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France, her Bomb, the World and Us

Open Letter to Madame de Sarnez, President of the National Assembly's Commission for Foreign Affairs

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Madame la Présidente,

On 8 October 2018, you were a guest on the Chaîne Parlementaire, for the programme « Follow-up » entitled : « France : a powerful voice? ».

During that broadcast you mentioned the perception that, in your view, foreigners perceive France as the bearer of the values of "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity". Shortly after that, you added that France was also seen as a "nuclear power" - which you seemed to consider an extra element of prestige in France's credit.

Allow me to say that those two perceptions are contradictory and conflicting in the minds of foreigners, as they are in reality. How can we simultaneously proclaim our attachment to liberty, equality and fraternity and declare ourselves ready to massacre thousands or millions of people (while reserving for ourselves the privilege of this exorbitant "right")? There is an absolute contradiction between the two attitudes. Foreigners are not dupes on such double language, as I have often been able to observe during the last twenty years when talking with NGOs and UN diplomats working for nuclear disarmament. They speak with affliction, bitterness or sarcasm about "the French" - i.e. France's diplomats - and their attitude. They know very well that France is the spearhead not for but against nuclear disarmament.

However much France, in her speeches and tracts, poses as a model of a disarming power, the "actions" cited as proof of this desire were all motivated by considerations of contingency - by technical, political or financial opportunity.

Thus the scrapping of the Pluton and then the Hades missiles results from them being politically unusable. Their limited range meant that they would all necessarily fall on west or east German territory - something that offended our West German allies. They were also unusable in military terms. Their use in the event of a Soviet attack would have done no more than attract onto France an atomic response at least equal in size, and probably larger - as was realised in May 1980 by the commanders of the "Blues" during a series of manoeuvres ordered by President Giscard d'Estaing in the occupation zone of Germany. Clearly, these missiles were worthless, except to please the "soldiers" a little, and the military-industrial lobby a lot - and to cause a dispute with our German friends. To declare them "pre-strategic" rather than "tactical" changed nothing. They had to be scrapped.

Similarly, the closure of the Albion Plateau and the dismantling of the "strategic" missiles there resulted from the fact that those missiles (horribly expensive ones) had been doomed from the start to obsolescence and destruction: their warheads would have soon needed hardening, and in a real conflict their very limited location would have certainly been targeted by pre-emptive strikes - which would have prevented them from leaving their silos or disrupted their programming through electromagnetic effect. As a result their production was stopped after 18 units instead of the planned 27. In the end they were all scrapped and France renounced definitively that "terrestrial component" (whether "strategic" or "tactical" or pre-strategic) of her « force de frappe » - her nuclear strike force.

Similarly, the closure of the CEP (the Pacific Experimentation Centre) resulted from the fact that this very expensive operation no longer served a useful purpose, not after the simulation programme was up and running. Such was the argument put forward by President Chirac to justify both the resumption of explosive tests after the moratorium which

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President Mitterrand had declared under international pressure, and also their interruption after a final burst of tests (curtailed) in the wake of general outcry and the same international pressure. Planned to be ten in number, and then eight, those nuclear tests deemed "indispensable" stopped at six. But after that France could agree to sign and support the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT or TICE in French) - whose aim was to forbid others from doing what France no longer needed to do.

Similarly, the closure of installations producing fissile materials for military use can be explained by the fact that France had much more than she needed and indeed possesses enough plutonium to make several thousand more bombs. This also accounts for her virtuous insistence in supporting the fissile "cut off" treaty, which would prevent other countries from obtaining what France already has in abundance.

Those "actions", and all the others with no exception (like the reduction in the number of "nuclear warheads") have only ever been a way of "making virtue of necessity" without ever renouncing the essential point: our power to massacre, supposedly of deterrent value, conceived to last and last *ad libitum*. In addition, we are full of conviviality, as is seen in our rule of "strict sufficiency" - we are content with the power to cause only a billion deaths, which is excellent proof of our fraternal sentiments.

In parallel with all those shams, France has never stopped postponing - indefinitely - her commitment to Article VI of the NPT, the Non-Proliferation Treaty which entered into force in 1970 and which France finally signed in 1992. In that article she undertook to negotiate the elimination of all nuclear arsenals, including her own.

It was France, for example, when President Hollande took power, that supported the US refusal to withdraw their bombs stationed in four countries of the European Union; France that, under President Sarkozy, signed with the UK the London Treaty known as « Teutatès », planning 50 years of Franco-British nuclear cooperation for the maintenance and renewal of our respective arsenals; France that applied pressure for her Anglo-American allies and her francophone « clients » to boycott the UN negotiations for the Nuclear Ban Treaty; France too that - on 7 July 2017, the very day when 122 states without nuclear arms voted for this treaty - incited the US and the UK to publish a joint communiqué declaring that those three states would never sign it.

What if France, on the contrary, had taken part in the Ban Treaty negotiations and encouraged the other nuclear powers to do so? China, India and Pakistan had given signs of interest by abstaining on the UN resolution (L41) with decided these negotiations, and North Korea had even voted in favour! With France's support that treaty could had led to a concerted and controlled process for eliminating nuclear weapons, instead of giving the nuclear-armed states no prospect other than unilateral disarmament, which they find very hard to consider. The reason why France so vigorously opposed the negotiations and their outcome is very clear: she does not want in any circumstance to renounce her atomic fetish, not even in the context of multilateral disarmament that is universal, complete and controlled!

« Liberty, equality, fraternity », you say? That would be nice. But what total duplicity in France's "posture"!

Our fellow-citizens, and foreigners too, are not duped by our leaders' double language, as is shown by the IFOP poll of May 2018 which ACDN commissioned (see attachment). 85 % of French citizens want to end these policies that make them the accomplices and potential victims of crimes against humanity. And they want to have their say by referendum, for they have never been consulted on this subject.

France would greatly bolster her unsteady image as "homeland of human rights" if she made her foreign policies conform to the values she proclaims. Instead of opposing it by all means, she should take the lead in a process for abolishing nuclear and radioactive weapons. That is her duty, her legal obligation, and that is what the foreigners

most friendly to France expect her to do.

If you doubt this, Madame la Présidente, may I refer you to the ACDN website (www.acdn.net) and to an article written in 2013 by Peter Low, director of the French programme at the University of Canterbury (New Zealand), a great friend of France, a connoisseur of our language and culture: "[France as an Obstacle to Abolishing Nuclear Weapons](#)", "[La France comme obstacle à l'abolition des armes nucléaires](#)".

His conclusion makes the essential point, which alas is still topical:

"A French government wishing for applause from abroad should renounce some current projects (developments of submarines, missiles, new warheads...), but should above all use France's influence on the governments of the US, UK, Russia and China in order to set up genuine negotiations for genuine multilateral disarmament - which would simply be honouring her obligations under the NPT, a treaty text that was approved by almost all the countries of the UN. We are waiting for that, we have been waiting for over 40 years!

"The French people should be pushing their government to commit to that, for example through the referendum long proposed by ACDN, which I for one endorse and which I have supported by writing my own letter to President Hollande."

Madame la Présidente,

There's a French proverb: "it's never too late to do right". This is often true, but not always: once a catastrophe arrives there is no time to take the measures that could have averted it. Through a series of chance coincidences, as on October 1962 during the Cuban Missile Crisis or in Moscow on the night of 26 September 1983, we miraculously escaped a nuclear catastrophe. But miracles are not guaranteed for ever.

On 25 September 1961, a year before the Cuban Missile Crisis which almost triggered a nuclear war - the real final war that still awaits us - President J.F.Kennedy said to the UN General Assembly: "Today each inhabitant of the planet must envisage the day when it will cease to be habitable. Each man, each woman lives under the nuclear Sword of Damocles hanging from a thread that can at any moment be cut by accident, miscalculation or act of folly. These weapons of war must be abolished before they abolish us." 57 Years later we are at exactly the same point, except that the world's equilibrium is even more unstable now than during the Cold War.

According to the atomic scientists, since January 2018 we are now only two minutes from the Apocalypse. Much closer that at the end of the 1980s.

In January 1986, Mikhail Gorbachev launched the slogan: "No nuclear arms by 2000!" Unfortunately he didn't have time to make that happen, but he did sign with President Reagan in December 1987 the Washington Treaty on the elimination of Intermediary Nuclear Forces, which freed Europe from the SS20s and the Pershing2 and which, in its wake, led two years later to the fall of the Berlin Wall. No less! Because, on top of direct benefits, nuclear disarmament, with its rule of prudence ("Trust and also verify!") has a fundamental virtue: it transforms "mortal enemies" into "partners" ready to cooperate and even obliged to do so. It carries us forward from an era of rivalry, defiance, fear and existential threat to an era of cooperation, confidence, peace and solidarity, making it possible to face the challenges which all humankind is now confronting. **It changes the atmosphere of the time.**

Thus it is urgent that we listen to the warning for those two great statesmen, John F. Kennedy et Mikhail Gorbachev, who were, at least on this matter, lucid and insightful.

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That's what we suggest to you, Madame, and to all your colleagues in Parliament.

France's nuclear policy is based on the threat to exterminate whole populations. It flouts human rights, international law, France's commitments, France's constitution... and it defies simple commonsense because it is illogical to defend republican values, including fraternity, while threatening to commit massacres; it is illogical to link France's "vital interests" to the use of arms that would be suicidal against any nation which also has them; it is illogical to claim to guarantee our security with these weapons while forbidding others of getting them; it is illogical to thus encourage proliferation while pretending to combat it; it is illogical to make budget cuts and yet spend billions of these death-machines unusable against other nuclear states, unable to deter terrorists, and yet potentially obtainable by terrorists.

Lastly, France's nuclear policy is contrary to democracy, for the French people have never had a say, and yet we know from a recent poll that more than 80% of people would reply YES to the question: *"Do you want France to participate in the abolition of nuclear and radioactive weapons, and to engage with all the states concerned in negotiations aiming to draw up, ratify and implement a treaty to ban and totally eliminate nuclear and radioactive weapons, under international and mutual control that is strict and effective?"*

You, Madame, as a citizen, can sign and support the attached Call for a Referendum, from which I have taken my last remarks.

As an MP, you can also sign with your colleagues the Parliament Bill aiming to organise a referendum on France's participation in the abolition of nuclear and radioactive weapons, which we are submitting to you.

Further, as President of the National Assembly's Commission for Foreign Affairs, you can doubtless encourage the commission to reflect on this fundamental aspect of international relations. France, we think, would be better for it, and so would the world.

That is what motivated this missive - I beg you to excuse its length. That was necessary to state the facts.

With respectful civic greetings,

Jean-Marie Matagne,
Président de l'Action des Citoyens pour le Désarmement Nucléaire (ACDN)
Docteur en Philosophie

Attachments:

- ▶ Parliamentary Bill
 - ▶ Form for parliamentary support
 - ▶ Appeal for a referendum on France's participation in the abolition of nuclear and radioactive weapons
 - ▶ Poll conducted by IFOP-ACDN
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