

Chirac reorganizes the French Army: Bonapartism, not Gaullist 'grandeur'

by Christine Bierre

Just as it took a "Socialist" President to turn France over to the financial oligarchy without provoking a mass revolt, so it has taken a "Gaullist" President to destroy what remained of Gen. Charles de Gaulle's republican military policy. The reorganization of the Army announced by President Jacques Chirac on Feb. 22 makes a travesty of the defense policies of de Gaulle, which for decades have been the pride of the French nation.

The centerpiece of the reorganization is the decision to abolish conscription and to go for a fully professional army. This is a powerful blow against the French republican tradition, in which conscription was conceived, not only as a necessity in order to have an army able to face up to any invasion of the national territory, but also as a means to develop patriotism among the citizens. The one-year obligatory draft was also conceived as an instrument for social integration of all sectors of the population, rich and poor, into the service of the nation.

A colonial expeditionary force

But beyond the issue of conscription, the entire mission of the French Army has been transformed by the reorganization. Indeed, the one concept that Chirac stressed repeatedly throughout his nationally televised interview, was the need to be able to "project" France's military forces to foreign theaters. Chirac regretted the fact that while the French Army totals 500,000 troops, France had "only" been able to contribute 10,000 troops to the Persian Gulf war effort, while the British, with a much smaller army, were able to deploy 40,000 troops. Basing himself explicitly on the British model, Chirac announced that he will reduce the total number of troops from 500,000 to 350,000, while increasing the number of forces to be "projected" up to 50-60,000.

What Chirac does not say, of course, is that it was perfectly normal that the French Army was not prepared to send more troops to the Gulf than it did, since de Gaulle had forbidden any "out of area" deployments, outside Europe. For de Gaulle, except in very specific cases such as crimes against humanity, any such deployment was tantamount to a colonial expedition, which he rejected as a matter of principle. Chirac's recent decision to integrate France into the NATO military command, is part of his force "projection" logic.

It is both the financial crisis and the strategic changes

in the world that prompted this restructuring, stated Chirac. Financially, in a period of budget deficits and austerity, France can hardly afford its present military effort. The changes announced by Chirac are aimed at reducing overall costs by 15%. On the strategic level, the French analysis is that the fall of communism, as well as the historical evolution among France's neighbors, has eliminated all threat of invasion of French territory. What remains, according to this analysis, is the strategic threat stemming from the various nuclear powers on the one hand, and a more diffuse threat coming from foreign theaters, which demands the increased "projection" capabilities of the French Army.

Fate of the nuclear 'force de frappe'

On the basis of this evaluation, and even though any serious analysis of the Russian situation points to a great danger of the reemergence of a violently anti-Western power in that country, Chirac will maintain a nuclear deterrent capability—the famous *force de frappe*—but at significantly lower levels. The previous three components of France's nuclear deterrent have now been reduced essentially to one: the strategic nuclear submarine force, made up of four submarines carrying a total of 16 MIRVed (multi-warhead) nuclear missiles, with six warheads each. The strategic missiles on the Plateau d'Albion, which constituted the land component of the deterrent and which have since become obsolete, will not be modernized, as was planned at one point, but will be simply abandoned. The site will instead house a Franco-German military academy.

The air component of the strategic forces (a combination of Mirage 2000 and Superetendard airplanes carrying long-range nuclear missiles) will remain, but as a complement to the submarine forces.

Finally, the Hades tactical nuclear missile (350 km range), which had provoked the hostility of the Germans, because, deployed in France, it threatened only their territory, will be entirely dismantled—an outrageous decision, since this mobile missile, which could travel 1,000 km per day if need be, could have been deployed elsewhere, in the context, for instance, of a European-wide defense system.

Very disturbing, in the light of the fact that France will be maintaining its nuclear deterrent, is the fact that Chirac has



The French republican conscript army is now a thing of the past, as Chirac sets up an expeditionary force for interventions in the context defined by the U.N.'s "new world order."

announced that all nuclear testing facilities, mainly on the South Pacific atoll of Mururoa, will be shut down, leaving the country with nowhere to carry out maintenance, modernization, and testing in the future. Finally, Pierrelatte and Marcoule, the factories producing the nuclear fuel, will both be closed down, although the government insists that it has all the fuel in stock that it needs for the future.

France and the 'new world order'

In terms of weapons programs, Chirac announced that all the main programs—Leclerc tanks, the *Charles de Gaulle* aircraft carrier, and Rafale airplanes—and all joint programs with Germany, with the exception of a transport plane, will be maintained. But in the light of the economic crisis, it is quite likely that they will be all delayed, as has been the case in recent years. The only area where there seems to remain a will to build something, is in the armaments industry, and this is only because dwindling weapons markets impose the requirement for a reorganization in order to face up to stiff international competition. There will be an emphasis on aeronautics, thanks to the merger of the two main aircraft companies, Aérospatiale and Dassault, as well as an emphasis on military electronics, built around a privatized Thomson and perhaps Matra.

Most important, concerning weapons programs, is what is glaringly absent from the reorganization: a policy to gear

up scientific-technological capabilities, in the area of directed energy and related systems. When questioned on the military systems of the future, Chirac warned that France's deterrence was still good for the next 50 years, and that any other talk would be science fiction. This is a thorough departure from de Gaulle's approach of putting France at the forefront of the most advanced scientific research, and ensuring that the military and the civilian economy alike would benefit from such research.

Behind the basic facts of the reorganization, it is the axiomatic change introduced by Chirac in the concept of the national defense, which indicate the world of difference which separates de Gaulle and the head of France's neo-Gaullist party today. While de Gaulle rejected the oligarchical geopolitical rules of the game, Chirac is adapting to those rules, and wants to beat out all the competitors. His economic turn of last October, toward British "free-market" austerity, and his military reorganization of today, both point in this direction. The reform of the French Army into a colonial army, is a suicidal adaptation to a world dominated by United Nations globalism, by the lack of respect for national sovereignty. It is only this supranational globalism—the "new world order"—which justifies the need for a world military *gendarme*, or for a series of *gendarmes*, to patrol and intervene militarily into crisis spots.

Chirac's rationale is undoubtedly the same as that of François Mitterrand during the Gulf war: France must participate in this new world order in order to get a share of the winners' "cake" of political influence. Chirac goes further than Mitterrand, however, in that he not only wants to bring France into that new order, but wants to prove that France, along with Europe eventually, can compete with the Anglo-Saxons for a bigger share of the cake. By adopting practices that General de Gaulle abhorred, Chirac is turning France into a medium-sized imperial power of the same nature as those which de Gaulle fought in his time. It is this petty arrogance of Chirac which was striking in his television address: his need to insist on the greatness of the French system, the greatness of its scientists, of its military technologies, all the while showing disregard for what truly made France great under de Gaulle. De Gaulle made of France a great nation, not because he built up its scientific, military, and civilian technology potentials—although he did. He made of France a great nation because, against the established powers, he had the courage to stand up for the Good, in defense of the inalienable rights of nations, of the poor, of the underdeveloped. He made France into a great nation because he transmitted to it a sense of a mission for the improvement of humanity. It is this ideal, coupled with an economic policy penalizing financial looting and favoring scientific research and productive investment in all areas, which created the basis for France's greatness. To this Gaullist idea of *grandeur*, Chirac has nothing to counterpose but a petty Bonapartiste conception of French arrogance and power.