

Hosted by Ifri

# Conférence navale de Paris

**2023** January  
18,  
2023

# CON- TENT

01. Foreword by the French Navy Chief of Staff,  
Admiral Pierre Vandier
02. Agenda
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04. Ifri Food-for-thought paper,  
Jérémy Bachelier and Elie Tenenbaum



# FOREW

# Ladies and gentlemen,



It is a great pleasure to welcome you to this first "Conférence navale de Paris", organized with the French Institute of International Relations.

This conference is part of the general review of the geopolitical situation across the globe. The contestation of international law, the weakening of multilateralism and the non-respect of treaties lead us to note the growing territorialization of the oceans and potential policies of the fait accompli. The corollary is a generalized rearmament, increasing the risk of recourse to the balance of power. We are also witnessing the extension of the fields of conflict to the cybernetic environment, to exo-atmospheric space, but also to public information and the seabed.

We are gradually moving from an era of crisis to an era of shocks, where each event generates changes over the long term, making it impossible to return to the initial situation. The war in Ukraine is the most telling manifestation of this, inducing changes in energy flows with global consequences.

Finally, we observe the consequences of climate change, growing threats to marine biodiversity, amplified by pollution, illegal fishing or overfishing. For the navies, these changes open up the possibility of confrontation at sea. They underline the need to better articulate and coordinate new areas of struggle in our air-sea operations and to reflect collectively on the consequences of current geopolitical and technological developments on naval strategy.

It is for these reasons that I wanted to organize this first naval conference in Paris, in conjunction with our American and British allies. It aims to bring together not only researchers, the military and elected officials, but also actors from the maritime world, civil society and the economic world, to understand the issues and shed light on a collective reflection. The confrontation of ideas and the mixing of experiences will generate a renewed thought.

It is a question of understanding in order to better anticipate, of being an actor and not a spectator.

**Admiral Pierre Vandier**  
Chief of the French Navy

# WORD

# Agenda

(ALL TIMINGS UTC+1)

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| 1:30 p.m.  | Arrival and registration at Ifri<br>(27 rue de la Procession, 75015 Paris)  |
| 2:00 p.m.  |   |
| 2:00 p.m.  | Welcome Remarks by Dr. Thomas Gomart,<br>Director, Ifri and Admiral Pierre Vandier, Chief of Staff<br>of the French Navy  |
| 2:15 p.m.  |   |
| 2:15 p.m.  | <b>SESSION 1</b>  |
| 3:30 p.m.  | Challenges, Key Priorities and Prospects of Western<br>Navies   |
|            | <b>Chair:</b> Dr. Thomas Gomart, Director, Ifri   |
|            | <b>Speakers:</b> Admiral Pierre Vandier, Chief of Staff of the French<br>Navy<br>Admiral Sir Ben Key, First Sea Lord of the Royal<br>Navy<br>Admiral Michael M. Gilday, Chief of Naval<br>Operations of the U.S. Navy   |
| 3:30 p.m.  | <b>SESSION 2</b>  |
| 4:45 p.m.  | The Evolution of Naval Strategy in Today's Geopolitical<br>Context  |
|            | <b>Chair:</b> Héloïse Fayet, Research Fellow and coordinator of the<br>Deterrence and Proliferation program, Security Studies<br>Center, Ifri   |
|            | <b>Speakers:</b> Kristen Guinness, Senior Policy Researcher, RAND<br>Corporation<br>Dr. Elie Tenenbaum, Director of the Security<br>Studies Center, Ifri<br>Prof. Geoffrey Till, Emeritus Professor of Maritime<br>Studies, King's College London   |
| 4:45 p.m.  | Coffee Break  |
| 5:00 p.m.  |   |
| 5:00 p.m.  | <b>SESSION 3</b>  |
| 6:15 p.m.  | The Impact of New Technologies on Maritime Forces   |
|            | <b>Chair:</b> Dr. Nicolas Mazzucchi, Research Director at the Center<br>for Strategic Studies of the French Navy (CESM)   |
|            | <b>Speakers:</b> Dr. Alison Russell, Associate Professor of Political<br>Science, Merrimack College<br>Nick Childs, Senior Fellow for Naval Forces and<br>Maritime Security, International Institute for<br>Strategic Studies (IISS) London<br>Philippe Gros, Research Fellow, Foundation for<br>Strategic Research (FRS) |
| 6:15 p.m.  | Concluding Remarks by Alice Rufo, General Director<br>for International Relations and Strategy (DGRIS),<br>French Ministry of Armed Forces  |
| 6:30 p.m.  |   |
| 8:00 p.m.  | Conference reception, Hôtel de la Marine<br>(2 place de la Concorde, 75008 Paris)   |
| 10:00 p.m. |   |

# PLENARY SESSION 1

## Challenges, Key Priorities and Prospects of Western Navies

Dr.  
Thomas  
Gomart



was appointed Director of the French Institute of International Relations - Ifri after serving as Director of strategic development from 2010 to 2015 and founding and directing Ifri's Russia/NIS Center from 2004 to 2013. Thomas Gomart holds a PhD in the History of International Relations from Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne and an EMBA from HEC (Paris). Prior to joining Ifri, Thomas Gomart worked at Marne-la-Vallée University (1996-1999) and for the French Ministry of Defense. He has also been Lavoisier Fellow at the State Institute of international relations (MGIMO – Moscow, 2001), Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Security Studies (European Union – Paris, 2002), and Marie Curie Fellow at the Department of War Studies (King's College – London, 2003). As a researcher, he focuses on digital governance, country risk, Russia, and think tanks. He published *Guerres Invisibles. Nos prochains défis géopolitiques*, Editions Tallandier, 2021, and his next book *Les ambitions inavouées*, Tallandier, will be published in January 2023.

# Speakers and contributors

## Admiral Pierre Vandier

**P.V.**

Was born in Toulon in 1967 and joined France's Naval Academy in 1987, specializing in naval aviation. After fighter-pilot training, he carried out combat missions in Bosnia (1995–97), Kosovo (1999) and Afghanistan (2004), and commanded the first naval squadron of Rafale aircraft (2002–04). He took command of the frigate *Surcouf* in 2007. In 2013, while serving as chief of operations for the African zone at the Joint Military Operations Centre, he directed the crisis unit for Operation Serval in Mali. He was appointed as commander of the aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* in July 2013. His later roles included international relations coordinator at French Navy headquarters, deputy commander for the Mediterranean maritime region, commanding officer of the Toulon naval base, and head of the military cabinet of the Minister of Defense. In January 2017, he became coordinating authority for international relations at French Navy headquarters and was subsequently promoted to Rear-Admiral on the 1st September 2017. He was then designated deputy commandant for the Mediterranean maritime region, and commanding officer of the naval base in Toulon.

He was then appointed as Principal Staff Officer of the Secretary of State for Defence before being nominated as Chief of the Naval Staff of the French Navy on the 1st September 2020.

## Admiral Sir Ben Key KCB CBE

**B.K.**

Has been First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff since November 2021. He joined the Royal Navy in 1984 as a University Cadet, subsequently graduating in physics from Royal Holloway, University of London. He qualified as both helicopter aircrew and as a Principal Warfare Officer, and has seen service around the world in a variety of frigates and destroyers. He has commanded four ships: the mine hunter *HMS Sandown*, the frigates *HMS Iron Duke* and *HMS Lancaster*, and the aircraft carrier *HMS Illustrious*. Shore appointments have included Resources and Plans in the Ministry of Defense, advisor to the Iraqi Director Joint Staff in Baghdad, the UK's Permanent Joint HQ, and HQ Air Command. He has also served as Principal Staff Officer to the Chief of Defense Staff. From April 2013 to July 2015 he was Flag Officer Sea Training. Promoted to Vice Admiral in February 2016, he was the Royal Navy's Fleet Commander until March 2019. He then served as the Chief of Joint Operations. Ben was selected in October 2021 to assume the office of First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff and began the role in November 2021.

## Admiral Michael Gilday

**M.G.**

Is Chief of Naval Operations in the United States Navy. He is a native of Lowell, Massachusetts and a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy. At sea, he deployed with *USS Chandler*, *USS Princeton*, and *USS Gettysburg*. He commanded destroyers *USS Higgins* and *USS Benfold*, and subsequently, Destroyer Squadron 7, serving as sea-combat commander for the Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group. As a flag officer he has served as commander, U.S. Fleet Cyber Command and U.S. 10<sup>th</sup> Fleet. His joint assignments include Executive Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Naval Aide to the President. He has also served in joint positions as director of operations for NATO's Joint Force Command Lisbon; Chief of Staff for Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO; Director of Operations, for U.S. Cyber Command; and Director of the Joint Staff. He became the 32<sup>nd</sup> Chief of Naval Operations in August 2019.



**01.** **Héloïse Fayet** is a Research Fellow at Ifri's Security Studies Center, where she coordinates the Deterrence and Proliferation research program. Her research focuses on proliferation in the Middle East, doctrines of nuclear-weapon states and strategic risk reduction. She also works on the geopolitics of the Middle East and strategic foresight. Before joining Ifri, Héloïse Fayet spent three years at the French Ministry of Defense as an analyst on the Middle East. She graduated from Sciences Po Paris with a Bachelor of Arts and a dual master's degree in International Security and Journalism.

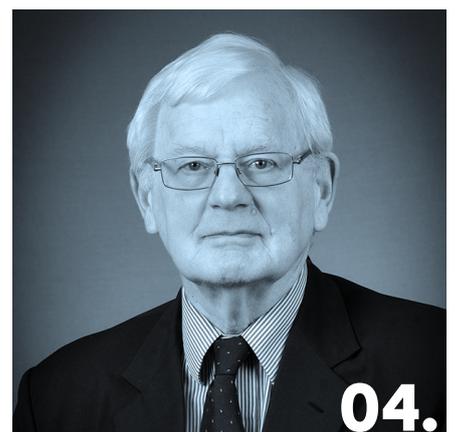
**02.** **Kristen Gunness** is a senior policy researcher in the RAND Corporation's Washington Office. Her background includes military, security, and foreign policy issues in the Indo-Pacific region with a focus on China, and deterrence and escalation management in the region. She has worked with a range of U.S. Department of Defense and private sector clients throughout her career and advised senior leaders in the United States Navy, USINDOPACOM, Office of the Secretary of Defense, and the Intelligence Community. Before joining RAND, Gunness served as the Director of the Navy Asia Pacific Advisory Group at the Pentagon, where she advised the Chief of Naval Operations on security and foreign policy trends in the Indo-Pacific region with a focus on Chinese maritime strategy and naval capabilities. Prior to her position on the Navy staff, she was Senior Project Director on Chinese military and security affairs at CNA. Gunness holds a BA from Tufts University in International Relations, a certificate in Chinese Studies from the Johns Hopkins SAIS Nanjing Center, and an MA in Security Studies from Georgetown University's Walsh School of Foreign Service.

**03.** **Dr. Élie Tenenbaum** is the Director of Ifri's Security Studies Center. A PhD graduate in History (2015) and a Sciences Po graduate (2010), he was a Visiting Fellow at Columbia University. He has taught international security at Sciences Po and the history of international relations at the University of Lorraine. Élie Tenenbaum works in particular on issues of irregular warfare, the fight against terrorism and hybrid threats as well as on French defense policy and military operations. He is the author of numerous articles and books on history and strategy, including his latest book, co-authored with Marc Hecker, *La guerre de vingt ans: djihadisme et contre-terrorisme au XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (The Twenty Years' War: Jihadism and Counterterrorism in the XXI<sup>st</sup> Century), published by Robert Laffont in 2021.

**04.** **Dr. Geoffrey Till** is Emeritus Professor of Maritime Studies at King's College London and Chairman of the Corbett Centre for Maritime Policy Studies. Once Dean of Academic Studies at the UK Joint Services Command and Staff College, he has authored nearly 300 books, chapters and articles. Since 2009 he has been a Visiting Professor, Senior Research Fellow and Advisor at the Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore. He now holds the Dudley W. Knox Chair for Naval History and Strategy at the U.S. Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island. His book *Understanding Victory: Naval Operations from Trafalgar to the Falklands* was published by ABC-CLIO in 2014 and he completed a fourth edition of his *Seapower: A Guide for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2018) and an edited version of Bo Hu's *Chinese Maritime Power in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2019). His book *How to Grow a Navy: The Development of Maritime Power* was published by Routledge in September 2022.

# PLENARY SESSION 2

## The Evolution of Naval Strategy in Today's Geopolitical Context



**01.** **Nick Childs** joined the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) as Senior Fellow for Naval Forces and Maritime Security in 2015. His specialist areas of interest are maritime strategy, policy, and capability development; U.S., NATO, European, and Russian naval capabilities; and maritime developments in the Middle East, South Asia, and the Asia-Pacific region. Before joining the IISS, Nick was a BBC journalist for more than 30 years, specialising in defense, security and international affairs.

**02.** **Philippe Gros** is a senior fellow at the Foundation for Strategic Research, a French think tank specializing in strategy and defense issues. His research focuses on forms of armed conflict and military intervention, capability developments, U.S. defense policy, and the development of strategic analysis and situation assessment methods. Before joining the Foundation for Strategic Research, Philippe Gros worked at the French Ministry of Defense between 1997 and 2006 where he contributed to the development of doctrines and concepts and participated in the Multinational Interoperability Council and in multinational experiments of the U.S. Joint Forces Command. He also teaches military affairs and methodology for strategic analysis at the Catholic Institute of Paris.

**03.** **Dr. Nicolas Mazzucchi** is a Research Director at the Center for Strategic Studies of the French Navy (CESM). He holds a PhD in Geographic Economy from Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. His main research topics are energy security, cyberstrategy and naval issues. Before joining the CESM he worked for the French MoD in strategic thinking and operations, and also for reputable French think tanks (IRIS and FRS) as a Research Fellow on energy and cyber issues. Scientific Advisor for Futuribles International, Professor of Geopolitics for the War College, the CHEM and the EMSST at the French MoD, he is an alumni of the War College. Dr. Mazzucchi is the French representative in the management team of the Consultation Forum Sustainable Energy for Defense and Security Sector for the European Defense Agency. Author of several books, his last one with T. Alexopoulos and T. Marketos, *Geostrategic Alliances in the Eastern Mediterranean and MENA*, was published by Springer in Spring 2022.

**04.** **Dr. Alison Russell** is a political scientist specializing in cyber security strategy and cyber warfare at Merrimack College, where she is Chair of the Department of Political Science and Public Policy, Director of the International Studies Program, and Associate Professor of Political Science. Dr. Russell teaches courses in cyber security, international politics, American foreign policy, comparative politics, and politics of the Middle East. She has also taught graduate courses at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, undergraduate courses at Boston College and Tufts University, and has been a guest lecturer at the U.S. Naval War College. Prior to completing her doctorate, she worked as a political-military analyst at the Department of the Navy's federally-funded research and development center, where she specialized in maritime security cooperation strategy. Dr. Russell has authored the books "Strategic A2/AD in Cyberspace" (Cambridge University Press, 2017) and "Cyber Blockades" (Georgetown University Press, 2014) and several articles and book chapters on cyber security, maritime security, and international politics. She is the recipient of the 2018 Sidney D. Drell Academic Award in Intelligence and National Security.

# PLENARY SESSION 3

## The Impact of New Technologies on Maritime Forces



# CONCLUDING REMARKS

**Alice Rufo** is Director General for International Relations and Strategy at the French Ministry of the Armed Forces. Before joining the French Ministry of Defense, she worked in the diplomatic unit of the Office of the President of the French Republic from 2012 to 2022. She was successively Technical Advisor for Strategic Affairs and the Asia-Pacific region from 2012 to 2014, Advisor for International Summits from 2014 to 2016, Advisor for Asia, Continental Europe, Turkey, and Refugee-related Issues from 2017 to 2019, and Deputy Diplomatic Advisor for Strategic Affairs and Disarmament from 2019 to 2022. Ms. Rufo is a graduate of the Ecole Normale Supérieure (2001-06), the Institute of Political Studies of Paris (Sciences Po), and the National School of Administration (ENA, 2008-10). She also holds a master's degree with honors in philosophy.



IFRI  
FOOD-FOR-THOUGHT  
PAPER

By Jérémy Bachelier, military fellow at Ifri's Security Studies Center (CES) and Elie Tenenbaum, Director of Ifri's Security Studies Center.

# Naval Combat Redux: a Renewed Challenge for Western Navies

Our world is becoming increasingly contested and unpredictable and we are trending towards a return of great power strategic competition, characterized by more frequent challenges to the established rules-based international order. As a consequence, the risk of interstate conflict continues to rise. This regressive evolution is most readily apparent in the maritime domain, where the concomitant impacts to the free flow of international trade and the control of illegal and unregulated fishing are interlaced with the prescient, yet growing challenge of environmental security. The sea, the oldest common of mankind, can no longer be considered as the relative sanctuary it has been in recent decades.

On the contrary, it may prove an especially attractive environment from which rogue states can compete or conduct aggressive behavior, secure in the inherent opacity of the maritime domain (blurred borders, long distances, low density) to minimize accountability and avoid escalation. The increasing proliferation of warships, submarines and naval weapons is the clearest and most worrying manifestation of this trend as the achievement and maintenance of effective maritime security and deterrence capabilities becomes vital to the national interests of maritime nations. As a result, the return of the dormant paradigm of naval warfighting is now an increasingly credible prospect for which Western navies must actively prepare.

# A new strategic competition playing out at sea

The war in Ukraine has confirmed the perception that a change is underway in the way non-Western powers apply sea power as a warfighting instrument. Russian naval blockades of Ukrainian ports, Kalibr missiles strikes, the capture and subsequent recapture of Snake Island from the sea, and perhaps most obviously the sinking of the Moskva, all point to the growing contest at sea which strategists must no longer consider as a staging area for air or land operations. Other deliberate tactical encounters below the realm of open conflict suggest that naval combat operations can be more appealing than other forms of naked aggression in the eyes of revisionist powers. The increased propensity for uninhibited aggression at sea has been underlined by naval "incidents" such as the Cheonan sinking by the Korean People's Army Naval Force in 2010, the Iranian attacks in the Gulf in 2019, and even some tense encounters in the Mediterranean. Not unlike cyber (and exo-atmospheric space), these have become a domain well-suited to provoking and testing an opponent's reaction through exploration of the gray zone.

Massive rearmament on a global scale portends the return to a naval hard power strategy, as nations strive to gain a capability edge over competitors. Between 2008 and 2030, many navies will make a dramatic leap in terms of tonnage and capabilities, particularly in the Indo-Pacific and Mediterranean

Sea. The increase in pure tonnage has also been accompanied by a new level of exceptional qualitative development, as in the People's Liberation Army Navy, which alone represents a formidable challenge to the West. For its part, the Russian Federation Navy is likely to emerge relatively unscathed from the current war in Ukraine – especially with regard to its submarine fleet – which may shoulder a greater strategic role in the future.

In the maritime domain so increasingly defined by multifaceted competition, it is imperative that Western navies must sustain the immutable mission to protect our Sea Lines of Communications and Exclusive Economic Zones, including seabed, from adversarial encroachment. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2022, however, the rules-based international order it purports seems increasingly under threat and more fragile at sea than it is on land. Extensive sovereignty and territorial claims over both international and territorial waters by revisionist powers are threatening freedom of navigation in various parts of the globe, but nowhere is the impact more acutely felt than in the Western Pacific. Such challenges can be overt or covert (the latter often through incremental "grey zone" tactics, which seek to impose change through 'fait accompli') thus shifting the blame onto the defender.



# Technological evolution by leaps and bounds

In something of a contrast to the vast increases of warship tonnage seen elsewhere to secure a relative fleet advantage, Western navies have favored investment in maintaining their technological edge. Such a quality for quantity tradeoff, however, does not always outweigh the comparative loss in sheer numbers. This is particularly evident in the field of munitions: the looming salvo competition does not bode well for those navies equipped with precious few million-dollar missiles and a dwindling kinetic strike capacity, indeed self-protection systems retain the higher priority for capability planners designing expensive new naval platforms. The ominous imbalance of offensive firepower in our new era of strategic competition therefore demands that we inculcate a culture of adaptive, disruptive and out-of-the box thinking amongst our future operators and future commanders tasked with the responsibility to fight and win at sea.

One must first acknowledge that there will be no silver bullet to counter massive enemy fleets. Accordingly, we should do all that we can to increase shipbuilding efforts. The U.S. Navy leads the way with its "Navigation Plan 2022" now aiming at fleet of 373 manned ships – 75 more than today. The Royal Navy

has stated its goal of reaching 24 frigates by 2030, an increase of one third from its current base. In France, the boost given by the 2019-2025 military programming law has put an end to three decades of equipment and capability cuts by laying the groundwork for future capabilities.

Western navies must not lose sight of their valid belief that technological superiority is key, especially in the early stages of a high-intensity conflict. Innovation must be encouraged, nurtured and funded as part of deliberate capability research and development programs. Innovations expected to mature soon include the ongoing rapid development of varying sizes of uncrewed systems at sea, in the air, on the surface and undersea. We can and should regard uncrewed systems as game changers. The ability to seamlessly combine humans and machines in naval combat maneuver will become a prerequisite for success in an ever more lethal future battlespace, envisaged to be characterized by long-range anti-access systems and acute electronic warfare. In the logical extrapolation of this trend, Western navies will also need to be pioneers in the effective systems integration of artificial intelligence, quantum technologies or directed energy weapons.

# Striving for more resilient and more agile navies



In the competitive and degraded future maritime environment, the qualities of endurance and resilience will be fundamental. This is especially true of space and cyber, both crucial for Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance as well as Command, Control and Communications functions. Additionally, given the anticipated exponential growth in systems complexity, navies must place a far greater emphasis on ensuring resilience in supply chains and maintenance processes, which in turn will become a much higher priority for adversary targeting efforts. It is only when these upstream enabling and support missions are mastered that fully assured naval combat potential can be unleashed.

The optimal use and allocation of weapons systems technology is of course only as good as the operator. The human factor remains the most essential and strategic component to a navy that aspires to fight and win at sea. The dynamic evolution of social norms and networks together with changing societal demographics are serious challenges to the maintenance of sustainable manpower levels and navies must devise novel and open-minded approaches to recruit, sustain and manage the future workforce. Command and doctrine must be adapted from the comfort of tradition to our new realities in order to carefully manage individual expectations. Sailors will have to train harder and smarter than ever before and curricula will need regular review for relevance and currency. To keep pace and evolve, navies must routinely challenge entrenched mindsets. For example, many decades of asymmetric warfare against terrorist and guerrilla threats have lost the habit of striking the first blow and an acute sensitivity to proportionality. This paradigm will fail in the face of peer or near-peer competitor equipped with agile and lethal capability.

The French Navy organized Exercise POLARIS in November 2021, which brought together 6 countries, 24 ships, 65 planes, and 6,000 soldiers, including 4,000 sailors from 6 nations for 16 days. This major exercise emphasized a renewed approach to operational preparation, to stimulate tactical thinking in the context of high-intensity combat and to get closer to the reality of naval combat in a degraded/contested environment. In 2023, a major, joint exercise called "Hemex-Orion", will similarly allow the military to work together in contexts that are getting ever closer to the reality of high-level combat intensity. Navies are increasingly engaging in more realistic, complex, and integrated exercises, which are also multi-domain and multi-environment. They are an active reflection of our contemporary adjustment to the use of naval power in our envisaged future strategic circumstance.



It is in this perspective that the Chief of Staff of the French Navy, Admiral Pierre Vandier, and Ifri are organizing the first "Conférence navale de Paris" on January 18, 2023.

The geopolitical risk of high-intensity confrontation at sea will reshape the world of naval warfare in the years to come. For success in future conflict, Western navies must explore the art of the possible, challenge paradigms, invent and develop new modes of action, optimise technology, manage tomorrow's workforce and master systems resilience.

**Jérémy Bachelier** is a Military Fellow at Ifri's Security Studies Center (CES) and Ifri's Defense Research Unit (LRD). He contributes to studies relating to the Indo-Pacific region and more broadly to French maritime, security, capacity and strategic issues. His Twitter account is [@JeremyIFRI](#).

**Élie Tenenbaum** is the Director of Ifri's Security Studies Center. He co-authored, with Marc Hecker, *La guerre de vingt ans: djihadisme et contre-terrorisme au XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (The Twenty Years' War: Jihadism and Counterterrorism in the XXI<sup>st</sup> Century), published by Robert Laffont in 2021. His Twitter account is [@ElieTenenbaum](#).



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