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**LETTER DATED 25 MARCH 2008 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC TO THE CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT
ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE CONFERENCE
TRANSMITTING THE STATEMENT MADE BY THE PRESIDENT OF
THE FRENCH REPUBLIC, MR. NICOLAS SARKOZY, AT CHERBOURG
ON 21 MARCH 2008**

I have the honour to transmit to you the statement delivered on 21 March in Cherbourg by the President of the French Republic, Mr. Nicolas Sarkozy.

Please distribute this information as an official document of the Conference on Disarmament.

(Signed): Jean-François Dobelle
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of France
to the Conference on Disarmament

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC

Presentation of the nuclear submarine “*Le Terrible*”

Cherbourg - Friday 21 March 2008

Ladies and gentlemen,
Mr. President (thank you for your remarkable work),
Mr. Minister, dear Hervé Morin,
Mr. Minister, dear Jean-Marie Bockel,
Members of Parliament,
Mr. Mayor,
General - I don't know why I say “General”, as there must be several,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very proud to be here with you in Cherbourg to salute all those who built *Le Terrible*, the fourth and latest addition to our strategic fleet. Right here, in 1967, General de Gaulle came to pay tribute to those of your colleagues who had built *Le Redoutable*. Like your predecessors, you may take pride in this submarine - a symbol of France's high technology and its resolve to remain master of its destiny. Very few countries in the world have the ability to realize such an industrial and technological achievement. It took decades of effort to master such know-how, which some of our partners have neglected and thus have difficulty replicating. I want to tell you today how proud France is of you. I have come here on behalf of France to pay tribute to your work and your great skills.

Our nuclear-powered ballistic-missile submarines are an essential part of our nuclear deterrent capability. This capability is the product of workers, technicians, engineers, men and women in uniform, and scientists - military and civilian. I have come to tell you that maintaining the capabilities required for deterrence at the highest level is an objective that is fundamental to our security.

I wish to pay tribute to the memory of the 11 French citizens - your colleagues, friends, husbands and fathers - who died in the Karachi attack on 8 May 2002. I know that their loved ones are here with us. I have told them that I will meet them within the next two weeks at the Elysée, along with the Defence Minister, to review the progress of the investigation. I want to convey my deepest sympathies to them. The nation has not forgotten them and will never forget them.

I know how much dedication and courage are shown by all those who confront danger in order to guarantee our security and peace, in Europe and throughout the world. I want to express to them, on behalf of all the French people, my support and gratitude. France is proud of its soldiers, and they have France's trust.

The national tribute we paid last Monday to the soldiers of the First World War reminded us, as if it were necessary, that in the past, Europe was a battlefield - to put it bluntly, a field of ruins. Most of the major conflicts were fought between European States. Thanks to the construction of Europe and the Atlantic Alliance, we have built a Europe of peace. Never in

history has our national security been so intimately tied to that of our allies and our European partners. Our common destiny lies with the European Union, and beyond that with all nations that share our values: peace, freedom, fraternity, the defence of the equal and irreducible dignity of human beings regardless of their origin, their beliefs or the colour of their skin.

But peace can never be taken for granted. Large-scale terrorism has shown us this. Today we are facing the assertiveness of new Powers, new ambitions, new threats and thus new rivalries. Added to that are the risks stemming from the competition for access to raw materials and energy, the diversion of technologies for aggressive purposes, and climate change. In this interdependent world, our interests have no borders, even though they are geographically defined.

The world has changed since the 1994 White Paper, which drew the conclusions from the end of the cold war and the Gulf War. It is different, more unstable, more changing, more complex. That does not mean it is necessarily more dangerous, it means it is less predictable than previously. Our vulnerabilities have therefore changed, and our strategy must be reassessed accordingly. It is not my wish - I do not have the right to wish - that France should prepare for the previous war, as it has done all too often in the past, or find itself unarmed in the face of a strategic surprise.

It is my responsibility to guarantee that our armed forces are always in a position to stand up to the threats facing our nation. I want to forge the defence policy that France needs, not a policy based on old habits or previous certainties. That is why I called for a new White Paper to be drawn up on defence and national security - not only on defence. Because from now on, it is just as likely that the security of the French people will be in question far from our borders as within our territory.

For the same reason, I want us to be able to confront all the problems directly. I owe our armed forces transparency and truth. I owe transparency and truth to the entire French people.

The truth is as follows: upon my arrival in office, I found that the financial outlook was particularly difficult. According to the Defence Ministry's financial forecasts, to modernize the armed forces as agreed by 2015, we would have had to raise our defence procurement budget by 6 billion euros a year, an increase of 40 per cent. Who can tell me such an objective would be credible?

These financial forecasts represent an obstacle that is incompatible with the commitment I made to the French people and our European partners to straighten out the nation's finances, which have been in the red for over 25 years.

I have no intention of continuing the methods of the past, those which placed me in this situation, because everyone loses thereby: the nation, which is legitimately concerned that its defence and security needs should be adequately met; the head of State, the Government and Parliament, which are facing the need for painful readjustments; and first and foremost the armed forces, which have repeatedly had to deal with delays in major weapons programmes and their consequences - ageing equipment and skyrocketing maintenance costs. I refuse to give way before a fait accompli and resign myself to having no room to manoeuvre. The duty of any

administration, civilian or military, is to do everything it can to preserve the President's room to manoeuvre and the Government's freedom to act. The duty of any political leader is to create room to manoeuvre in order to be able to exercise his or her decision-making ability fully.

I have chosen to build the future with a few simple guidelines: our strategy, our ambitions, our alliances, the European objective. And a principle, equally simple: I absolutely reject the idea of lowering our guard. Defence is the second-largest item in the State's budget. It will remain so. It will not be reduced. I have already made that commitment and I solemnly renew it now. But I will offer choices, avoided for too long, to reconcile the protection of the French people, the country's independence and its financial sovereignty.

I will not rely on 15-year-old assessments to guide the country's military effort. I have called for a White Paper for the beginning of the twenty-first century which will put forward a global concept of defence and national security for our country and its interests for the 15 years to come. Taking into account the major tasks which our armed forces must accomplish, the White Paper must formulate clear guidelines that will allow us, together with the Defence Minister, to make strategic and political choices.

The White Paper Commission has acknowledged that the proposed model for the armed forces in 2015 is obsolete. Everybody knows it was unrealistic, and yet no one told the French people. Well, I am telling them. I refuse to accept this framework as a starting point, just to decide what we would have to give up. It is futile to endlessly pursue models that cannot be realized. How pointless it is to seek to build a relevant model while contenting oneself with the deterioration of obsolete models! In fact, can there be such a thing as an unchanging model for the armed forces for the defence of our country? When threats change, when our strategy evolves, is it not normal for our military effort to be modified too?

To ensure the protection of the French people, their defence structures must be as operational and efficient as possible. I will draw all the necessary conclusions from this with the maximum degree of realism.

We will carry out these reforms. The French people have given me this mandate. This exemplary process of reform and rationalization, already initiated by Hervé Morin, will be accomplished entirely for the benefit of our defence structures and those who serve them.

I have decided to initiate a process of deliberation so that we will be able to prepare for these reforms constructively and without taboos.

The White Paper Commission, chaired by Jean-Claude Mallet, brings together eminent figures from a wide variety of fields. Parliament has been closely associated with it from the outset and will be at each stage of deliberations. The committees of the Senate and the National Assembly will be consulted on the draft of the White Paper. The White Paper will be presented to Parliament by the Prime Minister. I would have liked to do this myself, as head of the armed forces, but for the moment the Constitution prevents me from doing so. I would like the forthcoming revision of the Constitution to correct what has become an anomaly and, more generally, to strengthen the prerogatives of Parliament, especially those that deal with our

national defence effort. This must be debated as much as is necessary. Parliament will rule on the choices I will make, with the Prime Minister and the other Ministers, because at the end of the process, a new military planning law will be submitted to it.

I will make my decisions when the time comes, and I will explain them to the nation. You may rest assured that I will shoulder all my responsibilities, since what is most worrisome is not the prospect of making choices, but the lack of decisions. Choices will be made so that our defence policy is as useful and relevant as possible, the tool of great ambition for France and for Europe.

My first duty as head of State and commander-in-chief is to ensure that in all circumstances France, its territory, its people and its institutions are safe. And that in all circumstances, our national independence and freedom to take decisions are preserved.

Nuclear deterrence is the ultimate guarantee of that. It is the weighty responsibility of any President of the Republic to take the measure of this reality. Today I would like to share my thoughts on this matter with you.

Of course, over the 15-year period covered by the White Paper, France no longer runs the risk of an invasion. There are, however, other threats to our security. Certain nuclear stockpiles keep on growing. Nuclear proliferation, biological proliferation, chemical proliferation continue, along with the proliferation of ballistic and cruise missiles.

Today we must all be mindful of the fact that the nuclear missiles of even distant Powers can reach Europe in less than half an hour. Currently only the great Powers have such capabilities. But other countries, in Asia and the Middle East, are vigorously developing ballistic capabilities.

I am thinking in particular of Iran. Iran is increasing the range of its missiles, while grave suspicions surround its nuclear programme. It is indeed Europe's security that is at stake.

In the face of proliferation, the international community must remain united, the international community must remain resolute. Because we want peace, we must show no weakness to those who violate international rules. But all those who abide by them are entitled to fair access to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

But we must also be prepared to confront other risks besides proliferation. The imagination of our potential aggressors is boundless when it comes to exploiting the vulnerabilities of Western societies. And tomorrow, technological breakthroughs may create new threats.

That is why we are so attached to our nuclear deterrent. It is strictly defensive. The use of nuclear weapons would clearly be conceivable only in extreme circumstances of self-defence, a right enshrined in the United Nations Charter.

Our nuclear deterrent protects us from any aggression against our vital interests emanating from a State - wherever it may come from and whatever form it may take. Our vital interests, of course, include the elements that constitute our identity and our existence as a nation State, as well as the free exercise of our sovereignty. My responsibility, as head of State, is to evaluate the extent of these interests continuously, for in a changing world, they cannot remain static.

All those who would threaten our vital interests would expose themselves to severe retaliation by France resulting in damage they would find unacceptable and out of proportion to their objectives. Their centres of political, economic and military power would become priority targets.

It cannot be ruled out that an adversary might miscalculate the extent of our vital interests or our determination to safeguard them. Within the context of deterrence, it would be possible, in that event, to send a nuclear warning that would underscore our resolve. It would be aimed at re-establishing deterrence.

In order for deterrence to be credible, the head of State must have a wide range of options to deal with threats. Our nuclear forces have been, and will continue to be, adapted accordingly. The M51 intercontinental missile, which *Le Terrible* will carry as soon as it is commissioned in 2010, and the ASMPA missile, which the Rafale will carry starting this year, fit with our risk assessment over the period covered by the White Paper.

I am also convinced that it is essential to maintain two nuclear components, one sea-based and the other air-based. The characteristics of each, notably in terms of range and precision, make them complementary. The head of State must be able to count on them at all times in order to respond to any unexpected event.

In order to preserve our freedom of action, missile defence capabilities against a limited strike could be a useful complement to nuclear deterrence, without of course replacing it. Let us not lose sight of the fact that missile defence will never be effective enough to preserve our vital interests. On this issue, France has chosen a pragmatic approach. It is in this spirit that we are taking part in the collective effort within the Atlantic Alliance, dear Hervé Morin. We have solid technical know-how in this area that could be drawn on when the time comes.

Guaranteeing national security is expensive. Each year, the nuclear deterrent costs the French half what we spend on justice or transport. This cost must of course be kept under control as much as possible, in the financial context I mentioned earlier. But I am determined to shoulder this cost. It is neither a matter of prestige nor of rank, it is quite simply the nation's life insurance policy.

Our deterrent also takes into account changes in the world, in our alliances and in the building of Europe.

Together with the United Kingdom, we have taken a major decision. It is our assessment that there is no situation in which the vital interests of either of our two nations could be threatened without the vital interests of the other also being threatened.

As for the Atlantic Alliance, its security is also based on nuclear deterrence. British and French nuclear forces contribute to it. This has been part of NATO's strategic concept since 1974, and it remains relevant today. I say to all our allies: France is and will remain true to its commitments under article V of the North Atlantic Treaty.

As for Europe, it is a fact. By their very existence, French nuclear forces are a key element in Europe's security. Any aggressor who might consider challenging it must be mindful of this.

Let us, together, draw all the logical conclusions from this situation. I propose to engage those European partners who would so wish in an open dialogue on the role of deterrence and its contribution to our common security.

Our commitment to the security of our European partners is the natural expression of our ever-closer union. The Lisbon Treaty marks a historic step forward in this regard.

I would now like to turn to disarmament. It is a subject I would like to discuss with realism and clear-sightedness. When international security improves, France draws the necessary conclusions. It did so with the end of the cold war.

Rather than making speeches and promises that are not translated into deeds, France acts. We respect our international commitments, and notably the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. France has an exemplary record, unique in the world, with respect to nuclear disarmament. France was the first State, with the United Kingdom, to sign and ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty; the first State to decide to shut down and dismantle its facilities for the production of fissile material for explosive purposes; the only State to have transparently dismantled its nuclear testing facility in the Pacific; the only State to have dismantled its ground-launched nuclear missiles; the only State to have voluntarily reduced the number of its nuclear-powered ballistic-missile submarines by a third.

France has never engaged in the arms race. France never manufactured all the types of weapons that it was technologically capable of designing. France applies a principle of strict sufficiency: it maintains its stockpile at the lowest possible level compatible with the strategic context. I am dedicated to this principle. As soon as I assumed my duties, I asked for this strict sufficiency to be reassessed.

This has led me to decide on a new measure of disarmament: with respect to the airborne component, the number of nuclear weapons, missiles and aircraft will be reduced by a third.

I have also decided that France could and should be more transparent with respect to its nuclear arsenal than anyone has ever been.

After this reduction, our stockpile will include fewer than 300 nuclear warheads. That is half the maximum number of warheads we had during the cold war.

In giving this information, France is completely transparent because it has no other weapons beside those in its operational stockpile.

Furthermore, I confirm that none of our weapons are targeted against anyone.

Finally, I have decided to invite international experts to observe the dismantling of our military fissile material production facilities at Pierrelatte and Marcoule.

But let us not be naive; the very basis of collective security and disarmament is reciprocity.

Today, eight nations in the world have declared they have conducted nuclear tests. I am proposing to the international community an action plan which I call on the nuclear Powers to resolutely commit to by the time of the 2010 NPT Conference.

Thus I invite all countries to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, beginning with China and the United States, which signed it in 1996. It is time for ratification.

I urge the nuclear Powers to dismantle all their nuclear testing sites in a manner that is transparent and open to the international community;

I call for the immediate launching of negotiations on a treaty to ban the production of fissile material for nuclear-weapons purposes, and to establish without delay a moratorium on the production of such material;

I invite the five nuclear-weapon States recognized by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to reach agreement on transparency measures;

I propose opening negotiations on a treaty banning short-range and intermediate-range surface-to-surface missiles;

I ask all nations to accede to and implement the Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation, as France has done.

At the same time, the entire international community must mobilize in all other fields of disarmament. Here too, France will make its contribution.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have come to address a simple message to the nation: its security will be assured against the threats in the world, and France will play its full role to defend peace and its values. France's ambition must be worthy of its history.

This requires clear-mindedness concerning strategic realities and choices.

It requires having the courage to take the necessary decisions. You can count on me to do so.

Above all, it requires being clear and firm on the essentials. And what is essential is safeguarding the vital interests of France.

Here in Cherbourg, I offer you a guarantee. France will not lower its guard.

Thank you.
