

France's Military Capability 2020

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France is a major European military power that possesses nuclear weapons and holds a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. The country views its military power as an important instrument for exerting influence and has a military presence around the world, through permanent bases and various operations. However, attempting to maintain a global role has become increasingly difficult in times of budget deficits and defence budget cuts. Furthermore, France sees Islamic terrorism, rather than deterrence and defence in Northern Europe, as its most pressing priority.

SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

In 2017, newly elected President Emmanuel Macron initiated a strategic defence and security review.¹ It updated the more extensive security and defence White Paper of 2013 and covered threats and challenges, main priorities, and the role and tasks of the armed forces.² The review was also an important input to the long-term defence plan and to the annual defence budget. The current long-term defence plan was adopted in the summer of 2018 and covers the period 2019–2025.³ It entails strengthened defence efforts, the largest budget increase since the end of the Cold War and continued support for military operations.

The strategic defence and security review paints a grim picture of the security situation in France and abroad. The numerous terror attacks are highlighted in particular. A direct link is made between security in France and developments in two regions: the Middle East and the Sahara-Sahel, in Africa.

When it comes to priorities, Macron pursues a traditional French security and defence policy. The policy towards Russia is based on three parallel tracks: firstly, the need for an open dialogue, both bilaterally and in multi-lateral structures; secondly, continued EU sanctions and European cohesion; and thirdly, support to NATO reassurance measures. The recent attempts to reset relations with Russia have nevertheless been perceived as a shift, reflected

in both words and action. According to some readings, France is softening its stance towards Russia, giving in to internal pressure, and for the sake of national economic and political interests. Illustrative examples are high-level meetings between the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, and Macron, the resumption of bilateral talks between the foreign and defence ministers, and French declarations on a European security architecture including Russia.⁴

President Macron has furthermore emphasised the European dimension in security and defence and often linked it to strategic autonomy and military capability. The traditional French message that Europe must take more responsibility for its security is motivated by the perception of an increasingly unpredictable US that Europe cannot rely on. Furthermore, Macron has questioned NATO's political relevance in extremely stark terms, referring to NATO as "brain-dead" and doubting the reliability of Article 5. According to the French view, a strong European pillar within NATO is fundamental. At the same time, France continues to perceive the US as an important ally of last resort and a strategic partner. NATO is still considered a key component of European security.⁵

According to current strategic documents, the French Armed Forces have three fundamental tasks: to provide nuclear deterrence, ensure defence and protection of

1 Ministère des Armées, *Defence and National Strategic Review 2017*, DICOd, Bureau des éditions, 2017.

2 *Le Livre blanc sur la défense et la sécurité nationale 2013*, Paris: Direction de l'information légale et administrative, 2013.

3 Ministère des Armées, *La Loi de programmation militaire 2019–2025*, 2018.

4 Philippe-Vieal, Olivier, 'Pourquoi la France change de stratégie avec la Russie', *L'Express*, 10 September 2019; *France Info*, 'Pourquoi France et Russie cherchent-elles à réchauffer leurs relations?', 9 September 2019; Thom, Françoise, 'France-Russie: les liaisons dangereuses', *Diploweb*, 15 February 2020.

5 Sundberg, Anna, *Frankrikes säkerhetspolitik och militära förmåga*, FOI Memo 6605 (Stockholm: Swedish defence Research Agency – FOI, 2018); and *Economist*, 'Emmanuel Macron warns Europe: NATO is becoming brain-dead', 7 November 2019; *Economist*, 'Emmanuel Macron in his own words', transcript in English, 7 November 2019.

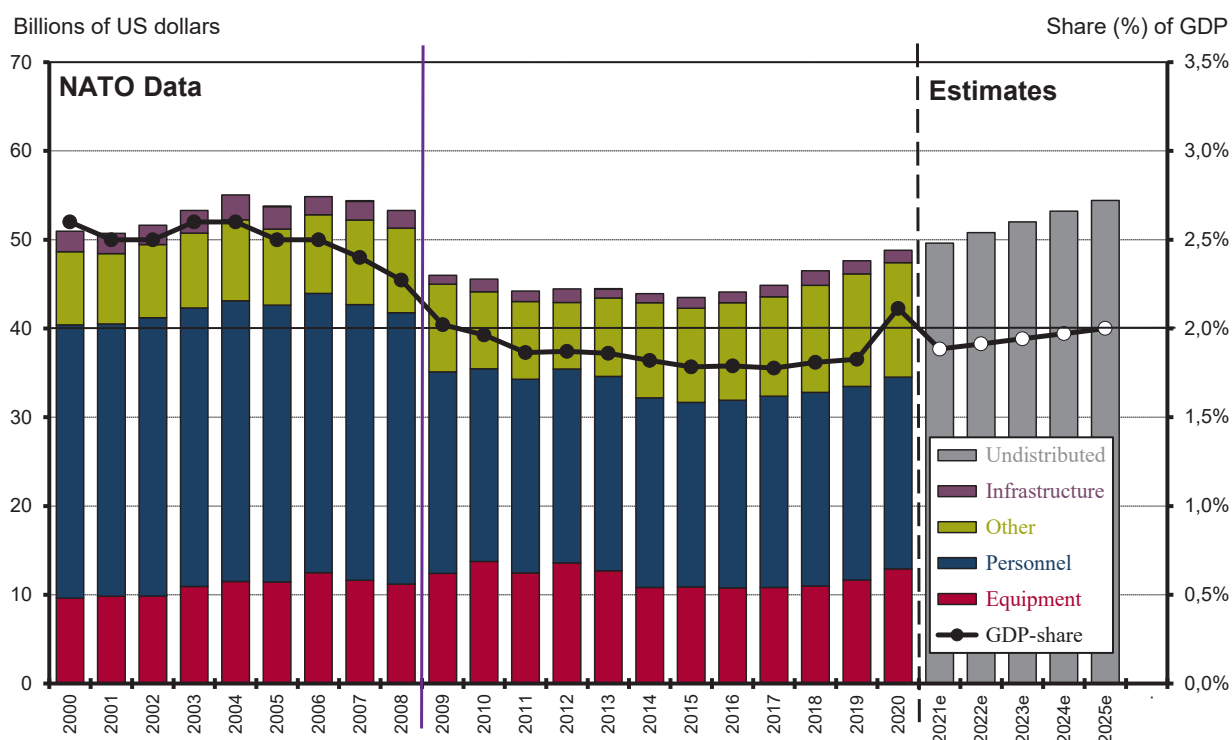


Figure: The military expenditures of France 2000–2025: Billions of US dollars/2015 prices (columns) and as share (%) of GDP (curved line)

Source: Bergstrand, Bengt-Göran, *NATO military expenditures*, Working Document (Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency – FOI), October 2020.

NB: From 2009, data include only the deployable part of the Gendarmerie. Estimates based on budget data for 2021 on the assumption that France will spend 2.0% of GDP on defence in 2025.

national territory and interests, and undertake international operations. The security and defence policy is furthermore implemented through five so-called strategic functions – deterrence; protection; knowledge and anticipation; intervention; and prevention – each of which represents a method to achieve stated goals. The latest long-term defence plan particularly stresses the need to strengthen intelligence capabilities, enhance the capability to prevent international crises, and increase the presence in new domains of strategic competition, such as cyber defence. In order to uphold its special status as a leading European military power, France wants to maintain the level of ambition in all areas, including defence industry, military capability development, and operational capabilities. This means that France also prioritises its national

defence industry to develop the most exclusive capabilities, such as aircraft carriers and nuclear weapons, in order to aim for a full-spectrum force.

MILITARY EXPENDITURES

In the period 2010–2015/16, French military expenditures were relatively stable, at a level averaging USD 44 billion.⁶ However, due to economic growth, the expenditures share of GDP gradually declined, from 2 per cent in 2009–2010 to 1.8 per cent in 2017. As a result of the internal security problems and a deteriorating situation in the Sahara-Sahel area, mentioned above, as well as the Russian aggression against Ukraine, French military expenditures have increased since 2015/16, to USD 48.8 billion in 2020.

⁶ The NATO definition stipulates that paramilitary forces should be included in military expenditures. Spending for the paramilitary Gendarmerie was therefore included in NATO statistics up to 2008, when it was decided that such spending should henceforth be excluded in the figures that NATO reports for France. This made the French military expenditures drop significantly in 2009.

According to the long-term defence plan, France aims to meet its NATO pledge to spend 2 per cent of GDP on defence.⁷ Incidentally, with the economic decline caused by the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, France will temporarily be allocating more than 2 per cent of its GDP to defence during this year. The projections in the graph also show that the expected economic recovery will in 2021 reduce the share, after which a return to the previously planned increase will take place. Military spending will then increase at an annual average rate around 2.2 per cent in the years 2020–2025, or at a pace similar to that in 2016–2020, and amount to approximately USD 54.4 billion in 2025.

France has for some years already reached NATO's second goal of spending at least 20 per cent of its defence budget on equipment, with 26.5 per cent in 2020. In the long-term defence plan, a total of EUR 112.5 billion will be allocated to equipment for the period 2019–2023. For the latter period, 2023–2025, EUR 25 billion will be allocated to the renewal of the naval and airborne nuclear component. This constitutes a considerable defence burden that may affect other investments. At least 36 per cent of defence equipment projects are to be carried out in cooperation with European partners.⁸

ARMED FORCES

The French Armed Forces have approximately 206,000 soldiers. This includes 9,000 soldiers of the Foreign Legion, spread over a dozen regiments, and 4,000 soldiers in the country's strategic nuclear forces, of which half are in the Navy and half in the Air Force. The operational reserve of the armed forces is made up of 38,500 soldiers, organised in the National Guard. In

addition, France has paramilitary forces, mainly in the national Gendarmerie, but also in the customs and coast guard, amounting to more than 100,000 active personnel, and 30–40,000 reserves.⁹

The national security operation Sentinelle, launched in January 2015 to address the pressing terrorist threat, has an authorised strength of 10,000 soldiers. In 2019, it was reduced to about 3,500 soldiers continuously deployed in the country, with about 3,500 additional soldiers on high readiness (48 hours), and another 3,000 in the strategic reserve.¹⁰ According to French official sources, a total of 13,000 soldiers are on operational duty in France. In addition to the forces rotating in Operation Sentinelle, this includes the coast guard, air surveillance and special forces.¹¹

French units are also found in other parts of the world. Firstly, France has five permanent bases abroad, four in Africa and one in the Middle East, employing a total of 3,700 soldiers. Secondly, France holds a total of 7,100 soldiers in five French territories outside of Europe. Finally, France takes part in various overseas operations, with a total of 6,500 soldiers.¹² France's rather small participation in NATO's assurance and deterrence measures on the eastern flank is regarded as a contribution to security, an opportunity to strengthen interoperability, and an expression of solidarity.¹³

Army

The total number of active soldiers in the Army amounts to 114,000.¹⁴ The Army's peacetime organisation consists of approximately eighty regiments of varying size. The combat units of the French Army are organised in two manoeuvre divisions, the 1st division with headquarters in Besançon and the 3rd division with headquarters in

7 Ministère des Armées, 'La Loi de programmation militaire 2019–2025 en 5 minutes', 2018; Maulny, Jean-Pierre, and Colomina, Pierre, 'Une loi de programmation militaire 2019–2025 aux objectifs contradictoires' (Paris: Institut de relations internationales et stratégiques – IRIS), 2018; International Institute of Strategic Studies, *The military balance 2018*, (London: Routledge, 2018).

8 Ministère des Armées, 'La Loi de programmation militaire 2019–2025 en 5 minutes'; Baichère, Didier, 'Loi de programmation militaire #LPM: priorité aux soldats et à innovation', 8 February 2018.

9 International Institute of Strategic Studies, *The military balance 2020*, (London: Routledge, 2020) p. 104; Ministère des Armées, *Defence key figures 2019 Edition*, 2019.

10 Ministère des Armées, 'Opération Sentinelle', 2020.

11 Ministère des Armées, *Defence key figures 2019*, p. 24.

12 Ibid.

13 Permanent Representation of France in NATO, 'French troops deployed in Estonia within the framework of the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) - April 2019', 12 August 2019; Ministère des Armées, 'France and the security challenges in the Baltic Sea region', «Your security is our security», Florence Parly, Minister for the Armed Forces, Helsinki, 23 August 2018.

14 Ministère des Armées, *Defence key figures 2019*.

Marseille, with approximately 25,000 soldiers each.¹⁵

The 1st division consists of four brigades; one mechanised, one marine infantry, one mountain infantry and the Franco-German infantry brigade, supported by one artillery, one engineer and one military working dog infantry regiment.¹⁶ The major units of the 3rd division are two mechanised and one air mobile brigade supported by one artillery, one engineer and one CBRN-defence regiment.¹⁷ In addition, the Army has some forty regiments, including combat support and training units organised under different commands (so-called commandements divisionnaires). The units are spread across the country, at French bases abroad and on French territory outside of Europe.¹⁸

Since the start of Operation Sentinelle, in 2015, the Army has constantly been on very high readiness. In addition, the Army has air-mobile troops and special operations forces on standby for national and international purposes. The French Army also contributes to NATO's enhanced Forward Presence (eFP). The operation, called Mission Lynx, consists of a rotating mechanised company, totalling 300–400 soldiers. The French forces are based alternatively in Tapa, Estonia, and in Rukla, Lithuania. The materiel placed in the Baltic states comprises 4 Leclerc tanks, 14 armoured combat vehicles (VBCI) and 5 armoured personnel carriers.¹⁹

On paper, the Army has a broad capacity, for both international crisis management and national and collective defence. Its rapid reaction capability is attributed, among other things, to its presence on France's bases abroad and operational experience. The Army has approximately 220 Leclerc battle tanks, 4,800 armoured vehicles and 109 self-propelled artillery pieces (CAESAR and AU-F-1). However, the materiel and personnel in the army have been under severe strain in recent years due to the many and enduring operations. There are reports of worn equipment, exhausted staff and insufficient time for

recovery, training and exercise. The scope for taking on new operations is considered to be limited.²⁰

The French Army is preparing for future high-intensity conflicts against a peer competitor in Europe's neighbourhood at the same time as it continues to face low-intensity conflicts and a range of other adversaries in its international operations, for example in Mali. As a consequence, the army must strengthen its artillery, interoperability, air defence and command structure. This will most likely be a challenge, since manning levels are likely to be low, particularly in the heavy units that have not been in high demand in recent years. In 2023, the army plans to conduct an exercise at division level, comprising approximately 15,000–20,000 soldiers.²¹ The long-term defence plan calls for the renewal of the Army's materiel, including equipment related to the soldiers' personal protection and safety, but also small-calibre ammunition and communication equipment. The defence plan further includes the purchase of more than 1,700 Jaguar and Griffon armoured vehicles, half of which are to be delivered by 2025.²² France and Germany have agreed to proceed with the joint development of the next generation of tanks, replacing, in the case of France, the current Leclerc tanks, in service since the early '90s. However, the new tanks will only be ready for use from 2030.²³

Navy

The Navy is comprised of approximately 35,000 sailors, 6,500 airmen in the Naval Aviation, and 2,000 Marines. The Navy's home ports are three major naval bases.²⁴

France's largest naval base, in Toulon, on the Mediterranean coast, hosts approximately 70 per cent of the French fleet. Toulon is the home port of the Charles de Gaulle, France's aircraft carrier; its helicopter carriers (Mistral-class); more than half of France's destroyers and frigates; the attack submarines; several medium and smaller surface combat vessels; and a part of the naval commando soldiers, i.e. the Marines.²⁵

15 Ministère des Armées, 'Armée de terre'.

16 Ministère des Armées, 'L'Armée de terre, 1re division'.

17 Ministère des Armées, 'L'Armée de terre, 3e division'.

18 Ministère des Armées, 'L'Armée de terre, le niveau divisionnaire'.

19 Ministère des Armées, 'Opérations, Mission Lynx'; Permanent Representation of France in NATO, 'French troops deployed in Estonia'; Sundberg, *Frankrikes säkerhetspolitik*, p. 25–28; Ministère des Armées, 'Dossier de presse: Mission Opérationnelle Lynx', May 2019.

20 Sundberg, *Frankrikes säkerhetspolitik*, p. 17–18.

21 Guibert, Nathalie, 'L'armée de terre française envisage de futurs affrontements «Etat contre Etat»', *Le Monde*, 17 June 2020.

22 Mackenzie, Christina, 'French forces to get new batch of Jaguar, Griffon armored vehicles', *Defense News*, 23 September 2020.

23 Sprenger, Sebastian, 'France, Germany kick off race "for quantum leaps" in aircraft and tank tech', *Defense News*, 19 June 2018.

24 Ministère des Armées, 'Marine nationale'.

25 Cols bleus, Marine nationale. 'Dossier d'information marine', September 2016; Ministère des Armées, 'Marine nationale'.

France's second naval base is located in Brest, on the Atlantic coast. Brest is home port for frigates tasked with protecting the strategic submarines and the bulk of the mine clearance fleet. Brest also holds a command centre responsible for overseeing all operational aspects of the strategic naval force. The Navy's four nuclear ballistic missile submarines are based in L'Île Longue, near Brest.²⁶

The third naval base is Cherbourg, on the northern coast; it is the home port of a flotilla of patrol boats and a unit of mine-clearance divers, with support vessels. The navy runs the coast guard and has units on constant alert for this type of mission.

The navy also has four naval air bases with a total of 15 maritime air squadrons (flotilles).²⁷ The French Marines are distributed in ten locations in France, with a focus on the protection of other naval forces and maritime special operations. The main base of the force is in L'orient, on the Atlantic coast.

The French Navy has one aircraft carrier with on-board fighter jets, and three helicopter carriers. With regard to other surface combat vessels, the figures vary slightly, but the navy has approximately 11 destroyers and 11 frigates. In addition, France has 9 submarines, including 4 nuclear missile submarines (SSBN) and 5 nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSN). The naval aviation has 42 Rafale Marine fighter jets, 3 Hawkeye aircraft for combat command, and 22 Atlantique 2 maritime surveillance aircraft, as well as 22 NH 90/Caïman and 14 Lynx helicopters. The North Atlantic is attracting increasing interest in the light of Russian activities and the navy has stressed the need for regular naval presence. The Navy's nuclear missile submarines are already patrolling the area.²⁸

The aim of the ongoing Navy reform programme, Horizon Marine 2025, is to renew the bulk of the materiel. In particular, the lack of frigates limits the ability to act, so that the plans include a modernisation of existing frigates and the acquisition of 3 new multi-role destroyers

(FREMM). There is also a need to replace the dated patrol boat fleet. A process is to be initiated to replace the country's aircraft carrier within 20 years and, as part of the current long-term defence plan, four new attack submarines will be acquired.²⁹ There is also an urgent need for transport ships and tankers. Two new ships of this kind will be operational by 2025; two more are expected in 2030. Moreover, France needs to rely on civilian light helicopters to replace helicopters that have reached the end of their expected lifespan.³⁰

Air Force

The French Air Force consists of about 40,500 airmen and operates 25 air bases around France. The air force is also present in Djibouti, in French territories outside of Europe, and in several international operations.³¹

The figures vary slightly from one source to another, but the Air Force fighter fleet is estimated at 220 aircraft, half of which are Rafale multirole aircraft, often described as the backbone of air defence, and half are the older Mirage 2000 aircraft. France currently has approximately 80 transport aircraft of various types.³² The air force regularly contributes to the Baltic Air Policing (BAP) mission; in 2018, French fighter jets were based for the first time at Ämari air base, in Estonia.³³

There are many reports of deficiencies in the French Air Force. Air refuelling capacity is a particular concern, but the need for more modern transport aircraft and fighter jets is also stressed. As regards air refuelling capacity, France plans to replace the 50-year-old aircraft (14 C-135FR and KC-135 Stratotankers) with new multirole aircraft (A-330 MRTT/Phénix), with one to be delivered in 2020. The original plan for 12 new planes has increased to 15, of which the extra three will be delivered in 2025–2030.³⁴ The new A-330 MRTT multirole aircraft will also strengthen the strategic airlift capability. Furthermore, the smaller transport aircraft, Transall C-160, which has been

26 Kristensen, Hans. M. and Korda, Matt, 'French nuclear forces', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 75:1, 2019: p. 51–55.

27 Ministère des Armées, 'Marine nationale. Bases d'aéronautique navale'.

28 Ministère des Armées, 'Marine nationale 2016', p. 7. Ministère des Armées 'Marine nationale'.

29 Ministère des Armées, 'La LPM 2019–2025: le deuxième porte-avions n'est pas pour demain', 9 February 2018; Tran, Pierre, 'Macron signs French military budget into law. Here's what the armed forces are getting', *Defense news*, 16 July 2018.

30 Le Télégramme. 'Armées. De bonnes nouvelles pour la Marine', 9 February 2018.

31 Ministère des Armées, 'Armée de l'Air'.

32 Ministère des Armées, *Defence Key Figures 2019 Edition* p. 27.

33 Ministère des Armées, 'Opérations, OTAN, Police du ciel'; Ambassade de France en Estonie, 'Enhanced Air Policing 2018: fin de mandat pour le détachement français'.

34 Tran, 'Macron signs'; Ministère des Armées, 'Projet de Loi de Finances, p. 22–23.

Table: Personnel and materiel in the French Armed Forces

Personnel/Materiel	Numbers in 2020	Planned reforms towards 2025
Personnel		
Regular force	206,000	+ 6,000
Reserves ^a	38,500	
Paramilitary forces	100,000 (reserves: 30,000)	
Materiel		
Tanks	220 (Leclerc)	
Armoured combat vehicles	625 (VBCI)	
Heavy artillery pieces	145 (77 155 mm self-propelled canon, CAESAR, 32 AU-F-1, 12 155 mm towed artillery TR-F-1, 13 M270 MLRS)	
Attack helicopters	66 (Tiger)	
Surface combatants	26 (1 aircraft carrier, 3 amphibious assault ships, 11 destroyers, 11 frigates)	3 new destroyers (FREMM) by 2022 and update of existing frigates
Submarines	9 (4 SSBN , 5 SSN)	
Combat aircraft	220 (Rafale, Mirage 2000)	28 new Rafale aircraft and 55 upgraded Mirage 2000 aircraft by 2025
Transport aircraft	80 (mainly CN235, C130 Hercules, C160R Transall, A400M Atlas), 16 tanker aircraft (C135FR, KC135 and A330 MRTT Phénix)	

NB: a. Ministère des Armées, ‘La Garde Nationale’.

in service since the 1960s, is supposed to be replaced by 25 A400M aircraft by 2025. By 2019, 16 of these aircraft had been delivered and two more are expected in 2020.³⁵

In addition to the joint development of the next-generation battle tank, France and Germany have agreed to develop a next-generation air combat system (Système de Combat Aérien du Futur, SCAF), by 2040. In the case of France, this programme intends to replace the Rafale fighter jets, but possibly also the Mirage 2000.³⁶ Under the current long-term defence plan, 28 new Rafale aircraft will be acquired and 55 Mirage 2000 aircraft will be upgraded by 2025.³⁷

The air force has suffered from particularly low operational readiness of both aircraft and helicopters. According to several sources, less than half of the aircraft are fully operational and the situation has continued to

worsen. In particular, the introduction of the A400M is experiencing problems. Moreover, the costs of maintenance and logistics have risen and a simplified maintenance process has been proposed to solve the problem.³⁸

Personnel and materiel

France ended conscription in 1996. For several years, staff reductions and other rationalisations were carried out. Following the November 2015 terrorist attacks, the planned staff reductions were suspended. Instead, recruitment began, in particular in cyber defence and intelligence. The current long-term defence plan aims at an increase of 6,000 posts by 2025.³⁹

For the French Armed Forces, the many and enduring operations have in recent years led to increasingly worn materiel. Therefore, the current long-term defence plan

35 Tran, Pierre, ‘France meets A400M milestone early’, 22 March 2018; Ministère des Armées. ‘Projet de Loi de Finances’; Ministère des Armées, ‘16e A400M: premier aéronef capable de larguer 16 tonnes de matériel en une seule fois’.

36 Sprenger, Sebastian. ‘France, Germany kick’.

37 Tran, Pierre. ‘Macron signs’.

38 Sources indicate that only one Caracal helicopter out of four, and one to two A400M aircraft out of a total of 15, are available. In the case of Rafale fighter jets, availability is around 49 per cent, and even less for other aircraft: 22 per cent of the C-130 transport aircraft, 25 per cent of the Tiger attack helicopters and 26 per cent of the Lynx helicopters; see Mulholland, Rory, ‘Ground force: Half of France’s military planes “unfit to fly”’, *The Telegraph*, 16 December 2017; Ministère des Armées, ‘Discours de Florence Parly, ministre des Armées, sur le plan de modernisation du maintien en condition opérationnelle (MCO) aéronautique’, 11 December 2017.

39 Sundberg, Anna, ‘France – Between north and south, and everywhere’, in Eellend, Johan, Roszbach Niklas H. and Sundberg, Anna, *The Russian wake-up call to Europe: French, German and British security priorities*, FOI-R--427--SE (Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency – FOI, 2016), p. 48; Ministère des Armées. ‘Projet de Loi Actualisation de la Programmation Militaire 2014/2019 – Dossier thématique’, 2014; Ministère des Armées. ‘La Loi de programmation militaire 2019–2025 en 5 minutes’.

prioritises the renewal and replacement of equipment. Increased resources are allocated to maintenance at the same time as maintenance procedures are being reformed in order to match the high operational needs.

The materiel for the armed forces has traditionally been acquired nationally. France maintains a significant national defence industry, encompassing global defence companies and a large number of small and medium enterprises. France regards the defence industry as a strategic resource underpinning national strategic autonomy. It is also a means to strengthen the country's international standing through arms exports. That said, the current long-term defence plan calls for enhanced European cooperation in the industrial development of new materiel, for example regarding UAVs, maritime patrol vessels, mine-countermeasures vessels and the already-mentioned cooperation with Germany regarding the next-generation tanks and air combat systems.⁴⁰

ASSESSMENT OF MILITARY CAPABILITY

France has comparatively large armed forces, located both in France and across the world. France has distinguished itself from other European countries in recent years by having a large number of forces on high alert both nationally and in international operations, often in harsh conditions. In addition, France has important strategic resources, such as an aircraft carrier and nuclear weapons. However, demanding commitments coupled with budget restraints have stretched the armed forces. Furthermore, there are shortcomings in terms of both quality and operational readiness, while the room for manoeuvre in Northern Europe is limited by France's focus on security challenges in the south.

As far as NATO's ongoing efforts on the eastern flank are concerned, a continued, but limited, French involvement can be expected on the ground, in the air, and at sea. France has a mechanised company of 300-400 ground troops in the Baltic states as part of eFP. They would most likely be ready within a few days in a crisis situation. In addition, France has maritime components patrolling the North Atlantic and from time to time fighter jets within the Baltic air policing mission.

There is no indication of any plans to expand the French presence on the eastern flank. However, a deteriorating security situation in the Baltic Sea region would almost certainly mean that resources would be distributed

differently and that France, as an EU and NATO member, would increase its presence. Solidarity is a key concept for France and, in addition to NATO's Article 5 and collective defence, France has pushed for the operational use of Article 42.7 in the EU treaty on mutual assistance in case of an armed attack. In the event of a deteriorating security situation, it would be difficult for France to back away, given the stated French ambition that Europe should take more responsibility for security and defence. Moreover, by contributing to the security of Northern Europe, France can demonstrate that, regardless of geography, European security is the responsibility of the whole of Europe.

Apart from the forces abroad, the ground forces have 1.5 air mobile battalion and the equivalent of a battalion of special operations units placed at high readiness. In addition, there are 5 mechanised battalions at 30 days readiness or higher. Of the mechanised battalions, 2-3 would likely be available within a week. In addition, up to one battalion of mountain infantry and one battalion of marine infantry may be available. Considering the problems reported when it comes to maintenance and operational readiness of materiel, the navy and air force would likely have one-third of the units ready within a week. This means that the French Navy would be able to mobilise 1 helicopter carrier, 3-4 destroyers, 3-4 frigates, 1-2 attack submarines (SSN), 2 naval air squadrons, and 4-5 Marine units. The French Air Force would likely have 3-4 fighter squadrons, up to 1 tanker squadron, 2 air transport squadrons, and 1 helicopter squadron ready within a week. Furthermore, as France attaches great importance to its nuclear deterrent, 1-2 nuclear missile submarines (SSBN) and one squadron of airborne nuclear fighters would most likely be able to conduct deterrence operations at short notice.⁴¹

A limiting factor for France's ability to act, however, is that the French armed forces continue to be away on and burdened by other operations. Furthermore, France has strategic interests in other parts of the world and may choose to prioritise its involvement elsewhere. Strategic capability deficiencies, such as air refuelling, are another limiting factor that already have an impact on international operations. In connection with Mission Lynx – the French contribution to eFP – strategic movement has been identified as a challenge. The difficulties have mainly consisted of formalities at border crossings, which are considered to be temporary. The strategic movement capacity in Europe

⁴⁰ Sundberg, *Frankrikes säkerhetspolitik*, p. 23-24.

⁴¹ On France and the nuclear deterrent, see Haute-couverture, Benjamin and Maitre, Emanuelle, *La France et la dissuasion nucléaire: le discours de l'École de Guerre du président Macron*, Note numéro 03/20 (Paris: Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, 11 February 2020); Elysée. 'Discours du Président Emmanuel Macron sur la stratégie de défense et de dissuasion'. 7 February 2020.

is otherwise claimed to be good in the army, supported by military heavy transport trucks and railway wagons.⁴²

The French armed forces have extensive experience of rapid intervention and operations in warlike conditions. France also has a proven ability to support its forces in action. However, most of the operations have taken place in an operational context that in many ways is different from that of Northern Europe, with smaller and lighter formations, and where France's well-established network of permanent bases, available logistics and local knowledge are important cornerstones of its capability. The army has consequently started a process to regain the capability for inter-state combat in Europe's neighbourhood.

Another aspect to consider is the level of endurance. Although France is capable of quick, high-intensity operations, the French forces in longer operations will have to depend on the cooperation and support of other countries. In ongoing international operations, France is dependent on assistance, for example, in air refuelling and tactical transport. Furthermore, the aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle needs both frigates and submarines as a protective shield, which is often provided by foreign countries.

Looking at the future development of the French military capability, there has been a positive trend, in terms of higher defence spending, since 2015, which according to the current long-term defence plan will continue until at least 2025, when France is to meet NATO's goal of spending 2 per cent of GDP on defence. Whether

France will reach this target in 2025 and be able to finance the planned equipment projects is still too early to say. Macroeconomic developments, the outcome of the 2022 presidential election and military strategic developments will influence the outcome. It is also clear that France is postponing major investments until the next president.

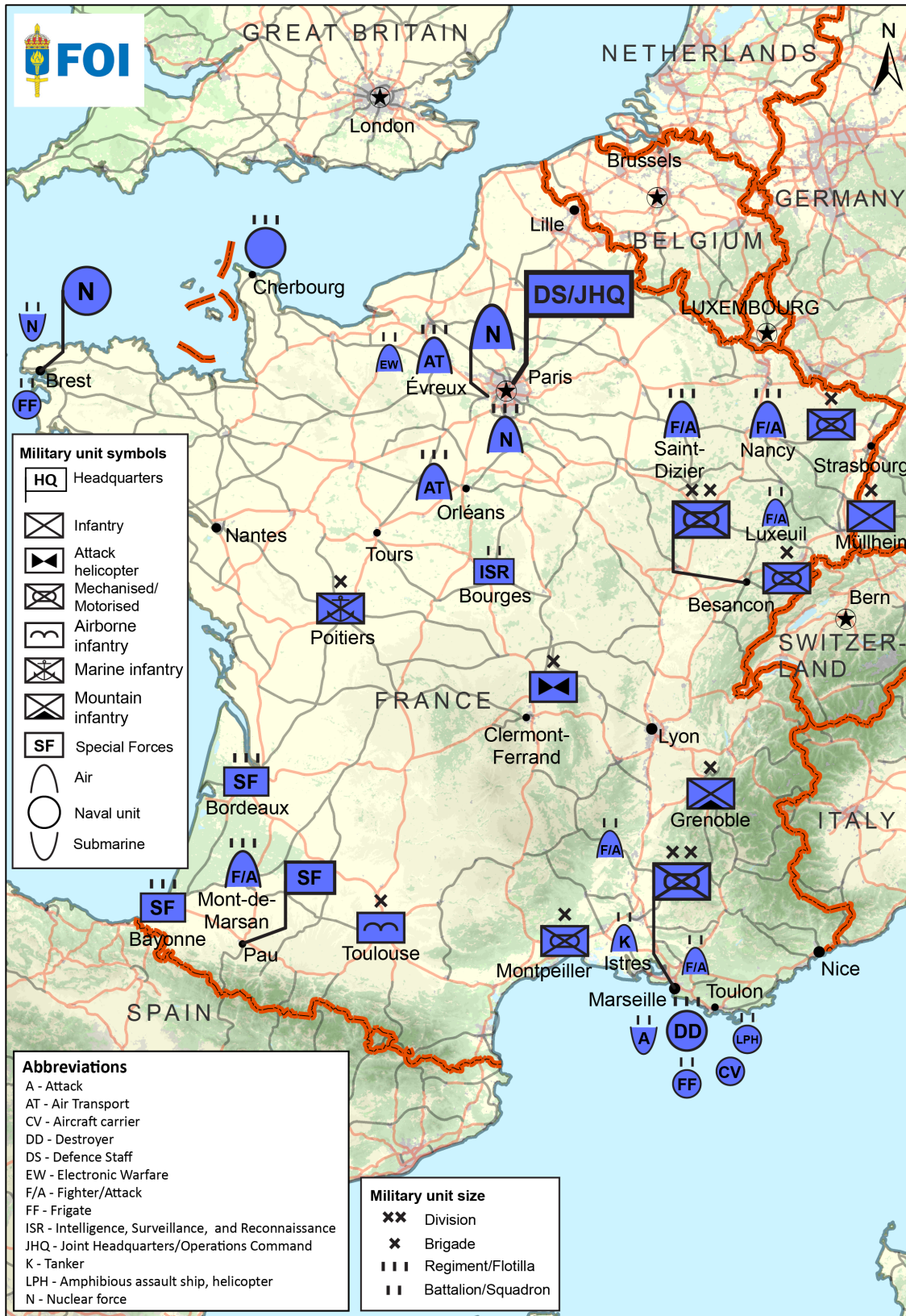
The land forces have been most affected by the tough pace of action and for the coming years the focus is on renewing their personal basic equipment, but also more than 1,700 armoured vehicles are to be purchased for the army. As far as the navy is concerned, the aim is to renew the bulk of the materiel, including through the modernisation of existing destroyers and frigates and the acquisition of new frigates and patrol vessels. As concerns the air force, the intention is to gradually replace both the air refuelling and transport aircraft. The Minister of Defence has also taken steps to increase the availability of French fighter aircraft, including through a simplified maintenance process. Although support for nuclear weapons is deeply entrenched in France and strongly associated with the notion of strategic autonomy, a domestic political debate is to be expected when they need to be modernised. The investment in conventional weapons could be set against future investment in nuclear weapons. France may also have to review its operational commitments in order to achieve a better balance between funds and ambition. It will take time for the cooperation initiatives, launched with among others Germany, to have an impact on the military capability. ■

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⁴² Sundberg, *Frankrikes säkerhetspolitik*, p 25–26; Ministère des Armées, 'Lynx 6: Un désengagement réussi'.

Table: Force structure of the French Armed Forces

	Organisation 2020	Planned reforms towards 2025	Assessment of forces available at short notice
Joint	Strategic Nuclear Forces - Naval Strategic Forces Command (4 nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines) - Air Strategic Forces Command (2 striker squadrons) Space Command (7 communication satellites) Cyber Defence Command Special Operations Forces Command (army, navy and air force special forces units)		1–2 nuclear missile submarines 1 strategic striker squadron (Airborne nuclear component) 3–6 special forces companies
Army	1 st mechanised division (1 mountain infantry brigade, 1 marine infantry brigade, 1 mechanised brigade, 1 infantry brigade (French/ German Brigade), 1 artillery regiment, 1 engineer regiment, 1 military working dog infantry regiment) 3rd mechanised division (1 airborne brigade, 2 mechanised brigades, 1 artillery regiment, 1 engineer regiment, 1 CBRN-defence regiment) Light Aviation Command (1 air-combat brigade)	A total of 1,700 new armoured vehicles, half of which to be delivered before 2025	1 mechanised company deployed to eFP 2–3 mechanised battalions Up to 1 mountain infantry battalion Up to 1 marine infantry battalion 1.5 air combat battalions at high readiness nationally
Navy	3 naval bases (1 aircraft carrier, 3 helicopter carriers, 11 destroyers 11 frigates, 22 patrol and coastal combatants, 17 mine warfare/countermeasures, 5 attack submarines) 4 naval aviation bases (3 fighter squadrons, 1 anti-surface warfare squadron, 3 anti-submarine warfare squadrons, 4 maritime patrol squadrons, 1 airborne early warning/control squadron) Marines (14 manoeuvre units, 1 combat support unit, 1 combat service support unit)		1/3 of the available units or less: - 1 helicopter carrier - 3–4 destroyers - 3–4 frigates - 1–2 attack submarines - 1 air fighter squadron - 4–5 units of Marines
Air Force	Air Defence and Air Operations Command 9 fighter squadrons (Mirage 2000, Rafale) 2 strike squadrons (Rafale) 2 tanker squadrons (A330 MRTT, C-135FR) 7 air transport squadrons (A400M, Hercules C-130, Transall C-160, A310, A340) 4 helicopter transport squadrons 1 airborne early warning and control squadron 1 electronic warfare squadron 1 air defence squadron		1/3 of the available units or less: - 3–4 fighter/striker squadrons - 0.5–1 tanker squadron - 2 transport squadrons - 1 helicopter transport squadron



Map: Overview of French armed forces and their basing

NB: Design by Per Wikström. The map covers mainly operational headquarters and manoeuvre forces.

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