

Report from Paris by Christine Bierre

Good news on French military budget

No crucial area has been left out in this military equipment budget for the 1987-91 period.

On Nov. 5, the President and the cabinet of France adopted the best military equipment budget since the Gaullist era. No crucial area has been left out in this budget for 1987-91, enhancing France's overall military power and ability to respond to every possible level of attack. The budget is designed to: 1) considerably improve France's nuclear might through ongoing modernization of the nuclear submarine component, and adding a mobile land-based missile force, along with improved tactical nuclear defenses; 2) enhance France's ability to act independently both strategically and in Third World theaters by providing adequate satellite equipment for military observation and communication and low-altitude radar systems; 3) improve overall deterrence by developing a chemical warfare capability.

The budget's adoption is all the more crucial, as was emphasized by the vice-president of the parliamentary commission on defense, RPR (Gaullist) deputy Jacques Baumel, in an op-ed in *Le Figaro* on Nov. 6, since it comes in the wake of the Reykjavik summit. Even though President Reagan's stance on SDI at the summit was absolutely key to the survival of the West, no serious European military strategist could endorse the "zero option" apparently agreed on at one point at Reykjavik.

The "zero-option" would involve U.S. and Soviet withdrawal of all their middle-range nuclear missiles and leave Europe in a situation of massive Russian superiority in the convention-

al, chemical, and short-range nuclear weapons fields. The "zero-option," also rejected by Caspar Weinberger and NATO commander Gen. Bernard Rogers, is thus totally unacceptable for Europe.

In this light, the continuing modernization of France's military power is very important. If present trends continue and if France conducts a crash effort in the development of strategic and tactical beam defenses, by the end of the century, France, together with Britain, will wield a considerable threat to the Soviet Union, thus contributing to improving the overall capacities of the Western alliance.

The overall budget allocated to military equipment for 1987-91 is 474 billion francs, an increase in constant-franc credits of 11% during the first year, and 6% for each year thereafter. Within this budget, the priority goes to modernizing the nuclear submarine forces aimed at increasing France's nuclear capacity to over 600 nuclear war-heads in the coming years.

Very important as well, is the decision to include in this budget the second component of the nuclear deterrence capacity, the building of a mobile land-based ICBM, the S-4, which will replace the 18 obsolete stationary missiles of the Plateau of Albion. The new missile will be stationed at Albion during peacetime, but will become mobile during any crisis. The nuclear deterrent is completed by the decision to pursue the construction of the Hades, the only short-range tactical nuclear missile France has which can

fly over Germany into the East bloc (350 km range) and which will replace the 120 km range Plutons. The Hades can be equipped with neutron bombs.

Last, but equally important, France announced for the first time its decision to "have available an appropriate deterrent capability" of chemical weapons. "France cannot renounce definitively categories of arms that other nations feel they have the right to deploy, and cannot accept seeing its defense forces paralyzed by an aggressor, were he to take the initiative to use chemical weapons."

The military budget aims at giving France, and Europe as a whole, an independent observation and communications capacity. Without military observation satellites, without AWACS-type radar systems, France could not have, according to the best military sources, even conceived of an independent military attack on Syria in response to the Syrian-backed terrorism of last September. Adequate funding was restored for the Helios military observation satellite which had been decided under former Defense Minister Charles Hernu. Equally important to pull France's military out of its blindness is the decision to purchase several AWACS-type systems.

A nuclear-powered aircraft carrier will be built, a new Dassault airplane, the Rafale, will be replacing the Jaguar class and other planes, and an improved tank, the Leclerc, will replace the old AMX 30.

What about beam weapons? France is a country of secrets, and nothing is stated concerning the areas of allocation of research funds. Research credits have gone up considerably, and it is generally expected that significant funds have been allocated to the general categories of beam-weapons defenses.