

PRESIDENCY
OF THE
FRENCH REPUBLIC

Press Service

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC
-ON THE NUCLEAR DETERRENT**

Istres – Thursday 19 February 2015

Ministers,

Elected representatives,

Members of Parliament,

Armed Forces Chief of Staff,

Air Force Chief of Staff,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am at the Istres base, an Air Force base. You, the Air Force, are hosting me today, and I would like to pay homage to the pilots, navigators and mechanics who lost their lives or were seriously physically injured less than a month ago in that tragic accident at Albacete, in Spain.

Once again, our Armed Forces have paid a heavy price to ensure the security of our country. Once again, I would like to pay homage to the military personnel who devote themselves to France's independence.

That is the very meaning of my visit.

Every day, the Air Force demonstrates its ability to protect the national territory against any potential air attacks. The Air Force is also capable of immediately deploying powerful assets, very far from France territory, for military operations. That is one of our responses, fulfilling our role and in accordance with our commitments, in the fight against terrorism. The Air Force can also strike hostile targets, as it is doing in Iraq and the Sahel region. Lastly, the Air Force also contributes to the implementation of the nuclear deterrent, which is the subject of the speech I wish to deliver today.

I belong to a generation that has had the priceless good luck not to have seen war situations in our country. My father and my grandfather lived through war, indeed wars. Born in the early 1950s, I had the wonderful good luck of being spared by those conflicts. But at the same time, what has been happening in Eastern Europe for the last year shows that peace can never be taken for granted.

Similarly, the arms race has resumed in many world regions, with a considerable, even rapid increase in defence spending and in arsenals, in a context of rising tensions. Some countries are investing in technologies that could undermine the strategic balances. Several are even developing dynamics of influence and threat in their nearby land and sea environments.

So – and this is a particularly serious observation – the possibility of conflicts between States involving us directly or indirectly cannot be ruled out. In the military nuclear field, new powers have emerged in the last twenty years. Others still seek to emerge, and countries that had, up to now, possessed nuclear weapons and talked of the urgency of disarming, have even increased their capabilities by developing new nuclear components or continuing to produce fissile material for weapons.

In parallel, tactical nuclear arsenals are growing, giving rise to fears of a reduction in the threshold for using nuclear weapons. In this context, what should France do? Our diplomacy has always called for a safer world. But France has to be lucid. France knows that it is insufficient to call for immediate and total nuclear disarmament: the reality of every party's actions needs to be consistent with their words.

France has therefore decided to tackle one of the most serious threats to global stability: the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

Any increase in the number of countries with nuclear weapons would be a major threat to peace, in the regions concerned as well as for international security.

That is the meaning of the position that we have adopted in negotiations with Iran in recent months, years even. To summarize our expectations with regard to those negotiations, they are very simple: civil nuclear energy, yes; nuclear weapons, no. The problem for now is that Iran has not yet demonstrated that it wishes to give up nuclear weapons. But the agreement will be concluded as soon as it does so.

Meanwhile, North Korea carried out a third nuclear test two years ago, which is both unacceptable and worrying.

But nuclear proliferation is not all. There is also chemical and biological proliferation, and that of their means of delivery.

In Syria, a fundamental taboo of our collective security system was broken in summer 2013, when Bashar Al-Assad's regime used chemical weapons against its own people. The threat of the use of force has been necessary for the destruction of the chemical weapons stockpiles and plants declared by the Assad regime to be undertaken. That process is now complete. But I am not, however, fully reassured, for "grey areas" remain and it is very likely that bombs containing chlorine were dropped on Syrian villages less than a year ago.

Proliferation is a global threat to the world, and obviously to France.

Of course, France does not feel directly threatened. We have no declared enemy. But, as I was saying, we have seen in recent months – with the Ukrainian crisis, the rise of Daesh and the cyber attack on an unparalleled scale against Sony – that surprises, even ruptures, are possible and the re-emergence of a major State threat to our country cannot be ruled out.

So, as Head of State, it is my absolute duty to take those threats into account, for nothing must undermine our independence. No weakness can be allowed in this international context. That

is why the time of the nuclear deterrent is not a thing of the past. There can be no question of lowering our guard, including in that area.

As I have said, that is my responsibility as President of the Republic and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.

As such, as President François Mitterrand once put it, the Head of State is the first citizen in France to speak and to decide.

The nuclear deterrent aims to protect our country from any aggression by a State against its vital interests, wherever it comes from and in whatever form. I would like to add that, for France, nuclear weapons do not aim to provide any advantage in a conflict. Because of their devastating effects, nuclear weapons have no place in an offensive strategy and can be conceived only as part of a strictly defensive strategy.

Nuclear deterrence also contributes to maintaining our freedom of action and decision, under any circumstances. It enables me to prevent any threat of blackmail by another State aimed at paralysing us.

France is one of the few countries in the world with global influence and responsibilities. Because France can exercise its responsibilities. Because everyone knows that when France speaks, it can then take action. The nuclear deterrence forces enable France to ensure that its international commitments are honoured, even if the use of nuclear weapons would only be envisaged in extreme circumstances of self-defence.

Our nuclear forces must be capable of inflicting absolutely unacceptable damages for the adversary, upon its centres of power: its political, economic and military nerve centres.

It is the supreme responsibility of the President of the Republic to constantly assess the nature of our vital interests and the possible threats to them.

The integrity of our territory, the protection of our people are obviously central to our vital interests. Whatever the means used by the State adversary, we must preserve the life of our Nation. This is the very sense of nuclear deterrence.

It cannot be ruled out, however, that an adversary could misunderstand the perimeter of our vital interests. So I would like to recall here that France may, as a last resort, underline its willingness to defend itself through a warning of nuclear nature, with the aim of re-establishing deterrence dialogue.

The definition of our vital interests cannot be restricted to the national scale, because France does not conceive its defence strategy in isolation, even in the nuclear field. We have already made that clear on numerous occasions with the United Kingdom, with which we have unparalleled cooperation. By participating in the European project from its outset, France has, with its partners, built a community of destiny. The existence of a French nuclear deterrent has made a strong, essential contribution to Europe. Moreover, France has real, heartfelt solidarity with its European partners. So who could believe that an aggression threatening Europe's survival would have no consequence?

That is why our nuclear deterrence goes hand-in-hand with the constant strengthening of the Europe of Defence. But it is our own. We decide, we assess our vital interests on our own.

I would also like to clarify our relationship with many countries which, as Parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), demand safeguards against the use or threat to use nuclear weapons. That is a legitimate aspiration. France made a unilateral statement that in no way undermines its right to self-defence. The Security Council has acknowledged that in 1995. France has confirmed its commitments as regards the implementation of nuclear-free zones in several world regions. That was necessary.

Today, I solemnly reaffirm that France will not use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon-States Parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty which comply with their international non-proliferation commitments in terms of weapons of mass destruction.

I would also like to clarify our relationship with NATO. The Alliance has a military aim and the independent strategic forces, like those of France and the United Kingdom, have a specific role to play in contributing to the overall deterrent.

That view, shared by all, does not involve any change in our country's posture. France does not and will not participate in the NATO nuclear planning mechanisms. That principle will remain. However, France does wish to contribute actively to the drafting of the NATO nuclear policy. In that respect, all NATO member countries need to show consistency and determination in that commitment.

That, ladies and gentlemen, is what I wanted to say about the very foundations of our deterrence policy.

I would now like to move on to the forces that implement it and keep it in working order. More than 50 years ago now, under a decree from the President of the Republic creating strategic air forces, a Mirage IV bomber was put on alert for the first time with a nuclear bomb. Since that decisive act, our forces have constantly held the nuclear deterrence permanent posture. Today, I would like to pay homage to the service members and civilians who guarantee the credibility of our deterrence and thus the safety of our citizens.

By definition, deterrence applies permanently. What would mean an intermittent deterrence? Indeed, the world has seen profound changes from the last 50 years. So have our forces changed. To ensure that permanent deterrence, we have had to adapt them continually, in terms both of capabilities and volume, to the evolution of potential threats to our Nation.

In 1996, France thus decided to abandon one of its components – the land-based one. It closed the Plateau d'Albion missile launch site and dismantled its short-range missiles. We have maintained two components, airborne and sea-based, while reducing their volume to maintain them at a level of strict sufficiency. Strict sufficiency that is the basic principle of the structuration of our deterrence forces.

Questions regularly arise for example about keeping the both components, or to contest the simulation programme, or about the need continuous at sea deterrent. Those debates are legitimate in a democratic society, and I do not wish to brush them aside. But we also need to be capable of justifying our choices and, as such, to regularly revisit the needs for the deterrent.

As far as I am concerned, I make decisions based on the only valid basis: France's ultimate security. I have therefore decided to maintain sea-based and airborne components, neither of which is dedicated to an objective entrusted to it alone. Both support all the missions of

deterrence, and their complementarity means that the Head of State has all the necessary and sufficient options at hand, never relying on one single type of asset

Let me explain. The sea-based component, with the permanence at sea of our submarines, their invulnerability and the range of their missiles, is a key component of our deterrent. Because potential aggressors, tempted to blackmail France, must know for sure that a response capability is constantly operational, and that they will never be able neither to detect nor destroy it. That is the whole point of the sea-based component.

The airborne component also ensures the continuity of the deterrent, with the strategic air forces. At their side, the nuclear naval-air force, based on the Charles-de-Gaulle aircraft carrier, offers other courses of action. In the event of a major crisis, the airborne component provides visibility for our determination to defend ourselves, preventing escalation to extreme solutions. That is what the two components are about: one invisible and one visible.

We therefore maintain the capabilities and credibility of both components. That means effectively implementing technological developments, including air and missile defence, , underwater detection...

Accordingly, the military spending bill will enable us to continue retrofitting the ballistic missile submarines to the M51 missile. It will enable us to deploy the Oceanic Nuclear Warhead (TNO) from 2016 and to commission design studies for the third generation ballistic missile submarine. And it will enable us, by 2018, to replace the last remaining Mirage 2000 N fighters with Rafales, carrying ASMPA (Improved Medium-Range Air-Ground) missiles. Moreover, the military spending bill confirms the renewal of the fleet of tanker aircraft; twelve Phénix MRTT aircraft have been ordered, with the first two due for delivery from 2018.

The military spending bill thus aimed to prepare for, adapt and implement the commitments I made to ensure the reliability and safety of our deterrence force. For my responsibility is to prepare for events to come and for a more distant future: the renewal of our components. The aim of the Head of State's action is not simply to prepare, if necessary, to counter today's threats. It is to ensure that, even long after that President is no longer in office – another will be – the continuity is maintained in our country, that chain that must not be interrupted in adapting our deterrence forces.

Concerning the sea-based component, I have also decided to launch the future developments of the M51 missile, so that the tonnage of our future submarines will remain very close to that of our Triomphant-class vessels. Studies are also carried out to explore the potential successor of the ASMPA missile. The most suitable technologies will be chosen in order to be even more efficient in terms of speed and stealth.

I have also instructed the Atomic and Alternative Energy Commission (CEA) to prepare, the necessary adaptations of our nuclear warheads ahead of the end of their operational life. Work also needs to be done to renew our weapons, without carrying nuclear tests. That means the simulation programme, fully compliant with the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).

But once again, I would like to underline our commitments. France does not and will not produce new types of nuclear weapon. I would thus like to hail the extraordinary scientific

and technical endeavour that the simulation programme represents. The military applications directorate of the CEA has met every deadline on the project while controlling expenditure.

Last year, 2014, saw the first experiments with the Megajoule Laser and Epure facilities. Once again, for the simulation programme, which is essential to prepare for the future, we are carrying out strategic collaboration with the United Kingdom. We are committed to cooperating for at least 50 years, sharing two simulation facilities: one in France, and one in the United Kingdom. We will soon be inaugurating the first achievements together, less than five years after signing the Lancaster House Treaty. That is another opportunity to hail all the accomplishments that have been made.

I also sometimes hear that the nuclear deterrence budget has been spared from the savings drive requested of our armed forces. As if it were convenient to maintain some sort of “competition” between the stakeholders of our defence. As if ensuring that we can maintain our deterrence force is in some way contradictory with the other missions entrusted to our armed forces. I want to respond to those potential issues of concern.

The budgetary context is difficult for all spending, including military spending, and for all components of our armed forces. We did, however, in the spending act, ring-fence the necessary appropriations, both for the deterrence force and for conventional weapons. Those responsible for managing that spending had to make the efforts of realism that were required, like the others, but with no concessions in terms of credibility, independence and reliability, through the deterrence force, wherever France’s survival and sovereignty are at stake.

But I would like to add another argument. The nuclear deterrent complements our conventional assets and has a ripple effect on the whole of our defence system. Thus, some assets contributing to the deterrent are used directly in our conventional operations too. I have in mind intelligence satellites, fighter aircraft, tanker aircraft, nuclear attack submarines, anti-submarine frigates and mine-sweepers.

I would like to give another example. The fighters of the Strategic Air Forces have what are known as dual capabilities. Those aircraft carried out about a quarter of the strikes during the operations in Libya and the Sahel region. The same dual-capability aircraft are currently deployed in Africa and Iraq, and contribute to the air defence posture on a daily basis.

Lastly, the deterrent stimulates our research and development efforts and contributes to the excellence and competitiveness of our industry. It is thanks to that research that there have been innovations. It is thanks to our ability to be at the highest level in terms of nuclear deterrence that we have been able to share expertise and incomparable technologies through industry. They have contributed to the economy and employment.

But we cannot justify military spending simply through a desire to stimulate the economy or create jobs. Military spending has to have a basis linked to the very stake they represent: France’s security, the defence of our interests, and the very promotion of our values. In short, what makes France, France.

Defence and security are not a burden like any other! It is not simply investment, even if it may take that form. It is what ensures our freedom.

In a dangerous world – and the world is dangerous – France does not intend to lower its guard. But while it is prepared to defend itself, it does not however wish to abandon the very

goal of disarmament, including nuclear disarmament. France is a peace power. And as such, it defends itself to get peace. France is a nuclear-weapon State under the definition of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). This means we have particular responsibilities. I therefore share the long-term goal of a total elimination of nuclear weapons, but, I would add, only when the strategic context allows. France will continue to work ceaselessly in that direction. It will do so tirelessly, in transparency and truth, and, I would like to say, wisely, in full coordination with its Allies.

Nuclear disarmament cannot be wishful thinking or an invitation! It needs to be demonstrated, first and foremost by the States that call for it. France has been exemplary, applying the principle of strict sufficiency, in recent years reducing by half the total number of its weapons. By half! It has reduced by a third the airborne nuclear component and abandoned ground-based missiles. We have not simply spoken of disarmament. We have done it as necessary. It has been exemplary in terms of irreversibility, stopping not only nuclear tests, but also the production of uranium and plutonium for nuclear weapons. It has fully dismantled the corresponding facilities, now basing its nuclear deterrent on a limited stockpile of nuclear material. And France has been exemplary in terms of the volume of its weapons stockpile: 300. Why maintain 300? Because of our assessment of the strategic context.

If the level of the other arsenals, particularly those of Russia and the United States, were to fall one day to a few hundred weapons, France would respond accordingly, as it always has. But today, that scenario is still a long way off.

I would like to go even further with transparency, concerning doctrine– that is what I am doing here today, before you, and the whole wide world – as well as our arsenals and our concrete disarmament efforts. That is why I am not afraid to reveal that France has three sets of 16 submarine-borne missiles and 54 ASMPA delivery systems. I would like all nuclear-weapon-States to make the same effort of transparency, as I am doing before you, for all the categories of weapons in their nuclear arsenals.

In the same spirit of transparency, France will very soon be proposing visits to new sites that no longer contain nuclear weapons, including the Plateau d'Albion, where the silos that housed the ground-based component of our deterrent have been completely dismantled, and the Luxeuil base, where the weapons storage depots are now empty. Once again, I hope that this gesture will encourage other nuclear powers to follow suit, with visits our experts would be pleased to participate in.

It is also important to declare a moratorium on the production of fissile material for weapons, and to dismantle the production facilities of that material, as well as nuclear test sites. Those are all steps that France once again encourages all nuclear-weapon-States to take too.

Lastly, France's diplomatic tool and foreign policy remain fully mobilized to support disarmament, particularly in the run-up to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference in a few weeks. Our first priority in that framework remains the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) as soon as possible. I say that all the more easily because France has shown that the complete and irreversible abandoning of nuclear tests is compatible with maintaining a credible deterrent. That message needs to be shared with all our partners.

Our second priority is the definitive end to the production of fissile material for weapons. It has been discussed for years, but negotiations have never begun, in the absence of agreement

from the main States concerned. That is why I now call upon all nuclear-weapon-States to enter into those talks on the fissile material production cut-off without delay. France will be proposing an ambitious, realistic and verifiable draft treaty on that subject in the coming weeks.

I came here to Istres to carry out this exercise of truth and transparency and, at the same time, to acknowledge what the deterrence force represents for our country. To reaffirm the fundamental importance of nuclear deterrence for France's security. It is not the whole defence policy. It is complementary to the efforts that we need to maintain in all areas to ensure the protection of our territory, to carry out overseas operations, to promote the values we represent and to combat terrorism, wherever it is.

The credibility of the deterrence force requires a rigour and professionalism that is, as it were, outstanding. And that is what you demonstrate, pushing yourselves to perfection in your specific training, with the demands of high quality, expertise and mastery of the most sensitive technologies. And that is why I wish to express, before you, the full confidence of your whole country. The whole Nation knows what it owes you. It knows that it owes to the deterrence force and shows that recognition. What you do – what the deterrence force permits – ensures that the Nation, France, your country, has what is most dear, most precious and most essential: its independence. There can be no independence without the freedom to choose our destiny. The deterrence is what ensures we can live in freedom and can, throughout the world, share our message without fear or worry, because we are certain that we have the ability to defend ourselves.

Independence, freedom, and the ability to ensure our values prevail. Those watchwords are why we must, every day, ensure the continuity of the nuclear deterrence and be capable, at all times, to further improve its functioning and weapons.

Long live the Republic, long live France.