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MEMORANDUM

France confronting Nuclear Disarmament

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PREAMBLE

The abolition of nuclear weapons - formal prohibition and total elimination - is today a categorical imperative of practical reason, as the philosopher Kant would say. The overriding need to abolish them, and also to phase out nuclear power-generation, has been demonstrated elsewhere. We will not cover that ground here.

To make the planet a world without nuclear weapons or power-plants is one of the major tasks for the 21st century. The abolition of these weapons is even the absolute top priority. It is only by accomplishing this that humankind will be able to avoid self-destruction even before we solve the other essential problems that must be dealt with, like climate change, energy shortage, lack of primary resources, the food crisis, pandemics, the deterioration of the environment and its biodiversity, or the risk of overpopulation.

Given that principle, how can abolition becomes one of the facts ?

Numerous obstacles stand on the road to nuclear disarmament. Some are small, some great.

The technical questions, relating for example to procedures for dismantling nuclear weapons or verifying disarmament, are not insurmountable, provided the political will is found. But the first and chief obstacle consists precisely in the absence or insufficiency of political will on the part of the players in question : the nuclear-armed states themselves. Among them, France is a major obstacle : France not only shows ill will, she has the determined will to never renounce her own nuclear weapons. It is not just that France is not disarming ; her fear that one day she may be somehow forced to disarm is leading her to put up obstacles to disarmament by other states.

Hence these two questions:

How is France confronting the question of nuclear disarmament ?

How can nuclear disarmament nevertheless impose itself on France?

We will try here to deal with the first question, without which no answer can be found to the second.

But there is a prior question: which France are we talking about?

1. Which France ?

Politically, there are two Frances : the French people and the French state. A third entity, the « French Nation » is said to unify the people and the state. But that is a fiction. **(1)**

Since the Révolution of 1789, the French people are officially « the sovereign ». It is in the name of the people that great declarations are proclaimed and constitutions adopted.

The people are also, in practice and in the long term, the real subject of History, for better or for worse : they produce and create, they transform the country, make revolutions, Republics, Empires, colonisation and decolonisation, collaboration, resistance and liberation, they make and suffer from wars while waiting to make peace.

But the drama for the French nation is the gap, the cleavage between the French people and the French state. The state is not close enough to the people, the policies it pursues in their name are too often disconnected from the population's wishes (expressed or repressed). In the case of nuclear matters, the separation is a gaping gulf. For nuclear technology in France (both military and civil) has always escaped totally from popular sovereignty.

In the Republic, the Parliament is the body representing the people. The people can express themselves also by referendum, and the constitution makes provision for this. But in matters of nuclear arming and disarming the French people have never been consulted either directly by referendum or indirectly through their « national representatives ». The Parliament's role has been limited to voting the military budgets, almost without debate. And that remark applies also to decisions about nuclear power-generation. **(2)**

We can therefore say that in France nuclear matters are the exception that disproves the democratic rule. Worse - that reverses and abolishes it. Can one really call a country a democracy where the Head of State has the authority to condemn and execute by one single gesture some millions of his fellow-humans, without consultation, trial or appeal ? That is not democracy or monarchy, that is dictatorship, unheard-of tyranny. Presently we will suggest why nobody (almost nobody) seems to have noticed this in France.

2. The origins of France's nuclear weapons

From the State's point of view, the actions of « France » from 1945 till today shows a remarkable continuity, despite frequent changes in government during the IVth Republic every six months on average), and the transition in 1958 from the IVth to the Vth Republic.

General de Gaulle played a leading role in the formation of what has become France's nuclear « strike-force ». As early as July 1944, when he visited Ottawa, three French scientists exiled in Canada informed him that there existed a Manhattan Project in which they had a part, and drew his attention to the atom bomb. He immediately understood its political and military importance. Back in France after the liberation of Paris, he was strengthened in this conviction by discussions, notably with Frédéric Joliot-Curie in December 1944. After the bombings of Hiroshima & Nagasaki and his meeting with President Truman in August 1945, his provisional government created by decree the Commissariat à l'Energie Atomique (CEA), on 18 October 1945.

This commissariat was given a special status, with two directors (administrative and scientific), a direct link with the Council President (i.e. the prime minister of the day), and with special secret funds not subject to any parliamentary control. The CEA's first task was to develop nuclear research for civilian purposes (scientific and industrial) and

military purposes. Its first scientific director, Frédéric Joliot-Curie, who was also a Communist Party member, opposed the military purpose and launched the « Stockholm Appeal » against nuclear weapons (which won him the Stalin Peace Prize). In 1950 he was dismissed without explanation from his post as High-Commissioner by the Council President of the time, Georges Bidault. The military purpose, although discreet, was really the chief mission of the CEA.

Under the IVth Republic, all successive governments of all colours, after the marginalising of the communists in 1947, encouraged or authorised and in all cases financed the CEA's ongoing work. Pierre Mendès-France (a socialist) was the man who guided through the interministerial council on 26 December 1954 the decision to build the French atom bomb, above all so as to have « a leading voice » in the UN and in world affairs.

As a result, when de Gaulle returned to power via the Algerian War and the putsch of 13 May 1958, and founded the Vth Republic, he found the French bomb almost ready. The government of Bourgès-Maunoury had already scheduled tests for the first months of 1960. De Gaulle's specific contribution was to make public « France's will » to acquire her own nuclear weapons, and to give them absolute priority. « The defense of France cannot wait! The army must immediately convert and adapt to deterrence! » he declared on 27 June 1962.

On 13 February 1960 there took place at Reggane the operation called « Gerboise Bleue », the first of the known 210 French nuclear tests between 1960 and 1996, of which 50 were atmospheric. Half a century later, France has about 300 « nuclear warheads » able to cause nearly a billion deaths.

3. France's deterrence strategy

If we believe Charles de Gaulle, the mission of the nuclear strike-force was exclusively deterrent. « *Deterrence begins* », he declared in January 1963, « *as soon as you have the capacity to kill enough of the aggressor's people to persuade him that it's not worth attacking you... When we are sure (as we will be in seven to nine years) that you can kill 40 or 50 million of an aggressor's people, we will be sure to not be attacked.* » Already in May 1962 he said : « *Between now and the end of (1963) we will have the necessary to kill twenty million men two hours after we have been attacked.* » He then added : « *We will not kill them, because it will be known that we can. For that reason, nobody will again dare to attack us. This is not waging war, as men have done for millenia, this is making war impossible, as no one had ever succeeded in doing. We are going to become one of the four invulnerable countries.* »

Those who thought through France's strategy set de Gaulle's discourse to music, and added to it a number of remarkable ornaments :

- ▶ The weapons are « deterrent » : therefore intended to deter, not to be used. It is a strike-force, intended not to strike. It is not a weapon for use, but a « weapon for non-use. »
- ▶ Deterrence aims at any potential aggressor, whether nuclear-armed or not, whether located in the West, East, North or South. It is « full-compass deterrence ».
- ▶ Above a certain threshold of lethality, it is effective irrespective of the force differential, and thus is « deterrence by the weak on the strong ».
- ▶ That threshold does not have to be exceeded by much ; it can and does obey the « principle of strict sufficiency ». Its threshold is also its ceiling.
- ▶ An aggressor who went beyond mere threats would receive a « final warning »: a nuclear strike on his military forces, prior to any strike on his cities. Proof of civility.
- ▶ Deterrence is not aggressive but defensive ; it serves only to defend our « vital interests ». (3)
- ▶ These vital interests do not have to be specified. They can be assessed freely by the Head of State : this is a « principle of uncertainty » which the potential aggressor is subject to.
- ▶ But there should be no doubt in the aggressor's mind what the Head of State's retaliation would be : that's the only

certainty which the Head of State's « deterrent posture » gives to the potential aggressor.

► Since nuclear weapons make us « invulnerable » (de Gaulle), deterrence is « the nation's life-insurance » (Sarkozy).

France's atom bombs, as « deterrent weapons » placed in the hands of a Head of State who is peace-loving by definition (being French) are thus by their very nature « instruments of peace »: deterring others from waging war on us, saving us from the need to fight them, and making everybody, even the most ferocious people, peaceful.

Jacques Chirac, for his part, in a speech at Ile-Longue, Brittany, on 19 January 2006, extended these vital interests to defending our allies and protecting our supplies of « strategic materials » Cf. [The "King" is mad. Remove him! And note 4](#), below.

All of de Gaulle's successors, without exception, have taken over this well-practised discourse, which at least has a semblance of logic, and seems to serve generally positive intentions. It became and remains the discourse of French diplomacy, except that the diplomats, less direct than de Gaulle, avoid mentioning the tens of millions of people that France would be ready to kill in order to « preserve her vital interests ».

Nevertheless, French nuclear strategy cannot be understood unless one sees the double mission - political and military - that has accompanied it since its baptism : to strengthen France's position at the top table, as Mendès-France noted ; to make France « one of the invulnerables », as de Gaulle said. That means one of the five nations (China followed France's example) endowed eternally with nuclear weapons, with permanent seats of the UN Security Council and with a power of veto which - according to the current Minister of Foreign Affairs - they ought not to use in cases of « mass crimes », except if the national vital interests of a permanent member of the Council were in jeopardy » (Laurent Fabius, article of 4 October 2013).

Thus, to retain these miraculour weapons that have the double privilege of making France « invulnerable » and serving peace, or (better) of "*making the protection of human life an effective priority*" in the words of Laurent Fabius, [France has to be free to commit "mass crimes" with full impunity](#)

This paradox - to protect human life by massacring humans - leads to a second paradox » : to retain this power, France needs to grant it to her peers in the « Club of Five », and thus authorise them to massacre her own populaton in all impunity, i.e. to commit what France's deterrent is specifically supposed to prevent !

4. The incoherences of French strategy

On 9 March 2013, a delegation from ACDN delivered to the Elysee Palace an open letter to the President of the Republic signed by 113 French and foreign personalities and hundreds of French citizens. This letter declared that France's strategy:

- flouts human life and Human Rights, for an atom-bomb explosion means "hundreds of thousands of deaths, women, children, old people incinerated in a split-second, plus hundreds of thousands dying in the following years in atrocious suffering" : it is a "crime against humanity" (as Alain Peyrefitte said to Charles de Gaulle on 4 May 1962) ;

- flouts international law, which obliges the nuclear states that have signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty, including France, "to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control."

- flouts the French Constitution, which places above everything else respect for human rights, and imposes this as

a duty, along with respect for treaties ;

- **flouts good sense**, since it is absurd to defend France's republican values, which include fraternity, by threatening to commit crimes against humanity; it is absurd to link France's "vital interests" with the use of suicidal weapons against another nation that may also possess them; it is absurd to claim to guarantee our nation's security with these arms while forbidding others to obtain them; it is absurd to want to economize while still wasting billions of euros on unusable devices of death;

- **and flouts democracy**, since the French people have never been consulted on the creation, maintenance and permanent modernisation of this strike-force that has already cost 300 billion euros. And yet we know that today, according to convergent polls, at least 80% of French citizens wish for the abolition of nuclear weapons, including France's ».

President Holland, in 28 March 2013 during a televised interview on France 2, gave an indirect public reply to this open letter:

« We have nuclear weapons. One can think what one likes about them. I know there are a certain number of our compatriots who are hostile to them. I say to them 'They are our guarantee, our protection'... We must keep and even modernise them. »

More directly, he sent us this message via the head of the president's office, on 3 April 2013:

« The Président de la République has received your new correspondence.

« The Head of State wishes to tell you that France's action in the matter of combating proliferation, mastering arms and disarmament, remains guided by constant principles and conforms with the objectives set by the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

« France will therefore play her full role in negotiations and discussions on nuclear disarmament, without renouncing our deterrence force, an essential element of our security which contributes to guaranteeing peace. »

The waffly language of fobbing-off is rich in oxymoron...

The most absurd thing is that this deterrence strategy is not even effective in deterrent terms. A former president, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, implicitly admitted this in his memoirs: he said he would have preferred France to be occupied than annihilated by an invader that was capable of replying to our atomic « final warning » with an atomic attack. He would not have used ours, he said, except to avenge France for a destruction « begun already » by the enemy (i.e. after France was hit by a first atomic strike)... so that the rest of France was sure to be drawn into the general destruction.

What a beautiful deterrence this is! You suspend it when the threat (usually imaginary) becomes concrete - and all it then does then is to widen the catastrophe! Far from making us invulnerable, the nuclear strike-force, in the face of nuclear-armed aggressor, is no more effective than the Maginot Line was in 1940.

This raises a question : what can enable us to explain, if not understand, the obstinacy of France's leaders in wanting to keep their nuclear weapons ?

5. The deep roots of France's strategy

Beyond the historic Gaullism which played an essential role in establishing it, the so-called deterrence policy can doubtless be explained at first by the persistence of a certain « gaullian » tradition that spreads far beyond the borders of the Gaullist party (which is currently decomposing).

This tradition, keeping the memory of the painful defeat of 1940 and the German Occupation that followed, cultivates a legitimate though shadowy concern about national independence, and refuses to « align » with any foreign power, while mixing these in a muddled way with nostalgia for French « grandeur » as was manifested in Europe in the Age of Monarchies, the Revolution, the Napoleonic Empire and then globally in the colonial empire, with a preoccupation for France's « rank » and with the belief, founded on grand declarations and universal values (Declaration of the Rights of Man, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity), and perhaps even on her lost status of being the « eldest daughter » of the Catholic Church, with the civilising mission entrusted to « eternal France ».

The circles close to the president thus see nuclear weapons as a way for France to keep a little of her lost power. And politicians aspiring to become head of state do not have the spontaneous inclination to renounce this phallic symbol of potency. It would take someone like Mikhail Gorbachev to be sufficiently intelligent and courageous.

Besides, these weapons which, demonstrably, have never been useful for defense even in terms of deterrence during the Cold War, have cost and continue to cost a fortune : 1500 billion francs between 1945 and 1998, over 300 billion euros so far. To renounce that today would be to recognise that francs and euros have been thrown down the drain, when they could have been used to improve people's lives and even form the basis of a more concrete power, for example in research and development of renewable energy. One does not give up such an onerous and futile object without trying to gain a profit, political in this case. France therefore needs despite everything to keep the radioactive seat that puts her among the happy few nuclear powers and ensures (in principle) that she stays permanently in the Security Council.

Besides, this assurance is not just political, it is also commercial. The atom bomb is the visiting card, the quality cachet of France's « savoir-faire » in one of the nation's « domains of excellence » : nuclear technology, which the military-civilian nuclear lobby intend to « promote for export ».

An anecdote can illustrate this. On 18 July 1962, Gaston Palewski, as Minister of State for Scientific Research and Atomic and Space Questions in the administration of Georges Pompidou, announced to the Council of Ministers chaired by de Gaulle : « *Our plutonium A-bomb is definitively ready. The future H-bomb will be tested from 1970 on. Several countries are asking for our help and cooperation in nuclear matters, such as India and Israel* ». After the meeting, de Gaulle said to the government spokesman, Alain Peyrefitte : « *See, it just has to be known round the world that France is becoming a nuclear power, and they request our technical aid. They prefer it to the Americans' or the Russians', which would make them dependent, or that of the British who are known to be dependent on the American* ». In reality, de Gaulle was not quite right : nuclear cooperation with Israel had started in 1956. Yet nuclear technology, branded with national independence, was a good export product. The French bomb was a locomotive to pull the train of nuclear power-plants abroad, even if it also meant first pulling the train of bombs by promoting proliferation. It was the weapons, of course, that most attracted the two nations named by Palewski as potential customers, and others were to follow (notably Iran and Iraq).

This link between military and civilian technologies brings us to the heart of the nuclear machinery.

6. The infernal machine

Since 1945, nuclear-loving scientists, politicians, military leaders and captains of industry have patiently and discreetly woven the institutional and human web that enabled them to put France in the hands of the « nucleocrats », by imposing their policies. The Commissariat à l'Energie Atomique (CEA) « agent of nuclear deterrence and national security » and in particular its Direction des Applications Militaires (DAM), which controls everything involving nuclear armaments, has become since 1954 a State within the State.

The CEA maintains close relations with the other actors in arms and nuclear power : they are AREVA (a corporation bringing together COGEMA and Framatome) and EDF (Electricité de France). Staff pass easily from one sector to the other. Together they form what can be called the « military-industrial nuclear lobby» or simply "le Lobby", which offers them perfect access to all the seats of power : presidency, government, administrations, Parliament, large enterprises, press, media, most political parties, certain trade unions, and even the French Catholic Church, which ignores the Vatican's condemnations of nuclear weapons. The elite colleges, the « grandes Ecoles » and primarily the School of Mines, provide recruits for the Lobby. In Parliament, the OPECST (Parliamentary office for evaluating scientific and technological choices) supports the Lobby, as of course do the Defense Commissions of the National Assembly and the Senate.

One of the fathers of French nuclear strategy, General Ailleret, declared in 1968 : « I have always been concerned that civilian nuclear technology and nuclear weapons should advance together. The latter would die if the former disappeared. » In fact the former, known chiefly through medical radiology before the advent of power-plants, was associated with Science's great exploits and great names (Becquerel, Pierre and Marie Curie, Irène Curie, Frédéric Joliot, Einstein even...) and had a much more positive image in public opinion than nuclear weapons, since the latter were military, and were known for Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and associated with the tensions of the Cold War. That difference in perception led the Lobby to treat differently the two faces of the nuclear Janus, leaving its worrying face in the shadow and highlighting the smiling face (thus some EDF poster in the metro trumpeted the « nuclear drill » and AREVA in the 2000s linked its image and name to wind and sea with the yacht *Défi français* , etc.).

The civilian nuclear technologies were meant to make nuclear things lovable, even the military ones, and so the Lobby felt threatened by the two catastrophes of Chernobyl and Fukushima. In each case it mobilised to systematically minimise the catastrophe and make the public forget it as soon as possible. In this it was greatly helped by its accomplices in various milieux - scientific, medical, political of course, but also and chiefly in the national press and the principal media (national radio and TV, with the relative exception of the Arte, whose audience is limited). These accomplices are very obliging to the Lobby. Theirs is a complaisance that resembles radioactivity in being invisible and inaudible and in manifesting chiefly by silence. A few brave journalists try, usually without success, to break the veil of silence that surrounds nuclear matters and particularly nuclear weapons, but the silence usually prevails.

7. Omerta (conspiracy of silence)

Evidence of this omerta is abundant. Here are two cases, one recent military case and one from politics.

On 5 May 2013 when a M51 missile costing 120 million euros was shot from the nuclear sub *Le Vigilant* in the bay of Audierne (Britanny), it exploded in flight - but the national press and media did not breathe a word. The debris from this firing was filmed by a civilian who published [the video on May 7](#). The firing was mentioned in [another video](#): 2mn long, it looks like a live clip made presumably on May 5 by a regional TV station (FR3 Bretagne, perhaps), probably alerted by eye-witnesses who are interviewed. 18 months later these videos had received 1,027 and 1,634 visits respectively. If we add television viewers, we can estimate only a few thousand, let's say generously that only 1 French citizen in 10,000 had knowledge of this glorious success of French « savoir-faire » in the service of national security and independence. Not a big percentage.

The lid on the nuclear pot is a heavy leaden cover that weighs on French society permanently, but especially in election campaigns, at the time when the French people could change the country's policies.

According to the Constitution of 4 October 1958 which governs the Vth Republic, the President is « the guarantor of national independence, of the integrity of the territory, and of respect for treaties » (article 5). « The President of the Republic is the chief of the armed forces. He chairs the high councils and committees of national defense » (article 15). So we can imagine that in an electoral campaign, a debate ought to take place between various candidates and within public opinion concerning the exercise of the president's kinglike powers. Does the constitution imply that he should have atom bombs at his disposal? Since 1958 - although a section of votes, especially on the left, contested de Gaulle's "*bombinette*" - the French people have never had any say in the matter. At the start of summer 1962, the general-president had considered having a referendum on the « establishment of a national deterrence force » but abandoned the idea before autumn in favour of another referendum about electing the president by universal suffrage. None of his successors saw fit to revisit the strike-force, even after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the USSR, the emergence of new nuclear powers (1998, India and Pakistan), or the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001...

In October 2001, hoping to finally introduce the question of nuclear disarmament and nuclear power-plants into France's electoral debate, a general meeting of ACDN (Action des Citoyens pour le Désarmement Nucléaire) mandated its president to be a candidate for the 2002 presidential election. This unusual candidacy, one of the first to be announced, provoked interest from radio, TV and newspapers on the local and regional level. The daily *Sud-Ouest* gave it a whole page in its Sunday edition distributed over eight départements and followed its campaign to the end. On the national level, *France-Soir* explained the candidate's struggle and published his photo alongside other « minor candidates » to whom this popular daily devoted a page in its issue of 18 December. A well-known TV presenter of a prime-time show on the 2nd channel spoke of it. And Karl Zero's *Vrai Papier Journal*, imagining an « ideal government », saw him as a future minister of defense, disarmament and international cooperation, alongside José Bové as Minister of Agriculture. For the Lobby, that could be a problem. Fortunately in their view, despite a dozen AFP releases mentioning this anti-nuclear candidate, *Le Monde* ignored him completely. This respected « journal de référence » never printed the name of Jean-Marie Matagne, not even in a special report devoted to the « minor candidates ». So if *Le Monde* says nothing about him, why would the others? *Le Figaro* ignored him too. It is of course a pure coincidence that *Le Monde* is owned by the arms-merchant Lagardère, and *Le Figaro* is owned by the aircraft corporation Dassault that makes the Mirage planes. As for *l'Humanité*, the daily close to the Communist Party, it did publish in its correspondence columns some extracts from a certain Jean-Marie Matagne. It merely failed to mention his candidacy.

Ten years later the same form of omerta permitted France's new president, François Hollande, to ignore a 42-day hunger-strike made with the object of meeting him as President and submitting a request for a referendum on France's participation in the abolition of nuclear weapons. Never mind that the world has undergone immense upheavals in recent decades, « la France » is undaunted and holds firm to its same position on deterrence. But, if you hear France's discourse, she is the champion in all categories of disarmament.

8. Fluctuat nec mergitur (She floats and does not sink)

In the handsome bilingual brochure (French/English) put out in 2005 by the Minister of Defense, the Secretariat for National Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and distributed at international meetings, France trumpets her actions against proliferation, and for the mastery of armaments and for disarmament.

It is true that France played a positive role in the banning of anti-personnel mines and chemical weapons.

The same cannot be said for conventional weapons - France is a major exporter of these, ranked 3rd or 4th,

depending on year. It is hard to pass off weapons sales as an active contribution to the « general and complete disarmament » which France claims to support.

But what about her nuclear weapons ? Let's examine the following assertions point by point.

-« *France considers that the purpose of the deterrent forces is to guarantee that its vital interests will never be threatened by any other power* »

Yes, but these « vital interests » are left, as we have seen, to the free assessment of the Head of State, who will have to decide alone in a matter of minutes, according to a statement by one of them (François Mitterrand). Varying from one president to another, these vital interests may become weird and even aberrant. **(4)**

-« *As such, the French deterrent is not directed against any particular country.* »

This is true, it threatens all. If it does not threaten any one in particular, that's because none in particular has threatened France for over 60 years (since 1954 and the Franco-British Suez expedition, which the USSR halted, with US support, by waving its nuclear threat). But since one can always imagine that one day some state, nuclear or not, might threaten France, she will never renounce her nuclear weapons. France's deterrence, being « full-compass », is also full-future. Eternal. That's the great advantage of the « deterrence concept ».

-« *French nuclear weapons form no part of any strategy based on the military use of such weapons...* »

That is true in one half of the discourse, but it is disproved in another, since in order to deter, their use has to be guaranteed. By technical means, which explains the constant effort at « modernisation ». And in political terms, hence the formula of François Mitterrand : « *la dissuasion, c'est moi* » [*deterrence is me*]. This prerogative has been affirmed by all his successors, notably François Hollande : « *Even if it should never stop adapting, I will be the guarantor of France's deterrence capacity. That is a specific prerogative of the President of the Republic: I claim it and assume it fully* » (article in *Nouvel Observateur*, 22 December 2011)

-« *...and have never been considered by France to be war-fighting assets.* »

That claim is false. In May 1980 President Giscard d'Estaing ordered manoeuvres in what was then the French Zone of West Germany. The aim was to test at what moment the commanders of the « Blues », attacked by the tanks of the « Reds » (hypothetically four times more numerous) would ask the President to authorise the use of Pluton missiles in order to compensate for their handicap and halt the « Reds' » advance. In the event, the Blue commanders did not do so, since the « Reds » also had tactical missiles. But that proves that the missiles were then seen as « war-fighting assets ».

The surest conclusion from these declarations of principle is that France has no intention of renouncing her nuclear strike-force, « the essential foundation of its security ». The brochure goes on to enumerate the « important unilateral measures » France has taken in favour of nuclear disarmament. Let's examine them one by one, which might be nitpicking but could be spicy.

9. Smoke and mirrors

-« *In order to adjust the format of its nuclear forces to the strategic environment, France has chosen not to continue of several programmes...* »

Does this refer to the « mobilité » programme, which aimed to hide the Hadès missiles by carting them around in ordinary trucks through the population? If not, what? Perhaps they were programmes France could not afford? In any case, it is certain she never renounced any of these modernisations of subs, missiles, carriers etc : 4th SNLE, M51, ASMP-A, TNO, AIRIX, LMJ (to give just the acronyms)...

-« ...and has significantly reduced its nuclear stockpiles since the end of the end of the Cold War. France has therefore abandoned and dismantled the surface-to-surface weapons system on the Plateau d'Albion... »

The weapons in question (18 modernised S3 missiles, of one megaton each, with a range of 3,500 km), right from the beginning, never had any other purpose than to be a target for a first strike which would have prevented them from leaving their silos, or de-programmed them by electromagnetic shock. In May 1994, wishing to keep them despite the ending of the Cold War, François Mitterrand found an original use for them: to serve as proof that we were subject to aggression ! « *If one morning we wake and learn, perhaps from the radio, that Albion has disappeared under explosions that may or may not be nuclear, that would be a sufficient signal that we had entered a dangerous period.* »

► « ...and the short-range surface-to-surface weapons systems Pluton and Hadès. »

These ones had no possible uses, for political reasons. « Every Pluton missile had a destructive power corresponding to 150-200 % that of the Hiroshima bomb. There is no need for a capacity to sprinkle the banks of the Rhine in that manner » (Mitterrand, 5 May 1994). With a (theoretical) range extended to 450 km, the Hadès missiles would land on East Germany, and our German allies wouldn't like that. In the end that was all scrapped.

-« *The number of nuclear submarines carrying ballistic missiles (SSBNs) has been reduced from six to four.* »

Four new-type in place of six old-type, that gives no advantage to the « enemy » (who is he?), since the range of those missiles is increased by 2000 km. In reality it was money that forced the reduction from six to four. « In June 1997, the Republic's treasury noted that the cost of developing the SNLE-NGs had gone up by 43.2 % above what was predicted in 1993, and considered that the cost of « four, even three » would be equal to the originally planned cost of six submarines » (Bruno Barrillot, Audit Atomique, p. 152).

-« *Today, one SSBN, at least, is at sea at all times, compared with three until 1990.* »

Another economy measure. Nothing would stop France from putting two or three to sea leaving one in dock. In any case, the sub on patrol has 16 missiles on board with 96 nuclear warheads of 150 kilotonnes, which makes the power equivalent of 1000 Hiroshima bombs - enough to cause 200 millions deaths... Just one SNLE-NG is still one sub too many.

-« *Lastly, the number of weapons carried by the airborne component has also been reduced.* »

Indeed, the number of squadrons has fallen from three to two (one of Mirage 2000-N, one of Rafale). Another economy measure. And because it is now far from clear how the « airborne component » could be used, except to please the Air Force and Dassault. Or is it because between 1986 and 2011, 38 Mirage were lost in accidents?

-« *Today France has only two nuclear weapons systems...* »

We have seen why: for technical and political reasons the earth-based component (Pluton, Hadès, and S3) was useless. And was expensive.

-« *France announced on 20 January 1996 the cessation of all nuclear testing following completion of a final series of tests.* »

A final series of 8 so-called indispensable explosions, reduced to 6 under international pressure, was justified by Jacques Chirac on the grounds of needing to prepare the establishment of simulation programmes (France coming later to this than the USA or Russia). These simulation programmes are now in place preparing the weapons of the future. The Laser Méga Joule complex is working at this, among others.

- « *This decision took practical shape in the complete dismantling of testing facilities in the Pacific, which was announced on 22 February 1996 and completed by the end of July 1998.* »

France no longer needed to do explosive testing, yet is still doing research to acquire new weapons. The Pacific Test Centre had become useless, so closing it down was not a disarmament measure, it was just budgeting and

good sense. It also enabled France to show herself particularly active in the CTBT (Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty), which does not aim to impose disarmament on the existing nuclear states but only to prevent others from arming themselves, i.e. proliferation.

France pursues the same objective when she works for controlling the proliferation of ballistic missiles, or for a "Cut off" Treaty that would prevent the non-nuclear states from obtaining fissile materials. France herself has oodles (enough plutonium to make 20,000 bombs), but doesn't need them and aims rather at the making fusion weapons triggered by lasers. That is why she dismantled « its facilities for the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons at Pierrelatte and Marcoule » meanwhile opening the Laser Mega Joule at Le Barp (near Bordeaux).

Despite all this play of smoke and mirrors, it is clear that France aims

- ▶ to keep and modernise her nuclear weapons ;
- ▶ to prevent them being questioned, by dressing them up in « humanist » rhetoric ;
- ▶ to oppose any initiative (e.g. the withdrawal of US weapons stationed in Europe) that might start a real disarmament process ;
- ▶ if need be, to stay on the outer (e.g. for conferences about the humanitarian aspects of the nuclear question) ;
- ▶ to confine discussions to the NPT framework, thus permitting her to distract attention from disarmament to non-proliferation and the promotion of nuclear power (her own technology especially) ;
- ▶ to remain in the club of the five nuclear-armed states with permanent seats on the Security Council ;
- ▶ to preserve her veto power there and at the same time her right to use nuclear arms, all the while affirming humanist values (as in the Fabius article) ;
- ▶ to prevent the club of 9 nuclear powers from growing any larger.

But France's discourse (national independence, deterrence of the weak on the strong, defense of vital interests...) and her contradictory actions merely encourage proliferation.

Actually, France is trying to square the circle by means of verbiage. That explains the incoherences of her strategy.

Conclusion

All the measures presented by France as « *unilateral disarmament measures* » have in reality been dictated by financial, technical or political necessity, and inspired by geo-strategic considerations. Never at any moment, past or present, has France envisaged renouncing her nuclear strike-force. Quite the contrary, she continues to modernise it.

Any French President respectful of France's commitments and her own Constitution* ought to say **5**: « *France*

France confronting Nuclear Disarmament

committed herself, in Article VI of the NPT, to pursue negotiations in good faith, with the other nuclear-armed states, negotiations for a general and complete nuclear disarmament treaty, with mutual and international control that is strict and effective, and bring those negotiations to conclusion. I call on the other nuclear states, signatories and non-signatories of the NPT, to meet soon in Geneva or Vienna, to negotiate the complete elimination of our nuclear weapons. They are weapons for massacres, for crimes against humanity. France is ready to eliminate hers. She invites all the nuclear states to do the same, and invites all the non-nuclear states to renounce them definitively. »

In the land of le Lobby, that is just a dream.

The President could be briefer: « Never will I use any nuclear weapons against anyone. » That would be in five seconds the first act of a unilateral disarmament, admittedly exemplary, but with little chance of being followed by the other nuclear states, even less than when South Africa abandoned its nuclear programme but was not emulated by India, Pakistan or North Korea.

That's not even a dream, it's a mirage.

So the question does really confront us, and there are ways to respond:

How can nuclear disarmament nevertheless be imposed on France?

One of these ways is:

Let us demand a French referendum on the following question:

"Are you in favour of France participating with the other States concerned in the total elimination of nuclear weapons, under strict, effective, mutual and international control?"

Saintes, 1st December 2014

Jean-Marie Matagne
President of ACDN
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â€" -

FOOTNOTE 1.

In reality, France is not double or triple, but multiple. Geographically, this « country » (metropolitan France and

overseas France) is very diverse. Sociologically too. But all the components nevertheless make a people and a country, on a territory with frontiers that are almost stable. The « real country » is the real entity of France, much more than the state is, or the Nation.

FOOTNOTE 2.

The nuclear energy programme which has made France, with 58 reactors, the world's most nuclearised state per head of population, was decided in an authoritarian way on a single day (5 march 1974) by the PM Pierre Messmer, at a time when President Pompidou was sick with the illness that caused his death four weeks later. The Parliament was not consulted, let alone the people.

FOOTNOTE 3. These « *vital interests* » are not limited to « the integrity of France's national territory. » They are vague. « *As for defending our vital interests, a formula I find useful, it is not possible to foresee all possible situations. The chief interests of the motherland cannot always be tied to the strict literal notion of the integrity of the nation's territory. There can be other vital interests that concern the nation's future and very existence just as much. This assessment remains vague today, for the Head of State would have to consider concrete situations in the future (and consult with others, if circumstances gave him enough time) and then as a last resort assess whether there is danger for the motherland and whether our vital interest is in jeopardy.* » (François Mitterrand, speaking on 5 May 1994)

FOOTNOTE 4. « *The heart of our vital interests will always be the integrity of our national territory, the protection of our population, and the free exercise of our sovereignty. Our perception of these interests evolve over time, in a world marked by the growing interdependence of European countries and by globalisation. For example, the guaranteeing of our strategic supplies and the defense of our allies are, among others, interests to be protected. It will be over to the President to assess the size and potential consequences of an aggression, a threat, or an intolerable pressure against these interests. This analysis could, depending on the case, lead to the view that they enter the field of our vital interests.* » (Jacques Chirac, 19 January 2006)

FOOTNOTE 5 Cf. [Request to invalidate the candidacies of Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande](#)