



Visit to the special forces of the 1st Marines Parachute Regiment speech by M. Jacques CHIRAC, President of the Republic

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Bayonne, 3 April 2007

It is with great pride and deep emotion that I meet you, men of the Special Forces, here in Bayonne. You are a symbol of our armed forces. You are an example to our fellow-citizens. You embody France's will not to leave to anyone else the task of ensuring her security. You embody her determination to influence world affairs, for peace, for justice, for the defence of our values.

I particularly wish to pay tribute today to your essential role in all theatres of operations, notably in Afghanistan, where most of you have distinguished yourselves. Some of your comrades in arms have been wounded there. Others have lost their lives. That supreme sacrifice is the ultimate expression of a soldier's commitment to serve his country: Lance Corporal Yagci, Corporal Crupel, Chief Petty Officer Lepage, Warrant Officer Gazeau, Corporal Poulain, Corporal Planelles, Chief Petty Officer Parø, your memory will be forever engraved on our hearts. France will not forget your fight for peace in a world increasingly marked by terrorism, the global scourge of modern times.

Yes, we live in a dangerous world today and there is, alas, no indication that tensions and conflicts of every kind will abate in the years to come.

It would therefore be madness to relax our efforts and our vigilance. France must ensure her own security and must continue to assume her responsibilities in the world to the full, as she has done throughout her history.

The first instrument of our credibility is, of course, our nuclear deterrent. Since I took office, I have been at pains to ensure its coherence and provide for the modernization of its seaborne and airborne components in a spirit of strict sufficiency. I have adapted our position to meet the new threats, in compliance with our international commitments. At all events, any potential aggressor knows that, if he were to consider attacking France, he would be liable to suffer unacceptable damage. The capacity that must always be ours, the capacity to constantly modernize our deterrent, will be one of the essential issues in years to come.



PRESIDENCE DE LA REPUBLIQUE

Of course, our credibility is not only technological: it is also human. Behind every weapon, however sophisticated, there are fighters. Our credibility lies in our capacity to deploy fully-operational troops, when necessary, at the service of the French people and of world security. Afghanistan, Côte d'Ivoire, Lebanon, Kosovo: 15,000 women and men are currently serving in 17 theatres of operations in the world.

They are serving, you are serving, with professionalism, with courage, and with honour.

Faced with new issues and new threats, I have always been at pains to ensure that you had the necessary means to complete your missions. That is why I have conducted a thorough modernization of our defence arm, with a policy of equipment fit for purpose and the professionalization of our armed forces.

You spearheaded this professionalization. It has now been completed, and completed on schedule. Everyone knows what a great asset it is for our national defence.

I am well aware of the demands that a military career makes on you and your families, and of the strong constraints it imposes. The new service regulations provide fair compensation for those demands. That is one of the reasons why I set up the Haut Comité d'évaluation de la condition militaire [high committee for the assessment of service conditions], which gives the government an independent view.

I have also arranged for the necessary review of our defence capabilities. The military estimates Act was designed in that spirit and it has been respected. It has also enabled the necessary programmes to be launched for the future.

I can now tell you with the greatest conviction and the greatest firmness: the defence budget must not be an adjustable variable in our budgetary policy. It is essential to continue our commitment over time. Otherwise, the French people will have striven in vain. If France were to lower her guard, she would lose control of her security and would cease to be the master of her fate. Such a choice would be both foolish and irresponsible.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Everyone who has had the privilege of fighting at your side recognizes your professionalism in the most dangerous situations and the most hostile environments. This professionalism also lies in your ability to defuse tension, restore confidence, and adapt to any cultural and human environment.

I say it here: we have an exemplary army, one that is respected in the world. It has proved its ability to work in complete accord with the authorities of the countries in which its forces are deployed, with the international organizations, and of course with all our allies, including first and foremost our European allies.



PRESIDENCE DE LA REPUBLIQUE

The progress of Defence Europe is clearly one of the keys to our security. That is why I have made it a priority, together with the approximation of our operational capabilities, our regulations, our industrial and research assets, our arms programmes and our training centres. And together with our joint commitment to peacekeeping operations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In visiting you here, I wish to express the nation's deep gratitude to the Special Forces. And, through you, I pay tribute to all our armed forces: to you, women and men of the army, gendarmerie, navy and air force. You are among the finest of our youth. You have chosen to place your lives at the service of our fellow citizens. You proudly epitomize military values: courage, self-sacrifice, discipline, willingness to lay down your lives for your country, for peace and for world security. The French people are fully aware of this: they know how much they owe you.

Speaking on behalf of the nation and in my capacity as head of the armed forces, I wish to express to you all my esteem, gratitude and friendship.

Long live the Republic! Long live France!./.

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