

# Which soldier for tomorrow?

Reflection circle G2S - n° 22

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Valeurs de l'Armée de Terre

**For several years now, armies have enjoyed a very positive image and broad public support, which is no doubt a factor in the success of recruitment. However, this situation is based on a paradox: society tends to move in the direction of relativism and permissiveness, while the virtues of the soldier are based on personal commitment and a sense of the absolute.**

The soldier, coming from society and destined, sooner or later, to return to it, must practice the virtues that are proper to him, without cutting himself off from a milieu which, if attached to him, does not always understand him. It is this paradox that must be managed, tomorrow as today, so that the soldier, the soldier of the army in particular, can fulfil his mission to the best of his ability, supported by a family, social and cultural environment that is favourable to him. This issue has already been discussed and widely referred to by the various Military Function Councils (MFC), as well as by the 2017 Strategic Defence Review, which the Ambition 2030 of the President of the Republic, which leads to placing the LPM 2019-2025 "at human level", has brought it back to the heart of the debate on the military condition. This being the case, it is naturally risky to attempt to draw up a picture of the "ideal" environment for the soldier of tomorrow, and it can be seen that a number of measures have already been taken, which does not contribute to the originality of the exercise. It is, however, possible to explore a few research directions and to develop several orientations likely to contribute to the development of the relationship between the soldier and society in the years to come. A three-point approach will be adopted:

- "Upstream" of active service: contributing to the conditions of choice recruitment, inserting the soldier into his environment.
- In the "exercise" of active service: improving the "daily life of the soldier".
- "Downstream" of the service, and in society: maintain the spirit of defence.

## **1 - Upstream: focus on attractiveness, for a recruitment of choice.**

This effort is not new, and the image of the "recruiting sergeant" of the Old Regime is obviously not far off. Beyond the structural aspects of the issue, such as the endogenous factor, or windfall effects linked to the economic situation, it is a question of making the "recruiting sergeant" image of the Old Regime known. The aim is to make young people aware of the place of defence in society, to cultivate its values and to arouse in them an interest that will generate vocations.

There is certainly no need to go back on the current arrangements, at least as far as the recruitment chain is concerned, its current network and the contribution of units (regiments), which play their role well and meet the needs of the armed forces, which is confirmed by the good recruitment figures. Efforts seem to be made, upstream of the SHIRBRIGs, by actors outside defence and in particular the educational community in the broad sense (family, school, various movements) from which a more constructive attitude could legitimately be expected.

The path of renewed citizenship, as it emerges from parliamentary work<sup>[1]</sup> If it is respected and practised proactively, it will, of course, play a major role. It would be desirable that its resolute implementation should be reflected in the evaluation of pupils, and that the two phases provided for in the framework of schooling should be taken into account in individual results, in the form, for example, of "bonus" points in examinations.

The opportunity offered by the Universal National Service (UNS) must, of course, be seized to raise awareness of defence and to recruit for the forces. Volunteering to serve in the armed forces, either prompted by the UNS or spontaneous, could be encouraged by the awarding of bonuses such as retirement points or priorities for recruitment at the end of service. Students or pupils of the Grandes Ecoles could be required to undergo military preparation with a view to giving them, as part of the reserve, training in defence matters in correlation with their level of education. This is an area to be explored, with a view to political decisions to be taken within the framework of legal or regulatory provisions which will, if necessary, have to evolve.

Furthermore, the quality of recruitment depends, and will continue to depend, on the professional and social prospects offered to the soldier who, coming from society, will return to it. It is normal for the Army to seek to retain the best of its "contract workers", officers, non-commissioned officers or non-commissioned members, but not all of them are called upon to. It seems essential, if we want to maintain a quality flow, that those who leave the institution after a few years are not left on the road. The real effort, already made by the armies, and in particular by the Army, must be continued, because it is important that those who leave our institution should be its promoters and not its detractors (cf. report LPM §3.1.3.2. "Attractiveness factor... the professional transition will be improved").

## **2 - In the exercise of active service: the improvement of the "daily life of the soldier".**

It is important that the soldier of tomorrow finds in the Army what he is looking for: a military commitment in a specific framework (that of a weapon) in the service of the country. It is therefore urgent, as the CEMAT has stressed and most observers agree, to give back its place to collective training and to the training of units in their speciality. This is, of course, first of all a problem of operational preparation and efficiency, it is also a motivating factor for both managers and the troop, which is underlined in the LPM report (§3.1.1.2): "the operational activity of the forces ... contributes to staff morale, to the attractiveness of the profession of arms and ultimately to loyalty".

Obviously, missions are not chosen, but it seems essential to prioritise "war" missions or

external operations, which are at the heart of the armed forces' profession, to the detriment, as far as possible, of internal security missions, which by their very nature fall within the domain of police forces. The lightening of the SENTINELLE system, as a result of the reduction in the "bill" for the personnel involved, the mission's mobility, and the reduced pressure on units allowed by the 2016 and 2017 recruitments, is naturally a step in the right direction. And, insofar as a certain contribution to internal security is irreducible, the use of reserve personnel, as is already the case, must be avoided. However, the pitfall of (re)creating a "two-tier army", which has been so rightly decried in the past, should be avoided.

The effort made for collective training will also have the effect of increasing the cohesion of units. The primordial role played in this area by operational commitments, which is especially sensitive within elementary units, which is essential, can thus be usefully extended. Beyond that, at battalion or regimental level, by capitalising on the excellence pursued in the area of speciality.

It is also important to preserve the special status of the soldier, as a just recognition by the Nation of those who devote themselves to its defence (RSD § 319). The military status, and more generally that of the combatant, is in fact specific. The reasoned and orderly use of force, which may go as far as the physical elimination of adversaries in conflict, the very essence of the status of combatant, is at the heart of the military status of the soldier. It is absolutely necessary to enshrine this exception in a special status, which protects the soldier from attempts to legalise conflicts, which are essentially harmful to the effectiveness of the military tool (cf. LPM report, §3.1.1.2).

However specific it may be, the soldier's commitment only makes sense within the framework of the Nation and in symbiosis with it. It is therefore important to preserve and develop the links between military formations and their local environment. Partnerships, twinning and various sponsorships are certainly not new, but they must be cultivated. The anchoring of a unit in its region, its weight in the local economy, but above all the capital of sympathy that it knows how to maintain and develop contribute to its attractiveness and, more generally, to the support of the population for its army.

Reserves also play an essential role, not only as an operational complement to the active forces, but as a link between the army and its environment. Beyond a citizen reserve with a relational vocation, it is important to focus a more significant effort on "operational" reservists, whose employment rate remains well below the possibilities opened up by the regulations, which the MPA provides for expansion. Enhancing the attractiveness of the reserve system by, for example, the use of incentives such as tax exemptions for companies employing reservists could be an encouraging signal. Moreover, while it is understandable that the private sector is reluctant to accept absenteeism of reservist employees, this should not be the case in the wider public service, where a more open attitude could be expected. It would not be indifferent if the Ministry of the Armed Forces itself were to set an example by linking certain positions of responsibility open to civilian personnel to the signing of a commitment on the reserve. The civil servants concerned, after appropriate military training, could, if necessary, participate in exercises and operations of the units they support.

### **3 - " Downstream" from active service: maintaining a consensus for the benefit of defence.**

The objective to be pursued is to create and maintain, within the City, a consensus for the benefit of defence and the armed forces. According to the terms of the report appended to the LPM (§3.1), to "make the military a modern citizen, fully integrated into a society

animated by a solid spirit of defence, developed from youth, and capable of contributing to its own protection through operational reserves".

The soldier is not an isolated individual, and the role of families or close friends is essential for his or her own equilibrium as well as for the integration of units into the local fabric. In this respect, the "family plan", implemented by the Ministry of the Armed Forces, is welcome. Beyond its social aspects, the effects of which should be felt over time, it is a question, for our armies, and mainly the Army, of conquering the "family plan". The aim is to conquer the "minds and hearts" of families or loved ones, who are often confronted with the hazards, constraints and constraints of military life, so that their support can be acquired. Here, too, the balance of a soldier confronted with situations and missions that are likely to become more and more difficult is at stake. The "military community" made up of soldiers' families and loved ones must become, if it is not already, the best advocate for the military in society.

It is also important to maintain the network of former military personnel, either recently returned to civilian life and active again in other sectors or retired after a longer career. This network, which could be used for the retraining of military personnel leaving the service, could be based on regimental or other friendships that can capitalize on shared experiences, the brotherhood of arms and, more generally, esprit de corps. There is no doubt that a certain "rejuvenation" of these chapters, or associations of veterans, is necessary, but the historical and geographical anchoring should not, however, be neglected. The units and formations are indeed the heirs of a history, and their daily life is part of the long term. Their past, often glorious, belongs to the "culture of arms" and contributes, if need be, to the development of reference points for the younger generation.

These associations of former military personnel would certainly benefit from strengthening their links with one another, since the pooling of their experience and achievements should contribute to their mutual enrichment and, above all, to making their voices heard. Without calling into question their exclusion from the scope of the MNAs, it is regrettable, however, that the MNAs are not open to retired or former military personnel, or to military families. They would certainly have gained in representativeness, like the German Bundeswehrverband, whose 220,000 members represent a critical mass that is necessarily taken into account in decision-making affecting the armed forces. Otherwise, we can only encourage our fellow citizens to increase, through their membership, the representativeness of an association such as the ASAF, whose sole purpose is to support the French army and maintain the spirit of defence.

**In conclusion, it is indeed a question of ensuring that the soldier of the army of the near future will be a modern citizen, integrated into a society in which the spirit of defence is itself developed and strengthened. This ambition is not new, even if it has been reaffirmed in the framework of the Ambition 2030 of the President of the Republic, and much has already been undertaken. It is now a matter of fostering the conditions for the development of a virtuous circle based, for the most part, on quality recruitment, well-trained and seasoned soldiers, and a consensus maintained, among others, by dynamic and representative associations.**

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1) Information Report No. 667 by Mrs. Dubois and Mrs. Guérel to the National Assembly, February 14, 2018.

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