

Schuman Paper
n°811
18th November 2025

French nuclear deterrence and Europe

Admiral (2S) Bernard ROGEL

When the Soviet empire collapsed in the 1990s, the existential threat to our borders became a thing of the past. At the time, we did not realise that this would only be temporary in the grand scheme of history. Taking a deep breath, we entered a period known as the '*peace dividends*', which led to strategic calm in Europe. This resulted, in our country as in the rest of Europe, in a continuous erosion of defence budgets and, *de facto*, a reduction in our military capabilities. Thus, until about ten years ago, short-term gains took precedence over necessary long-term caution. Today, the awakening has been somewhat brutal.

In this post-Cold War context of renewed peace, the principles of national nuclear deterrence were preserved and regularly reasserted in a world that remained, despite everything, nuclear. Its existence was perpetuated to guard against any strategic surprises. However, our deterrent forces, like our conventional ones, have undergone substantial downsizing, referred to as '*strict sufficiency*', as they have adapted to the new international context. There is no doubt that the era allowed for progress towards global disarmament, in line with the letter and spirit of the Non-Proliferation Treaty ([NPT](#)). A global movement to reduce nuclear arsenals was then undertaken. For its part, France dismantled its fissile material production facilities and its ground-to-ground component, signed the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty ([CTBT](#)), reduced the number of submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) from six to four and the number of air squadrons from three to two, to cite just a few examples.

THE RETURN OF NUCLEAR POWER IN STRATEGIC DISCOURSE

This now leads us to question once again the place of our nuclear deterrent within our defence system and its contribution to European security, given the profound transformation of the world under the dual effect of a return to power dynamics and the brutalisation of

international relations. These are reflected in widespread global rearmament. Added to this is the massive intrusion of hybrid strategies, which fall below the threshold of armed conflict, and growing confrontation in shared spaces (sea, space, cyberspace) which have become the lifeblood of our globalised societies. Finally, from a European perspective, the strategic priority given to China by the United States since the Obama administration's '*pivot to Asia*', as well as the attitude of the current US administration, which blows hot and cold in its relations with its allies, further complicates the picture. At a time when Russia is once again becoming aggressive on our borders, this is not without consequences for most countries on our continent, which until now had been living under the tranquillity of the American security umbrella.

This new paradigm is also reflected in the erosion of international treaties, including bilateral nuclear disarmament agreements between Russia and the United States, to the backdrop of China's rise to power. Finally, we should note the return of nuclear weapons to tactical discourse. The nuclear threat regularly brandished by Vladimir Putin, which dangerously combines deterrence and intimidation, could give ideas to those who will not ignore the fact that a nuclear country is not treated like any other. This weakens the Non-

Proliferation Treaty. In fact, with Russia's aggressive return and China's rise to power, to which we must add a serious risk of proliferation. *"The current nuclear multi-polarity can in no way be compared to the main approach of the Cold War. Unlike France and its allies, some States are knowingly opting for opaque and even aggressive nuclear postures, which include a dimension of blackmailing or seeking fait accompli. The deterrent-based power balances have thus become unstable."*[1]

WHY DID FRANCE CHOOSE THE PATH OF NUCLEAR DETERRENCE?

With this new state of the 'nuclear world' firmly set, it is worth recalling a fundamental point that is too often forgotten: why did France, under the determined leadership of General de Gaulle, choose the path of nuclear deterrence rather than aligning itself, like other European countries, with American protection? Firstly, of course, because our country had been severely affected by two world wars, and nuclear weapons had become a marker of power. The 'Force de frappe' (strike force), as General de Gaulle called it at the time, was fundamentally aimed at ensuring that there would 'never be war again' on our territory. It also served as a safeguard against nuclear blackmail and thus against the loss of strategic autonomy that the Suez Crisis of 1956 had revealed to our detriment. Finally, and most importantly, French leaders at the time still harboured fundamental doubts about the reality of the American commitment to the defence of Europe. As Prime Minister Georges Pompidou stated in 1962: *'Are they trying to lead us towards the neutralisation of Western Europe, which would leave our continent defenceless at the mercy of attacks from some and the goodwill of others?'*[2] All of these issues are once again becoming terribly relevant today.

It is therefore our country's security that is guaranteed by nuclear deterrence, likewise the conditions for its independence and sovereignty. With the establishment of a nuclear deterrent capability, three fundamental principles emerged and have permeated our entire defence policy: namely

security, autonomy and sovereignty. These principles, implemented since General de Gaulle, now protect us better than some others from the vagaries of the world. By strengthening all our armed forces in terms of both capability and doctrine, nuclear deterrence has prevented their definitive dissolution in the "dividends of peace" during the period of strategic slumber that followed the end of the Cold War.

The 'founding fathers' of nuclear deterrence wanted it to be national and independent, because they did not want to depend on anyone else for our security. Nevertheless, we must not be mistaken. It is not because the design and use of these forces are national that nuclear deterrence is strictly limited to the defence of our country alone. France has always included a European dimension in the very spirit of deterrence and, over time, in the definition of its vital interests. In 1966, Prime Minister Georges Pompidou underscored this saying, *"independence does not eliminate solidarity, it reinforces it; I would even say that it creates it. It is a question of restoring France to itself. In doing so, we are serving Europe and preparing it to re-emerge and play its role."*[3]

The principles of nuclear deterrence have changed little over time, even though the conditions for their application have been constantly adapted: continuous development of 'strict sufficiency' in the sense of reducing capabilities, the end of so-called 'pre-strategic' weapons, a doctrinal shift from demographic targeting (anti-city) to targeting centres of power, and the integration in 2001 of regional powers with weapons of mass destruction into the discourse on deterrence. At this stage, it is important to remember that France's nuclear strategy is fundamentally aimed at preventing war, at least in its ultimate forms. It is strictly defensive in extreme circumstances. France rejects nuclear weapons as weapons on the battlefield. This is an essential point that should not be forgotten.

The latest definition of French doctrine is given by President Emmanuel Macron[4]: Should the leader of any State underestimate France's deep-rooted attachment to its freedom and consider threatening

[1] Speech Emmanuel Macron, 7 February 2020

[2] Georges Pompidou, 16 July 1962, speech before the National Assembly

[3] General policy statement to the National Assembly, 13 April 1966

[4] Op.cit.

our vital interests, whatever they may be, that leader must realize that our nuclear forces are capable of inflicting absolutely unacceptable damage upon that State's centres of power: its political, economic and military nerve centres."

The key principle is clear: it means protecting our country's vital interests by threatening unacceptable damage. Of course, the difficulty for the man in the street is understanding what these vital interests are - a concept that might appear rather vague. But this ambiguity is in fact inherent to the concept of deterrence. It is up to the President of the Republic to define them and to assess any threat to them. We can assume that the survival of the nation and the integrity of its territory are part of this^[5]. But the concept must remain sufficiently vague to complicate the calculations of the adversary, who thus has no red line he can approach. Essentially, the dialectic of deterrence consists of sowing doubt in the mind of the adversary, forcing them to weigh up the risks and ultimately conclude that the benefits of an attack are not sufficient to outweigh the damage that would be incurred in return.

To be effective, nuclear deterrence must be credible.

This credibility rests on three pillars. First, operational credibility, which is demonstrated daily by the permanent patrols carried out by our submarines, but also by the more visible exercises of our air forces and by our missile test launches.

The second pillar is technological credibility, which translates into total sovereignty in the field of deterrence equipment. This is based on the talent of our Directorate General of Armament, the Directorate of Military Applications, the Atomic Energy Commission and our industrial partners, who independently supply us with some of the most complex equipment in the world. This necessary technological credibility of nuclear deterrence drives our entire 'high-intensity' defence system forward.

The third pillar is political credibility. This is undoubtedly the most important. No one should

doubt the determination of the President of the Republic to use nuclear force should our vital interests be threatened directly. Political credibility also rests on the fact that, whatever the nature and intensity of the attack, nuclear forces could respond immediately. This explains the permanence of deterrence, its invulnerability guaranteed by the dilution of submarines in the depths of the ocean, but also a responsive, short and vertical chain of command from the Head of State to the commanders of submarines and strategic air forces. This verticality, and therefore this responsiveness, is one of the keys to the credibility of deterrence.

Maintaining credibility must be a long-term endeavour. It often takes one or even two decades between the initial decision taken by the Nuclear Armaments Council and the actual implementation, to build and sustain these forces; this means that each decision must be carefully studied and weighed up at length.

Nuclear deterrence is the cornerstone of a comprehensive defence system.

We often hear the term 'deterrence' used in all sorts of contexts in the media. People talk without hesitation about conventional deterrence, cyber deterrence, techno deterrence, space deterrence, etc. This is a matter of semantics, and we could discuss at length the sometimes-overused nature of this term. But whatever the case may be, only the terrifying nature of nuclear weapons, guaranteeing the inexorable infliction of unacceptable damage, can prevent war in its most extreme forms. World wars, and the trail of war memorials in French villages, have shown us the futility of any other form of deterrence. However, it should of course be borne in mind that nuclear deterrence only covers vital interests. It is also essential to protect ourselves from threats to our other interests, particularly those resulting from isolated acts of force and policies of *fait accompli*, or those posed by hybrid strategies, which are increasingly prevalent. Nuclear deterrence must therefore be underpinned by robust conventional forces and strong state resilience to prevent any

^[5] The integrity of our territory, the protection of our population, and the free exercise of our sovereignty will always be at the heart of our vital interests. [Speech Jacques Chirac, 19 January 2006](#)

circumvention from below and ensure that all threats can be addressed within a coherent defence policy. Ultimately, nuclear deterrence appears to be the cornerstone of a comprehensive defence system that must include robust conventional forces, enhanced state resilience and the moral strength of our nation. This principle could be extended to the European continent as a whole. It is from this perspective of comprehensive defence and the place of French deterrence within the common structure that we should consider the issue...

AND WHAT ABOUT EUROPE IN ALL THIS?

It was necessary to fully understand all of the fundamentals of French deterrence before addressing the extent to which it can or should contribute to the security of the European continent. First, it is important to recall the particular position of French nuclear deterrence within NATO. True to the three principles mentioned above, France has always refused to participate in the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG), even after its return to the integrated military structures. Nevertheless, the [declaration](#) by the Alliance's heads of state in Ottawa in 1974, which has been regularly restated since then, acknowledged the contribution of French nuclear deterrence to the Alliance's security. At European level, it has also been integrated by our partners since the creation of the [Western European Union](#): "The independent forces of France and the United Kingdom contribute to the overall deterrence and security of the allies." [6]

At this stage, it is a kind of "de facto" deterrence: By its very existence, French nuclear deterrence contributes to the security of its allies. The vagueness in the definition of vital interests then comes into full play, as the growing interpenetration of the interests of the countries of the Union cannot escape anyone's notice.

BILATERAL DISCUSSIONS WITH THE UNITED KINGDOM AND GERMANY

Two countries have always been the focus of particular attention on the part of our leaders in their deliberations on nuclear deterrence. The French

1997-2002 Military Programming Law presented the elements of this as follows: "Consultation and cooperation have been initiated with our British partners. An in-depth dialogue will be undertaken with Germany, with due regard for the specific characteristics of each country. With other European countries, the eventual implementation of a common system of defence, as provided for in the Treaty on European Union, calls for consultation. This approach also involves dialogue with the United States and within the Alliance." [7]

Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that progress in discussions with Germany has remained slow to date. It was not until the [Treaty of Aachen](#) in 2020 that a modest declaration was made: 'the two States, convinced of the inseparable nature of their security interests, are increasingly aligning their security and defence objectives and policies, thereby strengthening the collective security systems of which they are part', without any explicit mention of nuclear deterrence.

On the other hand, it is with the other nuclear power on the European continent that the most spectacular progress has been made. As early as 1995, the French and British leaders declared that they could not imagine 'any situation in which the vital interests of one of our two countries, France and the United Kingdom, could be threatened without the vital interests of the other also being threatened'. This declaration, known as the 'Chequers Declaration', was confirmed and reiterated at the [French British summit](#) in Le Touquet in February 2003, and then by the [Lancaster House agreements](#) in 2010. In [July 2025](#), our leaders added a European dimension to this by stating, immediately after recalling the 1995 declaration [8], that "France and the United Kingdom agree that there is no extreme threat to Europe that would not prompt a response by our two nations".

SO, IS AN ENLARGEMENT OF FRENCH DETERRENCE TO EUROPE POSSIBLE?

This issue is not new and has been repeatedly [mentioned](#) in presidential speeches since the creation

[6] Platform on European Security Interests (The Hague, 1987). This was followed by the Preliminary Conclusions on the Formulation of a Common European Defence Policy (Noorwijk, 1994) and the Common European Security Concept (Madrid, 1995).

[7] Report appended to the military programming law for the years 1997-2002 - 3 July 1996.

[8] [Northwood Declaration](#), 10 July 2025

of the deterrent force. So why is it being addressed again now with greater urgency? Undoubtedly because of Russia's aggressive behaviour on Europe's borders and the doubts instilled by the current US administration, even if this has not yet materialised in practice, regarding the sustainability of its commitment to Europe's security. In these circumstances, the time has come to decide whether our Union wants to choose or suffer its fate, by adopting or not adopting a truly autonomous strategic vision of the conditions for its security. The answer depends entirely on us!

The European Union, a financial and economic power built on the concept of a single market, has long been afraid of military power. Until recently, the vast majority of European countries have preferred to rely on others to ensure their security. Worse still, support for French positions was too often seen by our neighbours as a challenge to NATO and its 'nuclear umbrella'. Deeply Gaullist France has the advantage of not having been shaped by NATO, even though it has always been a reliable partner in the Alliance. The least that can be said is that since 1992, it has always been a driving force in ensuring that the European Union has a certain degree of strategic autonomy, even if this has sometimes been done somewhat awkwardly by failing to be sufficiently clear about the link between European defence and NATO. As the statements in the appendix show, the question of the contribution of our deterrence to European security has always been part of strategic political discourse.

As mentioned earlier, we can consider that deterrence strengthens European security by its very existence and that our vital interests now have a European dimension, as was clearly stated in the last presidential speech^[9]. Could we go further, particularly if the American withdrawal became a reality? The first question is whether deterrence could be completely shared, going as far as pooling capabilities and, if necessary, the decision to deploy them. This would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, because the credibility of nuclear deterrence relies on concentrated decision-making

and vertical deployment, as well as technological and political mastery in the long time. Clearly, if the number of implementation keys were to increase, its credibility would be permanently compromised. To be effective, deterrence must therefore remain under national control.

So, is there a middle ground between the current situation and an impossible shared deterrence? A kind of concerted deterrence, to use the terms coined by Jacques Mellick and Alain Juppé in the 1990s. The answer is probably yes: first, through strategic dialogue between France and its European allies, but also by ostensibly demonstrating that EU countries are taken into account within the scope of France's vital interests. This could be done in a number of ways, some more visible than others, with the main aim of demonstrating position to the European public rather than sending a message to a potential adversary who has surely already understood the interdependence of European interests and the importance of the [mutual defence clause](#)^[10] established by the Lisbon Treaty. These options, which would have a financial cost and raise the question of our current '*strict sufficiency*', must naturally be discussed with our partners before any decision is taken. It should be noted that the proposal^[11] by the French President to involve European countries, that wish to reflect on the role of French deterrence in our collective security, in national nuclear exercises was already a preliminary response to this question.

However, we must be aware that above all deterrence is a political tool and that extending deterrence more broadly to our European Union allies must begin with the establishment of a comprehensive political project on issues of defence and resilience on the continent. Many people rush to discuss capabilities before discussing principles. However, we must always begin by determining the goal before defining the means. Before discussing a more Europeanised deterrence, the 27 Member States will need to establish a genuinely common political project and address issues of sovereignty and shared vital interests. This is already underway with the [Strategic Compass](#) starting in 2022, but we must now move

^[9] *Op.cit.*

^[10] Article 42.7 of the 2007 Lisbon Treaty

^[11] *Op.cit.*

away from a policy of small steps in favour of a truly comprehensive strategic approach.

The fundamental issue is one of trust. Obviously, European countries must be able to count on France's unwavering political determination to contribute to their security, regardless of which political party is in power. And France must be able to count on the determination of European countries to develop their conventional forces and the means for their strategic autonomy to support French nuclear deterrence so that we can finally build a truly comprehensive European defence. The extension, in whatever form, of French deterrence to Europe is inseparable from the establishment of a consolidated European defence project. This potential step forward cannot be taken without dialogue with our American allies with a view to convincing them, if they still need

convincing, that European strategic autonomy does not undermine their security but, on the contrary, strengthens it.

Nothing is inevitable, and our future depends on the decisions that we, as Europeans, are going to take from now on. We must open this new chapter in our shared history without delay, for clouds are gathering on the horizon. In reality, *"the only question we face is: what do we want to do together with our future so that we are not condemned to suffer it? The answer is in our hands"*[12].

Admiral (2S) Bernard Rogel

Chief of Naval Staff, French Navy (2011–2016),
Special Chief of Staff to the French President of
the Republic (2016–2020)

[12] *Un Marin à l'Élysée* – Admiral
Bernard Rogel – Tallandier 2023

You can read all of our publications on our site:

www.robert-schuman.eu/en

Publishing Director: Pascale JOANNIN

ISSN 2402-614X

The opinions expressed in this text are the sole responsibility of the author.

© All rights reserved, Fondation Robert Schuman, 2025

THE FONDATION ROBERT SCHUMAN, created in 1991 and acknowledged by State decree in 1992, is the main French research centre on Europe. It develops research on the European Union and its policies and promotes the content of these in France, Europe and abroad. It encourages, enriches and stimulates European debate thanks to its research, publications and the organisation of conferences. The Foundation is presided over by Mr. Jean-Dominique Giuliani.

APPENDIX

European defence and French nuclear deterrence

History of French declarations[13]

In 1962, when France did not yet have operational nuclear forces, Prime Minister Georges Pompidou emphasised that the nuclear power of a continental European country such as France, which was directly exposed to danger, helped to strengthen Europe's security:

16 July 1962[14]: *'Are they trying to lead us towards the neutralisation of Western Europe, which would leave our continent defenceless at the mercy of attacks from some and the goodwill of others? The French government believes that nuclear weapons controlled politically by a European country, and I would add, by a continental European country, will play an essential role. Far from weakening the Atlantic Alliance, it strengthens it. Not, of course, so much because of its power (...) but because of its presence and the fact that it will be controlled by a country exposed to the greatest danger. In this way, it will truly play its role as a deterrent because it leaves the adversary in no doubt as to the consequences of even a limited attack. [...]'*

13 April 1966[15], two years after the creation of the Strategic Air Force, he insisted in the National Assembly: *'Independence does not do away with solidarity; it strengthens it. I would even say that it creates it. The idea is to give France back to itself. In doing so, we are serving Europe and preparing it to re-emerge and play its role.'*

In November 1980, President **Valéry Giscard d'Estaing** spoke to the newspaper *Le Figaro* about France's nuclear forces. At the end of the Cold War, the European dimension of deterrence became explicitly apparent in all French political discourse.

January 1992, François Mitterrand discusses the need for EU Member States to jointly address the nuclear issue when the time comes. *'The debate*

over European defence raises unresolved issues that will have to be addressed. [...] Only two countries in the Community possess nuclear weapons. [...] Is it possible to devise a European doctrine? This question will very quickly become one of the major issues in the construction of a common European defence.'[16]

A few weeks later, **Jacques Mellick**, Secretary of State for Defence, was already discussing the concept of concerted European deterrence[17]: *As for a European nuclear doctrine, although it can only be envisaged in the very long term, it is already the subject of in-depth consideration. To give you an idea of the general framework of the discussions currently underway, I would say that a European nuclear doctrine can be considered in several ways:*

- *The first approach is to consider that Europe already has a de facto deterrent capability, based on the very existence of French and British forces, and logically linked to the intertwining interests of European states. European nuclear powers cannot but take these interests into account in their deterrence strategy. This is deterrence by observation.*

- *The second approach could be described as extended deterrence, as it consists of extending the benefits of sanctuary to its neighbours, but this requires their agreement to such an extension.*

- *The third aspect of European deterrence could be concerted deterrence. This would involve a nuclear power retaining its independence in nuclear decision-making while consulting its partners on the measures to be taken for the use of nuclear weapons.*

As for shared deterrence, it seems very difficult to share nuclear decision-making with other states when there is no homogeneous political union and no common political authority. Finally, in the event of a federal union of Europe, a nuclear power could transfer its deterrent capability to this new sovereign entity, but this development would require the political disappearance of the nations of Europe: on

[13] This list is not exhaustive.

[14] Speech before the National Assembly, 16 July 1962

[15] General policy statement to the National Assembly, 13 April 1966

[16] Speech by François Mitterrand, 10 January 1992.

[17] Speech by Jacques Mellick, 29 January 1992

the one hand, it is a long way off, and on the other, is it desirable?

In 1994, the White Paper asserts that there can be no European strategic autonomy without nuclear power.

In January 1995, Foreign Secretary Alain Juppé asks in these terms: *"Could the adoption of a single currency and a new Franco-German treaty (...) have no effect on France's perception of its vital interests? Should our generation be afraid to consider, not shared deterrence, but at least deterrence in concert with our main partners?"*^[18]

On 31 August 1995, these points were clarified in **President Chirac's** speech to ambassadors^[19]: *"It is my duty since I am responsible to the nation for the future and security of our country, to remind the French people that only deterrence can protect France against the possible use of weapons of mass destruction, whatever their nature. The concept of deterrence against all threats, wherever they may come from, remains – and will remain for a long time to come – entirely relevant.*

What may change, however, is its geographical significance. As it builds its defence capabilities, the European Union may wish for French deterrence to play a role in this defence. France will take the initiative on this issue with its main partners when the time comes."

Alain Juppé, Prime Minister, emphasised as he spoke on **7 September 1995** when speaking of Germany: *"Dialogue with Germany, meanwhile, must take into account a number of facts, including the following question: what can France offer that Germany does not already have thanks to American deterrence? This is a highly topical debate at a time when new relations should be established between Europe and the United States, while preserving and rejuvenating the transatlantic link. After the end of the Cold War, when German reunification brought an end to one of the most tragic episodes in the history of our closest ally, should we still be asking the question of 'extended deterrence' for Germany? I personally find that the expression can lend itself to suspicion of paternalism, which is why I prefer the term 'concerted deterrence', which I used for the first time last January.*

What does this phrase mean? First and foremost, it expresses the need for dialogue between two equal partners on a subject that concerns their shared future. Germany has no intention of acquiring nuclear weapons. It solemnly reiterated this after reunification, confirming the new state's accession to the NPT. In a world where nuclear weapons will continue to play a necessary role, if only because of existing arsenals, this commitment makes it even more important to guarantee Germany's security against this threat.

Jacques Chirac, speaking before your predecessors in 1987, recalled that, for General de Gaulle, France should form a 'common strategic space' with the Federal Republic, and he emphasised that the nations of Western Europe tended to constitute an inseparable whole. Was this not already an indication that France's vital interests had for several years been more political than geographical in nature?

This is one of the main results of fifty years of reconciliation and mutual dialogue. It is also the result of European integration, of which France and Germany have been at the heart since the beginning."

In his speech on 8 June 1996, President Chirac stated: *"But the European dimension is also evident in our nuclear deterrent.*

Strengthening our cooperation with the United Kingdom in this area is crucial for the future. At the last Franco-British summit, we emphasised the very close alignment of our vital interests.

- French and British deterrent forces have a specific role to play in the context of the common security policy. Of course, this does not mean replacing American deterrence with a French or Franco-British guarantee. What we want is to strengthen global deterrence.

- This cooperation is in line with the 'concerted deterrence' approach outlined by the Prime Minister in September. It is not about unilaterally expanding our deterrence or imposing a new contract on our partners. It is about drawing all the consequences of a shared destiny and the growing interdependence of our vital interests.

- Given the differences in attitudes towards nuclear weapons that exist in Europe, we are not proposing a finished concept, but a gradual approach, open to partners who wish to commit to it."

^[18] Speech by Alain Juppé, 30 January 1995

^[19] Speech by Jacques Chirac, 31 August 1995

In June 2001, Jacques Chirac declares that France still considers that any assessment of the damage that would be done to our vital interests *"would naturally take into account the growing solidarity among the countries of the European Union" ... "Finally, France wishes its nuclear deterrent to contribute to the security of Europe. It thus contributes to the overall deterrent capability that can be exercised jointly by the democracies united by the collective security treaty concluded more than fifty years ago between Europe, the United States and Canada. In any event, it is up to the President of the Republic to assess, in a given situation, the damage that would be done to our vital interests. This assessment would naturally take into account the growing solidarity among European Union countries."*

In the years 2000-2020, in the absence of a response from European partners, a more unilateral vision took hold, influenced by the ongoing construction of Europe and the growing interdependence of European interests. It emphasised the increased importance of Europe in France's vital interests. On several occasions, French leaders called for a shared reflection on the European dimension of French deterrence (Presidents Chirac 2006 – Sarkozy 2008 – Macron 2020) or reiterated that France's vital interests have a European dimension (Presidents Chirac 2001 – Hollande 2015 – Macron 2020). Following Donald Trump's arrival in office and the emerging uncertainty about the reliability of the American commitment, the presidential speech of 7 February 2020 attempted to restart the process by going so far as to make an unprecedented proposal: participation in nuclear exercises.

On 19 January 2006, Jacques Chirac launched a new call for joint reflection: *"Moreover, the development of the European Security and Defence Policy, the growing interweaving of the interests of European Union countries and the solidarity that now exists between them, make French nuclear deterrence, by its very existence, a core element in the security of the European continent. In 1995, France put forward the ambitious idea of concerted deterrence in order to launch a debate at European*

level on this issue. I still believe that, when the time comes, we shall have to ask ourselves the question of a common Defence that would take account of existing deterrent forces, with a view to a strong Europe responsible for its security. European Union member States have, moreover, begun to reflect together on what are, or will be, their common security interests. And I would like us to deepen this reflection. This is a first and necessary step."

Nicolas Sarkozy, Cherbourg, 21 March 2008: *"As for Europe, it is a fact: By their very existence, French nuclear forces are a key element in Europe's security. Any aggressor who might consider challenging it must be mindful of this.*

Let us, together, draw every logical consequence of this situation. I propose to engage those European partners who would so wish in an open dialogue on the role of deterrence and its contribution to our common security."

François Hollande, Istres, 19 February 2015: *"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."

Emmanuel Macron, Ecole de guerre, 7 February 2020: *"Europe has to put itself in a position to be able to better guarantee its security and take action in its neighbourhood. The European Union already set for itself this objective of autonomous action.*

Just imagine, it was at the European Council meeting in Cologne... in 1999! It is as compatible today as it was 20 years ago with the desire for Europeans to re-engage and be more credible and effective in NATO. This re-balancing is something the United States also wants.

This is why the Europeans must now take greater responsibility for this European defence, this European pillar within NATO. And I myself, fully take that responsibility, without hesitating! I can tell you this very clearly this morning: I believe that one of my responsibilities is indeed that this should not remain empty rhetoric, as was the case after 1999. NATO and European Defense are two pillars of European collective security. Let's accept it! Let's face it, and listen to the United States of America, telling us: "Spend more on your security, I may no longer be, over time, your guarantor of last resort, your protector". Let's take our responsibilities, finally!..."

"Furthermore, our nuclear forces have a deterrent effect in themselves, particularly in Europe. They strengthen the security of Europe through their very existence and they have, in this sense, a truly European dimension. On that point, our independent decision-making is fully compatible with our unwavering solidarity with our European partners. Our commitment to their security and their defence is the natural expression of our ever-closer solidarity. Let's be clear: France's vital interests now have a European dimension. In this spirit, I would like strategic dialogue to develop with our European partners, which are ready for it, on the role played by France's nuclear deterrence in our collective security. European partners which are willing to walk that road can be associated with the exercises of French deterrence forces. This strategic dialogue and these exchanges will naturally contribute to developing a true strategic culture among Europeans."

To be continued...