

## International and European Security: Some Insights from a French Perspective

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The French Strategic Review published on October 13, 2017, and approved by President Macron, gives the main guidelines for France's security and defense policy for the five coming years. The geostrategic environment changed utterly in the last three years. Not only the multilateral order seems to encounter more and more difficulties (the examples are numerous from Russia's annexion of Crimea in 2014 to the American withdrawal from the Paris agreement on climate change and from UNESCO in September and October 2017), but emerging powers (or re-emerging like in the case of Russia) tend to claim more and more military affirmation in international security and technological and cyber issues have become integral parts of international security in the last decade. Therefore after presenting France's strategic priorities in 2017, it seems important to take a short look at what can France and Germany bring to European security.

### 1. French strategic priorities between continuity and new challenges

What are French strategic priorities in an unstable world? The first priority is the fight against the terrorist threat, which has become a given since the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris and moreover in many European countries since then. French security is also to be understood in the framework of the state of emergency, a specific legal system adopted after the terror attacks in January 2015, and has been partly integrated



in the French common law on October 3, 2017. France is faced with multiple security challenges ranging from jihadist terrorism to acts of intimidation by Russia in Eastern Europe or China in the South China Sea. In this gloomy context France's main preoccupation is to remain strategically autonomous. Autonomy is France's leitmotiv in foreign and security policy. It is a legacy of the Gaullist era and still underlies France's position on defense and international security issues. De Gaulle's legacy has given the three fundamentals of French foreign and security policy until today: strategic independence, care about the country's rank in international relations, and multilateralism.

The new French president's security policy embraces these fundamentals. Strategic priorities are the protection of the national territory,<sup>3</sup> the guarantee of European and transatlantic security (more precisely on the southern and eastern borders of the European Union),<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The protection of the national territory currently implies the deployment of 7,000 soldiers in France in the framework of the Sentinelle operation and the creation of National Guard since July 2016 composed of reservists from the army.. and the national police force. The National Guard is currently based on 28,700 persons and should reach 40,000 in 2018, with a final objective of 84,000 volunteers in the coming years.

<sup>4</sup> The latest strategic review show a clear preoccupation for security regarding Russia, Sahel, and the Middle-East.

and the safeguard of multilateralism in international security. The practical applications of this principle of strategic autonomy are the upholding of nuclear dissuasion (which represents about 11 percent of France's military expenditures), and the necessity to dispose of a full-spectrum army equipped for high intensity operation as well as peace keeping and territorial protection. These ambitions are backed up with the political will to increase military expenditures. France is currently the most militarily active country in Europe, with several military deployments in Africa and the Middle East, not to mention the Sentinelle internal deployment. The French military budget has therefore been increased since 2015 to reach € 32.7 billion in 2017 and should be increased to € 34.7 billion in 2018. The French government is determined to reach the 2 percent NATO standard of the GDP for defense by 2025 against 1.8 percent in 2018. This also goes hand in hand with more effective industrial cooperation with other European countries. Thus it seems quite clear from President Macron's latest discourses that France will remain strongly involved in collective security as well as European security.

## 2. France, Germany, and European security: how to bring forward European strategic autonomy ?

In a context of Brexit and of geopolitical uncertainties, European defense resurfaced in political discourse, mainly in the words of French president Emmanuel Macron and German chancellor Angela Merkel. Indeed, during the last decade, despite the ever-intensifying security challenges they face, EU members progressively lost interest in the idea of deepening EU's defense policy. Perhaps the challenges raised by Brexit, but also by the actions of Putin since the annexion of Crimea in 2014 and the election of Donald Trump, serve as drivers for an enhanced CSDP. The European Council stated in December 2016 that Europeans should "take greater responsibility for their security," commit "sufficient additional resources," reinforce

"cooperation in the development of required capabilities," and "contribute decisively to collective efforts" in order to be able to act autonomously when and where necessary.<sup>5</sup> Thus France and Germany took several bilateral initiatives aimed at revitalizing European defense since 2016. France strongly supports the reinforcement of ESDP's instruments such as PESCO, the development of the MPCC, or the European Defense Fund. The main objective for France is to work at enhancing the EU's strategic autonomy, so that the EU would be able to cope more effectively with security challenges not only at its borders (such as migration, Russia's intimidation strategy, North Africa's instability), but also more globally.

On this road to more EU strategic autonomy, Germany remains a key partner to ensure European security not only through the EU's defense policy, but also through NATO. The Strategic Review 2017 therefore reaffirms France's commitment within NATO in terms of collective defense and reassurance. In order to maintain a high level of capability and increase cooperation with European partners, industrial cooperation is highlighted as an important driver of the development of a more effective European defense. For instance, President Macron and Chancellor Merkel announced during the last French-German summit on July 13, 2017, the creation in the future of a European air combat system based in particular on the development of a French-German combat aircraft and the settlement of a joint air transport unit composed of C130J aircrafts. Technology is also part of the strategic priorities and more precisely the development of cyber instruments both at the national and European level to be able to deter, prevent, and if need be respond to cyber attacks.

In a nutshell, in a multipolar world evolving rapidly, France is determined to bring forward the necessary efforts and work closely with its partners to help develop a comprehensive approach and cope with today's security challenges.

<sup>5</sup> European Council Meeting – Conclusions, Brussels: European Council, December 15, 2016, p. 3.