



New Year greeting to the armed forces speech by M. Jacques CHIRAC, President of the Republic (excerpts)

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Paris, 8 January 2007

(...)

My first thoughts go to those who have given their lives or sustained injuries carrying out their duty. Their sacrifice is the ultimate expression of the soldier's commitment to serve the nation. I pay them solemn tribute and express my affection and support to their families.

I also salute the 14,000 women and men who are, at this very moment, deployed on national territory or in external operations, particularly in Lebanon, the Balkans, Afghanistan and Africa. They proudly epitomize France's honour and commitment to peace.

The State's primary mission is to ensure the security of France and her citizens, protect her interests and defend her standing. The State is responsible for maintaining national independence. It is responsible for guaranteeing our vital interests and control of our destiny, solidarity with our European partners and our allies, and the commitment to peace. France does this in the name of a worldview founded on the universal values of human dignity, respect, justice and solidarity.

We live in a world of new threats. The rapid development of globalization, race for raw materials and emergence of new powers are upsetting the old traditional balances. Demographic, economic and cultural fault lines are widening. The temptations to go it alone or turn in on oneself are increasing. Frustrations and feelings of injustice stemming from unresolved conflicts form the breeding ground for extremists and terrorism. By pursuing strategies taking the world to the brink of the abyss, some States are embarking on the path of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons proliferation, and thereby gravely fanning international tension.

In this dangerous context, France can't lower her guard or leave it to others to ensure her defence. This is a major political concern. It will have to be at



the heart of the debate in the coming months.

Learning the lessons from the tragic experience of 1940, the framers of the Constitution of the Fifth Republic wanted the Head of State directly to assume responsibility for France's armed forces and defence.

ARMED FORCES' REFORM/BUDGET

Taking this on board, I have overseen the radical modernization of our defence capability.

Confronted with the complexity, nature and duration of the military operations, I embarked on the task of giving France fully career regular armed forces. You have been model architects of this in every respect and it has now been completed within the set timetable. Its benefit for our national defence is now obvious.

Our fellow citizens expect their armed forces to carry out their missions rigorously and determinedly. They know the risks you run. They know the imperatives and constraints of this great, noble career, which you have chosen.

This is why I wanted - and you were right to talk about it, General - the new terms and conditions of service of military personnel to afford you fair compensation for these demands.

A defence policy without adequate resources would be only a façade policy.

So I have seen to the restoration of our capabilities. The Military Estimates Act, scrupulously observed, thanks particularly to the action of the Prime Minister and Defence Minister - and I want to pay tribute to them in this respect -, set in train the essential modernization of our equipment and enabled the launch of the necessary programmes for the future.

Already you can see the consequences. This summer, the projection and command vessels and Leclerc tanks were deployed in Lebanon. In the very near future, Rafales will be at work in Afghanistan. The Hélios and Syracuse satellites constantly bolster our intelligence and command capabilities.

The next Estimates Act absolutely has to confirm this policy and allow delivery of the new equipment. If this is done, the armed forces will get the multimission frigate, A 400M transport plane and Tiger and NH 90 helicopters during this period, which is essential.

Maintaining a credible defence capability is a long-term task necessitating perseverance and realism. It is the fruit of constant and regularly revised analysis and requires continuously making an effort on the budgetary front.

For five years, despite the public finance constraints, I have seen to it, with the Prime Minister, that you had the necessary resources, even if the budget



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was calculated down to the last euro.

It's essential for the nation to maintain this effort, since the balance achieved is still fragile. It is tempting - and so easy - to cut the armed forces' budget! But such cuts come at the cost of their operational capacity, credibility, and ability to fulfil their mission. For our defence capability to meet the nation's needs, we must reject the possibility of operations being blocked. Responsible action is required, since at stake are the security of the French and our ability to uphold peace and defend our values in an increasingly dangerous world.

NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

The nuclear deterrent provides the ultimate guarantee of our vital interests. I continuously ensure its coherence and credibility.

Our doctrine has been adapted taking account of the new threats and our international commitments: faced with a major power, to be able to inflict damage of any kind, and, faced with a regional power, to exercise our response on its centres of power and capacity to act so that the risk of irreparable damage deters any potential aggressor.

Similarly, I make sure that the deterrent forces are continuously modernized, in a spirit of strict sufficiency. Their two, maritime and airborne, components offer the Head of State the essential flexibility and necessary credibility. Our ability constantly to adapt and modernize our deterrent forces is also a major challenge for the coming years.

DEFENCE EUROPE

The progress of Europe also serves our security interests. This is why I have made Defence Europe a priority, and the credibility of its operations under international mandate an imperative.

Defence Europe translates into action a will to bring our operational capabilities, doctrines, industrial and research assets, weapons programmes and training centres closer together. It has also brought our joint engagement in peacekeeping operations in Africa and the Balkans.

What has been accomplished since the Saint-Malo Franco-British summit in 1998 has opened up a new path bolstering Europe as a centre of peace and stability in the world. But we will have to go still further so that the EU fully shoulders its role, including in the Atlantic Alliance, and there is a balanced transatlantic relationship.

INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS

Conflict prevention is obviously our priority. But we know the use of force is at times indispensable, for example to protect our fellow citizens and



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interests or carry out peacekeeping missions, particularly under international mandate. This is why, with the experience gained in the Balkans, Lebanon and Africa, I am ensuring that the international mandates under which our forces are deployed enable them genuinely and fully to carry out their missions.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

This year the French will make some decisive choices for the future, as is customary in a democracy. In defence, it will be for the armed forces to implement them. This is why I wanted to remind you today what are, for the country, the main issues at stake. (●●)./.

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