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Britain and the signing of the 2010 Lancaster House Treaties with France: Turning its back on the EU but strengthening defence cooperation in Europe?

The idea of cooperation between the United Kingdom and France, especially in the field of defence is not something new. The very first ‘*Entente cordiale*’ was encouraged by Queen Victoria and Emperor Napoleon III in the 1850s, especially during the Crimean War (1853-1856) when French and British forces entered a coalition against Russia. Colonial rivalry considerably strained relations between the two main powers of the time. Yet, after the Fashoda Incident (1898), France and Britain decided to foster their cooperation with the signing, in 1904, of bilateral treaties known as the ‘*Entente cordiale*’ which dealt with the necessity to find an agreement on colonial disputes but also – and maybe more importantly – to join forces to face the increasing power of Wilhelmine Germany. These treaties were the cornerstone of the *Triple Entente* (that also included Russia) which played a crucial role during the First World War. Diplomatic cooperation between the two countries continued throughout the 1920s and 1930s and into World War Two when France and Britain fought alongside each other. The signing of the Treaty of Dunkirk in 1947 once more underlined the necessity both for France and for the United Kingdom to find a European partner to rely on so as to protect themselves from a potential German aggression. Yet, it soon became clear that this bilateral alliance did not carry enough weight to face the threat posed by Soviet Russia and the Treaty of Brussels was signed in 1948 with Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, one year before the Atlantic Alliance was created in 1949. The two countries also fought alongside each other once more in 1956 against Nasser’s Egypt, in what came to be known as the Suez Crisis.

This brief overview of the history of Franco-British relations shows that the two countries have quickly understood that cooperation was necessary if they wanted to protect their national interests, and promote shared values like parliamentary democracy or individual freedoms.¹ However, close diplomatic ties between the two countries and the prolonged debate on security issues in Europe did not prevent mistrust and rivalry between the two allies. This became all the clearer in the second half of the 20th century, during the first years of the European Community. The rupture was complete after De Gaulle vetoed Britain’s

¹ Philip M. H. Bell, *France and Britain, 1900-1940: Entente and Estrangement*, London: Longman, 1996; *France and Britain, 1940-1994: The Long Separation*, London: Longman, 1997.

application to the EEC and refused to join the nuclear cooperation project in which President Kennedy and Prime Minister Macmillan had offered him to take part. These decisions had long-lasting effects and Britain's membership of the EEC did not mend the strategic rift between the two countries. Quite on the contrary, tensions between France and the UK can account for the absence of an actual European defence policy. Indeed, while neither of the two countries could hope to carry such a project alone, it was impossible for them to cooperate efficiently as they disagreed about the role of the USA in European defence. On the hand, Britain wanted to avoid giving the USA any argument that might allow them to become isolationists again. On the other hand, France wanted to promote a European defence policy in order to convince the USA that Europeans were trustworthy allies.² This 'Euro-Atlantic Security Dilemma'³ considerably slowed down the possibility of a bilateral security policy and also made it impossible to develop an efficient European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). Nevertheless, at the end of the Cold War, Franco-British defence cooperation found a new momentum and became an engine for the new ESDP, as shown at the Saint-Malo summit in December 1998.

This paper thus seeks to understand the rationales that underpinned Franco-British defence cooperation after the Cold War and led to the signing of the Lancaster House Treaties in November 2010. In order to understand the motivations that guided the British government's foreign and defence policy choices I chose an interpretivist approach. Interpretivism is the approach chosen by Mark Bevir and Rod Rhodes in their study of governance.⁴ It insists on individuals' agency and studies how these individuals influence norms and discourses they inherited. Actions are to be studied within a historical context that influences choices. Thus interpretivists insist on what they call traditions and dilemmas to explain actions and practices. A tradition comprehends the whole historical background in which an individual's actions take place. A dilemma is the manner in which individuals choose to modify this inheritance to include new experiences and ideas. Traditions refer to the context, beliefs and social representations of individuals. However individuals are agents that can bring changes to these traditions.⁵

² Jolyon Howorth, 'Britain, France and the European Defence Initiative', *Survival*, 42 (2), 2000, pp. 33-45.

³ Jolyon Howorth, 'The Euro-Atlantic Security Dilemma: France, Britain, and the ESDP', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 3 (1), pp. 39-54.

⁴ See for instance Mark Bevir and Rod A. W. Rhodes, *The State as Cultural Practice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

⁵ Mark Bevir, Oliver Daddow and Ian Hall, 'Introduction: Interpreting British Foreign Policy', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 15 (2), 2013, p. 168.

This paper will thus study the strategic, political and economic reasons that led British leaders to foster defence cooperation with France after the end of the Cold War, leading to the signing of the Lancaster House Treaties on 2 November 2010. After the United States expressed their wish to see Europeans take a more active part in their own defence, and as France's attitude towards NATO's role in Europe became more positive, Paris became a natural partner. Britain and France share a 'role identity' which can explain their wish to join forces. Yet their rapprochement was also motivated by economic constraints and the necessary coordination of some capabilities that neither state would have been able to keep as defence budgets were being cut on both sides of the Channel. Thus, even though the traditional 'Euro-Atlantic Security Dilemma' has not disappeared, the UK and France now seem to have found a way to bypass the reservations both have had since the Suez Crisis about the development of a defence cooperation that would involve two European states without directly involving the USA, NATO or the EU.

Franco-British Cooperation after the Cold War

The 1956 Suez Crisis was a turning point in Franco-British relations⁶ as France and Britain adopted two seemingly irreconcilable strategies with Britain choosing a resolutely 'Atlanticist' strategy, while France adopted a 'Gaullist' strategy which some perceived (improperly) as being anti-Americanist. The first call for a Franco-British rapprochement was made by Yves Boyer, Pierre Lellouche and John Roper in 1988.⁷ The authors called for the two countries to leave aside their distrust for each other and their rivalry to find an agreement on European defence. But it was only after the Cold War ended that the 'Suez paradigm' was replaced by a new kind of relationship. Indeed, with the collapse of the USSR and of the Eastern Bloc, the role of the USA and of NATO in European security was questioned and it was decided that Europeans should be more committed to their own defence.⁸ In order to achieve better burden-sharing, it was decided to give a greater role to the Western European Union. But the end of the Cold War and the diminishing importance given to nuclear

⁶ On Suez, see Claire Sanderson, *L'impossible alliance ? France, Grande-Bretagne et défense de l'Europe (1945-1958)*, Paris : Publications de la Sorbonne, 2003. See also Peter Catterall, 'The Singularity of Suez in post-war Anglo-French Relations: *Une Entente mal entendue*', in Antoine Capet (ed.), *Britain, France and the Entente Cordiale since 1904*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pp. 124-142.

⁷ Yves Boyer, Pierre Lellouche and John Roper (eds), *Pour une nouvelle entente cordiale. La relance de l'alliance franco-britannique en matière de sécurité*, Paris : Masson, 1988. The book was also published in English as *Franco-British Defence Cooperation: A New Entente Cordiale?*, London: Routledge, 1989.

⁸ North Atlantic Alliance, 'London Declaration On A Transformed North Atlantic Alliance', London, 6 July 1990.

capabilities also led France and Britain to reconsider the way they could maintain their influence on the international stage and it soon appeared that taking part in coalitions led by the United States was the only way they could preserve their great power status. France then reconsidered its 'Gaullist' approach to foreign and defence policy to adopt a more 'Atlanticist' strategy. As it became clear that the US was increasingly unwilling to intervene militarily in Europe – for instance in former Yugoslavia – France progressively acknowledged the need to make the most of NATO's infrastructures and capabilities in terms of operation planning, logistics and command and control. In December 1995, Paris took a decisive step when it announced it would resume its place within the Council of Ministers of the Atlantic Alliance and eventually its seat in the NATO military committee. However, the USA refused the restructuration of NATO command that France requested, and it was not until after the election of Nicolas Sarkozy in 2007 that France expressed its will to become a full member of the NATO Integrated Military Command Structures – and its reintegration was made official in 2009, on the 60th anniversary of the creation of the North Atlantic Council.

France's return to NATO's military command 'lifted all reservations the British had about the French.'⁹ This allowed a new step forward in defence relations with the signing of the Lancaster House Treaties. But even before the 2010 treaties were discussed, there had already been a series of talks and decisions that bound the defence policies of the two countries, dating back from the 1990s. The reasons for this rapprochement are twofold: first, there was a strong political will on both sides of the Channel. This was confirmed at each Franco-British summit, up to the December 1998 summit where the Saint-Malo declaration was signed. But the Franco-British rapprochement was also built in the theatre of operation when the two countries fought alongside each other, especially in the Balkans.¹⁰

Between 1995 and 1997, France and Britain signed a series of Letters of Intent in which the potential fields of cooperation between the various branches of their armed forces were identified. In 1995, the Franco-British Euro Air Group was created with the aim of allowing better interoperability between the two countries' air forces.¹¹ In 1998, the group was enlarged to include Germany, Belgium, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands, and became the European Air Group (EAG). As far as maritime cooperation is concerned, a Letter of Intent signed at the

⁹ Military officer, interview, British embassy in Paris, November 2014.

¹⁰ Frédéric Charillon, « De Suez à Skopje : un nouveau partenariat franco-britannique pour le XXI^e siècle ? », *Politique étrangère*, 66 (4), 2001, p. 956.

¹¹ Ministry of Defence, 'UK-French Bilateral Defence Cooperation: Existing Areas of Cooperation,' 9 Feb 2001. Available online: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.mod.uk/issues/cooperation/uk_french.htm>, accessed 20 July 2017.

Bordeaux summit in November 1996 mentioned the possibility of joint operations and set 20 working groups on areas ranging from aircraft carrier development and operational planning to training between surface fleets to operational doctrine, amphibious operations and personnel exchanges.¹² Cooperation between land forces was at the heart of the Letter of Intent signed at the London summit in November 1997. While the two countries aimed at developing the European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI), they also reaffirmed the necessity of close cooperation between the two countries ‘to improve operational capability leading to increased harmonisation in operations, doctrine, training, logistics and equipment aimed at improving effectiveness in future combined operations.’¹³ In 2001, the British Ministry of Defence counted as many as 140 to 150 bilateral exercises, ranging from exchange of officers to large scale combined joint exercises.¹⁴

Lastly, France and Britain reinforced their cooperation programmes in the field of armament and military equipment. Such capabilities as the Lynx, Gazelle or Puma helicopters, the SEPECAT Jaguar jet attack aircraft, the COBRA radar systems, the PAAMS and Storm Shadow/SCAL-EG missiles, or the A400M transport aircraft were all designed as part of Franco-British cooperation programmes. Furthermore, Britain joined a Franco-German initiative aiming at setting out principles for cooperation in the field of armament. Together with Italy, they created the Organisation for Joint Armament Cooperation (OCCAR) in 1996. Since then, the organisation has been enlarged to include Belgium in 2003 and Spain in 2005.

Parallel to the development of the political dimension of bilateral cooperation, the armies of the two countries reinforced their cooperation on the ground, especially in the Balkans. The war in Bosnia underlined how inefficient European defence policy was. But it also highlighted the fact that France and Britain were the only two European states that possessed the resources and will that could affect the end of the conflict. They also became the two most important contributors to UNPROFOR and IFOR in Bosnia. Later, they also played a crucial role in Kosovo, when a British anti-submarine frigate joined the French carrier battle group and Tornado fighter jets flew from the French base of Solenzara. But French and British troops also fought alongside each other in the context of international military operations (for instance in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1998 or in East Timor in 1999).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

A turning point in the history of Franco-British defence cooperation was the signing of the Declaration on European defence at the Saint-Malo summit on 3-4 December 1998. This was a significant step for the EU's CFSP but it was also crucial for bilateral cooperation as Britain officially acknowledged it did not expect NATO and the USA to be solely responsible for European defence. At a time when France was drawing closer to the USA and the Atlantic Alliance, Britain thus softened its position regarding the EU's defence policy which, from then on, would not rely on Franco-German initiatives only but also benefit from a new Franco-British engine. In 2003, at the Le Touquet summit, measures were taken to improve both bilateral and EU defence cooperation. One of the proposals was to transfer responsibility for the NATO-led stabilisation mission in Bosnia to the EU. The two countries also proposed to establish an "inter-governmental defence capabilities development and acquisition agency", that later became the European Defence Agency. They also shared their intention to improve their collaboration on aircraft carriers.¹⁵

Franco-British military cooperation thus developed step by step – both politically and militarily – throughout the 1990s, thanks both to the will of the leaders of the two countries and during joint military operations. One reason that explains Britain's choice to strengthen its cooperation with France in the aftermath of the Cold War was its realisation that the USA was progressively building a foreign policy that was less and less centred on European issues. In that context, the 'special relationship' between the UK and the USA did not carry the weight it had had in the past and Britain felt the need to find new partnerships in order to maintain its status as a great power on the international stage. Soon France appeared as a 'natural partner'¹⁶ for the UK as the two countries' statuses were comparable. Indeed, both countries possess the nuclear deterrent; they are permanent members of the UN Security Councils, members of NATO and of the EU. They had to face similar threats and respond to similar strategic issues. To this list of similarities, one could add, as Lt General Simon Mayall did, that the two countries are ready to deploy troops.¹⁷ Thus Britain perceived France as a country sharing a similar 'role identity' to its own. The rapprochement between the two European states in the aftermath of the Cold War can thus be interpreted as their realisation

¹⁵ Jacques Chirac and Tony Blair, Declaration on Strengthening European Co-operation in Security and Defence, 25th Franco-British Summit, Le Touquet, 4 February 2003.

¹⁶ 'France is the UK's natural partner in Europe for defence co-operation'. Liam Fox, HC Deb 2 Nov 2010, vol. 517, col. 780-781.

¹⁷ « [The French] are another nation that is prepared to pull the trigger, as are the Americans ». Lt General Simon Mayall, dans House of Lords Select Committee on the European Union Foreign Affairs, Defence and Development Policy (Sub-Committee C), *Inquiry on British-French Defence Relations*, Oral evidence, 3 Feb 2011, Q 12.

that they shared interests. This in turn led them to share ideas about the respective roles of the EU and NATO in the defence of Europe. If all disagreements had not disappeared at the turn of the 21st century, a long-lasting compromise seemed to have been found at Saint-Malo, allowing new steps to be taken in the development of both CFSP and NATO. The signing of the Lancaster House Treaties in 2010 must then be understood as a new step in the history of this bilateral relation. However, it is impossible to understand the reasons that led to the signing of the 2010 treaties without taking into account the economic and strategic rationales that drove the leaders of the two countries to push towards a more formal and institutionalised bilateral relation.

Economic and Strategic Rationales for Cooperation

In 2006, the NATO Member States set themselves the aim of spending at least 2% of their GDP on defence. This objective was not primarily intended to solve the Organisation's funding issue but was used to reveal how committed each state was to NATO's common defence and aimed at maintaining the status of the Atlantic Alliance as a major security actor in the world. Among NATO's European Member States, only Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria, France, the UK and Romania devoted at least 2% of their GDP to defence in 2006. But among those countries, France and Britain were definitely the most important contributors to the Alliance's budget in absolute terms. It was this share of France's budget devoted to defence that made it a 'serious' partner, with whom the UK could legitimately reinforce its links and deepen its bilateral relation. This is what Liam Fox insisted upon during the debate on the November 2010 treaties: 'I repeat – this is about two sovereign nations, which between them spend 50% of all the defence spending of the NATO members in Europe, and 65% of the research spending.'¹⁸ The rapprochement with France was unanimously presented by British defence ministers as an asset for Europe and the influence European members of NATO would get in the Alliance.¹⁹ However, some senior officials went as far as to say that Britain did not actually have any other choice than to reinforce its relation with France if it wanted to avoid losing some of its defence capabilities.²⁰ Indeed, the 2010 *Strategic Defence and Security Review*, more specifically the *Future Force 2020* programme, announced a reorganisation of the armed forces through cuts in the total number of military personnel and a reduction in combat capabilities, together with ambitious modernisation plans. Yet, even if the

¹⁸ Liam Fox, HC Deb 2 Nov 2010, vol. 517, col. 787.

¹⁹ Liam Fox, interview, Jan 2015. Gerald Howarth, interview, Jan 2015. Nick Harvey, interview, Jan 2015.

²⁰ Senior civil servant, MoD, interview, Jan 2015.

aim of this programme officially was to allow the UK to maintain full spectrum capabilities, the forecast 7.5% reduction in the defence budget meant that Britain would not be able to afford the necessary level of spending to achieve this ambition.

France met comparable difficulties with a defence budget close to the UK's (the French defence budget was €32.1 billion in 2010²¹, compared with approximately €39 billion for the UK²²) and had to find solutions to face budgetary pressure. The 2008 economic crisis further aggravated an already dire budgetary situation with the 2008 *Livre blanc* announcing the government's intention to cut 54,000 defence jobs.²³ The *Livre blanc* also made it clear that maintaining France's strategic independence would henceforth be difficult because it lacked the necessary funding.²⁴ This was confirmed in 2010 when the 5-year law on military programming voted in 2009 had to be amended to include extra spending cuts of up to €3.5 billion over 3 years from 2011 to 2013.

Neither France nor the UK was ready to acknowledge officially that they did not have the financial means to play a great power role on the international stage any more, but their rapprochement was a sign that they realised they could remain major actors only if they led joint operations and shared capabilities, in particular as far as the nuclear deterrent was concerned. The history of Franco-British nuclear cooperation followed the same path as that of defence cooperation between the two countries until the end of the Cold War. Indeed, after the Nassau Agreement was concluded in 1962, the UK's main – and indeed sole partner – was the USA. The first step towards cooperation between the two European nuclear powers was made in 1992 with the establishment of a Joint Commission on Nuclear Policies and Doctrines, which later became the Joint Nuclear Commission (JNC), to discuss nuclear policy and doctrine (but leaving out operational cooperation).²⁵ And as available budgetary resources became scarce, French and British leaders started to consider cooperation in the field of nuclear deterrence:

We have talked about nuclear co-operation, and noted considerable convergence between the two countries on nuclear doctrine and policy. We do not see situations arising in which the vital interests of either France or the United Kingdom could be threatened without the vital interests of the other being

²¹ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2010: The annual assessment of global military capabilities and defence economics*, London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2010, p. 129.

²² HM Treasury, *Spending Review 2010*, Cm 7942, London: The Stationery Office, 2010, p. 57.

²³ Ministère de la Défense, *Défense et Sécurité nationale : le Livre blanc*, Paris: Odile Jacob et La Documentation française, 2008, pp. 317-318.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

²⁵ 'The UK/French Joint Nuclear Commission normally meets at official level every six months, alternately in London and Paris. The Commission's discussions cover a wide range of issues, but they exclude, by joint agreement, the operational aspects of our respective deterrent forces'. Keith Vaz, Minister of State for Europe, HC Deb 6 Mar 2000, vol. 345, col. 500W.

also threatened. We have decided to pursue and deepen nuclear cooperation between our two countries. Our aim is mutually to strengthen deterrence, while retaining the independence of our nuclear forces. The deepening of co-operation between the two European members of the North Atlantic Alliance who are nuclear powers will therefore strengthen the European contribution to overall deterrence. We have instructed our Joint Nuclear Commission to take this forward.²⁶

Without threatening the independence of their nuclear forces, the two countries declared themselves ready to cooperate and justified their cooperation on the existence of shared vital interests. Similar words were used in November 2010 by Prime Minister David Cameron and President Nicolas Sarkozy:

[...] a threat to our vital interests could [...] emerge at any time. We do not see situations arising in which the vital interests of either nation could be threatened without the vital interests of the other also being threatened.²⁷

Partly thanks to the work of the Joint Nuclear Commission, the two countries have developed their cooperation in the field of nuclear deterrence. Civil and military officials involved in French and British nuclear programmes started to meet regularly. But before 2010, the two countries did not have a joint nuclear policy and America remained Britain's main partner in this area. The USA only lifted their opposition to reinforced Franco-British cooperation when, at the end of the Cold War, nuclear capabilities became less strategically crucial, and after France resumed its seat in the NATO military committee, even if all American objections did not completely disappear.²⁸ Besides, the Franco-British rapprochement happened at a time when, in the midst of an economic crisis, finding a new strategic partner was all the more crucial than the decision to maintain the nuclear deterrent had been questioned by the Labour government in 2006²⁹ and later challenged by the Liberal-Democrats, whom had formed a coalition government with the Conservatives in 2010.³⁰ In the 2010 SDSR, the government renewed its commitment to maintain a nuclear-armed missile submarine on patrol at all times (Continuous-At-Sea-Deterrence, CASD) but reduced the number of nuclear warheads and delayed the decision to replace them.³¹ The signing of the Lancaster House Treaties thus took place at a time when Britain increasingly found it difficult to fund both its conventional and nuclear programmes. France being the only other nuclear power in Europe, it was the only serious partner with whom the UK was ready to consider signing a long-term cooperation agreement.

²⁶ UK-French Joint Statement on Nuclear Co-Operation, Chequers, 30 October 1995.

²⁷ UK-France Summit 2010 Declaration on Defence and Security Co-operation, 2 November 2010.

²⁸ Matthew Harries, 'Britain and France as Nuclear Partners', *Survival* (54 (1), 2012, p. 8.

²⁹ HM Government, *The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent*, Cm 6994, London: The Stationery Office, 2006.

³⁰ Liberal Democrats, *Policy Options for the Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Weapons*, London: Liberal Democrats, 2010.

³¹ HM Government, *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review*, Cm 7948, London: The Stationery Office, par. 3.8-3.10.

The Lancaster House Treaties: A Major and Long-Term Commitment to Cooperation

The signing of the Lancaster House Treaties was but the last step of the Franco-British rapprochement that had started long before Nicolas Sarkozy was elected President in 2007 and David Cameron became Prime Minister in 2010. However, until November 2010 the bilateral relation had relied upon political declarations and letters of intent which very much depended upon the will of the leaders of the two countries to further and deepen this cooperation. The Lancaster House Treaties allowed longer term projects to be made, especially regarding nuclear cooperation.

In 2008, Nicolas Sarkozy had already sent a clear signal of his intention to sign such a treaty in a speech he made in Westminster:

On behalf of the French people, I have come to invite the British people to write with us a new page of our common history, that of a new Franco-British brotherhood. A brotherhood for the twenty-first century. What France wants is simple: ever more harmony, ever more cooperation and ever more solidarity. [...] This new Franco-British brotherhood which I am calling for is essential in a Europe that is taking action. Of course, for we French, Franco-German friendship is one of the cornerstones of European reconciliation. I am convinced that in today's Europe the Franco-German engine is still essential. But it is no longer enough to enable Europe to act and bring its full weight to bear. We need to rally the 27. We need first of all this new Franco-British entente.³²

Sarkozy went against the French traditional presentation of Germany as France's main ally in Europe and of the Franco-German 'couple' as the most efficient engine of European integration to introduce a new paradigm based on cooperation with Britain. The joint declaration made by then Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Sarkozy confirmed the new ambitious partnership the two leaders were hoping to build:

The United Kingdom and France agree that, more than ever, our two countries shall act together, bilaterally, at EU level and international level, to contribute to shape globalisation [...]. President Sarkozy and Prime Minister Brown agreed today that the UK and France will intensify cooperation and regular contacts, working together as a partnership of pioneers leading the global response to new international challenges. They approved joint work on a range of initiatives covering international institutions, foreign and defence policy, development, migration, climate change and energy, and global prosperity, including the promotion of practical responses to such challenges.³³

The Franco-British entente was thus presented by both countries as a necessary level of cooperation for them to be able to deal with the challenges they were facing. A few weeks before the UK 2010 General Election, Brown hosted Sarkozy one last time and confirmed the UK and France were now working closely together on a large range of issues, including

³² Address by the President of the French Republic, Nicolas Sarkozy, to the UK Parliament – Royal Gallery, 26 March 2008.

³³ Joint UK-France Summit Declaration, London, 27 March 2008.

nuclear issues and security, and called their cooperation an ‘entente formidable’³⁴ which – the two leaders hoped – would be reinforced in the future, bringing further cooperation both at the heart of the EU but also in other international organisations like the G8 or the G20.

This ambition was quickly confirmed by the newly elected Conservative-led government, with Liam Fox stating in June 2010:

We must use every lever at our disposal, including the Commonwealth, UN, EU and other regional organisations, to protect our security in an uncertain, unstable, and unpredictable world. That is why a broad programme of defence diplomacy is required, as is stepping up bilateral defence co-operation, particularly with nations who share our interests and are prepared to both pay and fight, such as France.³⁵

Reinforcing bilateral cooperation with France was thus one of the key measures the government was prepared to take in order to guarantee security and the defence of national interests. The negotiations that had started under Brown went on with Cameron until the treaties were signed on 2 November 2010.³⁶

According to former National Security Adviser Peter Ricketts, the main treaty signed on 2 November 2010 was the ‘Treaty relating to Joint Radiographic/Hydrodynamics Facilities.’ Indeed, as the proposed agreement would have consequences on the two countries’ nuclear deterrent capabilities and would lead to mutual dependence in a sensitive field with potential important strategic consequences, signing a treaty was deemed necessary.³⁷ Nevertheless, as the title of the treaty suggests it, the aim was never to aim at sharing nuclear arsenals but to allow scientific and technological cooperation through the building of joint facilities that would model performance of nuclear warheads and materials. Furthermore, as Matthew Harries underlined it, the Franco-British treaty was not intended to challenge Anglo-American nuclear cooperation, especially on the production of warheads³⁸, and the British government was unlikely to dispense with the advantages provided by the transatlantic relation as that decision would have been both unpopular and fraught with uncertainty. Nevertheless, this treaty had a strong symbolic significance and was a clear sign of French and British leaders’ will to deepen their cooperation in a costly, yet essential, part of their defence policy. The treaty on nuclear cooperation was negotiated first and allowed the two countries to plan for the long term as this 50-year commitment meant it would not be threatened by political changes.

³⁴ Hélène Mulholland, ‘Nicolas Sarkozy and Gordon Brown hail ‘entente formidable’, *The Guardian*, 12 March 2010.

³⁵ Liam Fox, speech, Royal United Services Institute, London, 14 June 2010.

³⁶ Senior civil servant, MoD, interview, Jan 2015.

³⁷ Peter Ricketts, interview, Paris, 19 Jan 2015.

³⁸ Matthew Harries, ‘Britain and France as Nuclear Partners’, op. cit., pp. 17-22.

The first treaty was accompanied by a second one, whose scope was much wider. The Treaty on Defence and Security Cooperation aimed at developing cooperation between British and French armed forces and allowing the two states to share and pool equipment, including through mutual interdependence, to access each other's defence markets, and reinforce their industrial and technological cooperation. One of the key programmes at the heart of the newly signed treaty was the creation of a Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (CJEF), a non-permanent force 'suitable for a wide range of scenarios, up to and including high intensity operations.'³⁹ Since the creation of the CJEF was announced in 2010, a series of exercises has taken place involving land, maritime and air components and in 2016, with Exercise Griffin Strike, the Expeditionary Force demonstrated 'full validation of concept', making it available for operations.⁴⁰ The treaty thus reinforced existing links between French and British armed forces by taking their cooperation a step further towards interoperability and mutual dependence. Another major initiative was the creation of an integrated strike force ensuring aircrafts could operate off both French carrier Charles de Gaulle and future British carriers. At the time of signing, it was announced Britain would modify the design of its future carriers to make them compatible with French aircrafts. However interoperability was challenged in 2012 following the decision by Britain to revert to the F-35 short take-off and vertical landing (STOVL) variant of the Joint Strike Fighter, making it incompatible with French aircraft technology.

Other key elements in the treaty include provisions on industrial and armaments cooperation. Indeed, Article 8 (2) of the treaty states that 'each Party undertakes not to hinder legitimate access to its markets and to its Government contacts in the field of defence and security.' France and the UK thus clearly showed their will to create dependencies in a sensitive area of cooperation, including the development and improvement of missile technology.

Most of the plans mentioned in the treaty and the declaration that accompanied it referred to pre-existing programmes and built on existing areas of cooperation. Since the end of the Cold War, and even more since 1998, the two countries have multiplied the number of cooperation programmes and have reached a better level of mutual understanding. The signing of the treaties thus allowed France and Britain to uphold existing practices and foster cooperation

³⁹ UK-France Summit 2010 Declaration on Defence and Security Co-operation, 2 November 2010, par. 8.

⁴⁰ 'Defence Secretary welcomes deployable UK-France joint force', gov.uk, 21 April 2016. Available online: <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/defence-secretary-welcomes-deployable-uk-france-joint-force--2>>, accessed 20 July 2017.

between their armed forces as well as interdependence in the field of equipment in a more formal framework.

The progress in Franco-British defence cooperation allowed the development of an embryonic European defence policy. Yet, their bilateral cooperation did not come within the NATO framework or within the auspices of ESDP/CSDP which allowed the two states to contribute to the defence of the continent while avoiding the constraints of multilateralism.

Franco-British Bilateral Cooperation and the EU

In the preamble to the Treaty for Defence and Security Co-operation, France and the UK state that they commit to bilateral cooperation

Mindful of their rights and obligations under the North Atlantic Treaty and, in the fields of security and defence, under the Treaty on European Union,

Believing that greater defence and security co-operation strengthens the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation which remains the foundation of their collective defence and the forum for its implementation and reaffirming their commitment to supporting the role of the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy in strengthening international security,

Convinced that greater bilateral defence and security co-operation will reinforce those rights and obligations as well as the objectives contained in the treaties referred to above [...]

Bilateral cooperation was thus presented as a way of reinforcing French and British involvement in the international organisations responsible for European defence. However, because these international organisations had proved inefficient, the two states tried to move forward outside their framework. Franco-British cooperation was thus an example of what is called 'minilateralism', that is to say cooperation between a small number of states (from 2 to 10) without permanent specific institutions.⁴¹ This cooperation format allows states to choose one or several partners with whom they wish to deepen their relations in specific areas following mutually agreed upon terms. This kind of agreements is more flexible than multilateral agreements and thus allow states to reinforce their cooperation within NATO or the EU without directly depending upon them.

From the EU perspective, the Franco-British treaties were saluted as a positive decision that 'should help create a dynamic for stimulating further opportunities for cooperation between the Member States.'⁴² To some extent, Franco-British cooperation was but another partnership

⁴¹ Alice Pannier, « Le 'minilatéralisme' : une nouvelle forme de coopération de défense », *Politique étrangère*, (1), 2015, p. 38.

⁴² Council of the European Union, Conclusions, 3055th Foreign Affairs (Defence) Council meeting, Brussels, 9 Dec 2010. Available online: <http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_PRES-10-342_en.htm>, accessed 20 July 2017.

on the same model as other bi- or mini-lateral agreements involving EU Member States. These included the Franco-German Eurocorps, the Weimar Triangle (France, Germany, Poland), the Visegrad Group (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) as well as NORDEFECO (Nordic Defence Cooperation) which encourages cooperation in the defence industry between Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. One may also think of maritime cooperation involving the Dutch and Belgian navies (BeNeSam Treaty). The UK itself was involved in the creation of several such partnerships with other European states. For example, a few days after the signing of the Lancaster House Treaties, Britain contributed to the creation of the Northern Group, a defence forum that gathers the defence secretaries from Britain, Germany and Poland as well as from Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) and the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania). These examples show that Franco-British cooperation was far from being exceptional and that the EU may actually benefit from the existence of multiple such initiatives.

However, it was also argued in 2010 that British involvement in bilateral cooperation with France was another sign of their opposition to EU-led defence cooperation in order to avoid duplicating existing NATO arrangements.⁴³ Viewed from France, even if political and military leaders never officially renounced developing CSDP, bilateral cooperation was seen as a useful tool that might help further develop European defence policy but would mainly serve as an alternative given the lack of political will from other Member States.⁴⁴ This created frustration on the part of other European allies, especially German leaders, who were disappointed not to be included in Franco-British talks.⁴⁵

After the 23 June 2016 referendum France and Germany presented joint proposals for a ‘more active and useful’ European defence policy⁴⁶ However, the Brexit vote does not seem to have profoundly affected cooperation between French and British armed forces. On 12 July 2016, French and British Parliamentarians met in Paris as part of the twice yearly follow-up of the Lancaster House treaties and published a joint statement reaffirming ‘that even though the UK had decided to leave the EU, the Lancaster House treaties are still essential to the security of

⁴³ Liam Fox, interview, Jan 2015.

⁴⁴ French army general, interview, Nov 2014.

⁴⁵ See for instance David Brunstrom, ‘Analysis – Anglo-French defence deal could hurt Brussels goals’, uk.reuters.com. 3 novembre 2010. Available online: <<http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-europe-defence-idUKTRE6A251S20101103>>, accessed 20 July 2017.

⁴⁶ See Jean-Yves Le Drian and Ursula von der Leyen’s joint proposal, 11 September 2016. Available online: <<http://www.france-allemande.fr/article9346.html>>, accessed 20 July 2017.

both Nations.’⁴⁷ More concretely, on 26 March 2017, a couple of days before Britain officially triggered Article 50, British Defence Minister Harriett Baldwin and Délégué Général pour l’Armement Laurent Collet-Billon signed an agreement that began a programme to develop future long range weapons that would last at least 3 years. On that occasion, Baldwin declared:

Our relationship with France is strong and enduring. We have a long history of cooperation in defence and security with our European Ally. As demonstrated by having Europe’s largest defence budget, the UK is committed to European security and we will continue to collaborate on joint defence programmes across the continent.⁴⁸

Besides, French and British diplomats, senior civil servants and senior military officers agree bilateral cooperation will move forward, even after Brexit, just as it survived political changes in both countries in the last few years.⁴⁹ As far as military cooperation is concerned, ties between the two countries’ armed forces are now much stronger than they were even 6 years ago when the treaties were signed, with French and British chiefs of staff and senior officers meeting regularly. As far as industrial cooperation is concerned, the latest agreements signed by French and British Defence ministers seem to confirm the forefront role MBDA is expected to play in the future of bilateral and even European industrial integration. Politically however, as Brexit negotiations unfold, the relation between French and British leaders is getting tenser, which may explain why, while military cooperation is moving forward, CJEF has never been deployed.

Conclusion

The UK is but at the start of the 2-year negotiation period leading to Brexit yet it seems safe to say that the EU’s CSDP is far from being a priority for British leaders. Indeed, CSDP has not been a key element in British security and defence planning over the last decade and the last SDSR made no reference to it as part of the resources available for its defence. Besides, the UK hardly participates to CSDP operations and expects NATO to remain the leader for European defence and high-intensity operations. One of the priorities for the British government in recent years has been making choices that would allow the country to retain its

⁴⁷ House of Commons, House of Lords, Assemblée nationale, Sénat, Joint Statement, 12 July 2016. Available online: <<http://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/commissions-permanentes/commission-de-la-defense/secretariat/a-la-une/la-cooperation-franco-britannique-de-defense-plus-necessaire-que-jamais>>, accessed 20 July 2017.

⁴⁸ Harriet Baldwin, quoted in ‘UK and France strengthen defence cooperation with new weapon system agreement’, gov.uk, 28 March 2017. Available online: <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-france-strengthen-defence-cooperation-with-new-weapon-system-agreement>>, accessed 20 July 2017.

⁴⁹ That was at least the official discourse at the last meeting of the Defence Franco-British Council in Paris in November 2016.

worldwide influence while coping with cuts in public spending and shrinkage of military resources. In that context, rather than pooling and sharing resources with other EU Member States, the UK has chosen to focus on its bilateral relation with France. Therefore, the consequences of Brexit for the UK's defence policy are likely to be limited. However, for the UK's European allies, Brexit means France loses its only natural partner for defence in the EU and even if Germany steps forward in the near future, a potential Franco-German partnership is unlikely to become as efficient an engine for CSDP as the Franco-British relation has been at the turn of the 20th century.