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Nukes in the French presidential election

Nicolas Sarkozy considering the future role of nuclear weapons in our system of defense

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Publication date: Saturday 28 April 2007

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On 18 April 2007, the UMP Candidate wrote to the president of ACDN, who at the same time objected to a previous letter from Nicolas Sarkozy.

It is difficult to believe, but these letters represent the only occasion when Nicolas Sarkozy or any other official candidate explicitly mentioned the role of nuclear weapons in his policy of defense.

LETTER FROM NICOLAS SARKOZY, Presidential Candidate

to Monsieur Jean-Marie MATAGNE

President of ACDN

17100 SAINTES

Translated by Peter Low

Dear Sir

You wished me to consider the future role of nuclear weapons in our system of defense. I thank you for your letter.

I have taken note of all your observations about France's defense policy. They are useful remarks and I appreciate your sending them.

However, I wish to give the following clarifications. It would be unthinkable to aspire to be a great economic power without security, without a strong defense policy.

In my view, the soldiers, the civilians and the industrialists who work in the defense sector are first of all citizens like other citizens, and their expectations go far beyond their sectors of professional activity. Therefore my project is indissociable from the overall project which I am proposing to French voters. It would be misguided and disrespectful to think that military men make pronouncements only in terms of the defense budgets announced by the candidates.

Defense is a subject which concerns France's future and doubtless Europe's as well. Today we are confronted by multiple widespread threats. Whether it be proliferation of missiles and nuclear warheads, a matter of concern with Iran and North Korea, or the dissemination of bacteriological and chemical weapons, or hyper-terrorism, the conclusion is inescapable that no country is safe from these threats, certainly not France.

It would be irresponsible for me to reduce our defense efforts. That is why I am committed to maintaining our defense effort at least at the current level, about 2% of GDP. That is the minimum threshold for having well-trained and well-equipped armed forces that can ensure the protection of our territory and the security of our citizens.

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I wish, first of all, that defense policy should cease to be a reserved domain: a debate on defense can and ought to take place. That is the mark of a modern democracy. I intend to reinforce the powers of Parliament in the control of intelligence services, in approving the presence and modes of intervention of our forces abroad, in the launching of great arms projects and also in ratifying defense agreements.

I also wish to create, close to the Presidency, a national Security Council, which would be the central authority for analysis, debate and reflection in matters of Security and Defense. We must also pay greater attention to civil defense. This implies that we should mobilise our citizens more, and strengthen our capacities to foresee and if need be overcome any crises linked to the development of terrorist threats on our territory. I therefore propose the creation of a civil defense agency responsible for promoting a defense ethos and coordinating the action of state services and of others in our society.

As for the orientation of our defensive arm, I consider that deterrence remains an absolute imperative. It is a guarantee for us and for our European neighbours. I will strengthen the political and technical credibility of our arms systems, while respecting the principle of strict sufficiency of means deployed.

I also want a particular stress to be laid on prevention, through a better coordination of the activities of the intelligence services, but also by strengthening the resources for acquiring information, both human and technological resources.

As a corollary of this wish to strengthen resources, the building of a second aircraft-carrier, in the context of European cooperation, seems to me necessary to confirm our maritime presence. There also, it is a matter of coherence, since a single aircraft carrier cannot be permanently in operation.

Along the same lines, special attention will be paid to the other programmes for projecting power : the naval SCALP, the strengthening of existing precision strike capabilities, nuclear attack submarines of the "Barracuda" generation, and renewal of our frigates, or to air and sea strategic transport. For this I consider that the NH90 helicopter programme is a priority equipment for the army.

Finally, for protection, everything must be implemented to guarantee the effectiveness and protection of our ground troops. I'm thinking particularly of protection against nuclear, radiological, bacteriological and chemical risks. In line with this thinking, the programmes for battlefield antimissile defense will be developed.

I would also put into the arena of debate the dimensions of our military presence in France and abroad, and the extent in space and time of the missions entrusted to our forces in external operations. Some of our interventions probably have greater priority and legitimacy than others.

It is out of the question to build such a project without taking account of the EU and the European Policies of Security and Defense, or of the NATO missions.

It would be mistaken to view European defense policies as being in opposition to the Atlantic Alliance. The two organisations stand more in complementarity than in competition. For all that, it is imperative for Europe to organise so that its interests and values can prevail, to assume its international responsibilities, and to guarantee more autonomously the protection of its territory and citizens.

That organisation must also take an industrial approach in concert or within its capacities so as to place in common the forces and security resources that can be mobilised if there is a serious crisis.

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Concernant NATO, I do not wish it to evolve into becoming a world organisation undertaking missions on the borders between humanitarian, military and international policing. NATO must retain a clear geopolitical anchor in Europe and a strictly military vocation.

And the EU must be able to rely on the resources which NATO wields, notably for planning and command. Those, in my view, are three preconditions for maintaining France's current high level for contribution to NATO.

Such are the elements that I wish to draw to your attention. My programme for national Defense reflects what I want for our country, which is ambitious, clear and voluntary. I know that I can count on your support and confidence, which are more than ever indispensable and precious to me as I pursue my political action in the service of my compatriots whom I cannot disappoint.

Yours faithfully,

Nicolas SARKOZY,

Candidat à l'élection présidentielle

ACDN France

LETTER TO NICOLAS SARKOZY, 18 April 2007

Translation by Peter Low

Monsieur le candidat

On behalf of ACDN France I thank you for replying in a personal and detailed manner to the questions which two of our members put to you and to the other presidential candidates. I would like to respond particularly to the reply you sent on 26 March to one of these, incidentally a member of the UMP, who had written on 26 January expressing concerns about France's nuclear policy.

We are appreciative that, unlike certain candidates, you expressed opinions on this subject, although we regret that, unlike others, you did not give positive answers either to our request for a rapid initiative by France to open negotiations on nuclear disarmament (the full universal and controlled disarmament required by Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty), nor to our request for a referendum on that question. That is your choice. It would be a respectable choice, were it not contrary to France's commitment under international law (the NPT), contrary to article V of the Constitution, contrary to widely held human moral principles, contrary to simple good sense, and finally contrary to France's « vital interests ».

The « clarification » you give in your letter, far from replying to our « questions, expectations and doubts » seems to me to justify what I have just said. Let me limit myself to 7 points :

1.- You write : « To guarantee the security of the French people and ensure the protection of our vital interests are the priority of our foreign and defense policies. France's existence as a State and a nation depends on that. This security and this protection rely on the domain of autonomous nuclear deterrence. And they extend to our friends and allies. »

You do not seem to have noticed that it is contradictory to declare that

France needs an « autonomous nuclear deterrence » to ensure the security of her citizens, the protection of her vital interests, and even her very existence, while also declaring that "That security and that protection both extend to our friends and allies", in other words that they depend on OUR nuclear deterrence. For if they benefit, that would be because they don't need an "independent nuclear deterrence" of their own. Then why would WE need one ? Conversely, if we really need one, surely THEY ALSO do? They'd better get one quick!

In reality, if their security depends neither on their own "independent nuclear deterrence" (which they don't have or desire) nor on ours, since they have not asked to be protected by it, it follows that they don't need any "nuclear deterrence" at all to ensure their own security. In which case, why should we?... unless we suppose that we French are set apart from other beings, particularly threatened and fragile? This helps to explain the irritation shown by foreigners, including our European partners, at the little French rooster that sees enemies everywhere, is sometimes terrorised, sometimes bellowing (with ships named « le Tonnant » and « le Terrible »), sometimes puffing up his feathers (with ships named « le Triomphant » and « le Redoutable »), always up on his spurs, always crowing his own trumpet, and proudly proposing to protect the rest of the farmyard.

2.- You speak next of « the new threats » and say correctly that they are "numerous, real and serious". But how exactly will our atom bombs enable us to combat "the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, failed states, the endangering of our strategic supplies, ecological or humanitarian catastrophes and also pandemics"? The list sounds surrealist .

Can atom bombs relieve pandemics? Anticipate or repair natural disasters? Force our suppliers to provide, under threat, our "strategic" supplies (oil, gas, uranium, rare metals...)? Rebuild failed states? Terrorise terrorists? Prevent other states (or terror groups) from wishing and seeking for weapons of mass destruction, whether nuclear like ours - or chemical or biological ones - but still weapons of mass destruction LIKE WHAT WE HAVE?

To cure them of such wishes, will it suffice to France to be "firm on the objective of nuclear non-proliferation which is an absolute necessity for the safety of the world", as you put it? George W. Bush wanted to prevent North Korea from getting the bomb and he failed. What a tenderfoot, so lacking in firmness! How do you plan to do better?

3.- It is true that North Korea's success seems to validate another view which you have espoused, that of the French theoreticians of "deterrence from the weak to the strong": if a small nation with barely 20 million people (two million having starved to death) could stand up to the USA, the most powerful of all, was that not precisely because of its nuclear weapon, which spared it the fate of Iraq? (Ah, if Saddam had had the bomb, the Iraqis would not be where they are now ! »). Doesn't that prove that an "independent nuclear deterrence" is indeed "the Nation's life-insurance" that it is enough to have reached the « sufficiency threshold » to « sanctuarise » our national territory?

Not so, however, since what tempted the USA to attack North Korea was precisely the North Koreans nuclear ambition - their bomb therefore endangered them - and what held the US back was not the bomb (which it didn't yet have, at least in operational form) but was a complex mix of strategic reasons, including these : the risk of upsetting a regional balance that had been maintained with difficulty since 1953, the risk of coming up against China, an ally of North Korea and a nuclear one, the risk of covering South Korea with fire and blood (since the North has considerable means of bombarding it), and the risk of getting bogged down on a third front, after Afghanistan and Iraq...

Thus, the « Korean case » fails totally to prove that an « autonomous nuclear deterrence » is indispensable to the « sanctuarisation » of a country. Besides, the North Korean Head, a real dictator but not a stupid man, says he is now ready to renounce the bomb in exchange for oil provisions and a promise of non-intervention, with international guarantees.

4.- Let's suppose, nevertheless, that the partisans of the bomb are right about it being a necessity : the argument showing they are right on the national level proves them wrong globally (on the international level).

If one believes as you do that the Bomb is a "life-insurance", then every nation should have a right to it, and nobody should be denied it. The governments of the « proliferating » states share this belief, and for this reason one can say that the "deterrence of the weak to the strong" is a direct source of nuclear proliferation, which is a veritable plague threatening us all with a final catastrophe - on that point we are in agreement.

In fact there are only two ways of preventing proliferation or, as you say, reacting to this "absolute necessity for the safety of the world". The first would be general disarmament, but it implies French disarmament too, the entrusting of our "life-insurance" to something other than the bomb. The second would be to apply all sorts of pressure, as are currently being applied to Iran, and when that fails to wage « pre-emptive war » on each "proliferating" or « potentially proliferating » state. That would mean intervening with force to stop it getting the bomb BEFORE it obtains one and makes it operational. That was done with Iraq, with the « Gulf War » and what has followed. That might have been done with North Korea, but for the considerations mentioned above. That will perhaps be done with Iran tomorrow, with Egypt in the future, or with one of about forty states seen as able to « cross the threshold ».

Thus the "nuclear life-insurance" of each nation is the promise of perpetual « pre-emptive wars », resulting sooner or later in a general catastrophe - it is the death-insurance for all nations.

5.- Must we then hope, as you do, that our atom bombs will be truly all-purpose and will lead us to "improve our ability to anticipate and analyse crises and threats"? Such an improvement is very urgent because our atomic strategists have so far been unable to anticipate and analyse crises and threats, since they deemed us so well sheltered by our "independent nuclear deterrence", the national "life-insurance" which you speak of - and which some 184 states at present do without, without seeming to be worse off (quite the opposite) or threatened with disappearance. But let us be modest : our strategists and political leaders have done neither better nor worse than those of the other nuclear states. All have cooperated actively in the general craziness, which has resulted in a generous sharing of "the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism" and of new threats that are "numerous, real and serious", as you say - or, to quote M. Dray, a world "more dangerous and threatening" than ever.

6.- To illustrate the absurdity of this strategy, take for example the M51 missile currently being tested. With an announced range of 6000 to 8000 km, it will certainly give us a "capacity to strike deep into hostile territory" in zones far from our frontiers. With a further effort of imagination, perhaps, we will be in range of Beijing or Ouagadougou without our submarines even leaving Brest harbour. But will this mean that they will deter China and India and Pakistan from perfecting their weapons, or Japan from doing the same plus changing its constitution ?

It is doubtful in any case that the M51 programme and the other nuclear "equipment programmes will be subject to the "better management (in time and money)" which you call for. The cost to France over five years for this « vertical proliferation » would be between 18 and 25 billion euros, not even counting the maintenance for the current arsenal.

It's even less likely that these programmes can help us "establish true protection for our territory and civilian population in the event of terrorist attacks or technological or natural catastrophes." Fissile materials have an annoying tendency to attract terrorists and technological disasters.

Finally, it's horrible to have to say this, they don't even contribute to building « a European policy for security and defense, because

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- ▶ the decision to use a nuclear weapon IS NOT SHARABLE (the Prince hiding under the Elysee Palace in the Jupiter Command Post has the privilege of being a solo assassin).
- ▶ most other European states (not to mention their citizens) DON'T WANT NUCLEAR WEAPONS
- ▶ the European Parliament has twice called on France and the UK to RENOUNCE THEIR NUCLEAR ARSENALS!

How much longer then will we keep trying to flog off our "independent nuclear deterrence" to "our friends and allies"? Let me answer that bluntly : as long, as we keep trying to sell them the « products of excellence » of our « defense industry » which is ultimately the one raison d'être for all our "defense policies", the main purpose of all this strategic mumbo-jumbo, far and above the dizzy dream of princely omnipotence.

7. - To conclude your exposé, you explain, M. Sarkozy, that we can count on the bomb for "promoting of our humanist values internationally".

Can one deny that "our democratic identity and our national history give us the mission in the world of promoting liberty and respect for the individual", given that you have said so and have proposed yourself as the missionary? Can one deny that there is no better way of "promoting liberty and respect for the individual" than by threatening to massacre millions in a single strike, and, if necessary, by actually doing it once and for all? Indeed one can!

"If elected President of France, I undertake to guarantee the political and technical credibility of our weapons systems, respecting the principle of strict sufficiency of the means deployed." That means two things:

1. *Technical Credibility*: our bombs will hit their targets and inflict the predicted damage (7 Hiroshimas for the TN75 ; 22 Hiroshimas for the air-launched ASMPs).

2. *Political Credibility*: we can count on you to ensure you are taken seriously. If you have to use the bomb, you won't shrink from it. President Truman didn't in 1945, witness Hiroshima and Nagasaki. You will act.

If elected, Monsieur Sarkozy, you would be quite different from Giscard d'Estaing, who was President during a simulated Soviet invasion in May 1980 (a military exercise), and who deduced secretly (he revealed this in his memoirs) that he would never use nuclear weapons first - although that was and is part of France's strategy of a "last warning" before the « strike on cities », thus a pre-emptive strategy. Why ? Because he would prefer to see France occupied than subject to mutually assured destruction and annihilation, he would prefer French survival to French suicide, even in the name of « defending our vital interests ». With you, M. Sarkozy, it would be the opposite: whoever wished to "take on France" would meet with "an immediate sanction". The enemy would have to face a miserable quarter-hour of waiting, even if it meant the French people were living their last quarter-hour too. Altogether millions of human beings would die.

Setting aside all our other motives, M. Sarkozy, that is the reason why we are regretfully calling on our compatriots not in any circumstances to vote for you.

Jean-Marie Matagne, President of ACDN

MEDIA RELEASE, 19 April 2007

Nicolas Sarkozy must not get his hands on nuclear weapons

The three-page letter sent recently to ACDN by Nicolas Sarkozy (consultable on the website www.acdn.net) merits close attention. Unfortunately it changes nothing in the conclusions that ACDN has drawn from Sarkozy's two earlier letters in reply to what we were saying as voters and citizens.

We acknowledge M. Sarkozy's frankness and willingness to debate these matters, which certain other candidates, male and female, could well emulate, but our conclusions are as follows :

1° Despite our wishes (and despite commitments made by two other candidates) the UMP candidate does not intend to apply Article VI of the NPT, which imposes on nuclear states the duty to negotiate the abolition of their nuclear arsenals. Nor will he hold a referendum asking the French people their opinion about that option of disarmament which would be integral, universal and strictly controlled at all times.

2° He will continue to develop new nuclear weapons; furthermore he espouses the doctrine formulated by Jacques Chirac on 19 January 2006, which extends the possible use of our nuclear weapons almost at will.

3° Nicolas Sarkozy says : « If elected President, I commit myself to guaranteeing the political and technical credibility of our weapons systems ». This means :

a) « *Technical credibility* »: that our bombs will hit their targets and do the predicted damage (7 Hiroshimas for each TN75 warhead ; 22 Hiroshimas for each air-launched ASMP).

b) « *Political credibility* »: that we can count on Nicolas Sarkozy to make people take hm seriously. If he must use the bomb, he won't shrink from it : any state wanting to « take on France » would be exposed to an « immediate sanction. » M. Sarkozy thus takes the opposite view from M. Giscard d'Estaing who, at the height of the Cold War, secretly resolved not to make first use of a nuclear weapons, preferring an occupation of France (from which she has recovered several times) to her annihilation (shared with the so-called enemy population) from which she would never recover.

4° Despite M. Sarkozy's views, to threaten to massacre millions of people all at once and, if necessary, do it for good does not strike us as the best way to « promote our humanist values in the international arena ». Too many human beings would die. Too many are dying already, in this violent world of which the nuclear bomb is the sinister keystone. The tragic death of the Mayor of Nagasaki, Iccho Ito, has just illustrated this: organised crime is not just in the streets, it is also in those states that say they are willing to engage in it to a massive degree. Let's say STOP. Let's halt organised crime against humankind.

For this reason, and even apart from any other motive, we regretfully call on French voters no to vote in any circumstance for M. Nicolas Sarkozy.

For ACDN, Jean-Marie Matagne, President