



## □ France and Belgium: towards a common doctrine

Land Forces Doctrine Review

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Relations internationales

**"We will not protect Europeans if we do not decide to have a real European army. Faced with Russia, which is on our borders and has shown that it can be a threat (...) we must have a Europe that defends itself more alone, without depending solely on the United States and in a more sovereign manner".<sup>20</sup>**

**"The European partnership is highly developed in the field of rolling stock (NB: land), (...). This extremely high-performance rolling stock (NB: Griffon and Jaguar) will be the starting point for a European industry that will have a major impact on European defence".<sup>21</sup>**

The project of a supranational European army has divided the countries of the Union for decades. However, everyone recognises that it is now impossible to engage in a major operation alone. Interoperability is no longer an option, it is a necessity. As proof of this, for decades NATO has been striving to standardise its procedures, doctrine and equipment so that the forces of its members are, according to the Alliance's definition, "capable of operating synergistically in the execution of assigned tasks". In other words, that they are able to work "together". While such coalitions seem inevitable, it has to be said that the results, particularly for European land forces, are rarely up to scratch. There are many possible reasons for these difficulties. Among them are concerns about a possible loss of sovereignty, sometimes divergent national interests, support from local defence industries, or intelligence sharing that is difficult to achieve spontaneously. Nevertheless, Belgium and France have managed to overcome these challenges and together have taken a further step forward. It is now a question of working "like"!

### **Project Scorpion and CaMo**

On 25 October 2018, the Belgian government decided to enter into a strategic partnership with France to renew a significant part of its Motorized Capacity (CaMo) and to join the

Scorpion project. This is more than a simple purchase of equipment from an allied country, it is an in-depth collaboration in which each line of development (doctrine, organisational structure, training, etc.) will be carried out in close cooperation with France. Each line of development (doctrine, organisational structure, training, equipment, leadership, personnel and infrastructure) is studied in order to push interoperability to the limit. This partnership aims to achieve an ambitious desired end effect: to generate natively interoperable Belgian and French GTIA and SGTIA. Belgium and France are thus creating a model of European defence cooperation that can serve as an example. Belgian and French units will be perfectly interchangeable with, obviously, operational deployment, which remains a sovereign national decision.

## **An identical doctrine**

The purpose of this article is to describe how both partners are working to limit and, if necessary, reduce over time the gaps in their doctrine. By doctrine, it is necessary to understand the entire process that results in the publication of documents relating to the implementation of weapon systems and the operational use of units (technical guides, operating manuals, doctrinal reflection documents). In concrete terms, Belgium has defined a series of elements that it wishes to be "identical" to those of its partner, such as doctrine or part of the doctrine of the European Union. In concrete terms, Belgium has defined a series of elements that it wishes to be "identical" to its partner, such as doctrine or part of its equipment, while others will be "similar", i.e. the training cycle or support capabilities. By 2025, the doctrines for the use of motorised capabilities will therefore be identical, provided they do not conflict with national specificities. To achieve this objective, two lines of operation are being followed. The first aims to reduce the gaps between current doctrines ("coherence" axis) and the second aims to develop the Scorpio doctrine jointly ("design" axis).

## **Coherence: a success factor**

The aim of making current doctrines consistent is to facilitate the transition to Scorpio doctrine in 2025. Indeed, even if the appearance of the new manuals will probably not be a total break or a radical transformation of current French doctrine, it remains a challenge to adapt to change. And these difficulties are likely to be multiplied for an army that does not natively have the same way of working.

Although already today the doctrinal differences seem minimal, the intention is to avoid too "sudden" a change with the arrival of new equipment. To that end, the Belgian Land Component Competence Centre (equivalent to COME2CIA22) is studying French Army doctrine and identifying gaps that require action such as a change in organisational structure, changes in procedure or resource requirements of any kind (especially human and equipment). This rigorous work is essential to prepare the eventual transition to Scorpio doctrine.

In a few weeks' time, national experts from the various weapons will meet and work together to consolidate common know-how and work towards consistency in the user manuals. As Major General Watler Piatt, former Deputy Commander of the United States Army in Europe (USAREUR), noted: "It is not countries, but men, that maintain relationships"<sup>23, 23</sup> The success of this upgrade therefore relies on a community of willing actors operating in a network. This voluntarism is a sine qua non condition for success.

In addition to the interpersonal and human aspect, time is also a determining factor. To succeed, realistic deadlines are needed. The CaMo project and the deployment of the first Belgian units is about five years behind the Scorpion project. This time lag will allow for in-depth harmonization and gradual integration of the new Scorpion user manuals.

## **Design: joint reflection**

Alongside this "consistency" line, Belgium is also pursuing a "design" line of operation. A Belgian officer is already integrated into the Command Doctrine and Training Centre (CDEC) and more specifically into the Scorpion Combat Laboratory (LCS). There, he and his French colleagues are continuing doctrinal reflection while defining the first force employment manuals for the Scorpion ETIA. This insert participates fully in the work of the laboratory and is therefore much more than a liaison officer. As proof, he has been designated as a distinguished officer for several works such as the piloting of the writing of a doctrinal reflection on the infovalorized combat of level 5 and 6 units as well as for the preparation of Scorpion exercises.

In addition to his participation in the elaboration of the doctrine, this officer will be the first Belgian to assimilate the Scorpion manuals and his role will be to facilitate a more global appropriation of the doctrine within the Belgian land forces. He will therefore also be involved in the "consistency" axis via the regular dissemination of the new manuals.

Ultimately, by following these two lines of operation ("coherence" and "design"), the Belgian and French doctrines of use will be identical, accepted and fully exploited by the units.

## **A global partnership**

It is clear that, in addition to doctrine, other aspects are being considered, with interoperability as a main focus. One example among others is the method for drawing up an operational decision (MEDO) which differs from the techniques used in Belgium<sup>24</sup>. An analysis must be carried out and, if necessary, measures will have to be taken to mitigate these differences. Intuitively, it seems clear that if the training of our managers becomes identical in the future, these dissimilarities will naturally fade away. If solutions seem clear on paper, they are much more complex when they face the frictions of reality (budgetary impositions, limited human resources, political constraints, ...). These reflections are carried out in Belgium as well as by two others already deployed in the French organisation (within the CFT<sup>25</sup> and EMAT<sup>26</sup>). The latter have responsibilities in the execution of the project (deputy project manager) and in the deployment of the project in the units (deputy project manager). In the near future, other Belgian officers will join this first wave of inserts with the aim of increasing the interoperability of the two armies in all lines of development.

## **CONCLUSION**

By appropriating the same or seeking to provide similar effects, the French and Belgian armies have thus switched from "working together" to "working as". For more than fifty years, European countries have developed a capacity to act together, based on common procedures defined by NATO. However, this cooperation remained limited to the lowest

common denominator with a doctrine of compromise as a result. Today, the Franco-Belgian partnership gives a new dimension to interoperability by taking advantage of every opportunity to develop synergies between the two armies in all areas.

The aim is not to create a bi-national unit on the model of the Franco-German brigade but to create added value by harmonising each line of development. However, interoperability should not be confused with uniformity. It is the complementarity of the partners and the mastery of differences that will make the whole stronger. In other words, Belgium's motto, "unity is strength", takes on its full meaning in this partnership.

20 Emmanuel Macron, President of the French Republic, Europe 1, 06 November 2018.

21 Charles Michel, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium, RTBF, 25 October 2018.

22 Commandement de l'Entraînement et des Écoles du Combat InterArmes.

23 Increasing interoperability - the foundation for effective NATO operations, General Jean-Paul Paloméros, Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, 25 September 2013. <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2015/also-in-2015/enhancing-interoperability-the-foundation-for-effective-nato-operations/EN/index.htm>

24 Depending on the level, these techniques are based on a cross-analysis of the assessment factors (mission, enemy, environment and means) with the manoeuvre elements (attitude, objective, pace, deadlines, axis, device) or on the NATO Military Decision Making Process (MDMP) method.

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