

**Speech by Mr. Jacques Chirac, President of the French Republic,
during his visit to The Strategic Air and Maritime Forces
at Landivisiau / L'Ile Longue .**

Thursday 19 January 2006

Madame Minister,
Members of Parliament,
Chief of Defence Staff,
Chiefs of Staff,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is truly a pleasure for me to be with you today on the Ile Longue. I am pleased to be able to meet here the women and men, soldiers and civilians, who all stand united in the service of our country and participate in the accomplishment of a mission that is fundamental to its independence and security, namely nuclear deterrence.

The creation of a national deterrence force was a challenge for France, that would have proved impossible to meet without commitment on everyone's part. It imposed the marshalling of all energies, the development of our research capabilities and finding innovative solutions to all sorts of technical problems. Nuclear deterrence thus became the very image of what our country is capable of producing when it has set itself a task and holds to it.

I wish to pay tribute here to the researchers and engineers, from the Atomic Energy Commission (CEA) and all French companies, who enable us to always take the lead in vital sectors such as physical sciences, numerical simulation, lasers - in particular the Megajoule laser – and nuclear and space technologies. I would like to extend this tribute to all those who support, in one way or another, our nuclear forces: staff of the Defence Ministry's General Delegation for Armaments (DGA), executives and workers of partner industrial companies and groups, the gendarmerie in charge of governmental control and personnel from all the services.

I am of course thinking first and foremost of the crews of the maritime and airborne components who, permanently, and exercising the utmost discretion, carry out the longest and most important of all operational missions. I have set a stringent level of posture – that I know; but it is commensurate with our country's security requirements. I am aware of the constraints it imposes. One seldom speaks of you, but I want to salute your exceptional worth and your very great merit. The permanence of the deterrent posture, which has been remarkably kept to for forty years, is in itself a proof of praise. I wish to extend this tribute to your families, more particularly those of submarine crews. I am very much aware of what operational patrolling involves in terms of absence from home, solitude and sometimes suffering.

Ladies and Gentlemen, you are conducting this mission in a constantly changing environment.

It is true that, with the end of the cold war, we are currently under no direct threat from a major power.

But the end of the bipolar world has not removed threats to peace. In many countries radical ideas are being spread which advocate confrontation between civilisations, cultures, and religions. Today, this will to bring about confrontation translates into odious attacks which regularly remind us that fanaticism and intolerance are the source of follies of all kinds. Tomorrow, it may take even more serious forms, possibly involving States.

Combating terrorism is one of our priorities. We have adopted numerous measures and provisions to address this danger. We will continue in this direction firmly and resolutely. One should not, however, yield to the temptation of restricting all defence and security-related considerations to this necessary fight against terrorism. The fact that a new threat appears does not remove all others.

Our world is constantly changing and searching for new political, economic, demographic and military equilibria. It is characterised by the swift emergence of new poles of power. It is confronted with the appearance of new sources of imbalance, in particular the sharing of raw materials, the distribution of natural resources, and changing demographic equilibria. These changes could result in instability, especially if concurrent with the rise of nationalisms.

That the relationship between the different poles of power should sink into hostility in the near future is no foregone conclusion. To preclude this danger, we must effectively work towards establishing a fairer, more representative international order based on the rule of law and collective security. We must also prompt our major partners to opt for cooperation rather than confrontation. However, we are not safe from the unexpected reversal of the international system, nor from a strategic surprise. These are the lessons of our History.

Our world is marked also by emerging assertions of power based on the possession of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. Hence the temptation for certain States to acquire nuclear power, thus violating treaties. Tests of ballistic missiles with ever-greater range are also on the increase worldwide. This observation has led the United Nations Security Council to acknowledge that the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery were truly a threat to international peace and security.

Finally, one should not ignore the persistence of more traditional risks of regional instability. There are risks of this kind everywhere in the world, unfortunately.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the face of crises that are shaking the world, in the face of new threats, France has always first chosen the path of prevention which remains in all its forms the very foundation of our defence policy. Relying on the rule of law, influence and solidarity, prevention is central to the set of actions conducted by our diplomacy which constantly strives to resolve crises that may arise here and there. Prevention also involves a whole range of defence and security postures, foremost among which are prepositioned forces.

Believing that prevention alone is enough to protect us would however be naively optimistic. To make ourselves heard, we must also be capable of using force when

necessary. We must therefore have a substantial capability to intervene outside our borders, with conventional means, in order to support and supplement this strategy. Such a defence policy rests on the certainty that, whatever happens, our vital interests remain safeguarded.

This is the role assigned to nuclear deterrence which directly stems from our prevention strategy and constitutes its ultimate expression.

For in the face of the concerns of the present and the uncertainties of the future, nuclear deterrence remains the fundamental guarantee of our security. Wherever the pressure comes from, it also gives us the ability to keep our freedom to act, to control our policies, to ensure the durability of our democratic values.

At the same time, we continue to support global efforts to promote general and complete disarmament and, in particular, the negotiation of a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty. But we can of course progress along the road to disarmament only if the conditions for our global security are maintained and if the will to make headway is shared unanimously.

It is in this spirit that France has maintained its deterrent forces while reducing them, in accordance with the spirit of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and in compliance with the principle of strict sufficiency.

It is the responsibility of the French Head of State to assess, permanently, the limit of our vital interests. Maintaining uncertainty as to this limit is consubstantial with the deterrence doctrine.

The integrity of our territory, the protection of our population, the free exercise of our sovereignty will always be the core of our vital interests. But they are not limited to these. The perception of these interests is changing with the pace of the world, a world marked by the growing interdependence of European countries and also by the impact of globalisation. For example, safeguarding our strategic supplies or the defence of allied countries are, among others, interests that must be protected. Assessing the scale and potential consequences of an unbearable act of aggression, threat or blackmail perpetrated against these interests would be the responsibility of the President of the Republic. This analysis could, if necessary, lead to consider that these situations fall within the scope of our vital interests.

As I emphasised immediately after the attacks of 11 September 2001, nuclear deterrence is not intended to deter fanatical terrorists. Yet, the leaders of States who would use terrorist means against us, as well as those who would consider using, in one way or another, weapons of mass destruction, must understand that they would lay themselves open to a firm and adapted response on our part. And this response could be a conventional one. It could also be of a different kind.

From its origins, deterrence has always continued to adapt, in its spirit as well as in terms of its means, to our environment and to the threat analysis I have just recalled. We are in a position to inflict damage of any kind on a major power that would want to attack interests we would regard as vital. Against a regional power, our choice would not be between inaction or annihilation. The flexibility and reactivity of our strategic forces would enable us to exercise our response directly against its centres of power

and its capacity to act. All our nuclear forces have been configured accordingly. It is for this purpose, for example, that the number of nuclear warheads has been reduced on some of the missiles in our submarines.

However, our concept for the use of nuclear weapons remains unchanged. There is no question, under any circumstances, of using nuclear means for military purposes during a conflict. It is in this spirit that nuclear forces are sometimes referred to as "weapons of non-use". This formula should not, however, allow any doubts to persist about our determination and capacity to resort to our nuclear weapons. The credible threat of their utilisation permanently hangs over those leaders who harbour hostile intentions against us. It is essential for making them see reason and for making them aware of the inordinate cost their actions would entail for themselves and their States. Furthermore, it goes without saying that we always reserve the right to resort to a final warning to mark our determination to safeguard our vital interests.

Thus the principles underlying our deterrence doctrine remain unchanged, but the modalities of expressing this doctrine have evolved and keep evolving, so as to enable us to address the context of the 21st century.

Constantly adapted to their new missions, the capabilities of the maritime and airborne components enable a coherent response to our concerns. Thanks to those two components with different and complementary characteristics, multiple options are opened to the French Head of State which cover all identified threats.

The modernisation and adaptation of those capabilities are hence absolutely necessary for our deterrent to retain its indispensable credibility in an evolving geostrategic environment.

It would be irresponsible to imagine that maintaining our arsenal in its current state might, after all, be sufficient. What would be the credibility of our deterrent if it did not allow us to address the new situations? What credibility would it have vis-à-vis regional powers had we kept strictly to threatening total destruction? What credibility would ballistic weapons with very limited range have in the future? Thus, the M51 ballistic missile, thanks to its intercontinental range, and the Improved Air-to-Ground Medium Range Missile system (ASMPA) will, in a volatile world, give us the means to cover threats wherever they arise and whatever their nature.

Likewise, no one can contend that missile defence is sufficient to counter the threat of ballistic missiles. No defensive system, however sophisticated, can be 100 per cent effective. We can never be assured that it cannot be circumvented. Basing all our defence on this single capability would in actual fact prompt our adversaries to find other means to use their nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. Such a tool cannot therefore be considered a substitute for deterrence. But it can supplement it by reducing our vulnerabilities. This is why France has resolutely embarked on a common reflection within the Atlantic Alliance, and is developing its own programme for the self-protection of deployed forces.

Our country's security and independence come at a price. Forty years ago, the Defence Ministry devoted 50 per cent of its investments to nuclear forces. This share has since then constantly been reduced and is expected to account for 18 per cent only of investments in 2008. Today, in the spirit of strict sufficiency that characterises it, our

deterrence policy accounts overall for less than 10 per cent of the total Defence budget. Defence appropriations dedicated to deterrence go to leading edge technologies, essentially provide substantial support for scientific, technological and industrial research efforts in our country.

10 per cent of our defence effort is the right and sufficient price to provide our country with a credible and sustainable assurance of security. And as I wish to stress, calling this into question would be utterly irresponsible.

Moreover, the development of the European Security and Defence Policy, the growing interweaving of the interests of European Union countries and the solidarity that now exists between them, make French nuclear deterrence, by its very existence, a core element in the security of the European continent. In 1995, France put forward the ambitious idea of concerted deterrence in order to launch a debate at European level on this issue. I still believe that, when the time comes, we shall have to ask ourselves the question of a common Defence that would take account of existing deterrent forces, with a view to a strong Europe responsible for its security. European Union member States have, moreover, begun to reflect together on what are, or will be, their common security interests. And I would like us to deepen this reflection. This is a first and necessary step.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since 1964, France has had an autonomous nuclear deterrence. The lessons of History led General de Gaulle to make this crucial choice. During all these years, the French nuclear forces have ensured our country's defence and greatly helped to preserve peace. Today, they continue to keep watch, quietly, for us to be able to live in a land of freedom which is the master of its future and its destiny. They continue, and will continue tomorrow, to be the ultimate guarantor of our security.

In my capacity as Head of the Armed Forces, and on behalf of our compatriots, I would like to express the gratitude of the Nation to all the women and men who contribute to this essential mission.

Thank you.