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Letter to Alain Juppé and François Fillon

France, the People and the Atom Bomb

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Saintes, 21 November 2016

Dear Candidates,

You are both competing to be President of the French Republic, i.e. to have access to the « nuclear button » which could, if you are elected and if circumstances lead that way, make you a instant « serial killer », a mass assassin, guilty of crimes against humanity. That will be the same position as Putin, Trump or Kim Jung-Un, to name only three of the individuals who have humanity's fate in their hands.

One can easily imagine that neither of you wishes to face such a dilemma. And one can hope that the situation will never arise for you. But you are aware that the duties of Commander-in-Chief and « nuclear-button-presser » are part of the Head of State's supreme responsibilities, even if the Constitution doesn't breathe a word about the button, which could be called the « blind spot » of our supposed democracy and the defense secret in the background of all the elections we have held for decades. The transmission and procedures of the nuclear code will be the only witnessed transaction between the Elysée Palace's current occupant and his successor. A sort of sacred phallus.

You must be aware, and French citizens ought to know, that France's 300 « warheads », i.e. nuclear H-bombs, are capable, if we judge from the A-bomb at Hiroshima, of causing nearly a billion deaths. This, according to our strategists, provides the murderous « strict sufficiency » that our country requires to ensure the defense of our « vital interests ». Actually most other countries (184 out of 193 UN member states) don't need any. But we do. That is doubtless a case of the « French exception ».

The reality is that thanks to nuclear deterrence we are respected by the terrorists who threaten our existence and our values. Thanks to deterrence, there never were any massacres at Charlie-Hebdo, attacking free expression, or at the Bataclan, attacking music and spirit and good living, or in Nice, attacking our national day. All those things were spared thanks to our lovely nuclear bombs. Similarly, the US nuclear arsenal prevented 9/11/2001.

By the same logic, if we are attacked by a nuclear power, our bombs would dissuade it. It is true that in his memoirs President Giscard d'Estaing admitted that he would never use them first, not even during the Cold War, not even as final warning, for fear of triggering the destruction of France, preferring to see her occupied by the Reds. Who would blame him ? Our country has survived many an invasion, but would not survive destruction and mutually assured

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massacre.

But ignore all that - the « concept of deterrence » resists all criticism. It is our Maginot Line for which we've paid 300 billion euros, the indispensable « protection » which keeps on being modernised, because its « strict sufficiency » is somehow never sufficient.

And what does it matter if France's « concept of deterrence » and our « vertical proliferation » are encouraging « horizontal proliferation » by other state actors and inviting terrorists to get their hands on one or more atom bombs, which they could deliver to us cheaply in shipping containers. After all, to pass from a few dozens or hundreds of victims to millions is just a matter of scale. The more horrible the massace, the more scary, the greater the terror. Our « deterrence force » is based on that thinking. And the terrorists have understood that well, their actions are inspired by our « concept ». It's very annoying but France, especially the France of the military-industral lobbies, is very attached to her « concepts », even those that are incoherent, absurd, dangerous, criminal and anti-constitutional.

I will not be so tasteless as to insist on the many reasons that should lead France to renounce her bombs, preferably by leading the other nuclear states to do the same. They are all stated clearly in the attached Appeal for a Referendum on France's participating in the abolition of nuclear weapons, which I invite you to sign if you can.

Whatever the situation, the French people who recognise themselves in the republican values of liberty, equality and fraternity - which are not on the right or the centre or the left, but which belong to all citizens - have the right to know what position or posture you are each taking on this vital question. It is your duty to let them know it. If they have to vote for one of you, let that be an informed vote for the wisest or the least mad of the candidates.

One of you (you will recall) once co-signed with Michel Rocard, Alain Richard and General Bernard Norlain an opinion-piece published in *Le Monde* on 14 October 2009 with the title « Pour un désarmement nucléaire mondial, seule réponse à la prolifération anarchique » [For global nuclear disarmament, the only response to anarchical proliferation]. It concluded thus :

« The signatories of this declaration, citing their experience in these matters, express the wish that France should resolutely affirm her commitment to the success of the process of nuclear disarmament and her resolve to draw the right lessons from it when the time comes, lessons concerning her own capacity, by opening the necessary debates in her democratic institutions and by actively preparing for the coming phases of negotiation, starting with the preparation for the NPT Review Conference of 2010. »

In 2016, unlike 2010, things have progressed a long way. The UN General Assembly is about to decide, in early December, to convene a conference in 2017 which will be tasked with negotiating a « legally binding instrument », i.e. a treaty, to ban and to completely eliminate nuclear weapons. On 27 October 2016 Resolution L41, which proposes this, was voted on in the UN's disarmament committee, with 123 votes for and 38 against. France voted against it with four other nuclear states (USA, UK, Russia and Israel) while three others (China, India, Pakistan) abstained and North Korea voted in favour. To see Pyongyang giving humanism lessons to Paris, the « Birthplace of Human Rights » is an amusing result of our policies!

The questions which we put to you are four in number :

1. Do you want France to negotiate and ratify with all the States concerned a treaty to ban and completely eliminate nuclear weapons, under mutual and international control that is strict and effective?

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2. Do you want France to support, at the coming UN vote in New York, the convening of a conference in 2017, under UN auspices, for negotiations with this objective ?

3. Do you commit, if elected President, to make the above question 1 the subject of a referendum of the French people, without delay after your election ?

4. Whatever the result of the current primaries, will you encourage the MPs and senators of the right and centre to sign the referendum bill on France's participation in the abolition of nuclear weapons, a bill that has already been signed by over 100 parliamentarians ?

On the evening of Thursday 24 November, in Strasbourg, I will make public your replies or lack of response.

Please accept this declaration of our deep attachment to the values of the Republic.

Yours faithfully,

For ACDN,
Jean-Marie Matagne, President

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Pièces Jointes :

- Appel à référendum, Proposition de Loi référendaire et liste de ses premiers signataires au Parlement
- Tribune de MM. Alain Juppé, Bernard Norlain, Alain Richard et Michel Rocard, parue dans Le Monde du 14.10.2009
- Sondage IFOP-ACDN : Trois Français sur quatre veulent abolir l'arme nucléaire

Informations complémentaires :

27 octobre 2016 : le jour où le grand retournement de l'histoire est devenu possible

101 députés et sénateurs demandent un référendum sur l'abolition des arems nucléaires

Photos BFMTV

Joint Pieces

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