

# France To Curtail Military

*Spending Reduced;  
Draft to Be Phased Out*

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Washington Post Foreign Service

PARIS, Aug. 20—The two-month-old Socialist government today solidified its plans to curtail France's military spending and relaxed its minimal demands on young people eligible for military service. The moves open the possibility of a confrontation with President Jacques Chirac, the Gaullist chief of state who has stressed his constitutional prerogatives as chief of the French armed forces.

In a cabinet meeting to prepare the fall legislative agenda, Prime Minister Lionel Jospin's government formally scrapped a plan announced a year ago by the now-defeated right-of-center government as part of a broad reform and professionalization of France's armed forces.

A five-day civics encounter group and military promotion conference known as the "citizen rendezvous," championed by Chirac, was to replace universal conscription. Instead, the military draft, which dates back two centuries, is being phased out, and France's armed forces of 400,000 will be totally professionalized.

The Socialists do not oppose the general drift of mothballing the draft, as many European countries have done or are doing. But Defense Minister Alain Richard will present a still more modest rendezvous to Parliament next month: a one-day session that the French military establishment feels it needs

to make the case to young people for a career in uniform.

At the cabinet meeting's conclusion today, according to the Reuter news agency, Finance and Industry Minister Dominique Strauss-Kahn said defense procurement—about half the military budget—will be about \$13 billion next year, an 11 percent decrease from the spending outlined in the former government's budget.

"Defense will not be sacrificed in any way," Strauss-Kahn said.

Reduced military spending would help the Jospin government finance the ambitious job-creation program that helped the Socialist-Communist-Green coalition drive Chirac's center-right political allies out of power in the election June 1. At a time when one in four French

youths are unemployed, the program aims to put 350,000 young people to work in the public sector over the next five years.

The Jospin government has committed itself to meeting the budget deficit criteria required for France's membership in the planned single European currency. Its spending plans must not, for political and economic purposes alike, appear to threaten France's chances of passing muster in the new European money club when the first cut is made next spring.

Under the 39-year-old French constitution and the still-evolving traditions of government "cohabitation"—a president from one party and a government from another—few things are as clear among Chirac's narrow prerogatives as his stewardship of French foreign and defense policy.

In France, the president is "chief of the army." But the prime minister is "responsible for national defense," and his government decides the French budget. Last month the government also announced a retrenchment in France's military presence in its traditional continent of influence, Africa.

In a national day address to the French people July 14, Chirac said specifically that he will "be vigilant that our forces continue to have whatever resources they need for their renewal."

Some of the early published analysis of today's announcements suggested that Chirac, with public approval ratings climbing since the elections and the burdens of actual governance shifted elsewhere, could use the defense issue to reestablish a role for himself and possibly create chilly conditions in the thus-far friendly cohabitation relationship.

The Jospin government's apparent willingness to find spending cuts in France's military establishment worries not just Gaullists but also the country's troubled defense industry. It is busy shopping for clients elsewhere in Europe, the Middle East and Asia, and is unhappy with any talk of trims or delays in France's scheduled spending for aircraft and other military equipment. French unions representing the military construction sector also are opposed to any further shaving of the lean military budget.