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FRANCE'S NEW STRATEGY: THE 2013 WHITE PAPER

The French White Paper on National Security and Defence has been eagerly awaited. Due to declining defence budgets and military capabilities, France as the major military power in continental Europe is scaling down its ambitions. At the same time, it is seeking to give new momentum to European common security and defence.

French President François Hollande during the traditional military parade on 14 July 2013 in Paris.

After nine months of deliberations, the 2013 French White Paper on National Security and Defence was released on 29 April with the objective of identifying the threats with which France is faced and the means with which country should meet them. The 2013 White Paper maintains the main strategic priorities set out in the 2008 White Paper (protection, awareness, prevention, deterrence, and intervention), but highlights the need for greater convergence between them. In geostrategic terms, the focus on Africa has increased, whereas that on Asia has diminished. The White Paper implies controversial cuts in major military capabilities, a greater emphasis on force differentiation, and pooling and sharing (i.e., enhancing bilateral or multilateral cooperation to improve national military capabilities). At the European level, it suggests that France will seek to strengthen the European Union's (EU) Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP, formerly ESDP) by advancing pooling and sharing and pushing for greater EU strategic vision. However, ambiguities remain. Autonomy through nuclear deterrence and bilateral military cooperation with the UK are still given prominence.

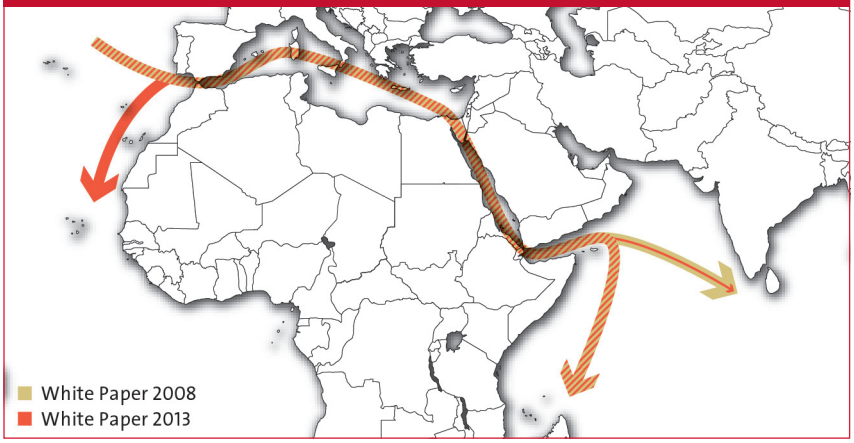
The White Paper in context

The 132-page 2013 White Paper is only the fourth white paper to be published since 1972. The 1972 White Paper was premised on the doctrine of deterrence – a key dimension of the Gaullist consensus on defence. The subsequent 1994 White Paper appeared following the end of the Cold War and reflected a changed international security environment. It paved the way for the professionalisation of the armed forces, eliminated nuclear-tipped surface-to-air missiles, and reinforced force projection capabilities.

Whereas the 1972 and 1994 White Papers had dealt purely with military security, the 2008 White Paper published under Nicolas Sarkozy's presidency introduced a comprehensive security strategy in response to a globalising world. It also sought to reintegrate France into North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military structures, from which it had withdrawn in 1966 under Charles de Gaulle – a controversial measure that marked a break with the Gaullist tradition – and to reinforce the CSDP. In part, this reflected a movement away from a defence and security policy resting primarily on nuclear deterrence to one that allowed France to play a greater role in crisis management operations, even though the importance attributed to nuclear deterrence remained high. It also responded to the need to reduce costs and signalled a focus on a "strategic arc" of instability that stretched from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf, the Horn of Africa, and on to South Asia.

The latest white paper is not just a means for President François Hollande to distinguish himself from his predecessor; at the same time, it also responds to the need to reduce public debt and adapt to an evolving strategic environment. The Arab Spring and instability in the Sahel clearly weigh heavily on the White Paper. The strategic evolution of the US is also a major consideration. It reflects the expectation that the US will be more selective about the types

France and the "Arc of Instability"



of missions that it carries out and "lead from behind". This, combined with the "pivot" towards Asia, will increase the likelihood that the US will seek to share the burden of engagements with Europeans and, in some circumstances, let Europeans to take the lead in areas that are not considered in the US's vital strategic interest.

Lessons from Libya and Mali

The interventions in Libya and Mali also influenced the writing of the White Paper. The war in Libya marked an important moment in the transatlantic relationship: For the first time since the organisation's creation, NATO assets were made available to a coalition led by European member states. Operations such as the UK-French-led NATO mission Operation Unified Protector in Libya in 2011 and the French-led Operation Serval in Mali in 2013 are likely to be repeated. Indeed, the White Paper reflects this expectation and draws a number of lessons from both operations.

While the operation in Libya was led by France and the UK under NATO command, it was an international effort that relied heavily on US military assets. Indeed, France and the UK would not have been able to carry out or sustain such a mission over a six-month period. Without US cruise missiles, drones, and electronic warfare, the mission would not have succeeded. The operation in Libya demonstrated the need for improved capabilities in the areas of command and control, information systems, intelligence, surveillance, targeting and reconnaissance, air re-fuelling, and precision munitions. The 2010 Lancaster House Agreement concluded between the UK and France, which allows for cooperative efforts to develop and procure precisely these costly capabilities, was already a response these needs.

The operation in Mali that began in January 2013 demonstrated the need for short-notice intervention (similar to the operation in Libya), the need to sustain an operation over vast distances both within the theatre and between the theatre and the main military bases, and the need to be able to carry out multi-dimensional operations. French pre-positioned forces in Burkina Faso, Chad, and Côte d'Ivoire helped to make the operation a success. US provision of human and signals intelligence was critical in providing information on targets of air strikes that paved the way for ground troops. The French also were over-stretched in terms of timely availability of air transport and in-flight refuelling, and strategic airlift was sorely lacking. As well as reinforcing the need to respond to rapidly changing situations, Operation Serval again demonstrated gaps in capabilities, notably the lack of aircraft to transport troops and equipment, new air-to-air re-fuellers in order to allow planes to fly long distances, and intelligence and surveillance.

Under Hollande, France is devoting more attention to the CSDP than was the case under Sarkozy.

Financial considerations as well as the need to develop and procure badly-needed expensive military assets also translate into a desire to reinforce pooling and sharing at the EU level, and this, too, is reflected in the 2013 White Paper. These practical considerations are also buttressed by greater emphasis on the European project. Under President Hollande, France is devoting more attention to the CSDP than was the case under Sarkozy. There is, nevertheless, a frank recognition of the obstacles that need to be overcome if European security and defence is really to be strengthened.

Strategic priorities and orientation

The 2013 White Paper maintains the five main strategic functions set out in the 2008 strategy: protection, awareness, prevention, deterrence, and intervention. The centrality of nuclear deterrence to France's national security strategy remains a constant. France's nuclear capability is still viewed as being the backbone of the country's military and strategic autonomy, despite the stated aim of reinforcing European defence and security.

Along with other state forces, French armed forces should be able to protect the country's infrastructure and institutions. The army should be able to respond within the context of NATO and the EU to aggression by another state as well as to crisis management situations in failed and fragile states. France needs to be able to plan and conduct operations autonomously or as a lead nation in a multinational operation, and to contribute to multinational operations.

France's military capabilities allow it to intervene where its interests are most acute, namely the periphery of Europe, the Mediterranean basin, Africa (Maghreb, Sahel, equatorial Africa, and the Horn of Africa), the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean (though with a diminished focus on South Asia). Sarkozy had attempted to reduce permanent military bases in Africa. However, fears on the part of local leaders regarding subsequent instability thwarted those efforts. The need for rapid deployment to Mali in 2013 confirmed the usefulness of pre-positioned forces in Africa, which are now no longer a point of contention as they were in 2008.

Adapting military capabilities

The armed forces still need to be able to protect the territory, deter potential adversaries, and engage in intervention operations. The White Paper implies a reduction of major capabilities by ten to 15 per cent. The country's ground forces will no longer have the eight brigades set out in the 2008 White Paper, but only seven. The navy will have ten rather than the 13 first-rank frigates envisaged in 2008. It will also lose fighter-bombers.

The ambition of deploying up to 30,000 ground troops and 70 combat aircraft in a major military operation has also been dis-

carded, with smaller-scale operations envisioned. For small-scale operations, France will maintain a pool of 5,000 troops on high alert available immediately to form a 2,300-strong force for missions of up to seven days. For longer missions, it will maintain 7,000 land force troops, with approximately 12 combat aircraft, one frigate, one attack submarine, and one transport and command ship, as well as special forces. For major coercion missions, a two-brigade land force of 15,000, approximately 45 combat aircraft, an aircraft carrier, two transport and command ships, and special forces will be available.

In the defence sector, 24,000 posts will be cut during the period 2015–19 (in addition to the already planned 10,000 job losses for the period 2014–15). The distribution of these job losses across the armed forces is still subject to debate and will be decided when the 'loi de programmation militaire' (Military Programming Law), which outlines the budgetary implications of the White Paper, is discussed in parliament in the autumn.

In relation to awareness and anticipation, the need to strengthen intelligence capabilities is given particular emphasis, as are space capabilities and electronic surveillance. Space and intelligence had already received attention in 2008, particularly observation capabilities, ballistic missile interception, early warning, navigation, and meteorological capabilities in space. This was partly prompted by the developing space programmes of emerging powers, notably China. In 2013, real-time intelligence needs are of particular significance. France requires drones of medium altitude and long endurance, equipped with image and electromagnetic intelligence devices. Tactical drones, light surveillance planes, and surveillance pods are also needed.

Following on from the 2008 White Paper, the need to develop further the technical capabilities with which to identify the origins of cyber-attacks and to evaluate the offensive capacities of potential adversaries is also outlined the 2013 White Paper. Cybersecurity had already been identified as a priority in the 2008 White Paper, resulting in the creation of an agency concerned with defence against cyber-threats – *l'Agence de la sécurité des systèmes d'informatiques* (ASSI). However, France will now create a cyber-defence organisation that will have not only defensive, but also offensive capacities and will be integrated into armed forces to accompany military operations.

Yet, France lacks critical equipment with which to meet its objectives. Budgetary constraints imply the need for pooling and sharing. Within the European context, France seeks rapidly to establish common capacities in line with capability needs, notably in the areas of spatial observation, air transportation and refuelling, surveillance in operation theatres, and logistics in crisis zones.

European security and defence

The 2013 White Paper reaffirms France's commitment to concept and capabilities development within both EU and NATO frameworks. In 2009, a French general was appointed to the post of NATO Supreme Allied Commander Transformation (SACT) and, as such, the country is responsible for furthering NATO's so-called Smart Defence within the alliance. In the area of Smart Defence, France stressed the need to take into consideration the requirements of the European defence industry questions in order to maintain the production base for advanced technologies with high added value. France does not view NATO and the EU as competitors, but as being complementary not only in terms of missions, but also in terms of the EU's Pooling and Sharing and NATO's Smart Defence.

Indeed, the CSDP is viewed as a priority for France. The White Paper stresses the need for renewed momentum within the current context. In particular, it notes that CSDP operations since 2003 have demonstrated a lack of political will, whether they were carried out as part of larger operations or as limited operations. The EU's ability to engage in crisis situations that call for multidimensional operations is also seen as lacking. The White Paper argues that the CSDP needs to utilise all the resources of the European Commission or member states better to respond comprehensively to crises. From the French point of view, better coordination of civil and military capabilities and an adaptation of the EU's procedures for an operation role are needed. The White Paper also stresses the on-going need for a common strategy to further develop defence industrial capacity. Paris sees financial contraction as an opportunity to further the development of cooperative approaches. It also argues for an EU White Paper that clearly defines the strategic interests and goals of the EU in the area of defence and security. This would contribute to the realisation of preventative actions, external operations, as well as pooling and sharing. Such an EU White Paper would update and go further in outlining the means with which the EU should meet the security challenges first outlined in the 2003 European Security Strategy, entitled "A Secure Europe in a Better World".

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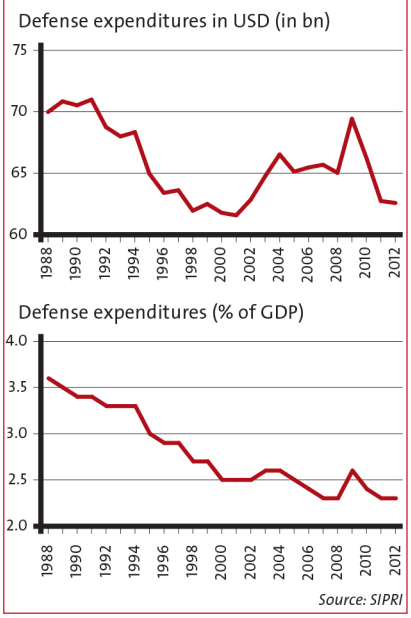
French military expenditures



Source: SIPRI

The European Council meeting on 19–20 December 2013 will focus on defence issues. This will be the first time since the Lisbon Treaty came into force on 1 December 2009 that EU leaders discuss defence and security issues at such a meeting. France is likely to propose making better use of the institutions and means of collective action, as well as the possibilities created by the Treaty, such as structured cooperation and reinforced cooperation.

The desire to reinvigorate the CSDP notwithstanding, the White Paper indicates that considerable importance is still attributed to bilateral cooperation as a means of better integrating capacities. Cooperative arrangements with the UK in the area of defence industry and armaments are thus still considered particularly important.

Significance for Switzerland

Some of the questions the French White Paper raises may also be relevant for the

drafting of the 2014 Swiss security report, despite the differences in strategic outlook of the two countries. In terms of the threat spectrum, there are similarities, such as the risk of cyber-attacks. However, there are also clearly differences, for example in relation to the scale of threat from terrorism. As such, France and Switzerland envisage a different range of missions for their armed forces.

Nevertheless, one question with which both countries are confronted is how to reconcile budget constraints with autonomous military capabilities. The rationale behind pooling is one that Switzerland, too, will find hard to ignore in the coming years. While the question of shared capabilities may prove sensitive in relation to sovereignty, there is a broad spectrum of pooling activities in which Switzerland may partake (see CSS Analysis No. 126).

Switzerland has already cooperated in the area of armaments with Sweden, Norway, Finland, Austria, Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, and Spain. Subsequent to an agreement concluded in March 2012, Switzerland is now able to participate in the European Defence Agency's (EDA) arms-related cooperative projects, such as joint training programmes and arms development and procurement. Switzerland may have the option of leasing parts of governmental satellite communication (SATCOM) being developed by the EDA, for example. As a member of NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP), Switzerland may also engage in Smart Defence activities on a case-by-case basis. Which framework is the most appropriate for Switzerland should be driven by the capability needs of the armed forces.

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