



Framework Nation

A European Challenge and French Ambition

Guillaume GARNIER

► Key Takeaways

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Being a framework nation means leading a coalition or a force module with significant capabilities. This status generates military leverage effects and therefore political influence. ■ To fulfill this responsibility, several criteria must be met: establishing the command structure, providing a significant portion of critical, scarce, and costly capabilities, and, finally, having a “combat mass” sufficient to unite the partners. The political and military added value thus requires resources—in both quantity and quality. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ As the United States’ commitment to the continent diminishes, European countries must organize their own force structures, including critical capabilities. This process may oscillate between cooperation and competition, with each country seeking to reap the political benefits of its rearmament efforts. ■ France harbors ambitions to be a framework nation. If it wishes to maintain its political and military standing, it would be in its best interest to maximize the strategic areas where it remains ahead of the curve and to strengthen its network of linkages with trusted partners, particularly the Nordic countries. |
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Introduction

First appearing in the early 2000s, the framework nation concept follows several distinct rationales, whether it refers to a country assuming the leadership of a military operation, directing a multinational capability project, or commanding a permanent force structure. In every case, the country that takes on this role fully intends to derive from it additional politico-military influence. Originally conceived for crisis-management scenarios, the concept must now be analyzed through the lens of a “major engagement”, a hypothesis clearly reaffirmed in the *Revue nationale stratégique 2025* (National Strategic Review) and underscoring the imperative to field forces capable of waging a sustained interstate conflict.¹ The challenge is therefore of an altogether different nature and must be placed in a context where the defense of the European continent could rest, essentially, on the forces of its own countries alone, owing to the tangible weakening of the transatlantic link.

Being a framework nation presupposes, first of all, possessing a number of critical command and support capabilities that ensure coherence among the deployed force modules. Yet these “critical enablers” are precisely what Europe lacks, since the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) collective force system was conceived and organized around a decisive American contribution. Beyond its role as a capability architect, the framework nation must also be able to provide a sufficient “combat mass” to give consistency and impetus to the whole. Meeting this challenge in the short term is extremely ambitious, and all the more so as it could fall within a logic of competition among European states seeking to translate their rearmament effort into political influence or industrial returns. It is therefore necessary to gauge the scale of these efforts in order to consider the possible shifts within the continent’s politico-military hierarchy.

At the European level, no country today meets all the criteria; while the weight of Germany and Poland is set to grow, France retains comparative advantages that give it, for some time yet, a certain head start in proposing common projects that would allow it to act as a framework nation, particularly on matters with a strategic dimension. France should also better organize “clubs of affiliates” in order to bring together the conditions for structuring sizeable force clusters, ahead of a major engagement.

1. “Revue nationale stratégique 2025”, Secrétariat général de la défense et de la sécurité nationale, July 14, 2025.

Genealogy and evolution of the concept

The EU takes the initiative

The first framework nation concept belongs to the European Union (EU). Endorsed in 2002 by the Council of the EU,² it aims to provide the Union with an instrument for conducting autonomous crisis-management operations, with a suitable politico-military chain of command. The EU exercises political control (through the Political and Security Committee – PSC) while a lead nation assumes military leadership of the operation, aggregating other contributing nations and providing the operational headquarters (OHQ), the logistical backbone, and a significant share of the force committed. The initiative is political in essence and, for the first time, offers the possibility of acting multilaterally outside the NATO or United Nations (UN) framework. The concept was implemented as early as 2003, with Operation Artemis in eastern Congo, in which France provided 80% of the personnel. This legitimized its role as lead nation but qualified the “European” character of its success.³

Germany at the helm

The notion evolved ten years later with the Framework Nation Concept (FNC), proposed by Germany in 2013, in a context where the European military apparatus appeared fragmented and incoherent, fueling American frustration over burden-sharing, as the Obama administration was reducing its military footprint in Europe.⁴ Berlin proposed responding with a multidimensional approach integrating operational, capability, and industrial dimensions. The FNC consists of bringing together willing states to pool capabilities, thereby offering a flexible framework for building multinational capabilities. Germany did not position itself as a political leader but as the initial source of proposals and a key coordinator. The objective of establishing permanent force structures was not yet a priority but was emerging as an operational complement. Berlin thus placed itself at the center of a structuring cooperation framework, which gradually drew in nearly all the eastern and northern European states (19 countries in all). The FNC translated into the establishment of 16 capability clusters,⁵ which constitute as many potential outlets for Germany’s defense technological and industrial base (DTIB).

2. Updated in December 2015. See: “EU Framework Nation Concept”, Council of the European Union/EEAS, CSDP/PSDC 678, December 18, 2015.

3. N. Bagayoko-Penone, “Artémis, un tournant pour la politique européenne de sécurité et de défense ?”, *Afrique contemporaine*, Vol. 1, No. 209, 2004, pp. 101-116.

4. A. Feltes and N. Masuhr, “La planification de la Bundeswehr”, *Analyses du CSS*, No. 329, Center for Security Studies–ETH Zurich, September 2023.

5. Logistics, medical support, engineering, military police, artillery, ground-based air defense, special forces, CBRN protection, C2, ISR, cyber defense, civil-military cooperation, electronic warfare, training, and mountain and urban combat. See: R. L. Glatz and M. Zapfe, “Le concept de nation-cadre de l’OTAN”, *Analyses du CSS*, No. 218, Center for Security Studies–ETH Zurich, December 2017.

NATO takes up the concept

As the security environment deteriorated on Europe's eastern flank in 2014, following the invasion of Crimea, NATO took up Germany's FNC at the Wales Summit.⁶ Two other states proposed initiatives inspired by it, with some nuances. The United Kingdom (UK) established the JEF (Joint Expeditionary Force), aimed at creating a club of affiliated countries centered on northern Europe, including Sweden and Finland, then neutral. This force placed greater emphasis on the operational than on the capability dimension, aspiring to bring together the nine countries concerned around rapid intervention. As in the German case, the JEF remained a flexible cooperation framework that was not politically binding on its members. Lastly, Italy proposed a third initiative, more marginal and centered on stabilization operations with five Danubian/Balkan countries. Of the four largest European military powers in NATO, only France refrained from launching an initiative, due to a peak in external operations (Barkhane, Sangaris, Chammal, Daman) and a domestic one (Sentinelle). Even if the reasons are understandable in hindsight, Paris thereby missed the opportunity to build its own club of affiliated countries from the outset.

The term framework nation thus initially covers two realities: the lead nation of a limited external operation in the EU sense, or a flexible framework for capability and/or operational cooperation in the FNC sense. NATO's strategic developments of 2016–2017 opened a third path. Indeed, framework nation may also designate a country that accepts a specific politico-military responsibility tied to NATO's posture, in order to carry out a precise mission within a delimited geographic area. This is the Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) arrangement, which consists of the deployment on a permanent basis of four battlegroups (BGs) in the three Baltic states and in Poland. Each BG is multinational but placed under the command of a framework nation (United States, Germany, Canada, and UK). France, still operationally overstretched at the time, again judged that it could not take on this responsibility and resigned itself to the rank of mere contributor, alternating between the German BG in Lithuania and the British one in Estonia. The worsening of the situation in Europe with the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 forced NATO to strengthen its posture in the East still further, increasing the number of BGs from four to eight, this time to the benefit of Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. Aware of the need to gain influence within the Alliance, and given its historical ties with the country, France took on the role of framework nation in Romania in 2022 (mission Aigle, which provides for a rapid build-up to brigade level).⁷

6. See § 67 of the Wales Summit Declaration, September 5, 2014: "This concept [...] will help to make available to the Alliance coherent sets of forces and capabilities, particularly in Europe".

7. See É. Tenenbaum, with the collaboration of A. Zima, "Retour à l'Est : la France, la menace russe et la défense du 'Flanc Est' de l'Europe", *Focus stratégique*, No. 119, Ifri, June 2024.

Political benefits, thus many contenders

Of the three meanings presented, it is important to recognize a key semantic difference. The French word *nation-cadre* maps onto two different terms in English; “lead nation” designates the *nation-cadre* of an external operation, whereas “framework nation” designates the *nation-cadre* of a mission, a force structure, or a project, generally capability-related. This lack of equivalence is a source of confusion.

Likewise, in national official documents, France’s framework nation ambition refers first and foremost to the ability to take military command of a coalition, whatever the political framework (NATO, European, or *ad hoc*).⁸ But this ambition must necessarily be translated into functional terms. Being a framework nation entails different requirements depending on the physical environment or on the capability cluster considered (some military capabilities generate greater political knock-on effects than others), and thus many ways of being a framework nation in structural terms.

France is obviously not the only country to display this ambition. For the largest European military powers (the four mentioned above, to which Poland can now be added), being a framework nation offers, above all, political weight and influence commensurate with the level of responsibility assumed. In the context of daily strategic competition (short of confrontation), a framework nation exercises a leading role in capability matters or in structuring force modules; it shapes collective doctrine, and thus the definition of techno-operational standards, which may favor equipment acquisitions to the benefit of the DTIB where the latter is substantial. In operations stemming from crisis situations, the framework nation generates politico-military influence: preponderance in the conduct of operations and a key role in shaping the terms of crisis resolution. In a major-war situation, there is no framework nation as such to provide strategic command, but rather a collective body (NATO) with its own rules. It nonetheless remains the case that framework nations positioned on key clusters (cf. below) secure greater influence.

By virtue of these advantages, Europe should witness between the various states a logic of competition rather than of healthy emulation, since the rearmament efforts undertaken push them to want to reap their political and industrial rewards rather than to be mere contributors to a large force directed by others.

8. Cf. “Revue nationale stratégique 2025”, § 161: “[France] can act as a framework nation within a NATO, European Union, or *ad hoc* coalition, in a major-war scenario.” See also the hearing of General Fabien Mandon, Chief of the Defense Staff, before the Commission de la défense nationale et des forces armées, Assemblée nationale, October 22, 2025: “We defend this ambition, which consists in guaranteeing France [...] a role as a balancing power and framework nation within a coalition”.

The Framework Nation in a major-war context: a high bar for Europe

Three conditions for aggregating others

Claiming the role of framework nation requires meeting a number of conditions in order to establish credibility. Three can be identified.⁹ The first is the ability to ensure command and control (C2), that is, to provide the command architecture in the broad sense of the term:

- The headquarters at the level concerned, which implies highly qualified personnel (mastery of complex procedures, a multinational, joint, or multi-domain working environment), who must be regularly trained and certified.
- The associated infrastructure, meeting demanding specifications.
- Connectivity, that is, all the communication and information systems (CIS) whose technical standards are constantly evolving, requiring continual upgrades, with an ever-greater need for resilience.

As can be seen, the first condition—*sine qua non*—is not merely technical but constitutes a constant challenge.

The second criterion concerns critical capabilities, also known as enabling capabilities (critical enablers), which provide essential operational added value. In Europe, they are rare because they are expensive, and most often rely on American capabilities, often even entirely so.¹⁰ They are long to list (cf. Table 1) but notably concern strategic intelligence, theater logistics, long-range strikes, electronic warfare, and multi-layered air defense. Being a framework nation presupposes, at a given level of command, providing most of those critical capabilities, or at least about half, to be credible.

9. Interviews with officers of the état-major des armées.

10. M. Bergmann and O. Svendsen, “How Europe Can Defend Itself with Less America”, Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 8, 2025.

Table 1: Europe's Main Shortfalls in Critical Capabilities

Capability segment	Components	Dependency on the United States: Significant Very significant Total
Strategic connectivity	Telecommunications satellites (sovereign core or dual-use constellations)	
	CIS software layers (cloud computing)	
Integrated (multi-layered) surface-to-air defense	Upper and exo-atmospheric layers (THAAD, SM-3, Arrow-3)	
	Mid layer (Patriot PAC-3, SAMP-T)	
	Lower and very low layers, including C-UAS (counter-drone): IRIS-T, VL-MICA, etc	Notably deficient in both Europe and the United States
ISR (intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance)	Advanced space-based detection and early warning	
	Space surveillance (SSA)	
	Strategic intelligence (space-based IMINT and SIGINT)	
	Tactical-operational intelligence (ELINT-SIGINT; HALE/MALE drones)	
Theater logistics	Strategic airlift (heavy-lift)	
	Logistical depth: volume of munitions and spare parts => stockpiles and supply assets	
Long-range strikes	Strategic (500 to +2,000 km)	
	Operational (150 to 500 km)	
	Tactical (70 to 150 km)	
First entry	SEAD/DEAD capabilities (suppression/destruction of enemy air defenses)	
Air control/air surveillance	AWACS and AEW platforms	
Electronic warfare (EW)	Offensive EW in particular	

Source: Guillaume Garnier.

Lastly, conducting a military operation requires more than a framework. It requires units that carry out the maneuver itself, that is, a minimum of combat mass. In this respect, the framework nation must act as a driving force and provide a substantial share, typically half, with a third appearing as a strict minimum. This holds for political reasons (credibility) but also military ones (critical mass to aggregate and preserve operational coherence).

The concept in an era of weakening transatlantic ties

To ensure the security of the European continent, the NATO Force Model (NFM) endorsed at the 2022 Madrid Summit provides for a scaling-up of the defense posture comprising three successive tiers, with 100,000 troops to be deployed initially, followed by

reinforcements of 200,000 and then 500,000 more in the event of conflict.¹¹ This entails greater European responsibility for the defense of the continent,¹² more necessary than ever as President Trump's statements and the signals from his administration demonstrate the fragility of the transatlantic link. In concrete terms, Europeans must prepare to assume a far greater share of their defense and organize more force clusters.¹³ This puts the framework nation concept directly to the fore: who is to command what, according to which real resources, present and future?

As we have seen, two states, the UK and Germany, stand out for having previously structured a club of affiliated countries, Italy's initiative having had few knock-on effects. As regards rearmament efforts, two states also stand out: Germany again, and Poland. While one might have doubted the durability of these efforts three or four years ago, that is no longer the case. Poland will reach 5% of gross domestic product (GDP) devoted to defense in the short term, and its capability targets suggest it will become the first or second land power in the territorial-defense segment by around 2030-2035.¹⁴ The German surge is also prodigious (€153 billion projected for 2029, i.e. 3.5% of GDP)¹⁵ and it is set to widen the gap drastically with the two European military leaders of recent decades, France and the UK. This surge also helps cushion the industrial shock resulting from the decline of its automotive and machine-tool production, activities that can be partly converted to defense.¹⁶ This advantage constitutes an additional source of motivation. Thus the French effort, however significant, struggles to match the German one, whose budget is likely to be nearly double the French one before long. This will inevitably alter military, and therefore political, balances in Europe. Berlin admittedly starts from further back in capability terms, but it can run up a public debt around half the size of that of Paris¹⁷ to finance its spending over the long term.

The NATO chart¹⁸ shows a like-for-like comparison of each country's military spending. France, which was in the leading pack over the 2014–2024 period, is now in the average range, with the funding of its nuclear deterrent included. Ultimately, all countries are rearming, and those that invest the most will strive to become framework nations of the most important force modules.

11. "NATO Force Model", NATO, April 2, 2025, available at: www.nato.int.

12. S. Biscop and B. C. Murillo, "PESCO: The Last Chance", *Egmont Policy Brief*, No. 341, Egmont Institute, April 18, 2024.

13. F. Wolf, "L'OTAN va devoir compenser urgemment une réduction majeure des forces aériennes et navales US en Europe", *Meta Defense*, May 27, 2026.

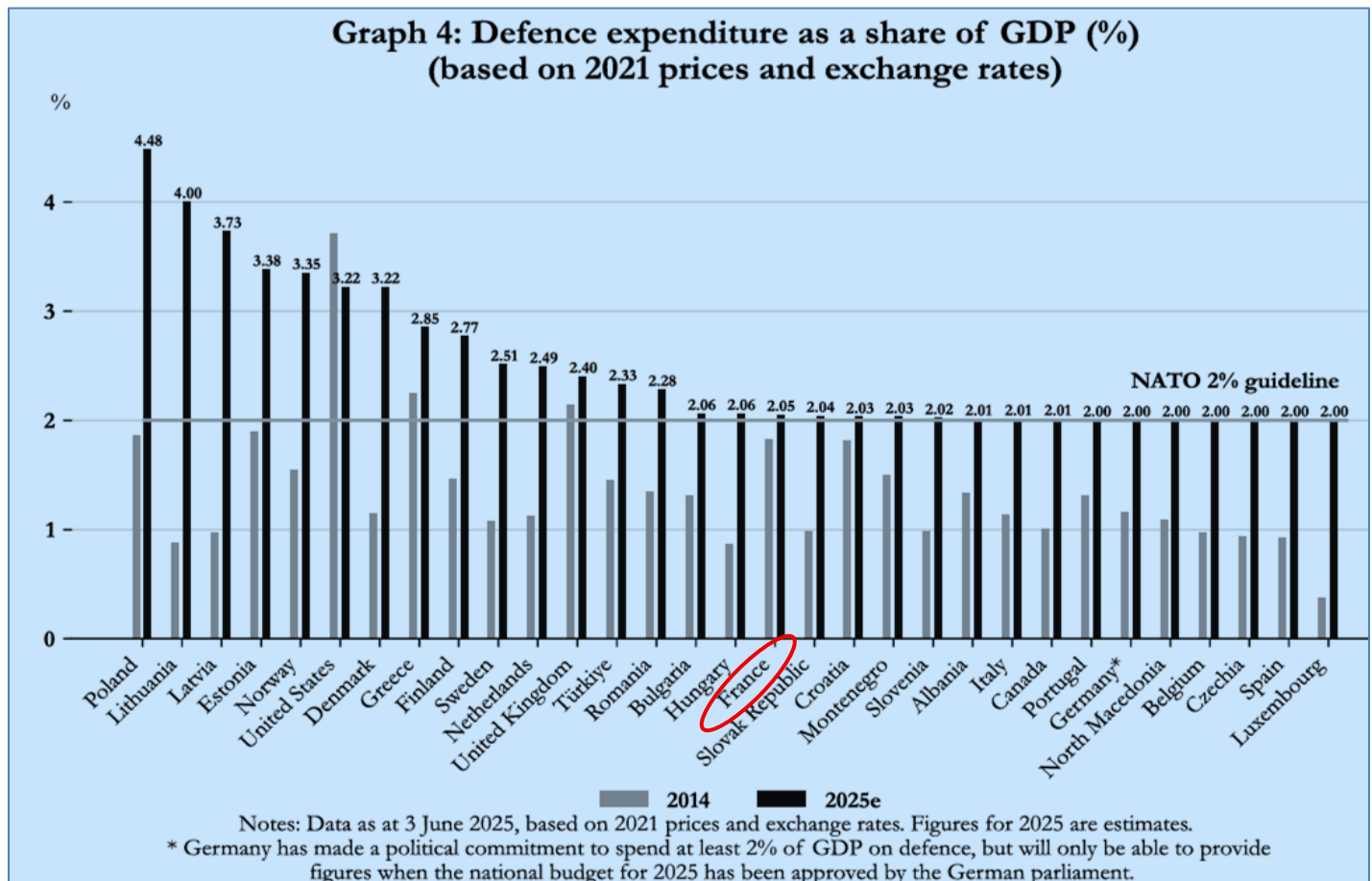
14. L. Péria-Peigné and A. Zima, "Pologne, première armée d'Europe en 2035 ? Perspectives et limites d'un réarmement", *Focus stratégique*, No. 123, Ifri, February 2025.

15. J. Möhring, "La Bundeswehr : de la Zeitenwende à l'Epochenbruch", *Notes du Cerfa*, No. 189, Ifri, February 2026.

16. "VW's Osnabrueck Plant would be 'Very Suitable' for Defence Production, Rheinmetall CEO Says", Reuters, March 12, 2025.

17. Respectively 63.5% and 117.4% of GDP at end-2025 (sources: Bundesbank and INSEE).

18. "Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2025)", NATO, 2025, available at: www.nato.int.

Chart 1: Comparison of Defense Budgets, 2014–2025

Source: NATO.

The likely European rebalancing in favor of Berlin and Warsaw is not, however, a zero-sum game. Everything depends on how, or whether, a coherent European pillar of NATO might be structured—one capable of covering the risk of a significant, or even total, American withdrawal. In this context, to preserve a leading role in Europe, France has every interest in drawing on its very real comparative advantages and in putting forward framework nation proposals on significant added-value segments.

What level of ambition for France?

State of play: assets to be maximized urgently

As regards the first condition relating to command structures, France is well positioned across the three major components of the armed forces. The French Navy and the Air and Space Force (AAE) have NATO-certified headquarters, respectively FRSTRIKEFOR (French Aeromarine Rapid Reaction Force) and JFAC FRA (French Joint Force Air Component), each demonstrating the ability to command a high-intensity NATO

operation. Likewise, the Army has the 1st Army Corps in Lille (1st CA, formerly CRR-FR),¹⁹ also certified. These three entities are regarded by NATO as being of the highest standard.

In terms of critical capabilities, France suffers more or less from the same shortfalls as its European counterparts,²⁰ but can rely on specific assets.

- With its catapult aircraft carrier (the only one in Europe), the Navy holds an inherently aggregating tool; in addition, it is the only one to operate up to three helicopter carriers, aggregating capabilities notably for an amphibious operation; finally, mine warfare is a state-of-the-art national competence. FRSTRIKEFOR can precisely command each of these components in a multinational format.²¹
- The Air and Space Force (AAE) is the air component with, alongside the UK, the broadest capability spectrum and the largest number of “critical enablers” in Europe (notably the A400M, A330 MRTT, AWACS E-3F, and Archange), which mechanically increases the possibilities for aggregation in complex air operations (COMAO), also a recognized French competence. Many of these critical platforms are, however, mortgaged to nuclear deterrence.
- On the land side, comparisons are more delicate, as no European country can currently field a complete army corps, the large integrating unit for an interstate conflict. Each lacks the associated critical combat-support and combat-service-support capabilities.²² Poland and Germany²³ appear the most advanced toward this goal, while the French Army has for its part set a gradual timetable to achieve it (from 2030 onward).²⁴ It has significant assets in airmobile combat and special forces but suffers from severe shortfalls, notably in long-range fires, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), electronic warfare, and maneuvering ground-based air defense units.

To satisfy the last condition, mass is still lacking, as ever, across the four environments (land, air, sea, space), and there is nothing to suggest much improvement in the medium term. Current budgetary efforts in fact only allow for restoring a certain structural depth and beginning to re-equip the armed forces with key capabilities. Thus, a significant increase in operational contracts will likely have to wait for the next Military Programming Law—that is, well after 2030.²⁵

19. Corps de réaction rapide – France. See: “Aligner la dénomination et la responsabilité : du Corps de réaction rapide - France au 1er corps d’armée”, Ministère des Armées et des Anciens Combattants, March 10, 2026.

20. B. Giegerich, “Progress and Shortfalls in Europe’s Defence: An Assessment”, *Strategic Dossier*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, September 2025.

21. See: “FRSTRIKEFOR – Contre-amiral Jacques Mallard”, Ministère des Armées et des Anciens Combattants.

22. See: G. Garnier, “Le corps d’armée, nouvel étalon de puissance pour les forces terrestres”, *Briefing de l’Ifri*, April 29, 2025.

23. L. Péria-Peigné and A. Zima, “Pologne, première armée d’Europe en 2035 ?”, *op. cit.*

24. G. Garnier, “Le corps d’armée, nouvel étalon de puissance pour les forces terrestres”, *op. cit.*

25. S. Audrand and É. Tenenbaum, “Enfin sincère ? L’actualisation de la Loi de programmation militaire à l’épreuve des défis stratégiques et capacitaires”, *Briefings de l’Ifri*, Ifri, April 16, 2026.

Comparative advantages for structuring European forces

Certain operational functions within the “global commons” produce strategic effects and could be leveraged for a framework nation role—especially given France’s continued scientific or capability lead in Europe in these areas.²⁶

Capitalizing on high-value-added strategic functions

First, space capabilities, indispensable to modern operations, offer a real comparative advantage. They are underpinned by command structures already in place and delivering unparalleled effects in Europe (the Space Command Center, the COSMOS Center, and the GRAVES radar²⁷). France can play a framework nation role here; however, a trade-off must be made between what it considers its sovereign core and what should be pooled from a European perspective. The Franco-German advanced space early-warning project (*Jewel*) could in this respect become a model of “co-framework nation”, once operationalized. Very high altitude (VHA, 20–100 km) should also be considered,²⁸ as France is already developing several capability building blocks (pseudolites such as maneuvering balloons or aerostats, over-the-horizon radar, and C2 ensuring “hyper-connectivity”²⁹). Anti-submarine warfare is another field of excellence. France and the UK are the only European countries with the entire associated capability spectrum (specialized surface ships and submarines, maritime patrol aircraft, acoustic intelligence, hydrographic and oceanographic mapping, etc). Global submarine proliferation and the prospect of confronting capable Russian assets confer politico-military leverage on whoever masters this entire warfare domain.

These three environments lend themselves to discreet and treacherous, or low-key, aggressions that are difficult to detect. Mastering them contributes to collective strategic depth in the event of conflict, conditioning freedom of action.

Other capability domains with a strategic vocation can also be cited, in which France has a head start. The design of a strategic conventional deep-strike capability can draw on the technological building blocks developed within the deterrence framework (ballistic or hypervelocity missiles).³⁰ Likewise, Thales’s SkyDefender project aims to network multi-layered surface-to-air systems, integrating high-performance and already-existing national (from the RAPIDFIRE gun to the SAMP/T NG) or European capabilities.³¹

26. See: C. Boutelet, “L’Allemagne veut devenir la puissance spatiale motrice en Europe”, *Le Monde*, October 22, 2025.

27. The *Aurore* program is to succeed it.

28. See: “Stratégie des armées pour la très haute altitude”, Ministère des Armées, June 5, 2025.

29. See: “Audition du général J. Bellanger (CEMAAE)”, *Compte rendu*, No. 10, Commission de la défense nationale et des forces armées, Assemblée nationale, October 22, 2025.

30. H. Fayet and L. Péria-Peigné, “La frappe dans la profondeur : un nouvel outil pour la compétition stratégique ?”, *Focus stratégique*, No. 121, Ifri, November 19, 2024.

31. See: M. Broyer, “Le SkyDefender de Thales : au croisement de l’intelligence artificielle et de l’intelligence économique”, Portail de l’IE, April 9, 2026.

New affiliations to consider

Since France has been unable to formalize a club of affiliated countries equivalent to the JEF or the German FNC, it appears to be lagging. This observation applies less to the air and naval domains, whose force structures offer greater flexibility and versatility, provided robust connectivity is ensured.³²

The land environment, for its part, requires pre-existing ties to ensure interoperability. It is difficult to assemble an army corps at short notice, except by accepting a high degree of friction. It therefore seems worthwhile to explore the new ties that could be created, in addition to those established with Belgium through the CaMo (*Capacité Motorisée*) partnership. In terms of comparative advantages, one capability aspect is often overlooked: “environment specificity” (i.e. capabilities tailored to particular types of terrain). French forces indeed combine a capacity for amphibious, airborne, airmobile, and mountain/extreme-cold combat. In Europe, they alone provide this complete combination, which is why the “light forces” component is overrepresented. It would therefore be possible to turn this into an asset from a collective-defense standpoint. Europe’s northern flank indeed has all the characteristics conducive to the employment of light forces: jagged coastlines, difficult and compartmentalized terrain with little infrastructure, and a harsh climate. Proposals could therefore be made to the Nordic countries and Canada. The JEF is not an obstacle, notably because of the drastic British reductions in the amphibious and airborne domains. The Nordic states are spending heavily to rearm; cross-cutting industrial armament ties could be consolidated, notably with Sweden,³³ thereby fostering interoperability. A leader in organizing large-scale exercises, France could propose “Orion-Grand-Nord-type” operational-readiness activities. France would also bring this region greater strategic depth (space, very high altitude),³⁴ especially in the event of American disengagement. As ties strengthen, France would more easily aggregate substantial force modules. The benefit would then be collective.

This is merely one example of relationships to be established. There are other possibilities: capitalizing on existing ties in the south (Romania, Greece, Croatia); investing alongside the Iberian countries; taking on “co-framework nation” roles, as with the CJEF,³⁵ for example with Italy. But the Nordic scenario offers a very compelling lever.

32. P. Gros, “Les nouveaux enjeux de l’interopérabilité”, Fondation pour la recherche stratégique, April 2020.

33. See: “La France et la Suède renforcent leur coopération en matière d’armement”, Ministère des Armées, June 18, 2025.

34. A key condition in the event of a United States withdrawal.

35. *Combined Joint Expeditionary Force*, a Franco-British force module.

Table 2: Possible Affiliations with France as the Framework Nation

Geographic focus	Grounds for affiliation and potential mutual benefits
NATO NORTHERN FLANK (including Canada)	▪ Combat in difficult/rugged environments—rapid joint deployments ▪ Control of maritime/undersea/deep-sea spaces ▪ Setting up a NATO strategic reserve? (Canada/Sweden/Denmark not directly bordering Russia) ▪ Industrial cooperation: complementarity of DTIBs (Sweden), major rearmament = strengthened interoperability
NATO SOUTHERN FLANK	▪ NATO defense posture (framework nation in Romania, Mediterranean/Black Sea) ▪ Politico-military ties already in place (Romania, Greece, Croatia) and DTIB customers (interoperability)
“WESTERN BLOC” (Iberian countries and/or Benelux)	▪ Political alignment: strong commitment to the notion of European sovereignty + shared Eastern-flank/Southern-flank concerns ▪ Overall securing of “the approaches to Europe” ▪ Fairly balanced force systems, with an expeditionary component ▪ Belgium and Luxembourg, the only partners integrated with the French Army to date ▪ DTIB ties (Spain, Belgium, Netherlands) that could foster capability projects leading to force clusters (naval mine countermeasures, airmobile combat, etc)
“CO- FRAMEWORK NATION” (United Kingdom or Italy)	On a specific operational domain ▪ UK: capitalize on the CJEF ▪ UK or Italy: pooling for NATO’s “Strategic Reserve Corps” ▪ Italy: development of an integrated European multilayered surface-to-air defense capability? ▪ Naval themes to be structured? (cluster for long-range strike from the sea, amphibious operations, mine warfare, etc)

Source: Guillaume Garnier

Conclusion

The framework nation concept emerges against a backdrop where major war on the continent is conceivable and the transatlantic link could collapse. Yet there is, to date, no coherent European force system capable of responding to the combination of these two grim scenarios. It would therefore be prudent to design such a collective system, for example by establishing a principle of relative specialization among the main countries, which brings us back to the framework nation concept. France could be a driving force here, both politically, since it has long advocated greater European autonomy, and militarily, as long as it can draw on its tangible comparative advantages to strategic effect. To do so, it will need to establish solid bonds of trust, both operational and industrial, with key partners. In the meantime, the clock is ticking, and sustained political impetus will be needed to align means with ambitions.

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How to quote this publication:

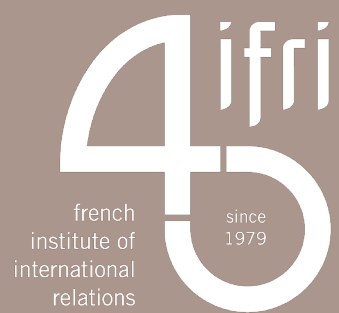
Guillaume Garnier, "Framework Nation: A European Challenge and French Ambition",
Ifri Memos, Ifri, July 10, 2026.

ISBN: 979-10-373-1260-0

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