



BASIC Getting to Zero Papers, No. 3

Analysis of the French White Paper on Defence and National Security

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Introduction

On June 17, French President Nicolas Sarkozy unveiled the French White Paper on Defence and National Security. The White Paper is the product of nearly a year of deliberation by a special commission created by the president to analyze France's national security strategy. The first such document since France's 1994 post-Cold War military restructuring, the paper follows Sarkozy's March 21 address in Cherbourg and remarks to the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament on March 27. The White Paper outlines a new framework for French security in the twenty-first century. Included in this framework are discussions of transatlantic security, further French military integration into the EU and NATO, and a host of policy prescriptions designed to aid France in adapting to the changing global security environment. This document will focus on the aspects of the White Paper which pertain to BASIC's *Getting to Zero* project.

Summary

- Reaffirmation of the role of nuclear deterrence in French security policy
- Modernization of Strategic Oceanic Forces and Strategic Air Forces
- Continued independence of French strategic nuclear forces
- France's action plan for nuclear disarmament

Continued importance of nuclear deterrence

One of the key findings at the beginning of the document is that "[n]uclear deterrence remains an essential concept of national security." To provide support for this statement, the White Paper points to transnational terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the development of new weapons systems, and the potential weaponization of space as threats to French security. The paper paints a grim picture of the international system, noting that these threats increase the risk that the international norm against using nuclear weapons will be broken. As a result, the commission contends that the maintenance of long-range ballistic missiles (LRBMs) must continue to be an integral component of French strategic doctrine.

Despite the commission's endorsement of a strong nuclear deterrent, the White Paper makes some interesting recommendations regarding the current state of France's arsenal. The country's nuclear policy is to "remain one of strict sufficiency." This complements Sarkozy's May 21 announcement of reductions in France's operational warheads. The president noted that these cuts will decrease the size of France's arsenal to less than 300 warheads. Though the exact number of French warheads is not made public, the Federation of American Scientists observes that - prior to the cuts - the country's armed forces possessed around 348 operational warheads. The Strategic Air Forces (FAS) account for 60 of these, while the Strategic Oceanic Forces (FOST) comprise the other 288. In 1996, President Jacques Chirac ordered the destruction of the country's land-based ballistic missiles.

Modernization of strategic nuclear forces (SNF)

Though the White Paper is very explicit in noting France's intention to continue observing a policy of strategic sufficiency, it also announces plans for nuclear modernization. The document explains that a credible deterrent depends upon the president's ability to choose between a variety of effective nuclear options, thus necessitating the modernization of France's SNFs.

The commission's report also highlights the importance of nuclear attack submarines equipped with cruise missiles, noting that their furtiveness and ease of mobility makes them effective in both escort and intelligence-gathering capacities. The paper sets forth a goal of the production of six of these submarines. This is a reference to the planned replacement of the *Rubis* class nuclear attack submarines (SNAs) with the next-generation *Barracuda* class SNAs.

Additionally, the White Paper codifies the replacement of the M45 submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) on France's ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) with the new M51 missile by 2010. This process began with Sarkozy's March 21 inauguration of *Le Terrible*, a new *Triomphant* class SSBN equipped with the M51 SLBM.

Though the document announces the reduction of France's "nuclear-capable land-based aircraft" from 60 to 40, it also provides details of a program of modernization for the Strategic Air Forces. Beginning in 2009, land and carrier-based Mirage-2000 NK3 and Rafale F3 aircraft will be armed with the new ASMP-A cruise missile.

Other key elements on the nuclear weapons modernization agenda include the preservation of the simulation program, improvements to the country's nuclear support environment - particularly in the communications realm, and a plan to increase the range and accuracy of all French nuclear missiles by 2025.

Strategic autonomy

The White Paper lays out a framework for French reintegration into NATO's command structure, which might lead to debate over France's strategic autonomy. Further, the commission advocates the strengthening of the European defense industry, noting that the EU provides a vehicle for beneficial joint procurement projects and technological resource-sharing.

The paper also expresses the interest of the French government in pursuing a European detection and early warning system, including long-range radar and geostationary satellites.

In spite of all the NATO and EU integrationist rhetoric in the document, the White Paper is very specific in emphasizing the independent status of France's nuclear deterrent. All technological developments relating to nuclear weapons will remain projects at the national level and the president will continue to maintain command over the decision to use nuclear weapons.

France's action plan for nuclear disarmament

One of the opening sections of the White Paper states that France is committed to preventing the proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons and will continue to pursue nuclear disarmament. The paper introduces France's action plan for nuclear disarmament which draws upon Sarkozy's March 27 remarks to the Conference on Disarmament. Included in the plan are the universal ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), safe and transparent dismantlement of nuclear testing sites, the beginning of negotiations to create a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT), and the cessation of fissile materials production. The plan also calls for the implementation of transparency measures among the five nuclear weapons states recognized by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the opening of international negotiations to ban land-based short and intermediate-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs and IRBMs), and the implementation and adherence of all states to the Hague Code of Conduct (HCOC) against ballistic missile proliferation.

Conclusions

The French White Paper on Defence and National Security offers some good first steps to realizing the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. France's unilateral arsenal reductions and action plan for nuclear disarmament set an example for other nuclear weapons states to follow. However, the White Paper also calls for significant modernization projects aimed at improving the destructive capabilities of France's strategic nuclear forces. These projects, combined with the rhetoric of the document, emphasize the continued status of nuclear deterrence as a hallmark of French security policy. If the French government truly desires to demonstrate its expressed commitment to global disarmament, it should pursue further cuts to its arsenal while resisting the urge to develop new nuclear weapons delivery systems and warheads.