

THE FRENCH WHITE PAPER ON DEFENSE AND NATIONAL SECURITY

With the White Paper on Defence and National Security of June 2008, France has embarked on an in-depth overhaul of its security and defence strategy. In terms of content, three innovative elements are noticeable. The first is a shift of focus away from France's historic spheres of influence towards a "strategic arc" of instability that stretches from the Atlantic via the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf and Horn of Africa and on to south Asia. Second, greater emphasis is put on intelligence. Third, the White Paper approves France's reintegration into NATO's integrated military command structure.



France's President Nicolas Sarkozy attends a ceremony during the Fall military ceremony in Paris 19/11/2008

Beyond content-wise innovations, the White Paper is noteworthy for several formal aspects. First, it was elaborated in a unique process. In August 2007, recently elected president Nicolas Sarkozy set up a commission with initially 38 members, who were entrusted with the crafting of a White Paper on Defense and National Security. The commission was given full latitude for its task, which is reflected in its composition and in the working procedures – both of which depart considerably from traditional patterns. In addition to representatives of the relevant government agencies and of the armed forces, the commission included qualified individuals from academia and think-tanks, independent experts, private stakeholders, and parliamentarians, which was noteworthy given the limited role the French parliament usually plays. It was chaired by Jean-Claude Mallet, a high-level civil servant profoundly experienced in security and defense questions, who had also

been one of the key drafters of the previous White Paper (1994). Amongst others, the authors of the White Paper sought inspiration from the UK. The British government published a comprehensive strategy in March 2008 that was, however, far shorter. The commission met in various formats between September 2007 and June 2008. Public hearings, a webpage for public debate and seminars completed the closed working sessions and aimed to provide a degree of transparency and participation that is rare in this area. During the same time, regular contact with the presidential administration ensured the acceptance of the paper by the president.

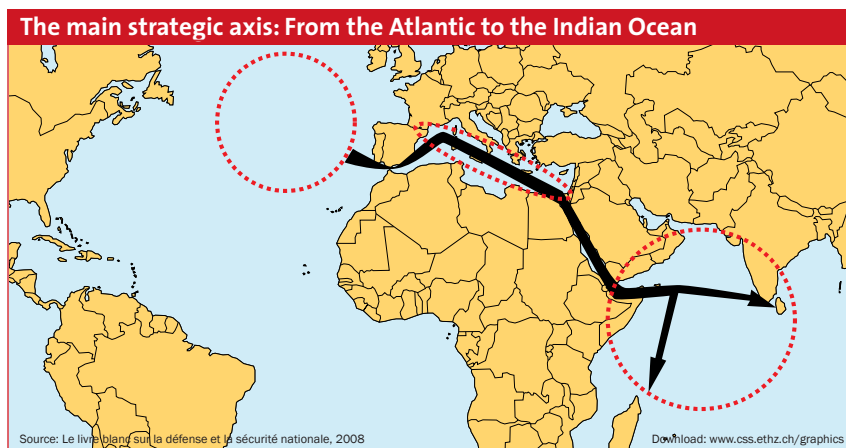
Second, the White Paper stands out for its length and great attention to detail. The more than 300 pages offer an analysis of the threat environment, the consequences for France and Europe, an outline of the European and transatlantic framework of

French security, the new strategy and the resulting modifications as regards institutional and content aspects, and eventually the consequences of the reform for the political structures, the administration, the personnel, finances, the defense industry, the research sector, and the population.

Third, the White Paper also reflects the willingness of the French government to engage in potentially painful reforms to keep up with strategic challenges. In 1994, the first White Paper published after the Cold War already undertook a reappraisal of French strategy and force structure. This prepared the ground for the decision in 1996 to move to fully professional armed forces, to dismantle the country's surface-to-surface nuclear missiles and to build up a substantial force projection capability, in keeping with the new strategic situation. Some 15 years later, a new appraisal was on the agenda, and it was widely expected that any new president elected in 2007 would embark on a defense review. However, the White Paper has to be considered within the broader reform movement initiated by President Sarkozy that aims at reforming the French political system as such. In the areas of security and defense, it is flanked by the *Carte Militaire*, presented in July 2008, and the *Loi de programmation militaire 2009–2014*, adopted by the cabinet in October 2008. Moreover, the White Paper was expected to inform the French EU presidency's work in the second half of 2008.

An overarching strategy

The 2008 White Paper goes beyond defense policy strictly speaking and defines France's first formal national security strategy, which is to be overseen by a new Na-



tional Security Council. While the 1972 and the 1994 White Papers only addressed the defense realm, the new document outlines a comprehensive strategy for dealing with existential threats and risks to the nation in a globalized world. Given the interdependent nature of threats and the increasing interaction of external and internal security, it is also necessary to integrate the areas of defense, internal security, foreign policy, and the economy in an overarching strategy.

The White Paper seeks to define France's strategy for the next 15 years. With the aim of assuring French security in face of globalized risks and threats, it offers an analysis of the current and foreseeable strategic context and outlines the necessary institutional, military, and political reforms to ensure France's security in view of globalized risks and threats, and to eventually enable the country to continue to live up to its own expectations, international ambitions, and quest for autonomy.

Strategic re-orientation and institutional innovations

The new strategy builds upon five basic strategic functions to achieve overall national security, namely knowledge and anticipation; prevention; deterrence; protection; and intervention. They replace and complement the previous four priorities of deterrence, prevention, projection, and protection, and also rearrange them in a new hierarchical order. The five functions cover both external and internal security, as well as military and civilian means, thereby reflecting the comprehensive approach of the strategy.

The new French strategy prioritizes knowledge and anticipation, with greater emphasis put on electronic and human intelligence-gathering. Institutional innovations, such as the inception of a *Conseil national du renseignement* headed by the French president, will improve the concentration and coordination of intelligence. There will also

be a new national intelligence coordinator, answering to the president. However, some observers fear that these developments might result in a growing concentration of increasingly non-controllable competences in the hand of the president. In financial terms, yearly spending on satellite technology, including spy satellites and electromagnetic surveillance, will double. France will launch a system of ballistic-missile early-warning satellites, to be operational by 2020.

Prevention, that is, the aim of avoiding the emergence or aggravation of threats to national security, is the second strategic function. It relies upon a collective and integrated approach that links a broad range of diplomatic, economic, military, and cultural tools at the international, European, and national levels. It calls for a strategic reorientation, namely, a shift of focus from France's historic spheres of influence towards a "strategic arc" of instability that stretches from the Atlantic via the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf and the Horn of Africa and on to South Asia. Prevention rests to a great extent on the presence of French forces abroad, mainly in Africa. However, this presence should be modified to increase the room for maneuver for French policies. France will close one of its two permanent military bases in sub-Saharan Africa. However, it will keep its base in Djibouti, and invest in a new base in Abu Dhabi, its first in the Persian Gulf and also the first in a country with which it has no colonial links. The existing bilateral defense agreements will be abrogated. These measures reflect how the reorientation and re-definition of means should enable France to continue to live up to its own ambitions for international leadership and responsibility.

Third, nuclear deterrence remains an essential concept of national security and confirms France's quest for autonomy. While the political credibility of the nuclear deter-

rent force rests upon the independent and autonomous decisionmaking capacity of the French head of state, the technical and operational credibility relies upon material capabilities, which France will maintain.

The protection of both territory and population is the fourth strategic function and introduces several innovations. A special emphasis is placed on internal security, such as the protection of movements of persons and goods, critical infrastructures, a modernization of the public alert system, and the planning and professionalization of crisis communication systems. The overall resilience of society and the authorities should be developed to ensure their continued functioning at all times. This implies a re-organization of the coordination and management of civilian and military actors. This emphasis on internal security has, however, been criticized as coming at the expense of France's defense policy (in the narrower sense) and its military power.

Finally, intervention abroad remains the key determinant for the armed forces' structure and requirements. France will maintain the force projection capability necessary to defend its security interests and responsibilities while also developing its capability for long-distance and in-depth force projection. Here, the French armed forces must be able in technical and logistical terms to cover the zones defined as being of strategic interest.

Building upon a threat analysis and the definition of France's European and international ambitions, the White Paper calls for fundamental reforms in the areas of administration, politics, the military, the defense industry, and research. One example is the *Conseil de défense et de sécurité nationale* (CDSN), headed by the president of the Republic, which will bundle all competences in the realm of national security and defense that according to the constitution fall under the responsibility of the president. Sarkozy had already called for the creation of such an institution long before the White Paper. It was adopted in cabinet in October 2008 within the framework of the *Loi de programmation militaire 2009–2014*. Some observers fear that while such an US-inspired structure would undoubtedly facilitate the necessary coordination of security and defense issues, it might also lead to a further concentration of competences in the Elysée Palace in structures lacking transparency. Such a transformation would reinforce the trend towards an increasing presidentialization of the French system under Sarkozy, while jeo-

pardizing the transparency Sarkozy called for when commissioning the White Paper.

Improving the military capacity to act

A fundamental aspect of the White Paper is the definition of operational and capability objectives for the armed forces and government authorities involved. The overall aim is the improvement of the military capacity to act, with a clear emphasis on intervention and projection. France will invest heavily in modernizing the armed forces' equipment, including a new space program, at the price of reducing its personnel strength. Out of 320,000 civilian and military defense posts, 54,000 will disappear. The savings will go towards upgrading military hardware, at a cost of €200 billion between now and 2020. Defense spending will increase by one percentage point above inflation from 2012. In time, the result should be a leaner, smarter, sharper army that is better equipped to respond to "globalized risks", including terrorism and cyber-attacks.

These aims are corroborated by the *Carte Militaire* (presented in July 2008 briefly after the the White Paper), which prepares the French defense policy map for a fundamental restructuring. It mainly involves a geographical concentration of domestic military installations, including the closure of sites and the dissolution of entire units. Together, these two documents reflect the shift from territorial defense to intervention abroad and thus the willingness to adapt the French security and defense policy to face the new challenges, including potentially painful reforms where necessary.

European ambitions and re-integration into NATO

The White Paper corroborates French positions when calling for a further development of a European defense policy. It urges a strengthening of the EU's capacity for independent military action and the creation of an autonomous and permanent military planning structure separate from NATO, with the aim of being able to carry out up to three operations in parallel. While calling for a strengthening of the European defense industry, France makes clear that it will maintain the national capacities necessary to assure strategic and political autonomy in key areas, such as nuclear deterrence.

In a clear departure from traditional policies, the White Paper approves the re-integration of France into NATO's military command structures, from which de Gaulle

withdrew in 1966. Given the modified international environment, the development of the Alliance and the French commitment in NATO operations, the argument goes, a further insistence upon a special case for France is neither coherent nor logical. As long as freedom of situation assessment and decision-making, nuclear independence, and freedom regarding the commitment of the French forces are guaranteed, France will consider a rapprochement with the command structures. It is expected that the process will be initiated at the Alliance's 60th anniversary summit in spring 2009. However, while France may want more NATO, it still wants more Europe: The possible return to NATO is linked to the commitment to a European defense policy.

What impact?

The White Paper is the first comprehensive attempt to adapt French security and defense policy to the challenges of a globalized security environment. The in-depth modernization it proposes should eventually enable a continuation of traditional French interests and of the country's international and European leadership claim by adapting means and instruments. The White Paper clearly addresses national, international, and European audiences, the latter particularly within the framework of the French EU presidency.

At the international level, the rapprochement with NATO was especially welcomed. At the European level, the rapprochement with NATO offers the opportunity to overcome blockages and deadlocks in view of improving the efficiency of cooperation and also eventually strengthening France's international role. It remains to be seen, however, how far European defense co-operation can evolve when EU leaders are distracted by institutional troubles and in view of the UK's dislike of anything resembling a permanent EU defense-planning capability. The linkage between the national and European levels and the impact of the White Paper is reflected in the fact that it was supposed to inform the update of the European Security Strategy called for by the French EU presidency. Other ideas announced in the White Paper have been implemented during the French EU presidency, such as the military exchange program inspired by the *European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students* (ERASMUS) exchange program for higher education.

The national reactions to the White Paper reflect the contentious character of some of

its stipulations. At the political level, it has been criticized for encouraging rapprochement with NATO and for incoherence in its strategic analysis. The constituencies affected by the closures of garrisons protested against the economic and social consequences, while the left and Gaullists alike have seized on this and the return to NATO as a threats to French independence. Military circles have criticized the reform and fear that France's international standing and its armed forces could go into decline. A group of high-ranking officers anonymously published an acerbic critique of the White Paper, in a snub that further burdened the already strained relationship between the president and the armed forces. In addition, the transparency Sarkozy had called for regarding the elaboration process has been criticized by observers as window dressing that only served to hide the fact that the results of the review process had supposedly been pre-defined by the Elysée Palace. They also point to some modifications, such as the creation of the CDSN, that support existing tendencies of centralization and presidentialisation.

As the White Paper has yet to be implemented, it is too early to assess its impact. The *Loi de programmation militaire 2009–2014*, which translates the White Paper into financial terms, was adopted in cabinet in October 2008. It includes the inception of the *Conseil national de renseignement* and of the CDSN. It also shows that the defense area is less affected by the general cuts in the public sector. The fundamental problem lies elsewhere in the one condition president Sarkozy imposed on its authors: that there would be no increase during his term in the 2 per cent of GDP devoted to defense. The 2009 NATO summit will show whether the rapprochement with NATO goes beyond announcements. The long-term perspective that the White Paper aims at, as well as the planned regular updates, will show whether it is really aimed at ensuring continuity with new means.

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