



Executive Summary

With the 2019-2025 Military Programming Law (MPL) due to be revised in 2021, the question arises as to what defense policy we wish to adopt to guarantee France's national and collective security. The financial commitment of 295 billion euros of the MPL is significant, especially in the context of a major economic crisis due to the pandemic. We nevertheless believe that this commitment should be confirmed in 2021, as it is adapted to the growing and varied threats our country is facing. In addition to securing the MPL, France must prepare its Armed Forces and its entire defense-industrial ecosystem for harsher confrontations, and forge a comprehensive and agile response to more systemic threats to its security. Finally, it must pursue its efforts towards European cooperation: there simply is no alternative.

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Diverse threats and risks on the rise

Financial crisis, cyber attacks, pandemics, information manipulation, terror attacks, foreign investment in strategic sectors, military power struggle: over the past 15 years, the risks and threats facing France and its European partners have increased. They are interlinked in various but interdependent areas, thereby reinforcing the prospect of a systemic crisis.

On top of this are threats from powers that exploit this turmoil to impose their will. They are uninhibited and use military power and ambiguous means to act on all strategic levers, both direct and indirect. Facing these threats, France can no longer rely as it used to on the multilateral system that is considerably weakened.

Strengthening our defense apparatus

Terror attacks on our national soil, followed by the health crisis, highlighted the Armed Forces' contribution to tackling security crises beyond the military domain. Their added value within the regalian apparatus rests primarily on their specific ability to engage in the most deteriorated situations they encounter in war zones. Moreover, the management of escalation,

including with middle powers, has become ubiquitous in recent military operations. It is important to prepare for the event of a higher intensity confrontation.

Our defense apparatus must therefore be strengthened, particularly in terms of internal resilience, responsiveness, capabilities and format. To achieve this objective, it is possible to act on several levers: budget, human resources, the industrial and technological ecosystem, innovation and operations.

Adopting a global and agile approach

In a context marked by multidimensional risks and the succession of shocks, defense policy must be included in an approach that is both global and agile. France is facing actors adopting hybrid strategies, i.e. acting ambiguously on all levers: political, informational, economic, diplomatic and military. To formulate a response, the organization of French resources must be coordinated from the highest State level all the way to the theater of crisis.

More generally, national resilience, which is critical for power, is being severely tested. In the short term, it can be strengthened by improving our crisis anticipation and management doctrine. All the forces must be brought together, right down to the local level, including the private sector. Finally, the pandemic and the masks shortage have served as a reminder of the relevance of the concept of strategic autonomy, which needs to be extended beyond defense issues, particularly in the digital area.

Maintaining efforts towards European cooperation

Given the new era of power struggle, not least of which the competition between China and the United States, France and its neighbours are faced with a critical mass problem – especially on space and digital issues.

This observation calls for a strengthening of European strategic autonomy in its three traditional components – political, operational, and technological and industrial. In the light of the current crisis, it is also important to extend it to the economic, financial and commercial fields which have been the competitive advantages of the European Union.

The issue of the gap between the European Union's defense ambitions and the reality of its capabilities must not be overshadowed. Nevertheless, there is no alternative. It is therefore necessary to persevere, in particular by exploiting the new tools developed since 2016 in the field of defense. The diversification of partnerships must also be pursued, particularly within the framework of the European Intervention Initiative, to foster a common strategic culture. Finally, it is important to continue to explain and clarify our position in order to federate more and propose how to better "share the burden" with NATO.

Our recommendations

Recommendation no. 1: Aim for a more integrated specialized military organization.

Recommendation no. 2: Enhance the readiness of the Armed Forces in a volatile strategic context.

Recommendation no. 3: Adjust capabilities and format to increase impact and endurance.

Recommendation no. 4: Secure the Military Programming Law.

Recommendation no. 5: Enhance the attractiveness of the military profession.

Recommendation no. 6: Spread the innovation culture beyond the Defense Innovation Agency.

Recommendation no. 7: Enhance the flexibility of France's comprehensive approach to hybrid warfare by increasing coordination.

Recommendation no. 8: Anticipate tougher multi-dimensional scenarios with a greater role for the Secretariat-General for National Defense and Security (SGDSN).

Recommendation no. 9: Involve the private sector in reserves and general mobilization, and practice.

Recommendation no. 10: Coordinate ministerial action at the central level, facilitate subsidiarity, ensure the survival of the Nation's essential functions.

Recommendation no. 11: Reinforce European strategic autonomy in key areas.

Recommendation no. 12: Strengthen France's unifying role in European defense and in NATO.