RETHINKING SECURITY

REINVENTING PEACE!

RETHINKING SECURITY FRANCE

Rethinking Security France (RSF) – is a collective initiative born of the realisation that security cannot be reduced to military responses, the arms race or power politics. Supported by a network of individuals, organisations and movements committed to peace and non-violence, RSF seeks to foster in France alternative narratives, reflections and practices based on justice, cooperation, human security and the prevention of violence. The initiative is part of an international movement to challenge dominant approaches to security, whilst seeking to link analysis, practice and concrete alternatives in France. It thus opens up a space for reflection, dialogue and action to rethink conflicts and the conditions for lasting peace.

With the support of Stop Fuelling War – Cessez d'alimenter la Guerre and funded by the NSC (Réseau pour le Changement Social)

Stop Fuelling War (SFW) is a French association under the 1901 law, also known as Cessez d'alimenter la guerre. Its initial aim was to highlight the arms trade and its unbridled commercial logic. The link between the arms industry, narratives of war and rising military spending is clear to those working for peace. We see weapons flooding into war zones, where genocides and serious human rights violations are taking place; they also fuel violent gangs and crime.

In response to this, Stop Fuelling War seeks to highlight alternative approaches and give greater prominence to non-violent means of resolving conflicts. Living together in peace is the norm, yet political and media attention focuses on violent destruction. If peaceful alternatives were as supported and organised as militarised security, many human rights violations could be prevented. This working paper is a first step towards bringing another narrative to the fore.

WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF:

ENAAT european network against arms trade

CENTRE DE RESSOURCES sur la NON-VIOLENCE

PARA PACEM

Nonviolent Peaceforce

ONM Organization for Nonviolent Movements

SURGE AFRICA organisation

The organisations mentioned do not necessarily endorse all the analyses and positions expressed in this document.

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Introduction

Security challenges', 'defence strategy', 'logic of escalation', 'nuclear deterrence': recent years, and particularly recent months, have been marked by France's bellicose rhetoric and stance. Faced with the return of so-called high-intensity warfare to European soil since 2022 and the sustained acceleration of inter-state military interventions worldwide, the security paradigm has taken a new turn.

The war between Russia and Ukraine, Israel's attacks on Palestine, and US interventionism in Venezuela and the Middle East are reigniting fundamental questions about our ability to 'build a world' and to coexist whilst ensuring security, well-being and justice for all. So, what can we do to live together without tearing each other apart? How should we understand militarisation today? How can we develop non-violent and non-repressive security strategies? Where should we start to bring about peace?

In France, the increase in the defence budget to €413 billion under the 2024–2030 Military Programming Act[1] (+35% compared to the previous financial year) and the Macron government's military engagement in international conflict zones in the name of a 'strictly defensive' logic[2] raise questions regarding the resources deployed and the objectives and aims of the political decisions taken in the name of supposedly protecting populations. We are even observing a general trend towards a semantic reversal that refers to 'crises' for 'wars', 'strikes' for bombings, 'defence' for escalation, or even 'peace' for strategies of power and confrontation. This institutional euphemisation contributes to the normalisation of violence, both internationally and domestically.

Against this backdrop, discourse and action concerning peacebuilding, non-violence and conflict transformation are relegated to the background, whilst alternatives for the non-militarised resolution of disputes go unheard. The only way out envisaged by many current governments seems to be the prospect of total war or the use of military force, cloaked in the rhetoric of defence.

In a traditional approach, security refers to the objective absence of threats to values deemed essential, as well as the subjective absence of fear in the face of such threats[3].

(1) https://www.defense.gouv.fr/ministere/politique-defense/loi-programmation-militaire-2024-2030/loi-programmation-militaire-2024-2030-grandes

(2) https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2026/03/04/iran-la-france-s-engage-dans-le-conflit-dans-une-logique-strictement-defensive_6669427_3210.html

(3) Wolfers, A. (1952). *«National security» as an ambiguous symbol.* Political Science Quarterly, 67(4), 481–502. https://doi.org/10.2307/2145138

Today in France, and more broadly across the Western world, the mainstream thinking that guides our decision-makers and embodies a revival of strategic-military logic views security as the management of threats, conflicts and power dynamics in the international arena. The same frameworks structure and permeate internal law enforcement processes in terms of surveillance, border control and states of emergency.

In such turbulent times as these, where the perils of all-out war and the destruction of thousands of human lives are at stake, it seems crucial to reclaim the democratic and collective debate on our ways of protection, coexistence, peace and conflict resolution, both in France and internationally. Some of us were born at a time in history and in a geographical location where direct warfare on the territory of mainland France was presented to us as a thing of the past, belonging to another era. Yet armed conflicts and wars have never ceased in other parts of the world. It must be acknowledged, however, that we are now plunged into a new era that may leave everyone feeling outraged, sceptical or powerless in the face of the rise in violence perpetrated in the name of defence and security[4].

Faced with these dynamics of destruction and repression, several questions therefore arise: are there other ways to promote security? Other ways of managing conflict that are not militarised? Other ways of ensuring protection without reproducing the logic of violence that claims to guarantee it?

With this in mind, it is worth recalling that security is, above all, a relational and context-dependent political concept and practice. It can only be defined by specifying the entity being protected, the values at stake, the identified threats, and the costs accepted in order to address them[5]. In other words, we must ask, within a framework of democracy and social justice, who is being protected, by whom and by what means, and at the cost of what dependencies or forms of violence.

Critical security studies remind us that security encompasses a set of mechanisms, discourses and institutions that must be analysed in terms of power, exclusion and domination. The idea is therefore to seek to understand the power structures and relations that determine what is constructed as a threat, and the populations who are, on the contrary, exposed to surveillance, control or exclusion. Such an interpretation paves the way for a redefinition of security, no longer merely as the preservation of the state in the face of supposed internal or external threats, but as an examination of the concrete conditions for a life of dignity.

According to feminist approaches[6], security refers precisely to living conditions in which people are protected not only from violence, but also from material deprivation and political and social exclusion. Other schools of thought, as well as a **multitude of citizen-led initiatives, have also contributed to broadening this understanding**

(4) In 2024, according to the SIPRI Yearbook 2025, the global landscape of armed conflict had deteriorated significantly, with the return of large-scale interstate wars and a rise in conflict-related deaths from 188,000 in 2023 to 239,000 in 2024, the highest total since 2018: https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2026-02/yb25_summary_fr.pdf Furthermore, at the national level, in November 2025, the NGO Flagrant Déni reported a 60% increase in police violence between 2016 and 2024: https://www.flagrant-deni.fr/rapportlespolicesdespolices/

(5) Baldwin, D. A. (1997). The concept of security. *Review of International Studies,* 23(1), 5–26. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210597000053

(6) Tickner, J. A. (1995). *Introducing feminist perspectives into peace and world security.* In K. Booth & S. Smith (Eds.), *International relations theory today* (pp. 275–291). Polity Press

of security, through the concepts of human security or 'bottom-up' security. Contemporary crises have in fact led to a multidimensional and diverse interpretation of security, going beyond its traditional military dimension alone. By taking peace, non-violence and conflict transformation as a desirable goal, alternative approaches thus invite us to broaden our understanding of threats and protection, starting not only from the state, but also from the vulnerabilities and concrete needs of populations.

Rethinking Security France (RSF) is part of this approach and is situated within a European network of citizen initiatives that are re-examining our relationships, our connections, as well as conflict resolution and peace in the face of the deadly security and defence logics at work today. The project in France echoes the work of other collectives such as Rethinking Security UK in the United Kingdom, Réseau Repenser la Sécurité en Afrique or Sicherheirt Neu Denken in Germany. Its aim is to generate debate, the exchange of ideas, the circulation of knowledge, critiques and alternatives to the dominant security paradigm, in order to renew the scope for reflection and action regarding our modes of protection and coexistence. **The initiative seeks to redirect public debate towards a broader vision of security, encompassing the protection of individuals, communities, living beings, human rights and the just conditions for peaceful coexistence.**

This paper is a concrete expression of that commitment. **It aims to encourage change regarding issues of security, protection and peace by asserting that credible paths exist beyond armed violence or repression.** Drawing on a range of expert and critical perspectives, it sets out to explore alternative approaches to conflict transformation and peacebuilding, with a view to building the non-violent world we wish to see emerge. These approaches offer concrete ways to prevent tensions, reduce inequalities and guarantee free and dignified living conditions for all.

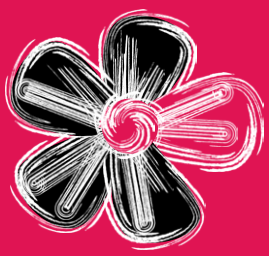
The first part provides an **overview of the current dynamics shaping security and peace in France.** It highlights the political, economic and material conditions that fuel the dominant security responses, influence our perception of threats, establish hierarchies of life and legitimise certain forms of violence, both in France and abroad. The aim is to demonstrate the limitations of the current security paradigm, emphasising that responses based on military force often treat the symptoms of conflicts rather than their causes. The intention is not to go into detail on every subject, but to open up avenues for reflection and to suggest useful references for the debate.

The second part gives a voice to a range of researchers, academics, associations, NGOs and citizens who are exploring and proposing alternatives to rethink security and build peace in France and beyond. By presenting theoretical frameworks and alternative practices, such as non-violent civil defence, non-violent communication or Unarmed Civilian Protection among others, they help to identify levers for political, institutional and citizen action. Conceived as a collective dialogue, these contributions bring to light a rich and nuanced map of possibilities, capable of offering concrete tools to citizens for bringing about change.

This working paper is thus intended as a tool explicitly designed to inform public debate on living together, democracy, security, defence, conflict management and peace. It aims to make accessible proposals, initiatives and innovative practices that are already charting **new ways of building a shared future, based on cooperation rather than confrontation, on the protection of lives rather than the accumulation of means of destruction.**

PART I

A CRITICAL OVERVIEW OF THE SECURITY SHIFT



Contemporary reconfigurations of security

A more heavily armed world, not a safer one

The idea conveyed by the media since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 is that the world is once again at war. Although the horrors of armed violence have always been a reality for many populations, it must be said that recent years have been marked by an alarming resurgence of armed conflicts. According to the Oslo Peace Research Institute (PRIO), in 2024 the world saw the highest number of conflicts since the end of the Second World War, surpassing the record set in 2023[1]. In total, 61 conflicts were recorded across 36 countries. In Palestine, Ukraine, Russia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Iran, and other countries and territories, the use of armed force is increasingly becoming the preferred method of conflict management, creating significant power imbalances.

At the same time, the world is undergoing an unprecedented process of rearmament. According to the SIPRI 2026 report[2], the year 2025 saw an unprecedented increase in military spending, reaching USD 2.8 trillion (+9.2% compared to 2024, excluding USA). These figures are at their highest since the Cold War and are part of a trend of continuous growth over the past eleven years on a global scale. In total, the share of global GDP devoted to military spending exceeded 2.5% in 2025, with increases in many countries, particularly in Europe and Asia. The three largest spenders in the military sector – namely the United States, China and Russia – alone account for almost half of global spending.

Wars and military spending feed off one another in a worrying spiral: conflicts and perceptions of insecurity justify, in the eyes of decision-makers, increases in defence budgets. Conversely, these increases reinforce the logic of competition, the arms race and the capacity for confrontation, contributing to an increasingly conflict-ridden and uncertain international environment. The 'security dilemma' theorised by Herz – namely that in seeking to protect itself and strengthen its security, each state ends up alarming the others – seems more relevant than ever.

At the same time, the resources dedicated to peace remain derisory. According to the Global Peace Index by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), spending on peace-

(1) The 2026 report containing the figures for 2025 has not yet been published, but it is highly likely that the trend will remain very high, given recent global events.
(2) https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2026%20Milex%20PR%20FRE.pdf

keeping and peacebuilding amounted to just USD 47.2 billion in 2024, representing a mere 0.52% of global military expenditure. Against a backdrop of eroding multilateralism and the withdrawal of US funding for cooperation, the UN has also announced a 25% reduction in its peacekeeping forces[3]. This imbalance is all the more striking given that the global economic impact of violence, again according to the IEP, reached USD 19,970 billion in 2024, or 11.6% of global GDP. In short, even as violence costs societies ever more, investment in peace remains marginal.

Europe and France in the era of rearmament

In Europe, faced with pressure from Russia, Member States have made rearmament a major political priority. This direction runs counter to the Union's founding principle – historically geared towards promoting peace – and sets the EU on a worrying course. As Laëtitia Sédou points out in the second part of the document, this European defence policy is, however, not new. It does not date from the 2022 invasion of Ukraine as the context would suggest, but has its roots in 2017, when the EU budget was first used for military purposes.

Between 2020 and 2025, against the backdrop of the Ukraine-Russia war, EU member states' spending surged (+62.87%), totalling USD 381 billion, or 2.1% of European GDP[3]. According to SIPRI, in 2024, military spending in Europe, including Russia, stood at USD 693 billion; in 2025, they stood at 864 billion (+14%)[4] . We are therefore witnessing a genuine shift in scale. In parallel, the 'Re-arm Europe' plan aims to mobilise 800 billion euros of additional investment in defence by 2030. It aims to put the EU's budgetary, financial and institutional resources at the service of defence, by facilitating joint borrowing, relaxing rules, reallocating public funds and mobilising private capital in the name of rearmament. Finally, at the NATO summit in The Hague in June 2025, the coalition's member states agreed to allocate 5% of their GDP to defence by 2035, of which 3.5% would go towards direct defence expenditure and 1.5% towards defence-related infrastructure, industry and resilience expenditure.

In France too, security is once again becoming primarily a military priority in public discourse and policy. Over the past ten years, the Ministry of the Armed Forces' budget has almost doubled, rising from €32.7 billion to €57.1 billion[5]. According to SIPRI, the country ranked ninth in the world for military expenditure in 2024. As part of the update to the military programming law – which provides for a total budget of €413 billion over seven years – the Prime Minister has announced €8.5 billion in additional ammunition orders by 2030[6]. According to the 'Key Figures of the 2025 State Budget' published

(3) https://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/policies/defence-numbers/

(4) According to SIPRI, "spending by Russia and Ukraine has continued to rise in this fourth year of the war, whilst the ongoing rearmament efforts of European NATO member states have led to the sharpest annual increase in spending in Central and Western Europe since the end of the Cold War". Jade Guiberteau Ricard, a researcher in SIPRI's Military Expenditure and Arms Production Programme, explains that this trend reflects "Europe's ongoing desire to assert its autonomy, combined with growing pressure from the United States to strengthen burden-sharing within the alliance".

(5) https://www.vie-publique.fr/en-bref/301379-budget-2026-le-gouvernement-detaille-sa-strategie-de-defense

(6) https://www.liberation.fr/politique/defense-sebastien-lecornu-annonce-85-milliards-deuros-supplementaires-pour-la-commande-des-munitions-dici-2030-20260325_KDE33YRDORCZLBMJYPZ25IE434/

by the Budget Directorate, the Defence budget amounts to €59.9 billion. It accounts for 10.3% of the general state budget and ranks among the very largest budget items[7]. From a strategic focus, rearmament has become a top budgetary priority. Against this backdrop, the war in Iran has further reinforced the justification for the rearmament decisions that have been made. In accordance with the defence agreements binding France to Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, the Macron government dispatched Rafale fighter jets, air defence systems and airborne radars in March 2026, and deployed the aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle to the region[8].

This massive reallocation of public resources is not without consequences. The priority given to this global trend of militarisation is at the expense of other budget items, such as health, education, justice, culture, pensions and infrastructure, which contribute to the well-being of the population. And whilst analysts rejoice at the relevance of this massive rearmament and the 'economic revolution'[9] it entails, it is hard not to lament the reversal of political and collective priorities. We are thus witnessing a gradual shift towards a model where arms production becomes the legitimised driving force behind security and prosperity.

When war becomes a market

Rearmament also appears to be the result of a political choice driven by powerful economic interests. Europe and its member states have entered a 'war economy' where arms production is seen as a lever for growth and innovation. According to ENAAT, the defence industry has capitalised on the new paradigm favouring militarisation to 'constantly push its boundaries'[10]. With €8 billion allocated to research and development (R&D) for new military technologies – 13.6 times more than previous programmes[11] – the European Defence Fund (EDF 2021–2027) perfectly illustrates the acceleration of Europe's militarist shift and the priority given to investment in warfare.

To strengthen the global competitiveness of Europe's defence industrial base, these budget lines encourage the development of new weapons and the integration of cutting-edge technologies[12]. The rise of 'high-tech' weapons, such as drones, precision-guided missiles, cyberweapons or systems incorporating AI–which correspond to

(7) https://www.budget.gouv.fr/

(8) It is also worth noting that, over the past five years, France has maintained a significant level of military engagement abroad, combining national operations with contributions to United Nations peacekeeping missions. National deployments have been particularly significant in the Sahel as part of Operation Barkhane, which mobilised around 5,100 troops at its peak in 2020–2021, before being gradually scaled back and then officially concluded in 2022, with residual regional presences of a few hundred soldiers remaining in countries such as Niger and Chad. In the Levant, Operation Chammal generally mobilised between 600 and 1,000 personnel, including air assets, naval deployments and special forces in support of the anti-Daesh coalition. Over the past five years, France has also maintained a regular, continuous and globally distributed naval presence, centred on assets such as nuclear submarines, an aircraft carrier and modern frigates. At the same time, it regularly deploys several large surface vessels, notably FREMM frigates and air defence frigates, on permanent missions ranging from NATO operations in the Mediterranean and the North Atlantic to national missions in the Gulf of Guinea and the Indo-Pacific.

(9) https://xpert.digital/fr/eurosatory-2026/

(10) https://enaat.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/ENAAT-WarLobbyReport_NOV2023_Summary-FR.pdf

(11) https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/attiser-les-flammes-execsum-fr.pdf

(12) Idem.

a model of 'connected warfare', often requiring no human intervention–raises serious ethical and political issues. Their production and export are, moreover, being encouraged, notably through the European Commission's recent adoption of the European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP) which, modelled on the US system, paves the way for the facilitation of arms sales and a weakening of public controls[13].

For many years, civil society has also highlighted the influence of the military-industrial lobby on European decision-makers and officials. According to several reports by the Delàs Centre and ENAAT, major European arms companies and their main lobbying organisations maintain privileged access to EU institutions, as evidenced by the hundreds of meetings held with the European Commission and their influence on public policy. At the same time, the review and allocation of projects funded by the EDF remain characterised by a significant lack of transparency[14]. It goes without saying that the profits at stake are enormous. For example, in the first half of 2025, the British firm BAE Systems generated a turnover of approximately €16.76 billion, an increase of more than 11% compared with the same period the previous year. For its part, the Swedish group Saab has secured several major contracts, including the sale of GlobalEye surveillance aircraft to France and A26 submarines to Poland, and anticipates a rise in its turnover of up to 24%[15].

Increased production and easier arms exports are leading us into a vicious circle where rearmament, wars, climate impacts and destruction reinforce one another. In this sense, the militarised security paradigm resembles a headlong rush rather than a sustainable response to contemporary insecurities[16].

Addressing internal conflicts and insecurities through force

Internal security is also subject to military logic. The doctrine of the security-defence continuum, widely invoked in institutional discourse, reflects this. With the militarisation of the police and borders, the distinction between internal security and external defence is now tending to blur[17]. The same categories and mechanisms of sorting, surveillance and control circulate between the external and the internal; and individuals, groups or behaviours are regarded as sources of disorder. What is at play here is a process of othering, that is, the designation of individuals and groups perceived and constructed as dangerous, justifying derogations from human rights in the name of the threats they are presumed to pose[18].

Current migration control in Europe illustrates this trend. The EU views the migration issue primarily as a threat to 'border protection'. In recent years, it has tightened legislation and measures targeting migrants and asylum seekers, to the detriment of respect for fundamental rights and the human security of individuals fleeing threats to

(13) https://enaat.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/EDIP_ENAAT_PositionPaper_April2025.pdf
(14) https://centredelas.org/publicacions/fed-uso-opaco-fondos-publicos/?lang=en et https://enaat.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/ENAAT-WarLobbyReport_NOV2023_Summary-FR.pdf
(15) https://xpert.digital/fr/eurosatory-2026/
(16) For a general overview of the war economy, see Laëtitia Sédou's contribution in Part 2 of this paper.
(17) Voir Bigo, D. (2002). *Security and immigration: Toward a critique of the governmentality of unease. Alternatives, 27*(Suppl. 1), 63-92. https://doi.org/10.1177/03043754020270S105
(18) Huysmans, J. (2006). *The politics of insecurity: Fear, migration and asylum in the EU.* Routledge.

their survival[19]. Frontex, the coastguard and border guard agency responsible for managing the EU's external borders has seen its budget increase 140-fold between 2005 and 2023. It also plans to increase the number of its staff from 10,000 to 30,000 by 2027, leading to an expansion of its scope of action. The agency has also deployed a repressive arsenal to block migration: walls, barbed wire, thermal cameras, sensors, drones and other surveillance devices. This policy relies on a techno-industrial complex combining civilian and military technologies, funded by public money, in the service of 'Fortress Europe'[20].

Border security has recently taken a further step forward with the strengthening of the 'return' regulation approved by the European Parliament. This text was approved on 26 March 2026 by MEPs by 389 votes to 206 (with 32 abstentions), notably thanks to an alliance between the conservative right and the far right[21]. By providing for the creation of 'return hubs' or deportation centres established in third countries, the extension of detention periods, and the introduction of detection mechanisms, this text reinforces the logic of coercive management of people deemed 'undesirable'. EU migration policies are therefore banking on a wholly repressive and ultra-security-focused approach, whereas the debate should instead be refocused on the causes of population displacement, such as the climate crisis, armed conflicts or growing inequalities.

The management of social issues and conflicts through militarised means is also an issue in France. For many observers, policing has shifted "from containment to the offensive"[22]. In recent years, physical expressions of social discontent have been met with a significant show of force, including the use of military-grade weapons such as stun grenades, assault rifles and LBDs (lanceurs de balles de défense / handheld weapon able to fire rubber projectiles). For example, in 2023, amidst the protests that rocked France – pension reforms, demonstrations against mega-reservoirs, and uprisings following the death of Nahel Merzouk – the use of grenades and LBDs increased by 173% and 58.6% respectively compared to the previous year.

Environmental protests are also being met with an increasingly militarised response from the police. According to the Toulouse Observatory of Police Practices, in July 2025, the thousand or so opponents of the A69 motorway in the Tarn were met with a disproportionate force comprising two Choucas and Écureuil helicopters, a Cessna 172 aircraft, several drones, two Centaure armoured vehicles, two water cannons, 30 mobile gendarmerie vans, around fifteen CRS vans, four 4×4 trucks, a pick-up truck equipped with a multi-shot grenade launcher, 12 Cougar grenade launchers, and 7 LBDs, highlighting "a profound transformation in the relationship between the State and protest"[23]. The doctrine of law enforcement in France is thus based on a strictly security-oriented management of demonstrations and collective resistance, conceived

(19) Numerous civil society organisations have condemned this crackdown, including La Cimade and Gisti, which criticise both the European Pact on Migration and Asylum, the outsourcing of migration control, and the abuses committed by Frontex (including pushbacks and other abuses at the borders, a lack of transparency, and violations of migrants' fundamental rights, amongst other things)

(20) For more information, listen to the podcast: https://podcast.fr/episode/aux-frontieres-de-leurope-un-arsenal-technologique-contre-les-migrants/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

(21) https://www.touteleurope.eu/l-ue-dans-le-monde/le-parlement-europeen-ouvre-la-voie-aux-hubs-de-retour-pour-migrants-hors-de-l-ue/

(22) https://www.politis.fr/articles/2025/09/militariser-la-repression-desarmer-la-contestation/

(23) https://hal.science/hal-05190488v1/file/texte%20rapport%2007%2C2025.%20OPP%20%281%29.pdf

as neutralisation as a supposed 'threat' rather than as a means of addressing and transforming social conflict.

In conclusion, it is clearly not a time for peace or peaceful coexistence for world leaders. We are witnessing the return of a state-centric and military-focused conception of security, to the detriment of a cooperative and global approach. Rearmament and security-driven logic are presented as rational responses to an unstable geopolitical and social environment, justifying a financial and industrial effort that, according to some analysts and experts, must be 'colossal'. Yet, historically, coercive interventions and repressive dynamics have amply demonstrated that violence begets violence and that the use of armed force is merely a short-term solution. Obviously, the question of the autonomy of the EU's defence capabilities vis-à-vis the United States arises and deserves to be debated. However, in addition to the human and economic cost, one may legitimately ask what effects militarised means and the arms and technology race actually have on global threats, the causes of conflict, and the social, ecological and political vulnerabilities we face (such as pandemics, climate change, inequality, poverty, the migration crisis, terrorism, etc.).

The blind spots of the 'security-first' approach

Security: a political and institutional construct

The current centrality of security and the military cannot be explained solely by the reality of conflicts and potential internal and international pressures on the state and its populations. According to Didier Bigo and the Paris School, security is an institutional and discursive construct that continually shifts the figures of the 'enemy'. The researcher demonstrates that security professionals create a framework that tends to expand the scope of threats and shapes the responses to them. The question then shifts from '*who is being protected?*' to '*who has the power to define what constitutes a threat?*'. In the name of maintaining legitimacy and authority, reproducing knowledge and restructuring security apparatuses, security actors construct certain phenomena as dangerous, urgent or exceptional and deploy the means and resources to address them. In other words, the dominant security paradigm is supported by institutions that have an interest in reproducing it[24].

The 'construction' of threats – or 'securitisation'[25] – thus invites us to analyse how threats are defined (wars, terrorism, migration, climate change, etc.) and how this definition shapes and justifies the responses put in place (rearmament, control, deterrence, surveillance, etc.). In this logic, certain threats and forms of violence are given undue prominence, whilst others are relegated to the background (such as social violence, inequalities, democratic fragilities, ecological degradation, etc.). Similarly, certain populations are viewed as requiring protection, whilst others are identified as potentially threatening or dangerous, to the extent of justifying the violation of their fundamental rights. State security thus defends a certain institutional and administrative order. It is based primarily on political choices – historically situated and socially constructed – rather than on real dangers. It is an institutionally constructed and politically contested category. Understanding security in this way paves the way for its redefinition and offers a more critical understanding of current trends in security responses.

(24) See the articles by D. Bigo, and in particular: Bigo, D. (2005). *The globalisation of (in)security? Reflections on the field of professionals managing anxieties and an analysis of the transnationalisation of (in)securitisation processes.* In D. Bigo, L. Bonelli, C. Guittet, & F. Ragazzi (eds.), *In the name of 11 September... Democracies put to the test of counter-terrorism* (pp. 97–122). Paris, France: La Découverte, and Bigo, D. (1995). *Major debates in a small world.* Cultures & Conflits, 19–20. https://doi.org/10.4000/conflits.872

(25) For a better understanding of this term, see the work of the Copenhagen School, in particular Ole Wæver and Barry Buzan.

When militarisation becomes the norm

In the current context in France and Europe, rearmament is presented as the only possible response to geopolitical conflicts and tensions. The militarisation of the public imagination is at work, and militarism – or the ideology underpinning militarisation – permeates much of our societies. This is evidenced by the various statements and positions taken by Emmanuel Macron's government in recent months and years. At the start of the pandemic, the President had already invoked a martial lexicon. The use of the expression 'demographic rearmament' – a sign of a pro-birth obsession linked to the idea of a 'war effort' – follows the same line, not to mention the countless speeches calling for the active engagement of citizens in the overall defence strategy[26]. This normalisation of war rhetoric contributes to a growing social acceptance of the use of force and military means to address social and geopolitical challenges, to the detriment of other non-violent avenues.

The climate of war and the societal rearmament that accompanies it are causing significant concern, particularly among younger generations. The idea of a permanent threat and pervasive insecurity is further reinforced by a continuous stream of anxiety-inducing media coverage. This is evidenced by the voice message sent by Emmanuel Macron to Fatima, a young internet user concerned about the repercussions of military interventions in Iran on her life[27]. In November 2025, the speech by the Chief of the Defence Staff to the Association of French Mayors, calling for people to prepare for potential sacrifices in the event of war, including 'accepting the risk of losing children', had already sparked controversy and crystallised anxiety, mistrust and rejection[28]. Furthermore, the strengthening of the army-nation bond is particularly evident in the introduction, from summer 2026, of a Voluntary Military Service, a voluntary enlistment contract for young people within specific military units for a period of 8 to 12 months[29]. These measures, just like the 'citizens' rallies' in schools, are widely criticised by civil society organisations for fostering a culture of war and the 'indoctrination' of young people. The Peace Movement and other groups argue that schools must, on the contrary, remain places of freedom, critical thinking and peace education.

The project of militarisation as a cultural, discursive, educational and institutional process also contributes to the weakening of our democratic system and poses a challenge to democracy. Firstly, within the context of the Europeanisation of issues in matters of security and defence, decision-making power is shifting from the national and parlia-

(26) See, for example: President Macron's statement on the occasion of the 81st anniversary of the liberation of Bormes-les-Mimosas, 17 August 2025: https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/299873-emmanuel-macron-17082025-liberation; the Statement by Mr Emmanuel Macron, President of the Republic, on defence policy, at Cesson-Sévigné on 20 January 2025: https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/296960-emmanuel-macron-20012025-politique-de-la-defense?utm_source=chatgpt.com or the announcement of the introduction of a voluntary national service on 27 November 2025: https://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/service-national-ce-quil-faut-retenir-lannonce-du-president-republique?utm_source=chatgpt.com

(27) https://www.tf1info.fr/international/la-france-ne-fait-pas-la-guerre-emmanuel-macron-repond-a-l-inquietude-d-une-jeune-fille-fatima-sur-le-conflit-au-moyen-orient-2428501.html

(28) https://www.liberation.fr/politique/accepter-de-perdre-nos-enfants-les-propos-du-chef-des-armees-font-bondir-au-sein-de-la-classe-politique-20251120_XU37DA34K5CUFDDLUKOC27VWNY/

(29) https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2025/11/27/l-integralite-du-discours-d-emmanuel-macron-sur-le-service-national-militaire_6655077_823448.html

mentary level to the regional and executive level[30]. According to the Arms Observatory, the concentration of the Head of State's prerogatives in the military sphere – the 'reserved domain' par excellence – also contributes to the dispossession of citizens' political power, transforming them into passive subjects with regard to decisions on defence and protection[31]. The government may, in fact, decide unilaterally to launch a military operation and only inform Parliament within three days of that decision. It is only after four months, should it wish to extend the intervention, that it must seek Parliament's authorisation[32]. Finally, and again according to the Arms Observatory, despite some progress in terms of transparency, arms export licences classified as defence secrets and the absence of a list of products in reports on transfers of dual-use goods (in addition to financial figures) hinder democratic oversight of military matters. The stifling of democratic debate on our defence policies therefore raises questions and calls for action.

Treating the symptoms, ignoring the causes

The core of security should not focus on the survival of the state but on the emancipation of individuals and groups from the constraints that threaten them and weigh upon their well-being[33]. The state can be 'secure' and militarily protected whilst its population grapples with forms of violence, exclusion or domination. In this sense, the security of the state may diverge from that of individuals. Emma de Rothschild[34] shows that historically, security had a broader connotation than that attributed to it today and referred to the protection of people against arbitrariness and social and political insecurity. According to her, reducing security to the military defence of the state is a historical reduction, and not the 'natural' definition of the term. The emergence of 'human security' and its promotion on the international stage from the 1990s onwards[35] broadened the very understanding of security by bringing within its scope poverty, access to food, and the health and environmental vulnerabilities that affect people's lives.

Dominant security discourses are not neutral. They construct target groups and shift the focus from causes to threats to be contained, to the detriment of addressing other vulnerabilities that would otherwise require greater political attention. Individuals and groups face a range of unmet needs that exacerbate vulnerabilities, place them in a state of insecurity, and fuel conflict. Yet the military-centric approach tends to address the visible symptoms of crises rather than their root causes, such as inequalities, political exclusion, economic exploitation, colonial logics, institutional fragilities or the ecological crisis. This focus on the immediate manifestations of insecurity favours short-term, coercive and militarised responses that address direct violence rather than the struc-

(30) https://www.ritimo.org/Violences-guerres-conflits-armes-evolutions-et-resistances
(31) https://www.ritimo.org/Face-a-la-guerre-et-a-sa-preparation-le-deni-democratique
(32) Article 35 of the French Constitution of 1958
(33) See, in this regard, the contributions of Critical Security Studies
(34) Rothschild, E. (1995). *What is security? Daedalus, 124*(3), 53 98.
(35) 'Human security' was explicitly mentioned for the first time in 1994 in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report entitled '*New Dimensions of Human Security*': https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-1994 However, the UNDP primarily institutionalised and systematised at the international level a broader conception of security that already had intellectual and political antecedents. See Rothschild on this point.

tural violence and power relations that produce it. Structural violence, as theorised by Johan Galtung[36],refers to the economic and political constraints that limit individuals' potential. These are the product of institutions, social norms or procedures, and prevent individuals and groups from meeting their basic needs. Managing crises, conflicts and insecurity therefore requires much more than mere security responses; it entails transforming the social, political and relational structures that make violence possible.

Climate issues are also being framed in security terms. States are increasingly incorporating climate change into their security strategies, presenting it as a potential threat multiplier – that is, something that can exacerbate migration, conflicts and natural disasters[37]. The security logic applied to ecological crises seeks to manage the resulting effects (tensions, displacement, disasters) through coercive means, without addressing the economic, energy and political structures that disrupt the climate and destroy living environments. According to SIPRI's Environment of Peace report[38], militarisation actually exacerbates the causes of environmental and biodiversity crises. Firstly, armed forces and the military-industrial complex are heavily reliant on fossil fuels and are responsible for lasting destruction and massive degradation of ecosystems[39]. Secondly, military preparedness and armed interventions absorb and divert human and financial resources that could be dedicated to the ecological transition. The SIPRI report emphasises the need to combine peacebuilding with ecological restoration, by tackling the deep-rooted environmental causes that create insecurity and vulnerability, such as CO2 emissions, dependence on fossil fuels, ecosystem degradation, climate injustice and the extractivist model.

(36) Galtung, J. (1969). *Violence, peace, and peace research. Journal of Peace Research, 6*(3), 167 191

(37) See in this regard authors such as Alex, B., & Estève, A., McDonald, M. or Dalby, S.

(38) https://www.sipri.org/research/peace-and-development/environment-peace

(39) The environmental cost of military activities is significant and documented in numerous reports. For example, the Conflict and Environment Observatory estimates the military's carbon footprint for 2025 at 5.5% of global GHG emissions: https://ceobs.org/new-data-reveals-the-military-emissions-gap-is-growing-wider/ The same observatory indicates that by March 2026, one month after the start of the Israel-US war against Iran, the environmental costs were already significant in terms of pollution, risks to water resources and damage to ecosystems, and were continuing to rise: https://ceobs.org/iran-war-environmental-risk-overview-as-of-27th-march/. Furthermore, in Ukraine, according to the European Commission, by 2025 approximately 1.7 million hectares of forest had been affected by the war, representing around 15% of the country's forest cover: https://chatgpt.com/g/g-p-694588f1682c81919f92b20cd705e455/c/69cbc5af-b630-838e-aedd-7b278e5c98bf Finally, UNEP reports that in Gaza, Israeli attacks have generated 61 million tonnes of rubble, 15% of which are likely to pose a high risk of contamination from asbestos, industrial waste or heavy metals: https:// www.unep.org/resources/report/environmental-impact-escalation-conflict-gaza-strip

Peace, non-violence and conflict transformation: a broader vision of security

Peace and security revisited

In this context, peacebuilding is by no means naïve: it is a different way of viewing the world and our human relationships – in short, a different paradigm. To feel secure, to cope with the upheavals of the world and respond to conflicts, there are alternatives to militarisation. Yet, in a technocratic context compartmentalised into silos of knowledge and practice, it is often difficult to think across disciplines and move beyond short-term, techno-industrial and military responses. Approaches based on non-violence and conflict transformation offer, in this regard, a fresh perspective and open up new avenues. They invite us to address the root causes of insecurity and conflict – injustices, exclusion, inequalities, trauma, struggles over resources – as well as the power relations that fuel them.

It is important to recognise that conflicts are inherent in any society. They arise from diverging interests, injustices, power relations, frustrations, domination, fears, inequalities, and so on. It is therefore not possible to make them disappear, but we can prevent them from escalating into repression or war. Security thus goes beyond mere protection against threats. From a broader, relational and transformative perspective, it can be understood as the collective capacity to prevent, navigate and transform conflicts without descending into violence. Peace and security do not, however, entirely overlap: security primarily refers to a state of protection, whereas peace denotes a broader horizon, which implies fairer social and political relations. In other words, peace does not replace security; it invites us to rethink it on the basis of justice, cooperation and conflict transformation.

Rethinking security therefore means considering it from the perspective of 'human security', 'common security'[40] or 'community security'. In this sense, the feminist authors have profoundly shifted the very way security is conceived. They oppose a state-centred and masculinised security, and propose more embodied visions. By developing

(40) Common security, developed by the Palme Commission in 1982 and updated by Common Security 2022, refers to a conception of security based on interdependence, according to which no nation can be security – whether for oneself or against others – but only in conjunction with them, through cooperation, disarmament and the search for common solutions to shared threats.

'feminist security', they take into account everyday insecurities (domestic, economic and racial violence) and not just war. They call for security conceived as a profound social transformation of relationships and structures. In particular, decolonial, community-based and Afro-Latin American feminists consider security from the perspective of the lived experiences of the Global South, Indigenous and Black communities. They fight against the insecurities linked to racism, extractivism, territorial dispossession, the militarisation of territories, police violence, urban poverty, forced displacement, and climate disasters. Feminist approaches critique dominant conceptions of security and are already opening up new ways of protecting, resisting and making peace[41].

Building peace through action

Approaches to peace and non-violence open up alternative ways of ensuring collective protection. They focus on the structural causes of violence as well as on the political, social and institutional mechanisms capable of preventing or transforming it. The idea is to create the conditions that make violence less likely and to guarantee the material and political conditions for a life of dignity. This is referred to as 'positive peace'[42]. This leads to a renewal of political imaginations. Many civil society organisations are already working towards this and carrying out innovative actions from which we can draw inspiration. From dockworkers refusing to export arms to the Freedom Flotillas, from student strikes to the No Kings marches, non-violent opposition to wars and armed destruction is organising itself and showing that there are many ways to resist.

Building peace requires effort. We already have a multitude of documented tools and initiatives at our disposal, but these need to be strengthened and many more are yet to be devised. In France, concrete solutions for peace exist, but they remain scattered, largely invisible and poorly structured. Building peace through action therefore involves consolidating these tools and giving them a more central place in how we think about our shared future[43].

At the global level, conventional methods generally rely on conflict prevention and diplomacy. These techniques encompass resources such as tension analysis, mediation, dialogue, early warning systems and de-escalation efforts before violence erupts. There are also civilian instruments conflict protection and transformation, such as non-violent civil defence, unarmed civilian protection (UCP), support for people under threat, local capacity building, protective presence, and support for human rights defenders.

Building peace and ensuring the protection of all people and all things also urgently requires the demilitarisation of security, that is to say, curbing the arms race, limiting arms exports, reducing the centrality of armed responses, and redirecting more resources towards diplomacy, cooperation and civilian protection capacities. Saving multilateralism and calling for respect for the rules of international law should also be a priority.

(41) See in particular the work of J. Ann Tickner, Laura Sjoberg, Cynthia Enloe, Yuderkys Espinosa Miñoso, Yomaira Figueroa-Vásquez, Ochy Curiel and Julieta Pardes

(42) The concept of 'positive peace', as developed by J. Galtung, refers not only to the absence of war, but also to the presence of social, political and economic conditions that reduce direct, structural and symbolic violence. Peace in this sense is therefore not to be confused with security; it shifts the meaning of security by situating it within a broader project of justice and non-violent coexistence.

(43) https://www.institutpourlapaix.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Penser-la-Paix-en-France.pdf

Finally, building a lasting culture of peace requires long-term work, such as developing education in non-violence, cooperation and conflict management, supporting independent media and critical thinking, combating discrimination, addressing trauma and memory, strengthening democratic participation, and fostering fairer and more inclusive institutions, in order to tackle the root causes of structural violence[44].

In France too, this can take very concrete forms through the implementation of educational programmes in schools, school and neighbourhood mediation, training in de-escalation within public services and non-violent communication (NVC), restorative justice, support for grassroots organisations, and the creation of spaces for dialogue when tensions rise.

Inspiring alternatives

The following contributions present and embody real-world actions. They take the opposite tack to the warlike reflex and highlight concrete alternatives for building a safe and non-violent world. Researchers, academics, organisations, activists and citizens draw on their expertise and experiences to contribute to the work of peacebuilding. The texts brought together in the second section thus explore several complementary paths.

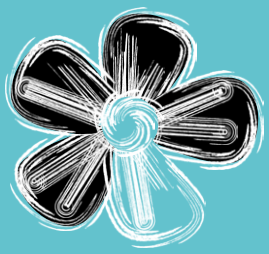
Laëtitia Sédou opens the discussion by placing French rearmament within the broader context of European militarisation and the arms industry's growing influence over regional and national policy decisions. **Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, Alain Refalo, François Marchand** and **Amber French** then each, in their own way, question the centrality of the military response and demonstrate what non-violent civil defence can contribute to the debate on protection, democracy and the active role of citizens. Through theoretical, strategic and practical approaches, their contributions restore depth to an idea too often sidelined in public debate: that of a defence based also on society, non-cooperation, civil resistance and collective preparedness.

Other contributions further shift the focus towards concrete peace-building practices. **Thierry Gautret de La Moricière** demonstrates how non-violence can also be practised in everyday relationships, through non-violent communication (NVC) and a patient process of unlearning violence. **Cécile Dubernet** and **Anna Penfrat** revisit civil peace intervention (CPI) and unarmed civil protection (UCP), demonstrating how civilians can protect other civilians in contexts of tension or war. **Ben Cramer** proposes rethinking security through the lens of ecology and collective resilience, whilst **Gabriel Lagrange** argues for a French foreign policy that takes the links between climate, peace and security more seriously. Finally, **Camille Boutron** demonstrates how the 'Women, Peace and Security' agenda can help us rethink our understanding of international issues and make security and peace policies more inclusive.

(44) See the resources from World Beyond War, "*How to Build a Global Security System as an Alternative to War*": https://worldbeyondwar.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/AGSS-2017.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com and QCEA, "Building Peace Together: A Practical Guide": https://www.qcea.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/ Building-Peace-Together_FR-1.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

PART II

THINKING ABOUT AND BUILDING ALTERNATIVES



Rearming Europe: a security policy or a power strategy?

LAËTITIA SÉDOU

Laëtitia Sédou has been advocating at the European level for 25 years on issues of peace, human rights and democracy. Since 2016, she has been the coordinator of the "DisarmEu-rope!" project run by the European Network Against Arms Trade (ENAAT), which aims to analyse and raise awareness about the militarisation of the EU. She holds three master's degrees in history, European politics and human rights, and has been a member of GRIP (Research and Information Group on Peace and Security) since June 2025.

Recent developments in France's 'defence policy'[1], such as the significant increase in the military budget over the past several years or the announcement of a hypothetical Europeanised nuclear umbrella[2], must be situated and analysed within the broader context of European rearmament, which has largely accelerated since Russia's 2022 attack on Ukraine.

The first point to note is that this policy of European rearmament began well before 2022, with the illegal invasion of Ukraine having served primarily as a justification for accelerating and expanding policies that were already in place or in the pipeline. The first concrete measures date back to 2017[3], when the European Union's budget was used for the first time for military projects, thereby crossing a red line that some consider a violation of the European treaties[4]. But the patient and discreet 'preparatory' work leading up to such a development spans at least two decades[5], whilst the issues military matters were – and for the most part still are – considered to fall within the exclusive

(1) The very terminology of 'defence policy' is open to question, since it essentially amounts to an arms race whose stakes go far beyond our mere defence. The term 'rearmament policy' will therefore be used more frequently in this article, although official French and European discourse refers to 'defence policy'.
(2) https://www.touteleurope.eu/vie-politique-des-etats-membres/dissuasion-nucleaire-emmanuel-macron-presentera-lundi-son-plan-pour-la-france-et-l-europe/
(3) Ruiz A. et al, 'A Militarised Union: Understanding and Confronting the Militarisation of the EU', ENAAT and Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2021, Chapter 1
(4) https://left.eu/european-defence-fund-immoral-illegal.
(5) Ruiz A., op. cit.; Villafranca Izquierdo L. "A European Commissioner for Defence: the origins and limits of Andrius Kubilius's mandate", GRIP, 2025

competence of Member States, including within the framework of European cooperation, which remains primarily intergovernmental.

This is why–and this is the second key point of analysis–the European rearmament programmes adopted since 2017 are based on the European Commission's industrial remit; in other words, on the realisation of the single market and support for competitiveness, including at the international level, of industry, in this case the military industry. This industrial lens will largely determine the type of 'defence policy' implemented at European level[6].

What do these policies and programmes actually entail? Initial funding has focused on research and development activities (including prototyping and testing), to support industry and research centres in developing the next generation of weaponry, including 'disruptive' technologies that could radically change the way wars are fought. The main instrument for this is the European Defence Fund (EDF), with a budget of €8 billion for the period 2021–2027, following on from two pilot programmes with a budget of €590 million in 2017–2020[7].

From 2022 onwards, the Commission is proposing new instruments to fund the subsequent phases, namely the production phase and the joint procurement phase by consortia of European states: in total, more than 2 billion euros in additional funding will be made available by 2027 through instruments such as ASAP (Action to Support Ammunition Production) or the European Defence Industrial Programme (EDIP)[8]. The amounts are still modest compared to the military expenditure of the 27 Member States (€343 billion in 2024) as the financial framework is constrained until 2027 and leaves the Commission little room for manoeuvre.

However, the next European financial framework (MFF 2028–2034) could allocate more substantial funding to armaments policies, in the region of €130 billion, if the European Commission's proposal to increase the budget for armaments and space fivefold compared to the current financial framework is accepted by the co-legislators.

France is the main beneficiary of these funds: since 2017, manufacturers and other players in the French defence sector have received 20% of the allocated amounts for military research and development via the EDF and its precursor programmes, five percentage points more than each of the three other military powers – Germany, Italy and Spain (the United Kingdom is not eligible for this funding)[9]. As regards support for production

(6) Villafranca Izquierdo L. op.cit.
(7) Ruiz A., op.cit.
(8) See the general overview of the various programmes on the official EU website: https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/eu-defence-industry_en
(9) In total, these four countries account for 65% of funding: https://enaat.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/ENAAT_EDF-factsheet_Nov22-FR.pdf

through ASAP, the first available data place France in third position with 16.5% of the allocated budgets, behind Germany (25.7%) and Norway (18.8%)[10].

The French government is throwing its full weight behind the French arms industry in its programmes, to the extent that it has had a hypersonic weapons project duplicated after the French consortium lost out to a Spanish competitor[11], or by taking offence at Romania 'favouring' German industry in its acquisitions funded by the EU[12].

France constantly pushes for a European preference in these financial schemes, and more generally in European industrial policy, knowing that its industry would be the primary beneficiary, even at the risk of irritating its European partners[13]. The French government has also played a major role in imposing rather drastic access conditions[14] on British industry for joint procurement funded by the recent €150 billion SAFE loan[15], which ultimately caused the negotiations to collapse, even though an agreement had been reached for the Canadian industry! The United Kingdom is a key military power in Europe, but its integration into these European armaments policies remains difficult, particularly due to French resistance.

A final important point of analysis is that the role of the military industry lobby in the emergence and evolution of these armaments policies has been extensively documented by civil society for years[16], and its influence extends beyond strictly 'defence' policies[17]. One can speak of a truly 'symbiotic' relationship between this industry and the European institutions, notably the Commission but also, since 2022, the European Parliament, not to mention the privileged relationship these actors often maintain with their own national governments, another channel of influence at the European level. Under the guise of issues that are supposedly purely industrial and technical, critical voices, particularly those from peace movements, are deemed irrelevant, whilst industry players and other think-tanks in favour of these policies are extensively consulted through various channels, even prior to legislative proposals, in order to 'better understand' their needs and proposals. To sum up, it is as if we were handing over the final say and the keys to our healthcare system to the pharmaceutical industry…

Furthermore, this is compounded by largely inadequate ethical controls on the types of weaponry being developed[18], a curtailment of Parliament's usual oversight role re-

(10) https://opensecuritydata.eu/
(11) https://enaat.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/ENAAT-NBB-2023-04_09.06.2023.pdf, p.1
(12) https://www.euractiv.com/news/france-fumes-at-romania-over-german-safe-contracts-report-claims/
(13) https://www.euractiv.com/news/industry-commissioner-rejects-criticism-of-plan-for-made-in-europe-rules/ ; https://euobserver.com/205402/eu-to-finally-unveil-made-in-europe-industrial-plan-after-repeated-delays
(14) https://fr.businessam.be/la-france-propose-de-limiter-lutilisation-des-composants-britanniques-dans-le-fonds-europeen-de-defense/ ;
(15) SAFE is one of the key instruments of the ReArm Europe plan presented in February 2025 by the European Commission, and makes €150 billion, raised on the financial markets, available to Member States for joint military procurement; See https://rosalux.eu/en/2025/english-rearm-europe-or-the-myth-of-a-european-defence-for-peace/
(16) See the reports by the Transnational Institute (2007 : https://www.tni.org/en/publication/the-emerging-eu-military-industrial-complex, by Corporate Europe Observatory, (2011 : https://corporateeurope.org/sites/default/files/publications/ceo_armslobby_en-v2.pdf), Vredesactie (2017 https://www.vredesactie.be/sites/default/files/pdf/Securing_profits_web.pdf) and l'ENAAT (2023 : https://enaat.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/ENAAT-WarLobbyReport_NOV2023_Summary-FR.pdf)
(17) https://multinationales.org/fr/enquetes/du-sang-sur-le-pacte-vert/
(18) https://enaat.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/ENAAT-TNI_execsum-FR-Attiser-les-flammes.pdf et https://

garding the implementation of these programmes, and fast-track adoption procedures that drastically limit debates within the European Parliament and the ability of critical voices to be heard, due to a lack of resources.

However, these rearmament policies are more likely to contribute to increased global insecurity for two main reasons: their contribution to CO2 emissions and thus to climate change[19], and the exacerbation of the global arms race, which in turn fuels conflicts and authoritarian regimes.

From the outset, European programmes have aimed to boost the competitiveness of the defence industry on the international stage, that is to say, its ability to export[20], and this aspect has become more pronounced over time: major companies in the sector and several Member States have rejected the possibility, in the event of an emergency, of obliging subsidised companies to prioritise deliveries to Ukraine or European states, in order to preserve the confidence of their export customers[21]; as part of a wave of deregulation affecting all sectors, including armaments, the EDF will soon be able to fund projects based solely on their contribution to strengthening competitiveness and opening up new markets (a criterion previously combined with others relating to European integration). The Commission also proposes to deregulate the control of transfers of military goods at European level to such an extent that it will undermine Member States' ability to effectively control exports outside the European Union, and thus to meet their international obligations in this regard, assuming, of course, that they are willing to do so[22]. Finally, as part of the recently adopted EDIP, the Commission is following the US model for arms sales, Foreign Military Sales, by proposing the creation of a centralised catalogue of available European military equipment, a European Military Sales (EUMS) mechanism and subsidies for national strategic stocks, which in turn facilitates exports via direct government-to-government agreements[23].

These policies therefore aim to fuel an arms race, but also and above all a technological race to remain competitive against China and the United States, clearly identified as our competitors in the Defence White Paper European Union of 19 March 2025[24]. The language of this White Paper is quite transparent: the aim is to preserve our capacity for economic hegemony in the world, in other words to turn Europe into a new military power[25] in order to preserve our share of the imperialist pie, and in particular our access to rare earths and other critical resources[26].

The rapturous applause and lack of criticism following US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's colonialist, supremacist and Christian fundamentalist speech at the Munich Se-

enaat.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/250224_CP-FR_CentreDelas-ENAATreport_EDFreview.pdf

(19) On this subject, see the numerous existing publications at https://climatemilitarism.org/#resources

(20) https://enaat.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/ENAAT-TNI_execsum-FR-Attiser-les-flammes.pdf

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(25) https://rosalux.eu/en/2025/english-rearm-europe-or-the-myth-of-a-european-defence-for-peace/

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curity Conference on 14 February 2026[27], undoubtedly say more about the true nature of these so-called defence policies than all the fine declarations on the importance of international law, which cost next to nothing.

And it is to be feared that France is seeking above all to regain its past 'greatness' through a European defence structure largely subsumed to serve its industrial, political and geostrategic interests. This, moreover, largely explains the resistance and mistrust of France's European partners regarding any political progress in this area that goes beyond the granting of subsidies for the production and purchase of arms…

Added to these direct threats to global human security is the diversion of financial and human resources, as well as political attention, away from essential public policies (health, education, etc.) and from non-violent processes of conflict prevention and resolution–ranging from tackling their root causes to diplomacy – which are, however, already severely underfunded[28]. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon already said as much in 2009: 'The world is over-armed and peace is under-funded'[29].

If Europe and France are serious about contributing to a peaceful and secure world, they should fund, support and promote the 'peace industry' rather than arms dealers.

This begins with a shift in conceptual framework, and thinking in terms of 'human security' and 'positive peace' rather than 'security' and 'the mere absence of armed conflict'. The next step is to prioritise the fight against climate change and the root causes of conflict, such as inequality, poverty, access to land or water, etc.; for example, reducing global military spending by 10% each year (amounting to $270 billion in 2024…)[30] and dedicating this sum to these objectives will do far more for world peace than the remaining $1.9 trillion allocated to military power… Finally, it is a matter of taking peacebuilding seriously, and providing conflict prevention and resolution with the resources they require. Peace is not a fine idea that will come about by itself through luck, but a path to be forged, for which significant resources are needed, both at the international and local levels: diplomats[31], historians, geographers, crisis analysts, mediators, community leaders, civil society actors, etc., are needed in large numbers, and must

(27) https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/02/secretary-of-state-marco-rubio-at-the-munich-security-conference

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(29) https://education.unoda.org/presentations/sgquotes.html#:~:text=Disarmament%20Education,achieving%20sustainable%20peace%20and%20security.

(30) For example, $16.9 billion would be enough to lift 123 million people out of acute hunger in 2025, and $10 billion would be enough to offset the US withdrawal from UN agencies and prevent a reduction in the UN budget.

(31) Contrary to the 'at the same time' narrative, France has significantly weakened its diplomatic corps, and the European External Action Service, a sort of European diplomatic corps, is in the process of significantly reducing its presence and field staff.

be equipped with strong interpersonal skills in languages, intercultural understanding, negotiation and mediation, active listening, and the ability to step back from one's own perspective…

In short, the aim is to prioritise the skills and human resources essential for peacefully resolving our differences – which are inherent to humanity – rather than the 'techno-solutionism' favoured by industry, whose objective is to make a profit.

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Confronting armed violence beyond military orthodoxy

ALEXANDRE CHRISTOYANNOPOULOS

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How should one prepare to face a military threat such as Putin's Russia, especially when US strategic support is increasingly uncertain? I shall focus my remarks on two topics: the presumed effectiveness of war as a method of 'defence', and the contrasting prospects for peace in Europe offered by two very different defence policies.

The rampant militarisation of Europe in recent years is fuelled in part by an assumption that it is time to question. This assumption is widespread, both in military circles and in popular culture at large, as well as among many political and activist circles. This assumption is that violence is an effective method or means of achieving one's ends (if only as a last resort).

Yet there is good reason to doubt this. Firstly (and to put it simply, perhaps even simplistically, to begin with), in any violent conflict, if one side wins, the other loses: violence therefore fails at least half the time.

Secondly, the reaction of those against whom violence is used may be to comply, to yield, or to refuse and resist. This response is neither predictable nor controllable: those who inflict violence cannot guarantee the submission of their opponents. I cite as examples recent conflicts, whether attacks carried out by armed groups such as Hamas, or military operations conducted by states such as Israel, Russia, or Ukraine – situations which are, of course, very different and cannot be equated with one another, but in which armed violence has generated more resistance than submission.

Thirdly, few of the wars over the last century have resulted in a decisive military victory. States with greater military capabilities do not necessarily emerge victorious: think of the wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Ukraine… Violence is therefore not particularly effec-

tive in achieving stated political objectives, nor does a greater capacity to inflict it guarantee success.

To be clear, I am not claiming that violence always fails, but in any case it fails more often than we tend to imagine when we advocate or support it. What resorting to war does guarantee, on the other hand, is a series of ravages: interpersonal violence (including sexist violence), material and environmental destruction… Violence destroys; it afflicts its victims and their loved ones; it brutalises its perpetrators; it traumatises all those it engulfs.

This does not mean that the use of armed violence benefits no one. Substantial profits can be made from the production of weapons. Political agendas and careers can be advanced. Competitors can be discredited. Specific targets can be eliminated. Images of decisive action can be projected. Pacifists have long been concerned about the way in which such interests heavily influence decisions to wage and prepare for war.

Armed violence is, in any case, not as often as one might think a wise choice, even when it comes to self-defence. And it leads to a dangerous militarisation, with authoritarian tendencies and dubious benefits. So, what can be done? How should we respond to threats, such as those posed, for example, by Vladimir Putin's Russia?

Well, I believe it is high time to bring non-violent civil defence (NVCD) back to the fore as an alternative to traditional defence strategies, if only, to begin with at any rate, as a complementary investment to more traditional military spending (as the special issue of Alternatives Non-Violentes from December 2024 does).

Let us make it clear, just in case, that non-violent resistance is not passive. It ranges from symbolic protests (speeches, posters, leaflets) through non-cooperation (strikes, boycotts) to more confrontational forms of action (civil disobedience, non-violent occupation). It does not prevent confrontation or violence, but any violence that arises is not inflicted on opponents, but absorbed by the resistance.

Nor does non-violent resistance refer to conventional political methods such as diplomacy or parliamentary initiatives, even if these are 'non-violent' in the strict sense. 'Non-violence' generally lies outside such customary patterns of political behaviour.

Since a 2011 study by Chenoweth and Stephan (Why Civil Resistance Works), it has been known that non-violent resistance appears to work at least as often as violent resistance (twice as often, according to the authors, although the details are a matter of debate). To be clear: non-violence does not guarantee success (any more than violent methods do). Furthermore, the majority of studies on non-violence cover examples of resistance that are primarily domestic in nature, rather than involving interstate war. The question that therefore arises is whether non-violence could function as a method of defence against a military invasion.

There is no grand, shining example of a country that defended itself using only non-violent civil disobedience. Lithuania, perhaps, during the collapse of the USSR. But there are countless examples of peoples who resisted, often in a relatively spontaneous yet effective manner, against all manner of authoritarian and colonial regimes – in other words, including regimes of occupation as well. How did they win? By shifting the balance of power through their resolutely non-violent resistance in the face of the opponent's violence, and by eroding the support that even the most violent regimes need to pursue their repressive policies. The violent repression of non-violent resistance can have a 'boomerang effect' that undermines the oppressor's presumed moral superiority. Non-violence sows doubt and encourages people to question the status quo. Whilst violent resistance reinforces the pillars of support for the regime, non-violent resistance weakens them. When non-violence succeeds, we know that it is partly thanks to these effects that it succeeds.

Let us return for a moment to the war in Ukraine. Between the Euromaidan of 2013–14 and 2022, Ukraine moved closer to NATO and doubled its military budget. What if the same commitment in terms of time, funding and administrative capacity had been devoted during those years to training all Ukrainians in non-violent resistance? What if Ukraine and its allies had decided to invest as much in non-violent civil disobedience as in the military response?

A wholly non-violent resistance would have resulted in many deaths before potentially undermining the willingness to obey and kill that the Kremlin requires of its soldiers. Ukraine would likely have found itself completely occupied, but prepared for a non-violent, total and determined confrontation. The course of events would have been risky, uncertain, and difficult for the Ukrainians. But are we certain that the outcome would have been worse than the razed cities, the displaced populations, and the more than 500,000 deaths the war has claimed so far, not to mention the still-uncertain outcome and the risk of nuclear escalation? (This is a question I examine in an article published in January 2025 in English, which has since been abridged and translated into French and published by Pressenza.)

We will have no proof that non-violent civil defence works until we have tried it.

To be able to do so, it would 'simply' be a matter of organising and funding training for all citizens in methods of non-violent resistance. States have the administrative and financial capacity to do this. It would cost far less than Europe's rearmament programme. It would avert the dangers posed by this rampant militarisation. And it would, incidentally, equip our democracies to better resist the rise of fascism, to act against climate change, against sexism, racial discrimination, and so on. In other words, it would fortify our democracies by revitalising the expression of the people's voices from the grassroots up.

It should be added that the doubling of Ukraine's military budget did not prevent the large-scale Russian invasion. The massive increase in European 'defence' budgets is sold to us as necessary to ensure peace; yet it entrenches the military-industrial complex, heightens tensions between two military blocs, deepens mistrust and fosters a militaristic culture that spreads far beyond military circles.

The orthodoxy of war is fuelled by a mindset rooted in geopolitical practices, political cultures and a military-industrial economy which, in turn, constitute the conditions for future wars, reinforcing the appeal of war as a present and future option. European reactions to the war in Ukraine thus illustrate how war becomes a recurring, entrenched practice that constitutes and perpetuates the conditions for its own reproduction. Moreover, war forges and reinforces the 'imagined communities' that are our national identities (to quote Benedict Anderson) on the basis of violent memories and mutual mistrust.

Non-violent methods of resistance, on the other hand, foster a higher degree of mutual respect and are more likely to stimulate a change of heart and eventual reconciliation. Non-violence does not threaten the physical integrity of its opponents. It does not dehumanise them. It promotes more democratic, less authoritarian values. If public spending must be increased to better protect ourselves, why not invest, amongst other things, in non-violent civil disobedience, if only alongside more traditional military investments (and the budgets allocated to diplomacy, humanitarian missions, the promotion of human rights, etc.)?

Why not use at least part of the resources allocated to defence to train all citizens in non-violent conflict resolution? That would open up a far more promising and far less terrifying future than the one our leaders are asking us to envisage.

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Escaping the fatality of violence in everyday life

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The current resurgence in the political sphere of violent power struggles, domination and territorial conquest, driven by the leaders of economic and military powers, tends to normalise violent behaviour and to maintain a sense of powerlessness and fatalism among populations.

Violence is a complex phenomenon with at least four dimensions – physical, verbal, symbolic and systemic violence – which interact and reinforce one another, making a stable and lasting state of peace more difficult to achieve. We may be tempted to think that peace is primarily a matter for institutions: governments, the judiciary, law enforcement, the military, international organisations, etc. Of course, the regulatory role of institutions is useful and necessary. Violence is very often the result of dysfunctions and injustices perpetuated by what is known as the system. However, the system itself is regulated by individuals who make personal choices regarding their fellow human beings. There is therefore a very strong link between the individual and systemic dimensions. This continuity of violence from the personal to the collective works both ways. Living conditions (systemic dimension) affect the cognitive mechanisms and relationship to violence of individuals (individual dimension), who in turn act upon their environment, with consequences for those who depend at least in part on their decisions (systemic dimension). No one can deny that history is full of examples of violent leaders who have left a legacy of suffering, and also of benevolent leaders who have contributed to the fulfilment of their fellow citizens. Very often, those who work for peace on a daily basis receive less media coverage than troublemakers due to the media's appetite for sensa-

tionalism, but their actions are very real. The link between violence in itself and violence towards others has long been recognised.

> *"Since wars begin in the minds of men and women, it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be constructed."*
>
> UNESCO Constitution – 1946

We can all take action for peace and the reduction of violence. Whilst non-violent activism, as championed by Gandhi in particular, aims to rebalance the balance of power by exerting political pressure to reduce systemic inequalities without resorting to violence, it is also possible to take action at the individual level and address one's personal relationship with violence. The first step is to become aware of our own habits and behaviours that trigger violence and to accept them. This is very difficult because, on the one hand, these attitudes are usually automatic and slip under the radar of our attention, and on the other hand, they contribute to our sense of belonging to a group within a cultural, historical and often traumatic framework where violence is normalised. Taking that first step to the side usually requires support or the occurrence of a specific event. Next, unlearning violence – that is, managing to inhibit our automatic responses and replace them with chosen behaviours – is also a challenge. Without going into detail, behind our behaviours, heuristic processes stemming from evolution, our experiences, our learning and circumstances are at work in cognitive circuits that do not engage our attention. Under these conditions, choosing non-violence when stimuli trigger automatic violent reactions requires learning and regular practice of alternative behaviours.

This is precisely the aim of Non Violent Communication (NVC).

NVC is a discipline developed in the 1970s by Marshall Rosenberg, an American doctor of psychology, which has since spread worldwide and is promoted by the Center for Nonviolent Communication (www.cnvc.org). Here is its objective in the words of its creator:

> *The aim of Nonviolent Communication is to **foster empathic understanding between people,** so that everyone's needs are met solely through actions **inspired by a desire to serve life,** rather than through actions motivated by the hope of a reward, the fear of punishment, guilt, shame, obligation, or the idea that one must buy esteem or love.* Marshall Rosenberg

The genius (in my humble opinion) of Marshall Rosenberg lies in having developed a simple yet powerful process whose application allows one to see initial effects take hold quickly. Deepening this over time and through regular practice enables profound changes to take place. Here is the process:

- The first step is to detach ourselves from our judgements, stereotypes, beliefs, evaluations and interpretations of a situation that has triggered us, in order to make an **Observation** that is as neutral as possible, as if an outside commentator were describing what they observe.
- The second step is to welcome our physical and emotional sensations – our **Feelings** – without censorship or judgement. The difficulty at this stage lies in daring to be vulnerable in a world that values strength, control and the suppression of emotions.
- The third step aims to make the connection between emotions and deep-seated **Needs**, based on the principle that unpleasant emotions (fear, sadness, anger…) tell us about unmet needs, and that pleasant emotions (joy, contentment, serenity…) tell us about met needs. Here again, we have never learnt to express our needs, but rather to neglect them, expecting others to fulfil them intuitively.
- The fourth step is that of the **Request** (or strategy), which we can direct at ourselves or at another person to clarify that something can be done to help satisfy our needs without it being a demand. This is the OFNR process.

Neuroscience has since confirmed Marshall Rosenberg's insights by establishing that the areas of the brain responsible for managing emotions (the so-called limbic system) form the actual link between metabolic needs and the triggering of behaviours. It is also important to remember that the function of our brain is to satisfy our basic needs, which reinforces the relevance of the NVC process, which focuses on identifying needs. Beyond this process lies an art of living and interacting with others, the aim of which is to unleash our natural inclination towards kindness and cooperation. For millennia, our social structures have conditioned us to speak a language based on moral judgements (right/wrong, normal/abnormal), comparisons and the denial of individual responsibility (through expressions such as 'I have no choice' or 'I must'). This way of thinking leads to dehumanising others, creating images of the enemy and justifying punishment through the concept of retributive justice. For NVC, all violence is the tragic expression of unmet needs: a person becomes violent when they have not learnt other ways to express their suffering or to ensure their fundamental values are respected.

At the heart of this tool lies empathy, the ability to be fully present to what the other person is experiencing behind what they say or do. This is where the power of NVC lies, for empathy is the only way to bring sufficient comfort to a person overwhelmed by an

emotion so that potentially violent automatic defence mechanisms cease. By listening to the needs behind the insults, anger or silence, we stop seeing 'people who need correcting' and start seeing human beings in distress. This requires a great deal of practice and work on our sense of inner security so that we do not react impulsively.

NonViolent Communication proposes to combat violence by replacing 'power over' others (domination based on fear and punishment) with 'power with' others (based on collaboration and interdependence). It calls for radical social transformation: acting with the intention of serving life and helping to ensure that what matters to each person is taken into account, without resorting to domination or guilt-tripping. This practice is not primarily intended for personal development; it is not limited to creating a bubble of empathy around oneself in order to live happily. The aim of NVC is to transform social, economic and political structures with the goal of reducing the level of violence in the world. By developing people's capacity for empathy, it helps to reduce domineering behaviour based on fear and punishment, and thus diminishes its impact on the design of social, economic or political regulatory systems. Learning it, at any age, is key to working for peace in daily life, which makes teaching it from childhood essential.

Without denying the value of institutional regulation at the collective level and actions to rebalance power dynamics, peace begins with inner work, through the pacification of our inner dialogue and the transformation of how we act and relate to others in our daily lives. This is the first step in non-violent action, a way of living in accordance with the principle 'be the change you wish to see in the world' so that we may choose peace, every day.

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Non-violent civil defence: an alternative concept of security and democracy

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In a context marked, in France as in Europe, by the proliferation of armed conflicts, war on the continent's eastern borders, the rise of authoritarianism and the accelerated remilitarisation of public policy, the accumulation of military resources guarantees neither the real security of populations nor the democratic stability of societies. Reducing security to the capacity to strike, destroy or control is to confuse protection with domination, and to treat the symptoms of conflicts rather than their causes. It is precisely to this strategic impasse that non-violent civil defence (NVCD) offers an alternative political response.

Non-violent civil defence refers to a collective strategy of resistance based on the social power of civil societies, organised, prepared and, where possible, politically embraced. Its aim is to render an enterprise of domination – whether military or political – ineffective. It applies equally to situations of foreign occupation, institutional coups, or internal authoritarian abuses.

In contemporary European democracies, this distinction is important. Threats to security do not take the form solely of conventional military aggression. They are also expressed through gradual erosion of the rule of law, the co-opting of institutions, the sustained restriction of civil liberties, the manipulation of information, or the imposition of authoritarian pressure on societies in the name of security emergencies. In these contexts, an armed response is not only ineffective but often counterproductive. It tends to reinforce the logic of fear, control and polarisation that undermine democratic societies.

The core of non-violent civil defence lies in a shift in the balance of power. Whereas dominant security doctrines rely on material superiority and armed coercion, NVCD

acts upon the social, economic and political conditions that render power effective. Governing, occupying, administering or exploiting a territory always requires a minimum level of cooperation from workers, public services, local authorities, essential infrastructure and communication networks. By organising the refusal to cooperate, collective disobedience and the targeted paralysis of these civil mechanisms, NVDC strikes at the decisive foundations of all illegitimate power.

Research on civil resistance has shown that, to be effective, these strategies require foresight, training, coordination, and a sustainable institutional and social foundation. But their strength lies in the fact that they enable people to remain active agents in their own defence, rather than being reduced to the status of victims to be protected or mere variables in strategic power calculations beyond their control.

As such, non-violent civil defence represents a major democratic shift for France and for Europe. It challenges the military institutions' near-exclusive monopoly on the definition and conduct of defence, without denying their role in the face of certain threats, at least in the short and medium term, during a phase in which several types of defence may coexist. It also challenges a paternalistic view of security in which citizens are merely populations to be protected. By recognising civilians' capacity for strategic action, non-violent civil defence gives concrete substance to concepts that are often invoked but rarely embodied, such as the spirit of defence, democratic resilience or civic responsibility.

No unarmed civil defence can function without an organised civil society. Associations, trade unions, professional networks, universities, independent media, local authorities, religious communities, neighbourhood groups and solidarity organisations form the social infrastructure that enables resistance to emerge, to endure, to realise its full potential and to achieve its objectives. A public policy on non-violent civil defence must support the vitality of these networks, not by exploiting them, but by recognising them as full partners: training facilities, cooperation agreements in the event of a crisis, funding for measures to ensure the continuity of essential services, coordination platforms, etc. In a country such as France, where the state retains a strong institutional centrality, this implies a shift in political culture: recognising that security cannot be decreed solely

from the top down, but is also built upon the autonomy and capacity for initiative of civil society.

One of the NVCD's major contributions is to demonstrate that democracy, in a substantial and advanced form, is in itself a strategic infrastructure. Freedom of the press, the independence of the judiciary, pluralism in civil society and trade unions, the autonomy of local authorities, critical education and access to information form the core of a society's capacity to resist domination, occupation, authoritarian drift or institutional collapse. Non-violent civil defence thus reveals democracy as one of the fundamental conditions of security.

To consider non-violent civil defence today is to reject the notion that militarisation, war and repression constitute the inescapable horizon of security. It is to assert that defending oneself can also mean preserving, organising and strengthening civil society's capacities for collective resistance, without which no democracy can claim to be secure in the long term.

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Non-violent civil defence summarised in 10 points

FRANÇOIS MARCHAND

François Marchand is a civil engineer from the École des Mines, retired since 2016 after an international career spanning 26 countries and 5 continents in the public transport sector. A conscientious objector in the 1970s, he has also been actively involved in voluntary work for the promotion of non-violence for over 55 years. He was instrumental in the creation of Non-violence XXI in 2001, of which he is co-president; he is committed to advocating for civil peace intervention, including nine years on the Board of Nonviolent Peaceforce (2016–2025), and, since the war in Ukraine, has been actively campaigning for non-violent civil defence (NVCD).

The war in Ukraine has marked the end of the sense of peace in Europe and the rise of the risk of war for all Europeans. It has triggered a shift in defence policies towards a massive rearmament drive in Europe and in each of our countries. This shift is met with an approving silence, or even support, from many citizens across the continent. The arms race has resumed with a vengeance in the face of our new declared enemy: Putin's Russia and its satellite states. But in such a context, could we not imagine other approaches, not solely centred on military strategies?

At the same time, the war in Ukraine has also revived non-violent civil defence approaches that were extensively studied and debated between the 1970s and 1990s. These approaches now challenge the predominantly military options that have been almost exclusively pursued. Since 2015, we have seen numerous initiatives taking a different path, as in the Baltic states. Our governments and armed forces are, moreover, aware of the limits of their military capabilities in dealing with current threats. They know they lack strategies that would mobilise the population in the defence of democracy in the face of hybrid warfare.

This short article attempts to summarise in 10 key points what a non-violent civil defence might look like – which I would also like to call 'citizen defence' as it relies on the power wielded by citizens, though it will undoubtedly not be exclusively non-violent.

1. The leverage of civilians: A war has rarely been won by military force alone; civilians who defend themselves with civilian means – most often unarmed – exert a different kind of leverage that counts towards the final victory. No one disputes the importance of civilians in the current defence of Ukraine; the Baltic states, which feel the threat from their Russian neighbour acutely, have begun to incorporate this civilian leverage.

2. Refusal to collaborate: The strength of civilians lies in multiple methods of defence, such as non-cooperation, boycotts, demonstrations, etc. (see Gene Sharp's list of 198 non-violent methods[1]), but their strength is always exercised through a refusal to collaborate with the occupying and/or anti-democratic power. The strength of civil resistance is now well-studied and recognised. Caution! There is no question of envisaging total non-cooperation, as citizens must continue to live and protect themselves from the enemy's repression.

3. Defence is therefore also a matter for citizens. Every citizen committed to democracy can and must play an active role in their own defence and in establishing the necessary balance of power; however, this comes up against a dual 'groupthink' regarding defence:

- Defence is the business of the military and their weapons.
- But there is also another form of groupthink: that which reduces civil defence to civil protection and the protection of citizens without ever making them active participants in the balance of power.

Breaking free from these two forms of groupthink is particularly difficult and will be a long-term endeavour.

4. Civil deterrence: The prior organisation, preparation and the anticipation of civil defence strategies act as a deterrent against a potential occupier or an undemocratic power. This point is fundamental: "*making a society unassailable and unyielding in the face of any attempt at destabilisation, by combining collective actions of non-cooperation to deter the aggressor*"[2].

(1) Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (3 Vols.), Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973

(2) See 'La dissuasion civile' (Civil Deterrence), written in 1985 by Christian Mellon, Jean-Marie Muller and Jacques Sémelin on commission from Charles Hernu, Minister of Defence, and published by the Foundation for National Defence Studies (FEDN) – the book is out of print, but available at: https://www.irnc.org/IRNC/Textes/3103

5. And what if civil deterrence were not enough? Like any strategy, whether military or civil, deterrence can fail: military and/or civil resistance is then necessary; preparation and foresight make such resistance easier to deploy and more effective. This is particularly true if strategic choices have been carefully considered in advance and grassroots organisations put in place.

6. Military defence + non-violent citizen defence (or Non-Violent Civil Defence – NVCD) operate complementary power dynamics; military defence does not have an answer to every form of aggression, nor does citizen defence. An example: there is no non-violent strategy against bombings, missiles and drones; only anti-aircraft 'defence' can protect civilians. Moreover, the boundary between armed and unarmed defence is becoming increasingly blurred: new cyber threats or those drones are breaking down these boundaries, as it is often unarmed civilians who intervene. It should also be noted that non-violent sabotage exists, but I will not expand on this point in this short text.

7. An Agency for Civil Defence (ACD)? The strength of this civil defence also lies in its preparation and foresight: preparing, anticipating, raising awareness, training, and practising resistance; this is a key element, but it remains difficult to promote, particularly in peacetime, as long as the threat is not felt to be significant. This is the case in France. A Citizens' Defence Agency (ADC) modelled on ADEME (the French Agency for Energy Management and Development) could serve as a tool for preparing civilians and civil organisations; it could be tasked with designing and implementing civil defence strategies, as well as the necessary training and awareness-raising programmes. … with a budget to match!

8. The perceived level of threats and their nature are key factors in establishing the structures of a NVCD; without perceived threats, only dedicated professional and often state-run organisations – such as the Agency for Citizen Defence (ADC), government departments, the national education system, the armed forces, etc. – can act 'in peacetime'. Once a perceived threat arises, the mobilisation of civil organisations can take place: thus, it is difficult to envisage a 'spontaneous' mobilisation of French civil organisations in the face of the threat of an occupation of France (by Russia?). On the other hand, it is reasonable to mobilise certain civil organisations (trades unions, local authorities, the voluntary sector, etc.) right now in the face of the threat of a takeover by the authoritarian and undemocratic far right; the same applies to cyber threats, which are already very real and require a collective response and mobilisation.

9. The spirit of defence: This concept, so dear to the military and classical strategists, is precisely a rather utopian notion in France in peacetime. The strategy of nuclear deterrence is particularly demobilising when it comes to fostering a spirit of defence! Citizen defence, or NVCD, offers an approach that gives substance to this concept and can provide a vision in which citizens play a genuine role in the defence balance of power.

10. Democratic Europe seems to conceive of its defence solely in terms of military strength: this is its Achilles' heel!

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Civil-military relations and the active role of civilians: a changing landscape and new rules

AMBER FRENCH

As an expert in civil resistance in times of war, Amber is dedicated to filling a significant gap: preparation for non-violent civil defence, which is essential for strengthening the autonomy and sustainability of European defence. More broadly, her work contributes to a better understanding of strategic nonviolent conflict, an Anglo-Saxon interdisciplinary field of study dating back to the 1960s. After 11 years at the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, in 2025 she co-founded the Organisation for Nonviolent Movements (ONM), an international NGO based in Paris, of which she is the director. She founded and edits the ONM's journal, Across Fault Lines: A Civic Journal, and was editor-in-chief of its first issue, 'Ukrainian Freedom: Collective Agency in National Defence', published in March 2026.

Armed conflicts have repercussions far beyond the battlefield. Civilian populations are deeply involved in war, often as victims, but also as actors. Contrary to the common perception of civilians as passive recipients of international protection, many communities organise collectively to resist occupation and defend their societies without resorting to armed violence. This phenomenon, often referred to as non-violent civil defence (NVCD), offers important insights into the evolution of civil-military relations in Europe, particularly in the context of the war in Ukraine.

Other contributions to this working paper describe this phenomenon, sometimes using different terms, as there is as yet no uniform international definition. This article aims to contextualise non-violent civil defence in Ukraine, to examine how the changing conflict landscape is altering the rules of the game, and to propose some avenues to enable the actors concerned to adapt to these transformations.

Non-violent civil defence: a complementary approach to the protection of civilians

The war in Ukraine highlights an often-overlooked dimension of contemporary conflicts: civilians are not merely targets of violence, but also actors capable of influencing the course of events. Forms of collective action – demonstrations, non-cooperation, information networks or local mutual aid – can complicate an aggressor's consolidation of control. They undermine the legitimacy of the imposed authority and disrupt its ability to govern effectively.

The Ukrainian example shows that civilian capacity for action remains a significant factor in asymmetric conflicts, as was already observed in several instances of unarmed resistance in Europe during the Second World War. Research conducted in various contexts, notably in Latin America, also indicates that civilian communities can develop collective strategies to reduce violence or limit its effects.

Despite its empirical significance, citizen agency remains relatively marginal in international approaches to the protection of civilians. Traditional frameworks focus primarily on humanitarian aid, international humanitarian law, peacekeeping operations and military protection mechanisms. These instruments remain essential, but they generally view civilians as recipients of protection rather than as actors in their own right.

Non-violent civil defence offers a complementary perspective by emphasising defence strategies developed by communities themselves. Rather than relying solely on external actors – international organisations, peacekeeping forces or foreign armies – societies often develop their own mechanisms to disrupt violence or reduce its impact. Research on civil resistance and peacebuilding suggests that incorporating these dynamics into protection strategies could strengthen the resilience and sustainability of societies in conflict.

However, non-violent civil defence is not without risks. In times of war, any form of action can lead to reprisals, and its effectiveness depends heavily on numerous factors (and not just external ones). This reality creates a paradox for some humanitarian organisations: non-violent civil defence often lies in a grey area from a legal and operational perspective. Some actors fear that civilians participating in such actions may lose some of their international legal protection. This is a cruel reality…

Ignoring this phenomenon, however, deprives decision-makers and humanitarian organisations of a full understanding of how societies instinctively and systematically react to aggression. A more in-depth analysis of non-violent civil defence could thus help bridge the gap between formal protection frameworks and the reality of civilian behaviour in times of war. A first step: involving non-violent civil defence experts in consultations between the ICRC (Comité International de la Croix-Rouge) and the governments of countries preparing for 'total war', for example.

Rethinking the theory of victory

The war in Ukraine also raises fundamental questions about how to define victory and defeat in contemporary conflicts. Traditionally, military success was measured by indicators such as conquered territory, death tolls or material destruction. In modern con-

flicts, characterised by hybrid warfare and significant informational and societal dimensions, these indicators appear increasingly inadequate.

Russian military doctrine accepts very high human casualties in order to achieve political objectives. If Europeans believe that these casualties will be sufficient to bring a military campaign to an end, they risk misinterpreting the strategic situation. In this context, the psychological and societal dimensions of the conflict become as important as the dynamics of the battlefield.

A society's ability to maintain its resilience–including politically, socially and culturally–can decisively influence the outcome of a war. The moral strength of civilians, national unity, social cohesion and the collective will to resist occupation thus become strategic variables. Comprehensive defence approaches are based precisely on this idea: the psychological and social resources of a population can constitute a central element of national defence.

This raises the question of whether European countries should more explicitly integrate preparation for non-violent civil defence into their conception of strategic victory. This implies recognising that national defence is not solely the responsibility of the armed forces, but also encompasses social resilience, information networks and citizen participation. The majority of European governments are engaged in comprehensive defence but remain blind to non-violent civil defence preparedness, the key ingredient.

Implications for civil-military relations in Europe

The integration of non-violent civil defence into European security thinking could transform civil-military relations. Crisis preparedness is now part of defence planning in several states. non-violent civil defence could complement these mechanisms by offering practical frameworks for organised resistance in the event of occupation (in the east) or hybrid attacks.

Training civilians in coordinated forms of civil resistance across Europe would be bad news for Putin. Even if these mechanisms are never activated, their existence can strengthen deterrence by signalling that an entire society is ready to resist. Machiavelli himself argued that strong republics are the most difficult to subjugate.

However, integrating non-violent civil defence into defence planning also raises ethical, practical and political questions. Encouraging civilian participation in forms of resistance may expose them to reprisals from the Russian aggressor, who is highly skilled in hybrid warfare. It is therefore essential to develop this capability on a widespread basis, supported by clear legal and normative frameworks, both at national and international levels, in order to regulate these strategies and protect populations. Finally, whilst the idea of frightens political decision-makers, it is an indicator that they have a far bigger problem to deal with as a matter of urgency: poor social cohesion and a lack of social trust, which are absolutely crucial for coping with any crisis.

Adapting to a changing context

The Ukrainian experience offers several lessons for both military institutions and civil society organisations.

For defence institutions, the main challenge is conceptual. Military planning must go beyond preparing for conventional war scenarios and take into account the dynamics of non-violent civil resistance that influence contemporary conflicts. Recognising the different forms of resistance, including non-violent ones, and inviting experts in non-violent civil resistance or local leaders can enrich strategic thinking.

For civil society organisations, the challenge lies more in education and contextualisation. Non-violent civil disobedience strategies are generally more effective when grounded in the historical and cultural narratives specific to each society – free from ideology, religion or political orientation, which divide people rather than uniting them.

Cooperation between European societies and Ukraine at grassroots level could also foster mutual learning on citizen participation in defence and forms of civil resistance.

Conclusion

Even if these dynamics were never to be fully integrated into European policies, history shows that civilians will continue to resist in the face of occupation or repression, often through non-violent means. The desire for freedom remains a powerful driving force in many societies. This will happen, whether we like it or not. It would therefore be better to embrace it and prepare for it.

The European security landscape is currently undergoing a profound transformation. The war in Ukraine serves as a reminder of the persistence of armed conflict, but it also highlights the importance of citizens' power to act and resist within the context of national defence. non-violent civil defence thus offers a useful framework for understanding how ordinary citizens can contribute to collective security through forms of unarmed action.

While not a panacea, it can at least complement existing defence strategies (let us be more pragmatic). By further integrating citizens' power to act and resist into protection frameworks, European decision-makers could strengthen societies' capacity to withstand aggression and preserve democratic values.

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Civilian peace intervention: an alternative concept to security

CÉCILE DUBERNET

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Although relatively unnoticed, civil peace interventions (ICP in French or Unarmed Civilian Protection – UCP in English) have developed in contexts as varied as Kenya, the Philippines, South Sudan, Israel/Palestine, Honduras, Guatemala, Kosovo and France. These projects, based on civilian and unarmed action, aim to mitigate high security risks in areas of tension. They combine local empowerment with the physical presence of third parties. Some teams specialise in observing and monitoring political processes (demonstrations, elections, trials, etc.), whilst others support human rights defenders; some groups act as local mediators, and most carry out patrols, monitor rumours and provide early warning. Overall, these initiatives seek to develop new methods to to implement a 'proactive' and protective presence.

Unarmed civil protection broadens our understanding of security actors. It also challenges the assumptions that violence constitutes an effective method of conflict resolution and protection. It does so in a practical way, by offering non-aggressive yet effective alternatives for protection, particularly in situations of inter-community tension.

In modern political science, states are regarded as THE providers of security. This conception is rooted in the emergence of the European state system following the Wars of Religion. From Bodin and Hobbes to Weber and Morgenthau, via Machiavelli, Locke and Rousseau, numerous renowned political theorists have shaped, explained and structured our understanding of the state as the dominant mode of governance. At the heart of this historical and intellectual construct lies the assumption that sovereigns ensure the security of citizens through a top-down approach. Despite the many in-

(1) https://hal.science

stances of governments being a source of insecurity for their own citizens, states staunchly defend their exclusive prerogative over security, which constitutes the very core of their legitimacy.

Nevertheless, this focus tends to prevent consideration of alternative forms of protection of life developed by non-state actors. Civil peace actors nevertheless address key security threats, such as the protection of life, freedom of movement, and the curbing of violence perpetrated by armed groups. Indeed, accompanying civilians through checkpoints to local hospitals, as well as prison visits; observing community votes aimed at protecting precious resources (water and forests) from mining companies; or night patrols in refugee camps all demonstrate a concrete, local, pragmatic approach by communities. Such missions can literally save lives.

For sovereign states, however, self-protection is a disturbing phenomenon. Governments fear, often with good reason, that the trust and obedience of self-organised civilians will evaporate. What is paramount for them is maintaining a monopoly on the use of force. Indeed, state structures, particularly the most centralised ones, display their military might so that citizens feel both reassured and intimidated, vulnerable in the face of the armed forces and police. Disarmament has been a major priority for the UN in post-conflict situations. To counter the idea that citizens should have a say in security matters, political leaders highlight the nightmare of so-called failed states, the horrors of gang wars and paramilitary conflicts, the risks of American-style shootings, or the unease of gated communities, as seen today in Haiti, for example. Security, they say, cannot be left in the hands of citizens. Too dangerous.

This stance is, however, problematic. Firstly, in many cases, it is the governments themselves that are corrupt or support paramilitary forces, thereby delegating control of territories to private structures, in contradiction to their own statements. Secondly, this argument rests on another assumption deeply rooted in political science, which can be called into question: the idea that security is primarily a matter of threats. The UCP, on the contrary, is based on an approach to security – including fundamental rights – that focuses above all on relationships and conceives of being secure in terms of building connections rather than threats.

In short, the UCP operates on the principle that security lies in co-constructed networks, which contrasts with traditional approaches to security that ultimately rely on separation (borders, walls, prisons, punishment) from what is deemed threatening. These different stances have implications in terms of methods and timeframes. In UCP, the challenge lies in holding firm without breaking ties, without intimidation or humiliation. In terms of language, for example, UCP relies on the creation of spaces for communication and mediation, on non-violent communication to limit verbal escalation, etc. Body language also matters: physical presence and movement are considered essential for increasing empathy and opening pathways towards pursuit of common goals. Great

attention is also paid to local information, alerts and rumours.

Time also plays a different role: in UCP, continuous immersion in the field is necessary to build multilateral trust. Conversely, military dominance is often exercised through spectacular, one-off coercive interventions designed to instil fear. Space is also understood differently: most unarmed civilian teams live amongst the population or in the immediate vicinity. They therefore share the space and the risks, whereas the military and diplomats live separately from the inhabitants. In reality, these conceptions of time, space and the art of building and maintaining trust are profoundly divergent.

Like any approach to conflict transformation, however, the tools of UCP have their own limitations: they require a minimum level of cooperation from host states as well as a high degree of professionalism (security, confidentiality, legal analysis). The existence of a normative and legal framework recognising humanitarian and human rights standards is a prerequisite for action. Thus, the UCP has no place in fully totalitarian regimes, nor in situations of large-scale genocide. It has little leverage in cases of total impunity and is not well suited to countering violent cultural practices such as forced marriages when these practices are widely accepted in society.

On the other hand, it is relevant for the protection of local human rights defenders at risk of disappearance or assassination, in contexts of land disputes, military or paramilitary occupations, checkpoints, ceasefire monitoring and peace processes, DDR (disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration), tense electoral contexts and democratic transitions or 'democratic backsliding' as seen in the United States, and in Minneapolis in particular. Overall, it has proved effective in engaging with armed actors seeking to maintain, claim or regain a certain degree of political legitimacy.

Beyond effectiveness lies the question of efficiency, also known as cost-effectiveness. UCP operations represent only a fraction of the cost of a military action and do not cause physical destruction. They do, however, entail risks, particularly for local activists who may feel encouraged, or even emboldened, by the international presence. Such programmes can also give rise to their own abuses: manipulation, dependency and corruption. The presence itself constitutes a sensitive resource and, as such, is susceptible to abuse. In short, UCP projects can fail. But militarised ventures fail too, at a considerable human, environmental and financial cost. The costs of success and failure are far higher in the case of military action. Comparisons remain, however, difficult to make. It is hard to obtain precise and reliable figures. Data on UCP remains patchy, even though databases are currently being developed.

Another difficulty lies in the change of scale, as there are few large-scale experiments allowing for comparisons with military interventions. Finally, as these approaches are most often perceived as complementary to militarised peace processes – and frequently integrated into them – it is difficult to evaluate them separately. None of this, however, should prevent us from reflecting on the matter. Overall, the budgets for military operations run into hundreds of billions each year for questionable results, whilst those for the UCP never exceed a few million for intriguing, and sometimes promising, experiments.

The UCP is not, however, limited to a complementary role to military operations. By drawing on local knowledge and skills, and by relying on an unarmed third-party presence, the UCP challenges the status quo. Its proposals challenge the assumptions of political science regarding security, protection and force. Yet, as an operational practice of other concepts such as 'human security', 'do no harm', 'restorative justice' or 'conflict transformation', the ICP could help to renew our understanding of international politics.

Although it is difficult to implement, deploy on a large scale and replicate, UCP embodies something authentic: its advocates take local initiatives seriously, mobilise non-violent tools to work towards a less violent future, and use the law to defend the rule of law. However modest they may be, such forms of coherence in conflict zones stand in contrast to our protection policies based on the military. These often seem hollow. Worse still, in some cases, such as the G5 Sahel or the peace process in Libya, or the diplomatic negotiations conducted in bad faith regarding Ukraine or Iran, security architectures are little more than scaffolding built on empty promises. They lack any connection to people's day-to-day security. They lack roots and social depth. Recognising this and taking the ICP more seriously could help us rethink the very fabric of security and move from hollow security architectures to dense textures of protection.

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Unarmed civilians protecting civilians: civilian peace intervention

ANNA PENFRAT

Anna Penfrat has been Nonviolent Peaceforce's representative to the European Union since 2021. Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) is an international non-governmental organisation that works to protect civilians in armed conflicts through non-violent strategies.

In the collective imagination, the physical protection of civilian populations in conflict zones is often seen as the preserve of state and/or armed actors. Yet, without having to go back as far as the Righteous Among the Nations of the World War II, it is possible to find a plethora of non-violent initiatives that succeed in protecting civilians in conflicts of varying intensity:

- In January 2025, ten young South Sudanese[1] successfully intervened to protect, without weapons or threats, Sudanese refugees whom they did not know but who were the target of a wave of large-scale violence that had claimed several victims. These young people had been trained in de-escalation techniques and were heavily involved in various community initiatives.

- In the Philippines, on the island of Mindanao, groups of unarmed civilians, including an international NGO, have played a key role for many years in monitoring the implementation of ceasefire agreements, supporting disarmament processes, preventing the resumption of hostilities between armed groups, and physically protecting[2] the population where necessary.

- In South Sudan, too, women travelling to the market in Bentiu have seen a reduction in violence against them thanks to unarmed patrols comprising local and foreign civilians trained in the prevention of, and support for, survivors of sexual and gender-based violence[3].

(1) https://nonviolentpeaceforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/A-Case-study-of-Violence-Prevention-Through-Proactive-Engagement-with-Youth-Gangs-.pdf
(2) https://nonviolentpeaceforce.org/civilians-caught-in-crossfire-your-impact-in-the-philippines/
(3) https://nonviolentpeaceforce.org/working-to-protect-day-and-night/

- When fighting cannot or can no longer be prevented, protecting civilians and reducing their exposure to violence may involve setting up local early warning systems to enable evacuations or other protective measures. Such warning systems exist, for example, in Burma/Myanmar[4] to bring communities at risk to safety.

- In Ukraine, many recreational associations have transformed into humanitarian actors and are notably supporting the evacuation of civilians near the front line. Their convoys are regularly targeted, and it is crucial to support them by helping them protect themselves appropriately, for example by providing them with drone frequency analysers, which have already helped prevent tragedies such as the one in Kupiansk in August 2025[5].

- In early 2026 in Minneapolis, USA, non-violent citizen mobilisation against the immigration police (ICE) ultimately led to their withdrawal[6].

These few examples, taken from a much longer list, are drawn from the experience of Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP)[7], an international NGO working to protect civilians in armed conflicts through non-violent strategies.

Since its foundation in 2002, NP has been implementing an approach known as Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP) (Intervention Civile de Paix en français (ICP)[8], sometimes also translated as "Civilian Peace Protection"[9]). CPI was developed to counter direct physical violence and defuse situations in which civilians face imminent threats of violence. It also helps to strengthen local peace-building structures. This approach is recognised and used by numerous groups[10], both formal and informal, around the world.

The methods used (which can be found in the examples mentioned above) include, in particular, protective accompaniment, interposition, dialogue with armed groups, local or international advocacy, etc. In many cases, the use of these methods has significantly

(4) https://creating-safer-space.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/CSS-Working-Paper-3.2-Myanmar-Digital.pdf
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reduced violence against civilians. This creates essential moments of respite for local communities, who can then better organise themselves and promote sustainable, non-violent solutions to the root causes of the conflict – through dialogue and structural reforms as needed.

Several factors explain how the UCP approach works and why it enables the protection of civilian populations without the threat or use of force:

- First and foremost: it is an approach based on interpersonal relationships. Forging links with a wide range of actors lies at the heart of UCP. It is these links that make it possible to defuse violent situations, by putting people back at the centre of interactions. For example, by engaging with different levels of a belligerent group's chain of command to reduce violations. Or by building relationships of trust with youth groups or traders, who can participate in peace and protection initiatives. Not to mention family or friendship networks, which can also be called upon to persuade influential actors. This requires the mobilisation of skills–sometimes technical ones such as de-escalation or negotiation–but also personal qualities such as empathy and humility.

- The UCP approach, when implemented by an international NGO, always serves to reinforce pre-existing initiatives, particularly those of local communities. The aim is to strengthen or expand existing self-protection mechanisms, rather than creating new structures.

- Any protective intervention or support is carried out following a careful risk assessment. This assessment is based on a detailed security analysis of the context and the relationships forged with stakeholders. The physical and psychosocial safety of the civilians being supported, as well as of those practising UCP, is indeed paramount.

- Finally, by embodying non-violence – for example, by refusing armed escorts – UCP practitioners demonstrate that alternatives are possible. This often challenges their interlocutors, helping to initiate discussion and even, in turn, inspire non-violent behaviour.

Several researchers are studying UCP to better understand its benefits, its variations, its limitations, and how it works (see here[11], here[12] and here[13]).

In the current geopolitical context, where much political discourse, in France and elsewhere, emphasises the need to protect the population against growing threats, it is crucial to consider all existing forms of civilian protection. As well as the way in which they contribute, or fail to contribute, to the perpetuation of violence, including structural violence. UCP demonstrates that ordinary citizens can break these cycles by ensuring that the means employed are commensurate with the desired end. It is therefore high time that France paid greater attention to UCP and other peacebuilding approaches, both in foreign affairs and domestic policy.

(11) https://creating-safer-space.com/ucp-research-database/
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In service to the earth

BEN CRAMER

Ben Cramer initially trained in conflict studies, then in the sociology of defence at EHESS and the Department of Peace Studies at Bradford. A journalist and columnist, he worked for Courrier International, Science & Vie, Charlie Hebdo and Reporterre, before leading Greenpeace's disarmament campaign for three years. He subsequently produced and presented several programmes, notably on RFI, and co-hosted the first debate in the European Parliament on the theme of 'Collective Security and the Environment' in 2008. An associate researcher at GRIP in Brussels and an associate member of the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam, he works on the ecological footprint of military activities and the concept of ecological security. He currently teaches at the Institut Catholique de Paris (FASSE) and at ESPOL in Lille, and is the author of '*War, Peace and Ecology*' (Yves Michel, 2014).

In his address to young people on 16 April 2022 in Marseille, the President of the France announced the establishment of an ecological civic service (SCE) enabling "*young people to participate in the nation's great project*". In 2023, only 7% of the civic service placements offered to young people fell within the scope of the ecological transition. The resolution on young people and climate action was adopted by the foreign ministers of the 46 member states of the Council of Europe on 23 October 2024. This text recommends that member states prepare young people to become "*agents of the ecological transition*", combat disinformation on these issues, invest in 'green' jobs and address the intergenerational inequalities linked to climate change.

Looking beyond borders

We should learn from the 26 countries around the world that, over the years, have set up special units tasked with protecting the environment within their territories, have assigned young recruits to plant two trees during their military service (Bulgaria), have formed units modelled on the army's 'eco-territorial' battalions (India), or provided training as 'environmental management and protection advisers' (for engineering officers in Belgium).

Because 'a falling tree makes more noise than a growing forest', we must turn our attention to initiatives promoting peace, particularly those involving young people...

Civil Protection

Civil protection remains the poor relation of the defence sector. At the national (French) level, there is no equivalent to the Russian Ministry of Civil Defence, Emergency Situations and Disaster Relief, known by the English acronym Enercom[1]. Although nothing can be transposed as it stands, let us remember that in 1981, François Mitterrand entrusted the volcanologist Haroun Tazieff with the role of Secretary of State responsible for 'the prevention of major natural and technological risks'.

Civilians, if only you knew!

The protection of people can no longer be ensured solely by the armed forces, if only because the civil/military divide has lost its relevance (for better or for worse). Civilising defence is an option, not because civilians are better 'equipped' for certain tasks or missions, but because civilians (in France) have been stripped of their means of defence in the name of deterrence. The 'strike force' has diverted citizens from a certain spirit of resistance, has impoverished or even buried efforts towards any form of civil protection, and has fragmented the working class.

Attempts have been made to bring civil and military programmes together: for example, with the project (a study sponsored by the UN) to create a corps of 'green helmets' capable of intervening in the event of ecological disasters, whether or not caused by conflicts. This was proposed as early as 1991 by the Swedish MEP Maj-Britt Theorin, former president of the International Peace Bureau[2], and debated in the European Parliament.

The 'Soldiers of the Earth'

Insofar as teaching everyone that defending one's country means ensuring its food sovereignty, it is important to teach every citizen to grow cabbages, just as one would plant trees. Ensuring a form of food security (one of the seven components of human security) also means training farmers, as practised in Bangui by the Association of Central African Farmers, who refer to them as 'soldiers of the Earth'. Providing culinary education to children in schools would also be a way forward. According to a recent survey (February 2026), 9% of French people say they learnt to eat well thanks to school, 80% believe that schools should play a key role, and 87% support the idea of compulsory culinary education. Promote education in agriculture that is non-toxic to the Earth, including training in permaculture and food preservation techniques (solar drying, food dehydration).

Beyond food

Moving beyond the traditional military-civilian divide means ensuring citizens receive a 'refresher course' in first aid, recruiting mediators in sensitive areas to better ensure

(1) https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minist%C3%A8re_des_Situations_d%27urgence_(Russie)
(2) https://athena21.org/polemologie-irenologie/bonjour-leurope/casques-verts-l-avenir-de-la-securite-humaine

'community safety', and to call upon non-military actors to address the insecurity of civilian nuclear facilities.

In summary

An Ecological Civic Service (ECS) should take the form of an annual civic placement. This form of ECS would aim to foster among young people a better understanding of current challenges (climate, social, demographic, food security, geopolitical, etc.) and to teach resilience, in order to meet the threefold imperative of solidarity, public health and resistance to threats. Teaching everyone that defending one's country, one's territory, one's homeland, means ensuring food sovereignty.

Democratising security to better safeguard democracy.

Prioritising the links between climate, peace and security in French foreign policy

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On 8 January 2026[1], whilst outlining the priorities of French foreign policy, President Emmanuel Macron painted a picture in which Africa appears only in the background, far behind European security concerns and ambitionsIndo-Pacific ambitions. This downgrading is not insignificant. It reflects both the decline in French influence on the continent and a growing relative disinterest, masked by the desire for 'renewal', 'restructuring' and 'rebalancing' of the partnership, according to Emmanuel Macron. Behind the assertion of a strategic reorientation, of a shift from a military approach towards more socio-economic issues, the change remains tentative, insufficient to mask the essential fact: France continues to view Africa through the lens of the past.

For the most striking blind spot in the presidential address lies elsewhere. Not a word on the effects of climate change in Africa. Not a word on adaptation, on resilience, on societies bearing the brunt of a disruption to which they contribute so little. Yet it is precisely here that stability of the continent[2] is at stake today: in this climate-peace-security nexus where extreme events, food insecurity, forced displacement and tensions over resources fuel political fragility and stoke instability. African leaders have not been

(1) https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/301567-emmanuel-macron-08012026-politique-etrangere
(2) https://weatheringrisk.org/en/publication/africa-climate-security-risk-assessment

mistaken, whether through the adoption of continental[3] or national policies, particularly in the Sahel[4]. To ignore this reality is to condemn oneself to treating the symptoms without ever tackling the causes. It is to reduce foreign policy to a reactive stance, at best insufficient, at worst useless.

By neglecting this aspect, France has deprived itself of a major strategic lever. For years, it has clung to a traditional security-focused approach, in which peace is measured by the absence of conflict and the success of military operations–a view largely shaped by the Ministry of the Armed Forces. This approach has yielded diminishing returns, fuelled a perception of arrogance and, above all, failed to bring lasting stability to the regions concerned. The example of Niger[5] is emblematic. French strategies, centred on counter-terrorism, geopolitical influence and securing resources, have been perceived as colonial relics, interference in national sovereignty, or even attempts to marginalise local armed forces. Tactical successes, such as the elimination of terrorist leaders, have been short-lived, as the root causes of instability have remained intact. Much of the violence in the Sahel stems from environmental degradation, competition for access to water and land, and the collapse of livelihoods: all realities relating to climate security that have been sidelined.

This strategic short-sightedness comes at a cost. France is no longer indispensable or particularly welcome. Its diplomatic prestige has been undermined by the withdrawal of its forces from West Africa, from Senegal to Niger – which is threatening[6] to go to war – via Chad. A debacle that the French president nevertheless presents as a mere 'review' of the military presence. At the same time, the partners from Non-Western countries (China, Russia, Turkey) have stepped in, offering similar security packages but ones perceived as less burdened by history. The irony is cruel: those who offer no structural solutions are gaining ground, sometimes by reproducing neo-colonial logic, whilst France, which could offer an alternative, remains stuck in an outdated mindset.

Yet another path exists. It involves consolidating environmental peace and prioritising the interplay between climate, peace and security. A foreign policy centred on adap-

(3) https://www.aupaps.org/en/page/78-climate-security
(4) https://www.un.org/climatesecuritymechanism/fr/news/strategy-action-how-sahel-pioneering-national-climate-peace-and-security-plans#:~:text=La%20stratégie%20climat%2C%20paix%20et,genre%20et%20de%20cohésion%20sociale.
(5) https://www.planetarysecurityinitiative.org/news/missing-climate-factor-why-european-military-interventions-niger-have-failed
(6) https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1765006/politique/la-niger-va-entrer-en-guerre-avec-la-france-menace-le-general-amadou-ibro/

tation to climate change, designed with security dynamics in mind, would have the rare advantage of simultaneously addressing several African priorities: combating climate change, reducing poverty and preventing conflicts. At a time when the pursuit of co-benefits has become essential, linking adaptation and peace is not just a slogan: it is a vital necessity for millions of people, and an indispensable strategy for African governments as well as for the revitalisation of France's Africa policy. Yet today, there is no strategy dedicated to this nexus at the Quai d'Orsay: climate security remains monopolised by the defence sector. The climate-defence strategy[7], however necessary it may be, does not replace a peace and security approach based on the adaptation of communities and not solely on the armed forces.

France nevertheless has all the assets to embody this approach. It possesses solid technical expertise on climate issues, recognised diplomatic know-how – notably in New York, where it plays an active role in the Group of Friends on Climate Security, including in Africa[8] – and a capacity to build international coalitions. Several aspects of climate security, such as food security and forced displacement, are already among the priorities[9] of its environmental diplomacy. It could offer what others cannot: a genuine climate security strategy, devised with Africans, to support their resilience and sovereignty. A strategy that is not limited to funding projects, but which supports states in transforming their public policies, managing risks and preventing resource-related tensions. More than a military or economic partnership, it is a foreign policy serving the people that needs to be rebuilt. To put the pieces back together, the new African policy must address the structural challenges of climate change and insecurity, given their profound interconnections. To regain its standing and influence, France must deliver tangible results, directly improve people's lives and offer a means of maintaining a positive presence in international institutions, by positioning itself as a champion of African climate security. This is a credible path for the future, and above all, a non-paternalistic one.

But this transformation requires a profound shift: truly listening to local needs, abandoning prescriptive reflexes, and building partnerships on an equal footing – a 180-degree change that the Élysée Palace is already calling for, but which it is still struggling to embody. Climate security cannot be a green veneer for a unchanged policy. It must become a strategic framework, a way

(7) https://www.defense.gouv.fr/dgris/approches-thematiques/domaines-transverses/securite-climatique
(8) https://onu.delegfrance.org/climat-paix-et-securite-dans-la-region-des-grands-lacs
(9) https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/politique-etrangere-de-la-france/climat-et-environnement/

of rethinking France's presence, rebuilding trust, and re-establishing influence based on utility rather than on legacy. Adopting such a strategy does not, however, imply a complete abandonment of the military option. Rather, it is to be understood as complementary: whilst military operations address short-term consequences and are costly politically, financially and in human terms, climate security addresses the causes of vulnerabilities through medium- to long-term policies at a lower cost, whilst aligning with French and African aspirations to reduce the footprint on the ground.

Africa does not need France to return. It needs allies capable of understanding that security today is played out in drying soils, in collapsing harvests, in young people migrating for lack of a future, and in the tensions arising around a well. If France wishes to regain a credible position on the continent, it must start by facing this reality head-on. It must accept that climate security is not a mere afterthought: it is the very heart of African stability and perhaps the last chance for a French foreign policy that is still searching for its purpose.

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Revising our frameworks for analysing major international security issues:a case for the Women, Peace and Security agenda

CAMILLE BOUTRON

Camille Boutron is a sociologist and associate researcher at the Institute for Peace. Her research has long focused on women's participation in armed conflicts, particularly in Latin America, before turning to gender policies in international security. She is the author of 'Combattantes, when women go to war,' published by Les Pérégrines.

In October 2000, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325, better known as the 'Women, Peace and Security' (WPS) resolution. Far from appearing out of nowhere like the white rabbit from the magician's hat, this resolution marked a major turning point in the consideration of women and gender in conflict prevention and resolution, and more broadly in the field of international security policy. Whilst the 1990s had seen a significant rise in the prominence of gender on the international stage – notably with the conceptualisation and dissemination of the concept of 'gender mainstreaming' – the Security Council remained one of the last UN bastions to prove relatively impervious to these developments.

Resolution 1325 was initially structured around three pillars: the prevention of gender-based violence in crisis and conflict contexts; the protection and care of women and girls who are victims of such violence; and, finally, the participation of women and girls in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Since then, a fourth pillar has been added, specifically concerning the consideration of women's particular needs within the framework of recovery operations. Indeed, since Resolution 1325, nine further resolutions were adopted between 2008 and 2019, shaping the structure of a vast international programme better known as the 'Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda'.

Whilst Resolution 1325 continues to serve as a common foundation, the other resolutions have sought to clarify specific issues and guide actions accordingly. Resolution

1820 (2009), for example, officially recognises sexual violence as a weapon of war, whilst Resolution 2242 (2015) calls for greater consideration of gender in the prevention and fight against terrorism, to give just a few brief examples. The agenda thus currently represents a genuine international framework for gender in international security, with over a hundred countries to date – including France – having adopted a national action plan to implement Resolution 1325, and international defence and security organisations, such as NATO, having officially incorporated the agenda into their scope of action.

Yet what is distinctive about the WPS agenda is that it first gained traction within civil society before becoming a genuine focus of public policy. This may seem logical, given that the adoption of Resolution 1325 effectively culminated a decade of campaigning by various feminist organisations for greater consideration of women in peacekeeping. At the dawn of the 2000s, as the first scandals involving sexual violence perpetrated by peacekeepers came to light, Resolution 1325 also sought to offer an alternative to the use of troops for peacekeeping. Many feminists considered (and still consider) the use of armed forces to protect civilians and curb violence between parties to be contradictory. Resolution 1325 therefore aimed to propose an alternative approach, in which civil society would have a greater role to play. It is therefore not surprising to note that it was primarily civil society organisations, particularly those formed by women campaigning for peace in conflict zones, that were the first to incorporate the WPS agenda into their action plans.

A recent example is that of Colombia, often cited as a model case due to the establishment of a sub-commission specifically dedicated to women during the negotiations held between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrillas between 2012 and 2016, which culminated in the signing of the world's first peace agreement to officially incorporate gender equality as an integrated approach throughout the text. Whilst there is much to be said about its practical implementation, we can at least acknowledge that this is a pioneering agreement in this field. However, if gender equality became a major issue in the negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC, it is primarily thanks to feminist civil society organisations that were able to harness – in particular the WPS agenda – to assert their right and legitimacy to sit at the negotiating table.

More broadly, the WPS agenda has facilitated the formation of a community of experts, researchers, diplomats, activists and even military personnel who, whilst not all sharing the same view of the issues raised and the solutions required, have reached a consensus on a common foundation centred on combating sexual violence and greater participation by women in the decision-making processes shaping post-conflict transitions. In

the academic sphere, the WPS agenda has also facilitated the development of large-scale international collaborations and research programmes, whilst new generations of female students are demonstrating a clear interest in the subject. In a more political and strategic context, the 'WPS' has become a genuine instrument of 'soft power' for several countries engaged with the issue, such as the Nordic countries and Canada – but also, more recently and more 'timidly', France – whilst reaffirming democratic values against a backdrop of rising conservatism and authoritarianism. At the level of civil society, the WPS agenda is one of the few international programmes to resonate globally, from Sri Lanka to Norway via Argentina.

Yet the WPS agenda is now under threat. The resurgence of conservative values and authoritarian practices in the United States, a major player in international security, and more generally the unprecedented backlash against feminist organisations and ideas, are all factors undermining its sustainability. In a more subtle but no less worrying way, the return of 'real' war tends to push the agenda into the background as Western democracies turn their attention to 'more serious' matters. Yet if there is ever a time when the WPS agenda is more useful than ever, it is now: in Ukraine, Iran, Gaza and Afghanistan–all theatres where the West's failure to guarantee global security is on full display.

Of course, the WPS agenda is no panacea, far from it. Although it was originally championed and defended by numerous activist organisations, both feminist and pacifist, its dissemination within the various administrations responsible for its implementation has drained it of what little political substance it had left after becoming official UN policy. In many respects, the WPS agenda remains a vague, hard-to-pin-down concept, serving primarily as a label or badge of recognition, without truly challenging traditional approaches to security. Yet it has the potential to do so, provided we finally decide to stop treating gender and women as peripheral issues to be dealt with 'when we have time'. The WPS agenda deserves to be better known and understood, as it presents itself as a valuable tool for both diplomats and activists alike; few concepts in the field of international security are capable of bridging the gap between individuals with such diverse, even opposing, interests.

In France, the relatively recent adoption of 'feminist diplomacy' has somewhat muddied the waters. Yet whilst clear links can be drawn between the two, significant differences remain: whilst feminist diplomacy is primarily a 'doctrine' guiding France's foreign policy towards the pursuit of greater equality for both women and men, the WPS agenda is a comprehensive programme, developed from an international perspective and incorporating a range of viewpoints. In this sense, it is far more significant as it provides insights that enable us to break away from traditional approaches to 'security': both in terms of its very definition (what kind of security are we talking about?) and its practical implementation (who should be responsible for ensuring security? And how?). From this perspective, one might consider that the increase in the defence budget for the 're-armament' of Europe, for example, actually presents numerous risks, by putting women in a precarious position as they will be on the front line of the resulting cuts to social benefits. Whilst it is far from representing a solution to the world's problems, the WPS agenda nevertheless offers interesting tools, both for renewing approaches to what is meant by 'security' and for the concrete implementation of actions aimed at making security policies more inclusive. To achieve this, we must first gain a better understanding

of the agenda and create genuine spaces for discussion on the best way to approach it – which tools, which objectives, which values. Time, space, and above all, above all, resources.

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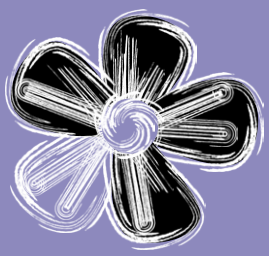
RETHINKING SECURITY

REINVENTING PEACE!



Conclusion

We are living through a turning point. Everywhere, discourse on defence, rearmament and security dominates the agenda. Peace, non-violence and conflict transformation, which should be the norm, remain in the background. And yet, as the preceding pages show: there are alternatives to violence and the use of armed force. Militarisation is neither an insurmountable fate nor a sufficient response to the insecurities and vulnerabilities of our time. It often treats the symptoms rather than the root causes of our problems. It does not address the structures that create inequalities, domination, divisions, violence and conflict.

To move towards peaceful coexistence, we must change our perspective. We must broaden the concept of security and, at last, equip ourselves with the means to achieve peace. This requires diplomacy, mediation, respect for human rights and international law, civil peace intervention, non-violent civil defence, education in non-violence, restorative justice, non-violent communication, civil disobedience, feminist, environmental and civic struggles, as well as all those forms of collective organisation that bring to life, on a daily basis, a different conception of protection, conflict and living together.

Repenser la Sécurité France seeks to break new ground. Through the creation of alliances and networks, the pooling of expertise, the circulation of ideas, the highlighting of innovations, training, citizen pressure and advocacy at all levels, we propose an alternative path. Our aim is to restore the influence of the civil, diplomatic, institutional and multilateral tools that can bring about real change.

It is often said that war requires courage. But courage is also, and perhaps first and foremost, on the side of peace. Choosing peace as a political horizon requires resources, imagination and commitment. We can reject the inevitability of violence. It is to this work of shifting perspectives, resistance and collective construction that this document – and more broadly ***Repenser la Sécurité France*** – invites us.

We propose an initial set of ideas to prepare for peace, but this paper is merely a starting point and calls for further development. The next step is to move beyond observations to propose concrete implementation measures, with a clear and credible roadmap.

We are convinced that the transformations outlined in the contributions would genuinely strengthen our collective security and generate significant savings, compared to the current trajectory of ever-increasing investment in weapons systems that do not guarantee sustainable security. Furthermore, this work does not yet address certain major issues, notably nuclear power and the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on warfare, society, education, peace and our common security, which will require further analysis.

France, Europe and, more broadly, the international community are currently at a turning point. Awareness already exists, but a more detailed 'roadmap' and a clear path forward are still lacking. The urgency is real, and it is becoming essential to undertake collective work to develop concrete responses commensurate with the challenges we face, so that together we can build the peaceful world we desire.

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