

in "Desert Storm" highlighted the difficulties of adapting the military instrument to these new strategic realities. Operation "Daguet," involving barely 16,000 soldiers out of a total of close to 500,000, was not essential to the mostly American plan for the liberation of Kuwait. However, the French division, well adapted to its role on the American forces' flank, showed obvious competence and was a useful contribution to the campaign overall.

While sending this division was the result of maximum effort on the part of France, it was still too small, both in comparison with the UK, which managed to send twice as many soldiers, and in comparison with France's own ambitions. The Gulf experience brought out the true extent of the French forces' deficiencies in logistics and mobility. But the main reason for the modest showing in numbers of soldiers fielded stems from a more fundamental structural problem: conscription. While national service may be appropriate to a military whose primary vocation is defending the country's vital interests, conscription is incompatible with missions stemming from collective security which necessarily involve operations far from home territory.

FOR THE SAME REASONS, THE CONFLICT ALSO CONFIRMED THAT A DEFENCE policy resting primarily on nuclear weapons is hardly suitable for international policing missions. Implicitly recognizing this during the conflict, President François Mitterrand excluded the possibility of French resort to nuclear weapons, regardless of what course the hostilities might take. Even if the risks of nuclear proliferation in the South (and now in the East) justify the maintenance of a sizeable French nuclear deterrent, the new strategic environment obliges France to re-focus its defence efforts in favour of conventional forces.

A third strategic revolution emerges from the likely future course of the former Western bloc. The Maastricht summit of late 1991 opened the path to political union and eventual common defence among EC members. Much is at stake here for France, because a Europe politically and strategically united would demand more harmony in these areas than did NATO – an alliance which France kept at arm's length. And so there is a double challenge: France must at one and same time continue to be the engine for the strategic unification of Western Europe, of which Maastricht was just the start, by proposing concrete initiatives in the areas of defence and security; and France must also accept the consequences this process will have, both real and symbolic, for its own strategic independence. Obviously, the stakes are especially serious in the nuclear domain, where the *national* character of nuclear decision-making will no doubt be retained for some time to come, but where the *European* dimension of the nuclear deterrent must inevitably grow in importance. In the same manner, to the extent that a single European strategic entity becomes a reality, the issue of NATO also grows in significance.

In this context, greater French participation in NATO's decision-making processes seems necessary – in the Military or the Defence Planning Committees, for example. A return to integrated military structures, however, would not be appropriate, as this would make little sense in the contemporary European political context, and what's more, no one is asking for it.

The challenges presented to French defence policy makers are thus considerable. However, the transformation of the French defence forces, both in its doctrines and internal structures, will be all the more difficult for two reasons. First, there is politics. Until now, the national consensus on defence policy has been in favour of a clear and convincing doc-

trine based on the assumption that France has a role and mission in the world, things that today are rather difficult to imagine. Further, the new strategic realities that influence defence policy call into question central assumptions of French national culture – the most important among these being conscription. And finally, the exigencies of current domestic politics – particularly the upcoming series of elections – is highly unfavourable for a long-term effort aimed to resolve these problems.

Then there are the constraints caused by economic trends and France's financial situation. It would be an illusion to imagine that defence spending is going to exceed 3 percent of GDP, and the current trend is somewhere between 2.8 and 2.9 percent. And money is not the only problem: there are considerable economic and social stakes for the country involved in the future health of French defence industries. In sum, the options available to the government are very few and would tend to favour carrying on more or less as before.

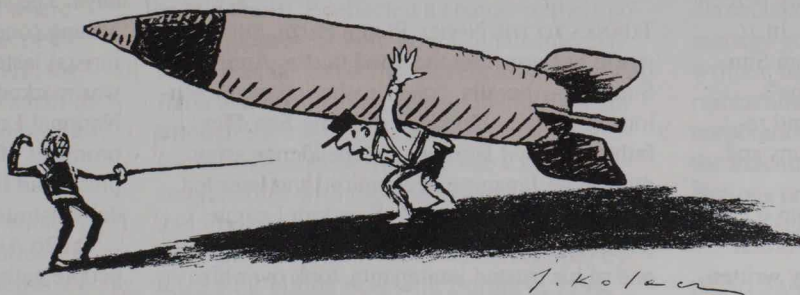
THERE HAS BEEN SOME DISCERNABLE MOVEMENT ON THE NUCLEAR weapons front in the last few months, however. While one hesitates to speak of reductions in the nuclear arsenal, it is clear that the growth in their numbers has been interrupted – something unimaginable a few years ago. A plausible outcome is that the strategic ground-to-ground element of the nuclear triad will be abandoned because of the imminent obsolescence of the missiles deployed on the Albion Plateau, and the

decision not to proceed with a mobile ground-based missile. The sea-based weapons will remain the backbone of the deterrent force thanks to a new generation of ballistic missile submarines. And last, the decision to postpone indefinitely the operational deployment of Hades missiles, and the possibility that these will be included in treaty bargaining that would eliminate short-range mis-

siles in Europe, means that France is heading towards the abandonment of a tactical (or "pre-strategic") nuclear capacity. Eventually, the French deterrent will rest exclusively on a simple strategic "dyad." In short, the preeminence of nuclear weapons is plainly under challenge.

At the same time, the new structure of conventional forces is becoming evident – especially the ground forces. By 1995 the current level of 280,000 will decline to about 225,000. To help achieve this objective, the length of compulsory military service has been reduced to ten months, and the professional, voluntary units within the *Force rapide* will be reinforced. Furthermore, a new command structure will be adopted for the army, placing more emphasis on inter-army operations, and on creating "modular" military formations allowing for more flexible management of the forces during crisis situations.

IN SPITE OF THESE NEW TRENDS, HOWEVER, FRANCE'S DEFENCE POLICY IN 1992 is characterized by great uncertainty. Crucial choices remain to be made in many cases – the largest outstanding one being what to do about conscription. This system has been in crisis for many years, it responds less and less to the republican requirement of universality, is ill-equipped to cope with the new strategic realities, and is too far gone for a quick fix. Other painful decisions will also need to be taken in the years to come: equipment and programmes, defence industries, nuclear doctrine, and relations with NATO and Europe – items that have been put off until now. Perhaps even more serious is the fact that France has yet to engage in a true national debate on defence and security issues. Such a debate is essential in order to clarify the choices the future holds and above all, to elicit the nation's consent. □



Jerry Kolacz