



Guardians of the Sky: France at the Forefront in the Fight Against Drones

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For over eighty years, the *Armée de l'Air et de l'Espace* has been watching over the skies of France, ensuring the sovereignty of the national airspace. But today, with the emergence of increasingly diverse and insidious threats, air defense is undergoing a profound transformation: the **anti-drone fight** is now one of its strategic pillars.

A Permanent Surveillance Chain

The French air defense, structured after World War II, represents one of the two permanent missions of the *Armée de l'Air et de l'Espace*, alongside nuclear deterrence. Today, it is based on the **Posture Permanente de Sûreté Aérienne (PPS-A)**, which mobilizes about **450 military personnel** day and night, 365 days a year.

The system relies on **over 70 radars**, a network of control centers, and the **Centre de Préparation et de Conduite des Opérations de Défense Aérienne (CAPCODA)**, located in

Lyon-Mont Verdun, the operational heart of the device. In case of a serious threat, the **Haute Autorité de Défense Aérienne (HADA)** — a body directly connected to the Prime Minister — can ultimately authorize the use of coercive measures, including the interception of suspicious aircraft.

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As explained by Air Brigade General **Olivier Poncet**, Chief of Staff of the **Commandement de la Défense Aérienne et des Opérations Aériennes (CDAOA)**, “threats come from all altitudes of the atmosphere: from mini-drones to high-altitude aircraft, with military, civilian, or terrorist nature. The PPS-A is an alert and reaction chain capable of intervening at any point in the territory within minutes.”

During major events – such as the **July 14th parade** or the **Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games** – the PPS-A is reinforced by **Dispositifs Particuliers de Sécurité Aérienne (DPSA)**. These are temporary “bubbles” that prohibit air traffic over certain sensitive areas and allow an immediate response to any intrusion.

An emblematic case was the opening of the Olympic Games: the entire airspace of Paris was interdicted for over a **150-kilometer radius**, with the support of allied assets. The effectiveness of the device was fully demonstrated: no threat compromised the safety of the ceremonies or the public.

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The Anti-Drone Dimension

The rise of drones has revolutionized air defense. Today, the **anti-drone fight** follows the same operational phases planned for any aircraft: **detection, identification, classification, engagement**. Large UAVs, comparable to small aircraft, are managed directly by the PPS-A and can be intercepted by fighter jets in operational readiness. **Mini and micro-drones**, on the other hand, fall under the competence of civil authorities – but with the constant support of the Armée de l’Air et de l’Espace, ready to step in should the threat require it.

General Poncet reminded that the protection of sensitive sites – airports, power plants, prisons, strategic industries – is the responsibility of the relevant ministries, but that the military chain remains “at the heart of the device,” ready to act in a secondary role.

Advanced Systems and Concrete Results

The range of means employed by the French Air Force is broad and complementary. The **MILAD**, **PARADE**, and **BASSALT** systems integrate radars, optical sensors, and goniometric antennas to detect and track drones. Added to these are aerial **jamming** (electronic disturbance) from **Fennec helicopters**, electronic capture for remote control of the drone, and, if necessary, **physical neutralization** using light weapons, artillery, or air-to-air missiles.

In parallel, the AAE is experimenting with **directed energy** solutions, such as lasers and microwaves, already successfully tested during major events. The results of the **Paris 2024 Olympic Games** speak for themselves: about **400 drones detected** and **over 100 neutralized** through jamming, seizure, or interception, without any significant incident.

The future of French air defense now lies in a **total data integration**. The goal is to create a **Recognized UAV Picture (RUP)**, a unified vision of drone airspace, shared between civilian and military sensors. This requires interoperability, international cooperation, and rapid industrial investments in new technologies — from **artificial intelligence** to **laser systems**.

The anti-drone fight, now permanent and interministerial, is no longer a mere complement to air defense: it is its new operational horizon, essential to ensure the **sovereignty and security of the French sky**.

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News link: <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/lutte-anti-drones-volet-majeur-posture-permanente-surete-aerienne>