



A strong army-nation bond, or the survival of the army...

military-Earth thinking notebook

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L'Armée de Terre dans la société

Heckled, sometimes weakened, but never really questioned, the armed-nation link is going through reforms of the military institution and changes in society. The White Paper on Defence and Security of 2013 introduces this notion in its preamble. At the heart of the problem of the relationship between society and its professional army, this link naturally legitimises, by its strength, the action and very existence of the latter. After shedding semantic light on the notions of army, nation and the link that unites them, the state of the art, on the eve of a new and important reform of armies, will allow us to become aware of the stakes of the indifference that society could have towards a professional army.

The notion of the armed-nation link

- The words army and nation

The armed forces, land, sea, air and gendarmerie, hold and deploy France's weapons. They are placed at the disposal of the French State to preserve its vital and economic interests and to ensure the free exercise of its sovereignty. France can thus contribute both to the security and defence of the European and Mediterranean area and to actions in favour of peace and international law. These essential notions are recalled in various texts having the force of law.

Article L1111-1 of the Defence Code states that the purpose of defence policy is to ensure the integrity of the territory and the protection of the population against armed aggression. Similarly, Ordinance 59-147 of 7 January 1959, article 1, establishes that the purpose of defence is to ensure at all times, in all circumstances and against all forms of aggression the security and integrity of the territory and the life of the population. The President of the Republic, legitimately elected by the people forming a political entity, is the head of the armies.

This institution, which is responsible for the protection of a group of individuals, whether or not they are present on a given territory, therefore appears to be the military emanation of the nation.

From the Latin "natio", meaning birth or extraction, a nation is a human community that is aware of being united by a historical, cultural, linguistic or religious identity. It can thus be characterized by objective elements such as territory, ethnicity, language, religion, culture or the State. But it is also a political construction, the result of a common past of effort, sacrifice and devotion, the knowledge and consideration of which guarantee social and national cohesion. All these reasons, linked to the country's history, allow the legislative power to build on this idea to consolidate the nation on a daily basis, as a legal person made up of persons governed by the same constitution.

- History

The armed-nation link in France has its roots in history, and more precisely in a republican tradition that stems from the Revolution. It was in September 1792 that soldiers, mostly volunteers, gathered en masse to defend the fragile nation and the integrity of the territory at Valmy. The notion of "Nation in arms" was born. It was made official by the law of 21 March 1905 instituting, in its compulsory and universal form, conscription, thus making it possible to involve citizens in the defence of the nation. Every citizen is a soldier called upon to defend the homeland, until the reform of Act No. 97-1019 of 28 October 1997 **suspending** national service.

The link between the army and French society has always evolved, oscillating between tension and relaxation. However, there are a few moments that mark this characteristic in particular.

Firstly, the period between the Debré Law 70-596 of 9 **July 1970 and the Richard Law of 1997**, both relating to **national service**. Indeed, during the 1970s, pacifist and anti-militarist currents of thought could give the impression of a separation, as illustrated by the slogan of the student demonstrations of the time: "The army is stupid, it stinks and it pollutes! In reality, it is more a matter of an apparent divorce than a substantive one, based on a forced but relatively brief relationship between French youth and their army. On the other hand, there is a split between the army leadership and the left-wing political world. The former see the "leftist" as an internal enemy, while the latter refer to the Algiers putsch to give the army an image of institutionalized disobedience. The Cold War, the identification of the USSR as a major enemy and the change of course of the French left on the nuclear issue in the years 1977-78 will largely contribute to the attenuation of this division. It will be almost closed again on 16 October 1989 with the first and symbolic commemoration of the Battle of Valmy as part of the bicentenary ceremonies of the French Revolution.

Beyond this purely political vision, the military community evolves and gets closer to the ways of life of the civil society. Several elements support this trend: the feminization of the army, reinforced by the unified status of 1972, the military family moving closer to the standard model with wives entering the work force, and a fertility rate at a level almost equivalent to that of the rest of the population.

Secondly, the application of the law leading to the suspension of military service in 1997. This project, led by a right-wing government, will be agreed upon and taken up by the left when it returns to power during the second cohabitation. By deciding in February 1996 to professionalize the French army, the President of the Republic suspended conscription, making a radical break with a two-secular history. Few people are aware of the "silent"

revolution then implemented by the army, which was successful if we believe the good image conveyed today by the professional army to public opinion.

The annual survey^[1] commissioned by the Ministry of Defence to assess the image of the armed forces is, on this point, interesting. Thus, the one conducted in April 2013 shows that 80% of those polled have a good image of the French Army, i.e. 6% more than in 2012, with 10% having an opposite feeling towards it. The value of French soldiers is also a popular topic, with 70% having a good opinion. Operation Serval in Mali has certainly played a role in these developments.

The state of the art today

Antimilitarism and pacifism are kept to a minimum. But the good image that public opinion now has of a professional army is also linked to growing indifference. The population knows less and less about its army, and political parties no longer really discuss defence issues at major electoral events, where they are generally relegated to the background.

- The 1997 reform: the transition to a professional army

The army no longer has the natural breeding ground of conscription that characterized its relations with the nation. It is no longer the "Nation in Arms", but a group of professionals who have opted for a military career. This situation is the result, among other things, of growing inequalities in the face of the obligation of national service, but also of the experience of the French commitment during the first Gulf War in 1991.

Most army personnel are not employed for life. Voluntary army recruits (EVAs), young non-commissioned officers and, increasingly, officers are on fixed-term contracts, the renewal of which is often subject to passing exams that mark out the life of the soldier, regardless of the level in the hierarchy. All assume, by accepting the status on engagement, the risks, constraints and loyalties imposed by it.

The suspension of national service has forced the armies and the nation to meet in different ways. The law created a Defence Preparation Call Day (JAPD), which since 2011 has become Defence and Citizenship Day (JDC). This day allows, in an interministerial but partial way, to draw up a sociological panorama of an age group. The army has therefore had to reposition itself and adopt an open approach in order to interest and attract young people. It is no longer just a question of waiting for conscripts at the gates of units.

The professionalised army has seen the end of border threats, particularly from the east, and, at the same time, the externalisation of its missions, which has led to an increase in the number of external operations (OPEX) over the last twenty years. These operations, beyond the judgement of expediency, have always received the support of the French. The primary mission of the armed forces, as recalled in the 2013 White Paper, remains the security of citizens, whether they are in metropolitan France or abroad. The updating and redeployment at national level of the Vigipirate plan following the 1995 attacks in Paris is the most representative example of this. It shows the extent to which armies are part of the life of the nation and its security in the face of diffuse risks. There is a continuity between defence, especially outside, and security, which relates more to the daily life of the population.

The military community is smaller and more homogeneous. Most spouses work,

regardless of rank, which leads to "common" lifestyles with the rest of the population. The fact remains that the military is not an ordinary citizen. He or she cannot be fully involved in social, local and political life. They cannot, for example, be municipal councillors or trade unionists.

- Reducing the size of armies

Professionalization had begun the decline in the size of the defence in general and the armies in particular. The White Papers of 2008 and 2013, followed by their respective military programming laws, confirmed this reduction in personnel, prison population and the weight of defence in the State budget. The armies will see their numbers shrink by nearly 20% between 2008 and 2014, i.e. 54,000 fewer military and civilian posts.

One of the consequences of these disappearances is an increasingly sparse geographical network, which highlights the previously unknown notion of a military desert leading to a de facto physical distance between the military and the nation. Some French regions no longer have military units, with the exception of the Centres d'information et de recrutement des armées (CIRFA) or the Departmental Military Delegations (DMD), which represent between five and ten military personnel. The only military personnel visible in the lives of the citizens of these deserted areas are the gendarmes, now under the dual supervision of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defence.

The risk today is that the increasing scarcity of professional military personnel in the daily lives of the population may give credence, within the nation, to the idea that defence is now a matter for experts, thus widening the gap between isolated specialists and society as a whole. It is essential that the army should be understood by the country that pays for it and, from this point of view, the nation's support for the policies implemented in the field of defence and national security is indispensable to justify the efforts that these entail, particularly in financial terms.

Fighting indifference and reinventing a new relationship

From the outset, the suspension of national service and professionalization were accompanied by measures to improve the nation's defence education and to renew the armed-nation bond. In addition, the armies also had to adapt their communication policies and openness to the outside world.

- Defence education and citizenship

"The spirit of defence (...) is in this regard the first foundation of national security. It is the manifestation of a collective will, based on the cohesion of the Nation and a shared vision of its destiny (...). There can be no effective defence and security without the support of the nation. This adhesion is the basis for the legitimacy of the efforts devoted to them and guarantees common resilience".

The 2013 White Paper sets out in a few words the State's desire to involve the various actors in the nation. In the event of a major crisis or threat at our borders, the spirit of defence must animate the entire nation and be symbolised, if need be, by general mobilisation.

The JAPD, which became the JDC, aimed to strengthen this spirit of defence and to contribute to the affirmation of the sense of belonging to the national community. It also

allows young people, boys and girls, to learn about the different possibilities for engagement in defence. It is an opportunity to highlight professional opportunities and to better develop exchanges between the defence personnel responsible for this day and the younger generations. The aim is to build lasting relationships through discussions, debates and testimonies, both formal and informal.

Interministerial action is favoured, and it is in this sense that in national education, the teaching of the principles of national and European defence organisation has been integrated into history and civic education courses, particularly in secondary schools. Defence education must, therefore, be aimed at the generations that have not performed military service, but also at the first generation of children whose fathers did not "do the army". The young adults who were 18 years old in 2001, when the last conscripts of the contingent were called up, will be 30 years old in 2013 and are therefore for the most part the parents of children in school.

In this regard, young people whose parents or close family have had military experience seem to have a comparatively better knowledge of the military and defence trades.

The Institute for Advanced Studies in National Defence (IHEDN), an autonomous public establishment since Decree 97-817 of 5 September 1997, has also played a full part in the academic trinomas, decentralized consultation and organizational structures set up under the authority of the Rector and involving the DMDs. The aim of this institute is to raise awareness of defence issues among senior executives in the public and private sectors, and to promote the emergence, in collaboration with universities and foundations, of a genuine French centre for high-level defence studies.

The reform has also made it possible to appoint an elected "defence correspondent" in each municipal council who provides a link at the local level, in particular with regard to issues of concern to the defence sector. The reform has also made it possible to appoint a "defence correspondent" in each municipal council, who provides a link at the local level, particularly for issues where an understanding of the spirit of defence is necessary, such as belonging to and defending the nation, but also the notion of collective memory.

- Communication and outreach efforts of the institution

The professional army strives to create and maintain close relations with the population through levers such as commemorative ceremonies, open-door demonstrations, twinning of units with surrounding communes or the creation of the citizens' reserve. The "great mute" must act to open up and improve communication. In this sense, the efforts of various partnerships with local authorities and companies, the nation-defence meetings launched in 2003, or the citizenship rallies represent a real challenge for recruitment, retraining and understanding of the army's action. Despite the reforms, the military remains an employer almost like any other. In 2013, 10,000 posts were to be filled in the Army, 3,000 in the Navy and 2,000 in the Air Force. In this sense, the institution must maintain its role as a social elevator, or more precisely as a social staircase, a notion that implies recognition of individual efforts. This is a not insignificant source of recruitment, as few companies are able to offer the opportunity to climb the ladder without initial training.

The volunteer scheme is also part of this approach to young people. It retains the spirit of service to the nation and marks the participation of the armed forces in the collective effort to integrate young people. This is also the case with the inter-ministerial "equal opportunities" plan initiated in 2008, which, together with the fight against exclusion, is an important issue for the cohesion and dynamism of our society.

The reserves, both operational and civic, also have a leading role to play in this respect, being able to strengthen the capacities of the professional army and to build up a diversified network to serve as a link with civil society. They thus use their networks to facilitate the retraining of military personnel at the end of their contract or to promote the orientation and recruitment of young people. Their breeding ground is very often found in participants in military periods of initiation or advanced training in national defence (PMIDN), which give young people a first concrete approach to the military environment.

In all these respects, the armed-nation link is essential because the army, an emanation of the nation, must be understood and supported by the country that pays for it. The nation's adherence to the policies implemented in the field of defence and national security is thus indispensable to justify the efforts that these policies imply. This does not mean that it should become an obsession, that the professional army should be constantly checking the support it feels it should receive, or that it should have to constantly reconsider what it is doing and its legitimacy. And that is the greatest difficulty.

1) Produced by the LH2 Institute

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