

RETHINKING NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

ANALYSIS OF THE PRESIDENTIAL INTERVENTION, FEBRUARY 7TH, 2020

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ABSTRACT

On February 7th, 2020, President Emmanuel Macron gave a speech on deterrence. The fundamentals of the doctrine have not changed. However, two usual components of nuclear policy are shifting – at least at the level of political communication. Firstly, the European dimension of deterrence translates into a concrete invitation, extended to partners who would be wishing to do so, to associate in deterrence-related exercises. Secondly, the articulation between conventional and nuclear becomes clarified. A connection is made at the political level, albeit without the creation of a continuum. Overall, as expected, this speech is political, but it also seems to claim to be more. The President of the Republic puts forward a disarmament agenda based on a realist perspective, taking into account the international context. He also develops an ethical thought on nuclear weapons, outlining a balanced path between “a moral absolute with no link to strategic realities” and “cynical return to a lawless power struggle.”

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INTRODUCTION

On February 7th, 2020, the President of the Republic gave a speech on France's defense and deterrence strategy at the Ecole Militaire (Paris). The purpose of this note is to put the Ecole Militaire speech into perspective with previous speeches and with some evolutions of the role of nuclear weapons in security strategy. Despite novelties in the tone and some elements clashing with the traditional blueprint, this speech is well in line with the tradition and even reconnects with its origins. As Emmanuel Macron recalled at the beginning of his remarks, no Head of State had come back to the Ecole de Guerre since Charles de Gaulle who gave a speech on November 3rd, 1959, announcing the creation of the "*force de frappe*."¹

VALUE OF SPEECHES ON DETERRENCE

The credibility given to deterrence is based not only on capability, technological and operational issues, but also on a political aspect articulated around determination to act and doctrine transparency. In France, Presidential statements on deterrence play a part in this political aspect. It is a Fifth Republic tradition: each of the eight Presidents since 1959 have fulfilled it. This French exception undoubtedly stems from the centrality of the role of the head of state in the doctrine and in the institutions of the Fifth Republic, linked to his election by universal suffrage.

Deterrence is a dialogue that cannot be held within clear red lines, but rather demands some ambiguity, so that uncertainty weighs on the aggressor rather than on the defendant. The speech from the head of state serves to remind that France is still counting on nuclear deterrence in the preservation of its vital interests, and to explain this strategy.

While these principles are reiterated and sometimes explained by framework documents on defense and security (white papers, strategic reviews), these documents do not have the same reach as Presidential statements, viewed as the main platform for the expression of the doctrine. When the President talks about deterrence, he shows that he shoulders his responsibility and displays his determination to launch, if needed, our nuclear forces.

In this regard, E. Macron already made two very symbolic trips in July 2017, a few months only after he took office. He first embarked on the nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SNLE) on the 4th of July and went to Istres air base two weeks later. At the time, he confirmed the fundamental principles of deterrence, reaffirmed his role and underlined the two "essential and complementary" aspects, without forgetting to mention the "sailors of the naval air nuclear arm [...] who would participate in deterrence from the aircraft carrier."² Ultimately, in all his statements on deterrence, the president placed himself as its guarantor.

1. Speech available online. See for example: <https://mjp.univ-perp.fr/textes/degaulle03111959.htm>. Audio version: <https://fresques.ina.fr/de-gaulle/fiche-media/Gaulle00335/vision-de-la-defense-de-la-france.html>.

2. [Emmanuel Macron Speech](#), 125 Istres Airbase, Thursday July 20th, 2017.

These speeches also fulfill other goals, beyond confirming the determination of the President, who is elected by universal suffrage, and is the guarantor of “deterrence.” On the international stage, it is useful to reassure of the intentions of a nuclear-armed State. “Our nuclear forces are not directed towards any specific country [...]” the President recalled. France, which “is not threatening anyone” and “in no way has an expansionist aim,” only considers this weapon strictly as a defensive weapon within the framework of deterrence, to be employed in “extreme circumstances of self-defense.” This is a constant in speeches since the Cold War. They are supplemented by new aspects. These aspects directly stem from the evolutions of some nuclear policy, although these evolutions are never clearly spelt out to avoid finger-pointing towards states that are hoped to “be a constructive player in our common security.”

In any case, E. Macron is drawing the outline of an international order in which “nuclear weapons must not be designed as tools of intimidation, coercion or destabilization. They must remain instruments of deterrence, with the objective of preventing war.” Russian displays of power around the Ukrainian crisis drew attention to the possible coercive use of nuclear weapons. In the same vein, this speech takes up familiar elements supporting the refusal to turn the bomb into a “battlefield weapon,” but the reflection is furthered when it is explained that “France will never engage into a nuclear battle or any forms of graduated response.” This clarification is not unnecessary in a context of worries linked, on the one hand, to the consequences of the end of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty; and, on the other hand to ongoing evolutions in the US, especially on “low-yield” warheads.

Indeed, the emphasis put on the reinforcement of non-strategic capacities in the last *Nuclear Posture Review* (NPR)³ was strongly criticized, on the basis that it could lower the nuclear threshold and could lead to an escalation-prone doctrine.⁴ The actual aim, linked to the constraints of extended deterrence, was to re-establish deterrence against states that could consider taking back the advantage in a conventional conflict by using non-strategic nuclear weapons (particular reference to the Russian theory of “escalation for de-escalation”).

In the short term, the NPR planned to modify a small number of warheads for ballistic missiles fired from submarines in order to reduce their power, to ensure that “potential adversaries perceive no possible advantage in limited nuclear escalation, making nuclear employment less likely.”⁵ The actual deployment of the W76-2 warheads, announced by the Department of defense on February 4th, 2020,⁶ relaunched the debate on non-strategic nuclear weapons, seen as more easily usable. So, the precisions given during this speech also answer some questions that have been discussed for a few months by experts and the media.

This demonstrates that doctrine transparency is necessary, and that it must be renewed even when there is no significant change to the doctrine, to be able to confirm the validity of

3. [Nuclear Posture Review](#), Department of Defense, 2018.

4. See Tiphaine de Champchesnel, “[The role of nuclear weapons after the new American posture review 2018](#),” IRSEM Research Paper n. 57, June 2018.

5. NPR, p. XII.

6. John Rood, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, [Statement on the Fielding of the W76-2 Low-Yield Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile Warhead](#), 4th February 2020.

principles that have already been laid out. In the end, the other nuclear-weapon states – as per the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)⁷ – do not communicate as regularly even if a *reporting* requirement as part of the NPT review process should incite them to do so.⁸ The nuclear states that are not members of the NPT are not under any obligation in that regards.

Finally, this message is also addressed to French people, and possibly to European people (see below). As E. Macron said, “democracies must examine the purposes of their nuclear deterrence policy, which raises moral dilemmas and paradoxes.” More simply, this is about reminding the *raison d’être* of deterrence in a post-cold war world: “nuclear deterrence has played a fundamental role in maintaining peace and international security, particularly in Europe. I am firmly convinced that our deterrence strategy maintains all of its stabilizing virtues, a particularly valuable asset in the world which we see before us, one of competition between powers, disinhibited behaviours and the erosion of norms.”

UPHOLDING FUNDAMMENTALS IN THE DOCTRINE

The speech is in line with previous speeches, on the doctrinal level, as it is articulated around fundamental concepts:

- While deterrence is aimed at preventing war, it is primarily concerned with our “vital interests” To preserve the ambiguity needed to uphold deterrence, these vital interests are not clarified. Otherwise, potential opponents could measure out their attacks to make sure not to risk a nuclear response. This central notion in the French doctrine has been taken up in the United States and in the United Kingdom. Previous speeches have tried to clarify this notion, while staying away, of course, from developing a real definition.⁹ The European element of these vital interests which has been included in speeches for a few decades is also present in this speech. Its importance given to the European perspective warrants a distinct analysis (see “role of French deterrence in Europe”).
- Nuclear deterrence is not confined to preventing nuclear aggressions. E. Macron reiterates formulation that is a constant in previous speeches (2015, 2008, 1996), insisting on this strategy only comes into play if there is “a State threat against our vital interests,

7. The NPT defines a nuclear State as “one which has manufactured and exploded a nuclear weapon or other nuclear explosive device prior to 1 January 1967.” As a reminder, these are the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France and China.

8. This *reporting* was implemented following the adoption of the action plan at the 2010 NPT Review conference.

9. See François Hollande’s speech on deterrence in Istres, 2015: “the integrity of our territory and the protection of our people are obviously central to our vital interests.” Nicolas Sarkozy’s speech (Cherbourg, 2008) emphasized their possible evolution: “Our vital interests, of course, include the elements that constitute our identity and our existence as a nation-state, as well as the free exercise of our sovereignty.” Also see the particularly long expansion in Jacques Chirac’s speech on the 19th of January 2006: “the integrity of our territories, the protection of our population, the free exercise of our sovereignty will always be at the heart of our interests. But they are not limited to this. The perception of these interests evolves at the same pace as the world does, in a world characterized by increasing interdependence between European countries and by globalization. For example, guaranteeing our strategic supply chain and the defense of our allies are, amongst others, interests that we must protect. It will be up to the President to evaluate the importance of the potential consequences of an attack, of a threat or of an unacceptable blackmail against its interest. This evaluation will, if needed, lead to consider that such events fall within the scope of our vital interests.”

wherever it comes from and in whatever form.” We should note that these words do not leave any ambiguity concerning the type of actor targeted by deterrence. In two instances, he further specifies that deterrence is conceived in relation to other States. First, the President says that nuclear forces could inflict unacceptable damages if “the leader of any State” was to “underestimate France’s deep-rooted attachment to its freedom and consider threatening our vital interests.” Secondly, the President says that a nuclear warning can be issued to “the aggressor State.”

- The centrality of the President’s role is reminded, though in a less technical way than in previous speeches that tended to emphasize that the assessment of vital interest was the President’s prerogative. While the notion of responsibility is ubiquitous, it is clearly laid out in the part of the speech recalling the nature of deterrence, with three mentions in two sentences: “as I am responsible before the nation for the security of our country and its future, it is my responsibility to protect France and its people from a State threat against our vital interests, wherever it comes from and in whatever form. Every day, I take on this ultimate responsibility, which is at the core of the duties of President, with the strongest determination. It is carried out through nuclear deterrence.” This emphasis on responsibility point to the ethical questions that appear at the end of the speech (see below). One undoubtedly thinks about the distinction made by Max Weber¹⁰ between ethics of conviction and ethics of responsibility, even if there is no direct reference to it.
- Deterrence rests on the acknowledgment, by the potential attacker, of the risk to pay cost higher than the benefits expected from a given attack. The perspective of “absolutely unacceptable damages upon that State’s centers of power: its political, economic and military nerve centers” should lead him to give up his project. The logic is exactly the same as in the 2015 speech.
- However, as previous speeches have emphasized, it could be necessary to “re-establish deterrence.” This is the role of nuclear warnings that can be considered in case the opponent is mistaken on “France’s determination to protect its vital interests.”¹¹ E. Macron specifies that this warning would be a one-time-only, non-renewable warning, thus referring to a *de facto* rejection of the graduated response doctrine.¹²

The strategic speech remains concise and deliberately brief regarding capabilities. Instead, it focuses on doctrine credibility: regarding unacceptable damage targets, he says: “our nuclear forces have been configured to that purpose with the required flexibility and responsiveness.” He also reminds that the components are “complementary,” without further explanation. The 2015 statement had brought clear explanations on that topic. The President commits to a renewal of nuclear forces, while keeping a moderate tone and without going into the details of the plan. This has been done in the past: “I have taken and will continue to take the decisions necessary to maintain their long-term operational credibility

10. Max Weber, *Le Savant et le Politique* [*Politics as a Vocation*], 10/18, 1963, p. 206.

11. Previous speeches mentioned the possibility of a mistake by the attacker on the “delimitation of our vital interest.” This is not the case here.

12. This was clear in President François Mitterrand’s 1994 speech: “I thought, and still think, that if we were to go towards a succession of nuclear warnings, we would come back to the graduated response doctrine and would forget the point of deterrence: avoid war.”

at the level of strict sufficiency required by the international environment.” Besides, the notion of “strict sufficiency” appears twice. Finally, the President confirms the “permanent deterrence posture” and pays homage to the crews – as he already did, especially – but not only – during his visits to the troops. We should point out the emphasis on the “daily” use of deterrence.

THE ROLE HELD BY FRENCH DETERRENCE IN EUROPE

As previously mentioned, while the European aspect of deterrence is anything but new, it is certainly emphasized in this presidential statement, with a twofold proposition: “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.” Certainly, associations in exercises can encompass many types of collaborations, and need to be more specified. In any case, this idea is opened enough to allow Europeans to commit in any way they like, noting that most of them are also involved through NATO nuclear sharing arrangements. In 2008, Nicolas Sarkozy proposed 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” but had not really been answered.

This opening towards cooperation is not unprecedented, but it had not been stated in Hollande’s speech. Besides, the fact that “France’s vital interests now have a European dimension” is clearly stated. This had only been implied in 2008¹³ and brought up as a question in 2015.¹⁴ The invitation formulated in 2020, although more direct, is really in the continuation of previous speech. In 2001, Jacques Chirac already expressed that the evaluation of vital interest would “naturally take into account the increasing solidarity between countries in the European Union.” Shortly after the “concerted deterrence” proposition by his Prime Minister Alain Juppé¹⁵ in 1996, the President stated: “The European dimension also appears in our nuclear deterrence [...] This is not about unilaterally expanding our deterrence, or to impose a new deal to our neighbors. This is about drawing the consequences from a community with a common fate, of an increasing interweaving of our vital interests.”¹⁶

13. “About Europe, it is a fact, French nuclear forces, because of their sheer existence, are a key element to its security. An attacker that would be thinking of attacking Europe should be aware of this.”

14. “Who could think that an attack threatening Europe’s survival would have no consequence?”

15. See for example Bruno Tertrais, “La dissuasion partagée,” *Revue Défense nationale*, n. 819, April 2019.

16. Jacques Chirac, in his deterrence speech in front of the IHEDN, 8th of June 1996. This speech contrasts with the preceding statement on deterrence, in which F. Mitterrand, while claiming to be “a convinced European” expression skepticism about the possibility to give deterrence a European dimension: “Could French nuclear power guarantee the integrity, the security of the European countries we have united with? This is not the question currently.” He does not contemplate a middle ground solution between a strictly national and a global European security. The European aspect still remains a central thread in the French doctrine. This is reflected in the 1972 White Paper: “France lives within an interweaving of interests that go beyond its borders. It is not isolated. The entire Western Europe

Regarding France's participation to NATO deterrence, the speech is relatively short, and completely in line with previous statements, recalling that, while refraining from participating in the planning mechanisms, we are contributing on the "political reflection level" and are working to "reinforce the nuclear culture of the Alliance."

Finally, rather unsurprisingly given the importance of the Brexit-induced break and by the fact that France becomes the only nuclear country in the EU, the speech refers to the so-called Checkers statement (1995): "Since 1995, France and the United Kingdom, Europe's only nuclear powers, have clearly stated that they can imagine no circumstances under which a threat to the vital interests of one would not constitute a threat to the vital interests of the other. I want today to formally reiterate that assessment." This solidarity between French and British interest was mentioned in the 2008¹⁷ speech, and more indirectly in 2015.¹⁸ It was called for by the current context, with Brexit and the tenth anniversary of the Lancaster House treaties that include a nuclear aspect.

THE CONVENTIONAL/NUCLEAR ARTICULATION

As if often the case on a topic surrounded by secrecy, it is complicated to establish with certainty that a given development is really new. Indeed, any unprecedented statement can merely reflect a willingness to make a pre-existing principle/decision public. This is the case with the complementarity between conventional actions and nuclear strategy.

The need to remind that deterrence fits within "the wider defense and international security framework, which takes into account all threats, including those below the vital interest threshold" already featured in the *White Paper on Defense* from 2013.¹⁹ The Strategic review had taken on this idea, adding that deterrence was "directly linked to intervention and projection capabilities." However, the topic was not covered in presidential statements.

The treatment of this question sounds more like a clarification rather than an evolution of the doctrine. It resonates with a 2006 formula which established that "the principles underlying our deterrence doctrine have not changed. But its means of expressions have evolved, and are still evolving, to allow us to face 21st century challenges." Indeed, as previously mentioned, the international context has evolved in such a way that the escalation from conventional towards nuclear conflict appears like a credible scenario. This is clear in the way in the formulation of the sentence on nuclear warning, which could signal to the attacker that the "nature of the conflict has changed."²⁰

could not avoid benefiting, indirectly, from the French strategy, which is a stable and determining factor in European security."

17. 2008: "We have taken a major decision with the united Kingdom and have come to the conclusion that there is not situation in which a threat on one's vital interests would not also mean a threat for the other's interests."

18. 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."

19. [White Paper on Defense](#), 2013, p. 75.

20. *Strategic Review for Defence and Security*, para 238 and 243.

Thus, the 7th of February speech clearly lays out the articulation between conventional and nuclear, though without abandoning the idea of a threshold (as confirmed by the phrasing “change in nature”): “In this regard, our defense strategy is a coherent whole: conventional and nuclear forces constantly support each other there. Once our vital interests could be under threat, the conventional military maneuver can be part of exercising deterrence. The presence of strong conventional forces thus helps to prevent a strategic surprise, the quick creation of a *fait accompli* or to test the adversary’s determination as soon as possible by forcing it to reveal *de facto* its true intentions. With this strategy, our nuclear deterrence force remains, as a last resort, the key to our security and the guardian of our vital interests.” One understands that this is not about establishing a continuum between conventional and nuclear, or to consider the nuclear weapon as a way to restore the advantage on the field. Including conventional maneuvers in deterrence exercises seems aimed at pushing back the threshold for triggering this “ultimate recourse.” This is not about trying to invent some conventional deterrence, but rather to recognize that, in some circumstances, the link between defense and deterrence could concretely manifest itself. This evolution in speech could be a French response to the issue of escalation that was mentioned above.²¹

DISARMAMENT

At first glance, one could be surprised to find such a long development on disarmament in a statement of defense and deterrence strategy. However, this topic is a constant in French speeches since the end of the Cold War. On this topic as well, this speech is in line with previous ones. The review part of the speech, a compulsory step to be able to underline the French exemplarity in terms of efforts to scale down the components of nuclear forces, and in terms of transparency and international commitments,²² is only rather quickly covered.

Next, a more forward-looking part shows that, once again, France attempts to relaunch disarmament dynamics, while keeping its typical realism, marking its position in multilateral organizations dealing with nuclear issues: “Disarmament cannot be an objective in itself: it should first improve international security conditions.” This logic is the basis of France’s refusal to endorse the “prohibitionist approach” embodied in the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in 2017, which would want that “to get rid of fear, to get rid of war, all we should do is get rid of nuclear weapons!” Actually, promoters of the TPNW really have a political agenda, one aimed at stigmatizing nuclear states and delegitimizing nuclear weapons through carefully targeted campaigns. The speech reflects this idea without placing itself in a frontal opposition, while giving credit to “concerns that

21. The phrasing echoes the 1972 White Paper: “We should evaluate the determination of an opponent with adequate means, and force him to quickly unveil its profound intentions, and for this, force him to use means whose gathering would be revealing in itself.” This was the role of the “air-land battle troops.” In 2020, the context has changes and the means of implementation of this strategy are different.

22. “In this regard, it has unique results in the world, in conformity with its responsibilities and its interests, having irreversibly dismantled its land nuclear component, and reduced the size of its arsenal, now inferior to 300 nuclear weapon.”

have been voiced.” Rather, it questions the consequences of an initiative that targets “our European democracies” (“where it is easiest”) and which could lead to “disarming our democracies while other powers, or even dictatorships, would be maintaining or developing their nuclear weapons.” Besides, he emphasizes that exemplarity does not apply to disarmament. Thus, “or a nuclear-weapon State like France, unilateral nuclear disarmament would be akin to exposing ourselves as well as our partners to violence and blackmail, or depending on others to keep us safe [...] even if France, whose arsenal cannot be in any ways compared to that of the United States and Russia, were to give up its weapons, the other nuclear powers would not follow suit.” In the end, by reiterating the French position on TPNW, the President goes against the idea that prohibition would become a norm: “Similarly, France will not sign any treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons. The Treaty will not create any new obligations for France, either for the State or for public or private actors on its territory.”²³

Concretely, a disarmament agenda is put forward. Such support from the highest level of the state will allow to consolidate the French delegation’s position at the NPT 2020 review, for the 50th anniversary of its entry into force. The 2008 Presidential action plan²⁴ had done so too. Beyond short-term stakes, this is also about involving the “most concerned European partners on these issues to lay down the foundations for a joint international strategy that we could put forward in all the fora in which Europe is active.” A “simple” agenda for which France calls for support from “all States” is articulated around “four points, which we know”:

- The respect of the norm carried by the NPT and its primacy – this can only be understood in the context of the promotion of the TPNW by States and NGOs that are retreating behind a language purporting the complementarity of both treaties, despite the TPNW precisely risking to threaten the NPT. The mention of “the benefits of peaceful uses of nuclear energy” reminds that the NPT’s pillars are not only non-proliferation and disarmament, but also on civilian purposes of nuclear materials.
- The beginning of negotiations on a treaty prohibiting the production of fissile material for weapons purposes during the Conference on Disarmament was a goal already set out in the 1995 documents documents for the prorogation of the NPT as well as in several Presidential statements on deterrence. This point also involves “safeguarding and universalization of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.” We should note that the goal set out is not the treaty’s entry into force, but rather the more concrete preservation of the treaty, and extension of its members, and the consolidation of the norm it pushes forward and supports through a international monitoring system.
- “The continuation of work on nuclear disarmament verification, that we are leading with Germany.” France is part of the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament, an international initiative launched by the US in 2014. This initiative focuses on

23. With this statement, France continues to place itself as persistent objector of the formation of a norm favoring the prohibition of the nuclear weapon. France insists that the TPNW cannot act in favor of such a norm.

24. The disarmament plan launched in 2008 during the Cherbourg speech was then carried by the European Union during the NPT 2010 Review Conference.

nuclear weapon dismantling. Accordingly, in September 2019, France and Germany conceived and executed an exercise to test processes coming into play during such operation, with the participation of nuclear as well as non-nuclear states.

- “The launch of concrete work to reduce strategic risks because unbridled escalation of a local conflict into a major war is one of the most worrying scenarios today that a set of simple and common-sense measures could efficiently avert.” This topic echoes the paragraphs on doctrine and on conventional/ nuclear articulation. The topic is closely linked to verifications and discussions within the NPT review process, as well as the ongoing P5 discussions. In the speech, a paragraph is devoted to contacts between nuclear states, and there is an emphasis on stability reinforcement goals and “involuntary escalations in the event of a conflict.” One notices that quite a large number of elements in the speech answer to the risks linked to “nuclear multipolarity”²⁵ that had been identified in the Strategic Review.

This disarmament agenda is separate from the arms control processes that France refuses to be associated with, as long as the two big power’s arsenals are “without a possible comparison with those of other nuclear-weapon-States.” However, the President expresses his support for the prolongation of the New Start beyond 2021 because the crisis of arms control treaties (conventional as well as nuclear) “led to the possibility of a return of pure unhindered military and nuclear competition by 2021, which has not been seen since the end of the 1960s.” For that reason, France is encouraging Europe to “make its voice heard” in the negotiation of a new tool “that could ensure strategic stability on our continent” as a replacement for the defunct INF Treaty and to “propose together and international arms control agenda.”

ETHICAL DEBATE ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS²⁶ AND THE FUTURE OF THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER

The last part of this speech invites to “discuss the meaning of deterrence strategy in today’s world” which lends itself, beyond a mere analysis of the international context, to an ethical reflection. The mention of this topic is unexpected, but not completely surprising: it has been getting renewed interest in France, for a few years already, undoubtedly in part because of the acknowledgment of the deterioration of the strategic context. Thus, research has been carried on this theme, including in academia.²⁷

The juxtaposition of the paragraphs on TPNW and ethical issues can be explained by the fact that promoters of the TPNW want people to believe that ethics dictate adherence

25. The Strategic Review (para 112) already mentioned “opaque positions, breaking with classic deterrence codes (whether it is public doctrine or declaratory prudence) either on aggressive nuclear positions with a blackmail aspect.”

26. On this topic, see Nicolas Roche, “Les questions morales et philosophiques soulevées par la dissuasion nucléaire,” *Académie des sciences morales et politiques*, 28 January 2018; Nicolas Roche, Hubert Tardy-Joubert, “Peut-on réconcilier morale et dissuasion nucléaire ?,” *Commentaire*, n. 168, Winter 2019.

27. <http://www.geographie.ens.fr/ethique-et-armes-nucleaires.html?lang=fr>.

to the treaty. Thus, in that area, the narrative can be divided in three positions: defensive (why would France not join the TPNW), descriptive (what ethical reasoning is the basis for our deterrence), and prescriptive (what orientations should be followed by nuclear states for the world to evolve in a desirable way).

The President relatively neutrally mentions the stance of the Catholic Church on the issue, reminded during Pope Francis' 2019 trip to Hiroshima and Nagasaki.²⁸ He does not comment or detail this position, simply recognizes its place in the ethical debate. Disagreements are clear, since the Pope firmly supports abolition, endorses the TPNW, deems deterrence a "false security," insists on the catastrophic impact of its use, and emphasizes that nuclear doctrines reinforce "a climate of fear, distrust and hostility." However, the Presidential comments setting out the goal "to set up a different international order, with effective global governance which can set up and enforce law" and admitting that "this rationality of deterrence is not enough to ensure peace, in the fullest sense of the term, that is to say a situation in which violence is not simply inhibited but rather in which there is true cooperation and harmony between all parties" resonate with the calls from Pope Francis to build "a world of justice and solidarity that brings real guarantees for peace."

France rejects the abolitionist position without avoiding the ethical debate and linking its own stance with the needs arising from our political regime: "democracies must examine the purposes of their nuclear deterrence policy, which raises moral dilemmas and paradoxes." In regard to this, the President emphasizes the notion of responsibility, and of his own responsibility in the context of humanity that acquires "the means to destroy itself" and in relation to other nuclear-state leaders. He draws the outline of a nuclear order that could be safer by calling on "the leaders of the other nuclear powers to show the same transparency in their doctrine of deterrence and to stop any attempts to exploit this strategy for the purposes of coercion or intimidation."

CONCLUSION

The speech on February 7th, 2020 answers a democratic requirement linked to the responsibility conferred by the possession of nuclear weapons. This responsibility is placed within a more global perspective, both strategic and philosophical. This exercise gains a political and diplomatic aspect, particularly given major international deadlines such as the tenth NPT Review Conference, which will take place next spring. However, the speech is also part of a longer tradition of the restoration of global strategic equilibrium and of stability. Indeed, in front of the Ecole de Guerre interns who will rise "to the highest grades in our armed forces" the President had developed an analysis of the international context in contrast with the "times of peace dividends," with the challenge of "strategic, political, economic, technological, energetic and military equilibriums," threats that have "increased

28. The speech is available on the Vatican Website. For an analysis, see: Antoine de Romanet, "L'Église catholique et la dissuasion nucléaire en 2019," *Commentaire*, n. 168, Winter 2019. About the Catholic Church's position, see also Tiphaine de Champchesnel, "Le soutien du Saint-Siège à l'interdiction des armes nucléaires," *Observatoire international du fait religieux*, CERI, February 2018.

and diversified themselves,” whose effects have “accelerated, have come closer to us, even sometimes directly hitting us.” Against this bleak picture, the speech on defense strategy and deterrence explains which responsibilities France wants to endorse, by articulating concrete paths to meet certain principles. The perspective of “a different international order, with effective global governance which can set up and enforce law” is not painted as an utopia but rather as a “goal” and a “political and strategic path.” The commitments and prescriptions in the speech are meant to be the first steps that France cannot take without its partners.

(Translation by Barbara Wojazer)

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