



EUROPE POLICY PAPER

AFTER THE TERROR ATTACKS OF 2015

A French Activist Foreign Policy Here to Stay?

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The German Marshall Fund
of the United States

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ALEXANDRA DE HOOP SCHEFFER, MARTIN MICHELOT, AND MARTIN QUENCEZ¹

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The shock over the attacks in Paris has triggered a turning-point in both France's domestic and international policies, and more specifically in its military engagement in the Syrian crisis and the fight against jihadist terrorism. Yet deeper trends in French foreign and security policy frame its recent initiatives on the international stage, accompanying President François Hollande's diplomatic activism and France's strategic priorities in the European neighborhoods and at the global level.

This paper analyzes the shaping and the implementation of France's recent diplomatic and military actions in light of shifts in the strategic environment and blurring lines between domestic and foreign policies. First, it highlights the main geopolitical developments influencing France's foreign policy: the redefinition of U.S. global leadership, the numerous security challenges in Europe and the European neighborhoods, and the emergence of new state and non-state security actors at the global level. The paper also focuses on the interests behind current French engagement in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the French ability to exercise credible leadership in foreign and security affairs in Europe and beyond — as well as influence regional balance of power — and the implications for France's "special" role in the transatlantic security partnership. Indeed, French-U.S. military cooperation has recently

reached a new high, with France and the United States working closely together in Libya, Mali, the Sahel, and now in Iraq and Syria. Paris has become Washington's most reliable European partner for power projection operations; the deepening of the French-U.S. strategic partnership parallels the relative decline of the U.K. strategic influence. Finally, the paper shows how Hollande's activism on the international scene and the unique centrality of security policy are shaping the changing French political context. It highlights the current softening of the traditional political divides on strategic issues, as well as of the long-established demarcation between foreign and domestic policies.

France's post-November 13th focus on the fight against terrorism at home and abroad will increase its reliance on U.S. military leadership and capabilities in the MENA region, and on NATO's and European partners' resolve to deter Russia in the East. France's expectations that its Allies will support this dual agenda may create tensions at the heart of the Alliance, as countries may be forced to choose, due to limited capabilities, between pressures borne on one side from the pan-European struggle against terrorism, and on the other the continued necessity to contain Russia. In a NATO Summit year, it will be critical to strike a balance between these two, at times competing, sides.

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2 INTRODUCTION

As activist as the new French posture may be, its capabilities are limited.

The shocking attacks of January and November of 2015 bookended a year of terrorist attacks in France; the country was struck five times in total. This violence left the public deeply unsettled and France “at war” with the self-proclaimed Islamic State group (ISIS). The shock from the November 13 attacks, called by many in France the “French 9/11,” has put immense pressure on the government to respond both domestically and abroad. Paris has stepped up its military engagement in Syria, and refocused on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and the threat of jihadist terrorism. Many have seen a more activist French foreign policy resulting from the November attacks. But the shift really started with the Arab Spring, and terrorism is only one reason for the new French posture.

The terrorist attacks were not so much a turning point for French foreign policy but a crystallization of trends that had been developing for a few years. From a French perspective, the country’s strategic environment has faced three fundamental transformations over the last 15 years: the redefinition of U.S. global leadership after the decade-long military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq; the multiplicity of security threats in the European neighborhoods, while the European project itself is being questioned by internal crises; and the emergence of new transnational challenges, involving both state and non-state actors, and

further blurring of the external and internal dimensions of security — as exemplified by the terrorist attacks in Paris last year — which require France to rethink its role and commitment to fight terrorism at home and globally.

The result has been the birth of a newly robust and activist French foreign policy that assumes more security responsibilities and steps up its military and diplomatic engagement, despite limited capabilities and the risk of overstretch. A renewed focus on the MENA region and terrorism has also created a new symmetry between France and the United States. France has become Washington’s most reliable partner in Europe, but Paris’s reliance on U.S. support is also painfully obvious. In parallel, the domestic context of foreign policy in France has changed, blurring the lines between traditional political positions and between domestic and foreign policy.

However, as activist as the new French posture may be, its capabilities are limited. France’s expectations of its European partners may be hard to meet. As tensions within Europe and crises around the Union continue unabated, capabilities will fall short. Disagreement is likely to ensue, and Europe will face tensions over priorities, including balancing between deterring Russia and containing terrorism.

3 DEFINING FRANCE'S STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT: UNITED STATES IN RETREAT, EUROPE IN TROUBLE

United States Steps Back and Pivots Away

The first half of the 2000s was defined by the tensions around the Iraq war, but French-U.S. relations have been strong since 2007. Both Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande's foreign policy and visions have been characterized as strongly Atlanticist by their opponents, a term with a traditionally negative connotation in France.¹ Key French strategic objectives, such as the security of Europe and its neighborhood, the promotion of the European project, and the defense of the liberal international order and its institutions rely on a high level of cooperation with Washington, and more generally on strong U.S. leadership at the global level. However, the U.S. shift of attention away from Europe and its strategic retrenchment under the Obama administration has also raised new concerns in Paris and shaped its priorities.²

In 2011, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton presented the concept of a "pivot toward Asia" to describe the new priority given to the Asia-Pacific region in U.S. foreign policy after the decade-long operations in the Middle-East and South Asia, an idea that was later confirmed by Barack Obama in a declaration to the Australian parliament.³ Though the pivot was soon limited by the crises in Ukraine and Syria, the strategic principles on which the pivot — or rebalancing — was built, based on

the efforts of previous presidencies,⁴ will remain relevant in the long term, and the need to further invest in the Asia-Pacific region will continue to frame U.S. global priorities. Traditional partners of the United States, both in Europe and the Middle East, feared that the new focus on Asian affairs would translate into a significant reduction of U.S. security engagement in their regions.⁵

In addition to strategic refocusing, the nature of U.S. global leadership has also changed due to strong financial constraints, which have reduced U.S. capacity to act as a security provider and further prioritized growth-driven initiatives such as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Indeed, although Washington is still able and willing to guarantee the security of its closest allies and will continue to provide them crucial support, and France has benefited from such support in both Libya and Mali,⁶ the political and economic legacies of the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan — the longest wars in U.S. history — and the consequences of the 2008 financial crisis have greatly reduced its power of projection. The United States has engaged in a long process of restructuring its defense budget, including the reduction of military spending and the need for more burden-sharing with its allies, which have directly affected U.S. military and NATO capabilities, as well as their credibility at

The U.S. shift of attention away from Europe and its strategic retrenchment under the Obama administration has also raised new concerns in Paris and shaped its priorities.

¹ Anne-Cécile Robert, "Plus atlantiste que moi..." *Le Monde Diplomatique*, April 2014

² See for example "The Implications of U.S. Strategic Restraint for the Transatlantic Relationship," Workshop Report, The German Marshall Fund of the United States, November 2013; and "Transatlantic Security Policy Towards a Changing Middle East," Workshop Report, The German Marshall Fund of the United States, February 2015

³ "As we end today's wars, I have directed my national security team to make our presence and mission in the Asia Pacific a top priority," Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament, November 17, 2011

⁴ During the 1990s, the G.H.W. Bush and Clinton administrations already attempted to respond to the emergence of new global powers in Asia by investing in new regional partnerships, and the G.W. Bush administration pursued the same goal by increasing its diplomatic, economic, and military engagement in the region. See for example Hugo Meijer (ed), *Origins and evolution of the U.S. rebalance toward Asia*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015

⁵ Gideon Rachman, "The U.S. Pivot to Asia — Should Europeans Worry?," Center for European Policy Analysis, April 2, 2012

⁶ Gabe Starosa, "Mission to Mali," *Air Force Magazine*, November 2013

As far as France is concerned, the shifts in U.S. foreign policy require all European powers to step up and take more strategic responsibilities.

the global level.⁷ This has left Washington looking for willing and able powers to take the strategic lead. These new limits were highlighted in 2011 with the notion of “leading from behind” used to characterize the U.S. support to the French and British-led interventions in Libya.

For France, the 2011 Libyan operation was an eye-opener. In August of that year, Sarkozy said, “President Obama has presented a new vision of U.S. military engagement that implies that the Europeans must assume more of their responsibilities. If we don’t draw the necessary conclusions, Europe will wake up to a difficult reality.”⁸ Two years later, a French White Paper on Defense warned that

“financial constraints and the lessons learned from recent conflicts will also have a strong influence on methods of intervention: the United States will probably seek more systematically to share the burden of foreign operations with its European allies, even if this means, in some cases, ceding power of initiative and command to them. The circumstances of the operations conducted in Libya and in Mali could provide a template for situations where American interests are less directly involved. Although not in the front line politically and militarily in such situations, the United States could support European action, although Europeans would not have any guarantee as to the capabilities that might be made available to them.”

⁷ Nora Bensahel and Jacob Stoked, “The U.S. defense budget and the future of alliance burden-sharing,” Policy Brief, German Marshall Fund of the United States, November 2013, <http://www.gmfus.org/publications/us-defense-budget-and-future-alliance-burden-sharing>

⁸ President Nicolas Sarkozy, Speech, 19th Ambassadors’ Conference, August 31, 2011, as quoted in *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/02/world/africa/02nato.html>.

The lack of assertive U.S. leadership in the Russian annexation of Crimea and aggression in Ukraine, and in the Syrian crisis, has allowed France to take the diplomatic initiative (along with Germany in the case of Ukraine), and to convince European partners to step up their military action in Syria.⁹

As far as France is concerned, the shifts in U.S. foreign policy require all European powers to step up and take more strategic responsibilities. The French perspective is therefore reactive: the evolution of U.S. leadership may create a destabilizing power vacuum in Europe and its neighborhoods, leaving France with no choice but to increase its power projection and activism at the international level. More specifically, Washington’s long-term focus on Asia and U.S. financial constraints provide new incentives to take the lead on security issues related to traditional French interests, notably in the MENA region and in Africa, particularly in the Sahel.

However, in his preview of the 2017 defense budget, U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter announced that the Pentagon was reshaping priorities to reflect a new strategic environment marked by Russian assertiveness and the rise of ISIS, signaling a partial “repivoting” of U.S. military power to both Europe and the MENA region.¹⁰ The announcement of the quadrupling of U.S. military spending on its “European Assurance Initiative” from \$789 million to \$3.4 billion, and the pledge to add “more rotational U.S. forces in Europe,” additional training exercises with NATO partners, “prepositioned”

⁹The creation of the “Normandy Format” in June 2014, which does not include the United States, was a response to the lack of progress of all other frameworks of discussion on the Ukrainian crisis. Similarly, the French decision to enhance cooperation with the United States and with Russia in the fight against ISIS, following the November 13th attacks in Paris, illustrate the French willingness to take the lead on an issue on which the United States has been reluctant to lead from the front.

¹⁰ U.S. Secretary of Defense Ash Carter, “Remarks Previewing the FY 2017 Defense Budget,” Washington, DC, February 2, 2016.

weaponry, and “infrastructure improvements” in Europe underscores a new sense of permanence to the U.S. presence in Europe and enduring commitment to European security and NATO’s collective defense. In Iraq and Syria, the United States has become increasingly frustrated with some partners not doing what it considers enough, and is now seeking to step up its military campaign against ISIS. This is reflected in Carter’s promise to increase the anti-ISIS budget by 50 percent, to \$7.5 billion.”

Europe Facing Divisions Within, Chaos Around

As a key European power, France’s strategic environment is also shaped by the evolutions of the European project and NATO, and more generally by the geopolitics of Europe. In recent years, however, simultaneous and compounding crises have emerged both inside Europe, where solidarity and identity are questioned, and in its near neighborhoods, which has turned into a belt of chaos.

There is a solidarity crisis in Europe. The economic crisis has forced austerity measures onto European populations and increased national debts while also raising broader doubts about the EU’s capacity to protect European economies. The recurring risks of “Grexit” have embodied the tensions over European solidarity; in the French political landscape and media, heated debates focused particularly on the role of Germany in the EU and the Greek crisis threatened the solidity of the “French-German couple.” The refugee crisis has further highlighted the lack of political unity among European partners. Despite a shared sense of urgency, the decision to force a deal imposing refugee quotas has not provided any reassurance on the EU and its member states’ ability to tackle the issue in the mid-

term future.¹¹ As a result, the support in France for a “two-speed Europe” to address these complex issues has dramatically increased.

The European project is also facing a crisis of identity and objectives. Divisions have weakened the member states’ ability to reach constructive agreements and have challenged the *raison d’être* of the European project. In most European countries, populist and Euroskeptical political parties have gained in votes and influence. The debate over a “Brexit” may foster further fragmentation among European partners about the future of the European project and strengthen nationalist Euroskeptical parties such as the Front National in France.

The Union is simultaneously confronted with powerful external challenges. The Russian invasion of Crimea and the security crisis in Ukraine and its implications — from the U.S. and European sanctions on Russia to the revision of the European Neighborhood Policy and the reinforcement of the French-German cooperation under the Normandy Format and the Minsk agreements — have deeply transformed the strategic environment in which France is operating. The Ukrainian crisis also monopolized the attention of NATO. The organization has aimed to redefine its priorities and force structure following the end of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission, a process in which France took part as it reintegrated the active commandment of the Alliance in 2008.

Most significant for Paris, though, are the multiplication of threats in the European Southern neighborhood. Since the so-called “Arab revolutions,” the risk of failing states in the

¹¹ The 120,000 refugees included in the difficult September negotiations constitute a very minor portion of the crisis, which could include 3 million additional migrants by 2017 according to the European Commission. See “European Economic Forecast, Autumn 2015,” European Commission, Institutional Paper 011, November 2015

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The struggle against Islamist terrorism has become the absolute security priority for France and many of its neighbors.

MENA region has dramatically increased, and the spill-over effects on Europe and France have been particularly destructive. The lasting war in Syria, the spread of ISIS, and the collapse of the Libyan state following the French and British-led intervention in 2011 are the most noticeable illustrations of the chaos in the south of the Mediterranean Sea, and its implications for Europe and France in particular. The struggle against Islamist terrorism has become the absolute security priority for France and many of its neighbors, and the attacks in Paris have irrevocably made France a frontline country in counterterrorism operations. Hollande has repeatedly declared that “France is at war,” and the lack of European and U.S. leadership in the fight against ISIS will force Paris to embrace a more assertive approach and convince the international community of the necessity to “destroy” the group.¹² It also means that the crises in the Southern neighborhood may overcome all other strategic priorities in the years to come, and determine French diplomatic and military efforts at the global level.

An Activist France, Refocused on Terrorism and MENA

France continues to think of itself as a global power and to try to shape global and European policy around issues such as climate change and cyber security, to name just two. However, France’s strategic priorities have been crucially shaped by the spread of international terrorism in non-governed areas and by failed states and state instability. This phenomenon extends beyond the European neighborhood, but particularly concerns the MENA region. The collapse of state authority, which generally leads to critical humanitarian

situations, and the spread of terrorism have spill-over effects in neighboring countries. The rapid resurgence of terrorist groups in Afghanistan following the withdrawing of U.S. troops in 2014 and the atrocities committed by Boko Haram in Nigeria and beyond are not just regional issues, but constitute threats to all actors in the international community.

Thus, against the backdrop of a United States that was less engaged in the region, a particularly activist French foreign policy began in response to the Arab uprisings in 2011. The 2013 French White Paper on Defense and National Security was profoundly influenced by the major geopolitical changes taking place in the Middle East and North Africa, signaling a “repivoting” of French strategic priorities to Africa (Sahel) and the Middle East. The 2008 version of the White Paper had emphasized the importance of reducing the French military footprint in Africa, but the deterioration of security in the region, which required the rapid deployment of 3,000 French troops to Mali in January 2013 to prevent an imminent takeover of the country by Islamists, confirmed the usefulness of pre-positioned forces in Africa. In August 2013, France was ready to support U.S. military strikes on Syria after it was proven that the regime of Bashar al-Assad had used chemical weapons against Syrian populations. In December 2013, France sent another 1,600 troops to the Central African Republic (CAR) to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe there and from July 2014 designed a new strategic approach in the Sahel by operating in close partnership with regional partners to contain terrorism. In September 2014, France was the first European country to join the U.S.-led anti-ISIS coalition in Iraq. France has also been heavily militarily engaged with the United States and within the NATO coalition in Afghanistan (2001-14) as one of the largest contributors to ISAF, with a peak deployment of 4,000 troops. However,

¹² Discours du Président de la République devant le Parlement réuni en Congrès [Speech of the French President in front of the Parliament], November 16, 2015, <http://www.elysee.fr/declarations/article/discours-du-president-de-la-republique-devant-le-parlement-reuni-en-congres-3/>

French public opinion has gradually soured on the Afghanistan mission, and a series of insurgent attacks that raised the French death toll triggered both Sarkozy and his successor Hollande to speed up the French withdrawal, which was completed in January 2015.

Paris's strategy rested on the assumption that there was a link between protecting French citizens at home and assuming international responsibilities to increase stability; the ISIS-inspired terrorist attacks in 2015 demonstrated how intrinsically linked both priorities were. As a result, Paris doubled down on its security measures at home and abroad. France now deploys more soldiers in domestic anti-terrorism patrols (10,000 troops in Operation Sentinelle, formerly called Vigipirate) than externally (8,000 in five current active external operations, with more than 11,000 "prepositioned forces" in 10 permanent overseas missions, from Guyana to French Polynesia). The extension of French airstrikes against ISIS in Syrian territory was justified by the need to prevent further attacks in France that might be orchestrated from Syria. In the aftermath of the November attacks, the goal of

the airstrikes was broadened to the "destruction of the Islamic State group."

After the January Charlie Hebdo attacks, France had already committed to increasing its defense budget by €3.8 billion over four years from 2016 (about 1.7 percent of the 2015 GDP) to ensure the army can tackle problems at home and maintain missions abroad, notably in Africa and the Middle East. The Ministry of Economy estimated at the end October 2015 that French spending for military operations abroad would reach €1.1 billion for 2015, and this figure very likely increased after the November 13th attacks. The bulk of the money goes to the French-led operations in the Sahel (Barkhane), Iraq/Syria (Chammal), and in CAR (Sangaris).

These engagements are already affecting France's relationships with its partners across the Atlantic and within Europe. France's new activist foreign policy has dove-tailed nicely with softer U.S. leadership, creating a new level of partnership between the powers — even before France suffered its version of 9/11.

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4 THE NEW U.S.-FRENCH “SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP”

The French push for increased U.S. commitment comes at a time when the Obama administration is tending to reduce its engagements abroad.

Ten years after the invasion of Iraq, the turnaround in Franco-American relations is impressive. For the first time since 2003, France and the United States have been carrying out air strikes in Iraq on ISIS targets and, since September 2015, coordinating airstrikes in Syria. France was the first ally to join the U.S.-led campaign. In late February 2015, the French aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* steamed into the Persian Gulf to join the fight against ISIS and has redeployed there in the aftermath of the November 13th attacks, in the temporary absence of the U.S. aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt (which needed repairs), multiplying airstrikes capacity in a significant way.

In this past year alone, the United States has been involved in French interventions in Mali (providing aerial refueling and soldier transportation) and CAR (for financial support and provision of non-lethal equipment). However, the French push for increased U.S. commitment comes at a time when the Obama administration is tending to reduce its engagements abroad. France has emerged as Washington's most reliable European partner in power projection outside of Europe, better even than Washington's "special relationship" ally, Britain. Dominique Moïsi, a senior adviser at the French Institute for International Affairs,

said: "France is in part replacing the U.K. as the deputy sheriff when it comes to intervention."¹³ French performance in Mali earned the United States' interest and endorsement, and the French-American counterterrorism partnership in the Sahel reinforced military links between the two countries.

Americans supply France with drones and intelligence as well as operating their own special forces in the framework of the "Operation Barkhane" in the Sahel. From the operation Unified Protector in Libya, to the Operation Serval in Mali, the U.S. military contribution has been critical. These operations have also revealed the depth of French and European capability gaps, and over-reliance on U.S. capabilities.

¹³ Dominique Moïsi, quoted by Alissa Rubin, "Persian Gulf Breach with U.S. Creates Opportunities for France," *The New York Times*, May 13, 2015.

5

THE SYMMETRY OF FRANCE IN EUROPE AND THE U.S. IN THE WORLD: “LEADERSHIP FROM THE FRONT” MIRRORING “LEADERSHIP FROM BEHIND”

While France has been working ever more closely with the United States, and Franco-U.S. relations are strong, France’s activist foreign policy is not a smooth fit within Europe. By resorting to article 42.7 of the EU Treaty, which requires EU member states to provide “aid and assistance by all the means in their power” to a member state under attack after the November 13 attacks, Paris is asking help from its EU partners, but also underscoring the need for European security solidarity and leadership against ISIS.

However, as Jean-Marie Guéhenno has rightly summarized: “there is something frustrating about France’s role in European foreign policy at the moment: it is a leader that often has few followers.”¹⁴ To a certain extent, France’s challenge resembles the same “partnership deficit” that undermines the United States’ willingness to exercise leadership and power through partnerships and alliances, rather than unilaterally. In 2011, David Ignatius highlighted what he saw as an almost intractable paradox: “This is a world that resents American domination but is also wary of sharing the burden. Our allies don’t want to be followers, certainly, but they don’t want to share leadership either. This deficit exists in every region, and it complicates Obama’s desire to offload some responsibilities at a time when U.S. financial resources are stretched.”¹⁵ Similarly for France, European countries are neither willing to follow Paris’ diplomatic and military initiatives, nor able to share the leadership of an ambitious European foreign and security policy.

In Syria, although the Obama administration wanted to avoid the appearance of an U.S.-led war against ISIS, Washington’s outsize role became

quickly visible: three Western allies (France, Australia, and Canada) and five Arab allies (Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates) have carried out only 8 percent of the airstrikes in Syria since the operation began and about 60 percent of the airstrikes in Iraq. The U.S. predominance became even more pronounced in Syria as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Jordan reallocated their firepower to fighting Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen. Bahrain’s and Qatar’s role has also been reduced. The new pledges of military support (by Germany, the U.K., Denmark, The Netherlands, but also by Gulf states) that followed the November 13th Paris attacks will not reverse what has been a worrying trend for the United States, as these contributions will remain mostly symbolic. This means that the burden carried by the French military and French-European over-reliance on U.S. hard power are unlikely to lessen in the near future, and will continue to characterize transatlantic military operations.

With the United States disengaging from Europe, France sees a rising need for a common European defense stance. The July 2013 U.S. Senate report on European defense was clear: “Mali was a test and Europe failed the test. There is no independent European military capacity or any political willingness to pursue a European defense policy.” It said: “Europe needs to be able to intervene, including when the United States does not want to engage. It is futile to believe that there can be a real European foreign policy without a common defense.” It concluded: “Without it, Europe is condemned to be a ‘big Switzerland,’ a super-NGO that pays but decides nothing.”¹⁶ A few European countries (Germany, Denmark, Belgium, the U.K., Spain, and The Netherlands) have offered transport

European countries are neither willing to follow Paris’ diplomatic and military initiatives, nor able to share the leadership of an ambitious European foreign and security policy.

¹⁴ Jean-Marie Guéhenno, “French foreign policy: activism or leadership?” Commentary, ECFR, March 7, 2014

¹⁵ David Ignatius, “Obama’s partnership deficit,” *The Washington Post*, June 10, 2011

¹⁶ French Senate Foreign Affairs, Defense and Armed Forces Committee, “Pour en finir avec «l’Europe de la défense» - Vers une défense européenne” [“Let’s get rid of “Europe of Defense”. Towards a European Defense”], July 3, 2013.

The successful implementation of France's strategy to fight ISIS depends heavily on other European countries' capabilities and willingness to take a more active role.

and air-to-air refueling assistance in Mali and CAR, but the limits of these actions expose the failure of France's long-time efforts to persuade the EU to develop a robust defense posture, with operational capabilities independent of NATO.

Hollande has been particularly frustrated by the EU's two other big powers. Germany's hesitance to step up its military action against terrorism, and in particular its lack of engagement in Libya and Mali, were seen as irresponsible in Paris. The U.K. is perceived to have an increasingly inward-looking posture, despite the close French-British military relationship. However, there may now be a small shift. Recent military decisions in Germany have been met with approval in France. In addition to sending more German soldiers to Mali and increasing the Bundeswehr's efforts in Northern Iraq to train Kurdish Peshmergas, in November 2015 Germany's Cabinet approved a mandate offering military assistance, including the deployment of 1,200 German troops to the U.S.-led international coalition against ISIS in Syria, reconnaissance flights, and the use of a naval frigate to the Mediterranean to help protect the French aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle. And in the U.K., Parliament voted on December 2 in favor of airstrikes against ISIS in Syria after Prime Minister David Cameron made a strong case for military action, a decision that was followed a few hours later by U.K.'s first airstrikes in Syria.

The successful implementation of France's strategy to fight ISIS depends heavily on other European countries' capabilities and willingness to take a more active role. But for this to work, Paris must also invest more in building consensus within the EU before taking military action. Leadership is based on the power to convince others to follow. The limits of France's approach were illustrated at the December 2013 EU Council where Hollande put his allies on the spot, calling for the EU to create a permanent fund to finance

military operations undertaken by member states (such as France's interventions in the Central African Republic or Mali). This proposal was met with a cool response, despite recognition by European allies that the Sahel's stability is critical to Europe's security interests. France had acted on its own because the other EU countries could not reach an agreement. French unilateralism has provoked some push-back among European allies who contend they do not have to pay for military operations decided by France without prior consultation. Sabine von Oppeln, a political scientist at Berlin's Free University, said: "On the one hand, France conducts a unilateral Africa policy, on the other hand they demand solidarity from other Europeans."¹⁷

In addition to persuasion, there is also the issue of control. Just as Washington seems reluctant to genuinely "co-lead" and share intelligence and operational control in conflicts, Paris has also not always been willing to cede control to European command (Mali, CAR) or to NATO command (in the initial phase of the 2011 Libya operations). Although France often acts in the European interest — for example in the Sahel — and is willing to cooperate with European partners where they agree with its policy, it is also willing to operate outside the EU framework, especially when urgent action is needed (Mali). "Co-leadership" has translated into its most minimalist form, i.e., pragmatic "division of labor" with a few able and willing allies. In this context, the French approach of international legitimization of its military actions has become increasingly opportunistic, favoring ad hoc cooperative arrangements that have the advantage of being flexible and avoiding the heavy structures of formal institutions. The Serval, Sangaris, and Barkhane operations are typical examples.

¹⁷ Quoted in "France pushing EU to fund military interventions," AP, December 16, 2013

In spite of its strong support for greater EU integration in defense and security matters, France's tradition of "strategic autonomy" is an obstacle to building a more integrated European defense. In keeping with the German concept of "leadership from the center" ("enabling others with fewer resources to make their vital contributions as equal partners" and "making others fit to assume responsibility for security in their own regions"¹⁸), Chancellor Angela Merkel has been leading an ambitious plan for military co-operation in Europe, calling for a permanent EU military HQ, combined weapons procurement, and a shared military doctrine. The U.K., along with Poland, Romania, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, insist that NATO should remain the guarantor of security on the European continent. When Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and Merkel resuscitated the idea of a "European Army" in March 2015, French Prime Minister Manuel Valls said that such an army "already exists," as France de facto plays that role for Europe in the fight against terrorism and assumes

¹⁸ Speech by Federal Minister of Defense Dr. Ursula von der Leyen, 51st Munich Security Conference, Munich, February 6, 2015

the heaviest burden each time the EU undertook a military effort abroad. Valls mentioned France's operations in Mali and in the Sahel, and appealed to the rest of the EU to "better share the expenses." France's idea of a more integrated European defense has more to do with a fairer division of labor across the EU than with a European Army. This was also reflected in its choice to ask for help using Article 42.7 after the November attacks, rather than Article 222 of the EU Treaty. Article 42.7 is more intergovernmental (and allows France to keep the reins) whereas Article 222 foresees a strong role for EU institutions.

The new activism of French foreign policy is thus clearly contradictory within the European context. First, like the U.S. it faces the threat of overstretch, and cannot count on receiving the support it wants. Furthermore, while France is a strong force pushing for stronger European security capabilities, its leadership will remain limited by its realpolitik interests and its desire to retain strategic autonomy — a tension that is also visible in its alliances with other powers.

In spite of its strong support for greater EU integration in defense and security matters, France's tradition of "strategic autonomy" is an obstacle to building a more integrated European defense.

6 FRANCE'S HYPERPRAGMATIC DIPLOMACY AND ITS DOMESTIC DIMENSIONS

France's Alliances: Economic Diplomacy with the Gulf and Iran, Tactical Cooperation with Russia

The November 13th attacks have forced France to revisit some alliances and to consolidate others — especially in the Gulf — to ask for help from European allies, and most notably to initially invite Russia to join a “grand coalition to defeat ISIS.” France’s rapprochement with Russia has been purely tactical, considering that Vladimir Putin has opposite views to France’s regarding Assad’s political future in Syria. In fact, Hollande’s goal of turning two rival military alliances, a U.S.-led one that includes Sunni Arab States Saudi Arabia and Qatar as well as Turkey (who aim to assist rebels in overthrowing Assad) and a Russian-led one that includes Iran and Lebanon’s Hezbollah militia (which is allied with Assad’s forces), into a single force focused on defeating ISIS appeared unrealistic. France’s efforts have very quickly been limited to “coordinating” with Russia and allies, rather than trying to build a fictive unified coalition. The Obama administration has been concerned about French diplomatic moves, worried that additional French-Russian cooperation could come at the expense of EU sanctions against Russia over Ukraine. However, despite disagreements among EU member states, they agreed on December 17, 2015, to renew the sanctions until July 2016.

This important decision shows that EU member states have been able to separate the Ukraine-Russia issue from the Syria-Russia issue. However, as is the case with leaders in many other EU member states and the United States, Hollande demonstrates that despite shifts in France’s Russia policy — evident in the Mistral \$1.6 billion contract cancellation in August 2015 — he continues to engage Russia diplomatically to find a political solution in Syria. Putin has made himself an indispensable geopolitical player. Bruno Tertrais, a senior fellow

at FRS, has said: in Syria, “Russia has been willing and able to bring significant firepower to bear against ISIS at a time when France is willing but not entirely able, and the United States is able, but not entirely willing to bring its full firepower to bear against ISIS in Syria.”¹⁹ This situation compels Western powers to engage in a balancing act of containment and tactical cooperation with Russia.

There are also other contentious inconsistencies in France’s foreign alliances. Despite Paris’ focus on combatting terrorism, France has been reluctant to revise its relationships with Saudi Arabia and Qatar, even given their well-known connections with Salafist movements. In fact, France has many interests and a long history of involvement in the Gulf, which has been a market for France’s defense industries since the late 1970s. Hollande’s realpolitik economic diplomacy with the Gulf States aims to sustain France’s global stature and capitalizing on recent rifts in U.S. relations with its partners, while turning a blind eye on their support to radical groups.

France’s security concerns, international ambitions, and domestic economic pressures have converged to emphasize important deals with key partners in the Gulf and with Egypt. From 2010 to 2014, 38 percent of French arms exports went to the Middle East, making it the most important region for France’s arms industry. In May 2015, Hollande signed a \$7 billion deal with Qatar that included the sale of 24 French Rafale jets, along with training of Qatari intelligence officers. In June, Saudi Arabia and France signed a \$12 billion agreement, that included \$500 million for 23 Airbus H145 helicopters, and in October signed an \$11.4 billion deal including contracts and letters of intent for small and medium enterprise investments, satellites, urban transport, and energy. Egypt signed

¹⁹ Quoted by Paul Taylor, “Putin’s ‘realpolitik’ aims to make Russia indispensable,” Reuters, November 24, 2015

Putin has made himself an indispensable geopolitical player... This situation compels Western powers to engage in a balancing act of containment and tactical cooperation with Russia.

a deal with France to buy two Mistral warships (with significant financing from Saudi Arabia) that had been originally ordered by Russia.

Paris and Riyadh's growing alignment was accelerated and facilitated by France's tough stance against the Iranian nuclear program, but also against the Assad regime, as well as its support of the Saudi military campaign in Yemen. Saudi Arabia's growing interest in fostering a stronger alliance with France is also linked to the broader geostrategic context, in which Washington's traditional Sunni allies have become frustrated and confused by U.S. foreign policy on the Arab uprisings, the so-called pivot to Asia, the U.S. backtracking on a Syrian chemical weapons red line, and the Iranian nuclear deal. Gulf States and Egypt have increasingly sought to diversify their traditional defense alliance with the United States. Signing defense deals with France allows Gulf States to express their discontent with U.S. policies. And France seizes this opportunity to fill the void: political losses for the United States translate into French defense industrial gains. Domestically, the French defense industry supports around 400,000 jobs, and thus remains one of the few relatively stable holdouts in an otherwise ailing economy. The recent arms deals are therefore celebrated domestically, with officials claiming that the deals created around 30,000 jobs in France for 2015.

However, Saudi Arabia cannot expect France to replace the United States as the power responsible for guaranteeing its security from foreign adversaries. Historically, and for the foreseeable future, the United States is the only country capable of providing that security umbrella to Saudi Arabia. France does not have the political willingness, nor the economic and military backbone to act as a credible security provider. It will more likely continue to deepen defense and economic cooperation through military deals and training support, without fundamentally changing

its strategic look at the region, and understands that the future U.S. administration may be a stronger political and economic competitor in the region. Finally, French domestic politics does not unambivalently support close ties with the Gulf and Saudi Arabia because of those countries' conservative approach of Islam, which many French citizens oppose. However, "the pragmatism that can sometimes make Hollande appear spineless in domestic matters is an asset in foreign policy. (...) Pragmatism was what made Hollande, two years ago, the first leader to meet with newly elected Iranian president Hassan Rouhani"²⁰ and to invite him for a state visit in January 2016 to relaunch Franco-Iranian cooperation. The result was the signing of important deals, including the sale of 118 Airbus planes, an oil contract with Total, and an investment by PSA Peugeot Citroën.

The Domestic Context of Hollande's "War Presidency"

Hollande's presidency, nearly four years in, has already taken on dynamics on the security and defense policy fronts that bear little comparison with the previous presidencies of Nicolas Sarkozy (2007-12) or Jacques Chirac (1995-2007). As a matter of fact, Hollande, who has oft claimed his desire to follow in the footsteps of François Mitterrand, the last Socialist president (1981-95), has presided over what David Revault d'Allonnes calls "the birth and thriving of a warring social-democracy."²¹ Through the unprecedented scope and centrality of security policy in his mandate, the current presidency will represent a model by which any future presidencies will be compared.

It seems that Hollande has not been able to resist the temptation of foreign adventure, partly in order to bolster a faltering a domestic image. As

²⁰ Pierre Briançon, "Hollande Unchained," *Politico*, June 10, 2015

²¹ David Revault d'Allonnes, *Les Guerres du Président* ["The President's Wars"], 2015, Seuil: Paris.

Signing defense deals with France allows Gulf States to express their discontent with U.S. policies. And France seizes this opportunity to fill the void: political losses for the United States translate into French defense industrial gains.

With the opposition criticizing how the president conducted military operations against ISIS in Syria and France's relations with Russia, security policy has become an issue that is no longer as immune from criticism as it had been.

Revault d'Allonnes puts it, Hollande, “passionate about political history, and a keen expert on his predecessors, knew the dilemma that had troubled them: the attraction of diplomatic action, an incomparable outlet to the inextricable difficulties that plagued the economic and social realms and illustrated all too well the structural powerlessness of the executive.”²² While it has become increasingly difficult for a president to influence the course of events on “low-politics” (domestic affairs), French security policy remains an executive shelter where the authority of the president is barely limited by opposition parties, of which Hollande has made full use. However, his large security policy footprint has ushered in a change. Opposition political parties from all sides have started engaging more vehemently in partisan debates about security policy — partly in order to be able to engage with the president, rather than limiting their attacks to the governments led successively by Jean-Marc Ayrault (2012-14) and Manuel Valls (2014-present).

The new political party emphasis on foreign policy was reinforced by the November terrorist attacks: security policy has become an object of contention in French politics. The critical reactions of Les Républicains (LR), Nicolas Sarkozy’s party, and the Front National (FN) of Marine Le Pen, not only regarding the level of security of France since the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks but also regarding border control in the context of the refugee crisis and the deprivation of nationality for binational citizens involved in terrorist activities, have framed French political debates since November.²³ With the opposition criticizing how the president conducted military operations against ISIS in Syria and

²² *Ibid.*

²³ See for example: “Nicolas Sarkozy: ‘trop de temps’ a été perdu depuis ‘Charlie Hebdo’” [“Too much time has been wasted since ‘Charlie Hebdo’”], *Le Monde*, November 18, 2015; “Le Front National lie les attentats à la crise des migrants” [“The National Front links the November attacks to the migrant crisis”], *Le Monde*, November 16, 2015.

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Thus the Hollande presidency has seen a new saliency to, and new levels of partisan fighting over, foreign policy. But his administration has also pursued a security policy of pragmatic coalition building that escapes ideological left-right lines. In both of these ways, Hollande’s foreign policy may prove transformational.

French Strategic Culture Under Hollande: Balancing Between History and Pragmatism

Just a few days after Hollande officially took over the presidency on May 15, he faced what would prove to be a strong marker of his presidency: the NATO Summit in Chicago on May 20-21.

After 17 years of right-wing presidencies, the international community was uncertain, at best, about what a Socialist returning to power would mean for France’s posture toward NATO. The full reintegration of France in NATO’s military command, decided in 2009 under Sarkozy, was the object of Allied concerns, who perceived Hollande’s campaign promise to withdraw French fighting troops from Afghanistan before the end of 2012 as the sign of a deeper disengagement of France from global affairs.

Any lingering questions about the unwavering commitment of France to traditional transatlantic alliance mechanisms were swept away after the publication of a report²⁴ commissioned by the presidency to ex-Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine, which stated anew how France’s interests and objectives would be carried out in the context

²⁴ “Report for the President of the French Republic on The Consequences of France’s Return to the Integrated Military Command of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Future of the Transatlantic Relationship, and the Outlook for European Defense,” November 14, 2012, <http://ambafrance-us.org/spip.php?article4114>

of the Alliance while promoting a stronger “Europeanization” of NATO. The conclusion of the report presciently laid out how French security policy would be carried out during Hollande’s presidency, and unabashedly showcased how France would pragmatically carry out its security interests:

“Changes in American foreign and defense policies [...] make it more necessary and less impossible for Europeans to play a greater role in their own defense, with the expectation that one day, they will assume most of the responsibility for it, while remaining allied with the United States. This policy needs to be implemented simultaneously within the European Union, within NATO, and within ad hoc groups, using suitable tactics for each case and each organization and with an eye to anticipating events. It is a bold and forthright policy to achieve greater influence within the Alliance, which will facilitate France’s European efforts.”²⁵

This pragmatic approach to coalition building and international cooperation will prove to be one of the strongest markers of Hollande as a “war president.” An editorialist for *Liberation* even dubbed Hollande a “hyperpragmatic” diplomat,²⁶ illustrating the fact that France remains a part of the club, but can choose to play by its own rules if the situation dictates it, whether in the EU or NATO framework. A high-ranked diplomatic advisor of Hollande insisted that “pragmatism is not a theory, but a sort of necessity. [...] There is no overall plan for the resolution of crises. We do not have a values-based agenda, nor are exporting a model. We are simply dealing with reality as it

is.”²⁷ This “reality-based” approach and the lack of a “Hollande model” for French foreign policy have led some to think that Hollande’s security policy ideology has been formed on the fly, in response to events and to the dynamics of domestic and European politics.

Any sort of analysis of the impact of Hollande on French strategic culture must consider that in his previous position as first secretary of the Socialist Party, evidence indicates that he paid very little attention to these issues. This is not unusual since, as argued above, security policy is only minimally the object of partisan debates in France. Therefore, it is tempting to think that Hollande arrived in power with little structured thoughts on security policies, and therefore that he lacked a strategy. Hubert Védrine, who served as foreign minister under the last socialist government (1997-2002), offers a damning indictment: “Hollande has no structured doctrine, no vision, no anticipation and alert system that allows him to detect mistakes. There is just this idea that we are France, that we have a universal vocation to incarnate human rights and topple dictatorships; that, above all, we have a special mission to fulfill just like the U.S. But there are very few countries in the world who consider that they are tasked with ensuring justice in the world. [...] Hollande is practicing neo-conservatism without knowing it.” The accusation of “neo-conservatism” (for Védrine does intend it to be an accusation) targets the French tradition of interventionism, and draws the comparison with U.S. neo-conservatives. Hollande is seen to have transgressed the accepted markers and (left-right) fundamentals of French security policy, which has in turn led to a blurring of the traditional political lines around these issues.

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²⁵ *Ibid*, p.24.

²⁶ Marc Sémo, “Hollande diplomate: l’hyperpragmatique” [“Hollande the hyperpragmatic diplomat”], *Liberation*, May 29, 2015.

²⁷ David Revault d’Allonnes, *Les Guerres du Président [The President’s Wars]*, 2015, Seuil: Paris.

War stood in as an escape from an unforgiving domestic scene, as a tool of self-aggrandizing and legitimation that Hollande undoubtedly took a shine to.

This “hyperpragmatism” attached to the accomplishment of France’s role in the world, to which has now been added the ever-so important national security aspects, could remain a strong feature of French security policy in the years to come. And it is not without consequences for the relationship with European and transatlantic partners.

War as a Communication Tool

Operation Serval, initiated by France on January 11, 2013, in order to defeat terrorist factions in Mali, represents a turning point in Hollande’s presidency. It not only represented his initiation to the position of commander-in-chief, but also symbolized what could be called his escapism. War stood in as an escape from an unforgiving domestic scene, as a tool of self-aggrandizing and legitimation that Hollande undoubtedly took a shine to. While not unprecedented — Sarkozy’s engagement in the Georgia/Russia conflict or the Libya intervention — a tipping point was reached when Hollande assigned such a high importance to war. Instead of escaping the domestic fray, he brought the fray to security policy. He also created the conditions for an opposition party to raise its profile by joining the security policy debate.

Why did Hollande need to escape? The first year of his presidency produced a wide gap between the expectations borne from a successful presidential campaign and the actual exercise of the presidency. The first major reform desired by Hollande, the same-sex marriage law, mobilized a large opposition that harbored doubts about whether Hollande was fit to be president, and raised concerns in other parts about his seeming indecisiveness and difficulty to impose decisions. Concerns also surfaced over the ability of the Socialist Party to govern after so many years, as evidenced by constant governmental infighting and the tragicomic demise of the finance minister,

Jérôme Cahuzac, who pledged to fight against tax evasion but was eventually forced to step down after it was discovered he kept a bank account in Singapore. With low popularity figures very early into his mandate, Hollande was confronted with the need to raise his stature and assert his presidentiality — and give a breath of fresh air to his government — in concrete ways.

At this moment, claims journalist and reporter Revault d’Allonnes, “war just erupted in the Hollande presidency. It is the first time, but not the last. War will never leave the presidency and will even become one of its most structuring elements.”²⁸ In preparing Operation Serval, “the unusual drive”²⁹ of the president contrasts with his seeming lack of direction in terms of domestic policy, illustrated by significant defeats in the municipal and European elections in 2014, which eventually led to the political demise of Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault, to be replaced by the more centrist Manuel Valls.

War also allowed Hollande to build his credentials as a leader in Europe, which were at the heart of his presidential campaign. While making the structured case for a renewed European defense and presenting France as its leader, Hollande also made a campaign pledge to create a new balance of power in Europe, in which France would provide a counterweight to Germany’s influence on economic affairs.³⁰ When he realized that this was easier said than done, Hollande turned his sights to France’s leadership on security issues. The operation in Mali, which was on the table since 2012 and had even been considered under the Sarkozy’s

²⁸ David Revault d’Allonnes, *op.cit.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ See “Discours de François Hollande sur la défense nationale à Paris le 11 mars 2012” [“Speech of François Hollande on National Defense in Paris, March 11, 2012”], March 11, 2012, <http://www.gilbert-roger.fr/files/fh-de%25CC%2581fense-11-mars.pdf>

presidency (before being shelved because it would have taken place during the presidential campaign), supported the narrative of France as a leader on security policy. Since the election, an operation had been envisaged and international negotiations opened to deploy the troops of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and for a European training mission under the auspices of the United Nations. However, struggling to form this coalition and under growing pressure at home, Hollande was convinced by Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, one of his confidants, to shelve the previous strategy of “global and indirect approach” in favor of a direct confrontation that would “shatter the feeling of impunity and invulnerability of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb [...] by stopping its military progress”³¹ toward the Malian capital, Bamako.

The operation in Mali, and consequent operations in CAR and Syria highlight how Hollande’s conduct of foreign policy is based on the traditional French notion of “strategic autonomy.” But the military operations also illuminate all the contrasts that compose Hollande: an inspirational candidate and a driven commander-in-chief, but a lackluster, if not almost dispassionate, communicator about domestic politics. These wars paint the picture of Hollande as rising to the opportunity only when there is an identified opponent and when there is a clear objective, and when decisions are made among a smaller circle. War has provided, for Hollande, rare moments of clarity during a presidential mandate that has often been on the brink of self-destruction from political and personnel mishaps. At the same time, the foreign policy escape may prove to have been temporary.

Besides the aspect of augmenting his presidential stature, and despite the relatively low and short-term impact that successful military campaigns will

have had on his popularity, Hollande’s activity will have managed to achieve another important effect: blurring the political lines that existed in France regarding security policy.

The accusation, levied by Védrine, of “neo-conservatism” marks the extent to which such frenzied military activity lies outside traditional boundaries. While the activism of Sarkozy was related to the fact that he was a self-avowed “Atlanticist,” existing political markers in France were unable to account for the role that Hollande’s activism would give to France on the international scene. The central role of the minister of defense in influencing decisions about military engagement, and the inflexible position of the minister of foreign affairs, Laurent Fabius, (sometimes referred to as “Laurent Cheney”³²) on Iran and Syria, participates in creating this image of an extraordinary policy as concerns foreign and security policy. One striking quote comes from a member of the president’s diplomatic team, who, regarding the choice of words in communicating to the population about the operation in Mali, argued that “there is no point in doing a typical center-left public campaign on something like this,” highlighting the extent to which this event has proven transformational on the domestic front.

The use of the word of “war” in Mali, the first time it had been used since the Algerian War (1954-62), set the tone for how France will respond to future crises, not only in its neighborhood but also on its own soil with the attacks of January and November 2015. In the latter case, Hollande talked about “acts of war” perpetrated by the terrorists, thereby justifying the proportionality of the response, and saying that “the [French] Republic will eradicate terrorism.” The use of such language is far from innocent: it forces the right-wing, and also the Front National, to adapt their own responses in a

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³¹ David Revault d’Allonnes, *op.cit.*

³² *Ibid.*

The terrorist attacks, particularly those on November 13th, also blurred another line in France, which may prove rather damaging to Hollande: the one between domestic and foreign policy.

position where the Socialist Party treads on their proverbial lawns. This pushes Sarkozy's party in an highly uncomfortable position, as it forces it to move further to the right in order to mark its difference, a space well occupied by the Front National; at the same time, this active presidency also forces the Front National to show its cards regarding foreign and security policy, two fronts on which its lack of experience and thinking can be damaging.

The terrorist attacks, particularly those on November 13th, also blurred another line in France, which may prove rather damaging to Hollande: the one between domestic and foreign policy. When the terrorists in the Bataclan yelled that "it is the fault of the Hollande, he shouldn't be intervening in Syria"³³ or that their goal is "to make [the concert-goers] suffer through what innocent people in Syria

³³ "Au Bataclan, les assaillants parlent de la Syrie et 'tirent'" ["At the Bataclan, the attackers speak about Syria and shoot"], *Libération*, November 14, 2015

go through,"³⁴ and then ISIS claimed responsibility for the attacks hours later, an important barrier has been broken, making Hollande fully accountable for his foreign policy decisions, and allowing opposition leaders to criticize and question the efficiency of his military engagements and his exercise of diplomacy.³⁵ Given the increasingly close connection between foreign and security policy decisions and national security, security policy will be central to political discussion in France.

³⁴ *Ibid*

³⁵ Nicolas Sarkozy spoke of a "poorly measured" intervention in Syria that led to an "elevation of the terrorist threat" in France. See "Sarkozy: 'On a sous-estimé la menace après l'intervention en Syrie'" ["We underestimated the threat after the intervention in Syria"], *Europe 1*, December 2, 2015

7 IMPLICATIONS FOR ALLIES

In a NATO Summit year, with expectations of a stronger role for the transatlantic community in protecting the eastern border of the Alliance, France's focus on fighting terrorism on the global stage raises a certain number of issues. Firstly, while France's commitment to NATO will not diminish, its possibilities to contribute further to reassurance on the Eastern flank will continue to be brought into question if further capabilities are to be committed in the Middle East. For both historical and societal reasons, France's neighborhood policy has been mainly focused on the Mediterranean and the Maghreb (North Africa), notably given the unstable conditions following the Arab revolutions. For France, "the future of Europe lies in the South,"³⁶ rather than in the East. The terrorist attacks of 2015 have only underscored France's priorities. France is particularly preoccupied by the failed state-terrorism nexus in the Sahel and the Middle East: "The possibility that whole territories can escape the control of a state over a long period is a strategic risk of crucial importance for Europe."³⁷ This, combined with Russia's engagement in Syria and the worrying developments in Libya, is a challenge for common European policies and consensus within NATO. Furthermore, the expectations that France has of its Allies in supporting this agenda may create tensions at the heart of the Alliance, as countries may be forced to choose, due to limited capabilities, between pressures borne from the pan-European struggle against terrorism and the continued necessity to deter Russia, an agenda carried by a proactive but embattled Polish government. It will therefore be critical for the allies to strike a balance between these two, at time divergent, sides.

France is facing a military overstretch, both on the frontline of the fight against terrorism at

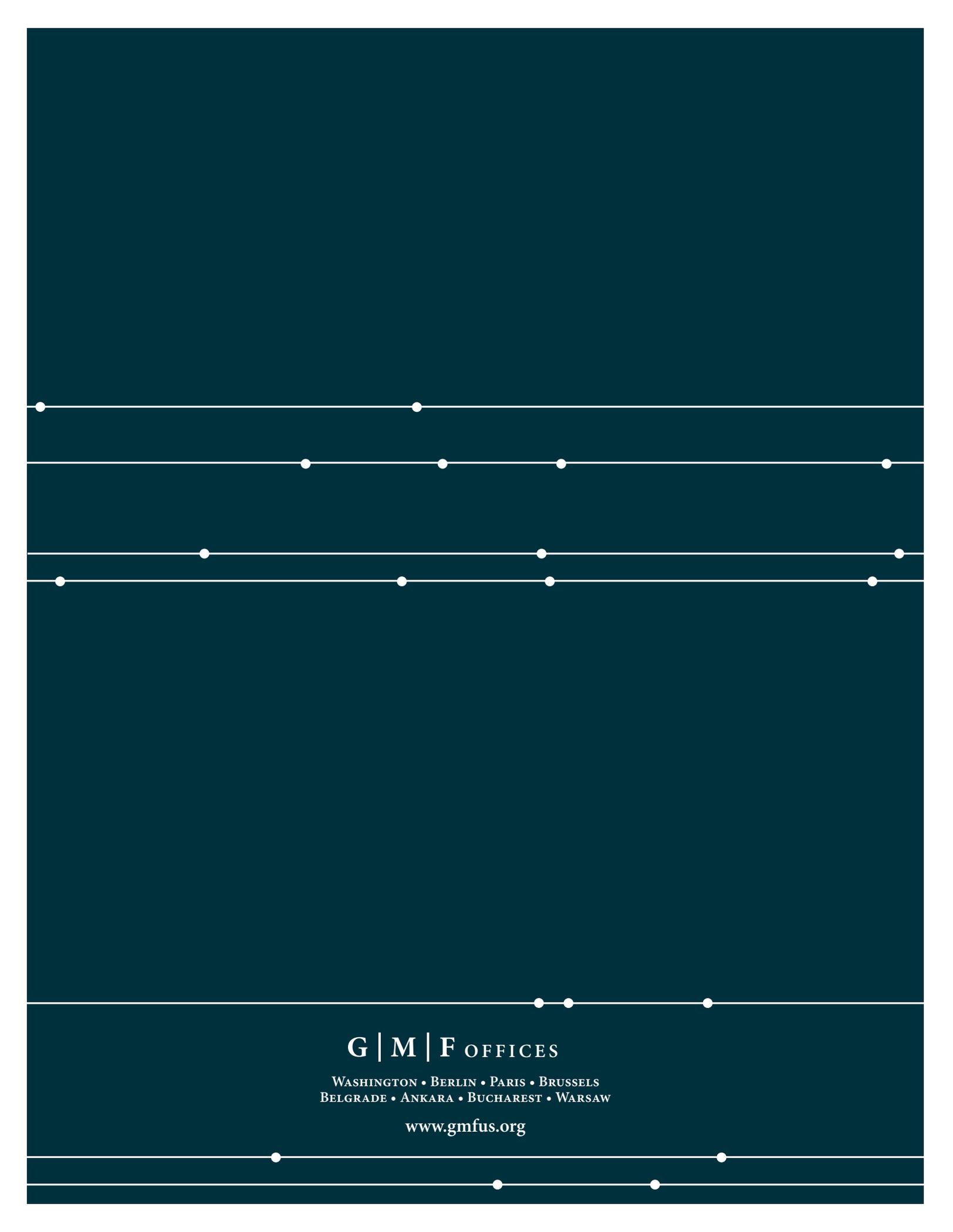
³⁶ Nicolas Sarkozy, "Discours sur l'Union méditerranéenne," Tanger, October 23, 2007

³⁷ French White Paper on Defense and National Security, 2013

home (shelling out €2 billion for its security after the attacks, according to a preliminary estimate) and abroad in Africa and Iraq-Syria, despite the EU's direct security stakes in the region. By declaring that the "security pact" will prevail over the "stability pact," Hollande has pointed to contradictory objectives defined at the transatlantic and European levels. The first one derives from the NATO Wales summit's conclusion that member states need to spend more on defense (at least 2 percent of their GDP); the second one is enshrined in the EU's stability pact that obliges member states to cut spending to reduce public deficits. Hollande's declaration that "the security pact prevails over the stability pact" has become the de facto unwritten rule, and previews budget conflicts in the eurozone, since Germany will not be happy to loosen limits on state deficits.

Finally, there remain real questions about long-term strategies for the Middle East and North African region. While there is an agreement on the necessity to increase the frequency of strikes on the positions held by ISIS, the ability of the coalition writ large to agree on how future regional stability can be secured hinges on dynamics (related to the relations between Middle Eastern and Gulf regional powers, for example) that will be hard to achieve. This, therefore, begs the question of how France's ambitions for the region can be framed, and whether Paris can articulate clear goals that go beyond the defense of national security. The unsustainability of military engagement in the region has been demonstrated by the United States, and it is one lesson from history that France, and also other European partners, will keep in mind.

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