Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear friends,

Allow me first of all to tell you how pleased and honored I am to be invited here today by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the CSIS. The influence of your institutions on the international stage has always inspired admiration and envy in France. And I’m all the more convinced of your assembly’s expectations and demands. At a time when our American allies are troubled by Europe’s lack of interest in its defense, I would like to take this opportunity to speak to you about our choices and our ambitions with respect to defense, as well as the 3 issues that will be incorporated in this new French defense policy, and regarding which the French-American partnership is, in my view, more vital than ever: Mali, Syria and Iran.


As I speak to you, the work on our new White Paper on National Defense and Security has just been concluded. This is now a regular exercise for France, initiated in 1972 in order to adapt its defense and security policy to the state of the world. The last White Paper was issued in 2008. A review was needed in order to define a new plan: developments in our strategic environment, as well as the tensions surrounding the model for the armed forces set out in 2008, made an exercise in truth and renewed ambitions necessary.

It was a political challenge because we had to reconcile two imperatives related to sovereignty: our financial sovereignty, while the financial crisis has weakened our public finances and requires strict control of public spending which affects us all, even the United States; and the sovereignty of our strategic autonomy, while the level of uncertainty and threat hasn’t diminished since 2008. We needed to preserve and maintain a defense tool that may have been at risk, in order to continue to have efficient armies that are always ready to meet security challenges, as well as fulfill France’s international responsibilities. We have risen to this challenge and I would like to convince you of this by making 4 remarks.

a) We wanted to update our analysis of the threats in a realistic and objective manner, in a context that has, for us, been marked by several major developments since 2008. I would like to mention 3 in particular: the sovereign debt crisis and the financial crises; the reorientation of U.S. defense policies; changes in the Arab world, which has entered a new phase that offers hope but also unfortunately, in the short term, risks and tragedies, as the situation in Syria, and to a lesser extent, Libya, reminds us every day.

We based our analysis of the strategic context for the next 10 years on 3 phenomena:

► What we refer to as the threat of the use of force is still fully present and there’s still a plausible risk of renewed conflict between states between now and 2025. A few points just to support this conclusion: Asian defense budgets are steadily increasing; some states are pursuing policies of power, for example Russia and China; the risk of regional destabilization in the Middle East remains, in a context of proliferation; the number of cyber attacks from states are increasing.

► The risk of weakness associated with the failure of some states that are no longer able to fulfil their responsibilities is becoming a strategic phenomenon on a new scale, as we’ve seen in the Sahel.

Lastly, the threats and risks continue to be magnified by globalization: terrorism, nuclear proliferation, the development of organized crime and challenges to the global commons, namely cyberspace, space and international waters.

The observation that we made in 2008 in our last White Paper pointing to an increasingly complex and unpredictable world has been confirmed. The threats are not diminishing, nor is the risk of strategic surprise.

b) This situation doesn’t take us by surprise or catch us out. France’s past, like that of the United States, has always been intertwined with that of the world. France, more than ever, intends to take action in close cooperation with its European partners as well as its allies. But it also intends to retain its ability to act on its own initiative, the initiative that allowed it intervene alone on the ground in Mali in order to prevent irreparable harm.
The White Paper that will be published in English in the next few days focuses on a clear definition of the 3 priorities of our defense strategy: the protection of France and French citizens, nuclear deterrence, and external intervention. As President Hollande strongly reaffirmed, these priorities cannot be separated. They are mutually supportive.

Protecting the territory and the population is still the main priority of our strategy, but this cannot be achieved without deterrent and intervention capabilities. We have to ensure that our compatriots are protected, including in the face of cyber threats. In the latter case, major efforts will be made to develop our ability to detect attacks, identify their origin, ensure the nation's resilience to these attacks and respond to them, including through an offensive strategy to combat cyber attacks. This is a strong focus of the 2013 White Paper, which draws all the consequences of what is for us a new strategic deal.

Deterrence continues to remain the ultimate guarantee of the security, protection and independence of the nation. It protects us from any aggression or threat of aggression against our vital interests, whatever their origin or form. It precludes any threat of blackmail that would cripple our freedom of analysis, decision and action. While aiming to maintain the same level of strict sufficiency, a consistent feature of our policy in this area, we will retain these two aspects, which are already being supported by our simulation program.

Lastly, the intervention of forces outside the national territory provides France’s security with the necessary strategic depth. It thereby strengthens the credibility of deterrence and ensures the protection of our security interests around the world. I would like to reaffirm that we don’t intend to leave any room for doubt with respect to our determination and capacity to take action, in accordance with our interests and international law.

The external intervention of our forces has 3 objectives: to ensure the protection of our nationals abroad, to defend our strategic interests, as well as those of our partners and allies, and to fulfill our international responsibilities.

With this in mind, France plans to have the military capabilities to allow it to engage in areas that are key to its defense and security: the European periphery, the Mediterranean Basin, a part of Africa – from the Sahel to equatorial Africa -, the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. These capacities should also enable it contribute to international peace and security in other parts of the world and I’m thinking here in particular of Asia.

c) The 2013 White Paper took the changes in our defense capabilities into account within the tight budgetary constraints that we’re now experiencing. Indeed, the national security and defense strategy must resolve a difficult dilemma in 2013: a level of risk and threat at least equivalent to the one that existed in 2008 and resources that are now constrained to an even greater extent by the need to put our public finances in order. In order to resolve this problem, three key objectives have been agreed upon:

- first, the continuation of a major defense effort: €179.2 billion will be devoted to defense between 2014 and 2025. France will continue to have the 2nd highest military budget in the EU which should represent on average almost 1.8% of GDP, according to NATO standards for the 2020 timeframe.

- second priority: taking the industrial imperative into consideration which will be reflected by a continuing emphasis over the next decade on research and development expenditure, development of the European defense technological and industrial base as well as efforts to equip our forces between now and 2025, allowing them to modernize, albeit at a slower pace than envisaged in the previous program, while ensuring the enhancement of all the critical capabilities required by our armed forces and while adhering to the clearly established priorities focusing on deterrence, intelligence and power-projection capabilities since there can be no sustainable defense effort, and therefore no sharing of this effort, without a national and European industrial base; our American friends should always keep this in mind.

- Lastly, the White Paper defines a new military strategy and new model for the armed forces that is more effective in order to address the most predictable threats and risks; this model for the armed forces aims to get the most from our military capabilities, by applying 4 principles:
the principle of strategic autonomy, in order to preserve France’s capacity to take the necessary initiatives as well as to exert its influence in the coalitions;

the principle of ensuring consistency with the range of potential engagements of our forces in various forms of conflict and crisis, including enforcement and first entry operations;

the principle of differentiation which involves equipping and training the forces according to the specific requirements of their mission, by focusing the most expensive resources where they are really needed;

and the principle of pooling resources with respect to the rare and critical capabilities that can be used in different missions (deterrence, protection and intervention) or shared with our main European partners (transport and air-to-air refueling) or between intelligence agencies.

On this basis, the new operational contracts, beyond the requirements for the permanent protection of the territory, provide for, with respect to the stabilization and international crisis management missions, a total commitment of 7,000 men - which can be adjusted - allocated to 3 theaters of operation and to naval and air units. For major enforcement operations our armies will continue to have first entry capability in major enforcement operations with the participation of special forces, two joint command brigades, representing approximately 15,000 ground forces, 45 combat planes and a carrier battle group.

These choices have consequences in terms of the level or targets of the distance of power projection. But they now allow us to signal our commitment to ensuring well-equipped and well-informed autonomous capabilities. These forces should have the capacity to have a decisive impact in areas where our interests and those of our partners and allies face the greatest threats. They will demonstrate that France is ready to assume its responsibilities as it did so in Libya from the outset and notably in Mali, in order to destroy the terrorist threat facing the African continent as well as the security of us all.

The model for the armed forces that emerges from these operational contracts isn’t a stand-by model or a model for withdrawal. On the contrary it’s forward-looking. It’s based on a renewed military strategy. It includes new strategic areas, such as cyber defense. It provides for the strengthening of special forces capabilities. It makes intelligence a clear priority. It provides for investment in the space sector as well as remedial action to modernize our armies, in key areas, namely with respect to drones and air-to-air refueling.

Of course, the pace at which our equipment will be modernized will be slower than predicted in 2008 due to the economic and financial crises that have taken place since then, but President Hollande was keen to make our industrial policy a key priority in the period ahead. A significant volume of appropriations has therefore been allocated to weapons programs. By the same token, we aim to continue our research efforts, which are crucial for the future, as everyone here knows.

The 2013 White Paper stresses France’s historical commitment to sharing a common destiny with its European partners. European integration is more than ever, despite its slowness, an important focus of our strategy. It’s key with respect to operations, as you can see today with respect to Mali, as well as with respect to the pooling of our capabilities, which we plan to do in the area of air-to-air refueling, air transport, drones and space. These are key areas for future cooperation since we have everything to gain from interdependencies that have been freely undertaken.

It’s not a question of seeking some kind of ideological revitalization of European defense, but rather of proposing to our partners a practical approach based on concrete, operational, industrial and capability-driven projects and a political approach, with a view toward optimizing our resources.

This commitment goes hand in hand with our commitment to NATO which is our Alliance. The 2013 White Paper draws all the consequences from the mission entrusted to Hubert Védrine by President Hollande. France will continue to play an active role in the Alliance, in a proactive and straightforward manner, through its contribution to the doctrine, planning and operations as well as through its exacting reform-oriented vision of the role and structures of this fundamental military alliance.
In this changing strategic environment, I want to strongly emphasize that France will preserve its international ambitions and its strategic autonomy. The type of army promoted by the White Paper reflects this project as well as our determination to preserve our strategic autonomy and our first entry capability. That sends a strong signal to our allies, and particularly to our American partners, whose views and efforts we have always shared when it comes to Europe’s shouldering more defense responsibilities.

This objective, which we have communicated to our partners for two decades, long pre-dates the “pivot to Asia,” which, let me say, in no way makes us worry that America is losing interest in Europe.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

[The major theaters of crisis]

Going beyond mere words, we’ve always taken action when the imperatives of responsibility demand that we do so. The French army’s operational successes in Mali as well as (let’s not forget) in Libya and Afghanistan, attest to this. And we will continue to do so wherever we deem it necessary.

We remain convinced that only by exercising such concrete, operational leadership – which we intend to keep doing, despite reduced resources – and by maintaining regular cooperation with other states committed to international security, can we, together, meet the many security-related challenges facing us today.

I would like to come back to four of these challenges: terrorism through the prism of the southern Sahel; Afghanistan; Syria; and Iran.

We’ve all known for years that the Sahel was becoming a new sanctuary for international terrorism. The President warned the international community about this last September in New York. We therefore did not hesitate when, on January 11, it became necessary to deploy French armed forces to halt attacks by terrorist elements from northern Mali. The stakes were not only local. Not only Mali and Africa were concerned, but global security.

Waiting any longer would not only have been a strategic error, it would have been tantamount to totally abandoning a nation and its 14 million inhabitants to jihadi groups. We could not tolerate that. When President Traore appealed to France for help, we knew that the offensive launched by al-Qaeda and its affiliates was aimed at extending their control over the entire country of Mali. Mali’s very existence was threatened. But another threat was the establishment of a terrorist state within arm’s length of Europe.

Today, the Malian government in Bamako is exercising sovereignty over most of its territory. Terrorist groups, AQIM, MUJAO, were hit hard, at the very heart of their sanctuaries, and some of their leaders, such as Abu Zeid, were killed. These movements did not achieve their objectives and they will no longer do so. But the result of our operations speaks volumes about what they were attempting to do: more than 200 tons of weapons were recovered and an impressive terrorist infrastructure was dismantled, comprising international terrorists who thought northern Mali would become their base.

We carried out this mission with a clear mandate from the international community and the active support of our allies. I therefore want to offer my warm thanks to our American allies for their support for our forces on the ground, in the areas of strategic transport, refueling and intelligence. In this regard, the Mali crisis perfectly revealed what a strategic partnership is capable of achieving.

I also see this as a concrete example of the kind of burden-sharing that is now necessary among allies, and the translation of a few simple principles we made a point of including in the White Paper: the capacity for analysis, intelligence and autonomous decision-making (indeed, Mali confirmed the absolute priority that must be given to intelligence-gathering mechanisms); speedy power projection, facilitated by our bases abroad; support from our allies in key areas and capacity pooling; a partnership with the Africans; and most important, the political will to act swiftly and strongly while maintaining respect for international law, and the ability of French public opinion to accept and understand this type of risk that is necessary for our own security.
We returned to Mali for a new phase of political and military transition, the first stage of a post-war period. But the situation in the Sahel is still far from being completely stabilized. We've seen reminders of this in recent weeks: our two countries now share the sad privilege of being the leading targets of jihadi movements. On the ground, we still have to worry about the use of indirect modes of action, although the hasty comparisons some have made to Iraq and Afghanistan are in many ways meaningless.

Through a gradual, pragmatic disengagement, our mission in Mali will change. We helped African (AFISMA) and Malian forces take over on the ground. Tomorrow, we will of course support the 12,600-man peacekeeping mission, which the Security Council just created – in a spirit of unanimity that is sufficiently rare to be worthy of notice. And through permanent forces in the area, we will maintain our capacity to fight terrorist movements.

But military operations must only be instruments of crises and emergencies. It is not our role to replace the political authorities of these countries and their regional organizations, whose work must be applauded and supported. There can be no lasting military success without political support, represented by a new triptych: elections, national reconciliation, and the restoration of the rule of law. The international effort, in which the U.S. took part, cannot and must not be temporary or transitory. The difficulties we are once again facing in Libya remind us of this.

The crisis in Mali is therefore a symptom of a disturbing trend. The international community must now take into account entire regions, which are all the more affected by cross-border threats in that certain nations do not have the means (or the will) to shoulder their governmental and social responsibilities. The cross-cutting threats we are currently facing demand a broader commitment, a comprehensive approach to the entire spectrum; that is another one of the White Paper’s conclusions.

Elements of this scenario remind us of Afghanistan, which remains a major theater. France will soon complete the withdrawal of its combat forces, in keeping with the decisions the President announced a year ago, at the Chicago summit. It is part of a broad policy adopted by all the Allies to transfer responsibility to the Afghan forces. Just as my country has not turned its back on its responsibilities in recent years, accepting long-term involvement in areas known for their danger and in the fight against al-Qaeda, despite the difficulties, we intend to continue our support for Afghanistan in its effort to regain its sovereignty and achieve a successful political transition. The transfer of power to Afghan security forces is taking place in an electoral context that will be decisive for the country’s future. It is up to us to support it in consolidating a state that lives up to its people’s expectations. Afghanistan knows that it can count not on the fatigue and lack of interest of the allies but, to the contrary, on their support and notably that of France, with which it has signed a 20-year friendship and cooperation treaty.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this general strategic landscape, there is however little doubt that the Middle East is crucial to much of our security. The White Paper explicitly acknowledges this, at a time when the region is still feeling the repercussions of the Arab revolutions.

This is particularly true for Syria.

There is little to add to the frustration felt by our governments and by each and every one of us as we contemplate the tragedy that has been unfolding for more than two years. The regime’s blindness and its recourse to a strategy of “ever more violence,” even at the cost of Syria’s total destruction; the humanitarian tragedy for all the families of the 100,000 victims, for the tens of thousand of disappeared, for the 4.5 million displaced persons and for the 1.5 refugees in neighboring countries; the escalating violence that each day fosters the rise of radical groups and prompts bad advice from the Iranian regime; the pressure on Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon from the influx of refugees… And our shared conviction that, the more Syria sinks into violence, the greater the risk of national collapse and the destruction of its society, with a host of incalculable consequences on the stability of neighboring countries – Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, as well as the State of Israel, and Turkey, our NATO ally.

Hannah Arendt reminded us that the opposite of violence isn’t the absence of violence, it is political power. What can we expect from politics today?
First, a rejection of silence and renunciation. More than two years after the birth of a protest movement that was initially peaceful and was immediately suppressed in the most brutal possible way, our concept of democracy in the face of the blind use of violence hinges on our refusal to accept the fait accompli. Those responsible for the atrocities must know that sooner or later, they will be held accountable by the international community. And the past two decades have amply demonstrated that this is not an empty threat.

A lack of unanimity has prevented the Security Council from playing an effective role. But now more than ever, the resolution of this conflict depends on being able to impose a political solution on the protagonists, with the alternative being widespread chaos or even a breakup of the country, as John Kerry noted last week in Moscow.

Yes, a political solution, but one that lives up to the aspirations of the people; that is, a transition in which the family clan in power in Damascus will no longer have a place. A solution that keeps the country from falling into a cycle of civil war and ultimately disintegrating. A solution that offers the project of a state to be rebuilt for all Syrians. We must therefore relentlessly pursue our efforts with our partners in the Security Council. To that end, we long ago proposed the idea of second Geneva conference and we are happy to see that the idea of an international conference on Syria has once again been put forward.

Banking on politics also means continuing our unwavering support for the moderate opposition, for the Syrian national coalition, encouraging it to expand to include all components of Syrian society, to reject extremist groups such as Jabat al-Nusra, and to offer the project of a true alternative State. Banking on politics also means providing support for the opposition’s military structures, as soon as they’re clearly identified, under the leadership of Salim Idriss’s staff. We will continue to do this in a decisive manner, working closely with our European partners.

Finally, and most important, it means indicating our intransigence when it comes to temptations in Damascus and among some of its allies to resort to terror through the use of chemical weapons. While France may have no official proof on a national level, enough evidence has accumulated for us, along with our British partners, to demand a robust investigation by the UN. Here too, the Damascus regime – which bears responsibility for its chemical weapons stockpiles – must know that it will be held accountable.

We are continuing to consult closely and intensively with the United States and the United Kingdom on this issue and on our options. It is one of the reasons for my visit. Because this crisis cannot be resolved without a major cooperative effort on both sides of the Atlantic.

A few words, finally, on Iran. All indications are that it is continuing its mad rush toward nuclear weapons. After the failure of the Istanbul-Baghdad-Moscow round of talks in spring 2012, the two Almaty meetings in February and April also failed to convince Iran to accept the slightest confidence-building measure. Given the inflexibility of the Iranian positions, we must continue our two-pronged approach and ratchet up pressure on Iran in the coming months, as the Iranians are expanding their enrichment program in terms of both quantity and quality. Now more than ever, it is our responsibility to defeat this strategy of procrastination and dissimulation in order to guarantee the viability of the non-proliferation system.

That responsibility justifies our strong commitment and that of our American allies and European partners to implement decisive sanctions. It is crucial to maintain coordination in order to increase pressure on Iran whenever it takes a new step in the wrong direction. And to remember that we have security interests and defense commitments in the Gulf, which we will honor.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In Mali, as in Libya and Afghanistan, France paid for collective security with its blood. Faced with the risks and the threats surrounding us, the leading condition for success still remains the determination to confront them with the necessary force.

We share that determination, bequeathed to us by the history of the 20th century, with the United States. Given the threats aimed at both of our countries, our bilateral relationship and our alliance are more essential than ever.
France intends to maintain our shared determination, despite hard-hitting financial constraints. The new White Paper reflects this ambition, expressing clearly and candidly the strong commitment that goes hand-in-hand with our vision of France’s role in the world. That is what I have come here to reaffirm to our leading ally in my meetings at the White House, the Pentagon and Congress.

Thank you.