PDSF 2026

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Gidi Brandes and Corentin Barre



A forum grounded in the present moment

The third edition of the Paris Defence and Strategy Forum (PDSF), hosted by ACADEM at the École Militaire under the theme "Sovereignty, Alliances and Partnerships," leaves us with the impression of a conference that understands the seriousness of the current strategic moment without becoming rigid or inaccessible. That balance matters. Too often, defence conferences either disappear into abstract jargon or become performative stages for set-piece national talking points. PDSF 2026 feels different. It brings together military officials, academics, government representatives, industry figures,

and younger policy communities in a way that makes debate feel both grounded and alive.

The choice of Denmark as guest of honour is especially revealing. It is not just ceremonial. It reflects a real and growing strategic convergence between France and Denmark, particularly around European defence, rearmament, and the question of how European states position themselves in a more dangerous and less predictable world. The opening by Danish Defence Minister Troels Lund Poulsen and French Armed Forces Minister Catherine Vautrin underlines that this is not merely an intellectual exercise. It is a forum trying to connect strategy to policy and policy to action.

Instability, chokepoints, and the new logic of power

What stands out most across the conference is the atmosphere of instability hanging over nearly every discussion. One panellist captures it perfectly by remarking that the world is now so unstable and unpredictable that what one says on Tuesday may already be disproved or irrelevant by Friday. That observation feels less like rhetoric than a sober description of the strategic environment. In the context of the Iran war, it becomes almost impossible to separate conference debate from unfolding reality. The result is a forum that does not discuss security as a distant field of analysis, but as something immediate, fluid, and deeply consequential.

Intelligence, assumptions, and institutional blind spots

If that panel captures the external volatility of the current moment, the session on intelligence failures strikes as the most intellectually honest. It is rare to see such open discussion of failure in public, especially in a field where reputation, secrecy, and institutional credibility are constantly at stake. What makes the panel so effective is that it moves beyond simplistic notions of "bad analysis." Instead, it shows how intelligence failure is often an organisational and political failure disguised as an analytical one. Cognitive biases, the difficulty of challenging dominant assumptions within institutions, and the tension between fast operational intelligence and the slower, more reflective work of strategic assessment all emerge as central themes. In the current Iran context, this discussion feels anything but abstract. It raises a deeper and more uncomfortable question: how often do institutions already possess fragments of the truth, yet fail because they are structurally unable to interpret them, elevate dissenting views, or act in time? That is a far more serious indictment than merely saying analysts got something wrong.

Beyond the panels: partnerships and future networks

Beyond these standout sessions, the conference's broader range is also telling. Panels on American foreign policy, Africa, and Latin America widen the lens without losing relevance. The discussion of the United States

is particularly interesting in how it frames Trump-era foreign policy less as a single coherent doctrine than as a struggle between ideological and strategic factions, symbolised here by the contrast between a Vance line and a Rubio line. That is a useful reminder that even when outside observers speak of "American strategy," there are often competing projects operating under the same banner. Likewise, the question of whether Latin America's apparent shift to the right represents a genuine transformation or something more contingent feels exactly like the kind of issue that deserves more scrutiny than headlines usually allow. The panel on Africa raises another worthwhile challenge: whether African models of security cooperation might offer lessons rather than simply being treated as objects of European analysis. That reversal of perspective is overdue.

Still, one of the strongest aspects of PDSF 2026 lies outside the formal panels. The corridor conversations seem almost as valuable as the official sessions. That says something important about the event's design and social character. There is a real density of expertise, but also a willingness to build bridges, especially with youth organisations such as Les Jeunes IHEDN and the Forum of Young Diplomats. That matters because strategy is not only produced in ministries, headquarters, or think tanks. It is also shaped through relationships, informal exchange, and the cultivation of future networks.

Overall, PDSF 2026 comes across as a conference worth taking seriously because it does not pretend that complexity can be solved with slogans. It reflects a world marked by uncertainty, fragmentation, and strategic competition, but it also insists on the continued relevance of alliances, partnerships, and honest debate. My main takeaway is that sovereignty today cannot mean isolation. In a networked and vulnerable world, sovereignty depends on resilience, credible partnerships, and institutions capable of questioning themselves. That is not a comforting message, but it is probably the right one.