, while simultaneously maintaining 5,000 personnel for low intensity combat or peace operations.

The army has reorganized according to principles of modularity and economy of resources. Two corps and seven division headquarters were eliminated in 1999. The building blocks of the operational forces are the remaining 85 regiments, grouped under eight combined arms brigades and one aviation brigade in addition to four combat support and two logistics brigades. Regiments will be task-organized for both training purposes and during operations, albeit not necessarily with the same peacetime brigade headquarters. Moreover, four force headquarters are being formed to replace the division-level commands. Responsible for brigade and regimental operational planning and exercises, but without permanently assigned forces, these headquarters also have a mission of rapidly deploying to organize the nucleus of a NATO-style division headquarters or a national joint task force headquarters. The new corps level headquarters, Land Force Command, was formed in 1998 from Third Corps Headquarters and the Rapid Reaction Force and is located in Lille (not far from Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe in Mons, Belgium). In addition to its role as headquarters for army operational forces, this headquarters will function as a command and control organization for the NATO environment—the headquarters for a multinational corps or the core of a combined joint task force.

Proposed legislation will decrease the formerly optimistic figure of available reserves from roughly 250,000 to 100,000.

Figure 1. Army-to-Army Training

Activity	U.S. Army	French Army	Location
Company exchange	82d Airborne Division	11th Parachute Division	France/U.S.
Mountain training	1st/10th Special Forces Battalion	27th Mountain Division	France
Battery exchange	XVIII Airborne Corps Artillery	11th Parachute Division	France/U.S.
Military police platoon exchange	21st Theater Army Area Command	601st Regiment Contrôle Routier	France/Germany
Airborne training	Rigger Company, U.S. Army Europe	St. Cyr	France
Language training	21st Theater Army Area Command	St. Cyr	Germany
Cadre exchange	101st Airmobile Division	4th Airmobile Division	France
Platoon exchange	101st Military Intelligence Battalion	54th Signal Regiment	France/Germany
Company airborne training	Southern European Task Force	11th Parachute Division	France/Italy

Mirage 2000C.

1st Combat Camera Squadron (Greg L. Davis)

Figure 2. Army-to-Army Exchange Program

U.S. Army	French Army
St. Cyr, Coetquidan	U.S. Military Academy, West Point
Doctrine and Training Staff, Paris	U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, Fort Monroe
Army and Joint Staff Course, Paris	U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, Fort Leavenworth
Signal School, Rennes	U.S. Army Signal School, Fort Gordon
Aviation School, Le Luc	U.S. Army Aviation School, Fort Rucker
Engineer School, Angers	U.S. Army Engineer School, Fort Leonard Wood
Infantry School, Montpelier	U.S. Army Infantry School, Fort Benning
Armor School, Saumur	U.S. Army Armor School, Fort Knox
Artillery School, Draguignan	U.S. Army Field Artillery School, Fort Sill
	U.S. Army Intelligence School, Fort Huachuca
	U.S. Army Air Defense School, Fort Bliss
	XVIII Airborne Corps, Fort Bragg
	National Simulation Center, Fort Leavenworth

officers and NCOs must now learn operational English as well as NATO staff procedures

Some 50,000 will be assigned to the National Gendarmerie, a police force under the control of the Ministry of Defense. Moreover, the army will also benefit from the new system which assigns a company of reservists to each regiment.

When discussing interoperability with allied forces, French army leaders list three areas for emphasis—equipment, information systems, and procedures. Officers and NCOs must now learn operational English as well as NATO staff procedures, which are routinely used in national training and exercises. Interoperability requirements are changing army education and personnel systems. Officers are also on notice that schooling and many assignments now require English proficiency as well as familiarity with Allied army organization and weapons systems.

There have been delays in some programs such as the MISTRAL air defense and TRIGAT antitank missile systems. Big ticket items such as the latest Leclerc tank and Tiger attack helicopter have been preserved. Modernization of C^4I capabilities is a top priority as seen in the fielding of an enhanced information system that allows the transfer of data to multiple tactical levels in real time. A follow-on tactical communications system is also in the works. Moreover, there are continuing advances in wheeled vehicles, optics, small arms, lasers, electronics, intelligence, and information systems.

An important element of the professional army is the 30,000-member *Troupes de Marine*. Originally formed to serve in the colonies—first under the Navy Ministry and later the Ministry of War—they were known as *Troupes Coloniales* or *La Coloniale* during the first half of the 20th century. Because the majority were career soldiers, transitioning to an all professional force was relatively easy. Some of the most highly decorated units in the French army belong to *Troupes de Marine*, and they have played a dominant role in recent interventions. Moreover, many senior army leaders have come from their ranks, including the current chairman of the joint staff. There are 18 regiments and 6 battalions (comparable in size to U.S. battalions) as well as several other units which are deployed independently. *Troupes de Marine* still are rotated overseas, acting as military advisors in former African colonies which maintain security agreements with Paris.

Navy

In terms of tonnage, French naval forces are the fifth largest in the world, ranking behind the United States, Russia, Britain, and Japan. The five-year defense reform and restructuring plan will cut the size to 45,000 sailors and 11,000 civilians with 80 ships by 2002. Reserves will be reduced in strength to 6,000 sailors.

Foch and *USS Dwight D. Eisenhour.*

Marine Nationale

Figure 3. Navy-to-Navy Exchange Program

U.S. Navy	French Navy
Super Etendard pilot aboard *Foch*	F/A–18 instructor pilot (VFA–106)
Arresting gear officer, *Charles de Gaulle*	Arresting gear officer, Lakehurst, New Jersey
Instructor, French Naval Academy, Brest	Instructor, U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis. Maryland
EOD diver, Cherbourg	Mine warfare instructor, Ingleside, Texas
CDC officer, *Duquesne*, Toulon	Division officer, *USS Kauffman*
SEAL, Commando Hubert, Toulon	SEAL Team 2, Little Creek, Virginia
Dauphin SAR helo pilot, Toulon	Flight instructor, Naval Air Station Meridian, Mississippi
E–2C NFO, Lorient	E–2C NFO (VAW–120), Norfolk, Virginia

The four operational headquarters are the Mediterranean fleet based at Toulon, Atlantic fleet at Brest, Indian Ocean fleet in Djibouti, and Pacific fleet at Tahiti. Most of the power projection fleet, *Force d'Action Navale*, including the carrier *Foch*, anti-air warfare ships, and amphibious ships, is based in Toulon.

Like the army, the French navy has worked with American forces since the Revolutionary War and maintains close relations to this day. Its ships patrol every corner of the globe protecting national interests in overseas territories and supporting Alliance objectives. As an indicator of the strong commitment to NATO operations in the Balkans, the 36-year-old *Foch* with its battle group sortied two weeks early from Toulon in January 1999 for duty in the Adriatic in response to the Kosovo crisis and remained on station until June, even after American carriers had withdrawn.

The highest navy priority is completion of the nuclear-powered carrier *Charles de Gaulle*, which displaces 40,000 tons and accommodates 40 aircraft, including the new Rafale fighter and U.S.-built E–2C Hawkeye. Begun in 1986, it was designed from the keel up to be compatible with the U.S. Navy F/A–18 and has the same basic catapult and arresting gear systems as *Nimitz* class carriers. *Foch* will be decommissioned as *Charles de Gaulle* becomes operational.

Aging embarked fixed-wing aircraft are being retired. Rafales replaced modernized F–8P Crusaders in 1999. The strike and reconnaissance roles will be filled by two squadrons of laser guided bomb-capable Super Etendards until replaced by a strike version Rafale in 2005. The Alizé early warning aircraft will be replaced by the E–2C Hawkeye in 2000, an enormous improvement in early warning capability. A fleet of 28 Atlantique maritime patrol aircraft is being supplemented by Falcon 50 maritime surveillance planes. The helicopter fleet will be upgraded with 27 NH–90 utility and antisubmarine warfare helicopters.

French jumpmaster over Fort Bragg, Rodeo 2000.

U.S. Air Force (James E. Lotz)

French officer briefing coalition pilots, Bright Star '99/'00.

1st Combat Camera Squadron (Jim Varhegyi)

Six nuclear attack submarines are based in Toulon, with at least one deployed at all times. Operations typically take place in the Mediterranean and Atlantic, but there are deployments to the Indian and Pacific Oceans as well. Six new-generation *Barracuda* class nuclear attack submarines will begin replacing older models on a one-for-one basis in 2010. All diesel submarines are being phased out. The mass of the nuclear deterrent is contained in four nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines based in Brest, also with at least one deployed at all times. The new generation 9,000 ton *Le Triomphant* joined the fleet in 1997 and *Le Temeraire* in 1999. *Vigilant* will arrive in 2003 and a fourth in 2008, coincident with the 8,000 kilometer range M–51 submarine-launched ballistic missile, to be fitted in all *Le Triomphant* class submarines. As the new boats enter the fleet, those of *L'Inflexible* class will be decommissioned, maintaining a permanent force of four.

Each year five French naval officers travel to New London for discussions on submarine tactics and systems developments with American counterparts. Their visit includes opportunities to use submarine tactical training simulators. In addition, all tactical pilots receive training up through carrier qualification at Meridian Naval Air Station.

France, Italy, and Britain have engaged in the tripartite Horizon anti-air warfare program, which will be fully compatible with NATO systems. However, with Britain's withdrawal from the program, the future is unclear. In accord with doctrine on developing more deployable forces, the navy launched two 12,000 ton *Foudre* class transports and plans to construct two even larger ships capable of embarking a JTF staff.

To keep up with the C^4I goal of continued interoperability, *Charles de Gaulle* as well as the E–2C Hawkeye, E–3F AWACS, and Rafale will have the Link-16 data link. The carrier will have a joint maritime command information system terminal and also the joint operational tactical system. A Franco-American naval working group meets every six months to enhance the compatibility of communication and combat systems.

Air Force

Exhibiting many of the same strengths as its American equivalent, the French air force is modern and technically sophisticated. Like other services, it is undergoing profound changes in force structure, professionalization, and force projection capabilities.

The air force has global commitments that in 1998 consisted of 14 bilateral and 9 NATO or Partnership for Peace exercises as well as 11 deployments as permanent detachments or in support of operations. It has more than a thousand aircraft, including fighters, C–135 tankers, C–130 and C–160 transports, and assorted small transport aircraft and helicopters.

The service has responded to evolving challenges since the Persian

Gulf War. Because France does not perceive a direct threat from a European power, moving to an all volunteer force is designed to project power. The air force has been striving to improve interoperability with nations in Europe as well as NATO. One example occurred in 1998 when eight Mirage 2000s, two C–160 Transalls, and 200 personnel took part in Exercise Red Flag in Nevada. Using iron bombs and laser guided munitions, the French were highly successful in this realistic exercise, which validated their training and tactics and demonstrated a high degree of interoperability.

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Although exercises like Red Flag can be critical in gauging progress in training and testing new tactical ideas, the best indicator of how effectively air forces operate together is a real crisis. The French have flown alongside the United States in Operation Southern Watch, in the skies over Bosnia, and in Kosovo. They have furnished 800 of the 1,800 troops to the Kosovo Reaction Force prepared to evacuate observers. French personnel took a principal role in leading an Alliance operation for the first time since leaving the integrated command structure. The air force deployed six C–130s, two C–160s, and a DC–8 to move supplies necessary to establish operations in Skopje and to deliver humanitarian aid to Albania and Macedonia. More resources are sustaining ground operations in Kosovo. Throughout the NATO air operations, the French were the second largest contributor, with over 100 dedicated aircraft. Their reconnaissance assets included Crecerelles and CL–289 drones as well as Cougar Horizon helicopters, which operated in concert with the joint surveillance and target attack radar system (JSTARS).

***USS Anzio* with French destroyer *Mountcalm*.**

U.S. Navy (Shawn Eklund)

The air force is undergoing a transition, adapting to new missions which require flexibility, rapid reaction, and sustainability. It trains and is interoperable with U.S. and other NATO forces and seeks opportunities to improve its ability to operate in joint and combined environments. The acquisition of the Rafale and modernization of the Mirage 2000 will provide a highly effective force well into the 21st century. The changing nature of the threat and need for mobility, however, will create problems because of the age of French assets, which do not meet requirements established for the future. The government is looking at various options which cannot be realized until 2010. Meanwhile, France will use tactical lift assets and sealift and rent outsized cargo lift.

Special Operations

With headquarters located on an air force base inside a mountain north of Paris, the Special Operations Command was organized in 1992 and represents the only truly joint command in the French military. The headquarters is manned by 60 officers and NCOs from each service, with liaison from both the national gendarmerie and military health services. This command oversees foreign military assistance, special unit training, hostage extraction and rescue, combat search and rescue, counterterrorism, direct action, VIP protection, raids, deception, psychological and civil-military operations, humanitarian assistance support, and tailored communications links. Equipped with state-of-the-art technology, it can be reinforced by the 11th Airborne Brigade, 27th Mountain Brigade, and 13th Airborne Dragoon Regiment for reconnaissance and intelligence collection, and by naval forces. It complements the intervention/protection role of the national gendarmerie and the French counterparts to the Defense Intelligence Agency and Central Intelligence Agency.

France and America are bound by common strategic interests and shared values. In crises that outstrip individual nations or collective resources, partners must take advantage of their respective capacities, technological strengths, forward presence, and lessons which enhance interoperability. Understanding capabilities of the French armed forces and rebuilding bridges are mandates for the future. France has been a traditional ally of the United States. As Charles De Gaulle reportedly remarked to Dwight Eisenhower during the U–2 Crisis in 1960, "I do not know what Khrushchev is going to do, nor what is going to happen, but whatever he does, or whatever happens, I want you to know that I am with you to the end." JFQ