

Traduction – Seul le prononcé fait foi

**Speech of the President of the Republic
on the Defense and Deterrence Strategy**

It is a real pleasure for me to be here today with you, in this prestigious Ecole de Guerre, which trained so many of our military chiefs.

As weird as this may sound, no Head of State came back here since Charles de Gaulle. In front of your predecessors, at the dawn of the 5th Republic, in a now famous speech, General de Gaulle announced on 3 November, 1959, sixty years ago, the creation of what he then called the “*force de frappe*”.

The strategic context has of course dramatically changed since, and I think it is important to come and share with you, the people who are going to be called to fill the highest-ranking posts in our armed forces, my thinking on the fundamentals of our defence strategy.

I do not need to remind you that “war is the mere continuation of policy by other means” as said by an author whose works are recommended to all of you in attendance today.

Therefore, I plan to proceed with a situation analysis – to use your military dialectic – which involves analysing the world as it is and not as we would like it to be, before explaining my idea for manoeuvring as Chief of the Armed Forces.

I’ve already had a few occasions to describe the state of the world as I see it, and I must say that I share writer Amin Maalouf’s observation of a disordered world – and I quote: “*the concern of a disciple of the enlightenment, whose luminous ideas are flickering, weakening and, in some countries, on the verge of going out.*”

The last decade that we went through has seen a tremendous challenging of strategic, political, economic, technological, energetic, and military balances and we are experiencing today, once again, the emergence of what could jeopardize the peace that has been achieved after so many tragedies on our continent.

At a time when the global challenges our planet is facing should demand renewed cooperation and solidarity, we are witnessing an accelerated disintegration of our international legal order and institutions that structure peaceful relations between States.

These phenomena undermine of course the comprehensive security framework, and directly or indirectly affect our defence strategy. Risks and threats have grown and become more diverse. Their effects are gaining ground and moving closer, and in some cases, impacting us directly.

Right after I was elected, I made fighting terrorism my top priority. It will remain so because a number of terrorist groups have declared themselves our enemy. The enemy is a threat that is becoming reality. The territorial caliphate of Daesh has since then been destroyed, yet the jihadi terrorist ideology and networks, thriving in the breeding ground of failed States, continue to seek weaknesses in our societies, realizing the existence of a continuum between defence and security.

Yet, it would be naive and thoughtless on our part to attribute all the security and defence problems to one sole threat, however crucial it is.

In reality, while our compatriots and we, ourselves, are rightly focusing on fighting terrorism, the world continues to change course before our very eyes.

Every day we are having to deal with the direct and indirect impact of globalization on our sovereignty and our security.

Managing tangible and intangible resources and flows is key to new power strategies. The high seas, air space and outer space and the digital realm, common spaces that interpenetrate each other and complicate our understanding of the issues, are becoming or are once again arenas for power struggles and at times, confrontation.

Since these changes are so complex and happening in many different geographic locations at the same time, they broaden de facto the field and modus operandi of possible interstate confrontations.

They are the symptoms of a time of paradigm shifts, which we are living through.

The first paradigm shift is strategic.

A new hierarchy of powers is being outlined, bringing with it a global uninhibited strategic competition that could generate risks of incidents and uncontrolled military escalation in the future. Several broad foreseeable trends are unfolding.

- First, global competition between the United States and China is an established strategic fact nowadays, which structures, and from now on will structure, all international relations.

- Next, strategic stability in Europe requires more than the comfort provided by a transatlantic convergence with the United States. Our security thus depends on our ability to involve ourselves more autonomously in our Eastern and Southern neighbourhood;

- Lastly, the line between competition and confrontation, which had enabled us to make the distinction between times of peace and times of crisis or war, is now completely blurred. There are now multiple grey zones in which hybrid or asymmetrical actions to exert influence, disturbance, or even intimidation are deployed, and could degenerate.

The Europeans, and ourselves, cannot ignore these broad trends at a time when other powers are engaged in rearmament programmes, including nuclear rearmament and when, over the last years, we've seen an acceleration in these programmes.

In this regard, the current nuclear multi-polarity can in no way be compared to the main approach of the Cold War. Unlike France and its allies, some States are knowingly opting for opaque and even aggressive nuclear postures, which include a dimension of blackmailing or seeking *fait accompli*. The deterrent-based power balances have thus become unstable.

With the proliferation of missiles using more advanced technologies, we are also facing an unprecedented situation in which regional powers are or will be capable of striking European territory directly.

Lastly, the taboo of using chemical weapons has been broken multiple times in Syria, Malaysia and even in Europe.

This strategic paradigm shift will clearly make the conditions for our future military actions even more stringent. Particularly when they are engaged to discourage potential aggressors or to increase the impact of their actions, our military forces will have to face a significant hardening of their operational environment.

The second paradigm shift is political and legal – I alluded to it in my introduction. It is the multilateralism crisis and the regression of law in the face of power balances.

The very idea of a multilateral order based on law, whereby the use of force is regulated, commitments are fulfilled and laws create obligations that apply to everyone, is being challenged greatly today.

This dismantling of international norms is part of an assumed competition-based approach whereby only the law of the strongest and power balances count. The most cynical go so far as to hide behind a legal premise and a superficial attachment to the world order to better violate it with total impunity.

These attitudes obviously raise fundamental questions to our democracies. Can we be the only ones to respect the rules of the game, the only ones whose signature on international commitments still has value? Has this become a guilty naivety?

The reality is that these issues are still of vital importance to a huge majority of United Nations Member States, for which the law protects and stabilizes and which aspire to a world order that strengthens security and peace. No peoples can benefit from the weakening of the universal nature of human rights. No peoples can benefit from the challenging of the authority of international humanitarian law, non-proliferation regimes, the Convention on the Law of the Sea or even the Outer Space Treaty.

Europe itself is directly exposed to the consequences of this deconstruction. Look at the current situation. Since the early 2000s, cracks started to appear across the whole security architecture in Europe, painstakingly built after 1945 during the Cold War, which was then consciously dismantled brick by brick. Following the impasse of negotiations on conventional arms, the end in 2019 of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty was the symbol of this disintegration.

Europeans must collectively realize today that without a legal framework, they could quickly find themselves at risk of another conventional and even nuclear arms race on their soil. They cannot stand by. Turning back into a field of confrontation for non-European nuclear powers would not be acceptable. I won't accept it.

Lastly, the third paradigm shift is technological.

Technology is an issue, as well as a disruptor and a referee in strategic balances. The deployment of 5G, data storage on the Cloud, as well as operating systems are strategic infrastructure in today's world. In recent years, we have too often considered that these were commercial solutions, simply industrial or private-sector issues, while what we are talking about here are strategic infrastructure, for our economies of course, and for our armed forces.

The emergence of new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, applications of quantum physics, or synthetic biology, is a source of many opportunities but also of future instability.

Providing unlimited innovation, digital technology is innervating all physical milieus. It has itself become a field of confrontation and the control of this technology has exacerbated rivalries between powers, which see it as a way to gain a strategic superiority. It is also a source of unprecedented possibilities for mass surveillance of populations and to enforce digital authoritarianism.

In times of crisis, these technological disruptions will put more pressure on our analysis and decision-making abilities, pulled between exhaustiveness, veracity and responsiveness. In this regard, they increase the risks of spiralling out of control and call for the implementation of robust and transparent deconfliction mechanisms.

The paradigm shifts of this world force us to think without taboo about what the wars of the future could be, keeping in mind that at the start of this 21st century, in the words of Raymond Aron, "*neither men nor States have said farewell to arms*".

First of all, there are conflicts within States in which third States acting in support of different factions, can find themselves pitted against each other. That is the case today in Libya, Iraq and in Syria. Operation Hamilton conducted with the United States and the United Kingdom in 2018 to sanction the Syrian regime for the prohibited use of chemical weapons is a tangible example of this increased nesting, these risks of escalation and the need for permanent channels of dialogue to mitigate them.

There is also a growing number of areas of friction between powers, engaged in activities to display their strength, almost going to the brink of a showdown. This is the case at sea in areas under dispute, from the Mediterranean and China seas to the Arab-Persian Gulf. This is the case on land when massive exercises are deployed there without advance warning. That is the case in undersea waters and in skies where strategic bombers are once again testing air

defences. Lastly, this is the case in outer space, which has also become an area of confrontation, more or less visible, but very real, and in cyber space, in a clearer manner.

In that regard, the escalation in early January in Iraq is proof that these different "in contact" situations can at any time lead to an open crisis between States that seem to have replaced the slogan of "war never again" with that of an hypothetical "why not war?".

Today, for the reasons I just described, theatres of crises in the Levant and in Libya are genuinely testing the cohesion of the P5 - which I would like to see convened at the level of Heads of State and demonstrating its ability to fully discharge its mandate to maintain peace and international security -; but they are also a test for solidarity within the Transatlantic Alliance. It is for this very reason that I'd had some strong words, which resonated as a wake-up call, and that we were able, after the December summit, to embark on a strategic review of NATO, which I'd like to be both ambitious and results-oriented.

As every time we are faced with historic challenges, our reaction must be the same: renewed ambition and audacity. We must shoulder our responsibilities. We have the choice of either taking back control of our destiny or aligning ourselves with any power whatsoever, thereby abandoning the idea of any strategies of our own.

An awakening is needed. Overhauling the world order to further peace is the course we must follow, and France and Europe have a historic role to play.

Ladies and gentlemen,

All our action needs to focus on the sole ambition of peace, through strong and effective multilateralism based on law.

I see four pillars for this strategy – promotion of an efficient multilateralism, development of strategic partnerships, search for European autonomy, and national sovereignty – make up a whole, these four elements give our defence strategy its overall coherence and deep meaning.

To ensure peace, we first need a multilateralism that works. It is through multilateralism that we can collectively address problems that everyone is facing.

France is not threatening anyone. It wants peace – solid and lasting peace. In no way does it have an expansionist aim. The security of France and Europe depends on international relations that continue to be governed by law that is accepted and respected by all.

In this regard, we expect Europe's major partners to work to safeguard and strengthen international law, not to weaken it. Transparency, trust and reciprocity are the basis of collective security.

Because this strategic stability, which can be achieved by seeking a balance of forces at the lowest possible level, is not guaranteed today. Behind the crisis of the major arms control and disarmament instruments, the security of France and Europe is at stake.

This crucial debate should not take place without Europeans, in a direct and exclusive relationship between the United States, Russia and China. And I know very well that this is the temptation for some, sometimes those that are the most concerned.

For Europeans, multilateralism that is rethought to further collective security and that complies with our founding principles must demand two things, which are not contradictory if we wish to ensure peace. First, promotion of a renewed international arms control agenda and second, a real European investment in defence.

These requirements stem directly from the ambition for sovereignty and freedom of action that I have championed for Europe since I was elected. This ambition is in line with a rebalanced transatlantic relationship, an alliance in which Europeans are credible and efficient partners. Europeans must be able to protect themselves together. They must be able to decide and act on their own when necessary. They must do it while never forgetting what History has

taught them: that democracy and the rule of Law without strength do not last long! They must be able to use regularly the mechanisms that ensure their solidarity.

That is why I firmly believe that Europeans must first and foremost define together what their security interests are and sovereignly decide what is good for Europe.

Thus, there can be no defence and security project of European citizens without political vision seeking to advance gradual rebuilding of confidence with Russia.

As I'm carrying out this project, I am demanding. I expect Russia to be a constructive player in our common security. But we cannot be satisfied with the current situation, in which the divide between us is growing and dialogue is weakening precisely at a time when the number of security issues that need to be addressed with Moscow are increasing.

The main objective – I have mentioned it numerous times – of my engagement with Russia is an improvement in collective security and stability conditions in Europe. This process will last several years. It will require patience, and high demands, and it will be conducted with our European partners. But we have no interest in delegating such a dialogue to others, nor lock ourselves in the present situation.

In that context, Europeans must also propose together an international arms control agenda. The end of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the uncertainties about the future of the New START Treaty and the crisis of the conventional arms control regime in Europe has led to the possibility of a return of pure unhindered military and nuclear competition by 2021, which has not been seen since the end of the 1960s. I'm neither describing an impossible nor a distant future – simply what has been happening under our eyes over the last years. Europeans must once again understand the dynamics of escalation and seek to prevent or impede them with clear and verifiable norms. For law must further our security, by seeking to restrict and curb arms and the most destabilizing behaviours on the part of potential adversaries.

We must have a very clear European position on this issue, which takes into consideration developments of modern weapons, and Russian arms in particular, which could impact our soil, and the interests of Europeans – of all Europeans –, including in northern and central Europe. We have to say it: even while into force over the past years, treaties were no longer protecting some of our partners.

Finally, it is important to rethink disarmament priorities. For too long, Europeans have thought that it was enough to lead by example and that if they disarmed, others would follow. This is not so! Disarmament cannot be an objective in itself: it should first improve international security conditions.

France will rally the support of the most concerned European partners on these issues to lay down the foundations for a joint international strategy that we could put forward in all the fora in which Europe is active.

And France, a nuclear power under the Non-Proliferation Treaty and a Permanent Member of the United Nations Security Council, will shoulder its responsibilities, particularly when it comes to nuclear disarmament, as it always did.

Seeking peace, France is committed to a disarmament approach, which furthers global stability and security. France has a unique track record in the world, in keeping with its responsibilities and interests, having dismantled irreversibly its land-based nuclear component, its nuclear test facilities, its fissile material for weapons production facilities, and having reduced the size of its arsenal, which is currently under 300 nuclear weapons. These decisions are in line with our rejecting any type of arms race and our keeping the format for our nuclear deterrent at a level of strict sufficiency.

This exemplary track record gives France the legitimacy to call for other nuclear powers to make tangible gestures towards comprehensive, progressive, credible and verifiable disarmament.

As regards nuclear disarmament, I call on all States to join us in supporting a simple agenda, under Article VI of the NPT, around four points, which we know:

First, upholding the cornerstone norm that is the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and safeguarding its primary role as it is celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2020. The NPT is the most universal treaty in the world. It is the only treaty that enables to prevent nuclear war while providing every party with the benefits of peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Second, the launch at the Conference on Disarmament of negotiations for a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty and the safeguarding and universalization of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. We're committed to it.

Third, the continuation of work on nuclear disarmament verification, that we are leading with Germany, because a disarmament agreement is worth nothing if it cannot be thoroughly verified.

Fourth, the launch of concrete work to reduce strategic risks because unbridled escalation of a local conflict into a major war is one of the most worrying scenarios today that a set of simple and common sense measures could efficiently avert.

I have also heard the calls for "trilateralization" or multilateralization of agreements to control or reduce nuclear arsenals.

Russian-American bilateral treaties relate to a chapter of history – that of the Cold War – but also to a reality that is still relevant today, that of the considerable size of arsenals still being held by Moscow and Washington, without a possible comparison with those of other nuclear-weapon-States. In this respect, it is critical that the New Start Treaty be extended beyond 2021.

But following the collapse of the INF Treaty, France wishes to see broader discussions start, in which Europe must have its voice be heard and ensure that its interests will be taken into consideration in negotiations for a new instrument that could ensure strategic stability on our continent. Let's be clear, if a negotiation and a wider treaty are possible, we would support them. If they are blocked by some, we won't stay idle. And the Europeans must be a part of, and signatories to, the next treaty, for what is at stake is our territory and a discussion that cannot take place above ourselves.

France, with regard to its own responsibilities, is also ready to take part in discussions bringing together the five nuclear-weapon-States under the definition of the NPT, regarding nuclear disarmament priorities, and confidence-building and transparency of the nuclear arsenals and the nuclear strategies of each of them. These discussions should aim to strengthen the stability between nuclear-weapon-States and to reduce the risks of involuntary escalations in the event of a conflict.

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This ambition of France, a power promoting balance, to further peace and security, cannot be realized without an extensive network of friendships, strategic partnerships and alliances, and

a global diplomatic capacity, because our security interests and responsibilities are global. This is for me the second pillar on which I want to quickly come back.

France is part of a network of relations rooted in history and geography. In this context, it will continue to develop and deepen strategic partnerships on all continents. It is currently involved in all the major coalitions, in the Levant and in Africa.

Over the past years, we have built new regional structures. In the Sahel region, France is fighting with determination against terrorism thanks to Operation Barkhane and along her international and G5 African partners. On 13 January, the Pau Summit clarified the framework of our operations and confirmed everyone's commitment. This is why I decided to send 600 additional soldiers to reinforce France's commitment to peace and security in the region. It is a true coalition that we built in Pau, with the Barkhane force as its backbone and in partnership with the Sahel G5. We are going to include in a step by step manner friendly powers, for collective security in the region. We are at the core of this new coalition. It is a strategic one for Africa, and for our security.

As an Indo-Pacific rim power, France maintains special ties with Australia, India and Japan to preserve the sovereignties and the freedom of navigation in this geographic space. It is conducting its defence cooperation projects daily and exercising its solidarity with its partners in the Arab-Persian Gulf, Mediterranean or Southeast Asia. This Indo-Pacific axis that we have, over the last two years, set up, explained, developed, stems from our geography, the reality of multiple military commitments that we have taken for several years, unprecedented exercises that we are conducting in the region, but also a reading of the world - that we must have. We are also an Indo-Pacific power, with nationals, bases, interests. Our ability to foster this freedom in the region, to defend our interests, to protect the major energy and technological routes also depends on this new axis and these new cooperations.

It is clear that at the heart of this global network, all of our European partners and our North-American allies have a special place, and I will come back to this point later.

Finally, when I speak of alliances and strategic partnerships, I want to underline our responsibility in our common framework, that of the United Nations, and the essential role of peacekeeping operations.

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In addition to arms control and networks of alliances, partnerships and diplomatic relations, there is the question of tangible ambitions that we want to establish for Europe's security and defence policy.

For years to come when it comes to defence, Europe will only draw strength from national armed forces. This is certain and bolstering the budgets and capabilities of these national armed forces must be a priority.

However, we have begun, among Europeans, to design tangible tools that could help us develop common awareness, defend shared interests, and act autonomously and in solidarity every time it is necessary. This path involves building an European freedom of action that rounds out and strengthens national sovereignties.

In this regard, it is important to clear up a misunderstanding. The question for Europeans is not whether they should defend themselves with or without Washington, nor to know whether the security of the United States plays out in Asia or on our continent. France naturally participates in the community of allied nations bordering the Atlantic Ocean, with which it shares values, principles and ideals. It is loyal to its commitments in the Atlantic Alliance, which has provided collective security and stability of its members and Europe for the past 70 years. And in this regard, I hear sometimes a lot of comments, but I prefer to look at the facts: France is a credible military actor, which is combating in the field and which has paid the price in blood. France proved it recently in the Sahel, once again. France is a reliable and solidarity-minded ally, including in tough times. It has proven this recently in Syria and Iraq. France is also convinced that Europe's long-term security involves a strong alliance with the United States. I reiterated this at the NATO Summit in London, and France is experiencing it every day in its operations.

However, our security also inevitably requires that Europeans have a greater capacity for autonomous action. The mere fact that saying it triggers so many reactions and doubts really surprises me. In the words of General de Gaulle: *“No alliance can be considered separately from the effort undertaken by each of its members, on its behalf, at its cost and on the basis of interests which are its own”*.

Indeed, the real questions for Europeans are the ones they must ask themselves, rather than the Americans: Why have they diminished their efforts to such an extent since the 1990s?

Why aren't they more willing to make defence one of their budgetary priorities and in doing so, make the necessary sacrifices at a time when risks are accumulating? Why are we having such complicated debates about the amounts to allocate to the European Defence Fund that we just created – because it is a question of secondary importance that others would deal with?

Why are there such big differences between budgets and defence capabilities of European States when the threats we are facing are similar, for the most part?

All these questions are questions that we, Europeans, should be asking ourselves. Europe has to put itself in a position to be able to better guarantee its security and take action in its neighbourhood. The European Union already set for itself this objective of autonomous action. Just imagine, it was at the European Council meeting in Cologne... in 1999! It is as compatible today as it was 20 years ago with the desire for Europeans to re-engage and be more credible and effective in NATO. This re-balancing is something the United States also wants.

This is why the Europeans must now take greater responsibility for this European defence, this European pillar within NATO. And I myself, fully take that responsibility, without hesitating! I can tell you this very clearly this morning: I believe that one of my responsibilities is indeed that this should not remain empty rhetoric, as was the case after 1999. NATO and European Defense are two pillars of European collective security. Let's accept it! Let's face it, and listen to the United States of America, telling us: *"Spend more on your security, I may no longer be, over time, your guarantor of last resort, your protector"*. Let's take our responsibilities, finally!

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But this European freedom of action, Europe's defence and security, cannot be based solely on a military approach.

To build the Europe of tomorrow, our norms cannot be controlled by the United States, our infrastructure, our ports and airports owned by Chinese capital, and our computer networks under Russian pressure.

At European level, we need to control our maritime, energy and digital infrastructure. There again, we were much mistaken. We had started to think, in the 1990s and 2000s, that Europe

had become a big, comfortable market, theater of influence and all-round predation. We even bailed out on our fellow Europeans, pushing so many countries in the south of our European Union towards investors who seized what we did not know how to buy, and what we were pushing to privatize. Even while these infrastructures were strategic.

A fatal error! For these critical infrastructures, we must find, at the European level, a real policy of sovereignty!

That is the case of the 5G infrastructure, data storage in the decisive Cloud, operating systems as well as and submarine cable networks, which are sensitive issues of our globalized economy.

At European level, we need to control our access to space and decide for ourselves what standards should be imposed on our companies.

This policy of standards, this strategic infrastructure policy, is essential. It is essential for our collective security, our ability to act. We live in a world of interoperability, with equipment that is increasingly digitalized. Spending what we spend on having perfect equipment, and handing over the connection infrastructure, between our equipment and our countries, to others, without any guarantee, would still be of strange naivety. Allow me not to participate into this.

European freedom of action requires economic and digital sovereignty. European interests, which Europeans alone should define, must be heard. It is Europe's job to define the framework for regulation that it imposes on itself, for it is a matter of protecting individual freedoms and economic data of our companies, which are at the core of our sovereignty, and of our concrete operational capacity to act autonomously.

We also need to strengthen Europe's technological independence and its ability to anticipate future strategic shifts. To do this, we need an autonomous and competitive industrial defence base, resolute and massive innovation efforts, control of our security technologies and control of our defence exports.

All of this today requires an *aggiornamento* of the European approach, of these economic and budgetary approaches, so that everyone can draw conclusions. We are no longer in the world of the 90s!

The correct use of these common sovereignty tools requires investments, first and foremost, an industrial policy, standards of sovereignty, much stronger and ambitious, but also the construction of a shared strategic culture, because our inability to think about our sovereign interests together and to work together convincingly undermines our credibility as Europeans on a daily basis. It provides other powers the possibility to divide us and to weaken us.

The building of this shared European strategic culture is what France is working towards, on the basis of tremendous progress accomplished over the past two years, and which makes our vision that was determined in 1999 more tangible: the European Defense Fund, strengthened cooperation (PESCO), but also the European Intervention Initiative, which we offered, set up, and that is being implemented.

Ladies and gentlemen,

If France is to live up to its ambition and its history, it must remain sovereign and determine itself, without being subject to them, the transfers of sovereignty to which it consents, just as it determines the binding cooperation projects it undertakes. And this is the fourth pillar of the strategy I want for our country: a true French sovereignty.

This desire for national sovereignty is absolutely not incompatible with our desire to develop European capabilities. It is even an essential prerequisite. Cooperation is best achieved when one can sovereignly decide to cooperate.

Defence, a foundation of all political communities, is at the heart of our sovereignty.

Our defence strategy is therefore defined, first and foremost, by its ability to protect our citizens, and to contribute to Europe's security and peace and its surrounding area.

But it is not limited to that. It must also give us the ability to defend our sovereign interests everywhere in the world, given our geography of overseas departments and territories and the extent of our strategic partnerships. It must enable us to shoulder our responsibilities in maintaining international security and peace. It must protect us from blackmail and thus preserve our autonomy to make decisions. It must give us the ability to rank and have influence among other nations. It must enable us to master our own destiny.

After the Cold War, an idealist vision gave credit to the idea that the world had become less dangerous, which led to a gradual reduction of the portion of our national budget devoted to defence. That was the era of peace dividends.

This choice, this reorganization of budgetary priorities, could seem justified at a time when considerable arsenals had been built up on both sides of the Iron Curtain. But the big mistake was, without any doubt, and in Europe only, to continue to reduce defence funds in the last 20 years and further reduce them during the financial crisis while other regional and major powers maintained or stepped up their defence efforts.

Basically, the last ten years have led to a profound mismatch: the Europeans have continued to reduce, to reduce, to reduce, when others had stopped doing so, even reinvested, accelerating technological change, accelerating their own capacities.

The format and the capabilities of our armed forces were directly impacted. Yet, at the same time, they were increasingly solicited in regional crisis management operations, which were increasingly diverse and farther away from Europe. The necessity to determine the size of our defence tools according to "higher range" challenges was often forgotten.

These cuts led to a growing discrepancy between the level of our military capabilities and the reality of the changing international environment that I just described.

In order to stop the slow erosion of our military capabilities and adapt them to this new strategic environment, I decided that an unprecedented budgetary effort would be made in the area of defence. It is a major and lasting effort for which I assume the responsibility before the nation.

I'm telling you this again, very clearly, today. I hear, sometimes - I am amazed by this -, doubts, questioning, desires for revision. Let us be clear: the issues we are talking about are too strategic and important. It is necessary that words be followed by acts in conformity with them, and over time, because we speak here of long-term programmes. What I decided our nation would commit to will be done, strongly and held over time. Let no one waste energy trying to revisit it.

But the budget is only one indicator of the effort. With regard to defence, as is the case with other areas of government actions, the budgetary aspect should not be the primary factor guiding us. For this effort means nothing if it is not implementing a strategic vision.

What should guide us is the reality of current and future threats for France and the French people, for Europe and Europeans. This means maintaining a careful balance between managing short-term issues while taking into account longer-term considerations. This means

anticipating coming threats and continuously adapting to new forms of conflict. That is what we want to preserve nationally and what we freely choose to do in cooperation with our partners.

To meet these requirements, France needs a comprehensive, modern, powerful and balanced defence tool implemented by responsive, forward-looking armed forces.

We can be proud of our armed forces, determined to follow that course. Our defence tool must enable us to meet three major challenges:

- Firstly, we must naturally be able to protect our citizens, our territory, and its air and sea approaches against all forms of threat and aggression. This is the linchpin of our existence as a nation and the very essence of our sovereignty.

On a daily basis, this objective brings together the soldiers from Operation Sentinelle, the patrol frigate and the air defence patrol. In addition, as part of the permanent deterrence posture, the silent watch by our nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) crews and strategic air forces provides daily protection to our territory and population, and beyond that, our vital interests.

As I am responsible before the nation for the security of our country and its future, it is my responsibility to protect France and its people from a State threat against our vital interests, wherever it comes from and in whatever form.

Every day, I take on this ultimate responsibility, which is at the core of the duties of President, with the strongest determination. It is carried out through nuclear deterrence. Like the transparency and the trust we owe to the international community, which is part of our responsibilities as a “nuclear-weapon State” under the NPT, exercising deterrence requires a strictly defensive, clear and predictable doctrine, the main foundations of which I am recalling here today.

Should the leader of any State underestimate France’s deep-rooted attachment to its freedom and consider threatening our vital interests, whatever they may be, that leader must realize that our nuclear forces are capable of inflicting absolutely unacceptable damages upon that State’s centres of power: its political, economic and military nerve centres.

Our nuclear forces have been configured to that purpose with the required flexibility and responsiveness. Should there be any misunderstanding about France’s determination to

protect its vital interests, a unique and one-time-only nuclear warning could be issued to the aggressor State to clearly demonstrate that the nature of the conflict has changed and to re-establish deterrence.

Within this framework, France draws on a daily basis on the two components of its nuclear forces, which are complementary. I have taken and will continue to take the decisions necessary to maintain their long-term operational credibility at the level of strict sufficiency required by the international environment.

- But our territory, like that of Europe, is not isolated from the world. It is affected by crises taking place in its direct environment. It must face the consequences of crises which strike more faraway regions or seas, but which are now getting ever closer due to economic flows, human exchanges.

To defend our security interests, we must thus meet the second challenge which comprises both the collapse of States which leaves entire societies prone to violence and armed groups, and the growing unrest in common spaces, whether they be oceanic, exo-atmospheric or cyber.

This is why each day, our armed forces help prevent crises and stabilize regions in which there has been growing chaos, in compliance with international law and our responsibilities as a Permanent Member of the United Nations Security Council, and through our stationed forces present on the ground and our overseas sovereignty forces, as well as through our external operations.

I also wanted France to step up its capabilities in the new areas of confrontation. Beyond intelligence and cyber defence, for which long-term investment is underway, space defence will be strengthened and reorganized within a new space command attached to the air force. With regard to artificial intelligence, it is one of the priorities of the newly-created Defence Innovation Agency.

- As the expression of strategic inter-State rivalry, certain regional crises today represent credible but not exclusive scenarios in which we may for the first time in a long time have to meet a third challenge, that of directly facing in an uncontrolled escalation, a hostile power, which could have a nuclear weapon or be an ally of a power owning weapons of mass destruction.

This third challenge is the very concrete result of the transformations in the nature of the threat I was describing earlier.

Taking of a territorial bet, the destabilization of one of our allies or strategic partners and challenges to the fundamental tenets of international law are no longer only scenarios of the past. They could, in the future, justify involvement alongside our allies of our land, naval or air forces in a major conflict to defend collective security, compliance with international law and peace.

In this regard, our defence strategy is a coherent whole: conventional and nuclear forces constantly support each other there. Once our vital interests could be under threat, the conventional military manoeuvre can be part of exercising deterrence. The presence of strong conventional forces thus helps to prevent a strategic surprise, the quick creation of a fait accompli or to test the adversary's determination as soon as possible by forcing it to reveal de facto its true intentions. With this strategy, our nuclear deterrence force remains, as a last resort, the key to our security and the guardian of our vital interests. Now, like in the past, it ensures our independence, our freedom to assess, make decisions and take action. It prevents adversaries from betting on escalation, intimidation and blackmailing to achieve their ends.

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As the Head of State, I am the guarantor of the long-term, for my responsibility as head of the armed forces is to protect our nation from threats, while looking several decades into the future.

Nuclear deterrence has played a fundamental role in maintaining peace and international security, particularly in Europe. I am firmly convinced that our deterrence strategy maintains all of its stabilizing virtues, a particularly valuable asset in the world which we see before us, one of competition between powers, disinhibited behaviours and the erosion of norms.

The fundamental purpose of France's nuclear strategy, the doctrinal bases of which I have just set out, is to prevent war.

Our nuclear forces are not directed towards any specific country and France has always refused that nuclear weapons be considered as battlefield weapons. I hereby reaffirm that France will never engage into a nuclear battle or any forms of graduated response.

Furthermore, our nuclear forces have a deterrent effect in themselves, particularly in Europe. They strengthen the security of Europe through their very existence and they have, in this sense, a truly European dimension.

On that point, our independent decision-making is fully compatible with our unwavering solidarity with our European partners. Our commitment to their security and their defence is the natural expression of our ever-closer solidarity. Let's be clear: France's vital interests now have a European dimension.

In this spirit, I would like strategic dialogue to develop with our European partners, which are ready for it, on the role played by France's nuclear deterrence in our collective security.

European partners which are willing to walk that road can be associated with the exercises of French deterrence forces. This strategic dialogue and these exchanges will naturally contribute to developing a true strategic culture among Europeans.

Our nuclear forces also significantly contribute to the overall strengthening of the Atlantic Alliance's overall deterrent, alongside the British and American forces. France does not take part in the Alliance's nuclear planning mechanisms and will not do so in the future. But it will continue to contribute to political-level discussions aiming to strengthen the Alliance's nuclear culture.

Since 1995, France and the United Kingdom, Europe's only nuclear powers, have clearly stated that they can imagine no circumstances under which a threat to the vital interests of one would not constitute a threat to the vital interests of the other.

I want today to formally reiterate that assessment. The high level of mutual trust, enshrined in the Lancaster House Treaties in 2010, the 10th anniversary of which we celebrate this year, is reflected in our daily and unprecedented cooperation on nuclear issues. We will steadfastly maintain this cooperation and Brexit will have no impact at all in this regard.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Before I finish, I would like to take a few more moments to discuss the meaning of deterrence strategy in today's world.

First of all, we must acknowledge that there is a long-standing ethical debate about nuclear weapons, which is not new, and to which Pope Francis very recently contributed during his visit to Hiroshima.

There is also a legal and strategic debate: in the face of a degraded international environment, some, including in Europe, have recently engaged in a prohibitionist approach, largely based on an absolute imperative and simple strategic reasoning: to eliminate fear, to eliminate war, we must simply eliminate nuclear weapons!

I profoundly respect the opinions which have been voiced. But France, a nuclear-weapon State, which is responsible for international peace and security, only partly shares this vision of the realities of our world. I would like to present my vision of the balances on which the Non-Proliferation Treaty is based and of the ethical reasoning which should be applied to maintain peace.

The ultimate goal of the complete elimination of nuclear weapons as part of general and complete disarmament is indeed enshrined in the preamble of the NPT. But given the realities of our world, progress towards this goal can only be gradual, and based on a realistic perception of the strategic context.

Since there is no means of quickly eliminating nuclear weapons from our world, the advocates of abolition have attacked the legitimacy of nuclear deterrence – and have especially done so, before anywhere else, where it is easiest, that is to say in our European democracies.

Yet I do not believe that the choice is between a moral absolute with no link to strategic realities, and a cynical return to a lawless power struggle.

I will not fall into the trap of this false choice, which destabilizes the international security architecture and does not live up to France's ambitions for peace, multilateralism and law.

My responsibility is to keep our country safe, in compliance with its international commitments, particularly those of the NPT.

This does not mean, however, that France is disregarding ethical issues relating to nuclear weapons. Democracies must examine the purposes of their nuclear deterrence policy, which raises moral dilemmas and paradoxes.

To do this, we must view deterrence in all its dimensions, which means placing it in a broader political framework in relation to our vision of the world order.

In 1945, nuclear weapons brought humanity into a new era, by providing it with the means to destroy itself and thus making it realize that we all share a single destiny. Their spread was limited in 1968 by the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons which was – so to say - a snapshot of the nuclear world of the time, noting that there were five nuclear-weapon States, and since then, with a small number of exceptions, it has been complied with. Possessing nuclear weapons places a historically unprecedented moral responsibility on the leaders of those countries. When it comes to France, I fully shoulder this responsibility.

We have no choice but to accept that we live in an imperfect world and to realistically and honestly face the problems which this brings.

I cannot therefore set France the moral objective of disarming our democracies while other powers, or even dictatorships, would be maintaining or developing their nuclear weapons.

For a nuclear-weapon State like France, unilateral nuclear disarmament would be akin to exposing ourselves as well as our partners to violence and blackmail, or depending on others to keep us safe.

I refuse this prospect. And let us not be naïve: even if France, whose arsenal cannot be in any ways compared to that of the United States and Russia, were to give up its weapons, the other nuclear powers would not follow suit.

Similarly, France will not sign any treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons. The Treaty will not create any new obligations for France, either for the State or for public or private actors on its territory.

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In fact, disarmament only has meaning if it is part of a historical process to limit violence.

The deterrence strategy is actually contributing to this, even paradoxically. In deterrence as practised by France, it is the very possibility of unacceptable harm to a potential adversary which, even with no threat issued, limits the effective violence.

We must recognize, however, that this rationality of deterrence is not enough to ensure peace, in the fullest sense of the term, that is to say a situation in which violence is not simply inhibited but rather in which there is true cooperation and harmony between all parties.

Our goal must be to work to set up a different international order, with effective global governance which can set up and enforce law.

This goal to transform the international order is not just an ideal – from now on, it sets out a political and strategic path which must enable us to make concrete progress.

To do this, it is essential to limit the role of deterrence to extreme circumstances of self-defence.

Nuclear weapons must not be designed as tools of intimidation, coercion or destabilization. They must remain instruments of deterrence, with the objective of preventing war.

France's nuclear doctrine strictly adheres to this framework.

I call on the leaders of the other nuclear powers to show the same transparency in their doctrine of deterrence and to stop any attempts to exploit this strategy for the purposes of coercion or intimidation.

So that, Ladies and gentlemen, was what I wanted to say to you today on France's role in the world, on its European ambitions, on its defence and deterrence strategy.

Let us be lucid and determined as we look to the future.

Lucid because we cannot pretend that globalization and technological advances do not disrupt the models from the past. More than ever, our strategic discussions must adapt to the upheavals of our environment, while taking a long-term approach. Let us have the courage to see the world as it is, as it will evolve. There is no fatality; But there can be historical mistakes when one prefers not to watch.

Determined because France must stay true to itself, proud of its history and its values and must uphold its commitments. A France fiercely committed to remain master of its own destiny, within a refunded Europe for the common good.

Long live the Republic, long live France!

