



SPEECH BY NICOLAS SARKOZY,  
PRESIDENT OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC

PRESENTATION OF *LE TERRIBLE* IN CHERBOURG

FRIDAY, MARCH 21, 2008

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mr. President, thank you for your remarkable work,

Mr. Minister, dear Hervé Morin,

Mr. Minister, dear Jean-Marie Bockel,

Members of Parliament,

Mr. Mayor,

General, or rather Generals, as there must be several here,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very proud to be here with you in Cherbourg to salute all those who built *Le Terrible*, the fourth and latest addition to our strategic fleet. Right here, in 1967, General de Gaulle came to pay tribute to those who had built *Le Redoutable*. Like your predecessors, you may take pride in this submarine—a symbol of France's high technology and resolve to remain master of its destiny. Very few countries in the world have the ability to realize such an industrial and technological achievement. It took decades of effort to master such know-how, which some of our partners have neglected and thus have difficulty replicating. I want to tell you today how proud France is of you. I have come here on behalf of France to pay tribute to your work and your great accomplishments.

Our nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines are an essential part of our nuclear deterrent capability. We owe it to our country's workers, technicians, engineers, men and women in uniform, and scientists—military and civilian. I



have come to tell you that maintaining, at the highest level, the capabilities required for deterrence is an objective that is fundamental to our security.

I wish to pay tribute to the memory of the 11 French citizens—your colleagues, friends, husbands and fathers—who died in the Karachi attack on May 8, 2002. I know that their loved ones are here with us today. I told them that I, along with the Defense Minister, would meet with them within the next two weeks at the Elysée to review the progress of the investigation. I want to convey my deepest sympathies to them. The nation has not forgotten them and will never forget them.

I know how much dedication and courage are shown by all those who confront danger in order to guarantee our security and peace, in Europe and throughout the world. I want to express to them, on behalf of all the French, my gratitude and my support. France is proud of its soldiers and they have France's trust.

The national tribute we paid last Monday to the soldiers of World War I reminded us, as if it were necessary, that in the past, Europe was a battlefield—to put it bluntly, a field of ruins. Most of the major conflicts were fought between European states. Thanks to the construction of Europe and the Atlantic Alliance, we have built a Europe of peace. Never in history has our national security been so intimately tied to that of our allies and our European partners. Our common destiny lies with the European Union and beyond that, with all nations that share our values: peace, freedom, fraternity, the defense of the equal and irreducible dignity of human beings regardless of color, creed and origin.

But peace can never be taken for granted. Mass terrorism has shown us this. Today we are facing the assertiveness of new powers, new ambitions, new threats and thus new rivalries. Add to that the risks stemming from the competition for access to raw materials and energy, the diversion of technologies for aggressive purposes, and climate change. In this interdependent world, our interests have no borders, even if they have a geographical location.

The world has changed since the 1994 White Paper, which drew the conclusions from the end of the Cold War and the first Gulf War. It is different, more unstable, more changing, more complex. Our vulnerabilities have therefore changed as well, and our strategy must consequently be reassessed. For I do not want—indeed, it is not my right—for France to prepare for the previous war, as it has done all too often in the past, or to find itself unarmed in the face of a strategic surprise.



It is my responsibility to guarantee that our armed forces are always in a position to stand up to the threats against our nation. I want to forge the defense policy that France needs, not a policy based on old habits or previous certitudes. That is why I requested the preparation of a new “White Paper on Defense and National Security,” and not only on defense. Because from now on, the security of the French is likely to be at stake far from our borders as much as within our territory.

For the same reason, I want us to be able to confront all the problems facing us. I owe our armies transparency and truth. I owe transparency and truth to the entire French people.

The truth is as follows: Upon my arrival in office, I found that the financial outlook was more than difficult. To achieve the “Armed Forces-Model 2015,” we would have had—according to the Defense Ministry’s financial forecasts—to raise our defense procurement budget by 6 billion euros per year, an increase of 40%. Who can tell me such an objective would be credible?

These financial forecasts represent a financial Wall, incompatible with the commitment I undertook to the French and to our European partners to reform the nation’s finances, which for the past 25 years have registered a deficit.

I have no intention to pursue the methods of the past that put me in this situation, because we would all lose out: the nation, which is legitimately concerned for the adequate provision of its defense and security needs; the Head of State, the government and Parliament, which are facing the need for painful readjustments; and, first and foremost, the armed forces, which have repeatedly had to deal with delays in major weapons programs and their side effects: aging equipment and skyrocketing maintenance costs. I refuse to give way before a *fait accompli* and resign myself to having no room to maneuver. The duty of any administration, civilian or military, is to do everything it can to preserve the President’s room to maneuver and the government’s freedom to act. The duty of any political official is to create maneuvering room in order to fully exercise his decision-making ability.

I have chosen to build the future with a few simple guideposts: our strategy, our ambitions, our alliances, the European objective. And a principle that is simple as well: I absolutely reject the idea of lowering our guard. The defense budget is the State’s second-largest budget. It will remain so. It will not be reduced. I already made that commitment and I solemnly renew that commitment. But I will offer choices, avoided for too long, to reconcile the French people’s protection, the country’s independence and its financial sovereignty.



I will not rely on 15-year-old assessments to guide the country's military effort. I have requested a White Paper for the beginning of the 21st century that is to propose a global concept of defense and national security for our country and its interests for the 15 years to come. Taking into account the major missions of our armed forces, the White Paper must also formulate clear guidelines that will allow us and the Defense Minister to make strategic and political choices.

The White Paper Commission has acknowledged that the "Armed Forces-Model 2015" was obsolete. Everybody knows it was unrealistic, and yet no one told the French. Well, I am telling them. I refuse to accept this framework as a starting point, just to decide what we would have to give up. It is vain to pursue without end models that cannot be realized. How pointless it is to claim to be building a pertinent model while contenting ourselves with the deterioration of obsolete models. In fact, can there even be a permanent armed forces model for the defense of our country? When threats change, when our strategy evolves, isn't it normal for our military effort to renew itself as well?

To ensure the French people's protection, their defense structures must be as operational and efficient as possible. I will draw all conclusions with the maximum degree of realism.

We will carry out these reforms. The French people have given me this mandate. But this exemplary process of reform and rationalization, already engaged by Hervé Morin, will be done entirely for the benefit of our defense structures and those who serve them.

I have decided to launch these deliberations so that we will be able to prepare this process constructively and without taboos.

The White Paper Commission, chaired by Jean-Claude Mallet, brings together eminent figures from a wide variety of fields. Parliament has been closely associated with it from the outset and will be at each stage of deliberations. The committees of the Senate and the National Assembly will be consulted on the draft of the White Paper. The White Paper will be presented by the Prime Minister to our Parliament. I would have liked to do this myself, as Head of the Armed Forces, but for now, the constitution prohibits me from doing so. The next time the Constitution is amended, I would like to correct what has become an anomaly and more generally, to strengthen the prerogatives of the Parliament, especially those that deal with our national defense effort. This must be debated as much as is necessary. Parliament will be able to rule on the choices I will



make, with the Prime Minister and the Ministers, because at the end of the process, a future military planning law will be submitted to it.

I will make my decisions when the time comes and I will explain them to the nation. You may rest assured that I will assume all of my responsibilities, for what is most worrisome is not the prospect of choices; it is the lack of decisions. Choices will be made so that our defense policy will be the most useful, efficient, and relevant, serving the great ambitions for France and Europe.

My first duty as Head of State and Head of the Armed Forces is to ensure that France, its territory, its people and its republican institutions are secure in all circumstances. And that in all circumstances, our national independence and decision-making autonomy are preserved.

Nuclear deterrence is the ultimate guarantee of that. It is the weighty responsibility of the President of the Republic to take the measure of this reality. Today I would like to share my thoughts with you.

Of course, during the 15-year period covered by the White Paper, France no longer runs the risk of an invasion. There are, however, other threats to our security. Certain nuclear stockpiles keep on growing. Nuclear, biological and chemical proliferation continue, along with the proliferation of ballistic and cruise missiles.

Today we must all be mindful of the fact that the nuclear missiles of even distant powers can reach Europe in less than half an hour. Currently only the great powers have such means. But other countries, in Asia and the Middle East, are vigorously developing ballistic capabilities.

I am thinking in particular of Iran. Iran is increasing the range of its missiles, while grave suspicions surround its nuclear program. It is indeed Europe's security that is at stake.

In the face of proliferation, the international community must remain united and resolute. Because we want peace, we must show no weakness to those who violate international norms. But all those who respect them are entitled to fair access to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

But we must also be prepared to confront other risks beside proliferation. The imagination of our potential aggressors is boundless when it comes to exploiting the vulnerabilities of Western societies. And tomorrow, technological breakthroughs may create new threats.



That is why we are so attached to our nuclear deterrent. It is strictly defensive. The use of nuclear weapons would clearly be conceivable only in extreme circumstances of legitimate defense, a right enshrined in the UN Charter.

Our nuclear deterrence protects us from any aggression against our vital interests emanating from a state—wherever it may come from and whatever form it may take. 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. My responsibility, as Head of State, is to assess their limit at all times, for in a changing world, they cannot remain static.

All those who would threaten our vital interests would expose themselves to severe retaliation by France resulting in damages unacceptable to them, out of proportion with their objectives. Their centers of political, economic and military power would be targeted on a priority basis.

It cannot be ruled out that an adversary might miscalculate the delimitation of our vital interests or our determination to safeguard them. In the framework of nuclear deterrence, it would be possible, in that event, to send a nuclear warning that would underscore our resolve. That would be aimed at reestablishing deterrence.

In order for deterrence to be credible, the Head of State must have a wide range of options to face threats. Our nuclear forces have been, and will continue to be, adapted in consequence. The M51 intercontinental missile, which *Le Terrible* will carry as soon as it is commissioned in 2010, and the ASMPA missile, which Rafale will carry starting this year, fit with our risk assessment during the period covered by the White Paper.

I am also strongly convinced that it is essential to maintain two nuclear components, one sea-based and the other air-based. Indeed, their respective characteristics, notably in terms of range and precision, make them complementary. The Head of State must be able to count on them at all times in order to respond to any surprise.

In order to preserve our freedom of action, missile defense capabilities against a limited strike could be a useful complement to nuclear deterrence, without being a substitute for it. Let us not lose sight of the fact that missile defense will never be efficient enough to protect our vital interests. On this issue, France has chosen a pragmatic approach. It is in this spirit that we are taking part in the collective work of the Atlantic Alliance—dear Hervé Morin. We have solid



technical know-how in this area that could be taken advantage of when the time comes.

Guaranteeing national security is expensive. Each year, their nuclear deterrent costs the French half the budget for justice or transportation. This cost must of course be controlled as much as possible, in the financial context I just mentioned. But I am determined to assume it. It is neither a matter of prestige nor a question of rank, it is quite simply the nation's life insurance policy.

Our deterrence also takes into account changes in the world, in our alliances and in European construction.

Together with the United Kingdom, we have taken a major decision: It is our assessment that there can be no situation in which the vital interests of either of our two nations could be threatened without the vital interests of the other also being threatened.

As for the Atlantic Alliance, its security is also based on nuclear deterrence. British and French nuclear forces contribute to it. This has been part of NATO's Strategic Concept since 1974 and it remains relevant today. I say to our allies: France is and will remain true to its commitments under Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty.

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.

Our commitment to the security of our European partners is the natural expression of our ever-closer union. The Lisbon Treaty marks a historic step forward in this regard.

I would now like to address disarmament. It is a subject I would like to discuss with realism and clear-sightedness. When international security improves, France draws the consequences. It did so with the end of the Cold War.

Rather than making speeches and promises that are not translated into deeds, France acts. We respect our international commitments, and notably the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. France has an exemplary record, unique in the world,



with respect to nuclear disarmament. France was the first State, with the United Kingdom, to sign and ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty; the first State to decide to shut down and dismantle its facilities for the production of fissile materials for explosive purposes; the only State to have transparently dismantled its nuclear testing facility in the Pacific; the only State to have dismantled its ground-launched nuclear missiles; the only State to have voluntarily reduced the number of its nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines by a third.

France has never engaged in the arms race. France never manufactured all the types of weapons that it was technologically capable of designing. France applies a principle of strict sufficiency: It maintains its arsenal at the lowest possible level compatible with the strategic context. I am dedicated to this principle. As soon as I assumed my duties, I asked for this strict sufficiency to be reassessed.

This has led me to decide on a new measure of disarmament. With respect to the airborne component, the number of nuclear weapons, missiles and aircraft will be reduced by one-third.

I have also decided that France could and should be more transparent with respect to its nuclear arsenal than anyone ever has been.

After this reduction, I can tell you that our arsenal will include fewer than 300 nuclear warheads. That is half of the maximum number of warheads we had during the Cold War.

In giving this information, France is completely transparent because it has no other weapons beside those in its operational stockpile.

Furthermore, I can confirm that none of our weapons are targeted against anyone.

Finally, I have decided to invite international experts to observe the dismantlement of our Pierrelatte and Marcoule military fissile material production facilities.

But let us not be naïve; the very basis of collective security and disarmament is reciprocity.

Today, eight nations in the world have declared they have conducted nuclear tests. I am proposing to the international community an action plan to which I call on the nuclear powers to resolutely commit by the 2010 NPT Conference.





Thus I invite all countries to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, beginning with China and the United States, who signed it in 1996. It is time for it to be ratified.

I urge the nuclear powers to dismantle all their nuclear testing sites in a manner that is transparent and open to the international community;

I call for the immediate launching of negotiations on a treaty to ban the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons purposes, and to establish without delay a moratorium on the production of such materials;

I invite the five nuclear weapon States recognized by the NPT to agree on transparency measures;

I propose opening negotiations on a treaty banning short- and intermediate-range surface-to-surface missiles;

I ask all nations to accede to and implement the Hague Code of Conduct Against Ballistic Missile Proliferation, as France has done.

At the same time, the entire international community must mobilize in all other fields of disarmament. Here too, France will make its contribution.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have come to address a simple message to the Nation: Its security will be assured against the threats in the world, and France will play its full role to defend peace and its values. France's ambition must be worthy of its history.

This requires being clear-minded about strategic realities and choices.

It requires having the courage to take the necessary decisions. You can count on me to do so.

Above all, it requires being clear and firm on the essentials. And the essential is safeguarding the vital interests of France.

Here in Cherbourg, I guarantee you: France will not lower its guard.

Thank you.