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NATIONAL STRATEGIC REVIEW: MACRON'S NEXT GRAND DEFENCE STRATEGY FOR 2030



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On Wednesday, November 9th, 2022 France's President Emmanuel Macron presented the new "Revue Nationale Stratégique" aboard the amphibious helicopter carrier Dixmude in Toulon, France (Ministère des Armées, 2022). The released document aims to define France's main national and international security objectives for 2030. The document addresses the role of France as a respected actor in international security and at the core of the European strategic autonomy initiative.

Macron aims to make France lead in European initiative so Europe can organise its tools to guarantee its security through a credible European defence, highly interoperable with NATO (Ministère des Armées, 2022). Furthermore, the return of inter-state high-intensity warfare in Europe increased the need for France to review its military model, mostly based on expeditionary capabilities to guarantee and defend France's interests all over the world. According to the released document for 2030, France must be ready for high-intensity warfare and be able to face hybrid strategies used by potential competitors (RNS, 2022). France must be able to defend and protect its citizens in metropolitan and overseas territories, supported by a credible nuclear deterrence and robust conventional forces. Moreover, through its ability to engage in high-intensity conflict, by 2030, France is looking to highly contribute to European defence and Mediterranean stability while leading NATO or EU coalitions.

France is also looking to reinforce its partnerships with the South to defend its sovereignty and interests and promote stability from sub-Saharan Africa, the Persian Gulf and the Horn of Africa to the Indo-Pacific area. Finally, France must ensure its freedom of action and its supply chain security by being present in the cyber, spatial, naval and aero maritime domains.

To achieve these objectives by 2030, France aims to fulfil the following ten strategic criteria (RNS, 2022, 2-3):

1. Nuclear deterrence
2. Resilience
3. A Competitive Defence Economy
4. Cyber security
5. The Euro-Atlantic
6. European Strategic Autonomy
7. A Reliable Security Partners
8. Guaranteed Sovereignty and Autonomy in Decision Making
9. To Act and Defend in Hybrid Domains
10. Freedom of Action and the Ability to Conduct High-Intensity Military Operations.

A CREDIBLE NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

The war in Ukraine has demonstrated the significant role nuclear deterrence has for the Euro-Atlantic's security. It displays the necessity to preserve and sustain credible nuclear deterrence to prevent a major war and defend France's vital interests under the European dimension. Furthermore, it confirms the need to better understand and contain the risks of escalation. As the only nuclear power in the EU, France aims to promote and defend the strategic culture of deterrence at the national and EU/NATO level. France's nuclear deterrence is participating in the security of France and Europe (Ministère des Armées, 2022). In parallel, it is important for France to conform to its strict sufficiency nuclear policy, in doing so keeping its nuclear arsenal at the lowest level possible permissible by its strategic needs whilst promoting non-proliferation. Last but not least, it is fundamental for France to closely monitor and preserve the independence of its national industry and reinforce its technical, operational, and industrial know-how directly linked to France's unique nuclear deterrence posture (RNS, 2022).

RESILIENCE AND UNITY

Macron's vision to fight logistic, energetic, environmental, informational, cultural and psychological threats is not to militarize the society, but to strengthen its resilience, moral toughness and to converge all its forces, civil and military, to defend its sovereignty (Ministère des Armées, 2022).

Unconventional threats are challenging nowadays Western societies to their core. From information manipulation to climate change and resource scarcity, these challenges pose a threat to French society's stability and cohesion. By promoting crisis preparedness, anticipating strategic stockpiles, and enhancing public communication on resilience, France aims to tackle these new threats. Furthermore, the promotion of universal national service and military reservists fits well in the overall project of a society unification. To do so, the French Defence Minister Sebastien Lecornu is aiming to increase reservist numbers to 100,000 by 2030 (Ministère des Armées, 2022).

Because the Strategic National Review is centred around high-intensity warfare, the perspective of a resilient and united France can also be achieved through the development of an efficient synergy between the armies and the civilians. In trying to achieve a more united national effort, national cohesion in the industrial, security and economic sector must be consolidated to support the armies in high-intensity engagement.

WAR ECONOMY

The traditional French strategic autonomy objective is deeply rooted in Macron's National Strategic Review and well expressed through the competitive defence economy program. The idea is to allow France to monopolize necessary resources to effectively switch to a war economy when needed (RNS, 2022, 35). To support a long-run war effort, the document highlights three main requirements: the build-up of strategic stockpiles (from ammunitions to critical components), the reallocation of sensitive production systems, and the diversification of the supply chain (RNS, 2022, 35). Furthermore, the implementation of a recycling branch to contribute to a circular economy would decrease the supply needs and participate in sustainable development (RNS, 2022).

Supply chain security is a key concern to the West and Macron has understood the need for more sovereignty and autonomy on raw materials and components. To do so, France is counting on European initiatives to install mechanisms to secure the supply chain and reallocate critical industry on European soil.

The document also suggests the creation of a plan to determine the need for critical equipment to face high-intensity and attrition warfare. It would allow the national and European defence industry to progressively adapt depending on the different geopolitical contexts and consider the different European and NATO capabilities (RNS, 2022).

CYBER SECURITY

An increasingly prominent sector of multiple hybrid threats, cyber-attacks are emerging as a critical challenge for modern democratic societies. The ability to reinforce cybersecurity capabilities is essential to preserve France's integrity. The National Strategic Review acknowledges the importance of cyber resilience for France and the impossible task to be completely bulletproof against every cyber-attack (RNS, 2022, 37). Therefore, France aims to increase its cyber capacities to prevent or greatly minimize the effect of cyber-attacks, especially for critical infrastructures and institutions (RNS, 2022).

Technology acquisition, innovation and investment are key aspects of France's cyber strategy. The creation of ecosystems and public-private partnerships are essential to bolster France's resilience to cyber-attacks and promote a French cybersecurity model that fits European directives (RNS, 2022).

Last but not least, the document outlines a preventive campaign to educate the population on cybersecurity and its associated risks whilst promoting the cybersecurity sector to fill the workforce gap at the national and European levels. According to the National Strategic Review, French resilience in cybersecurity also greatly depends on its European and international partners in participating in the creation of a safe and secured cyberspace (RNS, 2022, 38). At the international level, France is looking to extend its influence to promote cyber market regulations and fight against the proliferation of cyber weapons.

Finally, the document promotes cybersecurity interoperability in crisis management mechanisms between countries to facilitate the attribution of cyber-attacks and avoid unnecessary escalation.

EU-NATO

NATO plays a fundamental role in European security and consequently French security. France will continue to assume its role within the Alliance and increase its operational, technological and capability commitment in favour of interoperability.

In the meantime, France aims to conserve a special seat inside NATO, assuming a visible and unique position through its independent defence strategy supported by a credible nuclear arsenal. As a financial contributor to NATO and its operational credibility, France wants to increase its influence over the alliance and those of its European allies (RNS, 2022).

This statement is particularly important to illustrate Macron's vision of NATO and the European Union. Macron wants France to lead Europe on NATO's posture and European strategic evolutions (RNS, 2022, 39). Furthermore, it shows the desire for higher interoperability between the European Union and NATO while promoting a certain European strategic autonomy. To do so, NATO's member states in Europe need to respect the 2% GDP contribution from each member state for defence and even increase it following the war in Ukraine. Furthermore, European cooperation in defence, both at the capability and industrial level, would strengthen its resilience and, ultimately, directly participate in NATO's comprehensive defence capabilities.

According to the document, France supports the modernization and enlargement (regarding the adhesion of Finland and Sweden) of the EU-NATO partnership to tackle the security challenges Europe is facing.

EUROPEAN STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

France shares many similar security issues with Europe. The National Strategic Review communicates Macron's European pivot (Dempsey, 2022). According to the French president, France has a role to play in driving the European defence initiative, stressing the importance of carrying a common "European strategic culture, sovereign and autonomous, at the service of shared European interests" (RNS, 2022, 41). In this matter, Macron believes France has a key role to play as a permanent member of the European Union, NATO and United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

Following the war in Ukraine, strengthening EU-NATO security cooperation is a priority in the 2030 agenda, especially regarding military mobility, logistics, hybrid, and cyber threats. On the other hand, an increase in EU cohesion in the support given to Ukraine is imperative for the sanctions, high-level military assistance and equipment to be effective. According to Macron, "this constant is necessary for Europe to keep its ability to weigh in conflict resolution" (RNS, 2022, 41).

The second point in Macron's vision for an EU strategic autonomy lies in the development of its defence industry and technology. To do so, France is supporting the establishment of a short-term mechanism for the common acquisition of equipment. Furthermore, France supports the creation of a common defence investment program for the development and acquisition of critical and innovative equipment (RNS, 2022, 42). Moreover, the central role of the European Defence Agency (EDA) needs to be reaffirmed as well as the other existing mechanisms such as the European Defence Fund (EDF) or the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO).

As previously mentioned, Macron wants Europe to affirm its position as a global actor, promoting unrestricted access to contested areas, such as sea, space or even cyberspace, against hybrid strategies from its competitors. In this sense, Europe needs to act united and use its leverage and influence to protect itself from lawfare, information warfare and raw material blackmail (RNS, 2022).

Interoperability within the European Union is also at the core of France's National Strategic Review. France intends to establish strategic communications between EU member states to align their positions and actions. Better communication is key to improving interoperability and bolstering rapid deployment. A flexible Command and Control structure needs to be implemented at the European level to support large operations abroad as has been done with the Takuba task force in the Sahel, for consulting, training, equipment and combat support. With its strong geographic position, industrial and military capabilities and nuclear arsenal, France sees itself as a leader in European defence cooperation and enhances European responsibilities in international security.

A RELIABLE SECURITY PARTNERS

For 2030, France wants to be perceived as a high-value security partner in every part of the world. In Europe, France needs to strengthen its relations with traditional partners but also develop an inclusive strategy toward other European participants.

With Germany, France is looking for continuity in building a strong European defence in accordance with the strategic needs and ambitions of Germany.

With EU members, France needs to build up strategic partnerships, as has recently been seen with Belgium, Croatia and Greece, but also to re-affirm its ties with European partners, especially in the Mediterranean Sea (Quirinale Treaty with Italy and Cooperation and Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Spain) (RNS, 2022). Finally, France is looking to enhance operational cooperation based on shared experience in the Sahel with the task force Takuba or countries engaged in operation Barkhane (RNS, 2022, 43).

Regarding Eastern European neighbours such as Ukraine, Moldova, or Georgia, Macron restated the need for France and the EU to contribute to their security and economic stability. Lastly, Macron stressed in the document the importance of rapidly re-establishing a constructive dialogue based on a bilateral treaty between France and the United Kingdom (RNS, 2022, 43). The first bilateral summit has been scheduled for the first trimester of 2023 (Ministère des Armées, 2022).

Facing the increasing threat of terrorism and the growing influence of Russia and China in Africa, France needs to enhance cooperation with the continent in the domains of security, diplomacy, and development. The document mentions the re-vision of bilateral treaties and the ambition to build a sustainable, robust, and long-lasting strategic proximity with African countries (RNS, 2022, 44).

Regarding the increased militarization and competition in the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea, France must improve its presence in the area and support EU and NATO missions and re-enforce its cooperation with all the actors in the strategic compass. By doing so, France hopes to secure its freedom of action, the continuity of its supply chain and regional stability.

The progressive disengagement of the United States from the Persian Gulf has opened new opportunities for France regarding the re-dynamization of partnerships with regional actors. Nonetheless, this disengagement has resulted in the development of strategic associations between the Gulf and China and Russia, as well as the return of regional instability. France must, with its partners, counter destabilising activities waged by certain regional actors such as Iran and secure security partnerships in the domain of counterterrorism, armament, and intelligence. France defends the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the mechanisms created to control the export of chemical, biological, ballistic, and conventional weapons. Therefore, it aims to stabilize the region by monitoring the movements of conventional weapons and war equipment acquisition, and fighting against the proliferation of mass destruction weaponry (RNS, 2022).

In the Indo-Pacific, France sees itself as a power that needs to be re-affirmed to maintain the status-quo and stability in the area. India, Japan, Indonesia, and Singapore are important partners for France to enhance its posture as a military and political multilateralist country in the area. These partnerships aim at bolstering France's capacity to train and conduct operations in the Indo-Pacific region and anticipate growing threats. Furthermore, France aims to lead the EU strategy and partnership with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

GUARANTEED SOVEREIGNTY AND AUTONOMY IN DECISION MAKING

In an increasingly complex and competitive world, France must intensify its efforts to better anticipate future challenges and increase the awareness and comprehension of competitors' development. To do so, France aims to reinforce the versatility of its intelligence and diplomatic network. Furthermore, it stresses the importance to invest in technological capabilities to process and analyse a large quantity of data (RNS, 2022, 46).

According to the National Strategic Review, intelligence services must anticipate crisis, the newest military technology, terrorist threats, CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear) risks, fight against hybrid threats and promote national interests, both economic and industrial (RNS, 2022, 46). This versatility needs to be accompanied by long-term transformations and investments, especially for the military intelligence (DGRM) and the Directorate General for External Security (DGSE).

France is well-aware of the opportunity presented by the technological evolution in the domain of data processing, artificial intelligence, and quantum computing. Therefore, it needs to allocate the necessary investment to equip its intelligence services with accurate technological capabilities and tools to bolster its efficiency. Furthermore, technological interoperability between main foreign partners, especially within the EU and NATO, needs to be better developed around secured communications mechanisms (RNS, 2022).

TO ACT AND DEFEND IN HYBRID DOMAINS

China, Russia, Iran and North Korea are adopting hybrid strategies that can greatly undermine democratic cohesion, and legitimacy and impact their economic and defence potential.

For 2030, France must integrate the necessary tools to counter and tame hybrid threats. To do so, France is looking for increased cooperation and interoperability around a common strategic compass within the EU and NATO to better identify, attribute and react through a multi-sectorial approach (RNS, 2022).

At a national level, France is seeking to bolster its capability to retaliate against information attacks, as seen in Mali against French armed forces being falsely accused of war crimes. To do so, France must be able to publicly attribute these attacks so it can better answer and adequately adapt its reaction.

To attribute hybrid attacks is a delicate task, especially in the cyber domain. Furthermore, the use of plausible deniability makes it even more difficult to unilaterally sanction an actor for the use of hybrid tools. The increasing presence of modern private military companies (PMCs), armed groups or militias used as proxies by hostile powers is participating in the destabilization of French interests abroad (RNS, 2022, 48). Once again, such a case has been observed with the Russian PMC Wagner Group in Mali during operation Barkhane. With its partners, France wants to enable efficient national or European sanctions and pursue these groups through judicial or military actions if they target French interests or take part in war crimes (RNS, 2022).

Lastly, facing hybrid threats, France considers the protection of its critical infrastructure a priority. Submarine cables and satellites need additional means and tools to develop efficient detection, deterrence, and protection against potential attacks. In the long run, Macron wishes to enhance French industrial knowledge in this sector to make it a world leader in space operations and submarine communication cables (RNS, 2022, 49).

FREEDOM OF ACTION AND ABILITY TO CONDUCT HIGH-INTENSITY MILITARY OPERATIONS

France has complete decision-making autonomy to effectively implement political and military objectives. In Africa, the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific regions, France can support its partners and deter a potential attacker. This vision is greatly challenged when looking at the rise of China's People's Liberation Army Navy and its ambitious expansion. Therefore, France must always look to strengthen and develop its interoperability with allies and partners.

In Central and Southern America, as well as in the Arctic and Antarctica, French military presence ensures its freedom of action, flux, and interests.

For 2030, armies must be ready for high-intensity warfare. The war in Ukraine confirmed this need to effectively defend the Euro-Atlantic area. It is imperative to possess the ability to strike first and alone if necessary, during a long period of time and under attrition. In terms of interoperability, Macron wants his armies to be able to work in a coalition and give the military support needed to an allied country.

Finally, the increased contestations of common spaces (submarines, cyberspace, space) give even more importance to France's freedom of action. Macron does not want France to become one of these contestants but to defend its interests in these areas (RNS, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The National Strategic Review has highlighted key aspects of France's vision for defence. Despite its attachment to strategic autonomy, France understood in the awakening of the war in Ukraine that it is not in France's interest to go alone (Dempsey, 2022). Macron is re-shifting his program to Europe, officially putting an end to the Barkhane operations after 9 years of deployment in Mali and orienting France to be a leader in the European defence initiative (Dempsey, 2022). For 2030, the French president wants France to be prepared for high-intensity warfare and has become one of the main promoters of interoperability between Europe and NATO.

Furthermore, Macron did not forget to mention NATO where he wants the European Defence project to be highly interoperable with the North Atlantic Alliance and France to fulfil its commitment within the organization. He kept emphasising the importance of possessing a credible and independent nuclear deterrence that contributes to national and European security.

In this sense, Macron portrays a dual vision where he sticks to the traditional French strategic vision of strategic autonomy in military engagement and decision-making while promoting the importance of interoperability within the European Union and NATO and the need for increased cooperation in the European defence industry and smart power. National resilience against hybrid threats was also on the agenda. Macron seems to want to build a resilient society, educated, and prepared for the security challenges it is facing.

PICTURE SOURCE

Emmanuel Macron présente la nouvelle Revue nationale stratégique, à Toulon, le 9/11/22. - © SGT Philippe Gautier/ECPAD <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/nouvelle-revue-nationale-strategique-ce-quil-faut-retenir-du-discours-demmanuel-macron>

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