



"To arms citizens!": war and finance, politics and sovereignty...

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The worrying situation of French public finances has long seemed to make the military and budgetary issues irreconcilable. At a time when the security of the citizen and the defence of the nation have regained a central place in the public debate, it seems appropriate to improve understanding of the defence-budget-sovereignty relationship.

Co understand the principles of military action to ensure its long-term defence

This is war. This state of affairs is not new to the military, which has long been engaged in operations far removed from "peacekeeping" alone. Nor is it new for the observer who has endeavoured to look objectively at the evolution of the national and international situation. It now seems to have been taken on unanimously by the nation and the political authorities.

In order to wage war, soldiers are needed. That is true. In return, the soldier always has the same needs: a leader, a mission and the means to act. Because in recent years the level of commitment of our armies has been increasing and resources are struggling to keep up, it seems necessary to explain to our fellow citizens what is specific about military means. Perhaps they will then appreciate differently the recurring confrontations between Bercy and the armies. Perhaps they will agree that some action is needed. Perhaps they will then want, through national representation or more directly, to regain a voice on defence issues from which they have gradually become detached.

Recognise that military action is, by its very nature, in tension with budgetary logic

First of all, because a defence tool is forged over a long period of time. In the face of existing and foreseeable threats, it is indeed a question of equipping the nation with appropriate military capabilities. Establishing a doctrine that provides a framework for the way in which forces are engaged is a long-term undertaking. Recruiting, training and educating tomorrow's deployed soldiers starts today. Developing equipment that is specific in nature and ensuring its long-term support is not instantaneous. Military time will therefore always be under tension with budgetary time, whose unit of measurement is the year. The Military Programming Act was conceived as the tool that would allow the reconciliation of agendas. Has it been respected even once in the face of budgetary emergencies?

Secondly, because victory rests on the acquisition of a favourable balance of power, at least locally and temporarily. It is through mass, i.e. brute force, combined with manoeuvring capabilities, i.e. the ability to assemble available forces in time and space, that the soldier acquires superiority over the enemy. The technology at his disposal naturally helps him to do so. Because he is the guarantor of the success of the mission entrusted to him and because he commits his life and that of his men, he legitimately wants to have an optimum arsenal at his disposal. Military action will therefore always be in tension with the desire for budgetary moderation.

Finally, because adapting and dominating in order to face and defeat require the constitution of reserves. Military action takes place in the real world in the face of a constantly evolving enemy. Soldiers must therefore be able to anticipate and react to seize opportunities and reduce their own vulnerabilities. Even the best-informed man remains helpless if he does not have the capacity to act "just in case". Military action will therefore always be in tension with the concept of "just-in-time" and the budgetary principle of justification "at the first euro", military expenditure being justified at best only after the event...

Facing the challenges of short time without sacrificing the needs of long time

Faced with this triple tension, what can be done to reconcile military and budgetary issues? First of all, let us acknowledge that many players on both sides are working on it on a daily basis. However, it seems possible to strengthen the dynamic along three lines.

The first is to ensure the readability and credibility of needs and resources. The Ministry of the Budget is the nation's guarantor of the proper use of its finances. It is therefore legitimate for the budget to be able to discuss defence spending. On condition, however, that it makes an effort to understand the foundations of defence spending. The military must accept it and help it in this task. Conversely, the military must be able to know exactly what resources are being allocated to it and to what extent it will actually be available to it. When ignorance and mistrust reign, confrontation is never far away. Let us therefore increase the number of exchanges, let us equip ourselves with the tools that will allow us to do so, so that together we can concentrate on what is essential.

The second is to take greater account of the contribution of the armed forces to other public policies. In addition to defending France and its interests, the armed forces have a "collateral" effect in many other areas: social cohesion, employment, education, research

and development, etc. The fact is recognised, but what about budgetary trade-offs? What is the return for the armed forces when they "return" to civil society, each year, thousands of competent workers with a sense of community and commitment? What return for defence when it finances cutting-edge research such as the megajoule laser, the benefits of which are ultimately rather hypothetical? If the budgetary mechanism does not allow for quantitative valuation, it is urgent to adapt it.

The third is to contribute to the creation of a "strategic budget reserve". This time, the tools (government reserve) and mechanisms (taking into account the additional cost of external operations) exist. However, we are aware of their limitations. The programmed and recurrent constitution of a budgetary reserve dedicated to national defence appears to be the only way to guarantee the military to be able to mobilise resources in the face of new needs, while at the same time ensuring that politics retains its full freedom of decision. This would be a strong act that would finally make it possible to meet the challenges of the short term without sacrificing the needs of the long term. Current challenges and long-term prospects certainly require it.

Reinvesting in defence issues

While they may feel incompetent in the face of the technical and political nature of these issues, our compatriots must know that they are at the heart of them. Ensuring their defence and security is the primary role of the State. Another, equally important, is to make proper use of the taxes that are paid. Attentive and sometimes worried, they legitimately expect to be protected and to see their contribution used prudently. Yet let me invite them to reinvest in these issues that have sometimes escaped them. Let me remind them that armies are THEIR armies. That OUR defence will not be built without THEM. That the military and the budget are the artisans of THEIR sovereignty.

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