

# The Transformation of the French Air Force

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1959 onwards nuclear forces accorded  
top priority

1960 first French nuclear bomb test

1964 Mirage IV bombers—first  
operational pillar

- After Algeria, light and rapidly deployable joint units and theatre reception bases
- Interventions on a much smaller scale, but not at the lower end of the spectrum of military force
- Increasing Libyan air threat, deployment of French air defence assets (OCA, SEAD, SAM)
- Operation Lamantin (1977/1978): COIN from the air—8 Jaguars supported by tankers and SIGINT

# Desert Storm

- Precision engagement by means of AS30-L
- 1,237 combat and a significant number of AAR and airlift sorties, yet only 2 per cent of total
- Lack of capability to immediately operate in an advanced technological environment

## **Desert Storm—catalyst for force transformation**

- Interoperable C2 and significant share in MIDS development
- Interim solutions for conventional combat a/c fleet
- Space-based military assets essential for strategic autonomy
- Strategic core function—anticipation

## Allied Force (1999)

- Second largest contribution to Operation Allied Force: sorties flown, aircraft dispatched, PGMs
- President Chirac exercised tight political control, e.g. vetoed bombing of key bridges across Danube
- Despite Alliance frictions in 1999, first European air force to engage targets in Afghanistan

## **Operation Harmattan (Libya 2011)**

- Coalition of the willing setting— multinationalised Franco-British chain of command
- Campaign preceded by discreet French national ISR involving air, naval, space assets
- Opening strike on 19 March time-sensitive, preventing regime forces to enter Benghazi

- AH launched in the night of 3/4 June
- 250 sorties, > 430 HOT anti-tank missiles expended
- Strikes controversial, yet contributed to lift deadlock



## Force Goals

- Armed Forces Model 2015 (issued in 1996):  
300 modern combat aircraft, 50 A400Ms, 16 AAR
- Military Planning for 2009-14: 300 combat aircraft for both Air Force and Navy, 70 aircraft deployable
- 2013 Defence White Book: 225 combat aircraft for both Air Force and Navy, 45 aircraft deployable

- Decommissioning of AS37 Martel—no longer dedicated SEAD capability
- Bailing out of bilateral anti-radar missile programme with Germany
- 2003-8 Military Planning Law: EW development programmes—stand-off jamming
- Rafale's EW suit and AASM—destruction of enemy air defences

## **Air-to-Air Refuelling**

- Closely linked to its airborne nuclear component
- Availability rate decreased, increased maintenance
- 2013 Defence White Book: 12 MRTT (reduction of 2)
- A400M Atlas—convertible into tanker a/c

- Quick reaction to contingencies—both nationally and multinationally
- Strategic autarchy—nuclear deterrence, ISR, C2
- Balanced forces, particularly balance between teeth and tail
- Linchpin—ability to penetrate and defeat increasing potent air defences