



France, Paratroopers bring anti-drone defense to the front line with the PROTEUS system

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The 35th Paratrooper Artillery Regiment of the French Army is preparing to install the PROTEUS anti-drone system on a light vehicle of the Fardier type, with the aim of making the capability more mobile and better suited to the operational needs of airborne units.

The unit, based in Tarbes and part of the 11th Paratrooper Brigade, was the first regiment of the Armée de Terre to receive the PROTEUS systems in the Standard 1 configuration.

The first version of the system uses a 20-millimeter automatic cannon mounted on a TRM 2000 tactical truck and paired with the SANDRA targeting device, equipped with day and night thermal observation capabilities.

A solution developed by repurposing armaments already available in French arsenals and updating them to address one of the most widespread threats in modern combat scenarios:

small, inexpensive, numerous drones that are difficult to intercept with traditional missile systems.

A configuration designed for paratrooper units

The installation of PROTEUS on a Fardier would represent a significant step forward, especially in terms of mobility.

The TRM 2000, while ensuring the capability to transport the cannon and related equipment, is indeed an outdated and relatively heavy vehicle compared to the needs of a paratrooper unit.

The Fardier, on the other hand, is a light vehicle designed to accompany airborne units and transport men, ammunition, armaments, and materials even on difficult terrain.

A more compact configuration would allow French paratrooper artillerymen to have anti-drone protection more integrated into the maneuver of light units, reducing dependence on bulkier logistical means.

The capability could be used to protect command posts, artillery batteries, logistical areas, troop concentrations, and other structures particularly vulnerable to reconnaissance and attacks conducted with drones.

A 20-millimeter cannon against small UAVs

PROTEUS stems from the modernization of French 20-millimeter anti-aircraft cannons, reintroduced into service and integrated with new sensors.

In the Standard 1 configuration, the system combines the cannon with the SANDRA thermal camera, derived from the equipment used with the Mistral anti-aircraft missile system.

The complex is designed to detect, track, and hit small unmanned aerial vehicles using explosive ammunition.

According to the characteristics disclosed during the program's development, PROTEUS can counter micro-drones at distances of around 500 meters, while against larger targets, helicopters, or ground targets, the range can increase.

The system is normally operated by a crew of four soldiers.

The availability of large stocks of 20-millimeter ammunition also allows the French Army to have a relatively economical solution compared to the use of surface-to-air missiles against drones of very low commercial value.



The 20 mm PROTEUS cannon targets an enemy drone. The automatic weapon has been specifically adapted for anti-drone defense. Photo: caporal-chef de 1re classe Yann Dupuy.

The evolution towards Standard 2

The PROTEUS program is set to evolve through a Standard 2 configuration, featuring greater automation and precision.

The new version is expected to integrate a fire control software and artificial intelligence components developed with the contribution of the French Defense Artificial Intelligence Agency.

These technologies should help operators recognize the drone, calculate the distance, automatically track its trajectory, and determine the most effective aiming point.

The French Army thus aims to transform a cannon designed during the Cold War into a modern low-altitude defense system.

However, PROTEUS is not intended to operate in isolation. It represents one of the elements of the French anti-drone network, along with VAB ARLAD vehicles, radars, surveillance systems, and NEROD portable jammers, used to disrupt the connections between drones and their operators.

The lessons of the war in Ukraine

The need to provide a mobile anti-drone capability to paratrooper units directly derives from the experiences observed in the most recent conflicts.

In Ukraine, small commercial drones and FPV systems are used daily to locate troops, adjust artillery fire, transport explosives, and strike vehicles, fortifications, and individual soldiers.

Light units, often dispersed and lacking heavy anti-aircraft protection, are particularly exposed.

France is therefore developing a layered defense in which electronic warfare, cannons, sensors, and missiles can be employed in a coordinated manner.

For the 35th Paratrooper Artillery Regiment, the installation of PROTEUS on a light vehicle could make this protection compatible with the speed, autonomy, and mobility required by airborne forces.

The evolution of the system demonstrates how even paratrooper units are adapting means, doctrines, and training to a battlefield where the threat from the sky is no longer represented only by planes and helicopters, but especially by thousands of small drones that are difficult to detect and neutralize.

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