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Rochambeau Dialogue Consensus Statement

2018



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The Rochambeau Dialogue is an important programmatic effort designed to strengthen defense cooperation between the United States and its oldest ally, France. Each year's Track 1.5 dialogue is structured around a series of Franco-American panels, each seeking to address a specific and timely issue in Franco-U.S. security cooperation. The themes of these panel discussions may change from year to year, in an attempt to adequately reflect the growing scope and dynamism of the Franco-American defense relationship.

The first round of the Rochambeau Dialogue, held in partnership with the *Fondation Pour la Recherche Stratégique*, and hosted by the Pell Center for International Relations and Public Policy at Salve Regina University, took place in Newport, RI, from Sunday September 16 to Tuesday September 18, 2018. Over the course of the dialogue, the bipartisan group of participants—which included a mix of foreign and defense officials from both countries, as well as a select group of well-known defense analysts in the academic and think tank community—discussed a broad set of issues. These issues ranged from the future of NATO and European defense cooperation, to ongoing joint counter-terrorism efforts in Africa, to Middle-Eastern stability following the U.S. decision to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan for Action (JCPOA), and Franco-American cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Two official keynote speakers, General Jean-Pierre Montégu, the French defense attaché, and Dr. Brian Pierce, director of the Information Innovation Office at the U.S. Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) provided framing remarks during the dialogue. The group's conversations promoted agreement among the dialogue's nongovernmental participants to issue the following statements. These statements reflect the consensus views of the undersigned and are limited to the topics discussed in the course of this year's dialogue.

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COUNTERTERRORISM COOPERATION IN THE SAHEL

Ever since the French decision to intervene in Mali in 2013, the arid band stretching from Senegal to Somalia has become one of the main theaters of Franco-American defense cooperation. As the events surrounding last year's ambush of U.S. special operations forces (SOF) in Niger underscored, both nations' soldiers are fighting shoulder-to-shoulder in a remote, dangerous, and logistically challenging part of the globe. The U.S. continues to provide significant logistical and intelligence support to the French-led Operation Barkhane, and French and American SOF, as well as unmanned systems operators, have worked to increasingly coordinate the conduct and targeting of their operations. We believe that this military cooperation can be a vector for stability in Sub-Saharan Africa, and that—particularly in comparison to other recent counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency efforts—it has proved to be relatively successful and cost-effective. It has also allowed the French and American militaries to enhance and refine their levels of integration and interoperability, and to acquire a better mutual understanding of their respective strategic cultures and operational practices.

Both nations' political leaderships, however, must do a better job at relaying the strategic rationale behind their continued military presence in the Sahel. Whether in France or in the United States, the general public is war-weary and increasingly skeptical of the value and necessity of extended counter-terrorism operations. Paris and Washington should therefore work to assure their citizenries that these overseas missions are not unlimited, unaccountable, and open-ended. More importantly, both nations should work to better coordinate their foreign internal defense (FID) efforts, and empower regional security actors such as the G5 (composed of Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania), while not losing focus of imperative governance reforms and development needs. Providing our African partners with a greater ability to coordinate their military efforts, combat terrorism, and exert sovereignty over their restive border regions not only allows for better burden-sharing and a lighter military footprint—it is also an essential component of any long-term strategy for stability in Sub-Saharan Africa.

While we understand the strain these operations place on the overextended French and American militaries, we urge both partners to tightly coordinate any future drawdown strategies. Any large-scale troop withdrawals should be conducted in a gradual fashion, and in close bilateral consultation.

Finally, the African continent is emerging as a theater for great power competition, with authoritarian actors such as China, and to a lesser extent Russia, seeking to enhance their political influence, economic leverage, and military presence. As the two western democracies with the greatest degree of involvement in Africa, France and the United States should intensify their coordination and information-sharing with regard to Russian and Chinese activities on the continent.

NATO AND EUROPEAN DEFENSE COOPERATION

Both NATO and the European Union (EU) are confronting an array of shared challenges, ranging from Russian and Iranian revisionism to the persistent threat of terrorism and political instability within Europe's near-abroad. We recognize the urgent need for greater burden- and responsibility-sharing, not only within NATO, but also within the EU. Both France and the United States have engaged in sizable increases of their defense budgets, but require more direct military support from their European partners in order to maintain the same tempo of operational activity across the globe. We are in agreement with the most recent Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation, and believe that the security of NATO and the EU are closely interconnected. Advances in European defense cooperation—whether under the aegis of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) or smaller, more fluid and ad-hoc structures,

such as the European Intervention Initiative (EI2)—should not be perceived as constituting an existential challenge to NATO, given that they fill gaps in the existing transatlantic defense and security architecture. These parallel defense efforts, together with the EU’s plan to fund cross-border defense R&D and procurement, are mutually reinforcing—provided that the capabilities developed through such initiatives are complementary and do not dilute overall interoperability. More broadly, as noted in the most recent U.S. National Defense Strategy (NDS), “mutually beneficial alliances and partnerships are crucial to our (U.S.) strategy, providing a durable, asymmetric strategic advantage that no competitor or rival can match,” and U.S.-EU cooperation is of particular value.

We welcome Washington’s staunch commitment to the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI), and urge our European partners to work alongside France in fulfilling their respective defense investment pledges. In the absence of large numbers of forward-deployed troops along Europe’s periphery, strengthening NATO’s deterrence and defense posture requires an ever greater emphasis on military readiness and transcontinental mobility. NATO-EU cooperation is essential in this regard. We welcome the European Commission’s development of a new Action Plan on Military Mobility, which seeks to strengthen NATO’s rapid reaction capability, along with the EU’s ability to project military power overseas. Priority must be given to the strengthening and acceleration of these cooperative efforts, and in particular to the removal of logistical, administrative, and customs-related obstacles to military movement across Europe. We continue to view the United Kingdom, with its nuclear deterrent, expeditionary military capabilities, and permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) as a key ally. We are intent on enhancing the state of our trilateral military cooperation with London, and on shielding our vital defense relationship with our British allies from the turmoil surrounding Brexit.

MIDDLE-EASTERN STABILITY

France disagreed with the Trump Administration’s decision to withdraw from the JCPOA, and over its threats to sanction European companies still conducting business in Iran. These diplomatic divergences are significant, and should not be overlooked. Notwithstanding these differences, however, we all agree on the need to develop a more coordinated strategy to offset Iranian influence in the Middle East. France and the United States have both borne the brunt of Iranian-sponsored terrorist attacks, and recently jointly commemorated the many French and American lives lost in the 1983 Beirut bombings. We condemn Iran’s continued support of terrorist groups, and are committed to countering its destabilizing regional activities, especially in Syria and Yemen. We urge our respective governments to continue to work together to address these nefarious activities in a meaningful way, along with our shared concerns about Tehran’s evolving ballistic missile program.

We remain committed to the international norms outlawing the use of chemical and biological weapons. We welcome the Franco-American decision to follow through on this “red line” and conduct, earlier this year and alongside our British partner, a series of strikes against Syrian regime targets in response to Bashar al-Assad’s criminal pattern of chemical weapon use. Any proven recurrence in the use of chemical weapons should be met with a similarly calibrated yet robust military response.

While our commitment to the security of our Gulf partners is steadfast, we are concerned by the evolution of the war in Yemen, by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s increasingly repressive attitude toward civil liberties, and by UN reports of generalized war crimes. There is an urgent need to put an end to the conflict in Yemen, and we urge all parties to work in favor of a negotiated political solution.

Finally, while we remain determined to eradicate ISIL's presence in the Levant, we also seek greater clarity on the extent and duration of French and American military action in Syria, and encourage Paris and Washington to work to develop a clearer shared vision for resolving the Syrian crisis. European security is directly tied to Middle Eastern stability, which is, in turn, contingent on continued transatlantic commitment to a troubled region.

FRANCO-AMERICAN COOPERATION IN ASIA

Both France and the United States are resident Indo-Pacific powers with large Asia-based populations, extensive exclusive economic zones, and networks of military bases. Both countries also possess blue-water navies with the capability to operate with proficiency throughout the globe, and across the spectrum of conflict.

We are encouraged by the steady deepening of Franco-American defense cooperation in Asia, and by both nations' staunch defense of the global commons. We welcome France's decision to up the level of its naval activities in the international waters of the South and East China Seas, and to unequivocally condemn China's efforts to restrict freedom of navigation and overflight. We are alarmed by China's growing assertiveness toward its smaller neighbors, by its lack of military transparency, and by its continued militarization of disputed land features in the South China Sea. We urge Beijing to abide by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), to respect multilateral rulings with regard to maritime territorial disputes, and to adopt a less coercive approach toward its neighbors.

French and American military platforms should continue to exert their rights to lawfully sail through international waters, and both Paris and Washington should accentuate their efforts to develop networks of "minilateral" or "plurilateral" military and technological partnerships with other democratic naval powers such as the United Kingdom, Japan, Australia, and India. Strategically directed French arms sales—such as the sale of oceanic conventional submarines to Australia—can add ballast to U.S. balancing efforts in the region while consolidating defense relationships with partner democracies. Efforts must be made to preserve the existent strategic dialogue on this issue, and to reassure the current US administration that French arms sales in Asia serve a clear strategic purpose in terms of regional capability development, and are not merely another form of economic competition.

Last but not least, we remain concerned by the situation on the Korean peninsula. We urge Pyongyang to implement concrete and specific measures to bring about complete, irreversible, and verifiable denuclearization as stipulated by U.N. Security Council resolutions.

OTHER AREAS OF BILATERAL COOPERATION

There is an urgent need for a structured bilateral dialogue on the issue of arms export licensing, and on the rules and practices governing the application of the U.S. regulatory regime of International Traffic in Arms Regulation (ITAR). Such a dialogue also might usefully explore opportunities for increased transatlantic cooperation in the defense industrial sector.

Franco-American navy-to-navy interactions have grown substantially over the last few years, particularly in the realms of anti-submarine and carrier warfare. The 2016 Arrangement for Military Space Cooperation has also enhanced Franco-American cooperation in the space domain, including in the field of space-based maritime domain awareness (MDA). Building on the 2016 Joint Statement of Intent, and on the decision to continuously expand Franco-American cooperation beyond the common domains of air, land, and sea, we recommend institu-

tionalizing further joint research efforts in the fields of artificial intelligence, synthetic training, and electronic warfare. Going forward, we also encourage both defense establishments to expand the scope, scale and complexity of their joint training exercises, to structure wargames addressing high-end combat contingencies, notably in Asia, and to deepen military-to-military contacts through expanded participation in each other's professional military education institutions, "embedding" senior officers in each other's operational and planning staffs, and conducting periodic joint seminars of rising military leaders.

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