



STRATEGIC VISION

OF THE CHIEF OF DEFENSE STAFF



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At the core of the national defence and security system for our citizens, our territory and our institutions, the armed forces contribute to France's strategy as a balancing power.

I want them to be permanently ready to face a major conflict, acting in all environments and fields of confrontation to "win the war before the war" from the stage of competition, a normal state of the world based on an international order governed by law. They will respect the values and ethics that drive them, they are committed to serving the French people and performing well in their operations. They are ready to engage resolutely in a situation of international dispute and, if necessary, in a confrontation by imposing favourable strength ratios in the various environments and fields of confrontation, either by aggregating or integrating into interagency mechanisms or coalition operations.



Win the war
before the war



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1 ARMED FORCES SERVING FRANCE'S AMBITION

■ OVER THE LAST DECADE, THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT HAS DETERIORATED CONSIDERABLY

It is marked by the hardening of competition between major powers and questions multilateralism and international law – the fact that some regional powers are becoming uninhibited and are rearming– the multiplication of centres of crises – and its corollary, the increase of the migration flows – and the expansion of the terrorist threat. Faced with this fundamental trend, the utmost agility is constantly required: embracing the changes against which action is limited and seizing all opportunities to defend the strategic interests of both France and Europe.

■ FRANCE ACCEPTS ITS STATUS AS A BALANCING POWER IN A DURABLY TORMENTED INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Present on all continents, a nuclear power, a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and a founding member of both the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the European Union, it remains attached to a world order based on the law and the respect for human dignity. Albeit shaken, this order shall remain the reference for our actions.

■ FRANCE'S FOREIGN POLICY RELIES ON ALLIANCES AND PARTNERSHIPS WITH COUNTRIES SHARING ITS VALUES, ITS STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND ITS VISION OF THE WORLD

Being pragmatic, it relies on the best-suited co-operation frameworks. France supports the ambition of a European strategic autonomy enabling the Europeans, together with their allies, to take their security more into their own hands, to weigh in the new global balances and to implement a power policy, which reflects our values.



■ NUCLEAR FORCES AND CONVENTIONAL FORCES ARE CONSTANTLY WORKING TOGETHER TO DEFEND OUR SOVEREIGN INTERESTS AROUND THE WORLD. THE ARMED FORCES ALSO RELY ON OVERSEAS FORCES AND THOSE PRE-POSITIONED IN PARTNER COUNTRIES

The military force is one of the key elements of France's international power and influence policy.

As such we need to have a more strategic approach to the evolutions of conflicts. Recent military interventions have shown that we need to constantly rethink their role and their nature. It is especially true for crisis management, where we need to pay very close attention to the scale, the duration and the chosen objectives, in order to preserve our freedom of action at a time when our competitors play an increasingly disruptive role.



2 RENEWAL OF THE POWER PLAY, PERSISTENCE OF THE RISKS OF BEING WEAK

■ FOR THE ARMED FORCES, THE “PEACE – CRISIS – WAR” CONTINUUM, WHICH HELPED EXPLAIN THE WORLD ORDER SINCE THE END OF THE COLD WAR, IS NO LONGER RELEVANT ENOUGH TO UNDERSTAND ALL THE COMPLEXITY OF CONFLICTUALITY

We need now to consider and prepare our military strategy with three notions in mind: competition, dispute and confrontation.

These **three notions** of **competition, dispute and confrontation** are tightly linked. Two stakeholders might thus find themselves simultaneously competing in a domain and disputing in another. They can also be in dispute in a given geographic area only and compete against each other everywhere else in the world.

The competition – dispute – confrontation triptych

■ COMPETITION BETWEEN NATIONS IS THE NORMAL WAY TO EXPRESS POWER

It de facto corresponds to a form of “war before the war” and takes place in all domains: diplomatic, informational, military, economic, legal, technological, industrial and cultural. In the common areas, which are poorly regulated and controlled by nature, and easy prey for aggressive positioning, this competition finds itself exacerbated. Against increasingly disinhibited competitors, when the law is not an efficient option, one needs to be able to impose a favourable force ratio.

■ IN A COMPETITIVE CONTEXT, FRANCE CAN RELY ON ITS ARMED FORCES TO SHOW ITS DETERMINATION, IN THE FRAMEWORK OF A COHERENT GLOBAL STRATEGY

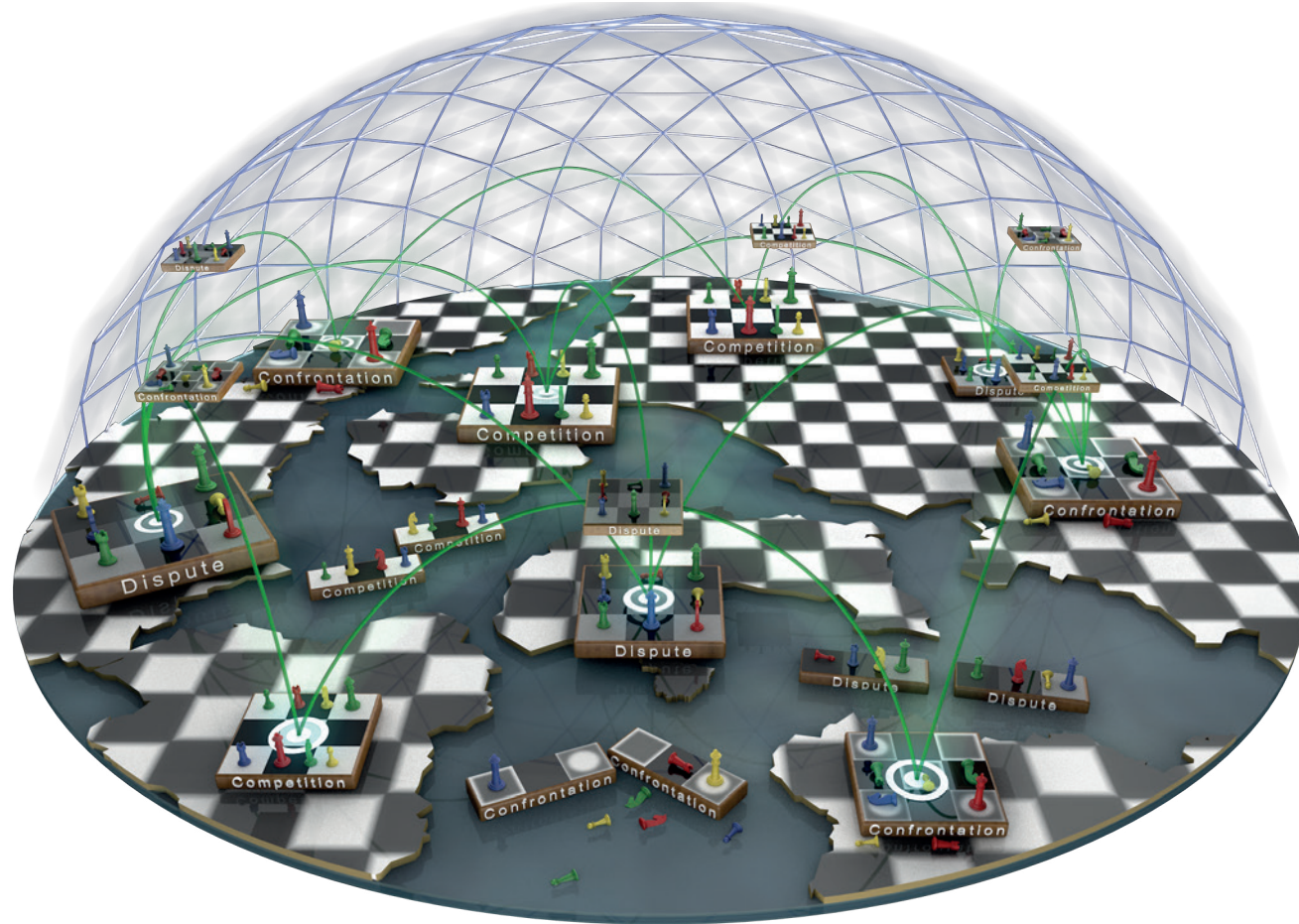
The goal is to win the war before the war, acting as much as needed in all or some of the domains and environments. Assuming this role requires, from the part of the armed forces, to help understand the capabilities and intents of the various competitors and to constantly propose relevant military options to the political decision-makers. All our actions give meaning to our determination: interactions with some of our competitors and with our opponents (operational deployments, air policing, submarine detection...) and operational training activities, both in a national framework and with our allies and partners.

■ WHEN A STAKEHOLDER DECIDES TO TRESPASS THE COMMONLY ACCEPTED RULES, COMPETITION TURNS INTO DISPUTE

It is war “just before” the war. In this type of balance of power, the armed forces must help lift uncertainty and prevent the imposition of a *fait accompli*. To do that, they rely on a high level of reactivity and on well-adapted capabilities. Alongside the other strategic power instruments, they must also be capable of understanding the intent of the various stakeholders, to ascertain the national objectives, to discourage the opponent and to impose a return to the abidance of international law while remaining in control of the level of violence.



The **confrontation** happens when a stakeholder, deciding to push his advantage forward, and persistently using the force to reach his objectives, provokes an equal reaction. It can take place in one or more areas of conflict, depending on the capabilities of the various parties. The prime objective of the confrontation is to force the opponent to accept our demands, especially by undermining its will and its ability to respond. The armed forces need to be able to detect the low early warning of confrontation enabling to anticipate the turn towards confrontation.



We need now to consider and prepare our military strategy with three notions in mind: competition, dispute and confrontation



The expansion of confrontation

■ NATIONAL POWER STRATEGIES ARE PRESENT IN A GROWING NUMBER OF DOMAINS AND ENVIRONMENTS

They cover an ever-larger area, as human activities expand towards new domains, thus multiplying the confrontation areas. Conflictuality has for a long time been focused on the ground, maritime then air environments, but it is now present in the exo-atmospheric and cyber ones, the deep-sea areas as well as the electromagnetic and information fields.

■ THIS MULTIPLICATION OF THE CONFRONTATION DOMAINS FAVOURS HYBRID AND FLEXIBLE STRATEGIES

These strategies associate military and non-military, direct and indirect, regular or irregular courses of action, the responsibility of which is often difficult to pinpoint, and always designed to remain under the assumed threshold of retaliation or open conflict. They can, among others, try to internally weaken the targeted country by attacking its national cohesion.

As our competitors, our opponents and our enemies readily use hybrid strategies, we need to be able to counter them. But beyond that, we need to master these strategies while abiding by the founding principles of our actions.

These developments have two major consequences. The first is the obligation to strengthen our global strategies and our capacity to assess the defence and security situation - to better understand the intentions of the various actors and to define and implement a power strategy, at national level and in concert with our allies and partners. The second one is the **broadening of the spectrum of our capability requirements.**

■ THE NOTION OF THRESHOLD IS AT THE HEART OF THE DIALECTIC OF COMPETITION, DISPUTE AND CONFRONTATION:

threshold of acceptability, threshold of antagonism and threshold for the triggering of a retaliation, be it military or otherwise. The definition of the various thresholds can involve strategic communication or be kept secret; it can vary from one situation to the next. The main stake of this dynamic is to ensure the preservation of the national strategic interests while keeping the escalation under control, up to confrontation if necessary.



3 MY AMBITION FOR THE FRENCH ARMED FORCES

■ TO WIN THE WAR BEFORE THE WAR, WHILE BEING ABLE TO GET ENGAGED IN A HIGH-INTENSITY CONFLICT,

I WANT ARMED FORCES WHICH:

- ▶ participate in France's exercise of responsibilities and in its ambition to be a balancing power, through alliances, partnerships and co-operations, able to integrate or lead coalition operations or interdepartmental crisis set ups;
- ▶ are organised to face strategic surprise, resilient beyond the mere permanent nuclear deterrence, security and protection postures, constantly able to be deployed to respond to any situation threatening France and its interests, in a high-intensity conflict if necessary;
- ▶ actively participate in the national power strategy as of the competition phase, where the interests of the various stakeholders already confront each other, especially through indirect or hybrid strategies;
- ▶ propose to the President of the Republic a very wide range of military options, associating controlled effects in all confrontation environments and domains, paying specific attention to actions in the exo-atmospheric and cyber domains as well as in the information environment, in order to bend our opponent's determination by imposing favourable force ratios.

TO DO THAT, ALONG THE LINE OF THE WORKS DONE SINCE 2017, DESIGNING OUR MANOEUVRE OVER AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME AND IN THE DEPTH WHILE CONSTANTLY FOSTERING AUDACITY AND RISK-TAKING...



■ THE COMPLEXITY AND RAPID EVOLUTION OF THE WORLD CONSTANTLY REQUIRE MORE AGILITY

and force us to regularly review the relevance of our processes and organisations. From head-quarters down to the terrain, we must promote a spirit enabling us to win the battle of ideas, to anticipate more, to be even more reactive and to impose the tempo of initiative. Enthusiasm, high-quality demonstrations and conviction strength should also enable us to win the support of our interlocutors.

■ THIS INTELLECTUAL AGILITY SHOULD FIRST FUEL THE ENTIRE CHAIN OF COMMAND

which structures and animates the armed forces in all domains: operations, support, operational training, capability development, ...

■ THE DEFENCE STAFF HAS A STRATEGIC ROLE TO PLAY AND DISSEMINATES A MARKED CULTURE OF DELEGATION AND A WELL-ACCEPTED CULTURE OF RESPONSIBILITY

It shall support the stakes of enhancing the efficiency of the organisations as well as simplifying the process and retaining the personnel. In that respect, it is important to bridge the gap between the private and professional digital environments, the digital dimension remaining comparatively absent in our jobs and in our everyday support system. In doing so, it will also be necessary to take the new vulnerabilities created by digitisation into account at all levels.

■ THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE ARMED FORCES IS A MAJOR CATALYST FOR THE RESTRUCTURING OF THE WORKING PROCEDURES

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■ THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION SHOULD BE DESIGNED AND IMPLEMENTED IN A DETERMINED AND CO-ORDINATED WAY IN ALL ORGANISATIONS

It should enable to develop a digital combat environment, processing all the existing data to support operational command and the knowledge – anticipation function. It also offers numerous future opportunities for day-to-day support, human resources management or quality of life.

Innovation must enable us to maintain our conceptual, organisational and technological superiority. To achieve this, it is necessary to mobilise all the actors of defence innovation to serve the purpose of the armed forces, the operational commitment.

■ EXPERIMENTATIONS OR REALISTIC WAR-GAME-TYPE SIMULATIONS PROVIDE MANY OPPORTUNITIES

especially to: prepare our operational deployments, conduct individual and collective training, assess our capability requirements, test concepts and organisations, ensure the overall resilience, and to facilitate innovation.

Fuelled by this culture of audacity and risk-taking, our efforts must be organised around three main axes:



AXIS #1

REINFORCING AND SUPPORTING THE ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY, ITS RESILIENCE, ITS COMPETENCES AND ITS RICHNESS

■ THROUGH THEIR DETERMINATION AND THEIR SKILLS, THE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE ARMED FORCES ARE ITS MAIN BLESSING

Military and civilian personnel, both in the active-duty and reserve components, as well as their families, make up the human community of the armed forces. The aim is to increase the resilience of this community and to foster its moral strengths. In particular, this translates into a permanent commitment to: maintaining the memory of our dead, taking care of our wounded and accompanying the bereaved and battered families.

■ BESIDES, THE MILITARY HAS UNBREAKABLE LINKS BETWEEN THE ARMED FORCES AND THE NATION, A LINK WHICH MUST BE KEPT ALIVE AND STRENGTHENED

As an emanation of the Nation, whose richness, dynamism and diversity they reflect and promote, the armed forces have a vital need for its support. It is hence of paramount importance that the armed forces remain faithful to the values which make their strength and which are shared by the majority of the French population.





■ THE ARMED FORCES PARTICIPATE IN THE PROJECTS SUPPORTING NATIONAL COHESION, AND ESPECIALLY THOSE AIMED AT THE YOUTH WHICH REPRESENT THE FUTURE OF OUR COUNTRY.

They already actively participate in many programmes to disseminate the values of the French Republic among global audiences and in national territories. They can expect the ex-military to accompany these programmes.

■ THE CONSTANT STAKES OF RECRUITING, TRAINING, RETAINING AND RETRAINING

of the personnel must be seen through the prism of our operational requirements and of the evolutions of society. They require defending and drives the need for youth in our personnel, whilst preserving the right balance between civilian and military personnel, increasing the technical expertise in terms of both quantity and quality, especially in the digital domain and to design “tailor-made” professional career paths, thus enabling women and men to achieve a full career in the armed forces.

■ THE OPERATIONAL RESERVE SHOULD TAKE A GROWING PART IN THE ARMED FORCES’ OPERATIONAL CONTRACT

Beyond the protection function, it must help take the resilience and strength stakes into account. It also represents a resource to meet the requirements for expertise in specialised domains, where labour is scarce.

■ FINALLY, THE ARMED FORCES MUST MAINTAIN THEIR POSITIVE DIFFERENCE, AS A TOKEN OF OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY, AND IN THE SPECIFIC DOMAINS

which underpin their resilience, their reactivity, their availability and their efficiency at the service of France. Generally speaking, any trivialisation of the military status or any attempt at unilateral disarmament through standards and the law should be opposed.

AXIS #2

DEVELOPING CAPABILITIES AND ADAPTING THE ORGANISATION OF THE ARMED FORCES TO CONQUER A MULTI-ENVIRONMENT AND MULTI-DOMAIN SUPERIORITY

■ FRANCE NEEDS TO BE ABLE TO RELY ON A CREDIBLE, WELL-BALANCED AND COHERENT ARMED FORCES MODEL

ensuring our ability to assert ourselves as of the competition phase and to commit ourselves up to high-intensity situations.





■ THE EXCELLENCE OF THE CHAIN OF COMMAND

relies on the flexibility and reactivity of **its organisation** as well as on its ability to understand situations, to decide quickly and cleverly and to synchronise effects on a broad scale, making the most of the opportunities offered by the cyber domain and artificial intelligence. Simplification must make it possible to regain useful time, at all levels, thus contributing to freedom of action on a daily basis and promoting anticipation.

■ MEETING THE ARMED FORCES' OPERATIONAL NEEDS

requires associating the level of performance of the equipment and the search for mass, and taking the needs for resilience, rusticity and resupply into account.

■ THE PROSPECTIVE AND CONCEPTUAL THINKING SHOULD CONSTANTLY INTEGRATE THE EVOLUTIONS OF CONFLICTUALITY

in order to identify the axes of transformation of the armed forces and orient the capability effort. To do that, it integrates – among others – the threat evolution dynamic as well as realistic engagement assumptions. The assumption of a major engagement, including high-intensity phases in all or some environments and domains, should in particular enable to determine the types of capabilities we needed. This reflection should also make the most of potential ruptures, especially those induced by technological evolutions increasingly coming from the civilian world.

■ FINALLY, AGILE PROCESSES SHALL PERMIT THE IDENTIFICATION – AND THE RESOLUTION – OF EMERGING CAPABILITY DILEMMAS

by proposing the good balance with regards to the allocated resources. They should also enable to realistically define the requirement, to seize co-operation opportunities, to shorten the procurement cycles, to facilitate evolution and to reduce the length and cost of the programmes.

AXIS #3

TURNING TRAINING INTO A NEW DIMENSION OF COMBAT TO BE CONDUCTED WITH OUR PARTNERS

■ OPERATIONAL TRAINING DIRECTLY CONTRIBUTES TO THE CREDIBILITY OF THE FRENCH ARMED FORCES

It must prepare the personnel and the chain of command for the toughness of engagements, for the diversity and ambiguity of hybrid courses of action, for the implementation of increasingly complex equipment, for the synchronisation of effects in several domains and environments and for the deployment within a coalition with our allies and partners.

■ OUR DEPLOYMENTS, OUR EXERCISES AND, MORE GENERALLY SPEAKING, OUR ACTIVITIES

are a way to show the credibility of our capabilities, to convey strategic messages and to notify our determination to our allies, our competitors and our opponents (strategic communication).

■ IF THE FRENCH ARMED FORCES HAVE PRESERVED THEIR ABILITY TO ACT ALONE, THE NORMAL FRAMEWORK OF THEIR ENGAGEMENT IS THAT OF COLLECTIVE ACTION. RELYING IN PARTICULAR ON THE TOOL OF INTERNATIONAL MILITARY RELATIONS

their goal is to play a leading role among our allies and to develop partnerships throughout the world. This partakes in our ability to integrate coalitions or to assume the responsibilities of a framework nation.

■ THE ARMED FORCES NEED TO CAPITALISE AND WEIGH MORE ON THE WORKS CONDUCTED WITHIN THE EU AND NATO

The point is especially to better anticipate the consequences of our allies' strategies and capabilities on our environment. We must also continue to contribute to the development of an autonomous European strategic awareness, in particular by seeking to develop our collective effectiveness.

■ IN VIEW OF THE THREATS AIMED AT FRANCE, THE ARMED FORCES PARTICIPATE IN THE NATIONAL ABILITY TO ASSESS THE SITUATIONS AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE INTERDEPARTMENTAL RESPONSE

On the national territory, the armed forces intervene in case of crisis or disaster, within the limits of their responsibilities and at the proper level, to complement the assets of the other ministries.



