



THE ROLE OF FRANCE IN THE WAR ON TERRORISM

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The September 11 attacks on New York and Washington revealed a transatlantic alliance that, despite its frequently bitter rhetoric, rested on a foundation of shared values and mutual trust. America's European allies responded to the attacks with unprecedented expressions of solidarity and generous offers of assistance. Indeed, the early amity occasioned by the attacks brought with it hopes of a new era of transatlantic relations in which the need to present a united front to a common and dangerous foe would make recent concerns about a "transatlantic culture gap" seem trivial. France, often the loudest critic of U.S. policy in Europe, lent its strong support to the war on terrorism--President Chirac promising soon after the attacks that France was "completely determined to fight by your side this new type of evil."¹ The French public and media similarly rallied to side of the United States, creating spontaneous shows of solidarity and sympathy across the French political spectrum.² The Bush administration welcomed this support, continually stressing that the war on terrorism would be a long struggle requiring substantial support from U.S. allies and partners.

Only eight months into that long struggle, however, these expressions of solidarity seem a distant memory. European and particularly French criticism of U.S. anti-terrorism policies has increased markedly of late, particularly since President Bush's "axis of evil" speech in January 2002, which French foreign minister Hubert Védrine described as demonstrating a "simplistic" understanding of international affairs.³ Apparently, cracks are beginning to show in the edifice of the U.S.-led anti-terrorism coalition.

The problems do not stem from a lack of French contributions to the war on terrorism. Indeed, France vigorously supported the invocation of NATO's Article V mutual defense guarantee in September and U.S. proposals in the UN Security Council to legitimate a military strike on Afghanistan and to create international authorization to freeze the funds of terrorist organizations. In Europe, French law enforcement has been active in pursuing Al-Qa'eda cells

¹ "Remarks by President Chirac and President Bush at the White House", September 18, 2001, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010918-8.html>

² See Philip H. Gordon and Benedicte Suzan, "France, the United States and the War on Terrorism," U.S.-France Analysis, Brookings Institution, October 2001 at <http://www.brook.edu/dybdocroot/fp/cusf/analysis/index.htm>. For example, polls in early October showed that 65% of the French public approved of the U.S. strikes against Afghanistan. Guillaume Tabard, Pascale Sauvage, and Sophie Huet, "Guerre contre le Terrorisme," *Le Figaro*, October 15, 2001..

³ David Ignatius, "France's Constructive Critic," *Washington Post*, February 22, 2002, p. A25. Despite these comments, one should note that French public support for the U.S.-led campaigns in Afghanistan remains strong at 64%. See Pew Center for the People and the Press, "Americans and European Differ Widely on Foreign Policy Issues", April 20, 2002 at <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=153>

in France and in cutting off sources of terrorist financing. In December, French authorities arrested Ahmed Laidouini, a Frenchman of Algerian descent, who is suspected of serving as a liaison between Al Qaeda cells in Europe.

Intelligence sharing with the U.S. has also increased dramatically, with nearly daily contact between U.S. and French law enforcement officials. Having experienced their own wave of Islamic terrorism in the mid-1990's, the French intelligence services have maintained a steady eye on reputedly radical mosques within the large French Muslim community. They have also been working hard to understand and even infiltrate the vast "Arab-Afghan network" of mujihadeen that has many connections within France.⁴ In Afghanistan, French officers were already on the ground before September 11 with Northern Alliance forces. U.S. forces used the contacts established by French intelligence there to create a partnership with the Northern Alliance that proved critical for overthrowing the Taliban government.⁵

From a military standpoint, France responded to early U.S. requests for help and by mid-December had deployed nearly 5,000 military personnel to Central Asia, approximately the same number as the United Kingdom.⁶ French forces have been present at nearly all phases of the operation in Afghanistan, contributing almost a quarter of the French Navy. This contribution includes a naval task force led by the aircraft carrier Charles De Gaulle that has been patrolling since December. (See Table 1) Planes from the Charles De Gaulle have flown more than 10% of coalition reconnaissance and air defense missions since the carrier arrived.⁷ During Operation Anaconda in early March, French Mirage jets based in Kyrgyzstan and Super Etendard fighter-bombers from the Charles De Gaulle struck 31 targets, becoming the only non-U.S. jets to have conducted strike operations in Afghanistan.

On the ground, French troops established allied control over the airport at Mazar-i-Sharif, over 500 French soldiers patrol with the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF), and, although the French government does not talk about them or their activities, French special forces have been present and presumably active in Afghanistan for much of the campaign. France has also approved an EU pledge of \$495 million and separately pledged \$54 million toward reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. Outside of Central Asia, France has relieved scarce U.S. reconnaissance assets in Kosovo and Bosnia, allowing them to participate in operations in Afghanistan.

Rather than from a lack of military or diplomatic cooperation, the problems in the coalition result from disagreements over the best strategies for defeating terrorism and for employing coalition assets. The French government has expressed frustration with what they see as a lack of consultation and attention to international norms. Thus, for example, French officers reportedly

⁴ Patricia Tourneau, "Paris a tiré les leçons de 1995", *Liberation*, October 5, 2001. French citizens in U.S. custody on suspicion of terrorism include Zacarias Moussaoui, the alleged 20th September 11th hijacker and at least two detainees held at Guantanamo bay.

⁵ Jacques Isnard, "Des agents de renseignement français auprès de l'Alliance du Nord," *Le Monde* October 10, 2001.

⁶ See French Ministry of Defense web site at <http://www.defense.gouv.fr> and the United Kingdom Ministry of Defense web site at <http://www.mod.uk>.

⁷ J.A.C Lewis, "French Fighters join action in Afghanistan," *Jane's Defense Weekly*, March 13, 2002; Bacque Raphaele, "Le gouvernement français veillera à empêcher toute dérive," *Le Monde*, November 23, 2001.

refused certain targets assigned to French strike aircraft by U.S. planners because, in the French view, they presented too great a risk to the civilian population.⁸

More importantly, the French feel that the lack of consultation has allowed the U.S. to rely excessively on military instruments in the wider war against terrorism to the detriment of diplomatic and economic tools that might address the social and economic grievances that they feel lie at the root of terrorism. From the French perspective, the predictable result of this ham-handed approach has been an increase in hatred for the U.S. and the West throughout the Muslim world and an increased danger of further terrorist attacks. The French press often echoes this criticism and has been particularly scornful of U.S. policies with regard to Iraq and Iran, to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and to the detainees held by U.S. authorities. Both the French government and French public opinion seem particularly incensed that some detainees, including French citizens, may face the death penalty.⁹ Indeed, when U.S. prosecutors decided to seek the death penalty in the case of Zacarias Moussaoui, the alleged 20th hijacker, French Justice Minister Marylise Lebranchu announced that France would no longer provide assistance to U.S. authorities if they judged that that assistance might be used in seeking the death penalty for Moussaoui.¹⁰

On the U.S. side, the rapid victory by mostly U.S. and Afghan forces over the Taliban government in Afghanistan has led many in the U.S. to assert that the European allies are neither necessary nor effective for military strikes against terrorist nations. From this perspective, allied forces are perhaps useful for intelligence and post-conflict reconstruction, but are of only symbolic importance for the actual fight and in practice hinder operations through their incessant demands for consultation and control.

All told these developments have encouraged the notion within the United States that French solidarity with the U.S. cause has weakened as the images of the World Trade Center disaster fade in memory. These difficulties within the anti-terrorist alliance are not confined to France—many U.S. partners in Europe and elsewhere, including such usually steadfast allies as Germany and Britain, have expressed similar discomfort with many aspects of U.S. policy. The end result has been a deep deterioration in transatlantic relations across a number of issue areas. Yet, as is so often the case, France seems to be at the vanguard of any allied criticism of U.S. policy.

In part, France plays this role because of its unique position within the alliance and the specific frustrations that result from that position. Although, as noted, France has made significant contributions to the struggle against terrorism, France arguably has the greatest reservoir of untapped resources that could be applied to the problem of terrorism. For example, France has a highly trained mountain troops useful for fighting in Afghanistan, more special forces to include elite light infantry, an ever greater capability to contribute to the ISAF and a variety of specific highly demanded assets for reconnaissance and intelligence that went unused.

⁸ Jacques Isnard, “Les Français ont été amenés à refuser des mission fixées par les Américains,” *Le Monde*, March 11, 2002.

⁹ As an example, see Alexandrine Bouilhet, “Guerre Contre Le Terrorisme: La peine de mort aux Etats-Unis gene les capitales europeennes,” *Le Figaro*, December 13, 2001.

¹⁰ Frederic Chambon, “Paris regrette la decision de John Ashcroft,” *Le Monde*, October 30, 2002.

As with the other allies, many of the French offers to contribute to operations in Afghanistan were declined because U.S. military planners felt that they were unneeded and would prove cumbersome. In part, this was because events moved so quickly in the early stages that it was difficult to integrate allied forces in U.S. plans. Rather than develop a detailed course of action, U.S. planners counted on a massive effort to create opportunities for U.S. forces and improvised as events developed. In such circumstances, smaller forces from other nations cannot be assigned a predetermined role and thus have difficulty playing at all. Compounding this dilemma was the U.S. tendency to cloak operations in an “American Eyes-Only” level of secrecy. As a result of these factors, when French planners arrived at the U.S. Central Command in early October, they had little to do beyond planning for the humanitarian assistance mission.¹¹ With its large military force relative to other U.S. allies, France is even less happy than most at being relegated to such missions. According to one French diplomat, “The Europeans would be very, very uncomfortable with this [humanitarian assistance] role. It would mean giving the U.S. carte blanche for its military operations. The Europeans would be expected by the Americans to pick up the pieces. And frankly, the US neither respects nor appreciates what the Europeans are doing. It would be a completely imbalanced (sic) relationship.”¹²

This lack of allied integration obviously did not seriously affect early operations in Afghanistan or the support lent to those efforts by France and other U.S. partners. However, those operations benefited from the wave of sympathy and solidarity with the United States that followed the September 11 attacks. As recent criticism implies, without careful nurturing that solidarity has proven to be a wasting asset. The next phases of the war may therefore require greater allied integration and cohesion than has thus far been demonstrated.

The U.S. could choose to continue the war without French support, either rhetorical or operational, but that decision would carry substantial costs. On an operational level, France adds some critical capabilities that the U.S. has in short supply as well reconstruction aid, intelligence, and influence in regions likely to be of interest to the U.S., particularly Africa and the Middle East. More importantly, perhaps, French support for U.S. operations is uniquely indicative of certain level of international legitimacy. Among U.S. allies, France has credibility with U.S. foes and allies alike as an independent critic of U.S. policy. According to the Chinese official news agency, Xinhua, “France ... has often been the lone sober-minded figure who speaks out the hard truth.”¹³ As a result, without French support, the U.S. will find it more difficult to attract a diverse coalition, to isolate its adversaries, and to weather operational setbacks. The negative effects on U.S. operational freedom of integrating French forces into U.S. plans must be seen in this light.

Many of these negative affects could be countered if U.S. leaders simply made greater efforts to acknowledge the French contribution to the Congress the American people. As in Kosovo, where French forces flew the most combat missions after those of the United States, the relatively large role of France in the war on terrorism have received scant attention in the U.S.

¹¹ Discussions with Pentagon sources

¹² Quoted in Judy Dempsey, “Europeans chafe at 'picking up pieces' after US,” *Financial Times*, February 21, 2001, p. 8.

¹³ Anonymous, “France Strives for Greater Role via Anti-terror War,” *Xinhua General New Service*, December 27, 2001.

President Bush's upcoming visit to France in May should therefore be seen an important opportunity to acknowledge French efforts and to recapture the early spirit of solidarity that contributed in ways we only dimly perceive to the victory over the Taliban in Afghanistan.

TABLE 1: FRENCH MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS TO OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM:

As of March 14, 2001

Total Personnel: Approximately 4500-5000

AIR FORCES	GROUND FORCES	NAVAL FORCES
C-160 and C-130 transport aircraft in Dushanbe, Tajikistan provide airlift and humanitarian support	460 soldiers to support the airbase operations at Manas, Kyrgyzstan and 100 soldiers to support operations in Dushanbe, Tajikistan	1 Carrier Battle Group (3500 personnel): 1 aircraft carrier (Charles De Gaulle) 1 Guided Missile Destroyer 2 frigates
2 KC-135 tanker aircraft in Manas, Kyrgyzstan to provide aerial refueling (160 missions)	240 soldiers to provide area security at Mazar-e-Sharif (until February 2002)	1 nuclear attack submarine 1 oiler
6 Mirage 2000 fighters in Manas, Kyrgyzstan to provide close air support for ground forces (45 missions)	500 soldiers participating in the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) in Kabul	Aircraft aboard the Charles De Gaulle 16 Super Etendard fighter bombers (220 missions)
2 Atlantique maritime surveillance aircraft in Djibouti for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance missions	15 planning personnel at Central Command in Tampa, Fla.	7 Rafale fighters 2 Hawkeye E-2C Aerial Early Warning Aircraft (100 missions) 2 Dauphin naval helicopters 2 Puma special operations search and rescue helicopters
2 French officers serving as air coordinators at the Regional Air Movement Control Center	Special Forces - Unacknowledged	1 Landing Ship, 1 Corvette, 1 Frigate and 2 Support Ships providing Maritime Intelligence
AWACS early warning aircraft as backfill for NATO AWACS deploying to the U.S.		1 Frigate, 1 oiler in the Arabian Sea for Leadership Interception Operations
2 Mirage IV reconnaissance aircraft (77 missions until February 2002)		

Sources: U.S. Department of Defense, French Ministry of Defense, French Embassy in Washington

