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INTRODUCTORY WORDS

1. **History shows the importance of the military in our country.** It has been said that "the history of France is as much inhabited by the destiny of arms as the military is by national history"[1]. 1] The **same is true of our territory as it is of our history.** Although less dense than in the past, the **territorial footprint of the armed forces remains strong.** The identity of certain localities has sometimes even been built up around a garrison, a port, an air base and, even today, the national gendarmerie remains present throughout the territory as its mission commands. Nearly all the soldiers are attached to a unit or formation established on the national territory⁴. 4 The present report seeks to assess the living conditions of **these soldiers and their families in the territories where they are posted.**
2. Since the end of the Cold War, **the territorial anchoring of the armed forces has undergone profound restructuring:**
 - rapid withdrawal of French forces from Germany (43,000 soldiers in 1990, less than 1,000 since 2014);
 - massive reduction in personnel numbers following the professionalization that took place in 1997, accompanied by the dissolution of many units and the closure

of military establishments, a phenomenon that was further accentuated between 2008 and 2015 (more than 550,000 military personnel in 1989, compared with a little more than 300,000 in 2017);

- large-scale transfer and redeployment of forces on the national territory, with some units even being transferred several times in succession.
3. Although deflation and restructuring are no longer on the agenda (see the draft military programming bill currently being examined), the military geography **has undergone a profound change: there are fewer** military establishments, they are also more dispersed and living, employment and housing conditions are more heterogeneous. This territorial conditioning affects military personnel and their families as it does civilians, which in itself is not abnormal, although it has been observed that its impact on the **military condition may be more pronounced because of the mobility imposed by a military career and its consequences on housing, spousal employment or children's schooling.**

This observation, which is that of the **diversity or even heterogeneity of the life of military personnel at their place of assignment, may** appear too general to be accurate.

It is true that not all armed forces are affected to the same degree or in the same way, and that not all members of the armed forces are subject to a high degree of mobility. However, in view of its importance both quantitatively and qualitatively, this situation must be regarded as one of the **characteristics of the military condition today.**

4. Each force has its **own geography**: while the gendarmerie is spread throughout the national territory (3,100 brigades, 109 mobile gendarmerie squadrons, 3 Republican Guard regiments), the army, although it has lost 61 regiments since 1989, remains present with 79 regiments in all the regions of the country. The army, although it has lost 61 regiments since 1989, is still present with 79 regiments in all French regions but not in all departments; the navy, on the other hand, and to a lesser extent the air force and the army health service are concentrated in a few areas (11 ports, 6 of which are overseas, 15 platform air bases,

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8 army training hospitals and 17 medical centres to which the branches located in the forces are attached). However, all the armed forces and related formations are exposed to diversity and even territorial **disparities**. For a sailor, a posting has completely different implications depending on whether it is in Brest, Toulon or Paris. In the departmental gendarmerie, the living conditions of the gendarmerie officer and his or her family may vary considerably depending on whether the soldier is posted to an area with many economic, cultural and social assets or, on the contrary, to a rural area with many handicaps or to a peri-urban area with a high level of local crime. The same observation of heterogeneity can be made for the air force, the army and the support services (army health service, army fuel service, etc.).

Whereas the 11th thematic report of the High Committee had led to underline the **profound** unity of the **military function and the military state, a unity carried by the mission, the status and the values, the present report leads to a first** observation: the **diversity of the local environment of military personnel and the heterogeneity of their living conditions.**

5. **The specifically military environment, administration and human support**^[2] The gaps described above are not very helpful in reducing them and, in any event, are often far from providing a sufficient quality of service on the national territory.

In the gendarmerie, as in the armies, the **state of barracks and living facilities** varies greatly, from good, even **very good, to very poor**. This situation, which is generally worse than the current civilian environment or even the state of military premises 25 years ago, is the consequence of the continuous erosion of maintenance and investment budgets. The **decisions taken to relaunch the programmes**, which are to be welcomed as they were indispensable, will only bear fruit in the long term and if the effort is sustained. **General support**, as noted in several reports by **the High Committee**, remains a major concern for the **command and for the military itself**. The gendarmerie has largely been able to escape the successive steps of pooling that have been taken in relation to the armies. While the reform may have appeared attractive in its conception, it was implemented in haste and without any real evaluation. The reform of defence bases resulted in the creation of an additional administrative level and geographical area, often with three consequences:

- increased **complexity of** procedures and transactions;
- a **distancing of the** supporters;
- a **reduction in the responsibility of the** command.

Only the **good will of those supported and the commitment of the supporters have so far been able to** avoid breakdowns, but the mistrust of the former and the great weariness of the latter do not allow us to expect a recovery because the biases are structural.

The **current transformation**, which will combine a strengthening of the local support centres with a harmonisation of defence bases and defence and security zones, augurs better results.

6. **Studies by INSEE, the Defence Economic Observatory (OED) and the Human Resources Department of the Ministry of Defence (DRH-MD) reflect this great heterogeneity:**

- inequality in the weight of defence personnel in the active population of the catchment areas

(less than 0.5% in the vast majority of the catchment areas but 5.6% in Bourges, 7.2% in Toulon and up to 18% in Guer and 29% in Mourmelon and Suippes);

- over-representation of the military (39% of the military and even up to 51% of sailors against 25% of the French population) in areas characterised by good quality of life quality of life in terms of services and equipment, but, and this directly concerns non-military spouses, a long-term unemployment rate higher than the national average;
- extreme diversity from one unit to another, within the same region (case of the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region), or even within the same defence base (Draguignan, Nice).

Finally, **three territories have such specific characteristics** that it would be tempting to describe them as special cases if the military population were small, which is not the case: the Ile-de-France region with a particular problem of employment, transport and housing; the Toulon area with acute difficulties in accessing housing; overseas territories with a sometimes high cost of living and security issues (Mayotte, French Guiana).

7. The High Committee has neither the ambition, nor the role, nor the capacity, to detail the actions and measures that would allow for the re-evaluation of the situation to respond to the diversity of needs and the heterogeneity of the situations noted above.

However, it seems to it that, beyond the **fundamentals of the military condition (unity of the general status, anchoring in the salary scale and pay of public servants, principle of fair compensation for hardship, balance of corps and careers)**, which are factors of unity in the military function, the Committee believes that the military should be able to "hold both ends of the chain". **Without calling this unity into question, it is necessary, without calling into question this unity, to take better account of the factors of differentiation in policies and actions to support the military condition:**

- the differences in **living conditions, housing and employment between the territories**

of assignment ;

- the impacts, themselves sometimes variable in time and space, of mobility **on** the military condition.

Indeed, it **is not uniformity that will make it possible to provide relevant responses to the needs actually** expressed and the difficulties encountered, but, on the contrary, a differentiation, reasonable and tempered by **equity, of the actions to be taken**.

The present report follows the same **logic as that which the High Committee proposed to favour in the opinion it** addressed to the Minister of the Armed Forces on 28 September 2017 on support for the families and relatives of military personnel, namely:

- the search for **equity of treatment rather than** formal equality;
- the **differentiation of** benefits and services, whenever necessary, to take account of operational constraints and the imperatives of mobility, including by neutralising the impact of certain resource conditions;
- responsiveness and decentralization of responses to deal with emergencies;
- articulation between the different levels of decision-making and implementation, always involving the **local** command in the **completion of** actions (assessment of needs, preparation and adaptation of responses, information for those concerned);
- the **periodic evaluation of the actions** carried out and the reversibility of the measures.

8. In choosing as the theme for the 12th thematic report the life of military personnel and their families according to place of duty, the High Committee wished to shed

additional light on the issues **raised in its 5th, 8th and 10th** reports, which were devoted to (a) The status of military personnel serving outside metropolitan France, particularly in external operations, the administration of military personnel and the status of military personnel engaged in missions to protect national territory, respectively. This additional insight is, in a certain number of cases, convergent **with the negative observations** previously **made** concerning the military condition **overseas and on domestic missions. This is not, to be welcomed, the case for external operations.** Furthermore, by giving priority to **differentiating responses** in this area, which in his **view are better able to** adapt to the diversity of needs and situations, the preThis report is **a counterpoint to the 11th thematic report on the military function, which** emphasised the factors of unity, coherence and cohesion. The very purpose of this 12th report: which takes as its starting point the field, real-life experience and daily life, naturally leads the High Committee to favour a differentiation of approaches to respond to the heterogeneity of situations. For the High Committee, this **position is the only one that allows it to "hold both ends of the chain"**.

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9. In the course of its report, and **without claiming to be exhaustive, the High Committee** considered it necessary to stress a few recommendations within the **framework** of them in the course of its report, and without claiming to be exhaustive, the High Committee considered it necessary to emphasize a few recommendations which are in the **spirit of the general approach** set out above and which seem to it to be likely to meet some of the needs encountered:
- Without calling into question the principle of **availability, and in** addition to actions dealing with the consequences of mobility, regularly reassess the needs for geographical mobility;
 - to value the military status and the constraints of mobility in the criteria for allocating defence housing;
 - **regularly update** the rates of territorial allowances and the list of eligible locations according to **socio-economic** developments in the places of employment;
 - as part of the work on the **new military compensation policy, renew the** link between the compensation policy and the housing and accommodation policies as well as the eligibility criteria;
 - to take greater account of the **constraints of the military state**, in particular operational and mobility constraints, in the conditions for the allocation of **social benefits** and the pricing of holiday and leisure activities;
 - draw up a **joint instruction from** the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of the Armed Forces to develop partnerships between **military units and civilian authorities (prefects and representatives of the** local authorities concerned);
 - generalise local **needs assessments and** inventories, so that the military **condition policy** can be applied locally, in **all territories**;
 - involve **formation commanders** in support processes (needs assessment, development and adaptation of responses, information for those concerned, evaluation) by strengthening, as necessary, their levers for action.

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1| Jérôme Hélié, Les armes, in Pierre Nora(ed.), Les lieux de mémoire, Quarto Gallimard, volume III, p. 3235. 4 98.5% of the military are posted on French territory.

2| Concepts that exclude any assessment of the operational sphere and support of the forces.

3| HCECM, 11th thematic report, The military function in French society, 2017, pp. 73 et seq.

4| HCECM, Revue annuelle de la condition militaire 2017, pp. 256 et seq.

5| HCECM, 5th report, La condition des militaires en service hors métropole, May 2011, HCECM, 8th report, l' administration des militaires, May 2014 and HCECM, 10th report, La condition des militaires engagés dans les missions de protection du territoire national et de la population, May 2016.

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