France's president says the country will maintain its costly nuclear arsenal despite looming military budget cuts, saying the weapons are essential for national defense.

President Francois Hollande said Wednesday that global security threats have made nuclear weapons essential for France, which is the only country in continental Europe to have them.

The statement came in Hollande's annual New Year's greeting to soldiers. The president says "it's a deterrent force that allows us protection against all threats and allows us to play a strong role on the world stage."

France’s military is facing a tighter budget in coming years, and has already pulled its soldiers from the costly and unpopular war in Afghanistan.