



## Ledamoten ALAIN COLDEFY

*Hedersledamoten, amiral Alain Coldefy, franska Marinen, har bland annat varit fartygschef på hangarfartyget Clemenceau. Under 1999, då flottiljämral, var Coldefy chef för en brittisk/fransk stridsgrupp under operation Allied Force ombord på hangarfartyget Foch. Han befordrades till amiral 2002 och tjänstgjorde som chef för försvarsstaben och därefter som generalinspektör för försvarsmakten. Han pensionerades 2006 och var 2016 - 2018 ordförande för KÖMS systerakademi Académie de marine.*

## *Mercator 2021, the way ahead for a forefront Navy*

In an increasingly dangerous international context, the French armed forces have been deployed on the ground, at sea and in the air for many years, on average 30,000 men permanently.

10,000 of them are in war operations, in Africa, the Middle East, or in maritime theaters, in the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and the Pacific, with frequent, even intensive use of weapons of all kinds, and against adversaries who are also equipped with modern weapons.

The Navy has been providing nuclear deterrence patrols at sea for the last 50 years in a tense operational context that has not changed since the Cold War. In addition to the permanent security posture which concerns the maritime approaches to the national territory and the 12 million km<sup>2</sup> of EEZ, it is engaged at sea, in the air and on land (Rafale, MPA Atlantic, Special Forces in particular) in all theaters of the French armed forces. Over the past ten years, the latter have observed a hardening of operations, in the face of determined enemies who do not care about the lives of civilian populations.

Admiral Prazuck, the head of the French Navy (*le Chef d'État Major de la Marine or CEMM*)<sup>1</sup> in 2018 implemented the first "Mercator" plan under a title of cohesion ("a course, a crew, our navy") for a navy "(1) of combat, (2) at the forefront, and (3) of all talents". The framework was the 2019-2025 programming law with the horizon at 2030.

In 2021, the new CEMM, Admiral Vandier, is following on from Admiral Prazuck's initial program with the "Mercator+ project". Based on the observation that the geo-strategic context has darkened even further in 3 years, it gives a vigorous "combatant" impetus to the initial plan by setting demanding but concrete objectives for each of the axes initiated by its predecessor. To do this, he obtained the agreement of the political

1. Le chef d'état-major de la Marine = Head of the French Navy (Eds. Remark)

authorities who clearly declared themselves in favor of an overall strengthening of the operational capacities of the French forces. It was essential.

The Mercator 2021 plan therefore does not take up the analysis of the strategic environment as for a White Paper, but highlights recent acceleration around three developments.

## **Return of Power Politics**

The first is the return of power politics. The political leaders had observed from afar a certain number of visible indicators, including:

- The rise of the Chinese navy, which in four years had built the equivalent in tonnage of the French fleet and which aims to own six nuclear-powered aircraft carriers, i.e. half of the US Navy.
- The return of the Russian navy to the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, with new weapon systems and in particular cruise missiles fired from the Caspian Sea, and the establishment in Syria of a naval base and a large air base.
- Globally beyond these two examples, a general rearmament of war fleets, with unprecedented technological breakthroughs.

They had observed on the part of these major powers, but also more and more numerous others, a strong tendency towards real confrontations through an uninhibited use of force, and operations in so-called gray or lawless areas.

As on land, there has been a growing tendency to disregard international law, treaties and recommendations of security organizations such as the UN by the policy of fait accompli (artificial islands in the South China Sea, Crimea) and specifically at sea the spread of disputes over the seabed.

## **Climate Change**

The second is climate change, with its consequences on shipping lanes and the violence of storms, cyclones and other climatic disasters, while 70 % of the world's population lives by the water.

## **Health Crisis**

Finally, the health crisis has demonstrated the fragility of the Western world obsessed with the mirage of globalization, and the rise of the Asian world, with China in the lead.

Learning from these recent developments, the French Navy, still employed for 30% of its hours at sea and in flight by the State's civil action at sea, has set itself the goal of being a navy of full war, capable of

- winning a high intensity war fight
- being fully integrated with other armies and operate in all environments
- being interoperable with allied forces• employing leading technologies giving a tactical and strategic advantage
- employing proud, seasoned, talented, resilient crews involved in environmental safety

It then specifies for each of the axes of the 2018 plan the essential short-term projects.



*Photo: DZA©MARINE NATIONALE*

## **Combat Navy**

For the "combat" navy:

- Intensify operational readiness
- Integrate new areas of combat into naval combat
- Stimulate strategic thinking



*Photo: ©Cindy Motet/Marine Nationale/Armées*

## **Forefront Navy**

For the "forefront" navy:

- Accelerate the appreciation of innovation and develop partnerships
- Accelerate the digitization of the navy
- Anticipate the navy of the future



*Photo: ©Loïc Bernardin/Marine Nationale/Armées*

## **Of all Talents**

For the navy "of all talents":

- Strengthen the moral strength, leadership and interpersonal skills of each sailor
- Modernize training capacities and skills development
- Renovate personnel management

## **Discussion**

It is not a question here of detailing each of these projects, the title of which is sufficient to describe their outline, but of trying to discern what these evolutions mean for the navy and how it prepares for the future.

In my opinion, it is the chapter on the combat navy that deserves attention. Combat preparation includes so-called organic aspects which require human resources (instructors on land and at sea) and above all material resources located near the large metropolitan bases, training centers for surface forces, submarines and naval air, firing ranges etc.

The French Navy emphasizes the deployment of the carrier strike group, which includes since 1999 one SSN<sup>2</sup> as in the US Navy, from the far north of the Atlantic to the disputed areas of the Pacific and of course the Indian Ocean where it has been present in strength since 1974. These deployments are widely announced and commented on by the Minister of the Armed Forces. The Mediterranean, for the aircraft carrier, is a maritime theater like any other, which was not the case previously.

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2. Nuclear-powered attack submarine (Eds. remark)

The objective is to *"overcome new challenges, to innovate tactically, to increase our level of knowledge in regions that we rarely visit, to consolidate control of operations at the top end of the war fighting spectrum, and to perfect interoperability with our allies while sending a strong signal to our competitors."*

For a long time, the navy had not sent such a clear message to its allies as to its adversaries. It had, by tradition, the habit of discretion without boasting. In our world of communication, it is important that the public be informed of the actions of its armed forces and in particular navies are best suited to the political range which goes from diplomacy to bombardment.

This chapter is supplemented by integration of new areas of conflict, namely cyberspace, the electromagnetic spectrum, information operations and exploitation of the seabed.

Similarly, the biological risk was tested in full scale in 2020 on the [Aircraft Carrier] *Charles de Gaulle* and the group's frigates, and entailed both new procedures before deployments at sea, including for SSBNs<sup>3</sup>, and a reflection on taking this pandemic risk into account in the future.

And it ends by encouraging the strategic thinking of all sailors, both through collective work (the so-called "chapels" must talk to each other) and writing, which is rather new.

Then comes the chapter devoted to the navy at the forefront. The remilitarization of the last twenty years has been remarkable and the innovations or sometimes the technological breakthroughs have been numerous.

The main danger comes from the proliferation of these new technologies, including in cyberspace, which has considerably reduced the operational advantage of our Western forces. The time of unquestionable technological superiority of our forces is definitely over.

Navies used to prepare long-term equipment and weapons programs, but that process is obsolete, and they need to get closer to companies that innovate at the rate of technological progress.

Speeding up the digitalization of the Marine Nationale is key and for example, implementation of a new "Information system and digital department" as well as a "Marine Data Service Centre" and "Artificial Intelligence Research Centre" at the Naval Academy have already taken place.

The navy is also at a pivotal period of renewal of its major components, namely the future aircraft carrier (2038) the 4 future SSBNs (from 2030) or the SCAF (Future Air Combat System) which will replace the Rafale.

The last challenge, certainly not the least, that of human resource, has always been a strong point of the French navy, which is one of only two navies in the world (with the United States) to operate in all combat areas of a complete navy, even if at a more modest level.

*"Mentoring-type coaching processes, training and leadership apprenticeship will be the subject of development work to strengthen the quality of the human elements of our Navy".* Everything is said in this sentence.

3. Nuclear-powered Ballistic Missile Carrying Submarine (Eds. Remark)

The new society is also that of a new type of bond between humans, kinship, double careers in couples, etc. ... The whole way the navy operates has already been modified and we must anticipate even more future behaviors.

## Conclusion

What to say in conclusion of this overview on the Mercator program which commits the navy for the 2030 horizon?

I would say that this is the message of a leader, a true leader who vigorously extends the impetus of his predecessor and who gives meaning to a navy ready to fight and to win.



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