

For a clear and realistic role for armies in the fight against "militarised" terrorists

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Groupe de liaison G2S

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The latest jihadist attacks in Brussels are urging Europeans to take the right measure of the threat to our security and defence posed by, among others, the Islamic state today and probably radical Islam in the future.

The call for armies to ensure the protection of the territory and the population responds to their priority mission, to their vocation of always and it is all the merit of the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces.e de terre for having put the army back at the heart of this problem, even before the tragic events of 2015, and for having obtained since then an increase in its strength to respond to it. However, the Vigipirate plan or Operation Sentinel are not representative of territorial defence, as last resort scenarios, much more demanding, could be envisaged.

Therefore, well before defining the "conditions of employment of armies on the territory when they intervene to protect the population", it would be advisable, once again, to go back to the purpose of the army, and to put it in perspective as a last resort, as a safeguard for the nation and a guarantee of the government's freedom of action in extreme situations. A purpose which is not linked to the conditions of its employment and which, henceforth, requires redefinition on the national territory, in order to meet both the expectations of our fellow citizens and the pressing demand of the military for optimum employment.

The two reports submitted to the government last month, that of the General Secretariat for Defence and National Security (SGDSN), classified as "The military's role in the defence sector" and "The military's role in the security sector", are available at .and therefore not made public, and that of the Ministry of Defence on this subject simply initiate reflection, but remain prisoners of procedures, modes of action and material issues. They are not sufficient to define satisfactorily the use of the army (land forces), which is primarily concerned by this ultimate ratio mission, when the time comes. The reflection must

therefore be continued and deepened, since as it stands it has many shortcomings.

This dossier is intended to provide food for thought on an extremely serious subject which, regrettably, has not been given more thought. It is regrettable that in recent years it has not been given more thought or a relevant legal framework, as has been the case for the other armed forces, the permanent positions of maritime and aviation security. We know the reasons for this, but the result is there.

The five authors of this dossier bring different insights from a variety of viewpoints. For them, it is a given that the army must, in exceptional circumstances, assume a priority mission on national territory. This mission must be carried out in a way that is categorically different from that of the security forces - police and gendarmerie - in terms of its purpose, the methods of action implemented, its scope and the authority to use it. On the other hand, it seems important to look at all the negative side effects, well described here and there, on the maintenance of the operational capabilities of the land forces, as they emerge in particular from the current operating procedures and the indefinite permanence of Operation Sentinel.

The Ministry's report, for its part, in creating this land protection posture, merely confirms a situation experienced by the armies with the Vigipirate plan since 1996 and then the current Operation Sentinel, on a larger scale. It does not propose any new operational or legal provisions for a mission that still falls within the scope of public order in its premises but which could, without warning, drift towards a paroxysmal situation, or even a "war" situation in the words of the executive.

Consequently, it maintains ambiguity and confusion about defence and security missions, about the different nature of the armed forces and the security forces, about the sharing of responsibilities between military and security authorities, and about the role of the armed forces in the defence and security sectors. It also leads to the downgrading of civil authorities down to the lowest levels, by the indifferenciation of missions between military units and internal security forces and, finally, by the imprecise subordination of the one to the other, which is not only a matter of interoperability factors, etc.

Military leaders are still in the best position to reason coldly about the conditions of employment of armies, both outside and within the national territory, to assess current threats and military solutions that contribute to the political goal sought: here, the eradication of the terrorist threat on metropolitan soil when the security forces are no longer sufficient for the task. Let us listen in their works to the professionals that the Republic has given itself; they simply ask for a clear definition of objectives, including the designation of an adversary (enemy?), a coherent sharing of responsibilities to be assumed and autonomy of appreciation and decision in the means to be implemented and in their use. This does not seem to be the case with the current guidelines.

An association under the law of 1901, the G2S is a group made up of general officers of the army who have recently left active service. They intend to pool their experience and expertise in defence issues, including their strategic and economic aspects, to give their vision of the desirable development prospects for defence.

Title : Groupe de liaison G2S

Author (s) : Groupe de liaison G2S

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