

# Franco-British military cooperation: a new engine for European defence?

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## **European Union Institute for Security Studies**

**Director: Álvaro de Vasconcelos**

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ISBN 978-92-9198-177-9

ISSN 1608-5000

QN-AB-11-088-EN-C

doi:10.2815/21700

Published by the EU Institute for Security Studies and printed in Condé-sur-Noireau (France) by Corlet Imprimeur, graphic design by: Hanno Ranck in cooperation with Metropolis (Lisbon).

## **Franco-British military cooperation: a new engine for European defence?**

Ben Jones



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## *Acknowledgements*

Many thanks to Daniel Keohane for his impeccable guidance and assistance throughout my time at the ISS. Thanks also to William Wallace, Menzies Campbell, Greg Simpson, Brian Crowe, John Lee, Michael Codner, Alastair Cameron and Claire Chick for assistance and encouragement, and remembering the late Tim Garden, a great champion of European defence cooperation. This paper would have been impossible without the many people, named and unnamed on following pages, who were kind enough to offer precious time for interviews. Errors, misjudgements and omissions are the author’s responsibility alone. Thanks to all at the ISS for help and companionship, particularly fellow Visiting Fellow Florian Trauner and office-mate Fraser Buffini. Finally, eternal gratitude to Veena Hudson for putting up with my itinerancy with characteristic patience and understanding.

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# Summary

The St. Malo Agreement on European Defence Cooperation of 1998 set out a new approach to defence cooperation in pursuit of a new goal – an autonomous European military capability. By contrast, the Franco-British cooperation launched in November 2010 by Prime Minister Cameron and President Sarkozy is once again a new approach, but it is one that seeks to sustain the *status quo* – in support of sovereign foreign and defence policies.

The primary motivation is not to produce a greater or more effective ‘European’ military capability. It is to maintain French and British aspirations to power projection and to military credibility in the eyes of the United States. The many similarities and shared vital interests of France and the UK underpin, but do not drive, the initiative. The end-goal is to retain access to military capability, whether that is through mutual dependence on each other’s industrial base and armed forces, or through pooling and sharing capability.

The relationship between the new push for Franco-British military cooperation and wider European defence policy is therefore quite enigmatic. Franco-British cooperation does not entail a strategic reappraisal of European defence. It side-steps the strategic question of the role of NATO and the United States in European defence and security. It does not, for example, address concerns among some European states over the long-term disengagement of the US from Europe. It could, potentially, cause divisions among European states if the Franco-British relationship is seen as too exclusive and not sufficiently concerned with wider European security.

Yet for all that, Franco-British defence cooperation could provide a roadmap to more effective European defence cooperation, based on deeper capability planning and mutual dependency. The Defence and Security Cooperation Treaty signed by Cameron and Sarkozy is undoubtedly a step-change from the cooperation that has gone before. The UK and France will set a new ‘gold standard’ for defence cooperation. And without discovering how, and indeed whether, the initiatives that France and



the UK embark on can work in practice, wider European defence cooperation has little hope of delivering anything.

This paper attempts to explore in some detail the motivation for the November 2010 treaty, how it might work in practice, and the impact it might have on wider European defence cooperation.

# Introduction

In November 2010, British Prime Minister David Cameron and French President Nicolas Sarkozy announced plans for unprecedented military cooperation between the United Kingdom and France, based on a new Treaty on Defence and Security Cooperation.<sup>1</sup> In the light of the global economic crisis, and coming days after the announcement of cuts to British defence spending, the agreement was immediately dubbed the '*entente frugale*'.<sup>2</sup> While defence cuts have been less severe in France, officials are apprehensive about the outlook after presidential elections in 2012.

Yet it would be wrong to see Franco-British defence cooperation as driven purely by a short-term need to balance the books. A number of the projects announced in November were under consideration long before the economic crisis. Since the 1990s, France and the UK have been working ever more closely on defence matters. The treaty should be seen in the context of three long-term trends that challenge the coherence and sustainability of long-standing French and British assumptions.

Firstly, defence budgets have not been funded to compensate for the rising cost of military capability. Over time this has led to a steady paring back of equipment and personnel numbers. Broadly flat in real terms, most European countries' defence budgets now struggle to deliver military capability to match their foreign policy aspirations.

Secondly, the relatively benign security situation in Europe leaves it all but impossible to make the political case for more defence spending. Defence, generally ranked low in issue salience polls, is often seen as an easy target for cuts. Finally, flat or lower spending combined with increasingly expensive technology undermines the viability of national, and even multinational, industries. This threatens long-standing preferences for indigenous technological and scientific capability, without which France and the UK fear that they will lose operational autonomy.

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1. 'UK and France open "new chapter" on defence cooperation', Official site of the Prime Minister's Office. See: <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/latest-news/2010/11/pm-welcomes-president-of-france-for-uk-france-summit-56505>.

2. Nick Robinson, 'The *entente frugale* - where will it all end?', *BBC News*, 2 November 2010. See: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/nickrobinson/2010/11/the\\_entente\\_fru.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/nickrobinson/2010/11/the_entente_fru.html).

These trends have, however, emerged in parallel with a long-term convergence in the interests of France and the UK. Indeed it is this convergence that underpins the unprecedented levels of mutual dependence to which they are now prepared to commit. They have pledged to pool elements of their defence industrial bases, to seek to harmonise requirements and doctrines, to buy equipment together and deploy forces together. Their agreement may pave the way towards a new form of defence cooperation – one that is less opportunistic and more planned, providing deeper interoperability and greater savings.

Yet this is not a merger of the British and French armed forces. On the contrary, the motivation, at least for now, is to retain access to a full range of capabilities to pursue independent foreign policies. They want to remain militarily credible partners of the United States, both bilaterally and through NATO. In stark contrast to the St. Malo agreement, which was motivated by a desire to improve the European Union's ability to act autonomously, the benefits to European military capability are in this case welcome, but not central. Whereas St. Malo was a new approach for a new goal, Franco-British defence cooperation is a new approach to the *status quo*, and the maintenance of national foreign and defence policies.

For this reason, the potential impact on wider European defence is not clear. Any agreement leading to the maintenance or improvement of military capabilities available to NATO and the EU is in itself advantageous. But there is no substantive policy linkage. Instead there is a pragmatic assumption that bilateralism between 'natural partners'<sup>3</sup> ought to work more effectively than a multilateral approach. Indeed, the assumption in London and Paris is that no other European states can rival the breadth and depth of the relationship that France and the UK have established.

Yet the vital interests shared by the UK and France are not so very different from those shared by most European states. With the US increasingly turning its attention to the Asia-Pacific region, European states must rationalise their increasingly fragmented and inefficient military capabilities. Not only in order to act as credible partners of the US, as their foreign

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3. As described, for example, by British Prime Minister, David Cameron. See 'Nicolas Sarkozy: Britain and France are "interdependent"', *The Telegraph*, 2 November 2010. Available online at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/industry/defence/8105584/UK-France-defence-David-Cameron-hails-new-military-cooperation-between-Britain-and-France.html>.

policies tend to dictate, but also to develop the crisis management role of the EU, particularly in the European neighbourhood.

It is therefore in the interests of Britain and France that they remain engaged leaders at the institutional and strategic levels of European defence cooperation. The impatience both countries feel, with some justification perhaps, regarding the lack of progress of the St. Malo era should not foreclose any opportunities to develop military capability through existing multilateral institutions, particularly those of the EU. Neither should it foreclose thinking about the institutional future of European security. It would be a mistake to oppose any particular method of working or institutional format on ideological grounds.

Indeed, what is striking about Franco-British defence cooperation is how successful both countries have been in discarding the ideological baggage of the past. The new pragmatism founded on developing military capabilities through close cooperation should be encouraged and emulated by partners in Europe. But there is a *quid pro quo*. If there is no credible reciprocation in response to these ambitious plans, then France and the UK can hardly be blamed for retreating into bilateral cooperation.



# 1. A strategic match

*‘(France and the United Kingdom) do not see situations arising in which the vital interests of either party could be threatened without the vital interests of the other also being threatened.’*

Franco-British Defence and Security Cooperation Treaty, 2 November 2010.<sup>4</sup>

## Ever-closer interests?

The post-war period has witnessed an accelerating convergence in the interests of France and the UK. The retreat from empire, the end of the Soviet Union and unprecedented peace and cooperation on the European continent, leave them more alike in their security situation than ever before. As members of the UN Security Council, the European Union and NATO, they have almost identical roles in the architecture of global security. Medium-sized powers, just 30km apart, they have similar-sized economies and armed forces. They share the same locus of economic and security interests. It is difficult to conceive of serious threats that would harm one rather than the other.

A shared analysis of threats is set out in the Defence and Security Cooperation Treaty; both countries see terrorism and hostile, fragile or failing states as the predominant threats to their national security. Both now operate cross-government national security councils. They both have the capability to deploy significant expeditionary forces.

The European neighbourhood remains the closest area of direct national interest to the UK and France. Both recognise the shift in power to Asia and the exposure of European economic and security interests to the fallout that would result from any major conflagration in Asia. Neither is prepared to rule out the long-term risk of major state-on-state warfare or a return to a major nuclear stand-off.

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4. ‘Treaty between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the French Republic for Defence and Security Co-operation’, London, 2 November 2010. See: <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm79/7976/7976.pdf>.

This convergence in strategic interests is mirrored by similarities in defence capabilities. The UK and France are by far the two most important defence players among European NATO countries and in the European Union, with broadly similar inventories and capabilities. In 2011, the core UK defence budget will be around £34 billion<sup>5</sup> and the French around €30 billion<sup>6</sup>. Defence spending makes up around 4-5 percent of total government spending in both countries. They account for around half of all European defence spending, and over 60 percent of research and development expenditure. The RAND Corporation has estimated that by 2015 the UK and France could account for around 65 percent of EU defence spending.<sup>7</sup>

Since the end of the Cold War, both have reformed their armed forces with an emphasis on expeditionary capabilities. Since 2001, France has reduced a conscription force of 400,000 down to a largely professional force of 250,000. The 2008 *Livre Blanc* on French defence and security policy further entrenched this shift away from the once prime consideration of territorial defence.<sup>8</sup>

Both continue to place a high premium on interoperability, accepting that most operations, and certainly large-scale operations, will be conducted on a multinational basis. Their defence ministries operate similar planning assumptions. The UK plans to be able to launch an 'enduring stabilisation operation' of one brigade of up to 6,500 personnel.<sup>9</sup> Likewise the French plan for a brigade-sized 'permanent operational alert' of up to 5,000 personnel.<sup>10</sup> For a 'one-off' major intervention both France and the UK commit to an expeditionary force of 30,000 personnel.<sup>11</sup> They share a history of deploying together on operations, most recently in Afghanistan.

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5. 'Departmental Settlements', *Comprehensive Spending Review 2010*, London, 20 October 2010, p. 57. See: [http://cdn.hm-treasury.gov.uk/sr2010\\_chapter2.pdf](http://cdn.hm-treasury.gov.uk/sr2010_chapter2.pdf).

6. Ministère de la Défense, French Defence Budget 2011, p. 17. See: <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/sga/le-sga-en-action/budget-finances-de-la-defense/budget/budget-2011>.

7. F. Stephen Larrabee and Julian Lindley-French, *Revitalising the Transatlantic Security Partnership: An Agenda for Action* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, December 2008), p. 44.

8. 'French and UK forces compared', *BBC News*, 17 June 2008. See: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7459316.stm>.

9. The Cabinet Office, *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review*, London, October 2010, p. 19. See: <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/strategic-defence-security-review.pdf>.

10. Présidence de la République, 'The French White Paper on Defence and National Security', (Paris: Odile Jacob/La documentation française, 2008), p. 11. See: [http://www.livreblancdefenseetsecurite.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/white\\_paper\\_press\\_kit.pdf](http://www.livreblancdefenseetsecurite.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/white_paper_press_kit.pdf).

11. See UK and French defence reviews, op. cit. in notes 9 and 10.

Both nations are proud of their military histories. By and large, public opinion is prepared to support the use of force for foreign policy objectives. France has tended to attach a more rigorous set of conditions to the legitimacy of military action, spelling out ‘guidelines’ for going to war, including compliance with international law.<sup>12</sup> Yet the UK’s recent *Strategic Defence and Security Review* (SDSR) now includes almost identical commitments.<sup>13</sup> This indicates, perhaps, a post-Iraq convergence of thinking, and a potential basis for future European norms of military deployment.

Both France and the UK continue to insist that they must retain certain levels of indigenous defence industrial capability to preserve freedom of action and operational advantage. Both are committed to the maintenance of a continuous at-sea nuclear deterrent. More sensitive is the UK-US intelligence-sharing relationship set out in the UK-USA Agreement,<sup>14</sup> but there are lower-key Franco-British agreements in place to share intelligence.

As Nick Witney, former Chief Executive of the European Defence Agency, puts it, ‘they are each other’s strategic match.’<sup>15</sup> This catalogue of shared interests, threats and attributes is therefore supported, not by a common foreign policy, but by an increasingly similar worldview.<sup>16</sup> It is not surprising then that they also share a set of problems and dilemmas.

## Stuck in the same boat

### *Hanging on to ‘full spectrum’?*

Flat defence budgets in real terms and the rising cost of high-tech equipment have left the aspirations of France and the UK to master a full spectrum of military capabilities increasingly untenable. The UK SDSR foresees a significant diminution in British military capability. The cuts focus on reducing Cold War-era capabilities such as main battle tanks and fast-jets, but the impact on deployable forces is striking.

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12. ‘The French White Paper on Defence and National Security’, op. cit. in note 10.

13. *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty*, op. cit. in note 9, p. 17.

14. Rodric Braithwaite, ‘End of the affair’, *Prospect*, no. 86, 20 May, 2003.

15. Author’s Interview with Nick Witney, November 2010, London.

16. ‘The United Kingdom and France share a common analysis of the organisation of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century international order’: Joint UK-France Summit Declaration, London, 27 March 2008, p. 1.



Whereas the British Strategic Defence Review of 1998 set the terms for a deployable force for a major operation at around 45,000, this has now been reduced to 30,000. The 1998 requirement for 32 major surface ships has fallen to 19.<sup>17</sup> A crude interpretation of these figures suggests the UK might have lost a third of the scale of its deployable capability since 1998.<sup>18</sup> A decline in French capabilities of similar magnitude to recent British cuts might be expected following the 2012 presidential elections.

Almost a decade ago, Tim Garden, a former British Air Marshal and defence analyst, argued that ‘the pursuit on a national basis of sophisticated and balanced capabilities, suitable for both high-intensity and peace-keeping operations, is a chimera.’<sup>19</sup> Yet both France and the UK appear to remain committed to the ideal of a full spectrum of capabilities. One senior industry figure argues that ‘if you extend the logic far enough you find that the UK does not have full spectrum capabilities. Nevertheless it’s an attitude of mind.’<sup>20</sup>

The SDSR has put off major strategic choices until an expected draw-down from Afghanistan before 2015. Some analysts believe a decision over whether the UK should prioritise maritime or expeditionary land forces will have to be taken at some point in the next few years.<sup>21</sup> France is likely to face similar dilemmas in 2012. For France and the UK with their aspirations to access a full range of capabilities, the logic of cooperation is clear.

### *Industrial base at risk*

This analysis of long-term decline in force-projection is mirrored in the capacity of the French and British defence industrial bases. In the late 1980s and 1990s, the realisation that national defence industries were no longer self-sufficient in certain core areas, particularly aerospace, led

17. UK Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Defence Review – Modern Forces for a Modern World* (London: HM Stationery Office, 1998). See: [http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/65F3D7AC-4340-4119-93A2-20825848E50E/0/sdr1998\\_complete.pdf](http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/65F3D7AC-4340-4119-93A2-20825848E50E/0/sdr1998_complete.pdf).

18. Superior technology can compensate for fewer units in capability terms. Nevertheless, ‘quantity has a quality of its own’, as Stalin is rumoured to have said.

19. Michael Alexander and Timothy Garden, ‘The arithmetic of defence policy’, *International Affairs*, vol. 77, no. 3, July 2001, pp 509-29.

20. Author’s interview with senior defence industry official, Paris, September 2010.

21. Michael Codner, ‘Defence review: what next for Britain?’ Channel 4 News, 19 October 2010. See: <http://www.channel4.com/news/defence-review-what-next-for-britain>.

to multinational European cooperation projects such as the Eurofighter fast-jet. Yet the ambitious multilateral programmes of the 1990s have suffered major drawbacks.

Different requirements from different partner nations have caused delay and major cost increases, as has the debilitating process of *juste retour*, where work-shares are distributed nationally according to the number of units ordered. Officials in France and the UK refer to the A400M aircraft, for example, as ‘a nightmare’ and ‘a disaster’. The prime contractor, EADS, has said it never wants to work in such a way again.<sup>22</sup> The UK now prefers bilateral programmes as a matter of policy, on the grounds that they are more ‘straightforward’.<sup>23</sup>

Yet without a national defence industrial base of sufficient scale, both countries fear compromising security of supply and freedom of action by becoming almost wholly reliant on the US. Given the rigorous US International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR), equipment and technology do not always flow easily across the Atlantic. This leaves those reliant on the US exposed to dependencies for Urgent Operational Requirements and potentially significant limits on autonomy. It might also undermine the development of competitive European or national alternatives, and places severe restrictions on the exportability of products manufactured in Europe under ITAR rules.

Despite some consolidation, the European market for defence is fragmented and inefficient. Although progress has been made in some elements of aerospace and particularly in complex weapons, other areas such as armoured vehicles and maritime procurement remain inefficient. As President Sarkozy noted recently, ‘Europe cannot afford the luxury of five ground-to-air missile programmes, three combat aircraft programmes, six attack submarine programmes, and twenty-odd armoured vehicle programmes’.<sup>24</sup>

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22. Bill Kincaid, *Changing the Dinosaur's Spots: The Battle to Reform UK Defence Acquisition* (London: Royal United Services Institute, 2008), p.154.

23. *Strategic Defence and Security Review*, op. cit. in note 9, pp 59-60.

24. Speech by Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the French Republic, at the International Aerospace Show, Le Bourget, 23 June 2007. See: [www.ambafrance-uk.org/president-sarkozy-s-speech-at-Le.html](http://www.ambafrance-uk.org/president-sarkozy-s-speech-at-Le.html).

### *Financial crisis and budget cuts*

The latest push for bilateral cooperation comes in the aftermath of a severe economic crisis and against a backdrop of deep spending cuts. Public sector debt in the UK has soared from around 37 percent in 2007 to 57 percent of GDP in 2010, with public sector borrowing up from 2.3 percent to 11.1 percent of GDP over the same period.<sup>25</sup> The Government is seeking to eradicate structural debt by 2015 through deep cuts to public spending.

The UK defence budget will take a cut of around 8 percent over the next four years, but given the need to address what was already a £36 billion unfunded procurement 'black hole' in its future equipment plan,<sup>26</sup> the real impact is much tougher than this. A senior French military officer believes that the defence cuts in France in future are likely to be 'unprecedented' with 'big decisions' on major programmes necessary.<sup>27</sup>

Yet defence and security matters do not poll strongly in issue saliency surveys. Indeed, a recent survey in France found that 45 percent of respondents rated defence as a priority area for cuts.<sup>28</sup> It must be said that with Government policy papers, and now the NATO Strategic Concept,<sup>29</sup> regularly conceding that European states face less of a military threat than at any time in recent history, this is hardly an irrational response from the public. Nothing suggests defence spending will diverge from its flat real terms trajectory in the medium to long-term.

The dire finances of the UK and the 'strong Treasury involvement'<sup>30</sup> in the SDSR have therefore compounded the pressure on the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to find ways to mitigate the problem of affordability. Partnership and mutual dependency with others has therefore become a core

25. UK Office for National Statistics, *Statistical Bulletin: Public Sector Finances*, October 2010, p. 2. See: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdffdir/psf1110.pdf>.

26. Michael Evans, 'D-Day for defence cuts in £36bn crisis', *The Times*, 15 December 2009.

27. Author's interview with senior French military officer, Brussels, October 2010.

28. Jean-Pierre Maulny, 'L'Union européenne et le défi de la réduction des budgets de défense', *Les Notes d'Iris*, Institut de Relations internationales et stratégiques, Paris, September 2010, p. 2.

29. 'Today, the Euro-Atlantic area is at peace and the threat of a conventional attack against NATO territory is low': NATO Strategic Concept, 'Strategic Concept For the Defence and Security of The Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation', Lisbon, December 2010. See: <http://www.nato.int/lisbon2010/strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf>.

30. *The Coalition: Our Programme for Government*, UK Cabinet Office, London, May 2010, p. 24. See: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100526084809/http://programmeforgovernment.hmg.gov.uk/files/2010/05/coalition-programme.pdf>.

thesis of the UK SDSR, which explicitly recognises that the reduction in British military capabilities will have to be offset, in particular by more effective cooperation with France.

## Suez laid to rest?

Despite this convergence of common interests and problems, the UK and France have long held very different views on the fundamental question of transatlantic relations. With its roots in the fallout from the Suez crisis, this divergence between the two key European military powers saw Britain favour a 'special relationship' with the US while France sought to create a more autonomous European foreign and defence policy.

A number of factors suggest that this historical period of divergence is coming to a close. The French return to the command structures of NATO is a key development in this respect. The 2008 *Livre Blanc* stated clearly that while France will not compromise on its strategic autonomy, the EU and NATO are 'complementary' and that there is no competition between them.<sup>31</sup> France seems now to have concluded that building European structures on anything perceived as anti-American or anti-NATO is a losing game.<sup>32</sup>

This culmination of a long-term re-alignment also relates to a French realisation that without interoperability with the US and other allies it could not play an effective role in the post-Cold War era. Sarkozy has led France in a more Atlanticist direction. The UK has on the other hand found that its ability to influence US policy 'has appeared very limited over the past decade.'<sup>33</sup> According to analyst Etienne de Durand, the 'Suez paradigm' is now effectively over.

Indeed, the lack of UK influence over the US, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan, has been noted by several British analysts.<sup>34</sup> And yet there is little sign of any diminution of the importance of the US in Westminster

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31. *Livre Blanc*, op. cit. in note 10, p. 2.

32. See for example, Dana Allin and Robin Niblett, Evidence to House of Commons Defence Committee, *The Future of NATO and European Defence*, 9<sup>th</sup> Report 2007-08 Session, 4 March 2008, p.153.

33. Etienne de Durand in 'Entente or Oblivion: Prospects and Pitfalls of Franco-British Cooperation on Defence', RUSI *Future Defence Review* series, Working Paper no. 8, September 2010.

34. See, for example, William Wallace and Christopher Phillips, 'Reassessing the Special Relationship', *International Affairs*, vol. 85, no. 2, March 2009.

and Whitehall, as memos from the Wikileaks scandal attest.<sup>35</sup> The recent SDSR continues to proclaim the US as the UK's 'pre-eminent defence and security relationship'.<sup>36</sup> As Hew Strachan notes, the relationship with the US remains 'the unspoken leitmotif in British defence policy'.<sup>37</sup>

Alongside close cooperation on intelligence, the reliability, credibility and, above all, loyalty of the UK as a military partner remains the British 'USP' in a world of competitors for influence in Washington.<sup>38</sup> Although not addressed directly in the SDSR, it remains a core assumption of British defence policy that the UK should be able to provide capability of strategic effect to NATO and US-led operations (for example, holding a territorial zone during an operation). Security commentator Michael Clarke has described this assumption as the need to meet a 'military credibility threshold' in the eyes of the Americans.<sup>39</sup>

UK involvement in the 2003 Iraq war has clearly had some impact on the validity of this assumption. As noted above, conditions for deployment are now drawn more tightly and more explicitly. The SDSR notes that 'we will be more selective in our use of the Armed Forces'.<sup>40</sup> And British opinion at all levels will in future be extremely wary of deploying troops at any suspicion of an unquestioning 'default Atlanticism'.<sup>41</sup>

Yet the impression in London, rightly or wrongly, appears to be that the Bush administration and the era of military-led 'regime change' was largely an aberration. British experience in Iraq and Afghanistan may suggest that the UK should expect less influence for its efforts, but the assumption that UK military power can, in better circumstances, deliver influence in Washington appears to be intact.<sup>42</sup>

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35. Andy Bloxham, 'WikiLeaks: Britain mocked by US over "special relationship"', *The Telegraph*, 4 December 2010.

36. *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review*, op. cit. in note 9, p. 59.

37. Hew Strachan, 'The Strategic Gap in British Defence Policy', *Survival*, vol. 51, no. 4, August/September 2009.

38. USP = 'Unique Selling Point', a marketing term.

39. Michael Clarke, 'The Overdue Defence Review: Old Questions, New Answers', *RUSI Journal*, vol. 153, no. 6, December 2008.

40. *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review*, op. cit. in note 9, p. 17.

41. See Nick Clegg, 'What next for Britain?', transcript of speech to Chatham House, London, 10 March 2010. See: [http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/16153\\_100310clegg.pdf](http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/16153_100310clegg.pdf).

42. See Michael Clarke, 'Has the Defence Review secured Britain's place in the world?', *RUSI Analysis*, October 2010. See: <http://www.rusi.org/analysis/commentary/ref:C4CBE880DC8385>.

Furthermore, de Durand notes that this argument increasingly holds sway in France also: ‘The ability to participate in US-led coalitions at a significant level has emerged as the new coin of international influence, thus validating in part Britain’s approach and leading to a reappraisal of the Gaullist roots of French strategy.’<sup>43</sup> It appears that despite the shock to the British political system caused by the Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns, it is on this assumption that the UK remains focused, and on which France is increasingly settling its policy.

Indeed, French defence ministry officials argue that Franco-British cooperation is above all motivated by a need ‘to preserve sufficient capability to be credible partners of the United States.’ This draws French and British foreign policy aspirations much more closely together; one British MoD official described the treaty as ‘a major reset’ and an ‘alignment’ of France with the UK.<sup>44</sup>

This is in part explained by President Sarkozy’s avowedly Atlanticist outlook, but it also reflects genuine French disappointment with European partners. The St. Malo era of capability development is regarded as something of a failure. A senior French defence ministry official remarks that ‘France fought hard for EU defence structures for ten years. We are now in a new era of developing capabilities. If we cannot do that collectively as Europe then we need to look at other ways.’<sup>45</sup>

Perhaps the old Europeanist-Atlanticist quarrels have at last given way to similar strategic approaches towards the US. There would be a tinge of irony in this, however. The UK cannot call on the same levels of influence it has exerted in the past, particularly as the Obama administration is increasingly looking away from Europe and towards the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>46</sup> And it needs France to retain that influence. So it is not entirely a vindication of post-Suez British foreign policy.

Indeed, the UK has been roundly criticised for a failure to think strategically about US disengagement from Europe and the decline or even demise

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43. Etienne de Durand, *op. cit.* in note 33.

44. Author’s interview with UK MoD official, November 2010.

45. Author’s interview with French Defence Ministry official, December 2010.

46. William Wallace cited at para. 84, p. 33, ‘Global Security: UK-US Relations’, House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, Sixth Report of Session 2009-2010, London, 28 March 2010.

of NATO, in part perhaps for fear of a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy.’<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, cooperation with France can serve as an insurance policy, albeit a tacit one, against US disengagement. Former British Foreign Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, observes that: ‘(France and the UK) recognise that over the next generation Europe cannot be 100% certain of Russian or American policy. Therefore if we Europeans, and in particular the two most relevant powers, do not enhance military cooperation we may live to regret that.’<sup>48</sup>

It is perhaps too soon to announce the complete demise of the ‘Suez paradigm.’ While there is a long-term realignment that is unlikely to be reversed, there are tensions within the French government over the lack of a strongly European dimension to French policy. The French defence ministry is perhaps more enthusiastic about bilateral cooperation than the Quai d’Orsay. The British establishment remains strongly Atlanticist, not least the Defence Secretary Liam Fox. In France, suspicion of Sarkozy’s own brand of Atlanticism remains strong both on the left and right.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, not all are convinced, either in Paris or London, that a more Atlanticist France will outlive the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy.

Neither has France dropped its long-term agenda for European defence. The UK remains implacably committed to NATO for the ‘heavy-lifting’ on European defence. A French defence ministry official says that ‘we believe there will actually be a need for more Europe in the future.’<sup>50</sup> But there is as yet no compelling new vision of what that might mean. France is perhaps content to see foundations laid through bilateral cooperation, for now at least.

## The bilateral rescue of national defence policy?

One senior industry figure close to the process describes the ethic driving Franco-British cooperation as ‘shared capabilities in support of sovereignty.’<sup>51</sup> To paraphrase the economic historian Alan Milward,<sup>52</sup> France and the UK are perhaps embarked on a bilateral rescue of their own

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47. Hew Strachan, *op. cit.* in note 37.

48. Author’s interview with Sir Malcolm Rifkind, London, November 2010.

49. Henry Samuel, ‘Sarkozy announces French return to NATO after 43 years’, *The Telegraph*, 11 March 2009.

50. Author’s interview with French Defence Ministry official, December 2010.

51. Interview with senior defence industry official, Paris 2010.

52. Alan Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State* (London: Routledge, 1992).

national defence policies. The paradox is that as they cooperate to continue to be themselves, they end up looking even more like each other.

For now, Franco-British defence cooperation is driven primarily by an aspiration in both countries to retain access to a full spectrum of military capabilities, sufficient to contribute strategic effect and retain credibility in the eyes of the United States, and therefore NATO. A secondary motive is to sustain their national defence capabilities for core sovereign obligations. A third is to contribute to bilateral and European missions, as well as to sustain general European military capabilities for an uncertain future.

Franco-British cooperation is underpinned by an increasingly common world view. It is not, however, built on a common foreign policy or a coherent vision of European defence.<sup>53</sup> Defence planning derives not just from the men and materiel available, but also from evolving foreign policy postures and geo-political assumptions. There remain significant differences of opinion and approach between the two countries, for example over arms sales to Russia and China, over prospects for Turkey's membership of the EU and over energy policy for Europe. The UK SDSR is largely silent on British geo-political priorities following the expected withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2015. The extent to which the UK and France can reconcile differing historical and geographical interests and priorities in Africa is also unclear.

These kinds of policy positions and assumptions, by nature dynamic and evolving, will inevitably put constraints on deeper and therefore more effective defence cooperation. Yet, that should not detract from the importance of the agreement. As Nick Witney puts it, 'the real significance lies in the implicit recognition by both parties that their individual pretensions to the status of global power will remain sustainable only if they begin pooling their defence efforts and resources.'<sup>54</sup>

In this sense, the decision to move to a deeper level of cooperation is a momentous one. The challenge is that cooperation will need to work on two levels – the higher level of political and foreign policy decision-making – and the more technical, but still challenging, level of defence cooperation.

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53. Although a common approach to many issues was indeed set out in the 2008 Franco-British Summit Communiqué.

54. Nick Witney, 'A Strategic Rubicon', European Council on Foreign Relations, 1 November 2010. See: [http://ecfr.eu/content/entry/commentary\\_a\\_strategic\\_rubicon](http://ecfr.eu/content/entry/commentary_a_strategic_rubicon).





## 2. Making it work

### A step-change in cooperation?

Despite France's absence from the NATO command structure, cooperation between the two countries has been growing steadily since the end of the Cold War. Following the first Gulf War and subsequent operations in the Balkans, it was realised that there was a need for greater interoperability between the French and British air forces. The Franco-British European Air Group was created in 1994 to meet this demand. It has since expanded to include Germany, Italy and Spain. A number of technical arrangements on air support and training cooperation have also been signed.

Parallel cooperation exists in the land and maritime domains. A Letter of Intent on naval cooperation was signed in 1996, covering 20 working groups and a wide range of areas for cooperation, including operational planning, doctrine and training. In 1997 a further Letter of Intent was signed on cooperation between the British and French armies, including regular meetings on doctrinal issues and concepts. The Franco-British Joint Commission on Peacekeeping was established in May 1996 'to harmonise procedures and doctrine for peacekeeping'.<sup>55</sup>

On the defence-industrial side a High-Level Working Group was set up in 2006 to develop closer cooperation in armaments programmes. In 2008, France and the UK agreed to a common approach to service support for the A400M military carrier aircraft. It is worth noting that much of this cooperation was pioneered under a Conservative government in the UK; Franco-British defence cooperation has lacked the controversy associated with EU defence cooperation. This dichotomy was evident once again following the recent announcements, perhaps to the surprise of some officials and observers.<sup>56</sup>

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55. Ministry of Defence, 'UK-French Bilateral Defence Cooperation: Existing Areas of Cooperation', 9 February 2001. See: [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.mod.uk/issues/cooperation/uk\\_french.htm](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.mod.uk/issues/cooperation/uk_french.htm).

56. For example, Franco-British cooperation was welcomed warmly by arch-euro-sceptic Conservative Bill Cash. 'UK/France Defence Treaty – New Chapter, New Book!', 2 November, 2010. See: <http://europeanjournal.typepad.com/>

While there is clearly some continuity, one senior British MoD official describes the process as ‘not a continuum, but if there is a step change it is in political approach.’<sup>57</sup> Moreover, discussions with officials in London and Paris suggest that while thinking on capability planning (particularly on doctrine), has been a component of cooperation in the past, it is now regarded as ‘fundamental’ to the push for deeper cooperation.

## The Defence and Security Cooperation Treaty

The Treaty on Defence and Security Cooperation marks a quite radical break with previous cooperation. Firstly, it takes a systematic approach to cooperation in its entirety, providing ‘an over-arching framework for defence and security cooperation.’<sup>58</sup> Secondly, it sets out the functional principles for further cooperation, e.g. harmonisation of requirements, doctrine, pooling and sharing resources. Thirdly, it provides for legally-binding mutual access to French and British defence industries. Finally, it sets out the principles for the deployment of a joint 10,000 strong Franco-British brigade. A number of projects are set out separately in a Letter of Intent. A second treaty sets out cooperation on joint testing and safety regimes for nuclear weapons.

The treaty is comprehensive, ambitious and open-ended, reflecting a ‘no taboos’ approach agreed by Sarkozy and Cameron. The restrictions on its application are few but fundamental. First, the parties agree that ‘control of their armed forces, the decision to employ them and the use of force shall always remain a matter of national sovereignty.’ Second, the treaty does not affect ‘rights and obligations of each Party under other defence and security agreements.’<sup>59</sup>

The scope of the treaty covers almost every conceivable area of cooperation, including ‘joint work on military doctrine’, ‘sharing and pooling materials, equipment and services’, ‘pooling forces and capabilities for military operations’, ‘industrial and armament cooperation’, ‘exchange

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57. Interview with UK MoD official, September 2010.

58. Explanatory Memorandum on the UK-France Defence and Security Co-operation Treaty, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 8 December 2010. See: <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/publications-and-documents/treaty-command-papers-ems/explanatory-memoranda/explanatory-memoranda-2010/120FranceDefenceSec>.

59. ‘Treaty between the UK and the French Republic for Defence and Security Co-operation’, op. cit. in note 4.

of information relating to political, policy, planning and decision-making processes' and 'exchange of classified data and information.'

### *National sovereignty and autonomy*

The only explicit mention of sovereignty in the treaty is in relation to the decision to deploy forces. Of course, both sides may claim national sovereignty as a reason for not entering into any particular field of cooperation. But the implicit assumption, indeed the critical assumption of the treaty, is that while the concept of national sovereignty is the final arbiter on a decision to cooperate, it need not necessarily hinder any particular type of cooperation.

Thus the open-ended nature of the treaty suggests that a pragmatic, case-by-case approach will be taken on the question of national sovereignty and autonomy of action. The deployment of the joint brigade, should it happen, would represent a relatively clear-cut case. But most decisions about preserving acceptable levels of autonomy will be far more nuanced, often representing a calculated trade-off against greater efficiency.

It has been noted that politically it may be easier to begin with cooperation on support equipment, and 'low density-high demand' capabilities, such as force multipliers like air-air refuelling, strategic airlift and intelligence and reconnaissance, rather than cooperation at the war-fighting end.<sup>60</sup> Some projects, such as that on A400M support and possible collaboration over air-tankers, follow this course. Yet France and the UK have chosen not to follow this path exclusively.

The option to rely on each other, for limited periods, for carrier-strike capability is a case in point. For some in the UK, this represents an unacceptable erosion of autonomy. It is argued that continuous availability of carrier-strike capability is, for example, necessary for the defence of the Falkland Islands.<sup>61</sup> Power projection using aircraft carriers throws up potential political difficulties. They can be deployed at sensitive moments in crises to exert pressure on particular states, but such a tactic would require close political coordination to be effective.

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60. Michael Alexander and Timothy Garden, *op. cit.* in note 19, pp. 509-29.

61. James Lyons, 'Navy chiefs warn scrapping aircraft carriers will leave the Falkland Islands wide open to invasion', *The Daily Mirror*, 11 November 2010. See: <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/top-stories/2010/11/11/navy-chiefs-warn-scrapping-aircraft-carriers-will-leave-the-falkland-islands-wide-open-to-invasion-115875-22708102/>

The joint force would also require political agreement before use. Some commentators have argued that Britain and France would be better off avoiding the need for political arrangements to ‘give a green light’ for use of a certain capability.<sup>62</sup> There is a risk that a divergence of views or a protracted decision-making process on, for example, a decision to deploy an aircraft carrier could undermine and sour the wider bilateral defence relationship.

Yet the price of sustaining the full autonomy of this capability, by having one carrier available at all times, is very high. The UK SDSR has not resolved on the precise future for the UK’s second carrier. However, even discounting the £2.5 billion acquisition cost, the acquisition and lifetime running costs of a second carrier and air wing are likely to be in excess of £8 billion,<sup>63</sup> even more including the requirement for escort ships. Technical modifications necessary for cooperation are small by comparison. Ultimately, while there could well be political difficulties to resolve, it is surely preferable to have the option than to have no carrier available at all.

### *Defence industrial base - pooling it, not losing it*

Perhaps the most radical element of the treaty is its provision on defence industrial and armaments cooperation: according to officials this sensitive area of cooperation was a key incentive for putting the agreement in treaty form. Article 8 (2) of the treaty states that ‘each Party undertakes not to hinder legitimate access to its markets and to its Government contracts in the field of defence and security.’<sup>64</sup> It is therefore likely that in all but the most sensitive areas, (such as cryptology and aspects of UK-US nuclear weapons cooperation), the UK and France could create dependencies in order to sustain certain sovereign capabilities and technologies.

It is a case of ‘pool it or lose it’. Cooperation can provide an accretion, rather than a diminution, of national sovereignty. Yet the definition of what constitutes a sovereign capability or technology is controversial. The

62. Etienne de Durand, *op. cit.* in note 33.

63. Assuming acquisition and in-service running costs of 40 Joint-Strike Fighter aircraft and one aircraft carrier. Based on figures from *In the Firing Line*, Greenpeace, 17 September, 2009, and Graham Warwick and Amy Butler, ‘Pentagon ramps up pressure on F-35 price’, *Aviation Week*, 7 December 2010.

64. ‘Treaty between the UK and the French Republic for Defence and Security Co-operation’, *op. cit.* in note 4.

recent UK Green Paper on defence and security equipment and technology assumes a 'default position' of acquisition on the open market, which also applies to the purchase of 'off the shelf' solutions.<sup>65</sup>

And yet it concedes that the UK must retain 'freedom of action' in operations, which assumes retaining indigenous British (or Franco-British) industry. There is also the question of how much weight should be attached to the apparent economic benefits of indigenous defence industry. There is unlikely to be a neat solution to this dilemma, but bilateral cooperation provides a means to mitigate the erosion of the defence industrial base, and the apparent threat to operational autonomy.

The commitment announced at the November 2010 summit to begin a joint programme on an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV), and in the longer term potentially an Unmanned Combat Air Vehicle (UCAV) should lead to a major new aerospace programme. In the absence of a European fighter programme beyond the Eurofighter Typhoon, this may be the only way to sustain the high-tech aerospace industrial base in France and the UK beyond the next decade.<sup>66</sup> Likewise cooperation on nuclear submarine technology helps ensure that specific technologies are sustainable for both countries.

Military telecommunications satellites have been identified as a potential area for Franco-British cooperation.<sup>67</sup> Cooperation on military satellites, while not moving into the most sensitive areas of intelligence collaboration does move into the space domain, an area in which the UK has previously tended to rely greatly on the US. The nuclear weapons cooperation agreed by France and the UK, and set out in a separate treaty,<sup>68</sup> is significant in that it opens up deeper cooperation in a very sensitive field. The move to share facilities for testing and safety of nuclear weapons is essentially rationalisation of one part of an extremely expensive capability.

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65. Ministry of Defence, *Equipment, Support, and Technology for UK Defence and Security: A Consultation Paper*, Cm 7989, London, December 2010.

66. Matt Bassford et al, 'Sustaining Key Skills in the United Kingdom's Military Aircraft Industry', *RAND Europe Research Brief*, 2010. See: [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_briefs/RB9545.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9545.html).

67. Peter B. de Selding, 'Britain and France revisit joint Milsatcom Program', *Space News*, 2 November 2010. See: <http://www.spacenews.com/civil/101102-britain-france-joint-milsatcom.html>.

68. The Treaty works 'in accordance with the objectives' of the Defence and Security Treaty. 'Treaty between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the French Republic relating to Joint Radiographic/Hydrodynamics Facilities', London, 2 November 2010, p.3.

Thus far, the UK and France have not moved towards cooperation at the operational level of nuclear weapons patrols. Shared patrols would likely offer significant savings by reducing the number of submarines necessary, but the sensitive nature of nuclear weapons would leave the terms of such an arrangement very difficult to agree. A form of deterrence different from the current continuous at-sea deterrence arrangements might provide sufficient political reassurance of autonomy, while still providing significant savings. As yet, however, there are no proposals to square this particular circle.

### **From opportunistic to planned cooperation?**

British Prime Minister David Cameron remarked at the November 2010 Franco-British summit that ‘the only times British forces have been deployed alone in the last 30 years was in Sierra Leone and in the Falklands.’<sup>69</sup> In the vast majority of cases, the UK and France will deploy as part of multinational operations, and should therefore cooperate more deeply.

The logic is sound. The problem is that both the bureaucracies that support military capabilities and operations, and the political decision-making to commit to military action, remain resolutely national in structure. In part this reflects the unique national sensitivities of defence and security policy, but it is also due to the legacy of Cold War planning and an era when military capability was largely indigenous.

Like most states, the UK and France plan and develop military capability on an essentially national basis, with reference to NATO and EU planning requirements. Although multinational collaboration has delivered major equipment programmes for some time, there has been only sporadic collaboration on the support, training and infrastructure that are necessary to generate particular capabilities. Different states may have the same equipment, but if they have different doctrine, requirements, safety regimes, training and so on, they will not necessarily have the same capability or interoperability.

A number of the measures announced in the treaty and the Letter of Intent contain aspects of what might be called an ‘opportunistic’ approach,

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69. ‘UK-France Summit Press Conference’, transcript of press conference given by David Cameron and Nicolas Sarkozy in London following the UK-France Summit on 2 November 2010. See: <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/speeches-and-transcripts/2010/11/uk-france-summit-press-conference-56551>.

driven by cost-savings and mitigating risk to budgets. Yet the treaty also holds out the longer-term promise of what might be termed ‘planned capability cooperation’, based on a common capability requirement, joint acquisition, joint support, training and so on. It is the latter form of cooperation that has the potential to bring about major returns in both interoperability and cost savings.

### *Opportunistic cooperation*

Cooperation over capabilities in the past has tended to follow the happy coincidence of need or timing, or the path of least resistance, i.e., a requirement for defence of a common coastline, neighbouring airspace, language, or similar equipment that can be pooled. Such cooperation is often bottom-up, driven by the military rather than by any top-down political strategy. It is ‘opportunistic’ in that it has not been systematically planned from the earliest stages of conceptual planning and capability development.

In the case of the plans for cooperation over aircraft carrier groups, upfront costs are necessary to fund modifications, which will then ensure longer-term savings. Air capabilities have particularly expensive support, training and infrastructure costs. Pooling, particularly of air transport capabilities, can offer big cost savings and opportunities to enhance interoperability.

It therefore makes sense to work together on support and training for the A400M aircraft. As the UK and France will both acquire A400M, there is an opportunity to harmonise training, support and doctrine. Given that they are also working towards a joint deployable brigade there could be further cost-savings and interoperability in terms of support for expeditionary forces.

Potential cooperation on air-tanker capability is one instance of opportunism, again based on the happy coincidence of requirement and timing. As France is looking to acquire new air-tanking assets it makes eminent sense for both the UK and France to look at the possibility of sharing these assets in some way. There may also be opportunities to broaden such a capability out to other European states.



### *Planned capability cooperation*

Military capability is about more than equipment, it includes all the inputs that go into producing a military effect – readiness, training, doctrine and so on. Officials in the UK and France have begun to look at a more structured alignment of the capability planning process. This requires much greater planning; a British defence official noted that talks between French and British counterparts have revealed that ‘one of the things we’ve identified is that we do not start talking to each other earlier enough.’<sup>70</sup>

The treaty sets the framework for the UK and France to cooperate on military capability in a systematic and comprehensive fashion. This would mean identifying the need for a capability, agreeing requirements, setting about joint acquisition and then cooperating on support, training and even operations. Such a process could offer substantial opportunities for rationalisation, economies of scale and interoperability.

A critical factor is the treaty’s provisions on mutual access to each other’s defence industrial base, and the desire to create joint programmes. This means that, combined with the points above, in future the entire capability planning process *could*, if desired, be undertaken together in a systematic and relatively stable political and financial setting.

There is no obligation on the UK and France to cooperate on capability development. There is however a treaty obligation to seek views and share information from the earliest stages. It may be that in certain instances it remains preferable to cooperate at different stages in the capability development process. For example, the collaborative work on nuclear submarine design may remain too sensitive to go beyond a certain stage.

Whether cooperation is of an opportunistic or planned nature, officials view the issue of doctrine as ‘fundamental.’ Doctrine is an essential component in the development of military capability. Where the UK and France operate according to different doctrines, even seemingly low-level issues can have far-reaching consequences both for cost and interoperability.

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70. Author’s interview with UK MoD official, September 2010.

For example, one British official has described how the set-up of an engine used in some French equipment was incompatible with the maintenance and repair doctrine of the British Army.<sup>71</sup> Incompatible doctrine became a major barrier against what may have been a more economical, more interoperable approach to capability. A UK MOD official describes how interlinked these elements of capability are, from doctrine through to equipment requirements:

‘We (France and the UK) need to get closer on doctrine – what we do and why we do it. We want to buy the same equipment yet we use it differently. Getting the services together to talk about doctrine is a key point. Then we can build on that through training together, exercising together and joint maintenance and so on.’<sup>72</sup>

Given how deep-rooted certain doctrinal practices may be, harmonisation will not be an easy process; it will take time, and may not be appropriate in every circumstance. While political support may be evident for removing such a potential blockage, the technical work may be substantial and thus delay or hinder deeper cooperation. France and the UK have now, however, formalised the process whereby the heads of doctrine from both countries will meet on a regular, structured basis.

### *Deployment of forces – training ground for cooperation*

The treaty foresees the creation of a joint 10,000 strong Franco-British expeditionary force. It will be made up of two brigade-sized forces of around 5,000, which is similar in scale to their respective planning assumptions for enduring operations. The objective of the brigade is not only to function, potentially, as an operational unit, but also as a means of driving greater interoperability.

As the UK’s General Jack Deverell has noted, expeditionary operations have the challenge of ‘bringing disparate force elements together [which] requires some sort of unity of concept, of training and of doctrine.’<sup>73</sup> The deployable expeditionary force, with its systematic training over coming years, will provide a testing ground for joint doctrine and improved interoperability.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid.

73. General Jack Deverell, Evidence to House of Commons Defence Committee, op. cit. in note 32, p. 165.

Operational experience in Afghanistan is already helping to develop trust between respective UK and French militaries and defence ministries. According to a senior British defence official, operating together in Afghanistan has had a big impact, ‘There has been a step-change in the attitude of the military here. The French were not in Iraq, but had we operated together in Iraq we would have been another 2-3 years on in terms of familiarity and concrete cooperation.’<sup>74</sup>

There are potentially very significant savings to be gained through logistics and support functions to operations. Expeditionary operations are very expensive to sustain. It ought to be possible to develop shared approaches to logistics, deployed Headquarters, equipment, bases and so on. Again, this will rely on developing shared doctrine, and the training for the joint force should help develop common approaches.

## Keeping up momentum

Officials in London and Paris express great satisfaction, even surprise, at the high levels of political will behind Franco-British cooperation. Yet despite the undoubted potential of the treaty, there is also caution. Given the failures of past capability initiatives, the stakes are high. An official from the French defence ministry notes that ‘if bilateral cooperation does not work, there is no fallback option.’<sup>75</sup>

Officials in Paris and London recognise that cooperation will need to be self-sustaining over a longer period if the cooperation is to realise its full potential. In order to sustain the momentum necessary to deliver effective cooperation, Article 4 of the treaty creates a Senior Level Group (SLG) tasked with the strategic direction, management and oversight of the cooperation initiatives that follow from the treaty. The SLG must find a way to combine two different national bureaucratic cultures and maintain pressure for results.

It faces two key barriers. The first relates to national priorities and bureaucratic capacity. It has been noticed in the French Ministry of Defence that the timing is ‘not perfect for the UK.’ Indeed, the British MoD is emerg-

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74. Interview with UK MoD official, London, September 2010.

75. Interview with French official at the Ministère de la Défense, Paris, December 2010.

ing from a major defence review with the complex implementation of its conclusions still to come.<sup>76</sup> The same kind of disquiet may be encountered in the French MoD, which is also likely to face difficult cuts in defence as well as a revision of its 2008 *Livre Blanc*. Afghanistan remains the pressing priority in both countries.

It has been noted that the St. Malo agenda failed in part because it was overwhelmed by the impact of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Nick Witney argues that the UK MoD ‘has not had the time, the money or the mental energy to think or consider what it might do on the European defence front.’<sup>77</sup> Depending on outcomes in Afghanistan, there may be a more benign climate for cooperation this time. But the risk is that national priorities will crowd out the political and administrative will to make cooperation work.

One senior British military figure notes that there may also be a tension between establishing close defence cooperation with others, and retaining the ability to respond rapidly to changes in enemy tactics. ‘When the enemy shows innovation in the field, you do not want any obstacles [such as cooperation] in place that might slow your response.’<sup>78</sup> This could apply to Afghanistan, but potentially other situations that may arise, making the alignment of doctrine more difficult.

Secondly, aside from the challenges of the immediate environment, there is the risk of bureaucratic inertia. Ministries of Defence in both London and Paris have highly effective ‘immune systems’, notorious for rejecting new ideas. It can be challenging enough to embed change within the confines of a single department, never mind across different departments in two different countries.

It is only natural that such a process will meet resistance from those who will tend to protect their functions and be cautious of different ways of working. The problem is perhaps encapsulated in Nick Witney’s observation that ‘the detailed and technical stuff is in the hands of people who don’t want to change. They don’t want to cooperate with each other and

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76. ‘Armed forces face further £1bn in cuts’, *The Guardian*, 10 January 2011. See: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/jan/10/armed-forces-face-1bn-cuts>.

77. Author’s interview with Nick Witney, London, November 2010.

78. Conversation with author, Paris, October 2010.

don't want to change the way they have been doing it for a thousand years.'<sup>79</sup>

Officials give mixed impressions of the levels of trust between the two militaries. While good levels of trust exist between the British and French Ministries of Defence at the highest levels and in certain military relationships, there is not yet a pervasive, close-working culture between the two. One official in the UK Ministry of Defence believes that this will change over time: 'Everyone here has a mate in Washington, we need to move to a situation where everyone here also has a mate in Paris.'<sup>80</sup>

The Senior Level Group will therefore need to exert considerable clout and retain access to sufficient resources to function as an effective secretariat for the process. It will be bolstered by the high-level political capital invested by Prime Minister Cameron and President Sarkozy, whose national security advisers will represent them. This arrangement should guard against any negative bureaucratic capture of the process, but the inter-departmental relationships will need to be managed effectively so that work is both well-resourced and driven along at a decent pace.

## **A quiet revolution?**

The UK and France will need to decide over the coming years how far they will trade autonomy against cost-savings. This, as defence officials say, is for the politicians to decide. Over time, it may be that the UK and France come to rely on each other for access to a wide range of capabilities, leaving little more than the appearance of significant autonomous capability.

The process will have its own dynamic. It is too soon to tell what impact, if any, closer defence cooperation will have on the foreign policies of France and the UK. It is plausible that Franco-British capability could come to be far more significant, taken together, than anything that could be offered by each state alone. This is not necessarily the intention, but it might have political ramifications if, for example, a Franco-British contribution were offered to a US-led operation. On the other hand, unforeseen foreign poli-

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79. Author's interview with Nick Witney, London, December 2010.

80. Author's interview with UK MoD official, London, September 2010.

cy divergence could undermine cooperation, which will be hyper-sensitive to issues of trust. Ultimately, the treaty is no more than a framework. It is limited only by its parties' own perception of national sovereignty, and acceptable levels of autonomy.

One scenario is that barriers to deeper cooperation are simply insurmountable and that the UK and France continue to engage in piecemeal, opportunistic cooperation. However, the pressures that drive cooperation are unlikely to cease, and if bureaucratic and industrial obstacles can be overcome, there is a clear path to substantial cost savings and interoperability gains.

In the longer term, the challenge of maintaining full spectrum capabilities may be too much to bear, even after amelioration through deeper cooperation. Industrial cooperation between the two countries may not create sufficient scale to keep critical defence industries available to both at an acceptable price to the taxpayer. Wider European cooperation offers greater scale, and in theory, more opportunity for savings and interoperability. Yet the considerable challenges of Franco-British cooperation can seem small by comparison with pan-European cooperation.



## 3. A new engine for European defence?

### The European response

EU Defence Ministers adopted conclusions in early December 2010 welcoming Franco-British defence cooperation, saying that it ‘should help create a dynamic for stimulating further opportunities for cooperation between the Member States.’<sup>81</sup> Other European states recognise that defence budget cuts provide an opportunity for more rational coordination and cooperation.

They are also increasingly concerned about further disengagement of the US from Europe. Poland, Finland and Sweden increasingly see CSDP as a potential hedge against this possibility,<sup>82</sup> with some seeking the ‘belt and braces’ guarantee of both NATO and a strong EU defence policy. Others, such as Belgium, Italy and to some extent Spain and Germany, continue to take their traditional line that EU defence cooperation is in itself a positive contribution to European integration. Yet there is also a hint of unease in the rhetorically warm welcome from Britain and France’s partners.

In France and the UK, in particular, there is a feeling that the gap between rhetoric and commitment on European defence remains too wide. This has fostered a certain cynicism among French and British officials (and some politicians) about the possibilities for genuine progress on European military capabilities. Within the UK’s governing coalition, there are those on the Conservative right, including Defence Secretary Liam Fox, who are opposed to further EU-led defence cooperation on ideological grounds. The Conservatives, even in coalition with the avowedly pro-European Liberal Democrats, would never have sanctioned ‘St. Malo II’.

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81. Council Conclusions on Military Capability Development, 3055th Foreign Affairs (Defence) Council meeting, Brussels, 9 December 2010. See: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/118347.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/118347.pdf).

82. ‘Finns urge EU to focus on own defence’, *Financial Times*, 14 November 2010.



Others in the UK are convinced of the need for greater rationalisation of European defence, and pragmatic about EU involvement, but are sceptical that real progress is possible on a multilateral basis. Indeed, the emphasis on bilateral cooperation is in large part a result of disillusionment with the multilateral approach to European defence cooperation. The malaise affecting European attempts to improve military capabilities is driven by a number of factors. As explored above, the credibility of multilateral industrial cooperation is very low compared with the period leading up to St. Malo.

Despite the rhetoric of European institutions that the EU is a global player, defence spending is falling, while military transformation is proving insufficient to fill critical capability gaps. The limited capacity of smaller states' defence ministries can also be a hindrance to cooperation with bigger players. While several CSDP missions have been quite successful in their own right, in the absence of clearly defined European interests and strategic goals, it is more difficult to justify their worth to Member States.

The position of Germany is critical to any possible shift from bilateral to multilateral reinvigoration of European defence policy. It is Europe's largest economy with a considerable defence industry and a vast manufacturing base. Yet it remains culturally predisposed against putting forces into the kinds of combat situations that the UK and France routinely face. Germany has a declining defence budget and takes a different approach to defence exports from France and the UK. Yet there are perhaps signs that Germany is slowly shifting towards strategic convergence with others, albeit at a far slower pace than France and the UK. Germany is undergoing an unprecedented post-War military transformation, moving away from a conscript force and towards a professional army geared to expeditionary operations. This is bound to have an impact on the ethos of the German armed forces, on its planning and its requirements. Secondly, German Defence Minister Karl Theodor zu Guttenberg has placed himself at the forefront of attempts to reinvigorate European defence cooperation through pooling and sharing capabilities.

## **A Franco-British gold standard?**

Franco-British defence cooperation is not intended as a re-launch or reinvigoration of the St. Malo agenda. As such, the process leaves a big ques-

tion mark over the institutions and approaches developed since St. Malo. It can, however, act in two ways to reinvigorate European defence cooperation. Firstly by acting as a kind of gold standard for cooperation. Secondly, as a pole of attraction for others to join, representing perhaps the beginnings of what might eventually move from bilateral to 'European' planned capability cooperation.

The innovative nature of Franco-British defence cooperation ought to provide a testing ground and a template for deeper defence cooperation between others. Indeed, Sweden and Germany put forward a 'food for thought' paper on ideas for pooling and sharing capabilities at the December 2010 EU Defence Ministers meeting. It was proposed that a 'Wise Pen Team' could support Member States in 'voluntary efforts to implement pooling and sharing.'<sup>83</sup>

The so-called 'Weimar Triangle' group of states, France, Poland and Germany, have also called for a reinvigoration of European defence cooperation led by Catherine Ashton, the EU High Representative. Suggestions include a permanent civil-military headquarters for planning, as well as common funding for battle-groups and pooling research and development funds.

The Swedish-German 'Ghent Initiative', shares the pragmatic focus on capability development that has driven Franco-British cooperation. The objective of increased cooperation should be 'to spend resources within Europe more efficiently and to maintain a broad array of military capabilities to ensure national political ambitions as well as Europe's ability to act credibly in crises.'<sup>84</sup>

There is, predictably, some enthusiasm in London and Paris for the idea of the UK and France as exemplars for defence cooperation, with *ad hoc* groupings of states forging ahead with their own cooperation arrangements. This reflects the current British preference for working bilaterally. Defence Secretary Liam Fox, for example, recently addressed his Nordic counterparts, calling for cooperation in areas such as cyber and energy security, joint support to supply lines in Afghanistan and building on

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83. Council Conclusions on Military Capability Development, *op. cit.* in note 81.

84. *Ibid.*

interoperability through the Nordic and UK-Sweden battle-groups. The Weimar Triangle represents another potential grouping.

The work that the UK and France will embark on, particularly on the alignment of doctrine, could provide valuable lessons and frameworks for other states. Sharing lessons learned about other areas of cooperation, including the political oversight mechanisms that will be put in place, could be helpful. The UK and France are likely to discover a certain amount of useful best practice through closer cooperation, and as such they will become the 'gold standard' for the theory and practice of deeper defence cooperation.

There may be a limit, however, to the extent to which France and the UK can provide a template for others. Their natural partnership has enabled them to consider planned capability cooperation, as well as mutual dependence in defence industry and technology. Without these similarities, other states may have a different approach to cooperation. This may be of the more opportunistic kind, certainly in the short-term as they try to mitigate the impact of defence budget cuts. It seems likely that if there is to be any immediate cooperation between other clusters of states it will follow the opportunistic path, finding savings and preserving capabilities by cooperating with existing equipment, for example greater pooling of air assets like airlift and fighter jets.

If the Ghent initiative is to make serious progress, it needs to demonstrate purpose by presenting some concrete proposals, either in clusters of regional cooperation, or eventually through linking up with Franco-British cooperation.

### *A new pole of attraction?*

It is important to make a distinction between acquisition based on multilateral industrial collaboration (eg A400M) and what is termed loosely 'off the shelf' acquisition. The example of the procurement by a number of NATO states of the US airborne warning and control system (AWACS) was effective, in part, because it was 'off the shelf' and did not become bogged down in industrial wrangling over work-shares and differing requirements. The objection to multilateral cooperation in the UK and France is based largely on this criticism. In future, if France and the UK

can agree joint projects that avoid these problems they may enjoy the success that has been enjoyed by the NATO AWACS initiative.

It may also be possible to extend cooperation in some of the areas already identified by France and the UK.<sup>85</sup> There ought, for example, to be some scope for further expanding joint support for the new A400M fleet, and there may be an impact on the wider European Carrier Group initiative following the Franco-British decision to make carriers interoperable. The potential cooperation in air tanker capabilities could be extended to others and developed into a shared European NATO asset. Likewise, while not addressed in current plans, following the decommissioning of the UK's Nimrod maritime reconnaissance capability, there may be scope for building a shared capability for Europe.

The current critique of multilateral industrial cooperation should not unnecessarily hinder the very strong potential for European bulk purchasing of 'off the shelf' equipment. That said, the controversial area remains industrial cooperation on the development of major new platforms. The key Franco-British proposal is to work together on a new generation of Unmanned Aerial Vehicle, and potentially a combat UAV in the longer-term. It is not yet clear whether this project could be widened to include others. If Franco-British industrial cooperation were to become completely exclusive, it could have a chilling impact on the defence industries in other countries, leading them to give up on European solutions completely.

Yet officials in the UK MoD are sceptical that multilateral cooperation can continue to drive European industry, with some observing that European states are already less willing to 'pay a premium' for indigenous European capability. The scepticism is understandable. But there is a danger that it potentially closes down more effective methods of multilateral cooperation. At heart it is not the number of partners that causes programmes to become mired in cost and time over-runs. It is that the processes of *juste retour* and wildly differing requirements increase risk of failure as the number of partners grows. European states should continue to consider whether agreements can be made to mitigate these perennial problems before entirely ruling out multilateral cooperation.

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85. Sophie C. Brune et al, 'Restructuring Europe's Armed Forces in Times of Austerity', Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), *Comments* no. 28, November 2010.

In the longer term, the Franco-British commitment to share information at the earliest stages of planning could lead to harmonisation of forward acquisition plans and requirements. France and the UK may in time develop shared capability packages, covering not just equipment but doctrine, infrastructure and training. This kind of planned capability cooperation might be extended beyond France and the UK, who would underpin wider cooperation as a kind of 'gold standard'.

The 10,000-strong deployable force may also prove capable of some pragmatic extension. Over time, other states might be invited to joint training in order to harmonise their own doctrine, where appropriate, with France and the UK. This might provide an incentive for further harmonisation of requirements.

## What future for multilateral cooperation?

Assuming that there is a desire on the part of the UK and France to share information and/or expand cooperation to other states, it raises the question as to whether there is any role at all for the EU and NATO institutions. Indeed, Liam Fox has argued that Franco-British cooperation will 'prove' that such initiatives can be carried out effectively on a 'state-state' basis.<sup>86</sup>

Yet there is a real question mark over the capacity of the UK and French MoDs to handle a string of bilateral relationships. The relatively small team of officials in the UK and French MoDs and National Security Councils have a limited amount of time and energy to devote to bilateral cooperation with other European states. It is unclear whether there is any appetite or the bureaucratic capacity to take on many more bilateral strands, and they are unlikely to be underpinned by the type of structured cooperation foreseen by the Franco-British treaty.

### *The EDA and NATO*

Both NATO and the European Defence Agency (EDA) have been criticised for their lack of success in encouraging greater collaboration. In the UK the EDA is treated by British officials with scepticism, who describe it as a 'talking shop' and something of a failure at fostering greater col-

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86. Liam Fox, 'A closer alliance with France will be good for Britain', *The Telegraph*, 30 October 2010.

laboration. France, while supportive of the EDA, has not put forward any specific proposals to reinvigorate the organisation. As intergovernmental bodies, they can only be as dynamic as their membership.

There still remains a concern and preoccupation in the UK that the EDA constitutes an unnecessary duplication of activities that can be handled by NATO through its Allied Command Transformation. Yet those with direct experience of the two are more sanguine.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, many are sceptical of joint EU-NATO bodies such as the EU-NATO Capability Group, which has a poor reputation among diplomats.<sup>88</sup>

Both institutions ought to be able to help take work forward on the kind of pragmatic, capability-driven agenda recently suggested by Germany and Sweden. As far as industrial cooperation goes, the EDA is important. As Nick Witney argues, ‘there is much more that EU institutions can do on the defence industrial side because of the chasm down the Atlantic caused by US technology-sharing and market access policies.’<sup>89</sup>

The EDA has the advantage that it is an all-European forum that can discuss concerns over the European defence industrial base and capability needs at the same time, an approach that NATO simply cannot undertake. It is a flexible body that can focus on a smaller number of Member States on an opt-in basis. It also has a connection to the High Representative and to defence ministers of all Member States.

In the current climate of intense pressure on defence budgets, the EDA can play an important role in sharing information. For Witney, ‘showing and telling is a hugely valuable thing. Transparency and mutual accountability are very important.’ Without understanding the situations of other defence ministries, it is almost impossible for any kind of strategic picture of European capabilities to be developed.

It also provides a secretariat function and technical resource for defence ministers and the High Representative. Working through a number of bilateral relationships, even the better-resourced ministries may become

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87. General Jack Deverell notes that ‘In a philosophical sense, why have two? But in a practical sense, a realistic political sense, a technical sense, almost certainly there will be two bodies there.’ Op. cit. in note 73, p.79.

88. Paul Sturm, ‘NATO and the EU: Cooperation?’, *ISIS European Security Review*, no. 48, February, 2010.

89. Author’s interview with Nick Witney, London, November, 2010.

overwhelmed. Yet the UK officials may believe that this is too high a price to pay for the EDA. The UK government has said that the UK will remain in the EDA for two years, after which time it will review its membership of the body.<sup>90</sup> At this point the UK will need to think very hard about the political and diplomatic ramifications of any withdrawal.

### *Permanent Structured Cooperation*

Some commentators and Member States believe that the provisions for Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) set out in the Lisbon Treaty would provide a sound framework for coordinating European defence cooperation. Yet PESCO remains a very open-ended idea in the Lisbon Treaty. It is not yet clear whether there can be one or many 'PESCOs', whether the cooperation should be exclusive or inclusive of all Member States, and what exactly should be the criteria for such cooperation.

The development of PESCO is not seen as a priority in the UK or France. On the other hand, officials are not dismissive of PESCO. They believe there may be potential for this form of closer cooperation when and if Franco-British cooperation shows results.<sup>91</sup> Without Franco-British participation, PESCO is unlikely to happen and would anyway achieve little. But both countries should remain positively engaged in the debate about its potential.

### *A European White Paper?*

Some analysts have suggested that the time is now ripe for a European defence White Paper.<sup>92</sup> The level of decline in European military capabilities does demand a common strategic approach to give some coherence to Member States' planning and capabilities and plan rationalisation. There is something of a strategic black-spot at the heart of European defence planning, preventing the rationalisation that needs to occur. And yet, while NATO is seen as the pre-eminent body for defence planning, and while the ongoing stand-off between Turkey and Cyprus prevents institutional change, it is difficult for a coherent and coordinated NATO-EU approach to planning to emerge.

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90. Written Answer to Parliamentary Question, Column 315, *House of Lords, Hansard*, 28 October 2010.

91. Author's interview with MoD official, London, November 2010.

92. Jean-Pierre Maulny, *op cit.* in note 28, p. 8.

The suggestion of the EU Defence Ministers that a ‘Wise Pen Team’<sup>93</sup> be established is a good start in the short term. It should be given a wide enough remit to look at European defence from a more strategic perspective with a view to rationalisation. Effective work from this group could pave the way for a White Paper. It is in the interests of France and the UK that such a strategic perspective on European defence cooperation should exist. Indeed, what is necessary is a European-wide emulation of what France and the UK have embarked upon. Without it, European defence will be defined by fragmentation and atrophy rather than by any rationalisation according to security requirements.

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93. *Op. cit.* in note 81.





## 4. Conclusions and policy recommendations

The UK and France have taken a bold step towards deeper, planned military capability cooperation. They have found a kind of strategic comfort-zone with each other. Yet they have perhaps come to different conclusions about the role of their European partners. Germany, the only state of comparable scale, has a very different cultural and historical outlook towards expeditionary operations. And, while regarded as close and reliable partners, others are regarded as lacking the necessary scale for mutual industrial dependence or close cooperation across the full spectrum of capabilities.

Franco-British defence cooperation is not St. Malo II. It is based on maintaining military capabilities and proving relevance and credibility to the US. Franco-British cooperation offers no direct path to a more coherent, rational future for fragmented European defence. Indeed, it is a project with its own significant challenges. It does, however, offer a potential new 'gold standard' for future cooperation mechanisms and a pole of attraction for others to join – a pioneer group in the making.

The UK and France have shared vital interests, but they are not so very far removed from the vital interests of Europe as a whole. Europeans agree that the focus of the US is turning away from Europe and towards Asia. All understand that while European defence spending in aggregate is impressive, it is hopelessly inefficient in practice. Yet the EU's common foreign policy is still struggling to articulate a coherent strategy. National interests still diverge. Attitudes to the role of the EU in defence policy are very different across Europe.

There is a significant risk that British ambivalence towards European institutions, coupled with a lack of concrete proposals from other European states, could create a vicious circle of disillusionment on both sides. All sides should make a serious effort to maintain momentum on European defence capabilities at this critical moment.

If Franco-British defence cooperation is to become a road-map rather than a road-block for European defence, there will need to be an accom-

modation. For France and the UK, that means leadership and engagement with European states that fully support pragmatic cooperation to build capabilities, and an open mind to expanding industrial cooperation from a bilateral to a multilateral format. For the UK in particular it means continued commitment to the St. Malo agenda and input into a strategic perspective for the future rationalisation of European defence capabilities. In return, the onus is on other European states to come forward with credible and concrete examples to improve European military capability and demonstrate that they too are serious.

## Recommendations

1. France and the UK should show strong commitment and support to the 'Wise Pen Team' endorsed by EU Defence Ministers, and continue to engage in debate on the future of PESCO.
2. The Franco-British Senior Level Group should establish an interface with the EDA and NATO (Allied Command Transformation) in order to:
  - (a) Disseminate lessons learned from cooperation projects. The UK and France are likely to build a great deal of expertise on cooperation, the fruits of which should be available to others, perhaps also through staff exchanges and visits.
  - (b) Share information on capability planning. The UK and France have committed to talk about future capability needs much earlier in the process. It makes sense to widen this process to include others, although there will be no obligation on France and UK to do this.
3. EU Defence Ministers should use the EDA as a forum to help give coherence to the emergence of any cluster group efforts, and to share information over the status of their defence budgets, cuts and capabilities.

# Annex

## Abbreviations

AWACS	Airborne Warning and Control System
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
EDA	European Defence Agency
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ITAR	International Traffic in Arms Regulations
MoD	Ministry of Defence
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation
SDSR	Strategic Defence and Security Review
SLG	Senior Level Group
UAV	Unmanned aerial vehicle







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ISBN 978-92-9198-177-9

ISSN 1608-5000

QN-AB-11-088-EN-C

doi:10.2815/21700

published by the European Union Institute for Security Studies

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