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***NATIONAL SECURITY REFORM  
The French Approach***

**By**

**Manuel Lafont Rapnouil**



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# Report Documentation Page

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**Meeting Complex Challenges through National Security Reform**  
**Panel 4: Reform Approaches of Allies and Partners**  
(INSS-NDU, October 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008)

**The French Approach**

By Manuel LAFONT RAPNOUIL

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Before last spring, France had only published two White Papers on Defense:

- the first one, in 1972, was obviously marked by the Cold War context and laid out an “all-deterrence” approach;
- the second one, in 1994, drew lessons from the end of the Cold War, as well as from Desert Storm and Balkans operations. It insisted on the importance of forces projection. It was followed in 1995 by the end of national draft and the professionalization of the French armed forces, one of the deepest reforms France undertook in the recent years.

In the 2007 presidential race, the need for a new White Paper was a point of consensus. France was facing difficult questions – about doctrine, equipment programs and operational organization – that would better be served by a global approach. So, soon after taking office, President SARKOZY tasked a large Commission to draft France’s third White Paper.

But what was asked for was more than just an update:

- for one reason, the strategic environment has dramatically changed since 1994 and is to change probably even more from now on up to 2025. The Commission’s mandate referred to some of the past evolutions that have impacted the international environment: the 9/11 attacks, the rise of new regional centers of power, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, effects of technological evolutions;
- for another reason, the President asked for an entirely new approach by extending the scope to National Security. And among the critical comments, none contended that the White Paper didn’t deliver on this particular point.

**1) A Globalized Environment**

The White Paper begins by an assessment of the international strategic context and its possible evolutions up to 2025. Globalization is considered the major driving force. Since the end of the Cold War, indeed, it has transformed the economic, social and political environment, the paradigms of national and international security and the assumptions of France’s policy “in both positive and negative ways”. And this process is still going on. The White Paper draws some conclusions, among which the following.

→ External Security and Domestic Security

The idea that external security and domestic security are narrowly intertwined is common. But its implementation remains scarce. National Defense already was a broader concept than *stricto sensu* military operations or territorial defense. But the global perspective adopted by the White Paper goes further into developing an integrated approach of both dimensions.

### → State and Non-State Actors

States are not disregarded. Actually, the White Paper makes it clear that France could be engaged in a state-to-state war, and considers plausible a major high intensity conflict, especially in the Middle-East or Asia. But major threats could result from non-state actors. The White Paper actually considers as the most dangerous hypothesis a major and non-conventional terrorist attack on the European soil echoing a conflict in an area of strategic interest for Europe. Therefore, non-state actors are wholly taken into account, and not only the most threatening ones (organized crime, terrorist groups or proliferation networks). The White Paper also pays attention to mass medias, private military and security firms, humanitarian NGOs, defense industry, local government authorities, scholars, all of them being actors, stakeholders or even partners that need to be engaged.

### → Risks, Threats and Vulnerability

At the end of the day, the White Paper considers the French territory probably safe from any State-originating invasion. But it also stresses that, in a different manner, it is probably more vulnerable today than in 1994. In this regard, threats and risks, meaning intentional or unintentional dangers, are tackled: conventional or non-conventional threats (conflicts, proliferation, hyper-terrorism, ballistic missiles) to international peace and security, but also global risks (climate change, highly lethal diseases), new threats (cyber-attacks) and not so new dimensions of strategic confrontation (energy).

### → Uncertainty

The White Paper also offers a lot of specific comments on various geographical areas of concern, as well as insights on a wide array of other issues. But, overall, it insists on the uncertainty of the strategic environment. The world is not just more complex. It is more unforeseeable and, probably, more unstable. In particular, strategic ruptures or surprises are more plausible, which makes it even more important to have flexible and versatile tools and to develop information and prospective capabilities.

### → Introducing a new concept in the French doctrine: “National Security”

On this basis, “National Security” is introduced: “The (French) National Security Strategy is defined in order to provide responses to all the risks and threats which could endanger the life of the Nation”. This novelty is considered as enabling French authorities to tackle both risks and threats, to set up a global approach through military and non-military means, internal and external tools.

## 2) Five Strategic Functions

### → Knowledge and Anticipation

Knowledge and Anticipation is a new fifth strategic function compared with the 1994 White Paper’s four functions. This singularization stresses how crucial intelligence has become in such an uncertain context, but also broadens the scope to diplomatic action, prospective and other information related activities. Knowledge and anticipation guarantee autonomy in decision-making and preserve strategic initiative. This function is officially characterized as the “first line of defense”.

→ Prevention

Prevention is obviously one of the best ways to address security challenges. Three main levels of action are identified:

- dealing with the root causes of crises which haven't broken out yet;
- limiting the spreading and deepening of open crises at the earliest stage possible;
- contributing to reconciliation and reconstruction to prevent any relapse.

Prevention is also considered on specific issues asking for specific action such as proliferation, trafficking, highly lethal pandemics, etc.

→ Deterrence

Nuclear deterrence is the “ultimate guarantee of the security and independence of France”. Its “sole” purpose is to prevent any State-originating aggression against the Nation’s vital interests. The White Paper makes clear that the President should be provided with an autonomous, wide and diversified range of options, while respecting sufficiency. Hence the decisions to modernize the two components of the French deterrence capabilities – sea-based ballistic missile and airborne missiles – and to further reduce the number of warheads to less than 300.

→ Protection

As it anticipates on a higher and different vulnerability, the White Paper stresses the importance of protecting both the French population and national territory. It underlines the importance of “resilience”, another new concept in the French doctrine. It also stresses the importance of response capabilities, crisis management and crisis communication, preparedness, training, live exercises, etc.

→ Intervention

Intervention abroad will remain an essential modality of action. And the White Paper states that one of the most difficult challenges will be to be able to address stabilization missions and crisis management operations as well as to engage – if need be – in a high-intensity conflict.

### 3) Policy and Organizational Consequences

→ International Approach

Stressing the growing importance of protecting nationals and national territory – and tasking armed forces with an increased focus on related missions – doesn't mean disinvestment from abroad theatres. On the contrary, National Security should benefit from all the array of an international strategy.

Getting to specifics, the White Paper identifies, especially under the prevention and intervention functions, a priority geographical axis that runs from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indian Ocean through the Mediterranean Sea and the Arabic peninsula. This axis is also a basis from where France will be capable to take into account the growing strategic importance of Asia as well as to deal with the ongoing security interests that link France and Africa.

→ Collective Approach

On the international scene, the European framework stands as a priority. The White Paper sets ambitious goals on crisis management capabilities, both military and civilian, but also on defense industry issues, on the protection of European citizens (against terrorism, organized crime, natural or industrial catastrophes) and on “new threats” (coordination of defense against cyber-attacks, securing of energy and strategic raw materials supply). Consistently enough, it advocates

the drafting of a European White Paper on Defense and Security. Today, an updated version of the December 2003 European Security Strategy is being discussed amongst the 27 EU Member States.

The White Paper then tackles the issue of the North Atlantic Alliance. NATO is responsible for the collective defense of the Allies and is a valuable crisis management instrument, on a complementary basis with the EU. Therefore, the White Paper commits France to the renovation of the Alliance, calls for a new balance between Americans and Europeans within NATO and advocates France's participation into NATO military structures.

The White Paper also recalls the wider importance of effective multilateralism in general and of the United Nations in particular. Lastly, it underlines the utmost importance of the nonproliferation regimes, in particular of the world nuclear order, calling for further efforts on non-proliferation and disarmament.

#### → Military Capabilities

The White Paper, even if it is not limited to defense policy, offers guidelines for the French defense effort. The resulting capability challenge is the following:

- on the short term, to modernize and improve the availability of the most frequently used equipments. Force protection, land combat capabilities and strategic as well as theatre mobility are particularly targeted by this effort;
- and to do it while, with a longer term vision, launching programs that will prepare for the future. These new programs relate in particular to intelligence, observation, space capabilities, detection and early warning capabilities with regard to antimissile defense, offensive as well as defensive cyber-war capabilities, surveillance and armed drones.

#### → Organizational and Legal Reforms

The reorganization of public authorities and modifications introduced in the legal corpus are mainly guided by the new "global" approach.

- Reorganization of the National Security bureaucracy will particularly aim at "decompartmentalizing". For instance, modernized crisis rooms will be established both in the Home Ministry and in the MFA. For another example, the priority given to space results in the creation of a Joint Space Command.
- One of the most prominent reforms in this area is the creation of a Defense and National Security Council, under the chairmanship of the President, which takes over for several formats previously dealing with National Security relevant affairs. This DNSC will deal with military and interior security budgetary bills, deterrence issues, terrorism, major crises, etc.
- Intelligence is also a field of major reforms, along with the massive budgetary efforts on intelligence equipments. The new Internal intelligence central directorate (DCRI) unifies existing services in the field. A National Intelligence Council, subsidiary body to the above mentioned DNSC, will provide guidelines for equipments program and operational activities, with a National Intelligence Coordinator being personally in charge.

#### → The Importance of Civilian Response

Whether for prevention, protection or intervention, the White Paper stresses the importance of joint action between civil and military departments and agencies. Coordination between them is considered as "one of the fundamental principles of the new strategy". Therefore, the White Paper stresses the importance of civilian and civil-military operations and highlights the goal of developing civilian expertise and capabilities. In the prospect of attacks or catastrophes on the

national territory, it also commits to engaging beforehand with local authorities that would play a key-role in operations.

#### 4) A More Open Debate

##### → A Growing Need for Public Support

Public support is one of the necessary conditions for the strategy to be effective. This is true as an element of public reform methodology. But it also has to do with substance. For instance, resilience covers not only the ability of public authorities to respond to a major crisis and to rapidly restore normal functioning, but also French society's will and capacity to deal with a major attack or catastrophe and its consequences. Public support is a condition of the successful implementation of key elements of the strategy.

##### → A Rare Open Process

The whole White Paper drafting process was much more open than the previous ones, undertaken by a large Commission which reunited military and civilian high ranking officials, but also experts, civil society representatives and, for the first time, members of Parliament. The "transparency" also relied on other pillars. For instance, the Commission held open hearings, broadcast on the French equivalent of C-SPAN and available on the web, with French and Foreign experts, with delegations from each main political party as well as with representatives of the French armed forces and security services. It even solicited public input through Internet forums on various subjects. This openness brought some – anonymous – criticisms among senior military officers, regretting that the military wasn't more numerous in the process; but it was overall very much welcomed.

##### → International Consultations

As the President had asked for, a lot of consultations were directed at foreign officials and experts, not only during the public hearings (for which the five continents were represented), but also through informal and closed meetings, especially with Europeans, either in Brussels or in their capitals. The UK, which was drafting its own National Security Strategy around the same period of time, and Germany were obviously the main interlocutors. But Italy, Spain, Sweden and others were also included in this effort.

##### → A Call for More Debate

This openness is not a one shot policy. The White Paper calls explicitly for more debate on Defense and National Security issues, and sets some steps in this direction:

- Prospective studies and strategic research will be developed. The former will fuel debate within the National Security related administrations, while the latter will indirectly but decisively contribute to create support within the general public.
- The discussion of each new Military Program and Interior Security Program Bills (presumably every five years) will be preceded by an update of the White Paper.
- An Advisory Board will be set up as a subsidiary organ to the DNSC in order to bring independent expertise and advice to the President and the Prime Minister;

##### → A Bigger Role for Parliament

Last but not least, Parliament will play a bigger role. The presence of four parliamentarians within the Commission was a sign of the President's desire to move the legislative branch out of its traditional back-seat in defense decision-making. One of the most striking expressions of this

new posture was an amendment to the constitution: not only will the Parliament now have to be informed of any external deployment of armed forces; but it will also have to authorize its extension should the deployment last more than four months. Other measures include consultations when updating the White Paper, and more information on intelligence activities or on bilateral defense agreements.

## 5) Issues under Discussion

### → Not everything is debated

Potentially controversial subjects were defused by the Commission's far-reaching work: thus the introduction of the concept of National Security received wide acceptance. The White Paper succeeds in addressing fears of a militarization of domestic security issues (the debate in France isn't so much about the militarization of its foreign policy) while confirming that there's nothing wrong with military personnel taking part in counter-terrorism activities on the national territory. Neither did the yet not very detailed paragraphs about deterrence provoke much debate. A knowledgeable expert of French Strategic Affairs working here, Leo MICHELL, contends that the White Paper was no exception to a tradition of doctrinal opacity due to the fact that "leading French strategists argue that strategic ambiguity – that is, an element of unpredictability in the French response – strengthens deterrence"<sup>1</sup>.

### → Too Bleak a Picture?

The Commission took pains to avoid developing a fear-driven strategy. Still, some critics have evoked a strategic assessment that doesn't differentiate between threats and risks, and doesn't establish clear prioritization. The same feared a protective posture and criticized the "resilience" concept as a symptom of a traumatized and traumatizing world vision. An answer would be that resilience is rather a useful adaptation to new vulnerabilities, enabling a society to move past potentially traumatic experiences. The British example and approach were vital in convincing the Commission on this point. Moreover, the White Paper's conclusions are far from organizing an introverted posture.

### → Which Level of Ambition?

The geographical focus adopted by the White Paper on the axis between the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean makes it official France isn't claiming a world vocation anymore as far as crisis management is concerned. The White Paper also makes it clear that while strictly national intervention may still be necessary (in particular to protect French nationals abroad, to implement bilateral defense agreements and to respond to punctual actions aimed against national interests), collective action will be the rule. But, even though some noted this modesty (I can hear some whispering "unusual modesty"), no-one really denied that past claims were unsustainable. On the contrary, many approve this evolution which clarifies France's responsibilities and strategic interests... and the importance of a reliable international security system and of working with friends and allies. Moreover, by increasing margins of manoeuvre for strategic equipment programs, France is able to make needed investment and, therefore, to go on playing a key-role in the maintenance of international peace and security and offering key contributions to collective action while preserving minimal strategic autonomy and freedom of action.

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<sup>1</sup> Leo G. MICHEL, "Defense Transformation à la française and U.S. Interests", *Strategic Forum*, n°233, INSS/NDU, September 2008, p. 3 ([www.ndu.edu/inss/](http://www.ndu.edu/inss/)).

→ Intelligence vs. Action?

One of the offshoots of this ambition issue relates to the priority given to the Knowledge and Anticipation function. If it hasn't been politically controversial, still, it raised concern within the military on the grounds that knowledge without action capability would be worthless. The slimming of the French Defense instrument will translate into a downsizing of the armed forces to 225 000 in 2012, with over 40 000 jobs being cut.

The President addressed these concerns last June by committing to a "Frontline First" operation: the brunt of the reduction will be borne by administrative and support functions, reversing the current ratio between back office and front office personnel (from 60/40 to 40/60). Moreover, all savings realized are to be reallocated to the Defense budget. Through the White Paper, the executive branch committed to first maintain defense spending till 2011 (at the level of 2% of the GNP), and then to increase it until 2020 (+1 % a year in real terms).

While focused on versatility and on adapting combat forces to new strategic imperatives, the White Paper acknowledges that quantity has a quality of its own. France aims to be able to deploy 30 000 soldiers in one theatre in six months and for up to a year whereas the current maximum is 26 000 troops. Projection goals also comprise of 70 combat aircrafts, one or two naval groups and an aircraft-carrier group.

→ NATO and ESDP

The most sensitive debate may be running about NATO and ESDP. President SARKOZY's commitment to reverse longstanding French policy and return to the integrated military command has provoked a raging debate, across party lines. But it has to be stated that, basically, almost everybody agrees on at least two points:

- France's commitment to NATO is strong, and already important, be it through troop contributing to operations (under integrated command), contributions to the NRF, funding. The debate is about the purpose and usefulness of going the extra-mile;
- France's ambition for ESDP is just as strong and consensual on all sides, and aims to develop a crisis management instrument. Collective European defense is a more long-term perspective.

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# NATIONAL SECURITY REFORM

## The French Approach

### Introduction

- Previous White Papers: 1972 and 1994
- A Consensus for a New White Paper
- More than an Update:
  - A Different Strategic Environment
  - A Different, More Global Approach

# NATIONAL SECURITY REFORM

## The French Approach

### Introduction

- A Globalized Environment
- Five Strategic Functions
- Policy and Organizational Consequences
- A More Open Debate
- Issues Under Discussion

# **NATIONAL SECURITY REFORM**

## **The French Approach**

### **A Globalized Environment**

- External Security and Domestic Security
- State and Non-State Actors
- Risks, Threats and Vulnerability
- Uncertainty
- Introducing “National Security” in France

# NATIONAL SECURITY REFORM

## The French Approach

***“The National Security Strategy is defined in order to provide responses to all the risks and threats which could endanger the life of the Nation”***

# **NATIONAL SECURITY REFORM**

## **The French Approach**

### **Five Strategic Functions**

- Knowledge and Anticipation
- Prevention
- Deterrence
- Protection
- Intervention

# **NATIONAL SECURITY REFORM**

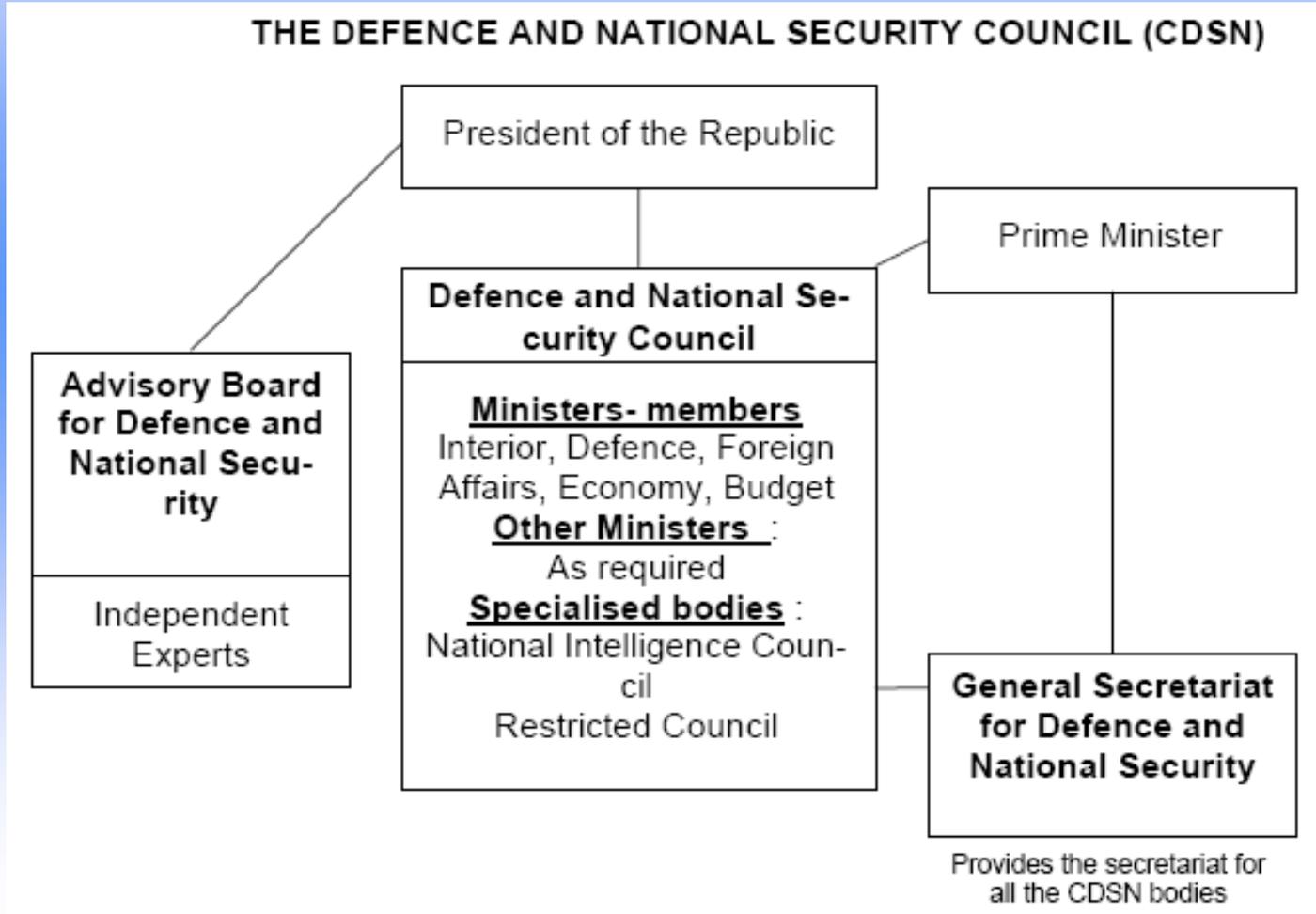
## **The French Approach**

### **Policy and Organizational Consequences**

- International Approach
- Collective Approach
- Military Capabilities
- Organizational and Legal Reforms

# NATIONAL SECURITY REFORM

## The French Approach



# **NATIONAL SECURITY REFORM**

## **The French Approach**

### **Policy and Organizational Consequences**

- International Approach
- Collective Approach
- Military Capabilities
- Organizational and Legal Reforms
- The Importance of Civilian Response

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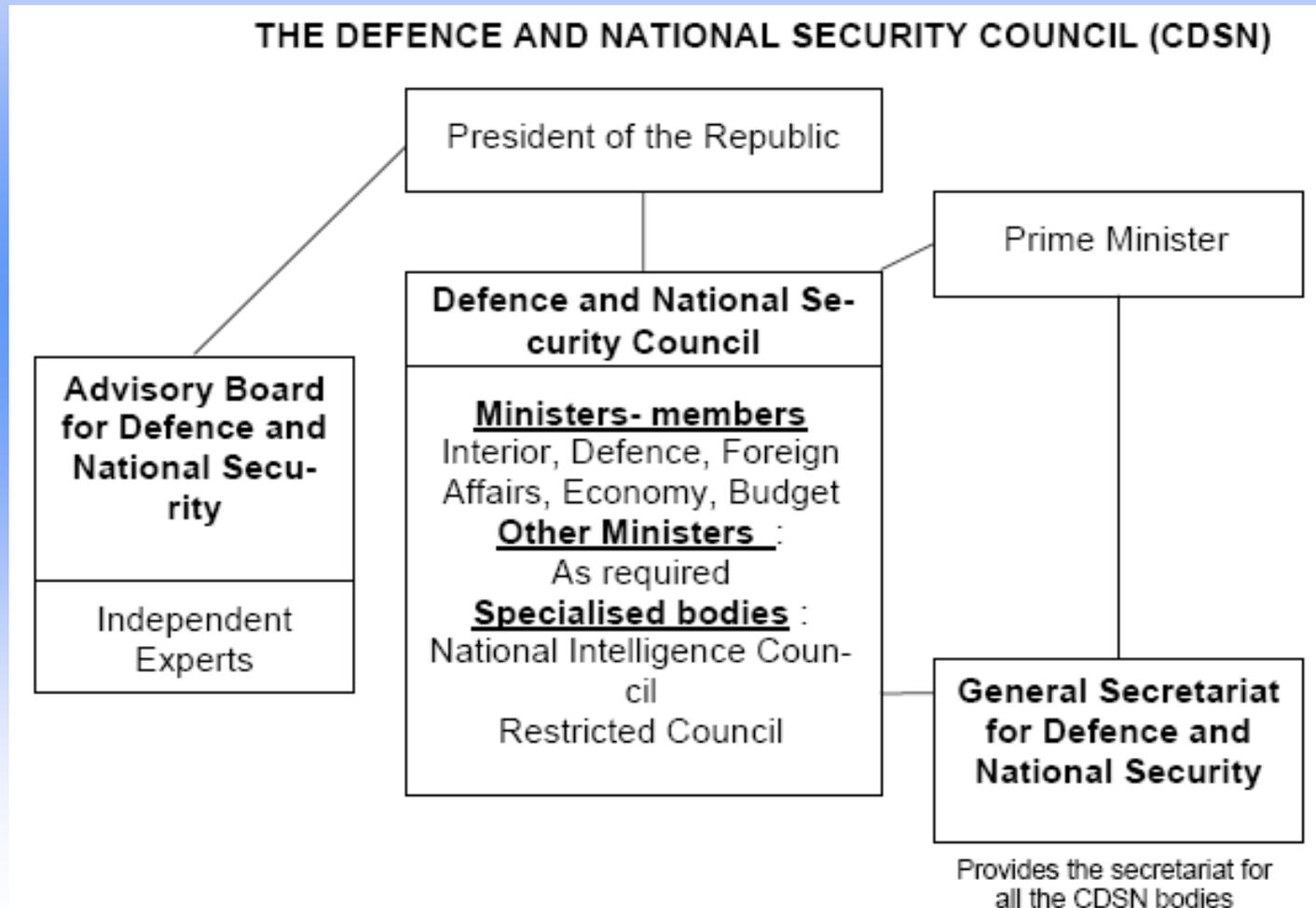
## **The French Approach**

### **A More Open Debate**

- A Growing Need for Public Support
- A Rare Open Process
- International Consultations
- A Call for More Debate

# NATIONAL SECURITY REFORM

## The French Approach



# **NATIONAL SECURITY REFORM**

## **The French Approach**

### **A More Open Debate**

- A Growing Need for Public Support
- A Rare Open Process
- International Consultations
- A Call for More Debate
- A Bigger Role for the French Parliament

# **NATIONAL SECURITY REFORM**

## **The French Approach**

### **Issues Under Discussion**

- Not everything is debated
- Too Bleak a Picture?
- Which Level of Ambition?
- Intelligence vs Action?
- NATO and ESDP