

# Why France's defense cannot be 'decoupled' from the alliance

by Laurent Rosenfeld

French political leader Jacques Cheminade, a collaborator of *EIR* contributing editor Lyndon LaRouche, declared in a statement issued in February that the defense of France cannot start on the Rhine river but has to begin "on the Elbe and the Fulda rivers"—the border with the Warsaw Pact. France cannot, in other words, draw a "Maginot Line" around its own territory (known in French military parlance as the national "sanctuary"); its defense is bound to the defense of Western Europe and the Atlantic Alliance as a whole.

The current global strategic crisis, the intensity of Soviet pressure on Europe to "decouple" from the United States, and the drive to develop anti-ballistic missile defense capabilities on the part of the United States and Soviet Union, have combined to trigger an urgent debate in France over the increasingly obvious vulnerability of the nation's independent nuclear deterrent, the *force de frappe*. Although not a participant in NATO's military command structure, France remains politically and strategically a member of the Atlantic Alliance, and is probably today one of the most reliable allies of the United States. The resolution of the current debate therefore has crucial bearing on the security of the alliance generally.

Cheminade, the Secretary General of the Parti Ouvrier Européen (POE—the European Labor Party) and chairman of the France et son Armée (France and its Army) committee, warned against the possibility of a Soviet conventional surgical strike against the north German state of Schleswig-Holstein, in the direction of the Danish Jutland peninsula and of the Danish straits that close off the Baltic Sea, where an important chunk of the Soviet fleet is based (in Kronstadt). In order to dissuade the Soviets from such an adventure, Cheminade declared, the deployment of an American armored battalion and the possible deployment of an English paratroop regiment are good symbolic measures (since they create a "tripwire" in addition to that provided by the West German army, the Bundeswehr), but are still grossly inadequate. Therefore, Cheminade called for a reintegration of French forces into the Western posture and proposed a series

of immediate and longer-term measures, which we detail below.

Although there are some "Maginot Line" adherents, like Gen. Pierre Gallois, who nurture the illusion that France could somehow maintain its precious independence if the Soviet Union did launch an attack, most military analysts realize that France's nuclear missiles would present little obstacle if the U.S.S.R. decided to risk such an adventure. Even more of a delusion is the idea that French forces could do anything against the Warsaw Pact's 170 divisions.

This means that the defense of France cannot be decoupled from that of Germany, in particular. Along with Cheminade, many political and military leaders have recently emphasized this strategic reality. Among them are "new philosophers" André Glucksmann and Bernard-Henri Levy, the former chairwoman of the European Community, Simone Veil, and actor Yves Montand. All four of these called for stationing nuclear weapons in West Germany. In the view of many political commentators, including Glucksmann, there is presently an informal agreement on that subject between opposition leader Jacques Chirac's Gaullist Rassemblement pour la république party (RPR) and a large section of the ruling Socialist Party, including president François Mitterrand and Defense Minister Charles Hernu.

In order to understand the current debate and the defense tasks which France confronts, it is necessary to review the reasons for France's withdrawal from the NATO military organization in 1966-67.

## De Gaulle vs. McNamara

The main strategic problem for France and for other European countries in the 1960s originated from the adoption in the United States of the Mutually Assured Destruction doctrine and, even more, of its later "flexible response" variant. If the MAD doctrine had already introduced a dangerous concept of *assured vulnerability* (since it took as its premise that no nuclear war would ever be fought—an assumption quite contrary to Soviet military doctrine), what Robert

McNamara's "flexible response" meant for Europe was essentially the loss of the American nuclear strategic umbrella. It meant that the U.S. commitment to defend Europe was no longer reliable, or that, if the United States were to defend Europe, the territory of Europe would be obliterated in the process. It is easy, in that framework, to understand why some European countries contemplated decoupling or even surrendering in any showdown with the Russians.

General de Gaulle was not ready to accept this option. He therefore decided to withdraw from the NATO structure, which was imposing this option on Europe, and to put the French strategic forces then becoming operational on a return to a deterrence doctrine based on massive retaliation. Officially, the idea was of course to make a non-flexible "nuclear tripwire," independent from the United States and other NATO countries. The policy of "deterrence of the weak against the strong" meant that if France were attacked, it would release the entirety of its nuclear arsenal against the large cities of the attacker. France was not, of course, in a position to win a war, but it could make the consequences of such a war so unpleasant to the attacker that the cost of the attack would vastly exceed its expected benefits. In order to stress the "independence" of the French deterrent, the doctrine of *tous azimuts* ("aimed in all directions") was promoted, to indicate that any country threatening France would be so targeted, not only the Soviet Union.

However, the truth of the matter was slightly different. When de Gaulle decided in 1966 to leave NATO (effective in 1967), he made clear that this did not mean any kind of neutrality, but that France remained a full-fledged member of the Atlantic Alliance. The French *force de frappe* was the expression of France's political will to immediately raise the dimension of an attack to the strategic level, and thereby to force the United States to respond at that same level; in other words, its aim was to function as a tripwire for the American deterrent. Here is what de Gaulle said to a group of prominent military leaders in the late 1960s: "I can't buy a full gun, but, with my *force de frappe*, I can put my finger on the Western nuclear forces."

Thus, the meaning of the *tous azimuts* expression was in fact that the *force de frappe* was targeted against the Soviet Union, but was, at the same time, aimed politically against U.S. Eastern Establishment figures such as Gen. Maxwell Taylor, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy, Henry Kissinger, James Schlesinger and others who were controlling the State Department, the Pentagon, other sections of the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, and NATO.

### **The *force de frappe* today**

Corollary to de Gaulle's decision to develop an independent strategic capability was his decision to simultaneously develop so-called "tactical" nuclear warfare forces, in order to develop a war-fighting capability able to offer a deterrent and to protect France from threats and blackmail in the inter-

national strategic poker game.

Although some generals and other strategists (such as Gen. Pierre Gallois and High-Frontier supporter Marie-France Garaud) have been playing with the idea of a "full sanctuarization" of the French national territory and that of a "complete independence," i.e. decoupling from the United States, it is clear to most politicians and experts that the French *force de frappe* is meaningful only in the context of the alliance with the United States and other countries of the Western Alliance. This has become increasingly true. If not obsolete, the French nuclear forces are becoming more and more vulnerable to a Soviet first strike.

### **The French forces today**

To summarize the French nuclear capabilities, France presently has:

- Eighteen intermediate range ballistic missiles whose silos are based in the Plateau d'Albion (in the southeast of France). Today's S3 missiles have a single one-megaton warhead and a range of 3,500 km (slightly over 2,100 miles), which is enough to reach the western part of Soviet Union, including Kiev, Moscow, and Leningrad. Although their silos and warheads have been recently hardened, they would be immediately destroyed by a Soviet first strike.

## **The army reorganization**

The current reorganization of the French Army will enable it to function more effectively as part of the Western military alliance, according to a statement by Gen. Herve Zwingelstein, chief of the Department of General Studies of the French General Staff Feb. 17.

"It has been decided, while keeping our freedom of action and our full autonomy of decision," he said, "to clear up any ambiguity, vis-à-vis our partners, on our capability to engage in fighting, extremely early if need be, and thus to concretize the solidarity which links us to our European partners. . . . Before an American reinforcement in Europe could come from the United States, the French Army provides the reserve, the second echelon, of the alliance."

This statement was made on the occasion of the relocation of the French Third Army Corps Command headquarters from the Paris area towards the North into the city of Lille. Together with the two other army corps stationed in eastern France and in West Germany, the main battle corps of the French Army is now much more forward-based than it was before. The other important unit, the 50,000-man Rapid Action Force, is also organized in order to intervene primarily in Germany. The current reorganization also implies that the main command structure has been shifted from the static "military region" type to the more mobile "army corps" concept.

● Five nuclear missile-launching submarines presently operational, plus a sixth one, the *Inflexible*, due to be operational in early 1985. The first five submarines now have 16 M-20 missiles each (with a one-megaton warhead each and a range of 3,500 kilometers), i.e., a total of 80 warheads. Equipped with 16 new M-4 MIRVed missiles (with six 150-kiloton warheads), the *Inflexible* will have 96 warheads, more than the five other submarines together. Four of these five submarines will then be renovated and fitted to carry the M-4 missiles. Even with the enhanced M-4 missile (which has a 4,000 km range), these submarines share the weaknesses and limitations of the American *Polaris* submarines: If detected, they are vulnerable to a Soviet strike performed with SS-20s (which have a range of 5000 kilometers plus).

● The *Mirage IV-A* strategic bombers, which are quite obsolete. In order to be able to reach targets in the western Soviet Union and return, they would need in-flight refueling, which would make them tremendously vulnerable (not to speak of the vulnerability of the KC-135 Boeings supposed to refuel them). Presently equipped with free-fall bombs, they should be fitted soon with an air-to-ground middle range missile (ASMP); this missile can fly 300 to 400 kilometers at Mach 3 to 4. With this missile, the *Mirage* could make a good tactical nuclear bomber, but still probably not a strategic bomber.

Then there are the tactical nuclear forces, which include:

● The *Mirage III-E* and *Jaguar* tactical bombers (to be replaced by *Mirages 2000*) and the Navy's *Super-Etendards*. Both of these will also be equipped with ASMP missiles.

● The *Pluton* tactical nuclear missiles, with a range of 120 to 150 kilometers. These missiles are presently stationed in eastern France, from where they can reach only West German targets. The only intelligent use of those would be to base them forward, near the "Iron Curtain," where they could play a role against a Soviet blitzkrieg. However, there is one serious limitation: There are only 42 launchers and about 120 missiles (the launchers can be reloaded), which makes their use very limited. They are supposed to be replaced (but in seven to eight years only!) by the *Hades* missiles, whose range is about 500 kilometers.

To summarize the situation, the French nuclear forces constitute at this point no reliable deterrent, but they could provide considerable firing power against a Soviet adventure, provided some measures are taken in order to: 1) integrate them more in the Western disposition; and 2) reduce their present vulnerability.

### **An emergency program**

An emergency program to improve France's defenses would immediately include forward deployment of the "nuclear artillery regiments," the *Plutons*, in such a way that they contribute to the defense of West German territory, rather than threatening its annihilation. These should obviously be supported by the relevant anti-commando troops. In order to be able to stop a Soviet blitzkrieg without risking the destruc-

tion of Germany, these *Plutons* should be armed with neutron warheads. At the same time, the heavy artillery tubes (155 mm howitzers and cannons) should also get neutron shells. France has developed the neutron bomb, but its industrial production has officially been delayed, although most analysts believe that at least small quantities of them are ready. Mass production of neutron bombs is necessary and, if this takes too much time, France should consider an agreement with the United States whereby the U.S. administration would temporarily supply neutron bombs. It is to be noted here that in order to make a credible defense of Western Europe, a minimum of 5,000 neutron bombs is required (while the United States has so far produced only about 1,000).

Other initiatives to be taken, by France as well as by the other European countries and the United States, include a reinforcement of anti-tank warfare capabilities (including anti-tank missiles, fighting helicopters, and battle tanks), as well as anti-aircraft defense.

As far as France is concerned, the French tactical nuclear bombers (*Mirage III* and *Jaguar*), as well, possibly, as the so-called strategic bombers, should be deployed for fighting missions in Central Europe, specifically for strikes against the Soviet second echelon of forces.

Further, an urgent renovation and reinforcement of the strategic arsenal is needed. This implies:

● implementing an immediate program of civil defense capable of protecting the population against nuclear bombing, specifically, in the short term, against the fallout incurred by a counterforce strike;

● making operational as soon as possible the *Inflexible* submarine and accelerating the fitting of the other submarines to the new M-4 MIRVed missiles;

● accelerating the production schedule for the planned *Hades* missile systems, whose range allows them to strike against the Soviet second echelon;

● launching a military space program in order to provide as soon as possible observation satellites, and, in the longer term, to carry anti-missile beam weapons;

● developing laser-weapon point defense, in order to protect specifically the *Plateau d'Albion* intermediate range ballistic missiles and the *Ile Longue* (in Brittany) submarine base against a Soviet first strike. Before the beam weapons become operational, these strategic locations should be defended with American-built *Patriot* missiles equipped with nuclear or neutron warheads. While not offering foolproof protection, these *Patriots* could make a Soviet surgical strike much more uncertain and difficult.

As for the French "strategists" who seriously contemplate defending France on the banks of the Rhine and sacrificing its West German ally—without even being smitten with the remorse that could have tugged at *Edouard Daladier's* conscience after his Munich betrayal—they not only violate France's honor, but also jeopardize its defense and place Europe at the mercy of the Soviet Union. Soviet agents would behave no better.