

<https://acdn.net/spip/spip.php?article18>



The latest metamorphosis of the French nuclear strategy

Nuclear Weapons: How France is preparing a catastrophe

- Homepage - Background papers -

Publication date: Wednesday 4 February 2004

Copyright © www.acdn.net - All rights reserved

On Monday 2 February 2004 Madame Alliot-Marie, France's Minister of Defense, delivered at the Institut des Hautes Etudes de la Défense Nationale (IHEDN) a speech which gives an overall definition of France's defense policies and in particular of her nuclear strategy.

Miniaturised Nuclear Weapon

" On the subject of deterrence, there is no new doctrine under consideration" she declared, "Nuclear weapons are political weapons, different in nature [from others] and in no way intended for the battlefield. Respecting these principles, we have ruled out the option of miniaturised weapons. The development of such weapons would raise questions about our doctrine evolving towards use, which we refuse to accept.

In saying this, the Minister was replying indirectly to articles published on 27 October 2003 by the newspaper Libération, which predicted that a change in doctrine would be announced: France was allegedly about to claim the right, like the USA, to research and develop miniaturised nuclear weapons ("mini-nukes" for short), and potentially to use them for "pre-emptive strikes" against non-nuclear states suspected of wanting to acquire weapons of mass destruction (nuclear, biological or chemical), or of having them and threatening France. Also indirectly, in declaring this option "ruled out", the minister confirms that this had indeed been considered. It is not impossible that the press articles, by attracting attention to this possibility and provoking strong reactions, contributed to its renunciation..

In any case, France is renouncing the "development of a miniaturised weapon" (though not, as we shall see, the basic research which could lead to one) and this is good news. However there remain grey areas and with the announcement comes a confirmation which opens sombre perspectives.

GREY AREAS

It is true that the Minister said "we" (i.e. the president of France) "refuse to let our doctrine evolve towards use" of nuclear weapons on the battlefield - ours would be merely "political weapons". But the Minister doesn't say explicitly that this doctrinal renunciation includes abandoning the theoretical and practical research which could bring about the development of this weapon. On the contrary, she reaffirms the need to maintain the entirety of the "Loi de Programmation Militaire" (LPM) 2003-2008 and devoting all the necessary funds to it. And she spells this out: "in the absence of tests, the simulation programme is indispensable for the perfecting of our weapons and guarantees their security and reliability."

This programme includes the research carried out at the Centre d'études scientifiques et techniques d'Aquitaine (CESTA), located at Le Barp (Gironde). In the context of the "Ligne d'Intégration Laser" (LIL), and then the future "Laser Mega Joule" (LMJ), researchers are studying the possibility of using lasers to "light" the process of thermal nuclear fusion, which might one day make it possible to build miniaturised H-bombs, which would be more acceptable as battlefield weapons (although just as nasty in destruction and radioactivity). When visiting the CESTA on 14 November 2003 Madame Alliot-Marie declared her strong support for the staff and said: "to visit the CESTA is to touch the heart of state power. I know how huge the budget for this is, but at the same time this is normal because it guarantees the credibility of our deterrence".

Several questions now remain unanswered:

Nuclear Weapons: How France is preparing a catastrophe

* What are the new weapons which the simulation programme is intended to perfect? In addition to the new nuclear warheads (M45, M51) we may fear that these still include "mini-nukes", secretly of course. The only guarantee to the contrary would be the shutting down of CESTA with the abandonment of the LIL and of the LMJ programme.

* The "deterrence credibility" of France's nuclear programme rests technically on the maintenance of existing weapons: 348 nuclear warheads and their delivery systems, the equivalent in total of 57 million tonnes of TNT or dynamite and theoretically capable of killing a BILLION people. With such a capacity why decide to perfect or develop new weapons, new launchers (missiles) and a 4th nuclear-armed submarine of the new generation (SNLE-NG)? Why does the LPM 2003-2008 contain this unprecedented technical and financial effort in favour of its nuclear component when in normal circumstances (cf. Article VI of NPT) all these weapons old and new are destined for the rubbish heap?

* Finally, the "credibility" of the deterrence is not merely technical. It is also primarily, as the minister says, political (although to view "nuclear weapons" as "political" means something quite different: they are in fact intended to ensure not so much France's security as her "rank", as General de Gaulle used to say, among the "great powers"). In fact, if we want to deter a likely aggressor from attacking France by fear of nuclear reprisals, then the aggressor would have to fear their effective use, would have to believe in them.

In this regard, the Minister's entourage admits (Libération, 27.10.03) that "there is a problem about saying that in the event of a crisis with some nation we are going to liquidate 30 million people". This "political" embarrassment is not new, and if we seem to notice it only now, that's because our strategists, blinded by the "political" function of the atom bomb (ensuring the nation's prestige) have NEVER seriously asked themselves that question. From 1980 onwards President Giscard d'Estaing had understood the impossibility of using atom bombs in the event of real conflict; but neither he nor his successors drew the only logical conclusion: namely that we might as well do away with them immediately. This very impasse is what led, in France as in the USA, to the "temptation of mini-nukes": weapons whereby nuclear deterrence might FINALLY be able to become credible! Credible, however, only against weaker states that not yet possess nuclear weapons, that we are sure have not brought weapons of mass destruction onto our territory, and cannot count on terrorist organisations to bring them here afterwards! That list amounts to a lot of conditions requiring to be met to confer a tiny bit of credibility on this "strike force" whose only virtue consists in having cost us 300 billions euros.

But since the embarrassment exists now as in the past, it will remain in the future. So will the "temptation". This raises the following question: what will occur tomorrow or the day after, if by chance the current research does make France capable of building "mini-nukes"? We would then risk a sudden resurgence of the "option to use" which was ruled out today, and a decision to "develop" the weapons that go with it.

Nothing there is reassuring. But there is worse.

SOMBRE PERSPECTIVES

This avowed renunciation of the "option of use" has the merit of leaving the Bush administration as the only one to have adopted it, at least for now. Unfortunately, it is accompanied with another declaration which has the virtue of frankness, but which has the effect of placing us, openly now, on a catastrophic road: "In an unpredictable and dangerous world," says the Minister of Defense, "the great powers possessing nuclear weapons are not at all considering their abandonment."

Thus France takes authority from the attitude of the other nuclear "great powers"; France approves it, adopts it, and announces that it is out of the question for her to respect article 6 of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). In fact, at the end of the last NPT revision conference, France, the USA, Russia, China and the UK made, on 19 May 2000, "an unequivocal [sic] undertaking to eliminate the entirety of their nuclear arsenals". Since then, they have undertaken nothing at all, they have not even met to agree on a calendar for negotiations. The Minister is thus announcing to us

Nuclear Weapons: How France is preparing a catastrophe

that France will continue, in good conscience, to betray her word, to make of the NPT a scrap of paper, and thereby to justify the proliferation of nuclear weapons in countries which do not yet own them. For if the nuclear states parties to the NPT do not respect their commitments, why would the other states respect theirs? And if the "great powers" consider their nuclear weapons indispensable to their security, why would other states not have the right to them?

Thus, while France gives herself an appearance of virtue with regard to miniaturised weapons - as long as her research has not made a breakthrough - she is pursuing policies which may justly be called absurd and criminal, because they encourage the proliferation which they claim to combat, and infamous, because they are founded on contempt for the gravest, most solemn of international commitments, and anti-constitutional, because article V of the French Constitution entrusts the President with the task of ensuring strict respect for international treaties. The Constitutional Council, seized of this matter on 2 April 2002, when a challenge was made to the validity of the President's candidacy for re-election, declared itself incompetent to judge. This could be considered a forfeiture and deserves to go to the High Court of Justice, or the International Court in the Hague. What party, what politician would dare take these steps? Will it be necessary for mere NGOs or citizens to do it?

By default, the French people must become involved in this matter. They must realise that France's so-called "doctrine of deterrence" is incoherent, criminal and incredibly expensive, and that it - along with the policies carried out by France's leaders - make the French people and other peoples the hostage and target of collective massacres, defined since the Nuremberg trials as crimes against humanity. We call on our citizens to demand to be consulted by referendum on the question of nuclear disarmament - naturally after true and two-sided information and with a clear question. We call on them also to interrogate all the candidates in the next cantonal, regional and European elections about this. If only because, at this time of budgetary restrictions, France has to devote to more useful purposes the budgets devoured from the production of weapons of mass destruction.

THE FRENCH PEOPLE MUST ACT WITH OTHERS

Let us respond to the appeal of the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, who know what they are talking about: with them and the mayors of the world's greatest cities, let us demand integral, universal and controlled nuclear disarmament, which is the only way of preventing nuclear proliferation, of verifying at the same time the elimination of the other weapons of mass destruction (biological, chemical or new technology), and of eliminating the risk of humanity destroying itself. Let us demand the denuclearisation of the planet: an immense mobilisation is taking place, which the French must join. Given the catastrophe which threatens us if we remain resigned to it, there is no alternative.

Saintes (France), 2004-02-04

Jean-Marie Matagne,

President of the Action des Citoyens pour le Désarmement Nucléaire (ACDN)

31, Rue du Cormier - 17100 -Saintes (FRANCE)

acdn.france@wanadoo.fr

<http://acdn.france.free.fr>