



For a "Ministry of the Armed Forces" and a comprehensive defence policy

military-Earth thinking notebook

le Chef d'escadron Thierry PERN

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Histoire & stratégie

Squadron leader Thierry Pern pleaded for the end of the "Ministry of Defence" appellation and a return to the original appellation of the Fifth Republic: the Ministry of the Armed Forces. An illustration of this personal opinion is proposed at the end of the speech through the example of the nuclear, radiological, biological and chemical (NRBC) issues.

"War is too serious a matter to be left to the military alone..."

Clemenceau's famous joke has remained in the memory and, paradoxically, it seems more relevant than ever. Indeed, the Fifth Republic wanted to set up a global defence (economic, industrial, technological, diplomatic...) with the ordinance of 7 January 1959. Unfortunately, this initial desire does not seem to have really taken root in our culture and political philosophy. Admittedly, the rapprochement of the notions of internal security and defence and, in particular, the emergence of the notion of resilience have contributed to the development of a collective awareness of the need for a broader coordination of various competences. In the same vein, the parliamentary vote on military commitments and the periodic revision of white papers are, in theory, likely to foster the spirit of defence. The whole process has, moreover, led to the drafting of a new defence code, with the law of 29 July 2009, which establishes a national security strategy. This text explicitly specifies that all public policies contribute to national security. Alas, an error, even a mistake, has long been established in our vocabulary: defence is in fact the name of a ministry, even though it is the responsibility of the Prime Minister according to the Constitution (Articles 9 and 21), and is therefore an eminently inter-ministerial issue. The end of national service has only exacerbated the disastrous collective perception that the defence of the country is the military's business.

The name is an omen

Historically, the reason for this appellation is simple. In 1969, Michel Debré, a former Prime Minister, agreed to join the government when Georges Pompidou became Head of State. However, the main draftsman of the constitution did not intend to content himself with the simple title of Minister of the Armed Forces, which had been precisely established by the Fifth Republic. He therefore obtained the more regalian title of Minister (of State) in charge of National Defence. Michel Debré thus received a delegation of powers normally devolved to the Prime Minister and will, for example, have the General Secretariat for National Defence (SGDN) under his authority. He will also lead the drafting of the first white paper to define our country's strategy at a time when the implementation of nuclear deterrence was nearing completion. It should be noted in passing that the term "national" will not remain attached to the name of the ministry after Michel Debré's departure. Finally, the protocol rank of the ministry will soon depend on the political influence of the portfolio holder and will therefore no longer be a notion of "status"... even though the law defines a function with this protocol rank, in particular to settle the vacancy of powers.

Defence: a politically correct cover-up of the ultima ratio

However, this appellation of "Défense" is not only French. It is even tending to become the standard towards which many very diverse countries, including all our allies, are converging. In France itself, this term is not really new since it was adopted as early as 1932, briefly and then consistently by the Third Republic just before the ^{Second} World War. The adoption of the term "National Defence and the Armed Forces" in the 1930s was then in response to an objective of coordinating efforts between the armies, each of which retained a ministerial department or secretariat of state.

The objectives sought at the time of this reorganization are therefore quite different from our contemporary concerns. The aim was to master the complexity of a general mobilization of millions of men, to administer huge state arsenals while at the same time looking after our colonies and associated territories. As a result, it made sense at the time to combine the Departments of War, Navy, Air, Armaments and Veterans Affairs into a huge Department of National Defence and the Armed Forces. The main vice of this organization was a lack of unity in political leadership and a dilution of responsibilities, things that General de Gaulle would try to resolve with the Fifth Republic.

The problems are very different today and we 21st century Europeans live ⁱⁿ societies where war has become unthinkable. As a result, this gentle word for defence preserves our ears from a more martial vocabulary. Is the term defence, which is often associated with the notion of legitimacy for the general public (self-defence), perhaps a semantic presentation to justify one of many traditional state missions? Conversely, the term defence may be more realistically explained elsewhere in the world. For example, countries that do not have the same relationship to the use of force, such as North Korea or Syria, for example, also have a realistic interest in having a modest defence ministry. Machiavelli was right when he said that "the Prince need not be virtuous, he only has to be seen to be virtuous"!

But if, as General de Gaulle reminded us, an army is first of all used to make war and, in the meantime, to prepare for it, let us not forget that a war or an armed conflict is won first and foremost thanks to the efforts of the people. what Clausewitz theorized with his famous trinity between the people, their government and the army. Consequently, to reduce, even if only in representations, defence to the sole business of the military is both an institutional and a strategic mistake. In short, our country's spirit of defence would

therefore benefit from no longer being monopolized by a single ministry in the representations of public opinion.

The army, one of the means to an end: defence and national security

It should also be pointed out that the term "defence" is also too simplistic to describe all the actions carried out by this ministry. Indeed, the Army of the Republic, defined in the texts (article L4111-1 of the Defence Code) as being at the service of the nation, carries out daily a good number of actions. actions that do not strictly fall within the scope of defence, such as, for example, public service missions, support for the security forces, State action at sea or aid to the population. Consequently, the term defence does not correctly reflect the interministerial vocation of armies, just as it wrongly suggests that defence could be carried out by the military alone. The latter are, however, helpless in the face of many of the problems essential to a country's defence: terrorism, cyber defence, industrial policy in the field of armaments, energy and raw materials, transport and telecommunications, and economic intelligence...

It therefore emerges that the defence of the nation is truly a global issue that needs to be coordinated at the level of the whole government. Fortunately, France long ago^[1] set up the General Secretariat for Defence and National Security (SGDSN) to ensure this interministerial coordination. However, this administrative body attached to the Prime Minister cannot ensure the political leadership of this interministerial coordination. The name Ministry of Defence maintains the misconception that the incumbent of this position exercises the political leadership of the country's defence, which is absolutely not the case since its only levers of action are the armed forces.

The example of CBRN-E defence: a highly interdepartmental affair

The nuclear, radiological, biological and chemical (NRBC) issues, and in particular the associated terrorist risk, are a major challenge for our societies today. The sarin gas attacks on Matsumoto (1994) and the Tokyo subway (1995) by the Aum Shinrikyo sect showed that it was possible to carry out an attack of this type even by a non-state organisation with limited resources. It also goes without saying that the CBRN threat is a central concern in view of ballistic proliferation and the risk of a return of state terrorism. Fortunately, our country's institutional response to this problem is global, and not just a matter for the military alone. For example, a government CBRN plan, resulting from the merger of the Biotox, Piratox and Piratome plans, has been drawn up to develop our country's protection and response capabilities in the face of these threats. From upstream, through work to prevent acts (control of trade in sensitive products, health monitoring, control of the food and water chain, intelligence work, to name but a few examples...) to downstream with the return to normal life, many ministries are involved in taking CBRN issues into account.

However, it is not certain that this involvement of the various ministerial departments is total and complete due to the lack of awareness or sensitisation of all stakeholders. Unfortunately, in many minds, defence is the business of the defence and the military. Cartesianism and jurists have given weight to the meaning of words in our representations. The point here is not to judge this mental structuring axiologically but simply to note a particular perverse effect. In this case, a real global approach to defence issues was degraded when the Ministry of the Armed Forces took the excessively broad

name of Ministry of Defence.

In conclusion, it should be noted that taking the name of "Ministry of the Armed Forces", the name chosen by General de Gaulle during the 1920s would be an act, a symbolic one, but one that underlines the fact that defence and national security is everyone's business! It would therefore be working to develop our country's defence spirit by encouraging the support or participation of the community in this undertaking.

Finally, this development might also be in line with a slow movement in history towards the disappearance of direct armed threats to our country from other states. However, this end to inter-state conflict increases the complexity of the responses to be made to the new, more diffuse and insidious threats (terrorism, cyberspace, CBRN, etc.). Faced with such challenges, yes, defence must be everyone's business!

1) 1921 creation of the SGDN; General de Gaulle served there from 1931 to 1937. In January 2010, he absorbed the Secretariat of Internal Security (SGCI) and became the SGDSN.

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