



The Paris fire brigade: a national testing laboratory?

Cahiers de la pensée mili-Terre n° 45

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Published on 01/12/2016

Engagement opérationnel

At the time of the establishment of the National Territorial Command (TN COM), the author asks about organizational transferability and levels of exchange between TN COM and BSPP.

Born from the will of the CEMAT, General Bosser, the National Territory Command (COM TN) - integrated in the "In Contact" army model - has vocation to to frame the response of our Army to requests on the national territory, to mark its major commitment and its reaffirmed role on the territory, and to facilitate the engagement of units¹.

Structurally oriented towards emergency operations in an exceptional territory that is BSPP has proven itself as an operational tool whose sole purpose is to support the is the protection of people, property and the environment of its competence. Thus, it can be envisaged - by virtue of its organization, its principles training and experience - as a great inspirational unit or even, in some cases, as a standard meter to evaluate a particular option.

The stakes for the Army on the national territory

The 2013 White Paper on Defence and National Security states that "[...] the commitment of the armed forces to reinforce internal and civil security forces in the event of a major crisis may involve up to 10.000 men of the land forces, as well as the adapted means of the naval and air forces. In order to fulfil these various protection missions, resources will be called upon, when necessary, from our intervention forces on an ad hoc basis".

In addition to this global approach, the Army, as part of the security/defence continuum, must define a land-based protection posture - post operational defence of the territory -, without being a simple provider of means, and to take advantage of the "In contact"

model to reappropriate the land environment.

The twofold role of the Army on national territory While taking care not to think that Operation Sentinel sums up once and for all the Army's employment possibilities, it must ensure :

- the commitment of a resilient, autonomous, seasoned and sustainable force, complementing, on the one hand, the more general action of the security forces and, on the other hand, the more general action of the armed forces in the country.
internal security forces
in the field of security and, on the other hand, civil security forces in the field of assistance to populations
;
- the provision of mastered know-how and specific skills, in particular in the field of organisation, response planning, support and logistics.
and the provision of support and logistics.

Whether it is for one or the other of the above-mentioned components, the army must acquire a culture of domestic operations. It is not just a matter of executing on requisition, but of becoming a visible and indispensable player in the protection of the territory. To do this, it can capitalise on its intrinsic qualities (ability to work day and night, high mobility and intelligence know-how), its specific know-how (NRBC, engineering, transport, traffic, signals, intelligence, ALAT, water treatment, road opening and re-establishment, support) and its modes of action in OPEX.

The sine qua non for this capitalisation is adapted and targeted training in order to achieve the same level of excellence as that demonstrated in external theatres of operations.

A complex chain of requisitioning and competition requests

The Army is rarely engaged on the national territory in isolation and on its own initiative (except in emergencies, small numbers of men - up to 130 - and for a period of up to three days). It acts upon the request (requisition or request for assistance) of the local civil authorities, usually by prefects, in accordance with the principle of respect for the chain of territorial joint defence organisations (OTIAD).

It can be seen that the units are designated quite directly by the CPCO2 and that their action is coordinated by the interministerial defence and security zone headquarters (EMIZDS).

Even if this system "from local to interministerial" works, it seems that it could be improved through better coordination, particularly between prefects and military authorities. Clearly, a dilution of governance is to be deplored due to the multiplication of those who give orders.

The BSPP, a major unit of the national territory

- **Unique status and organization**

Under the authority of the Prefect of Police of Paris, who takes the title of Director of Rescue Operations during interventions, the BSPP is the largest fire brigade unit in Europe and the third largest in the world. It carries out approximately 460,000 interventions per year.

Its size and "success" require an organisation of its command based on a balance between the centralised management of resources and orders and, by relay, maximum decentralisation in execution down to the lowest hierarchical levels.

The BSPP is made up of six groups (corps constitués), three of which are fire and rescue units (GIS), one of support and rescue units (GAS), one of support and rescue units (GSS), and finally the training, instruction and rescue unit. The three ISUs share equally the operational sector made up of Paris and the three departments of the inner suburbs. The ASG supports them during interventions requiring special technical skills (hazardous environments, CBRN, cyno, RSMU3...), but is also made up of specialised units under agreement.

The GSS provides support for the whole and arms professional companies (infrastructure, medical, logistics, etc.). 17/18 or 112 calls are processed centrally at the Alert Processing Centre (CTA) which operates in partnership with the police in order to sort them very early on and provide a better quality of service at lower cost (interoperability).

Interventions are then relayed to the nearest rescue centres via operational monitoring stations (OMPs). The resources that may be requested as reinforcements are provided either by the operational centre (OC) at the level of the BSPP staff or by the operations monitoring centres (CSO) at the level of the ISGs.

This chain of command is both very simple and very effective since it ensures the identification of a single head ofThis chain of command is both very simple and very effective since it guarantees the identification of a single intervention leader, the direct transmission of orders and the interoperability of all the resources sent, whether they be BSPP, police, FORMISC4, civil fire brigades, EMS or from the voluntary sector (civil protection, Red Cross, Order of Malta).

- **The assets which make the strength of the BSPP**

By nature perfectly experienced in interministerial operations, since it is an emanation of the Army (defence) put into service under the orders of the Prefect of Police of Paris (interior), it has been a member of the French army since the beginning of the 20th century. The BSPP deliberately cultivates its ability to break down the barriers between the actors involved, which is so harmful to interoperability.

Working on a daily basis with the staff of these three major ministries, the PPS is well aware that war cannot be won alone and that a sustained dialogue leads to a mutual understanding that is beneficial and saves precious time.

This mutual understanding requires the adoption of a language and procedures understood by all stakeholders and the conduct of joint exercises at all levels (grouping

within the CODs, brigade with the ZOC, or even national with the COGIC).

As the only interdepartmental fire brigade unit in France, the BSPP is located in a megalopolis that acutely accumulates all the urban risks (rescue of people, river, road, high-rise buildings, industrial, tourist, aeronautical, etc.), but also the particular risks inherent to its unique situation as a capital (concentration of national powers).

This overall experience makes BSPP an expert in almost all urban emergency situations, including those of larger dimensions (attacks since the 1980s, the Gare de Lyon railway accident in 1988, the Crédit Lyonnais fire in 1996, the 1998 football World Cup, the 1999 storm, the Concorde crash in 2000, the 2005 heat wave, urban violence, the H1N1 flu crisis, etc.).

In order to maintain its know-how, as part of its operational preparation, the staff exercises every Saturday at the operational centre. The scenario changes systematically and each time it is an opportunity to test everyone's ability to manage complex crises. These exercises are conducted jointly with the EMS in the Paris region.

To facilitate interoperability with the Paris Police Prefecture (PPP) directorates, the BSPP has developed the habit of automatically sending liaison elements to other services to improve coordination between the police and fire brigade chains of command.

In the same spirit, to go further, it is important to conduct joint exercises so that the different actors are used to working together effectively. In addition, the BSPP takes a very active part in large-scale crisis management exercises organised by the PFP, such as Sequana 2016, which simulated a 100-year flood of the Seine and brought together partners and players from the Ile-de-France region (including the armed forces) to strengthen the coordination of their actions.

Because it is permanently on the ground and has a dense network in its area of competence, the BSPP is a privileged source of intelligence, which enables it to report without delay to its supervisory authorities, particularly during crises and major events.

What to transpose to the TN COM, and how?

- **The insertion of TN COM in the OTIAD chain**

As seen above, the action of the Army on national territory could be improved through better coordination, particularly between prefects and military authorities. This role could be devolved to the TN COM, which would designate the units best suited to carry out the missions and would arm an ad hoc Crisis Operations Centre (COC) which would represent the missing link between the CPCO, the IMMZDS, the EMIAZDS and the troops deployed on the ground.

In this way, the chain of command would be more direct and probably more efficient, as is the case with the PSCB. At the same time, it would offset the dilution of governance resulting from the multiplication of principals and facilitate the engagement of units.

- **Creation of a reference system (regulation on national territory)**

So that the regiments, without waiting to be mobilised, can refer to employment regulations and have a better knowledge of the different contexts of their engagement, the TN COM must be able to produce a sort of catalogue of common know-how - national territory - and the different types of regiments, equivalent to the BSPP's BSPP -, but also of know-how specific to specialised units (helped in this by the schools of arms).

This will enable it to include them in their operational preparation, or even to disseminate them to the civilian authorities so that they can refine their requests in terms of the effects to be obtained, thus employing the units as judiciously as possible while at the same time rewarding their action. In order to develop a genuine culture of protection of the national territory, these documents could serve as a basis for CIMICs and initial training schools to adapt tactical lessons.

- **TN COM on the initiative of multi-actor exercises**

As the BSPP MS does at its level on a weekly basis, TN COM, in order to reaffirm the role of the army and its level of excellence in the territory and thus take the initiative, must be able to be, with a good degree of friendliness, a key player in the field. It must be possible to organise exercises of all sizes - including large-scale exercises - with a good frequency, taking into account a wide range of scenarios (natural disasters, climatic events, malicious acts, industrial accidents, technological disasters, air crashes, pollution, etc.).

These exercises will be an opportunity to test the interoperability of actors from different cultures and to adopt common procedures and language. In addition, they will provide opportunities to demonstrate specific capabilities that are sometimes overlooked by the army, particularly in the field of intelligence.

- **Developing the network of liaison elements**

Widely used at the BSPP, ad hoc link frameworks represent a real added value when activating crisis PCs. They are real catalysts of synergy, promoting coordination between partners, avoiding harmful misunderstandings and reducing delays. These liaison officers, whether experts or not, can be part of the active staff as well as of the operational reserve, which is to be increased under the aegis of the TN FCOM.

The involvement of the BSPP on the national territory

Officers serving in the BSPP are first and foremost officers of the Army. As the latter change, TN COM could capitalize on their experience and specific know-how. By "round trip" system. This osmosis would benefit both individuals, by broadening their skills, and organisations. This measure, by extension, would be of interest to FORMISC officers.

The BSPP is experienced in all urban intervention techniques. TN COM would benefit from getting closer to the latter to form a pool of officers who could be deployed throughout the territory in the event of an event affecting any city. This would be achieved either by immersion in the staff OC or by attending one or other of the qualifying courses for PPS officers (guard officer, tactical command post officer, group guard officer).

These courses are already open to executives of first aid associations, doctors and police officers in the context of mutual knowledge of procedures.

Providing nearly 380,000 personal assistance interventions per year, the BSPP can be considered as a reference unit for first aid in France. On the strength of this expertise, it is likely to welcome, as it already does for certain medical auxiliaries who are to be projected in OPEX, the reference units in the national territory. In addition, the GFIS has a victim assistance training centre which is responsible for training firefighters in first aid at different levels (team members, instructors and instructors).

It has a cardiac arrest simulation room with ten mannequins. Through a partnership with TN COM, the latter would be able to train active soldiers, reservists and even trainees from the recently created voluntary military service which is an integral part of TN COM.

As mentioned by the general commanding the BSPP in the aftermath of the 13 November attacks, it would be interesting to improve cooperation with the Sentinel forces (6.500 people simultaneously in the Ile de France region), who know how to cordon off a neighbourhood and search suspicious persons if necessary, in addition to the Paris police and fire brigade who, in return, would be able to share their experiences at all levels and help people discover their jobs.

At the time of an engagement on national territory in support of civil security, this knowledge would certainly be beneficial to the forces.

Although it is an integral part of COM TN, the BSPP, due to its specific features and its fire brigade missions, cannot strictly speaking be considered as a test laboratory for the national territory. Indeed, the range of missions assigned to the Army on the national territory goes well beyond the missions of civil security. On the other hand, it is one of the most experienced army units in action in an interministerial context and, like the UIISC5 , it is also an expert in emergency missions.

As such, its organization, its state of mind and the principles prevailing in its modes of action can serve as a reference when setting up the structures of the TN COM, which will also have to act in the above-mentioned context. To this end, a protean rapprochement of the forces of the Army and the BSPP is desirable and feasible.

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¹ Definition and role of the TN COM: <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/terre/l-armee-de-terre-au-contact/leniveau-divisionnaire/commandement-terre-pour-le-territoire-national/commandement-terre-pour-le-territoire-national/le-commandement-terre-pour-le-territoire->

