

# FRENCH AND EUROPEAN SECURITY IN A DEFENSE-ORIENTED ENVIRONMENT: AN INTERVIEW WITH GENERAL PIERRE GALLOIS

*FORUM:* Why has France chosen to exclude itself from President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative?

*GALLOIS:* That is very simple. President Reagan said that he would develop a strategic shield — not a tactical one. The French, as far as I understand it myself, realized that this would protect the Americans rather than the allies, because the word “tactical” was excluded from the definition of the envisioned defensive shield. We think that if the Americans are going to produce such a defensive shield in the future, the Russians probably will do the same. This is the phenomenon of action-reaction between the two big powers. In that case, if such a shield is efficient on the American side, it may be efficient on the Russian side. Then, French retaliatory forces would suffer, because our power to penetrate Russian defenses would be diminished. And as we have no shield to protect us, we would be without any possibility of defense, open to their attack without the ability to retaliate, that is to intimidate and ultimately deter such an attack. These were the main military reasons.

There are several other reasons which are important. The idea for research cooperation, again as I understand it, was that it would be a one-way type of organization — some of the elements of French technology going to the States without returns for France. For these reasons the President of France refused to participate. Personally, I think that was probably a mistake, because a proper answer — to my mind — would be to see whether or not some of the technologies investigated by the Americans may be applied to the geographical situation of Western

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Pierre Gallois is a retired Brigadier General of the French armed forces. He served under General Eisenhower in SHAPE and was involved in the French integration with NATO. In the 1960s, as a close advisor to General DeGaulle, he played a major part in the development of an independent French nuclear force. General Gallois taught strategic studies at the French War College, the Sorbonne, and various other universities, and has published over ten books on international strategy. He is currently a member of the Board of Directors of the Institut de Geopolitique in Paris.

Europe. After such a survey it would still have been possible to make a decision on French participation.

*FORUM:* Is there any current cooperation in defense-related research between France and the United States in this area?

*GALLOIS:* Oh yes, there is some cooperation. But not in very advanced technologies where the United States is ahead, such as very high powered lasers, for instance, or electro-magnetic guns and the acceleration of particles.

*FORUM:* Has France then initiated its own program? And if so, what is its focus? Is it tactical defense, point defense, or area defense?

*GALLOIS:* No, the French thought they could find a proper answer to SDI in their Eureka program, which has been proposed to the allies and is currently under discussion by other European nations. Such a program is not a military program. Subsidized mainly by companies, not governments, it would be a short-term program capable of yielding some profitable returns very early. SDI, in contrast, is carried out by the U.S. government. It is a long-term program, possibly without immediate profits. Therefore, there is a great difference between the two approaches. The American one is military, utilizing very advanced technology and is government-financed. The European program is smaller in scope, of a short-term perspective and subsidized by industry rather than governments. The target for the Americans is the achievement of a comprehensive military shield. The French are trying to develop a technological base, which can positively affect industry and trade within the next three or four years.

*FORUM:* Are you saying France does not fund any research geared toward independent defense against ballistic missiles?

*GALLOIS:* We have naturally done research along the same lines as the Americans and Russians for a long period of time, but on a highly reduced scale. The technologies are not advanced enough, especially if we consider the special circumstances in Western Europe. The Soviets, for example, could use reduced trajectories if they attack with missiles. Those are very difficult to defend against. There also is little warning time. Furthermore, saturation of targets is very simple, because we have no hard targets, only soft targets in Europe. Even inaccurate weapons

exploding at height pose a grave danger. This is a different problem from defending American missile silos.

*FORUM:* As a "quick fix" solution, the upgrading of conventional air defenses, such as the Patriot system, has been proposed. Would this be enough to achieve an anti-tactical missile defense?

*GALLOIS:* That is true. The Patriot was conceived, I think years ago, as a weapon against incoming warheads. It has been downgraded to be in compliance with the ABM Treaty of 1972. Such a weapon can be upgraded again to have some effectiveness against incoming warheads. But we believe that saturation of a Patriot defense would be relatively easy. Furthermore, even if Patriot had a missile defense capability, this would not help Europe to develop really adequate systems, such as the ones the U.S. is going to develop within SDI. SDI is not only the idea to make a shield, but it also encompasses a change in strategy to take place in, let us say twenty-five years. SDI technology might be deployed in space, but it could also be used on the ground to replace what we call today conventional weapons. That indeed would be a very ambitious program and nothing of the sort has been even envisaged in Europe.

*FORUM:* If the U.S. and USSR went ahead with strategic defense, and nuclear weapons were indeed rendered obsolete, would this have any beneficial consequences for Europe?

*GALLOIS:* There is a danger. I think that SDI will come about, we do not have the power to stop it. There will be so many good reasons for the U.S. to go ahead with SDI, that you are going to stick to it. When President Reagan said that in the end, the main idea is to get rid of atomic weapons, that made us a bit anxious. For us nuclear weapons are the only weapons which can intimidate a large power. We can not imagine a defense which would rely on combat with the Soviets, because they would win. Highly civilized and advanced countries are not prepared to make sacrifices in conventional combat. The solution must be more deterrence-oriented. It is very difficult to deter without weapons that do not have an effective capability to intimidate. For the time being, I do not see any weapons which have such a capability except nuclear weapons.

*FORUM:* France is now engaged in a modernization program of its strategic and tactical nuclear arsenal. If an effective Soviet defense would make the limited French forces obsolete, does it make sense to invest new resources in offensive weapons?

*GALLOIS:* We expect SDI to have an effect on the Soviets. They will reinforce their system of defense. Hence we have to multiply the number of warheads, to have a chance to saturate their system. This is why we are multiplying the amount of warheads we could launch in a first salvo by a factor of six or ten. We may also modify our nuclear strategy. Instead of taking Soviet cities as hostage, instead of targeting the heart of the enemy territory, we could target the fringes of it, where the armed forces of the enemy are deployed. In that case we could use also the short range weapons with depressed trajectory, relatively accurately, and in great numbers, to create a threat to their conventional ground and air deployments. We hope that such a threat will deter them from using their weapons against us.

*FORUM:* Would this mean that Soviet forces in territories of other Warsaw Pact countries would be targeted?

*GALLOIS:* Yes, and properly also at the fringes of the Russian territory. If it is difficult for us to intercept their weapons against our deployments, it will also be very difficult for them to intercept a great number of warheads directed against targets in relative proximity to our own line of defenses.

*FORUM:* Would this not leave the Soviets with an escalation dominance? They could threaten to annihilate the French homeland if their forces come under attack.

*GALLOIS:* They would have an escalation capability. The problem is whether or not we could stop such an escalatory power with the threat of destroying their entire military deployments in Western Europe. That would to a certain extent be a very great punishment for them.

*FORUM:* At what point would France execute this threat? Up to now France has declared that it would use nuclear weapons only when its own territory is directly endangered by hostile forces.

*GALLOIS:* Oh, that policy remains the same. The more powerful the Soviets are, the more we think that the American nuclear umbrella is not secure, the more we intend to use nuclear weapons only, when and if French territory is threatened and when and if French sovereignty over the French people is in danger.

*FORUM:* The forces France would threaten with its new strategy would already have to have reached a certain proximity to French territory. Does this mean the Russians would be held hostage, or punished in Germany?

*GALLOIS:* Well, we could have what we call an interdiction campaign, which is, as you know, the destruction of static targets in the theater for ground operations in order to paralyze these operations. Some of these targets are in the Soviet satellite states, some of them are in the Russian territory.

*FORUM:* You mentioned that a Soviet SDI system would trigger an increased French deployment of nuclear warheads. On the other hand, we hear very often that strategic defense would necessitate an increased effort in conventional weaponry. Can a medium power such as France afford to do both things at the same time, or would you set a certain priority?

*GALLOIS:* Conventional forces are of little relevance any more, because they are so easily destroyed. They are "sitting ducks" in a surprise attack. Do not forget that democracies would never launch such an attack. The initiative of a war would be on the Soviet side. If they attack with initiative and surprise, our conventional deployments will be wiped out in a few minutes. We do not think it is necessary to allocate a lot of money to such a conventional defense. We believe if the Soviets were going to take the enormous risk — and I do not think they are going to do it — to attack Western Europe, and initially France, it will be to win. If they meet resistance, they will use any means to overcome it, including nuclear weapons. Hence we know that we have to be prepared to avoid all-out war. Therefore we do not consider conventional weapons to be greatly significant. In any case we would be forced to use atomic weapons.

*FORUM:* If an attempt to preempt conventional weapons could be successful, as you say, would it not even be more likely that the Soviets could preempt French nuclear forces which threaten them.

*GALLOIS:* Yes, this is why we rely on mobility on sea and on the ground. We are in a position where we have to absorb the first blow in any case, as we do not take the initiative. We must deny the enemy the knowledge of where he has to strike. This denial can be achieved only through mobility. This is costly, but still, it costs less to have mobility of some atomic weapons than to attempt to hide and move divisions;

that would be impossible — even aircraft are “sitting ducks” on the airfields.

*FORUM:* You are the father of the French strategy of minimum deterrence, a strategy which is said to have helped safeguard French sovereignty over decades. When you look ahead, are you worried about the challenges and changes brought about by strategic environments which is increasingly defense-oriented?

*GALLOIS:* Naturally. France has been invaded five times during the last hundred years, because it was occupied four times, and because of the losses we incurred. I thought from the outset that we should use technology to prevent France from being involved in wars again. When the first bomb exploded in Hiroshima some of us — and we were not many, probably four or five — thought that we should use such a new technology to deter any attack and to keep France out of war. We had limited means and I tried to devise a strategy which had some validity until now, the strategy of deterrence of the strong by the weak. Few weapons are supposed to inflict enough damages proportional to the value we represent to the would-be aggressor. That proportional relationship still exists. We are a medium-size power, not worth a great punishment. Hence, I thought that through the capability to destroy some thirty, forty or fifty cities, the U.S. had from 1945 to now, we would be in a position to deter. This strategy was adopted by all the governments of my country, including the socialists.

Now, we are at the verge of a complete change in weaponry and strategy. We are entering an intermediate phase, which may last twenty years, before technologies, which are at development stage, can really transform the situation. We have to maintain the capability to deter for the next twenty years and at the same time we have to prepare ourselves for the next phase, beginning around 2010. I deplore that we are not in more of a working relationship with the United States to see what weapons developed in the States in the future may be used for the protection of France. The atomic weapons developed in the United States have been used for the protection of France for the last forty years. This at least implicit cooperation must continue.

*FORUM:* Could the necessity for cooperation in the defense of Europe lead to tighter integration of Western European powers?

*GALLOIS:* I doubt it. You know the situation in Europe: a general attack by the Soviets on all the Western European countries is not the

most likely scenario. What we are scared of are more limited actions against, let us say a portion of Turkey or Norway. European defense would not work in such cases. If Norway is attacked, I am sure the Greeks, Turks, Italians, Spanish, Portuguese, Belgians, and Dutch will not move a finger. The same would happen if Turkey were attacked; then the northern nations would stay still. It is difficult to imagine a European defense, it is like thinking about African or Asian defense. You cannot compare or equate geographic situation with the theater of operation. Against the immense power of Russia we should first take care of our security by ourselves, because nobody would come to your aid in case of great tension. That feeling is shared by all the countries. In the field of defense, integration has little meaning. It has always failed, because we do not feel a common threat.

