



**DIMENSION
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Background Note

Session 1

"Preparing for tomorrow's conflicts and crises"

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Preparing for tomorrow's crises and conflicts

In his "Strategic Vision" published in October 2021, General Thierry Burkhard, Chief of Staff of the French Armed Forces, stressed the fact that the "peace-crisis-war" continuum used since the end of the Cold War no longer corresponds to the conflicts in today's world. He suggested considering military strategy in the light of three notions: competition, disputes and confrontation.

Competition consists in a balance of power governed by commonly accepted rules of international law. When a competitor decides to break these rules, it enters the dispute phase, which is the war "just before" the war. Finally, if this actor resorts to military force and provokes a reaction of at least an equivalent level, it provokes a confrontation, the objective of which is to impose its will on the adversary by force.

Over the past decade, the strategic environment has deteriorated due to increasing disputes over shared spaces, which are by nature less regulated by the rule of law and less protected than national spaces. We can see this proliferation of contested spaces in different environments, not just in air and sea, but also space, cyberspace and, increasingly, in the information field. This is the context in which hybrid warfare strategies have developed, strategies that combine military and non-military, direct and indirect, regular and irregular modes of action, with the objective of destabilising the adversary while remaining below the threshold of conflict.

The deterioration of the strategic environment and emergence of these hybrid attacks require European states to strengthen both their situational awareness and military capabilities. Indeed, in this context, European military commands must be in a position to impose a favourable balance of power in the event of a dispute and to engage in high-intensity confrontation, if necessary.

In France and in Europe, the armed forces have been adjusting their organisation for several years in order to take into account this new strategic environment. In France, the creation of a space command and the Air Force's name change to the Air and Space Force in June 2021 heralded other developments at both the EU and Member State levels. The EU Commissioner for the Internal Market's, for instance, has announced on 25 January 2022 his will to create a genuine European space command in the medium term.

Commission President Ursula von der Leyen acknowledged the geostrategic dimension of cyberspace when she announced during her State of the Union address to the European Parliament on 15 September 2021 that she would present a proposal for European legislation on cyber resilience (Cyber Resilience Act).

Since early winter 2021-2022, the deterioration of our geostrategic environment has illustrated the importance for European armies of developing their responsiveness to unconventional modes of action. Two examples especially stand out:

- First, the hybrid attack in which Alexander Lukashenko's regime attempted to destabilise the Schengen area by exploiting migration flows at the border between Belarus and EU states,
- Second, the large-scale computer attack on several Ukrainian government websites on 14 January 2022 that destabilised the Ukrainian administration.

As far as the sea is concerned, as early as August 2019 the Ministers for Defence and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy decided to strengthen their cooperation to step up maritime security, which is subject to increasing threats. Formally created by the Council of the European Union on 25 January 2021, the pilot project for a "coordinated maritime presence" (CMP) in the Gulf of Guinea provides for Member States to coordinate the resources deployed by each country in this area and to share certain information gathered under the aegis of a coordination unit attached to the European Union Military Staff (EUMS).

The challenge for the European Union then becomes, in the words of the French Chief of Staff, to be able to 'win the war before the war', i.e. to impose a favourable balance of power:

- by strengthening the army's human community,
- by increasing capabilities to gain superiority in multiple fields and environments,
- by reinforcing operational preparation,
- by consolidating partnerships within the European Union and NATO.

Questions

What results can we draw from the 'coordinated maritime presence' pilot project? What avenues exist to improve this programme? How and why should there be a coordinated maritime presence in the Indo-Pacific, announced by the High Representative of the Union in January?

What should be the scope and content of the Cyber Resilience Act announced by the President of the European Commission in her State of the Union address in 2021?

What aims and resources should the Union deploy as part of developing the future Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Toolbox?

What avenues are there for reinforcing the EU's intelligence service EU INTCENT so that it can serve a common strategic culture and help our appreciations of situations to converge?