

'Paris adopts "final warning" stand' from The Guardian (1 December 1982)

Caption: On 1 December 1982, the British daily newspaper The Guardian comments on the reorganisation of French defence policy.

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Paris adopts 'final warning' stand

From Walter Schwarz
in Paris

French tactical nuclear missiles are to be removed from army units in eastern France and placed directly under President Mitterrand's control, in a far-reaching defence reorganisation designed to restore the Gaullist emphasis on "ultimate deterrence."

Instead of being seen as battle weapons, the medium-range missiles are to be considered "a final warning" to an aggressor before the full weight of strategic nuclear forces are unleashed. The missiles' credibility is to be heightened from 1991 when the existing Pluton missiles, with a range of only 75 miles, are to be replaced by the Hades, with a range of 219 miles, which will enable it to reach East German targets from French soil.

New guidelines issued this week by General Jean De-launay, the army Chief of Staff, also provide the President with a "rapid assistance force" of anti-tank weapons, carried by helicopters, from next year. This will enable France to play a more immediate part in meeting attack before it reaches the homeland.

Forward intervention troops of the First Army Corps are also to be given more mobility to enable them to play a part in what French generals call the "forward battle" — to be waged independently, or as

Tactical missiles to be placed under direct control of Mitterrand

● Charles Hernu: 'playing for time'

part of NATO action. Gendarmes are to replace soldiers in defending key installations from sabotage.

The new policy, to be confirmed in a general review due next spring, has come under immediate attack by the right-wing Opposition. This led on Monday evening to the rejection of the defence budget by the Senate, where the Opposition has a majority. It was the first time in the Fifth Republic that a defence budget has been defeated. It now has to return to the National Assembly for second reading.

The main criticism is that the new strategy is accompanied by austerity cuts in conventional forces, especially the modernisation of weapons in the army, navy, and air force. Austerity led last month to the abrupt cancellation of £1.3 billion of military orders.

The Opposition also attacked



the ambiguities of a defence policy that has hovered for years between two opposing concepts: all-or-nothing deterrence in defence of the home "sanctuary" versus preparation for a "forward battle" which Gaullist critics see as "getting back into NATO through the back door."

An initial move towards a "forward battle" concept was made by President Giscard, who also prepared the ground for the manufacture of the neutron bomb. President Mitterrand had indicated that he is likely to go ahead with the neutron bomb, but it is not now clear what role it is designed to play.

Attacking the ambiguity, Mr Yvon Bourges, who was Mr Giscard's defence minister, accused his successor, Mr Charles Hernu, of "playing for time." The Giscardian Opposition leader, Mr Jean Lecanuet, said there had been an "un-

announced change in defence which is at variance with foreign policy."

But there was ambiguity, too, in the Opposition's complaints, directed variously at austerity cuts and strategic concepts. Many speakers said the defence effort, at 3.9 per cent of GNP, was not credible. But Mr Hernu replied that the cuts this year were marginal and had not affected "any basic options."

Ambiguity has also arisen about possible French participation in nuclear arms reduction. Mr Mitterrand said last week, that the French nuclear strike force could not be counted as part of the NATO arsenal because, while the super powers had enough to destroy each other several times over, "for us to give up even a little bit of our present force would deliver us to the good pleasure of the great powers."

However, Mr Mauroy, speaking to the Western European Union Assembly in Paris on Monday, said French refusal to have its weapons counted applied only "at this stage."

Meanwhile, the Government appears to doubt American readiness to defend Europe. Mr Hernu told the West European Union Assembly that Europe's predicament "would be less worrying if senior Americans did not voice semi-official views casting doubt in their willingness to defend Europe."