https://acdn.net/spip/spip.php?article921

President Hollande, Speech on Nuclear Deterrence, 19 February 2015

- Homepage - News - External sources -

Publication date: Wednesday 25 February 2015

Copyright © www.acdn.net - All rights reserved

Comments by ACDN will follow.
By the way, you may read our earlier analysis, MEMORANDUM: France confronting nuclear disarmament

Messieurs les ministres,
Mesdames, messieurs les élus, les parlementaires,
Monsieur le Chef d'Etat major des Armées,
Monsieur le Chef d'Etat major de l'Armée de l'air,
Mesdames et messieurs.

I am at Istres, a French air base [near Marseille]. You the Air Force are greeting me here, and I take this opportunity to pay homage to the pilots, navigators and mechanics who lost their lives or were gravely injured in the terrible accident at Albacete in Spain a month ago.

Once again our armed forces have paid a heavy price for the security of our country. Once again I pay homage to the military personnel who are devoted to France's independence.

That is indeed the meaning of my visit today.

Every day our Air Force shows its capability for ensuring the protection of the nation's territory against possible air attacks. The Air Force is also able to deploy powerful arms, far from metropolitan France, for operations abroad. That is one of the responses that we bring, in our place and within the limits of our commitments, to the struggle against terrorism. The Air Force can strike at hostile targets, and does so in Iraq or in the Sahel. And finally, the Air Force contributes to the implementation of nuclear deterrence, which is the subject of my speech to you today.

I belong to a generation that has had the inestimable fortune not to have experienced war on French soil. My father and grandfather knew war, wars. But I. being born at the start of the 1950s, had the great fortune to be spared by those conflicts. Yet at the same time what has happened in the last year in eastern Europe reminds us that peace can never be taken for granted.

In the same way, the arms race has resumed in numerous parts of the world, with an considerable, even rapid increase in military expenses and arsenals, in a context of mounting tension. There are States that invest in technologies that could potentially fragilize the strategic balances of today. Some are even developing logics of influence and threat in their surrounding regions, on land and on sea.

So - and this is a serious matter to acknowledge - the possibility of state conflict concerning us directly or indirectly cannot be ruled out. In the field of nuclear arms, new powers have emerged in these last twenty years. Others seek to emerge, and the States which were already nuclear-armed and which claimed that it was urgent to disarm the the others, have even increased their capacity with the development of new nuclear components, and have pursued the production of fissile materials for weapons.

In parallel, tactical arsenals are being strengthened, and this leads us to fear a lowering of the threshold for using nuclear weapons. In this context, what should France do ? Appeal constantly for the organising of a more secure world : and that's what our diplomcy does. But France must be lucid. She knows that it is not enough to proclaim

Copyright © www.acdn.net

immediate and total disarmament, because the reality of each country's actions must be consistent with its words.

France has therefore decided to struggle against one of the most serious threats weighing on the world's stability, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.
Any increase in the number of States possessing nuclear weapons is a major risk for peace ; firstly in the regions in question, but also for international security.

That is the meaning of the position we adopted months ago, if not years, in our negotiations with Iran. If I wished to summarize our expectations of this negotiation, I would say simply : yes to non-military nuclear technology, no to the bomb. The problem is that at the moment Iran has yet to show us its desire to renounce nuclear weapons. But as soon as it does so the agreement will be signed off.

North Korea, for its part, carried out a third nuclear test two years ago. That is as unacceptable as it is worrying.

But there is not just nuclear proliferation, there is chemical and biological proliferation and vectors of that nature.

In Syria, in the summer of 2013, a fundamental taboo of our collective security system was broken, when the regime of Bashar EL- ASSAD used chemical weapons against Syria's own population. It required the threat of force to bring about the destruction of stocks, factories and chemical weapons declared by the regime.

That process is now finished. But this does not leave me totally reassured, since it leaves some zones of shadow and it is highly probable that some bombs containing chlorine were dropped less than a year ago on some Syrian villages.

Proliferation means a global threat to the world. Proliferation necessarily threatens France.

Admittedly France does not feel directly attacked, she has no declared enemy ; but as I have been remembering the last twelve moths, we have seen the Ukraine Crisis, the rise in power of Daesh [Islamic State], and the unprecedented cyber-attack on SONY - so surprises, even ruptures are possible. And the reappearance of a major state threat to our country cannot be ruled out.

So as Head of State I have the imperative duty to take account of these threats, since nothing must touch our independence. The international context does not allow for any weakness. That is why the era of nuclear deterrence is not over. There must be no question of lowering our guard, even in this field.

As I have said, that is my responsibility as President of the Republic, and as head of the armed forces.

In this matter, as President François MITTERRAND once said, the Head of State is France's first citizen to have his word and to take his decision.

Nuclear deterrence aims to protect our country from any aggression of state origin against our vital interests, wherever it comes from and whatever form it takes. Let me add that for France nuclear weapons are not intended to bring any advantage in a conflict. Because of their devastating effects, they have no place in the framework of an offensive strategy, they are conceived only for defense.

Deterrence is also what enables us to preserve our freedom of action and decision in all circumstances, because it

Copyright © www.acdn.net

enables us to reject any threat or pressure of state origin that might aim to paralyse us.

France is one of the rare nations whose influence and responsibility are situated on the global level. This is because France can exercise her responsibilities. Because everyone knows that when France speaks, she can act. And her deterrent forces enable France to guarantee that her international commitments will always be honoured, even if the use of nuclear weapons is conceivable only in extreme circumstances of legitimate self-defense.

Our nuclear forces have to be capable of inflicting absolutely unacceptable damage to the adversary on his centres of power, i.e. his political, economic and military nerve-centres.

It is the supreme responsiblity of the President of the Republic to constantly evaluate the nature of our vital interests and the attacks that may be made on them.

The integrity of our territory and the safeguarding of our population constitute the heart of our vital interests. Whatever means a state adversary uses, we must preserve our nation's capacity to live. That is the meaning of nuclear deterrence.

Nevertheless, I cannot exclude the possibility of an adversary misunderstanding the delimitation of our vital interests. That's why I wish to issue a reminder here, that France can as a last resort indicate her will to defend our vital interests, by means of a warning of a nuclear nature aimed at reestablishing deterrence.

The definition of our vital interests cannot be limited only to the national scale, because France does not conceive her defense strategy in an isolated way, even in the nuclear field. We have repeatedly affirmed this conception with the UK, with which we have unequalled cooperation. We participate in the European project, we have built with our partners a community of destiny, and the existence of a French nuclear deterrent brings to Europe a strong and essential contribution. France also has, with her European partners, a solidarity of fact and of heart. Who could then imagine that an aggression jeopardizing the survival of Europe would have no consequence ?

That is why our deterrence goes hand in hand with the constant strengthening of the Europe of Defense. But our deterrence is our own ; it is we who decide, we who evaluate our vital interests.

I wish to clarify also our relationship with numerous States which, whether signatories of the NPT or not, are asking for guarantees against the use or threat of nuclear weapons. The aspiration is legitimate. France has made a unilateral declaration, which takes away nothing from her right to self-defense, and the Security Council acknowledged that in 1995. France has confirmed her commitments concerning the establishment of nuclear-free zones in several regions of the world. That was necessary.

Today I solemnly reaffirm that France will not use nuclear weapons against states not armed with them that are signatories of the NPT and that respect their international obligations for non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

I wish to clarify also our relationship with the Atlantic Alliance. The Atlantic Alliance has a nuclear vocation and independent strategic forces, such as France and the UK, have a specific role to play and contribute to overall deterrence.

To recognise this situation, as everyone can, does not imply a changed posture for France. Our nation does not take part in NATO's mechanisms of nuclear planning, and will not take part in them. That principle remains. On the other

Copyright © www.acdn.net

hand, France wishes to contribute to the Alliance's definition of nuclear policy. In this regard, all NATO member-states need to show constancy and determination in this commitment.

There, Mesdames et Messieurs, that's what I wanted to say about the very foundations of our deterrence policy.

Now I will turn the the forces that give it movement and order. Fifty years ago now, after a presidential decree creating the Strategic Forces of the Air, a Mirage 4 with a nuclear bomb was placed on alert for the first time. Since that decisive action, not one day, not one hour has passed without permanent nuclear deterrence being provided by our forces. I wish to pay homage to the uniformed and civilian personnel who guarantee the credibility of our deterrence and thus the security of our compatriots.

By definition, deterrence means permanence. What would intermittent deterrence look like ? Over 50 years, it is true, the world has changed profoundly and our forces have changed too. To ensure this permanence we have had to adapt continually, in capacity and volume, to meet the evolving threats that could target our Nation.

So France decided - in 1996 - to terminate one of those components, the ground-to-ground one, by shutting down the Albion Plateau [in SE France] and dismantling the short-range missiles. We have kept two components, one airborne the other oceanic. This has not prevented us from reducing the volume of our forces, so as to maintain them at the level of strict sufficiency. This principle of strict sufficiency is also the basis of the organisation of our deterrent force.

Well, there are voices raised regularly asking questions about the maintenance of those two components, questioning the simulation programme for tests or the need for our SNLEs (submarines) to be permanently at sea. Those debates are legitimate in a democratic society, and I don't wish to brush them aside. But we need to be able to justify our choices and therefore to regularly revisit what the needs of deterrence are.

For myself, I decide from the only issue that matters : the ultimate security of France. I have therefore decided to maintain an oceanic component and an airborne component. Neither is focused on a single target of its own. Both combine to form the sum of deterrence missions and their complementarity anables the Head of State, at every moment, to have available the necessary and sufficient range of options and to never be dependent on a single type of means.

Let me explain. The oceanic component, by our subs' permanent presence at sea, their invulnerability, and the range of their missiles, is a key element in the deterrence manoeuvre. This is because we need any potential aggressor tempted to put pressure on France to be certain that a retaliation capacity is always operational which he cannot either detect or destroy. That is the interest, the utility of the oceanic component.

The airborne component also ensures permanent deterrence by means of the Strategic Forces of the Air. And the nuclear air/sea force, in operation from the aircraft carrier Charles-de-Gaulle, offers other means of action. In the case of a major crisis the airborne component gives a visibility to our determination to defend ourselves, thus avoiding a recourse to extreme solutions. That is the interest of the two components, which I could describe as one unseen and another very visible.

It is also necessary to maintain capacity and credibility of the two components. This means transferring into the actual weapons the technological evolutions in the fields of air defense, anti-missile defense and underwater detection.

The Military Programme Law is the one that enables us to continue adapting the SNLEs, our subs, for M51 missiles, which will enable us to put the oceanic nuclear warhead into service from 2016 on, to launch SNLE conception

Copyright © www.acdn.net

studies for the third generation and to replace, between now and 2018, the last Mirage 2000Ns with Rafales carrying ASMPA missiles. In addition the Military Programme Law has committed us to renewing the fleet of refuelling planes - 12 Phoenix aircraft have been ordered and the first two will be delivered in 2018.

The Military Programme Law has been careful to prepare, adapt and implement the commitments I have made to ensure the reliability and security of our deterrence force. For my responsibility is to anticipate and also to prepare for the more distant future which will be the renewal of our components. What makes the action's meaning for the Head of State is not just preparing to confront if necessary the threats of today, it is also ensuring that our country, long after one President hands over his position, is led by another, so that there is continuity, a chain of adaptation for our deterrent forces that cannot be interrupted.

I have also ensured, in the matter of the oceanic component, that there are future adaptations of the M51 missiles, so that the tonnage of future subs remains close to that of our Triomphant class. Studies have been made too to explore what the successor to the ASMPA could be. The most demanding technologies will be used, in particular to be more effective in the speed of the materials and in furtiveness.

In parallel, I have instructed the CEA (Commissariat à l'énergie atomique) to prepare, the necessary evolution of nuclear warheads at the end of their useful life. And also there are the things that have to be done to renew these weapons without conducting nuclear tests. That is the simulation programme which is fully consistent with the CTBT (Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty).

There too, I wish to solemnly recall our commitments. France does not and will not produce new types of nuclear weapon. I wish therefore to salute the extraordinary scientific and technical challenge which is this simulation programme. The CEA's directorship of military applications respects all the deadlines of this project, and keeps control of expenses.

In 2014 there were the first experiments with the Laser Mégajoule in the EPURE facility. There too, for the simulation programme (essential to prepare for the future) we have a strategic collaboration with the UK. We are committed to cooperate for at least 50 years, sharing two simulation facilities, one in France one in the UK. We will soon be able to inaugurate the first implementations, less than five years after the signing of the Lancaster House Treaty, and this will enable us, again, to salute all the efforts made.

I mean to say also that the budget for nuclear deterrence will have been spared from the cuts demanded of our armed forces. Could it be desirable to maintain some kind of competition in our defense forces ? Could ensuring the continuation of our deterrence force were in contradiction with their other missions ? No. I can therefore respond to any possible questions about this.

The budgetary context is tight for all expenses, including military expenses, for all weapons. Nevertheless we have ring-fenced, in the Military Programme Law, the sums needed for the deterrence force and for conventional weapons. The people managing the sums assigned for deterrence have made realistic decisions, as have others, without ever compromising credibility, autonomy or reliability, in the matter of the force's mission of ensuring the survival and sovereignty of France.

But let me add another argument. Nuclear deterrence is complementary to our conventional tools and exercises a training effect on our whole defense apparatus.

Thus some tools that serve in deterrence are directly used in our conventional or classical operations. I'm thinking of the information satellites, the purusit aircraft, the refuelling planes, the nuclear attack subs, the anti-sub frigates and

Copyright © www.acdn.net

the mine-sweepers.

Let me give another illustration. The pursuit aircraft of the Strategic Forces of the Air have so-called dual capacities. These planes have carried out about a quarter of the strikes made in the Libya and Sahel operations. These same planes with dual capacity are active today in Africa and Iraq and contribute every day to the air defense alert.

Lastly, deterrence stimulates our research and development efforts and contributes to the excellence and competitiveness of French industry. The fact that there has been research is the reason why there are innovations. The fact that we have been supremely capable in nuclear deterrence has enabled us to disseminate, in industry, the know-how, the incomparable technologies that have served our economy and therefore created jobs.

But one cannot justify military expenses just by the desire to stimulate the economy or create jobs. Military expenses need to have a basis in the very stake that they represent, i.e. the security of France, the defense of our interests, the promotion of our values, the things that make us France.

Defense and security - that responsibility is not similar to others ! It is not just an investment, even though it can have that character ! It is what enables us to be free.
In a dangerous world - and it is dangerous - France does not intend to lower her guard. But at the same time as being ready to defend herself, she does not want to renounce the very objective of disarmament, including nuclear disarmament. France is a power for peace, and that is why she defends herself, for the sake of peace !

France is what is called a possessor state in the terms of the NPT, i.e. we are recognised as having nuclear weapons. That situation endows us with particular responsibilities. Therefore I share the objective, in the long term, of the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, but I add : when the strategic situation makes this possible. France will continue to ask unremittingly in this direction. She will do so transparently, truthfully, I might say wisely and in good agreement with her Allies.

Nuclear disarmament cannot be an incantation or even an invitation ! It has to be demonstrated and firstly by the State that proclaims it. France has been exemplary in applying the principle of strict sufficiency. So she has reduced by half, in recent years, the total number of her weapons. By half ! She has reduced by a third the airborne component. She has renounced her ground-to-ground missiles. We have not spoken about disarmament ; we have done it to the necessary degree. France has not been content to stop nuclear tests, she has also stopped the production of uranium and plutonium for nuclear weapons. She has completely dismantled the corresponding facilities, henceforth relying for deterrence on a stockpile of nuclear materials. France has been exemplary with regard to the volume of her stock of weapons, namely 300. Why 300 warheads ? Because that corresponds to the evaluation we make of the strategic context.

If the levels of other arsenals, in particular the US and Russian ones, are reduced some day to a few hundred, France would draw appropriate conclusions, as she has always done. But we are a long way from there today.

I wish to go even further in transparency, on our doctrine, on what I'm doing today for you and world to hear - transparency about our arsenals and our concrete efforts for disarmament. That is why I am not afraid to reveal that France has three sets of 16 missiles carried on submarines, and 54 ASMP1 vectors. And I wish all the nuclear-armed states to make the same effort at truth that I am making now, for all the categories of weapons in their nuclear arsenals.

In the same spirit of transparency and truth, France will very soon propose visits to the sites that no longer hold nucelar weapons : the Albion Plateau, where the silos that used to hold the ground-to-ground component are

Copyright © www.acdn.net

completely dismantled, and the Luxeuil base whose depots of weapons stockpiles are now empty. There too I hope this gesture inspires the attitude of the other nuclear powers, with visits that our experts would be pleased to make.

It is important too to declare a moratorium on the production of fissile materials for weapons, and to dismantle their production facilities, along with the nuclear testing sites. More things that France again invites all nuclear-armed states to do also.

Lastly, France's diplomatic tool, her foreign policies, remain fully mobilized for disarmament, and that is particularly true now a few weeks before the NPT Review Conference. Our first priority, in the context of this debate, is still the entry into force of the CTBT as soon as possible. I say this with ease because France has demonstrated that the complete and irreversible renunciation of nuclear testing is compatible with the maintenance of a credible deterrence. This message must be taken to all our partners.

Our second priority is the definitive end of the production of fissile materials for weapons. There has been talk of this for years, but negotiations have not managed to begin, for lack of agreement among the countries concerned. That is why I call today for all the nuclear-armed states to engage in discussion immediately on the total cessation of fissile materials production. In the next weeks France will propose a draft treaty on these questions that is ambitious, realistic and verifiable.

I was determined to come here to Istres for this exercise in transparency and truth, and in gratitude for what the deterrence force is to our country. To reaffirm the fundamental issue that this nuclear deterrence represents for the security of France. It is not the whole of our defense policy. It is complementary to what we must continue in all domains to ensure the protection of our territory, to carry out operations abroad, to ensure the promotion of what we represent, and also to fight against terrorism wherever it is located.

The credibility of the deterrence force calls for rigour and professionalism, I might say uncommon professionalism, and you show proof of that because you have brought to perfection, in the specific training you do, this requirement of high quality and know-how and the operation of the most sensitive technologies. That is why here I want to express the full confidence that our country has in you. Our entire Nation knows what it owes you, knows what it owes to the deterrence force, and testifies here to its gratitude. What you do, what the deterrence force makes possible, is ensure that the Nation, France, your country keeps what is most dear and precious and essential to it, its independence. And there is no independence without the freedom to choose her destiny. The deterrence force is what permits us to be able to live free and to bring our message to the whole world without fear or apprehension, because we are sure of our capacity to defend ourselves.

Independence, freedom, capacity to make our values prevail - those are the reasons why we must every day ensure the permanence of nuclear deterrence and be capable constantly of further improving its organisation, its functioning and its weapons.

Vive la République et Vive la France.

Translated from French into English (NZ) by Peter Low for ACDN.

Copyright Peter Low / ACDN