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Research Report

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Turning Away from CSDP?

Franco-British Bilateralism in Security and Defence Policy

Ronja Kempin / Jocelyn Mawdsley / Stefan Steinicke

France and Britain are sending a new signal: 12 years after the Saint-Malo Declaration, in which they called for the establishment of the European Security and Defence Policy, in an unprecedented collaboration Paris and London have resolved to turn away from the CSDP for the time being. The agreements on bilateral cooperation made at the Franco-British security and defence summit on 2 November 2010 are clearly more than a savings package. In unison the two states have challenged their EU partners to enter into clear commitments on the CSDP, and thus to clarify what can be expected from the EU in security and defence policy in the future.

France and Britain have opened a new chapter in their bilateral relations. On the occasion of their recent summit on 2 November 2010, when President Nicolas Sarkozy met with Prime Minister David Cameron in London, they agreed to cooperate closely on security and defence policy in future. Within the framework of two legally binding treaties, both states committed themselves to extending the cooperation between their armed forces and to joint development of their nuclear weapons technology.

Tangible Projects

Numerous concrete measures to further this intensified cooperation were agreed. The two states reached an accord on the establishment of a joint expeditionary force. This force will bring together troops

from all three services with their associated headquarters and logistics and support services, and will train together as early as next year. In contrast to the Franco-German brigade, this Franco-British expeditionary force, which is not intended to be a permanent standing force, will be able to engage independently in robust combat operations. Furthermore, it was agreed that there would be an integrated carrier strike force based around both states' aircraft carriers. This should be available from 2020 onwards. This decision, together with agreement on the need to ensure interoperability of the aircraft carriers allowing common usage by both countries' planes, means that London and Paris have ensured that they will have maritime projection capacities at their disposal until 2050. Thirdly, both will share the training of personnel for and the maintenance of their A400M military trans-

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port aircraft. Improved cooperation on maritime mine countermeasures was also agreed. Subject to financial agreement, it is also foreseen that France will be able to draw on new British air to air refuelling capabilities to meet its needs for its fighter and transport aircraft. On armaments cooperation it was agreed that the two would jointly develop drone technology. The next generation of Medium Altitude Long Endurance Unmanned Air Surveillance Systems will be realised bilaterally, and they will jointly assess requirements and options for the next generation of Unmanned Combat Air Systems from 2030 onwards. Finally, they will assess the potential for cooperation on the development of military satellite communications.

In addition they will cooperate on nuclear matters. In a groundbreaking treaty, which was drawn up in close consultation with the USA, they have agreed to work closely together on the simulated testing of the performance of their nuclear warheads and associated materials. To that end, British experts will be able to access a French research centre in Valduc, where virtual testing of the viability and safety of the warheads can be carried out. Moreover, a new joint technology and development centre based at the British atomic weapons establishment at Aldermaston will develop radiographic and diagnostic technology to support this hydrodynamic testing of nuclear weapons.

More than a Savings Programme

Media reports viewed the decisions of the London summit as nothing more than a savings programme with little substance. A few days before the meeting, the British government had announced drastic changes for its armed forces in its Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) document. One aim of this programme was to reduce the 36 billion pound (41 billion €) deficit in the defence budget. To this end armaments projects were postponed, for example the renewal of the Trident nuclear

missile submarines, reduced (the number of planned destroyers and frigates) or, as the example of the Nimrod MRA4 reconnaissance aircraft shows, cut altogether. The aircraft carrier Ark Royal is to be immediately withdrawn from service along with the Harrier jump jets deployed from it. The armed forces will no longer be able to be deployed abroad at their current levels. In operations of the magnitude of Iraq or Afghanistan, British troops will no longer be able to play such a prominent role in future. In addition to these cuts, the Ministry of Defence budget will shrink by 8% in the next four years: 17,000 military and 25,000 civilian jobs will be lost as a result.

The French government under Nicolas Sarkozy had already introduced a similarly drastic programme of cuts in 2008, when it was decided to reduce the French armed forces from 271,000 to 225,000 men. 83 military bases were to be closed in the hope that the savings could be diverted to cover the costs of ongoing armaments projects. In June this year however it became clear that a further 5 billion € had to be saved to balance the defence budget. Accordingly, President Sarkozy decided that the multi-role tanker and transport aircraft, the Mirage fighter bomber upgrade, the space satellite surveillance system and the command and control network for national air operations would be delayed.

There is no doubt that the bilateral agreements on defence and security cooperation have the aim of maintaining the strategically core capabilities of both states. The agreement on the use of aircraft carriers, which secures maritime projection capability for both, shows this. At the same time though, the agreements of 2 November 2010 are about more than just an attempt to soften the impact of national budgetary constraints through bilateral cooperation. Intensified Franco-British cooperation began four years ago. It was at this time that Paris decided to change its attitude to the Atlantic Alliance, whose integrated command structure France had

left in 1966 in order to protect the independence of its defence policy. This re-orientation of French policy towards NATO and the USA bridged the traditional gulf between the fundamentals of British and French security policy, and opened the way for an intensive rapprochement between the two partners, who have cooperated closely ever since.

The clearest example of this rapprochement is to be found in the review processes of both countries' fundamental documents on security and defence policy. Representatives from the British Ministry of Defence were consulted in the preparation of the French White Book "Defence and National Security" and the Military Planning Law for 2009–2014, which sets out the state's defence plans and budget. Similarly French military officials cooperated in the formulation of both the British national security strategy "A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty" and the SDSR, which was published a few days later. The outcome of this cooperation is that British and French positions on global threats and challenges, and the security and defence capabilities required to address them, show a high level of strategic agreement.

The agreed cooperation in the fields of defence technology and industry is also based on congruent strategic considerations. The announced ten year plan for cooperation in the field of complex weapons, to be started by the launch in 2011 of projects on the development of the anti-surface missile FASGW(H)/ANL, an assessment of enhancements to the Scalp/Storm Shadow cruise missiles, and a joint technology roadmap for short range air defence technologies, showed the appetite of both states for the development of industrial cooperation. Both want to smooth the way for cooperation between British and French defence firms through funding for joint research and development projects, for which London and Paris intend to set aside 50 million € each annually.

Unsatisfactory Progress with CSDP

A decisive factor furthering the move towards Franco-British bilateralism on armaments cooperation is both partners' increasing disappointment with the lack of EU progress in the improvement of European military capabilities. Particularly in France, government and industry are weary of delays in decisions on collaborative projects by their partners, which endanger the maintenance of industrial capacities. The most obvious manifestation of this dissatisfaction is the French decision to withdraw from the already announced Franco-German-Spanish Talarion project, which had tasked EADS with the development of the next generation of Medium Altitude, Long Endurance Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, in favour of developing the drones with the British. Both countries also seem to be drawing the same lessons from the problems surrounding the construction of the A400M military transport aircraft, which had been seen in France as a European prestige project and decisive catalyst for the CSDP, and in Britain as a test case for multilateral collaborative procurement.

In Paris and London, both governments and parliaments seem to have agreed that in future bilateral cooperation should be prioritised ahead of security and defence cooperation in the EU context. The decisions of the London summit cannot just be traced back to the traditional Euro-scepticism of the British conservatives though. Paris and London could have decided to carry out the agreed projects within the EU framework of Permanent Structured Cooperation, which offers the possibility to member states to cooperate flexibly in the defence field. That they have distanced themselves from this step shows the low level of expectations both countries have of meaningful progress in CSDP cooperation. This attitude will also have consequences for the European Defence Agency (EDA). It seems that both states' unhappiness with the level of progress made by the EDA in the realisation of urgently needed military capabilities, has led them to cooperate

outside the EU institutions. This decision by France, in particular, which until now has been the leading nation in its consistent support of the EDA's work, is likely to weaken the EDA.

The Future of CSDP

Against this background, the message from the London summit is clear: France and Britain are placing bilateral cooperation ahead of European projects for the foreseeable future. Their search for partners for the building up of a European capacity to act militarily has been unsuccessful. Germany – which had been explicitly invited to participate in this by France – has been unable to agree on trilateral action on defence cooperation. As a result London and Paris clearly gave priority to NATO over CSDP in their summit declaration, although continuing to press their EU partners to increase efforts to develop crisis management capabilities. They also pressed for the implementation of the decisions of the European Council from 8 December 2008, which committed member states to the generation of crisis reaction forces, with particular focus on projection capabilities (strategic air transport and maritime capacities), and the improvement of satellite reconnaissance.

Twelve years after the Saint-Malo summit London and Paris have called on EU states to decide on the future path of CSDP. Both have made their preference clear: the CSDP should be in the position to be able to deal with the complete crisis cycle, from prevention to management to post-conflict reconstruction. For them it is not enough just to try to prevent the outbreak of crises. Up until now however, the EU partners have ignored the call from both states to declare themselves unambiguously in favour of an EU military capacity to intervene, and for the development and acquisition of the required capabilities to do so. The NATO Secretary-General was the only voice to warmly welcome the decisions of the London summit. As the most important part-

ner of Britain and France in the security field, Germany is especially called upon to stop the complete and final withdrawal of the pair from CSDP.

This can be done if Chancellor Merkel rapidly approaches Hungary, which takes over the Council presidency at the beginning of 2011, and Poland, which will lead the next troika presidency from July 2011. Chancellor Merkel should agree with both states to make progress on CSDP into a central theme of their presidencies. Concretely, the pooling and sharing of military capabilities should be driven ahead quickly. First initiatives could aim to construct a transport helicopter group and to improve military communications capabilities, particularly between central command and deployed troops. Both measures would significantly strengthen EU capabilities, and signal to London and Paris that the message of their summit has been understood.

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