

Restoring Peace in Africa, Revitalizing European Defense, and Renewing NATO: The View From Paris

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Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends,

First of all, let me say what a pleasure and an honor it is for me to address the CSIS today. Very few institutions in the United States, and on either side of the Atlantic for that matter, contribute as much as yours to strategic thinking. I am truly delighted to be with you and I wish to thank John Hamre for his brilliant, and kind, introduction.

As we speak, the French armed forces, present in a dozen African countries, are engaged in major international security operations in the Sahel and the Central African Republic. I would like to share with you France's choices and ambitions in terms of defense and security policy in Africa, as well as my vision of French-American and Euro-American cooperation in global security.

Africa represents a key area of interest for France and for Europe. Because of the historical ties which exist between us and a number of African countries, which give us a special responsibility. But also because Africa has such great potential for this century - one of the greatest reserves of future growth – while presenting major defense and security challenges.

France is particularly well positioned to contribute to meeting these challenges. As we have shown, we will not back out of our responsibilities. Our interventions in Libya, Mali and very recently in Central Africa are a demonstration of our resolve.

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Allow me to start from the analysis developed in the French White Book on Defense and National Security. This document defines, among the major issues in international security for the next fifteen years, the « risks of weakness » as opposed to the « threats of force ». It refers to these « faltering » States which become, due to the absence or weakness of State and governmental structures, sources of instability, violence, trafficking and regional insecurity. Today, these situations create a major threat for Africa.

As you know, the African continent is at the dawn of profound social, demographic, political and environmental changes. These evolutions, though they might create opportunities, are also a source of new threats which are, for the most part, transnational. Some – illegal trafficking and Jihadist terrorism – constitute the downside of the necessary and desirable insertion of Africa into globalization.

Many African States are vulnerable to these threats. Their capabilities in terms of border security and stemming flows of illegal goods and human beings are limited. Regional cooperation in this area still remains insufficient. It is these vulnerabilities which constitute, in our view, a major risk. Whole regions, from the Sahel to the Horn of Africa, thus suffer from illegal trafficking as well as armed and violent movements which exceed by their size the traditional movements in the regions, as we witnessed in Mali.

These stakes are not only local. Tomorrow, it is the whole international order which might be affected. That is why France says it forcefully: by helping Africa to overcome its risks of weakness, we are strengthening international peace and security.

Our armed intervention, on January 11, 2013, was about more than Mali. It was about European and even global security. Our adversary was Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb – or AQIM – under its various forms. The threat, was the creation by violent, very well organized and equipped Jihadist groups of a terrorist State threatening the region and Europe.

We acted in accordance with international law, and at the enormous cost of a heavy engagement, with the sacrifice of several of our servicemen. But we were able to save an African capital, Bamako, and we destroyed a Jihadist sanctuary, at Europe's doorstep.

I want to take this opportunity to convey my warmest thanks to our American allies for the support they gave our forces on the ground. It is also in the field that the solidity of a friendship is tested, and our engagement in Mali was proof, if necessary, of the highest quality of the partnership between our two countries on issues of collective security.

The coordinated action of the international community thus enabled us to put a stop to the expansion of terrorism in the Sahel.

Today, the Malian territory is under the sovereignty of the Bamako government. The presidential and legislative elections last July and December contributed decisively to the normalization process. The gains obtained through international military operations must be sustained. The reconciliation process initiated by the President of Mali, strongly encouraged by the international community, constitutes an essential condition for long term regional stability. Likewise, the revitalization of economic development policies is crucial. These policies must benefit the underprivileged regions in the north of Mali. Only this development and this reconciliation can create a fair and lasting solution.

Despite these encouraging developments, we must remain vigilant. The security challenge is still to prevent the Jihadist groups to regroup their forces in Mali as well as in the neighboring countries. The challenge is also to enable Mali, like other countries, to defend itself against these existential threats.

The challenge has taken on a regional dimension. We know the groups gravitating around AQIM and threatening Niger, Libya, Tunisia, Chad, just to mention only a few examples. .

This is why France has adjusted its military deployment in the region.

The volume of our forces engaged in North Mali will be drawn down to reach 1,000 men before next summer. But we will still support the Malian forces and the UN forces, and we will continue to conduct counter-terrorism operations in the zone.

Above all, to deal with the transborder nature of the Jihadist threat, we have begun to increase our deployment as part of a regional approach. It is with a strength of some 3,000 servicemen that we are ready to fight terrorism throughout the Sahel region. I will come back to this shortly.

African States, in particular in the Sahel, have taken the full measure of the existing threats in that region and are determined today to confront terrorism together. It is up to us to match their determination; it is up to us to encourage them to cooperate.

In this undertaking, Libya represents a major challenge. Tripoli has a hard time getting rid of its militias and securing its borders. As long as this situation lasts, we have to help the neighboring countries guard against the chaos in Libya, particularly in the South.

We cannot allow a threat similar to the one that triggered our military intervention last year to take root again in Mali, nor in any other State in the region. We must also, wherever this is possible, weaken the threat of Jihadist terrorism which crosses borders from South East Asia to the Middle East, from the Near East to the Western coasts of Africa.

Washington and Paris are in full agreement on this. The international effort in which the United States is taking part cannot be in vain.

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I started by mentioning the risks of weakness which affect Africa. The crisis in the Central African Republic is another typical example, however different from Mali.

Since the *Seleka* seized power last March, the country was increasingly drawn into a cycle of interfaith violence, the like of which had never been seen before in CAR.

One must understand that the Central African problem is first and foremost political. It is the manipulation of the religious aspect of Central African antagonisms with the aim of keeping power, which resulted in lethal confrontations over these last few months. This manipulation was initiated first by President Bozizé's clan during his last years in power then, since March 2013, by the representatives of the *Selekas* in Bangui and the country they were holding.

Secondly, we find ourselves in a country where the State (I was able to see it myself), has completely disappeared: the administration, the police, the law, the "gendarmierie",

the armed forces have vanished; A paralyzed government, stolen resources. The void created in the Republic of Central Africa offered a propitious terrain for all sorts of trafficking, for setting up radical movements and creating a regional destabilization with repercussions in Chad, the Sudan, the Congo and Cameroon.

The break out of violence which preceded the arrival of our troops, and the mounting tensions between the various communities were confirmation that we were on the verge of a large scale disaster. The populations were pushed to the edge by months of unprecedented and wide scale exactions.

Therefore, we decided to act on three fronts: internationally, with the African organizations and the UN, as well as with the European Union; militarily, with an intervention of some 1,600 soldiers on the basis of a mandate of the UN Security Council; and politically, by supporting the transition towards elections before the end of this year, thanks to a new team in charge of this transition under the direction of a newly elected President, Mrs. Samba-Panza.

The French and African forces have given us the upper hand over the Seleka and the militias. They were not able to suppress all the violence but they succeeded in slowing down the deterioration of the security environment, thus restoring hope.

Our soldiers intervene in support of MISCA, the International Mission of Support to the Central African Republic. French forces and MISCA thus contribute on a daily basis to protecting the civilian population by conducting common patrols, by disarming the militias, by securing the airport which allows the humanitarian aid to be delivered. This military action was absolutely necessary from day one. It continues to be so. It is in the process of being increased outside the capital.

The daily confrontations show the need for a continued strong international presence.

After that, the Central African State will need rebuilding. Again, it is the responsibility of the whole international community. It is a real peace-keeping operation conducted by the United Nations that the Central African Republic will need. In a few weeks, the members of the international community will be invited to take part in a donors' conference in support of MISCA. By committing to provide up to 100 million dollars to MISCA, the United States have already demonstrated their commitment to the resolution of this crisis. This is also the sign that we share a common vision of the crisis and its stakes.

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There are, of course, other crises in Africa. I think about Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan. In resolving these crises, the United States have played an essential role. In the case of Somalia as in the case of the DRC where France is already involved, we have witnessed encouraging signs of an increasing security effort by the Africans themselves. We are starting to see the early signs of these efforts

also in the Central African Republic with the action of the ECCAS (Economic Community of Central African States) as well as in Mali with the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States).

The message that we have addressed to the 53 African Heads of State and representatives gathered in Paris over a month ago at the Elysee Summit on Peace and Security in Africa was simple: you must reinforce these efforts.

We also support the initiative of Senegal to organize an informal international forum on peace and security in Africa, since dialogue and coordination constitute prerequisites which are absolutely necessary to stability. I think that our European and American partners must be fully involved in that exercise.

Our approach is simple. During the Elysee summit, we reaffirmed our full and complete availability to support the actions of the African Union, regional organizations and the States dealing with these threats.

We are also ready to support the creation of a rapid reaction force under the aegis of the African Union. We will also respond favorably to the requests of our partners for training and advising their armed forces.

This approach is fully coherent with our White Book on Defense and National Security. On the basis of this analysis, our overall deployment in Africa will be tailored to better respond to new security requirements. It will be more centered, as I said before, on the Sahel region. We will have operational assets deployed from Chad to Mali. They will benefit from the support of two Advanced Operational Bases which will offer reserves for the conduct of operations, as well as two operational poles of cooperation.

The two Advanced Operational Bases, one in Abidjan in the Ivory Coast, the other one in Djibouti, will have at their disposal capabilities enabling them to respond in case of emergencies to the deterioration of the security environment in the region. These two bases will be located in the strategic airport facilities of the continent. They will enable us to act in the field of maritime security in the Gulf of Aden and the Gulf of Guinea, and to serve as a stepping stone for stabilization actions in zones of potential crises.

Our two poles of cooperation will also have a regional purpose. Located in Dakar and Libreville, they will enable us to reinforce the actions of cooperation conducted for the benefit of African States, in collaboration with African regional organizations.

The resolution of crises in Africa goes indeed through the Africanization of crisis management.

In order to do that, we will need to mobilize everybody. In this collective effort, the United States is an essential partner for France, because we share the same vision of the security challenges in Africa and of the solutions to seek.

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In an ever more complex and uncertain economic and strategic environment, the partnership between our two countries has rarely been that crucial. In the face of new threats, and given the budgetary constraints affecting all of us, it is together that we must meet the security challenges facing us. In Africa in particular, in the face of crises which are convulsing the continent, France assumes its full responsibilities. It does so with the support of Washington, as demonstrated in Libya, for a year now in Mali, – with the decisive U.S. logistic and intelligence support, and now in the Central African Republic – with a significant U.S. logistical and financial support.

Through these crises, we have developed a new mode of Transatlantic cooperation. It is now time for this cooperation to be further structured. This is one of the purposes of my visit. In my view, this strengthening requires two things :

First, a reinforcement of the French-American partnership in its most strategic dimensions. Few countries, like our two nations, have the will and capabilities to engage in overseas operations, whenever the situation requires it. For this reason, we must continue to enhance our intelligence exchanges and cooperation, compare our strategic analyses and consolidate our forces' capability – in particular our Special Forces' capability – to act together. These issues, among many others, will be discussed at meetings I will have today and tomorrow with my American counterparts.

Secondly, I think that we must aim to reinforce the Euro-American partnership. It is essential that the United States and the European Union work in closer coordination. Our approach, let me be clear, is that of complementary actions of the European Union and the Atlantic Alliance.

This implies a non-duplication of the efforts of each one of these organizations. There are indeed areas where the European Union has developed skills that the Alliance does not have; it is good in particular in mobilizing assets throughout the whole range of the political, security, economic and humanitarian tools.

The EU's will to strengthen its ability to act, including on its own, serves American interests, since it reinforces the capacity of Washington's European allies to contribute to collective security.

It is in that spirit that we approached the topic of security and defense at the European Council on December 19-20, 2013. We decided, as far as we are concerned, to avoid ideological debates in order to obtain concrete results. I have never ceased to repeat this message of pragmatism since assuming my duties as French Minister of Defense.

I have the feeling that we have made significant strides. The conclusions of the European Council allow us to progress in the sense of increased responsibility sharing by Europeans, especially as regards the support by the EU to the reinforcement of

security and defense capabilities of third States as well as the finalization of the EU maritime security strategy.

The European Council was also the opportunity to show the willingness of the Europeans to address some capability shortfalls identified during operations, especially surveillance drones (ISR) and air-to-air refueling.

Finally, we are convinced that Europe can be a true military partner for the United States only by keeping its powerful and competitive defense industry. That is why maintaining the EU's strategic autonomy, through the reinforcement of its industrial and technological defense base, is one of the central points of the European Council.

These stakes which seem, at first, to be of importance only to the Europeans, are also of great interest to the United States in the first place.

This rebalancing of the partnership between the two sides of the Atlantic is indispensable. Indispensable to the United States which must better share the burden with its European partners. Indispensable to Europe which must better share responsibilities with its American partners.

Indispensable to the vitality and the future of the Transatlantic relationship, which could otherwise be increasingly contested on both sides. If we wish that NATO continue to be as relevant as it used to be, it must adapt. If we wish that the NATO Summit of next September to be a success, then we must at all costs take into account this new development.

In conclusion, I will say that the analysis of the security stakes in Africa which I have just shared with you, requires, more than ever before, that our two countries work together. This analysis requires also that we strengthen our regional partnerships in order to be able collectively to further contribute to the international stability in Africa and elsewhere.

France fully assumes its defense and security responsibilities. It does not spare any effort to that end. In this context, we are working for a renewed partnership with the United States, which will take into account our respective strategic priorities and the development of threats which we are confronted with.

The welcome I have received since my arrival and the most productive exchanges I have had have only confirmed the usefulness and, may I say, the need for our partnership. Together, we must form a decisive driving force to mobilize nations toward a safer world.

Thank you for your attention.