



## Viewpoint from Paris



Photo: Dennis Kolesnyk

# France Updates its 2017 Defence and National Security Strategic Review

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Shortly after winning the presidential election in May 2017, Emmanuel Macron tasked a team to draft the Defence and National Security Strategic Review to update the existing White Paper that dated back to François Hollande's administration.

On 11 October the same year, the Strategic Review was presented to the President of France during a Security Council meeting. This solid 110-page document examined the core interests of France, its defence ambitions, and evaluated the security environment. The Review was also a key document for the preparation of the Military Planning Law for 2019-2025, aiming to bring the French defence expenditures up to 2 percent of the GDP.

The 2017 Strategic Review underlined several challenges, the growing ambitions of certain regional and global powers, as well as the general deterioration of the security environment. The issues of disinformation and cybersecurity did not go unnoticed, especially given that Emmanuel Macron's presidential campaign was targeted by the Russians.

Since then, and according to the French Ministry of Defence, certain trends underlined in the Strategic Review have been confirmed and some others have emerged.

Therefore, the necessity to update the document in order to improve the analysis of the evolving strategic environment has been imposed. On 21 January 2021, the French Minister of Defence, Florence Parly, presented the update to the Strategic Review.

The development of the document was carried out mainly by the Ministry of Defence and coordinated by the Directorate General for International Relations and Strategy with the involvement of some other actors at the national and allied level.

This 56-page update starts with taking stock of the developments described in the 2017 Strategic Review and, with no surprise, acknowledged the deterioration of the strategic context that jeopardises "the international security architecture".

The resumption of strategic and military competition by Russia and China is confirmed in the document and considered one of the main threats. Interestingly enough, the Strategic Review Update

contains 22 mentions of Russia, but only 13 times in the Strategic Review itself. It suggests that Moscow's hostile actions are being taken more seriously than a few years ago.

The document notes that health protection measures are having an unprecedented negative impact on the global economy leading to a severe economic recession. In addition, the "power strategy" adopted by Moscow and Beijing, including in the COVID-19 context, is underlined. It also notes Russia's ambitions, despite constraints on financial resources, to deploy its strategic ambitions beyond the usual theatres.

Russia and China are considered to be the most active in using so-called "hybrid strategies" that includes, but is not limited to the use of lawfare, non-state armed groups, as well as manipulation of information.

The document stresses the importance of cooperation with partners and allies with the President of France putting "the revival of European defence at the core of France's international action." The necessity of convergence and cooperation, including within the EU, NATO and ad hoc initiatives, in particular the European Intervention Initiative (EII) received particular attention. Paris also seeks the enhanced engagement of its allies and partners to fight terrorism and build the defence capabilities of the G5 Sahel countries.

The document also underlines the risk of the European continent being "downgraded" or even "withdrawn" from world affairs, painting a grim picture for European countries.

The authors of the document believe that "direct confrontation between major powers" can no longer be ignored. And finally, the document sets out the ambitions for 2030, where, among other things, the need to improve interoperability with allies and partners and the reinforcement of the reserve forces are noted.

For France, which considers herself a stabilising power, it is of paramount importance to be able to back up the political efforts by a "strengthened, effective and agile defence apparatus" and pay particular attention to cyber (informational) and space domains.