

Mühlberger, Wolfgang

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French-German development collaboration in MENA: Options for humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) and triple nexus cooperation in Libya and Iraq

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French-German Development Collaboration in MENA

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Wolfgang Mühlberger



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peace (HDP) and triple nexus cooperation in
Libya and Iraq

Wolfgang Mühlberger

Wolfgang Mühlberger is a Middle East expert with over 20 years of professional experience in and on the region. He founded the advisory firm Menalytics in 2020 and supports CMI, the Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation, as Senior Advisor MENA & Strategy. Previously, he spent a decade as researcher in think tanks, analysing political transitions, armed conflicts, and statehood/governance in the MENA region. Mr Mühlberger has published over 60 titles, including an edited volume on Political Narratives in the Middle East and North Africa. Since 2020 he has implemented numerous projects as a consultant in Iraq and Libya, at the intersection of fragility, peacebuilding, and development.

Email: wolfgang.muehlberger@cmi.fi

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Tulpenfeld 6, 53113 Bonn

Email: publications@idos-research.de

<https://www.idos-research.de>



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Abstract

This study takes a critical look at Franco-German relations in the field of international cooperation along the entire humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) spectrum to better gauge the usefulness of bilateral collaborative action in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Both the corresponding potential – for example in the current Syrian transition – as well as existing coordination formats are of interest to the inquiry. The latter are examined in more detail against the background of German and French activities in Libya and Iraq. In this context, the analysis also considers the HDP nexus as an instrument of cooperation, which offers ideal conditions for application in fragile, conflict-prone (Libya) or war-torn countries (Iraq) due to their complex needs. The paper concludes with a series of recommendations for initiating or strengthening Franco-German cooperation in fragile states of the MENA region in the fields of humanitarian aid, development policy, and peacebuilding measures.

The study is divided into three thematic sections, the first of which examines bilateral relations between Paris and Berlin, with a focus on the phase following the signing of the Aachen Agreement in 2019. The analysis of national and international framework conditions for and against international cooperation is also part of this section, taking into account the effects of the Trump 2.0 administration. In the second part, the foreign and development policy approaches of both countries are analysed with a focus on their Middle East policies. Here, convergences and divergent approaches are of special interest, allowing conclusions to be drawn about the ability and willingness to cooperate. The third section is devoted to a synthesis of the operationalisation of activities within the HDP spectrum, with Libya and Iraq as country examples, as well as additional considerations relating to Syria.

On the one hand, this approach enables one to identify structural factors that either hinder or promote bilateral Franco-German cooperation in the international context. On the other hand, sufficient space is also given to current developments in order to be able to categorise trends and contextual factors which have a reinforcing or weakening effect on cooperation drivers. The Discussion Paper concludes with a recapitulation of the findings, and derives actionable recommendations for strengthening cooperation between Paris and Berlin in the crisis-ridden MENA region on the basis of HDP coordination.

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Abbreviations

AA	<i>Auswärtiges Amt</i> (German Foreign Office)
AFD	<i>Agence Française de Développement</i> (French Development Agency)
APD	<i>Aide Publique au Développement</i> (ODA, in France)
<i>approche 3-D</i> (Fr.)	development, diplomacy, defence
<i>approche globale</i> (Fr.)	comprehensive approach (multilayered French nexus model)
BDS	Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement
BICC	Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies
BMZ	<i>Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung</i> (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development)
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative (China)
CDCS	<i>Centre de crise et de soutien</i> (Humanitarian cluster in the French MFA)
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy (EU)
<i>contiguum</i> (Fr.)	double or triple nexus to enhance convergence and coordination
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
DCAF	Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance
DEVCO	(former) Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development)
DFID	(former) Department for International Development (United Kingdom)
DFSVR	<i>Deutsch-Französischer Sicherheits- und Verteidigungsrat</i> (German-French Security and Defence Council)
DG	Directorate-General (EU)
double nexus	any twin combination of sectors, such as H-D (humanitarian-development), D-P (development-peace), or H-P (humanitarian-peace)
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
EF	<i>Expertise France</i>
EIB	European Investment Bank
EMP	Euro-Mediterranean Partnership
EPF	European Peace Facility (EU)
EU	European Union
EUR	euro
EUTF	European Union Trust Fund
FCAS	Future Combat Air System
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (United Kingdom)
GDP	gross domestic product
GIZ	<i>Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit</i>
GNU	Government of National Unity (Libya)
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team (United Nations)

HDN nexus	humanitarian-development nexus
HDP nexus	humanitarian-development-peace nexus
HTS	<i>Hay'at Tahrir ash-Sham</i> (Jihadist Syrian militia, formerly associated with the IS and AQ)
IASC	Interagency Standing Committee (United Nations)
IDP	internally displaced person
IFI	international financial institution
IFCL	International Follow-up Committee on Libya
IRINI	European Union Naval Force Mediterranean Operation
JFC	Joint Force Command (NATO)
KfW	<i>Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau</i> (KfW Development Bank)
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
LIF	Libyan Independent Forum
LPM	<i>Loi de programmation militaire</i> (Military programming law)
MCAS	Main Ground Combat System
MEAE	<i>Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères</i>
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MFA	ministry of foreign affairs (generic term)
MGCS	Main Ground Combat System
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MRI	Mutual Reliance Initiative
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NSS	National Security Strategy (Germany)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OIR	Operation Inherent Resolve
<i>Quai d'Orsay</i>	traditional designation of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
SCN	security-climate nexus
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal (United Nations)
SDN	security-development nexus
SRTF	Syria Recovery Trust Fund
SSR/G	Security Sector Reform/Governance
<i>triple articulation</i> (Fr.)	synonym for contiguum

triple nexus	synonym for HDP nexus
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UfM	Union for the Mediterranean (French: UpM – <i>Union pour la Méditerranée</i>)
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	US dollar
USIP	United States Institute of Peace

1 Introduction

This Discussion Paper explores joint efforts across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) spectrum in international settings, with a focus on French-German cooperation and coordination potential in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region. To enhance the understanding of this problem, the analysis portrays the opportunities for and constraints to bilateral cooperation in the fields of humanitarian assistance, sustainable development, and peacebuilding, in fragile settings such as Iraq and Libya. In this thematic and geographic context, the inquiry goes beyond the separate HDP pillars, reflecting on the merits of HDP nexus implementation to counter instability in a zone of perennial geostrategic relevance.

Germany and France, accounting together for almost 50 per cent of Eurozone GDP (gross domestic product), are commonly considered the twin engines of the EU (European Union) due to their pivotal roles in European integration. At the same time, the two count among the most powerful contributors to humanitarian aid and development cooperation on the global scene, ranking number 2 and number 5 respectively (OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development], 2024).¹ In view of their combined economic and political weight, a mutually reinforcing foreign and development policy orientation based on shared geopolitical interests could yield positive implications for beneficiaries and partners in the Southern geographic neighbourhood, and could equally allow them to further their own interests. Such a cooperative approach has only gained in relevance as the second Trump administration slashes expenses for development and peacebuilding organisations, and as a potential new field for reconstruction and peacebuilding has recently emerged in Syria.

The Arab world, a region defined by proximity to Europe, is particularly prone to conflict, political instability, and fragile statehood. For this reason, a coordinated “external action” across the entire HDP spectrum between Paris and Berlin could serve as a practical tool to achieve shared objectives, by supporting sustainable development and fostering stability in countries affected by protracted crisis, such as Libya and Iraq, or Syria. In times of geopolitical competition with China and Russia, an uncertain evolution of the international order, domestic budget constraints, and the detrimental effects climate change, the triple nexus approach represents an effective tool to create a competitive advantage for both France and Germany, as well as for project beneficiaries.

During the past two decades, the evolving geopolitical landscape has been marked by two trends: The emergence of complex, multilayered conflicts leading to protracted crisis and fragility, and the incremental reduction of funds available for HDP activities. These parallel developments occurred in combination with the shortcomings of older concepts addressing instability, namely the security-development nexus (SDN) and the humanitarian-development nexus (HDN). To counter these, the peace dimension has been introduced to the latter by the United Nations, seeking to combine all three pillars in a synergetic manner, creating a new, triple nexus. The introduction of the peace element, though relatively recent, was mostly motivated by the fact that this dimension gained increasing relevance due to the emergence of complex crises and violent conflicts, necessitating a more holistic approach in fragile environments, beyond – but in conjunction with – the humanitarian and development realms. Also, an efficiency hypothesis has gained traction, arguing that the nexus approach is more conducive to achieving set goals (“collective outcomes”) by fewer means (BMZ [Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development], 2021).

1 Based on OECD DAC (Development Assistance Committee) figures computed at the end of 2024. See OECD DAC (2024, 20 November), ODA Levels in 2023 – Preliminary data: Detailed summary note. Current and forthcoming budget reductions across the HDP spectrum by global top donors can be expected to impact the ranking in 2025, most certainly advancing Germany’s rank to number 1 globally in terms of ODA (official development assistance).

The HDP nexus, also referred to as *contiguum* or *triple articulation* in France (ICVA [International Council of Voluntary Agencies], 2021), is a complex and evolving concept to increase coordination and cooperation between actors across its three dimensions, with a focus on fragile, conflict-affected environments. From this perspective, it makes sense to compare two countries in the MENA region marked by protracted crisis and enduring post-conflict predicaments, Iraq and Libya respectively. Here, Germany and France have both been involved in roles across the HDP spectrum, as well as, to varying degrees, in security interventions and diplomatic conflict-resolution efforts. In such settings of enduring tensions, the reviewed literature suggests that the holistic logic of the HDP nexus concept is particularly well-suited to work across institutional and organisational divides to achieve more favourable outcomes for vulnerable communities and implementing agencies alike (Hövelmann, 2020).

While there is a global rise in humanitarian needs due to the levels of armed conflict, France and Germany are facing budgetary constraints; at the same time, Iraq and Libya are in the midst of transitions from the preponderance of a post-conflict humanitarian crisis to more long-term development and peacebuilding efforts. Simultaneously, their categorisation as lower middle-income, oil-rich countries has motivated an incremental reduction of external humanitarian assistance (NRC [Norwegian Refugee Council], 2023).² Therefore, despite ongoing needs, a double nexus focused increasingly on the development and peace dimensions could increase in relevance. Nevertheless, not only do humanitarian needs persist, in particular in Syria; they may also surge in the case of a relapse into armed conflict. This is why the HDP nexus provides a useful tool to capture the features of this process, to understand how the actors involved conceive their respective roles, and to envisage the cooperation and coordination requirements of this approach.

Methodologically, this paper is based on a literature review and interviews. Even though limited conceptual reflections are part of the argument, in general, the focus is on the practical dimension of HDP nexus operationalisation as well as cooperation across the three HDP pillars. In other words, the triple nexus approach is used as a template, to gauge both the actual level of and the hypothetical potential for bilateral cooperation between France and Germany across its three domains within the geographical context of North Africa (Libya) and the Middle East (Iraq). Furthermore, this study is based on the basic assumption that geopolitical interests are being translated by development cooperation policies, and also – though to a lesser extent – by peacebuilding activities (Fuster, 2024).

To develop the main argument – that is, the utility of strategic bilateral cooperation between France and Germany across the HDP spectrum in the MENA region – the study is structured as follows: Section 2 sheds light on the state of bilateral Franco-German relations, with a focus on their evolution since the Aachen/Aix-la-Chapelle Treaty of 1919. Here it looks at the relationship between President Macron and consecutive German chancellors, as well as the role of both countries in the EU context; furthermore, it distils some shared, generic geopolitical interests in an age of uncertainty and a shifting international order – epitomised by the erratic and highly disruptive policies of Trump 2.0. Section 3 puts the French and German MENA policies in the foreign, development and security realms into contrast. This allows one to form conclusions on shared and divergent interests in relation to the region, crystallising out the drivers for, and impediments to, enhanced bilateral cooperation. Section 4 synthesises the findings from the two preceding sections in relation to the HDP spectrum and triple nexus cooperation. Primarily based on a literature review, the practice of HDP nexus implementation is discussed, with the cases of Libya and Iraq serving as concrete examples to gauge the potential for Franco-German

2 In both Iraq and Libya, an ongoing transition to a more development- and/or nexus-oriented approach is being implemented, also based on the countries' status as middle-income countries by the World Bank. See NRC, 2023, p. 25 (Iraq) & p. 38 (Libya).

cooperation, adding reflections on Syria. The final section of the paper recaps its findings and accordingly proposes a range of actionable recommendations for bilateral cooperation.

2 Franco-German bilateral relations: work in progress

The relationship between Paris and Berlin needs to be constantly cultivated and nurtured – despite a successful and formal reconciliation during the post-war decades. This permanent bilateral exchange makes it possible to identify converging interests and, building on this, to launch joint initiatives. To delve into this ongoing process, this section analyses the state of Franco-German relations (subsection 2.1), with a focus on their evolution since the Aachen/Aix-la-Chapelle Treaty of 2019 (subsection 2.2). It sheds light on the relationship between President Macron and consecutive German chancellors, as well as the role of both countries in the EU. The last subsection (2.3) distils some shared, generic geopolitical interests in an age of uncertainty and a shifting international order. This new era is marked by the unpredictable policies of US President Trump during his second tenure, also with implications for humanitarian aid, development assistance, and peacebuilding activities. In sum, the structural (shared interests; securitisation of development policies) and circumstantial (new US administration; transition in Syria; ongoing war in Ukraine) drivers, all reinforce the argument in favour of enhanced Franco-German cooperation.

2.1 The European tandem: from Merkel-Macron to Merz-Macron

Although bilateral ties are essentially about intergovernmental understanding, personal relationships at the highest political level are certainly no less decisive for the actual quality of the interaction, as well as for the ability to promote/implement intra- and extra-European cooperation. Until recently, as pointed out in this subsection, this could be well observed in the rather strained relationship between Macron and Scholz – with a new potential for empowering the tandem under “Mercron II”.

Following a rather harmonious relationship between the French President Emmanuel Macron and the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, vaguely reminiscent of the Mitterrand-Kohl friendship, bilateral atmospherics changed when Olaf Scholz became German chancellor in late 2021. This shift was mostly due to different “styles of policy-making and communication” between the German chancellor and the French President (Gibadlo & Plociennik, 2023, p. 6). Nevertheless, Merkel and Macron previously also experienced some level of disagreement, as the dismissive German position regarding the French initiative for European “strategic autonomy” indicated. From the French perspective, this has been interpreted as a German reluctance to embrace Macron’s policy propositions. Yet, a closer look reveals differences in the strategic cultures that emerged in the wake of the second world war, with France driven by the overarching goal of sovereignty, while Berlin followed a strict transatlantic orientation in foreign and security policy (interview 10).

However, besides the question of personal relationships and chemistries between the highest political representatives, the two countries remain the twin-engine of the European Union. Since Brexit, they are by far the two strongest economies of the EU, and both are major contributors to international aid and multilateral organisations. In 2023, Germany and France contributed USD 36.7bn and 15.4bn to global aid expenses, respectively. Also, they have seen an incremental rapprochement of their initially divergent positions regarding the questions raised by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, re-converging on a topic of essential geostrategic significance. Effectively, it appears that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has been the single most important driver for Germany’s geopolitical shift – leading to a range of financial implications, such as increased funding to the military budget (Martin, 2023). Nevertheless, the war on the Eastern

fringes of Europe has also triggered a foreign policy reorientation in France, where Macron decided to embrace a strongly antithetical position versus Putin from 2023/2024 onwards, despite earlier French attempts to maintain channels of communication with Moscow. It could be argued that this essential convergence was “sealed” by the French state visit to Germany in mid-2024 (Ross, 2024a, June).

Traditionally, the cornerstones of the bilateral relationship are defined by amicable relations, a shared leadership role in the European Union, and intense economic ties. In fact, French-German alignment has repeatedly enabled the European integration mechanism to progress (creation of the EU; launch of the Euro single currency; and 2004 enlargement), while nurturing a culture of bilateral coordination and compromise, leading to the designation “twin-engine of Europe” (Gibadlo & Plociennik, 2023, pp. 7-8). Historically, the rapprochement was made possible by a policy of reconciliation, embodied in the Élysée Treaty, signed by Charles De Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer in 1963 (Beutin & Lopinot, 2019). The agreement not only laid the foundation for the depth of the current relationship – it also helped to expand the Franco-German peace project to the European level, and was complemented by the 2019 Aachen Treaty.

French hubris and German Selbstverzwergung

Despite the depth of the relationship, differences in outlook and policies mostly occur due to varying strategic cultures. France, on the one hand, has a strong impulse to maintain a sort of special position in the international system, based on its autonomous nuclear capacities, its permanent seat on the UN Security Council, as well as the historical legacy of its colonial empire, captured for instance in the term *Françafrique* – though by now a widely challenged concept, as the latest developments in the Sahel in 2023 have shown (Bansept & Tenenbaum, 2022). Nevertheless, researchers have called for a revision of France’s traditional foreign policy positions, revisiting perceptions in order to update the effective interests and revise policies accordingly. In fact, despite the material and institutional basis of French power in the international realm, some analysts of French foreign policy assert a certain hubris based on path dependencies, arguing for a realistic reassessment of evolving capacities and interests (Antil & Vircoulon, 2024).

Germany on the other hand, has been cultivating a strong transatlantic connection for decades, only quite recently emerging as a more distinct foreign and security actor in its own right, driven by the war in Ukraine (Martin, 2023). Primarily under the nuclear umbrella of the United States, and reflexively seeking its protection amid crisis, Chancellor Scholz announced a *Zeitenwende* in 2022 (Maslanka, 2024).³ Indeed, this step represents a paradigmatic shift in the self-perception of Germany’s position, role and responsibilities in international affairs, with major implications for budgetary reallocation towards defence spending – away from a tendency that has sometimes been referred to as *Selbstverzwergung* [self-diminishment] (Martin, 2022; Wiczorek-Zeul, 2024).

These differences have implications for the reading of conflict dynamics, proposals for conflict resolution, and the evolution of their bilateral relationship. France and Germany have also embarked on two opposite trajectories: while France is experiencing an incremental loss of international significance – as recently portrayed by the forced retreat of its military assets and diplomatic presence from several Sahel states – Germany is in a process of redefining its international role in correspondence to its economic power, incrementally moving away from its previous status as a *Zivilmacht* [civil power] (Ross, 2024b, November).

3 In 2022, Germany decided to purchase US F-35 aircraft – which can carry nuclear warheads. This stirred frustration in Paris, where Macron had been making the case for French nuclear deterrence for Europe, and thus for French fighter planes.

At any rate, this setting represents a new opportunity to define areas of convergence in a more systematic manner than before. For instance, some observers have argued for the creation of a “community of interests and of action means” (Tran Thiet, 2024). Such an effort could turn out to be helpful in the bilateral coordination of international cooperation, as referred to in the 2019 Aachen Treaty, fostering increased coordination across the HDP spectrum in fragile, conflict-affected environments.

Interest convergence and discrepancies: Berlin and Paris in need of dialogue

In view of a mixed bag of convergences and differences in interests, there are regular calls to step up the exchange between France and Germany. For instance, at the end of 2024, the Governor of the French Central Bank, Villeroy de Galhau, and his German counterpart Nagel called for a revival of the bilateral dialogue (Bundesbank, 2024). However, since Trump took office for the second time, his political decisions have also contributed to the need to seek closer Franco-German cooperation in the international sphere.

In fact, regular exchange is necessary in order to develop common positions and resolve any differences. Such dialogue is best conducted on the basis of an obvious convergence of interests, even if these often need to be formulated jointly before concrete steps towards cooperation can be implemented. It is usually at the European level that international cooperation between France and Germany crystallises. However, both countries also share concerns in the south-eastern geographical vicinity of the EU, which is why this overlap of interests would provide a good basis for expanding the horizon of cooperation – be it on the basis of bilateral endeavours in the MENA region.

While the initial response to Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine has given proof that the two countries differed in the readings of the conflict, the previous period, between 2014 and 2022, had been marked by a non-controversial cooperation in the Normandy format (Jasiński & Maślanka, 2023).⁴ Meanwhile, Germany has been able to reduce its resource-dependence from Russia, allowing a departure from its former “Eastern Policy” doctrine, opening up the way for a re-convergence with France versus the Russian Federation. Also, the securitisation trend of German foreign policy due to Ukraine has created a policy rapprochement between Paris and Berlin, with the latter potentially embracing a more security-oriented view in line with Paris’s traditional *modus operandi*. In particular, in view of Macron’s argument for a European defence-related autonomy, a convergence has manifested itself with regard to defence projects – as already stipulated in the Aachen/Aix-la-Chapelle Treaty. Notably, some areas lend themselves to complementarities or a constructive division of labour. While Germany will continue its tendency to focus on Eastern Europe (be it for economic reasons), “France is more inclined towards the Mediterranean region, and will seek to strengthen the EU’s relations with North African countries, for reasons including its energy policy” (Gibadlo & Plociennik, 2023, p. 6).

Yet, a major cleavage persisted between Macron’s proposal for the EU’s “strategic autonomy” in comparison to Scholz’s idea of “European sovereignty”, as laid out by the latter in the Prague summit of August 2022 (Jasiński & Maślanka, 2023). While Germany until recently considered NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) – and hence US protection – a given, the French concept already factors in a foreseeable US departure from European security, while also corresponding to enhanced European “involvement in the Mediterranean and Africa” (Jasiński & Maślanka, 2023, p. 6).

On the question of trade, strong German exports create a trade balance deficit on the French side. Yet, Macron’s calls since 2017 to enhance French-German cooperation in the EU (Jasiński

4 The Normandy format refers to negotiations between Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine.

& Maślanka, 2023, pp. 2-3),⁵ in particular the proposal for a common Eurozone budget, have remained unheeded to date. In fact, Germany is extremely reluctant to embrace proposals for fiscal coordination that go beyond the current set-up of the Eurozone. Conversely, while Macron calls for tougher regulation of migration into Europe, Germany's labour market demand implies advocating for controlled migration. In view of these differences – and the French perception of German reluctance – bilateral relationship management remains a constant necessity (Ross, 2024a, June).

Cooperation prospects: inevitable Franco-German compromise?

In view of this mixed bag of substantial divergences, shared challenges and an equal number of commonalities, the bilateral relationship saw its most severe test in recent times in 2022, when the annual intergovernmental consultations were cancelled in November – though the meeting was rescheduled to January 2023, and the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly did convene as planned during the same month (Gibadlo & Plociennik, 2023). In fact, the January meeting did not lack symbolism, as it coincided with the 60th anniversary of the foundational Élysée-Treaty (Jasiński & Maślanka, 2023, p. 8).

A reason for the disagreements that surfaced in November 2022 had been the cleavage between Paris and Berlin concerning their post-February 2022 position versus Russia following its full-scale war in Ukraine, as well as the lack of effective progress concerning the common defence project around the FCAS fighter plane.⁶ Here, the usual pattern of a mix of intra-European and international themes are the reason for Franco-German controversies – and eventual compromise. In fact, their previous close coordination for the Minsk I and II negotiations, and their ability to agree on the post-Covid recovery plan for the EU, have both shown the twin-engine's capacity to find compromises when needed.

In a certain way, it seems that the Franco-German tandem always realises the lack of alternative to finding agreement at some point, opening up the way to seeking mutual understanding. Equally, "Germany and France [...] will prompt their governments to continue cooperation for fear of weakening the political weight of both countries in the event of escalation of misunderstandings" (Jasiński & Maślanka, 2023, p. 9). For instance, allowing Germany to participate in the hydrogen corridor, also provides Berlin access to North African gas. In a way, this French gesture also carries a geopolitical component, as it simultaneously underscores the French strategic prioritisation of the Euro-Mediterranean arena – while tying Germany indirectly to the region via questions of energy security.

Back in April 2023, the level of bilateral disagreement still prompted the following, slightly exaggerated, diagnosis offered by some media reports: "The breakdown of French-German relations augurs ill for the EU" (Rahman, 2023, 16 April). While Chancellor Scholz was gazing across the Atlantic, rather than to Brussels (also due to frictions inside the coalition at the time), Macron, on the other hand irritated by his tendency to go off-script and by his plan for a "sovereign Europe" (Rahman, 2023, April).

In practice though, since Macron's comments in February 2023 at the Munich Security Conference, France has converged on an anti-Russian consensus, though more staunchly than Scholz, arguing in favour of German Taurus deliveries (UK-French Scalp missiles already being in use) – and even referring to deploying French ground troops in Ukraine in early 2024 at a

5 Following Macron's 2017 Sorbonne speech, where his ideas were put forward for the first time in public, France and Germany signed the Meseberg Declaration in 2018, lining out in more detail the willingness to cooperate on several dossiers.

6 The Future Combat Air System (FCAS) is a bilateral cooperation between the French company Dassault and the "European" Airbus.

conference in Paris. Nevertheless, such statements are also part of the French choice for “strategic ambiguity”, a deterrence philosophy Scholz might not have been comfortable with in principle (Czymmeck & Wissmann, 2024).

However, observers of the bilateral relationship continue to note a constant up and down. In May 2024, one could read again in the French daily *Le Monde* that “the French-German engine [was] idling due to Germany’s transatlantic obsession and its refusal to allow France, the only European nuclear power, to exercise its primacy in military matters” (Gougeon, 2024, 30 May).

The tandem inside – and outside – the European Union

As most pivotal achievements in the EU have been achieved by French-German compromise, the quality of bilateral relations is perceived more often than not in relation to implications for cohesion in the European Union (Mourlon-Druol, 2017). In practice, a distinct sort of Franco-German intergovernmentalism has emerged, sometimes referred to as “embedded bilateralism”, marked by norms of cooperation on the basis of shared geostrategic interests, and a “[German] balancing act tilted towards France” (Howarth & Schild, 2022).

In 2024, a new EU Commission Directorate-General for the Mediterranean was set up, headed by Dubravka Šuica. The EU is a central player for aid deliveries and development support in the MENA region (Youngs & Zihnioglu, 2021; Bodenstern & Furness, 2023), while it has equally been seeking increasingly to implement its interventions on the basis of a HDP nexus approach (Veron & Hauck, 2021; Jones & Mazzara, 2018). To facilitate the required coordination among EU member states, a number of instruments have been launched. These include the “Practitioners Network”, and “enhanced synergies” between development banks (such as the French AFD (*Agence Française de Développement* [French Development Agency]) and the German KfW (*Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau* [KfW Development Bank]), both part of the “European financial architecture for development” (Bilal et al., 2022, p. 12).

In the Mediterranean and the wider MENA contexts, convergences or divergences between France and Germany are more abstract, compared with other Mediterranean countries such as Spain and Italy. For instance, France and Italy respectively have the biggest and the second largest European fleets in the Mediterranean Sea respectively, and both highly value the role of their navies in establishing security in the Mediterranean basin.⁷ Nevertheless, Germany also provides naval support to missions in the Mediterranean, including for the IRINI mission (European Union Naval Force Mediterranean Operation) related to the Libyan arms embargo – which is a good indicator of shared interests, as will be discussed in more detail below.

2.2 The spirit of Aix-la-Chapelle: French-German cooperation after the 2019 Aachen Treaty

To deepen the generic analysis of the bilateral relationship from subsection 2.1, this subsection focuses on the Franco-German relationship since the signing of the Treaty of Aachen, or Aix-la-Chapelle. Here, particular attention is paid to the question of co-operation in the international, non-European sphere, with the interventions of both countries in Mali being examined as an example of advanced international cooperation and coordination across the HDP spectrum. These shared experiences could hypothetically also serve as a basis for the coordination of

7 The French military port of Toulon (in the *département* Var) is the biggest of its kind. Italy’s naval capacities are also strongly tied to NATO structures, in particular the JFC (Joint Force Command) Naples.

future bilateral cooperation on Syria – moving forward from the symbolism and spirit of the Treaty to actual implementation and tangible outcomes.

In 2019, France and Germany sought to put the formal basis of their amicable bilateral relationship, the Elysée Treaty, on a new footing with the Aachen/Aix-la-Chapelle Treaty. The idea to formally reinvigorate the remarkable post-World War II relationship surfaced during Hollande's presidency (2012-2017), though it only took shape under his successor Emmanuel Macron, and Chancellor Angela Merkel. In fact, the treaty was practically requested by the French President during his speech at Humboldt University in 2017 (Tribolet, 2020). Technically, it should be noted that the agreement is an "intergovernmental agreement" and not a binding treaty under international law (Seidendorf, 2020). Also, the Aachen agreement complements, but does not replace, the foundational Élysée Treaty. As the number of bilateral announcements has been legendary, the real question is to what extent the treaty materialised into specific cooperation agreements, and what kind of achievements have been reached under the given circumstances (Seidendorf, 2020, p. 14).

Of particular interest here is the broad policy field of external relations, especially in the areas of humanitarian missions, development policy, and peacekeeping measures – aka HDP. The treaty primarily addresses three policy areas, including foreign policy and international development. While the former is the field where substantial announcements were made, including those on defence cooperation, it is also the domain where differences easily surface and impede cooperation progress (Seidendorf, 2020, pp. 15-16). Yet, as argued above, global geopolitical shifts are driving France and Germany closer together on a wide range of issues.

The Aachen/Aix-la-Chapelle Treaty makes reference to a variety of topics, including European Affairs (First Chapter); Culture, Education, and Mobility (Chapter 3); Regional and Cross-Border Cooperation (Chapter 4); Sustainable Development (Chapter 5); and Organisation (Chapter 6).⁸ The overall emphasis is on the European dimension, seeking improved coordination within the framework of the EU's institutions, with the aim of fostering European integration. But the Treaty also highlights the goal of cooperating in the realm of foreign and security policy, including within the context of the United Nations in order to further multilateralism. In general, the aim is to coordinate positions between the signatory states where shared interests are concerned, and to act in a unified manner, whenever possible. In fact, this spirit is the ideal prerequisite for cooperation across the HDP spectrum.

More specifically, "The Treaty between the Federal Republic of Germany and the French Republic on German-French Cooperation and Integration", as the Aachen Treaty is officially called, makes several references to bilateral cooperation in the field of development assistance, or, rather, "sustainable development". In particular, Chapter 2 "Peace, Security, and Development", Article 7 refers to fostering enhanced cooperation between "Europe and Africa", while instating an annual, bilateral "dialogue format" at the political level to discuss matters related to "international development policy".⁹ In addition, Article 7 makes explicit mention of "crisis prevention", "conflict resolution" and "post-conflict support", thus using non-securitized terminology for activities related to peacebuilding. Article 5, that deals with foreign policy, underscores the need for bilateral cooperation and exchanges, corresponding to a (sort of) technical prerequisite to coordinate matters across the HDP spectrum.

8 Chapter 5 includes "sustainable development" in its title. Detail is added in Article 18 which makes reference to shared efforts regarding climate change, the Paris Climate Summit Agreement, and Agenda 2030. See "Vertrag zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Französischen Republik über die deutsch-französische Zusammenarbeit und Integration, 2019".

9 See Vertrag zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Französischen Republik über die deutsch-französische Zusammenarbeit und Integration, 19 Januar 2019.

However, concerning the degree of intended institutionalisation, development or “peace”, matters receive lesser attention than, for instance, “defence and security”, where the DFSVR (*Deutsch-Französischer Sicherheits- und Verteidigungsrat* aka German-French Security and Defence Council) has been upgraded by the Treaty (Heumann, 2020).¹⁰ In a less formal manner, Article 7, referred to above, institutes an “annual dialogue on the political level” in order to “intensify coordination of policy planning and implementation” related to international development assistance.¹¹ Also, the agreement repeatedly underscores “mutual obligations”, opting for a strong wording, even though neither compliance mechanisms nor sanctions have been put in place.

As stipulated in the Treaty (Chapter 6, Organisation, Article 23), in January 2020 and May 2021, respectively fifteen “priority areas” and thirteen “cooperation projects” were defined by the Franco-German Ministerial Council.¹² Out of these, two of the proposed projects contain an international development component. The first project is framed as “Work[ing] for a closer partnership with Africa in trade, the fight against climate change and support for Sahel countries”; the second as “Support [to] North-South cooperation in the field of mathematics”. Interestingly, besides the mention of the Sahel zone, “Africa” is not defined precisely in the Treaty, leaving room for interpretation whether North Africa is also included, or whether the term only refers to Sub-Saharan Africa.

Aachen, Mali and bilateral cooperation practice in the international realm

Following the signing of the Aachen Treaty in 2019 and its coming into effect a year later in 2020, focused research has been carried out to explore the actual status of and further potential for French-German cooperation in the specific field of “sustainable development” policy. It should be noted that the Aachen Treaty has been complemented by specific agreements to “translate the political will of French-German rapprochement into concrete measures and to ensure their implementation” (Krüger & Vaillé, 2020, p. 1). In addition, financial cooperation has been defined as a key area for collaboration via project co-financing. In practice, though, the political will for bilateral cooperation expressed in the various agreements and treaties mostly leads to cooperation within the wider framework of multilateral organisations or institutions.

According to Krüger and Vaillé, the core obstacles to more advanced bilateral cooperation and effective practical coordination relate to three domains. First, besides a principled agreement of the importance of “Africa” (see related comment above) and the method of promoting the private sector (for example, as an employment generator), there is no strategic alignment of the development systems with regard to methods or policies. Second, institutional structures and their respective mandates are deemed fairly incompatible in fostering enhanced cooperation. Thirdly, cultural differences – for instance concerning time management or communication styles – would require more mutual learning to facilitate closer ties (Krüger & Vaillé, 2020; Kaplan, 2020b; interview 10).

10 The Council was set up in 1988, and is mentioned explicitly in Chapter 2, Article 4, paragraph 4. See also Heumann, 2020, p. 84.

11 During the interviews as well as on the basis of the literature search, the author could not identify data to confirm that such foreseen dialogue activities have actually either taken place in the past or are currently taking place.

12 As a central coordination instrument envisaged to carry on the spirit of the Treaty and to ensure its intentions materialised, the “French-German Council of Ministers”, as well as parliamentary delegations, have established a regular pattern of interaction. In this respect, see also the final section of this Discussion Paper “Conclusions: findings and recommendations”.

Furthermore, at the institutional level, the French foreign and development policy system is more centralised, with a strong coordination and decision-making role exerted by the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs – and the Republic’s President as the key driving force, with his own team of diplomatic, foreign policy, MENA (Anne Claire Legendre) and Libya (Paul Soler) advisors.¹³ In fact, some interlocutors confirmed that the French embassies sometimes play a role in the vetting of projects (interviews 1, 2 and 7).¹⁴ Conversely, in Germany the federal system creates institutional separation, autonomy in decision-making and budgetary silos, the reason why certain interviewees argued that the cross-ministerial consensus on using the HDP nexus as a coordination mechanism has gained considerable traction in order to facilitate cross-institutional coordination (interview 10).

Although the French presence in the Sahel region shrank to a historic minimum in 2024, the previously extensive and deep cooperation between France and Germany in Mali demonstrates that bilateral cooperation can function in a complex and fragile environment when there are sufficient shared interests in making it work.¹⁵ As Demesmay and Staack (2020) explain in their contribution to the “Frankreich Jahrbuch 2019”, neither was a shared strategy towards “Africa” put in place – although a range of cooperation themes are mentioned in the bilateral Aachen Treaty (private sector development, education, and so on); nor were their development assistance policies fully aligned with each other, even though shared concerns relate to uncontrolled migration flows from the region, as well as the threat of international jihadism. The goal of stabilising the “region” was facilitated via a mix of policies, including development assistance, as well as – related to peace and conflict questions – security policies (Demesmay & Staack, 2020).

As the bilateral agreement refers to “Africa” in general, and assuming this refers to the entire continent, it could be argued that two major zones of instability, the Sahel and North Africa, are thus included, though without direct reference. In fact, the most advanced cooperation – and coordination – between Germany and France in the international arena has occurred in the Sahel theatre, where a mix of HDP activities and hard security policies has been employed – until recently in tandem, to control instability, to ensure sustainable development and to foster peace. Especially the “migration crisis” of 2015 led Berlin to think about the potential (negative) implications of similar scenarios related to North or West Africa (Demesmay & Staack, 2020, p. 93). In that sense, the German perception has been aligning with the French, regarding the “proximity” of the regions, as well as the potential threats.

However, already before the recent forced retreat of France’s assets from virtually the entire Sahel, the idea was to alleviate its regional military footprint. This is also linked to the reduced availability of French assets, and hence its limited ability to finance costly military interventions abroad (Demesmay & Staack, 2020, p. 96). In this context, while the foreseeable trend towards limited budgetary latitude will further reduce French capacities, it may open up avenues towards engagement in efficient bilateral cooperation with Germany, be it along the HDP nexus or, in French parlance, the *contiguum/triple articulation*.

13 See Élysée, Équipe du Président, <https://www.elysee.fr/la-presidence/cabinet-du-president-de-la-republique-et-services-de-l-elysee>.

14 Interviews with French development assistance actors and a French international development scholar (Interviews 2 and 7). According to the latter, the role of the French embassies is enshrined in a law: *Loi n° 2021-1031 du 4 août 2021 de programmation relative au développement*.

15 According to the researcher Boubacar Haidara, the requests for funds from Germany have been increasing on all levels following the French exit – from officials to NGOs (non-governmental organisations), which is the reason why the planned cuts are seen with concern in Mali (feedback from interview 14 and information from the 2024 *Mali Spotlight* BICC publication (Meininghaus, 2024)).

In view of the apparent limitations of traditional French policies, President Macron announced a paradigm shift which has been most visible in the field of ODA (Official Development Assistance). The plan for incremental increase was to move up the means for development assistance from 0.43 per cent of GDP in 2017 to 0.55 per cent in 2022 – a successful trend, but one reversed since 2023. Eventually, though, the reality of reduced means could foster enhanced cooperation between the two national development banks, the French AFD and the German KfW (Demesmay & Staack, 2020, p. 97).

In addition to the question of financial resources, France and Germany also intend to collaborate at the policy level, “[w]ith the aim of improving security and stability in West Africa, [...] endeavour to better coordinate their development policy strategies” (Demesmay & Staack, 2020, p. 99).¹⁶ In the Aachen Treaty this intention is mentioned in Article 3, and mostly, Section 7. Yet, it is not an entirely new policy field for bilateral cooperation since, according to the authors, the AFD and KfW have already been collaborating for several years (Hodson & Howarth, 2024).¹⁷ Yet, what has become clear is that, in this complex domain, additional partners are required and bilateral cooperation needs to be complemented multilaterally (Demesmay & Staack, 2020). To replace thematic discussions at the Franco-German Ministerial councils, a coordination instrument, the “Franco-German dialogue for development policy” was introduced at the time (see the related recommendation regarding its lack of, and need for, institutionalisation, respectively, in the concluding section of this Discussion Paper).

In the Malian context, it clearly appeared that, despite certain discrepancies, close bilateral cooperation is possible. Practically, France alone was overwhelmed in West Africa, due to its limited financial means. While it considers itself a pragmatic actor, Germany is seen as idealistic, or even unrealistic (for instance on the gender topic) (interview 14). From the vantage point of Berlin, cooperation with Paris was an instrument to control “irregular migration” via stabilisation efforts. And while France still follows certain path dependencies and post-colonial trajectories, the ongoing reform of French development policies will put stronger emphasis on education and economic development – potentially allowing stronger Franco-German alignment (Demesmay & Staack, 2020, pp. 104-106).

In practice, French and German policies across the HDP spectrum and in the security field are neither systematically aligned, nor closely coordinated, nor based on a shared strategic outlook. Yet, increased Russian interference in France’s former Sahelian zone of influence, the fear of uncontrolled mass migration to Europe via the Sahel – and North Africa for that matter – as well as the risk of overspill to Europe from international Jihadist networks in MENA and beyond, should be reason enough for Paris and Berlin to seek closer coordination. In the interlinked security and sustainable development fields, both should attempt to align their reading of conflict dynamics and scenarios caused by fragility, helping them to offset their reduced direct leverage over emerging regional players.

The Aachen Treaty: Carolingian symbolism, scaffolding, or action plan?

As a non-binding agreement, hence depending on good will and circumstantial motivations for implementation, the Aachen Treaty, a complement to the Élysée treaty, nevertheless carries a high symbolic weight. At the same time, it is specific enough to work as the basis for precise action, also for cooperation in the international sphere, including in North Africa and the Middle

16 According to an interview conducted with a French diplomat liaising at the AFD (interview 9), the trend of increased financial means continued after 2022 regarding contributions to the AFD.

17 According to feedback from the KfW (interview 5), the AFD is one of the most important bilateral cooperation partners, on the basis of consultations and co-financing, often in a “Team Europe” context. For a detailed discussion of the relation between Team Europe and development finance, see Hodson and Howarth, 2024.

East. Concerning the question of the common engagement of France and Germany in Europe's Southern neighbourhood, Koepf and Koopmann (2024) assert that the reasons for a relatively "subordinate reflection" of the very topic have been related to substantial dissonances during the elaboration of the Treaty. The authors equally admonishes that even though "Africa" is being referred to, other regions of geostrategic relevance – such as the MENA region, often the Mediterranean in French jargon – are not mentioned as such (Koepf & Koopmann, 2024).¹⁸ A reason that "Africa" has been explicitly mentioned might be due to the fact that, at the time of the treaty elaboration and its signature, Franco-German multi-level cooperation abroad had reached its apex in the Sahel, in particular in Mali (interviews 5 and 16). On a more generic level, the authors refer to the ambitious level of the Aachen Treaty in terms of its announcements, while it remains non-binding and hence depends on political will and institutional action to translate its stated goals into practice. Also, to a certain extent, German reluctance has been pulling the brakes in the process.¹⁹

In actual fact, a way of countering the "increase in transaction cost due to diverging methods" has been the choice for project co-financing between French and German development banks (Kaplan, 2020a, p. 2). For instance, in 2013, the Mutual Reliance Initiative (MRI) was set up by the French AFD and the German KfW, in conjunction with the EIB (European Investment Bank), to "enhance the effectiveness of development cooperation" (EIB, n.d.). The MRI is a mechanism that allows one of the three signatories to take the lead on project financing, and, as an interviewee put it, to "spread the risks for the involved financial institutions in unstable countries" (interview 7). Among other things, it covers the geographic area of the EU's "Southern neighbourhood", including projects between Morocco in the west and Jordan in the east.

More recently, in 2021, four major European Development Agencies, including the AFD and the KfW, set up the "European Strategic Cooperation Framework", a finance platform to further the realisation of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs). Thirdly, the role of co-financed trust funds has come into play to facilitate cooperation and share risks or burdens. For instance, in Syria, the SRTF (Syria Recovery Trust Fund) has been established as a multi-donor trust fund with both German and French participation. In view of the ongoing political transition in Syria, as well as a wide range of needs across the entire HDP spectrum, this fund and other financial cooperation instruments could be used to foster bilateral cooperation, including to operationalise HDP nexus projects.

When reading the Aachen Treaty, some sections stick out as visibly more detailed than others. Nevertheless, with a separate article on international development cooperation, the agreement expressed the intention to improve bilateral cooperation in this field (Tribolet, 2020). However, it cannot be ruled out that Macron wanted to use the treaty primarily to bring movement back into the joint armament programmes (FCAS and MGCS)²⁰ – to ensure the progress of European integration "in his spirit", namely, to move closer to European strategic sovereignty. Nevertheless, it took more than four years before things actually got moving (DFI [Deutsch-Französisches Institut], 2024). Thus, the question remains whether the current circumstances – Trump 2.0 policies adversely affecting the financing of HDP activities, and the transition in Syria – constitute a sufficiently strong incentive to move forward with the Treaty's stipulations on international cooperation between France and Germany. But certainly, the Aachen Treaty can serve as a useful compass for cooperation in the international realm, as, during the past five

18 This analysis draws a balance sheet after the first five years since the Treaty was signed.

19 Inter alia, relations have been strained from time to time due to setbacks with the planned common defence projects; differences over energy politics (in particular national subsidies with an effect on economic competitiveness); or the question of military dependence on the United States, that is, the discussion around European strategic autonomy.

20 MGCS = Main Ground Combat System, a bilateral tank development project.

years, the constraints and opportunities have greatly evolved and have nudged Paris and Berlin closer to each other's positions and geopolitical outlook.

2.3 Shared predicaments: France and Germany between geopolitical shifts and domestic constraints

Based on the analysis of Franco-German relations, and their evolution following the 2019 Aachen Treaty, this subsection explores the domestic and international circumstances that both Paris and Berlin are confronted with. This inquiry allows one to deepen one's understanding of drivers for and impediments to bilateral cooperation in the international realm, with a particular focus on cooperation along the HDP spectrum in fragile settings. In this context, the disruptive policies of Trump 2.0, and the political transition in Syria, though following an uncertain trajectory, both carry implications as drivers for enhanced bilateral cooperation between Paris and Berlin across the HDP spectrum.

Declining aid budgets, geopolitical competition, and climate change

German and French development cooperation are both facing budgetary constraints, while they also have to navigate an evolving geopolitical landscape, including in the very dynamic MENA region. Though there is a tendency for budget cuts in the humanitarian and development sectors, and a strong geopolitical reorientation towards the Ukrainian battlefield that carries major fiscal implications, this set of elements can be considered an incentive for Franco-German cooperation.

Furthermore, the incremental retreat of the French armed forces from virtually the entire Sahel, corresponds to a major geostrategic blow for France's traditional involvement in this region adjacent to North Africa. However, this rupture also represents an opportunity to assess fundamental French interests in a new light, beyond path dependencies nourished for decades on the basis of its former African colonies. Any such reassessment, if carried forward, might also have implications for the role France foresees for itself in the MENA region itself. In light of this, Germany and France might use the opportunity to align their policies on the basis of shared interests in the region and to gauge the potential for cooperation, both in terms of constraints and positive drivers, including the option of cooperating across the HDP spectrum or via the triple nexus. Last but not least, the increasingly adverse effects of climate change trigger conflicts and increase vulnerabilities across the board, the reason why triple nexus approaches would represent a smart tool to capture and address such complex interactions.

Budget reallocations: shifting priorities and conflict-related needs

In September 2024, the previous German government announced a drastic cut in the sums earmarked for humanitarian aid – despite a global rise in humanitarian needs, triggered by conflict, and climate change. If it had been implemented, this step would have reduced the German contribution to the field in an unprecedented manner, slashing it by substantive 50 per cent (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 2024). According to the draft budgetary law, the reduction would have amounted to EUR 1.19b, reducing the remaining budget to EUR 1.04b (Bundestag, 2024, August). However, this is not a novelty but corresponds to the continuation of a trend to reduce the funding of foreign aid (Bollag, 2024). Considering the end of the coalition ("*Ampel-Aus*" [end of the so-called traffic light coalition]) in 2024, the question is how the current Merz government will handle this portfolio. As the humanitarian file rests with the German Foreign Office (AA, *Auswärtiges Amt*), a lot will depend on the actual balance of power within the new government, and the ability of the *Auswärtiges Amt* to withstand the initially planned reductions (interview 10).

Similarly, the previous French government triggered an unusually public debate on the rationale and amount of its contribution to development cooperation, a topic rarely making it to the headlines in France, indicating the limited room of manoeuvre that Paris enjoys due to its heavy indebtedness. The idea that was floated would have corresponded to a substantial reduction of French development policy spending, to the tune of minus 20 per cent. This would have brought down the sum from EUR 6.5b to EUR 5.2b (*Libération*, 2024). As in Germany, the intended step was criticised as being counterintuitive in view of increased global vulnerabilities. Eventually, the only reason these plans could not be pushed through was the dissolution of the Barnier caretaker government in December 2024. However, the current Bayrou government followed up on this proposal and reduced the amounts for development assistance even further by almost EUR 800m.²¹ Against the backdrop of the 2023 LPM (*Loi de programmation militaire* [military programming law]) which saw a 40 per cent increase in defence spending over the 2024-2030 period, the constraints are evident and will also need to be confronted by any other future government (Maslanka, 2024).

Clearly, these reduced means and switched priorities for both Paris and Berlin virtually correspond to an emergency call to pool resources and seek additional spending efficiency, as enhanced cooperation on the basis of HDP and triple nexus projects would be beneficial for Paris and Berlin alike.²²

Global competition in the MENA region and implications of Trump 2.0

In the course of the Arab Spring and its aftermath, the MENA region has been experiencing substantial external interference, especially in fragile settings, by regional players and international actors. Amongst others, this geopolitical competition has seen Russia emerging as a pro-active party since its direct military support to the Asad regime in Syria.²³ It remains to be seen, though, how the events unfolding in the region after the 7 October 2023 will reshape the power relations (Mühlberger, 2024); to what extent Russia might be forced by circumstances to refocus on Ukraine sooner or later; and what the recent developments in Syria mean for Moscow's future relationship with Damascus. Yet the new situation in Syria could also open new avenues for cooperation between France and Berlin. Due to the high numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) (several million) and refugees hosted in neighbouring countries (Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan), humanitarian needs will persist for a while, until economic recovery gains traction. Reconstruction efforts across the board will go hand in hand with supporting development, as well as the necessity to push for transitional justice to foster social cohesion in a highly polarised and fragmented setting.

Meanwhile, the EU's systemic rival and key trade partner, China, turned into the most important importer of crude oil from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and Iran, and is seeking to establish greater connectivity in global trade routes for its exports by incorporating the Middle East into its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with a strong focus on the role of Iraq concerning the planned land corridor to the Mediterranean (Marangé & Pina, 2024, October).

21 This amount comes on top of the envisaged reduction of EUR 1.3bn planned by his predecessor Prime Minister Barnier. See also https://www.lexpress.fr/politique/budget-aide-au-developpement-plan-france-2030-les-premieres-coupes-du-gouvernement-bayrou-N4GY46YDMBCRDH6D6GXDVLAWNE/?cmp_redirect=true

22 In 2024, both Germany and France reduced their ODA budgets, with severe additional cuts envisaged for 2025.

23 At the time of finishing the final draft of this paper, the Jihadist opposition in Syria had been able to oust Bashar al-Asad from power, leading to discussions between the HTS (Hay'at Tahrir ash-Sham)-led interim government and Moscow regarding the fate of Russian military assets in the country.

In addition to new players emerging on the scene, others have been waning in relevance. The loss of French geopolitical leverage in the Sahel – ongoing since the Mali fiasco of 2021 – has been well captured in an analysis of the Barkhane mission: “[L]e drapeau tricolore quitte le Mali dans un contexte de rupture diplomatique et de progrès sans équivoque de l’influence russe dans le pays [The French tricoloured flag leaves Mali in the context of a diplomatic rupture and of unseen progress of Russian influence in the country]” (Bansept & Tenenbaum, 2022, p. 4). Paradoxically though, France to date sided with the Russian Federation in the Libyan context, where Wagner mercenaries have equally been supporting Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar’s role in Eastern Libya. Historically, this can be explained by the view Paris has entertained up to now of the Libyan Fezzan region – traditionally considered as part of the wider French *zone d’influence* in the Sahel. As the French international relations specialist Daguzan pointed out: “*La politique française à l’égard de la Libye étant aussi une politique sahélienne* ... [The French policy toward Libya also being a Sahelian policy ...]” (Daguzan, 2020; emphasis added). In this fraught new context for French geopolitics, the jury is out on how the Sahel retreat will affect its posture in North Africa, especially its role in Libya. As French military assets have been relocated from Sahelian countries to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a fundamental policy change in Libya appears a priori unlikely (Army Recognition, 2024; interview 12).²⁴ On the meta-level of French foreign policy, as Antil and Vircoulon have highlighted in the context of recent developments in the Sahel, Paris might eventually be compelled to reassess its national interests and to review its foreign and security policy accordingly (Antil & Vircoulon, 2024).

For both Paris and Berlin, the election of President Trump has reignited discussions over European strategic autonomy and necessary shifts in foreign policy priorities, even though Germany is likely to remain reluctant concerning real systemic changes, as it has no nuclear umbrella of its own but relies on US weapons stationed on its territory (Kunz, 2020). In the HDP spectrum, the decisions of Trump 2.0 have already wreaked havoc, as the dismantling of USAID (United States Agency for International Development) and USIP (the United States Institute of Peace) have shown. But as Germany and France both have to grapple with their own combination of budgetary constraints and reallocations towards defence spending, chances are slim that either could step in to replace the United States in any meaningful measure. Nevertheless, a focused and coordinated cooperation to stabilise Syria could be a smart choice.

Climate change, water diplomacy, and environmental peacebuilding

Lastly, a rising number of studies underscore the detrimental effects of climate change on social peace and its potential to trigger conflicts (NUPI [Norwegian Institute of International Affairs] & SIPRI [Stockholm International Peace Research Institute], 2023). In the MENA region, Iraq is one of the most severely affected countries, leading to considerable numbers of IDPs and rising social tensions (NUPI, 2022). Yet, conflicts over the use of resources not only have local or national dimensions, they also lead to regional and cross-border tensions, the reason why in the context of the peace pillar of the triple nexus, efforts to foster peace via tools such as water diplomacy and environmental peacebuilding rise in prominence. In practice, the operationalisation of the HDP nexus approach allows one to build climate resilience, a topic of urgency in negatively affected environments. In fact, future support to the transition in Syria will also require the climate and resource topic to be systematically included.

24 The UAE are the closest French ally among the Arab Gulf countries in their Libya policy. See also <https://armyrecognition.com/news/army-news/army-news-2024/france-revises-its-military-strategy-by-shifting-forces-from-africa-to-united-arab-emirates>. The Franco-UAE relationship also has a strong defence component, as Abu Dhabi has ordered 80 Rafale fighter planes (interview 12).

Cooperation drivers and constraints

As this section has shown, there are a number of factors that influence the ability and willingness of France and Germany to cooperate internationally. This includes not only the quality of the relationship between the French head of state and the German chancellor, but also contractual agreements such as the Treaty of Aachen from 2019. In addition to the structural factors described in accordance, there are elements caused by current developments, as President Trump's decisions since his second inauguration have made clear.

In combination, the three themes (budgetary constraints, geopolitical competition, and climate change) correspond to a clear call for coordination, pooling and common action, in order to uphold the roles played by Paris and Berlin on the international stage. But on top of these three predicaments, domestic politics in France and Germany until recently have not been conducive to enhancing bilateral efforts. In November 2024, President Macron called for snap elections – though his own term lasts until 2027, being a warrant for foreign policy continuity. In Germany, the so-called traffic light [*Ampel*] coalition led by Chancellor Scholz imploded at the end of 2024. The situation has evolved with the new Merz government in office since March 2025, while France has eventually managed to present its fourth government (under Prime Minister Bayrou) in a single year in late December 2024. While Chancellor Merz decided to lift the *Schuldenbremse* [debt limit], this occurred primarily to cope with increased defence spending, most probably leaving the HDP sectors with fewer means, despite omnipresent needs. The new German coalition agreement [*Koalitionsvertrag*] clearly states in the last paragraph of the section on development [policy] that “an adequate reduction of the ODA will be necessary”.²⁵

Notwithstanding these challenges, the structural drivers for foreign policy coordination remain in place, and shared interests – migration management, stability in MENA, security concerns related to jihadism, and energy security – have the potential to drive cooperation between France and Germany on external affairs, ideally by following a triple nexus logic due to its efficiency and cost-saving potential, a key characteristic in times of reduced aid budgets. Above all, the shared key foreign policy goals of containing uncontrolled mass migration, cooperating in counter-terrorism, curtailing Russia and China, in extending their sphere of influence in regions adjacent to the European Union, and ensuring access to hydrocarbon resources and new hydrogen production sites will continue to frame foreign, security and – increasingly – intertwined development policy considerations between Paris and Berlin.

3 The MENA region in the perception of France and Germany

Building on the analysis of Franco-German relations and the national and international framework conditions for coordinated bilateral action, this third section is dedicated to French and German foreign policy, with a particular focus on the MENA region. In analogy to the previous section, here the HDP question is considered as a cross-cutting issue, before the fourth section of the study examines it in greater depth and discusses it in detail against the background of the situation in Libya and Iraq, as well as in relation to the HDP nexus.

25 Koalitionsvertrag “Verantwortung für Deutschland“: “Aufgrund der Notwendigkeit, den Haushalt zu konsolidieren, *muss eine angemessene Absenkung der ODA-Quote erfolgen*” (lines 4273-4274); the emphasised part corresponds to the citation above.

3.1 Foreign, security and development policies: systems in Paris and Berlin

In order to set the framework for how the MENA region is viewed in Paris and Berlin, this subsection juxtaposes their respective foreign and security policy systems. The analysis also takes into account the consequences of the Ukraine war on these two fields of activity. This allows one to shed light on how – despite all existing differences – a tendency towards convergence of positions has emerged and how this could open up areas for bilateral collaboration in international development cooperation.

The French foreign policy system is strongly centred around the Republic's president, referred to as *verticalité* [verticality, or top-down], whereas German foreign policy is driven mostly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs [*Auswärtiges Amt*], as well as by the Chancellor (interview 7).²⁶ Germany's federal president is confined to a formal representative role, whereas the chancellor, as head of the government, has some foreign policy prerogatives. Another major difference lies in the different roles of the national parliaments in relation to foreign policy decision-making. While the German *Bundestag* debates foreign policy decisions, the French president can rely on a rather formal procedure – basically of recognition – in the *Assemblée Nationale* (Tull, 2023; Major, 2021).

Equally important are the divergent self-perceptions of the two countries' roles on the international stage. On the one hand, France seeks to perpetuate its image as a virtual superpower [*La Grande Nation*], based on entirely autonomous nuclear deterrence capacities [*force de frappe*] and, accordingly, a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. On the other hand, Germany has often been referred to as “reluctant hegemon”, due to a presumed relative mismatch between its economic superpower status and its hard power projection capacities, or willingness (Schweiger, 2014). This reluctance also plays out in Franco-German relations, where Paris sometimes tends to interpret the German posture as lack of interest – in particular in its own cooperation proposals (Kempin, 2021).

Furthermore, even though both countries are NATO members, France tends to view the future of European security through a more “continental” lens, while Berlin, until recently, first and foremost considers the transatlantic bond with the United States as the ultimate guarantee of its own and European security (Kaim & Kempin, 2024). Yet, with France originally taking the lead on the idea of European “strategic autonomy”, the inauguration of Trump 2.0 and the war in Ukraine have already moved Paris and Berlin closer together in an open-ended process, though accompanied by a strong securitisation of foreign policy (Kaim & Kempin, 2024).

What Paris and Berlin certainly have in common, is their staunch principled support for multilateralism and the shared goal of defending the international liberal order. For instance, in the spirit of multilateralism, the Aachen/Aix-la-Chapelle Treaty makes explicit reference to France's intention to support the German bid for a permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council and also to the increasing alignment of positions developed since 2022 regarding the Russian aggression, based on a 180-degree-turn away from Germany's former *Ostpolitik* [Eastern Policy], and Macron's realisation of the improbability to work via “appeasement” with Russia under Putin.

26 According to a French development expert (interview 7), the counsellors of the French President enjoy a superior position in strategic and foreign policy decision-making compared to the *Quai d'Orsay*, the French Foreign Ministry.

Foreign policy implications of Russian warfare in Ukraine

Before the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, France had three clear foreign policy priorities: Africa (including migration), counter-terrorism (aka the fight against jihadism) and the Middle East and North Africa, where both themes are essential, in addition to energy security (Maslanka, 2024). Whereas these three topics have not lost their relevance, the situation in Eastern Europe has somehow shifted the orientation, in particular as Macron has incrementally embraced a hawkish position versus Putin's Russia. In the African and North African context, this also relates to Russia's grey war activities in the Sahel, which – very much to the detriment of Paris – have led to the expulsion of French armed forces from Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso over the past three years (BBC, 2024).²⁷ As some of these countries (Niger and Chad) border on the South of Libya, from the French perspective the loss of French influence in the Sahel also corresponds to a strategic setback of far greater magnitude (Harchaoui, 2019).²⁸

France attributes itself the status of a middle power with global influence.²⁹ In the past, France was also a global colonial power, the reason why some of its postures appear to be informed by historical path dependencies instead of actual hard interests (Antil & Vircoulon, 2024). In particular, Paris considered itself for an extended period a hegemonic power across Africa, and the south-bound orientation of its diplomacy traditionally encompasses the Mediterranean basin. Accordingly, the armed forces play a central role in its foreign policy – comparatively much more than those under Berlin's command. For instance, the French-led former Sahel operation *Barkhane* consisted of more than 5,000 soldiers, whereas Germany's contribution to MINUSMA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali) amounted on average to a couple of hundred soldiers.³⁰

France's strong posture in Africa is also based on considerable financial contributions in the field of development cooperation, though its aid is reputed to be "politically arbitrary and lacking effectiveness" (Tull, 2023, p. 3).³¹ Nevertheless, the idea of *Françafrique* has been fading away, and accusations of neo-colonialism have been weaponised against Paris by its geostrategic contenders Russia and China, as well as by local Sahelian potentates (Antil & Vircoulon, 2024). At the same time, in North Africa the Tunisian president embraces a populist and sovereignist posture, whereas the relationship with Algeria is as complicated as ever. The strong capacities of the French Navy – the largest in the Mediterranean – might also explain the tendency to refer to a "Mediterranean" policy (Daguzan, 2020, pp. 114-116), as it is customarily referred to by Paris, rather than a North Africa and Middle East policy, as Germany does.

From the vantage point of Berlin, the Russian onslaught against Ukraine triggered two major developments. On the one hand, it was compelled to revise its foreign and security policy, for instance by devising the drafting of a National Security Strategy (NSS), a document unseen since the end of the Second World War (Auswärtiges Amt, 2023). On the other hand, Germany also revised its development policy, giving it a decisive geopolitical turn, a process which had already been underway for a couple of years before the Ukraine ordeal started (Öhm, 2021). In

27 Also, Niger is a main nuclear fuel supplier for France's energy sector. On the controversy, see also *Comment une mine d'uranium est devenue un pion dans le conflit entre le Niger et la France*, 10 December 2024, BBC <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/articles/cdxzezd7527o>.

28 For Libya's significance for Paris, see Harchaoui, 2019.

29 The French *Revue Nationale Stratégique 2022* refers to France as a "*puissance d'équilibres*" [balancing power], whereas it mentions the United States as a "*puissance mondiale*" [global power].

30 For a detailed discussion of Germany's role in the Sahel, see Antil & Maurice, 2022.

31 A target of 0.7 per cent of French GDP for ODA contributions was set in 2021 for the period until 2025.

the parlance of Chancellor Scholz, the new situation was the cause of a *Zeitenwende*, a historical turn caused by Russia's military posture in Eastern Europe (Bundesregierung, 2022).³²

The German National Security Strategy was released in 2023, partially based on a participative process with contributions from citizens' councils held across the country. Its purpose was to support the "emergence of a coherent foreign policy" of the then tripartite coalition (Barbin, 2024, p. 21). In a French reading, though, the process highlighted the difficulties in "overcoming the principle of ministerial autonomy" and the "constitutional partition of German external action" (Barbin, 2024).³³ The document itself makes multiple references to "development policy" and "sustainable development", including a brief section on "development policy as sustainable security policy" (Auswärtiges Amt, 2023, pp. 43-44). This can be considered evidence for the tendency to securitise the wider foreign policy field, including development assistance. In fact, German development policy already started taking a geopolitical turn during Merkel's chancellorship, as Öhm pointed out in his study (Öhm, 2021).³⁴ In the same vein, the most recent version of the "governmental development policy report" from the end of 2024 clearly establishes a connection between security issues and development policy, with the latter being a potential contribution to the solution of the former, as part of an "integrierte Sicherheit" [integrated/comprehensive security] concept (BMZ, 2024). Further, in the *Bundestag*, the political party AfD requested a discussion on the controversial issue of an "interest-led and non-ideological" development assistance, a first in this domain (Bundestag, 2024, July) which indicates aptly the extent to which the parameters on debating German development policy in parliament have been shifting. Lastly, the HDP nexus had been explicitly referred to in the programme of the previous *Ampel* coalition (Böttcher & Wittkowsky, 2021). However, the new *Koalitionsvertrag* does not refer to it anymore.

Since 2022, a geostrategic re-orientation of France toward the East of Europe has occurred, whereas Germany has emerged with a more distinct geopolitical profile, a role that many already expected from Berlin before the war in Ukraine due to its economic weight. Nevertheless, even if such a shift has occurred and a recalibration of priorities has taken place, the MENA region will not lose its relevance. This is due to its relative proximity, and, most fundamentally, because the grievances that triggered the Arab Spring in late 2010 in Tunisia have neither been systematically addressed, nor fundamentally resolved, necessitating ongoing stabilisation, development and peacebuilding efforts.³⁵ And as the crisis-prone MENA region is not bound to lose its geostrategic relevance, tackling its numerous challenges in a cooperative manner might turn out to be the most effective policy for Germany and France to engage in tandem. In other words, even though France and Germany have different strategic cultures in foreign, security and development policies, Germany is considered "among France's more valuable partners in the region" (Charillon, 2018, p. 95).

32 Olaf Scholz used this term for the first time during his speech at an extraordinary meeting of the *Bundestag* in February 2022 to describe the end of the post-war security order in Europe, as well as its global reverberations.

33 As argued above and below, the HDP nexus approach turned out to be an ideal instrument to break down existing ministerial "silos" and to foster cross-ministerial communication, cooperation, and coordination.

34 The study is based on the assumption of development policy as a soft-power foreign policy instrument, seeking to influence perceptions of a donor country in a positive manner while also being a potential lever to ensure political influence and to defend economic interests.

35 For a detailed discussion, see Section 4 of this study.

3.2 The Arab world according to Paris: Mediterranean policy or Arab policy 2.0?

This subsection discusses French foreign policy in the MENA region, highlights some of the structural constraints it faces, and presents essential information from relevant policy documents. The Middle East and North Africa are part of France's traditional sphere of influence. French foreign policy towards the region is strongly framed by a "Mediterranean" lens, though complemented with a distinct policy on the *Proche et Moyen Orient* (Near and Middle East), which includes Jordan, Iraq and several Gulf states. Its sense of national *grandeur* and aspiration to a global rank leads to a virtual entitlement to a leadership role across the Mediterranean Sea. This aspiration is underpinned in practical terms by the fact that France is in control of the largest navy in this area – which is one of the reasons why tensions with Turkey have been on the increase lately, in particular in the Eastern Mediterranean where both compete to project maritime power (Alaranta, 2022).³⁶ Furthermore, all former French colonies, protectorates and mandates across the Arab world were countries adjacent to the Mediterranean,³⁷ somehow informing a post-colonial path dependency – and viewpoints that might appear almost anachronistic. Nonetheless, the "Roman Mediterranean" (*Mare nostrum*) having been a paradigmatic case of hegemonic order, the partial French framing of its MENA-policies as "Mediterranean" without doubt plays on this historical significance – though with only limited claims comparable to those of a truly trans-Mediterranean Roman empire. Nevertheless, this framing not only corresponds to a geopolitical game, it also draws on ample references across French thought and literary productions, first and foremost the idiosyncratic work of the historian Fernand Braudel, who set the basis for a romantic infatuation *à la française* with the Sea between the European and African and Asian continents (Lepenies, 2016).³⁸

An evolving French "Arab policy"

Despite the visibility of the Mediterranean component of French foreign policy, it has an actual "MENA policy" which is determined by the fact that "[t]he Middle East is a key stage for France's foreign policy to prove its credentials as an international power" – which even allows it "to punch above its weight" (Rapnouil, 2018, p. 1). As Rapnouil notes further:

[t]he Middle East has shaped as well as supported France's international ambition for over 200 years. And, in turn, France has been continuously active in the region. As a consequence, it has strong political ties, close economic relations, and a *major military presence throughout the MENA region*. (Rapnouil, 2018, p. 3; emphasis added)

The author also argues that

[t]he key to understanding France's foreign policy on the Middle East is that the country sees the region first and foremost as a *stage for foreign policy and great power politics* – namely, an opportunity for France to punch above its weight. In this view, this is a place where it can display and take advantage of its much-valued [...] 'independence', i.e. its freedom of manoeuvre. (Rapnouil, 2018, p. 7, emphasis added)

36 Such tensions with Turkey are anathema for Germany, which traditionally seeks a more amicable relationship with Ankara, for domestic as well as for migration control reasons – despite, one may argue, its own role in the naval IRINI mission.

37 Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia in the Maghreb have been settler colonies and protectorates since the 19th century; Lebanon and Syria in the Levant came under French control after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire.

38 For an extensive discussion of the historical evolution of this perception and depiction of the Mediterranean, see Lepenies, 2016.

In fact, the French participation in the military intervention in Libya is a case in point.

Nevertheless, “[w]ith lofty ambitions undermined by limited means, France eventually felt it needed to maintain effective relations with the region’s governments” (Rapnouil, 2018, p. 9). But the Arab uprisings of the 2010s leading to chaos and resurgent authoritarian regimes were “generating a sense of crisis among French officials” (Rapnouil, 2018, p. 9).

The reason for this alert is not only based on the direct interests France holds in the region, such as energy security, counter-terrorism and migration management. It was also caused by the fact that France always seeks to “leverage the centrality of the Middle East in global affairs to maintain its relatively high diplomatic profile” (Rapnouil, 2018, p. 17). In comparison to Paris,

France’s key European partners and the EU often carry less political (colonial) baggage than France, and possess relevant instruments to foster exchanges and capacity-building with local civil society. They also have the resources to provide the necessary levels of development and humanitarian assistance, something which is clearly beyond France’s capacity alone – even if Macron succeeds [in] increasing the French budget for such activity from 0.38 percent of GDP [to the planned 0.55%]. (Rapnouil, 2018, p. 29; author’s addition)

Therefore, the author concludes that “[m]ultilateralising parts of its policy through the EU could also help France develop bolder policy on more sensitive issues such as human rights. In short, France needs the EU’s diplomatic leverage, its international credibility, and its financial resources” (Rapnouil, 2018, p. 29). Thus, as France’s overarching goal remains to maintain regional stability, the sheer size of the MENA region leads to a subdivision of policies into the Maghreb, the Levant and the Gulf. The latter has been emerging in relevance as opting for the so-called “reassurance approach” – for authoritarian regimes to continue their domestic policies of repressive stabilisation – has drawn Paris closer into the orbit of the Arab Gulf sheikhdoms, leading in particular to establishing close ties with the UAE (De Chermont, 2021).

France’s core interests in the region more closely defined as *Proche et Moyen Orient* [Near and Middle East] are threefold: the fight against terrorism; ensuring the development of conditions conducive to the improvement of economic ties, cultural relations and diplomatic interaction; and, as an intended collateral, the maintenance of France’s position as a global power. Furthermore, the extent to which the threat of jihadism has grown exponentially during the upheavals in Syria and Iraq has engendered a switch to an era of “crisis management”, marked by regular military involvement (Fayet, 2022).

Yet, the recent geopolitical shifts may require a revision of French strategy, as extra-regional actors (China, Russia) and emerging regional powers (Turkey, UAE) seek to upgrade their role. Hence, in a reading of the implications of developments similar to those in the Sahel, some researchers call for questioning the relevance of historical ties in the Middle East, and, accordingly, for the need to reassess and prioritise actual interests (Fayet, 2022).³⁹ Also, an interministerial approach – with similarities to the HDP approach established in Germany – has been recommended, in order to move away from a security centred-approach. Equally, the need to team up with European partners “who share security and energy interests in the region” has been stressed (Fayet, 2022, p. 6).⁴⁰

39 On the defence level, it has been argued that this could be realised by a reconfiguration of the command zones to correspond more closely to spheres of influence related to interests.

40 According to feedback from interview 6, the relevance of the HDP nexus approach in Germany is given by the thematic involvement of two ministries, which hence need to coordinate closely – this takes place via the GAAP (*Gemeinsame Analyse und abgestimmte Planung* [Shared analysis and coordinated planning]).

Clearly, these reflections support the idea for cooperation with Germany in the MENA region, first and foremost on the basis of shared interests, and thanks to convergences driven by international developments that risk adversely affecting Paris and Berlin in particular, if they do not join forces and streamline their actions.⁴¹

Lofty goals and structural constraints

French foreign policy has clear objectives such as maintaining its “independence”, that is, a status of maximal autonomy, and upholding multilateralism – grounded in its P5 role at the United Nations – as a tool to defend interests. But, evolving meta-conditions, marked by geopolitical fragmentation and, hence, multiplied competition, include the battlegrounds and post-conflict settings of the Arab uprisings in the MENA region. In this tense context, because of the threat of jihadism and a respective focus on counter-terrorism, France has moved closer to the orbit of Arab Gulf states, also using soft-power instruments in the form of cultural diplomacy (Pochat, 2023).

Having said that, structurally, France remains constrained in its room to manoeuvre by limited means due to a weak economic performance. As its means are not up to its ambition, and because of the lack of a voluntary limitation of its operational range, a debt spiral has taken root. At the same time, the challenges in the MENA region – socio-economic grievances, and fragility in places like Libya, Syria, and also relatively speaking in Iraq – have not subsided. While this situation has cemented a partial securitisation of its foreign policy, French military interventions in Iraq (and Syria) have also been useful in upholding its international status – a much sought after outcome of its foreign policy. Accordingly, if Paris wants to uphold its status and achieve its most cherished foreign policy goal, the combination of its constraints in relation to an ambitious foreign policy will oblige it to cooperate bi- and multilaterally, first and foremost in the European context, where the highest level of interest convergence can be observed (Pochat, 2023).

La Méditerranée: failed initiatives and changing trends

The actual importance of the Mediterranean for French foreign policy depends heavily on the personal preferences of its presidents and therefore also on the political climate. While Nicolas Sarkozy strongly favoured the potential driving force of the UfM (Union for the Mediterranean) as a pillar of his foreign policy (*au moins sur le plan de l’affichage* [at least on the level of display], Daguzan, 2020, p. 112), Macron was much more reserved during his first term of office. It was only later that he discovered the topic for himself, though primarily in connection with security issues. Under its current regional strategies, the *Quai d’Orsay* [French Ministry of Foreign Affairs] lists a distinct “Mediterranean policy” (Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, n.d. -a).⁴² However, the document neither addresses issues nor defines goals from a strategic angle but follows a rather programmatic approach enumerating a number of “action topics”. Three main pillars form the basis of France’s policies: regional cooperation on the basis of the UfM; policies focusing on youth; and “upholding a strong European ambition towards the Southern neighbourhood”. The third pillar also makes reference to development, resilience, and “peace and security”.

41 Section 4 spells out the path, by which cooperation across the HDP spectrum, and on the basis of the triple nexus, could structure bilateral cooperation in MENA countries.

42 The only other regional strategy of the French MFA concerns the “*Indopacifique*”. Notably, neither an Africa nor a Sahel or a MENA strategy are to be found on the website of the French foreign ministry, *Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères*.

In 2022, the *Sénat*, the French “upper chambre” of parliament, published a detailed analysis of the situation across the Mediterranean, highlighting the potential loss of “Western influence” and underscoring the trend towards a “militarisation of international relations in the Mediterranean” (Sénat, 2022). In fact, the document does not spare with criticism of “EU initiatives” to foster economic integration between the north and south of the Mediterranean Sea. Also, this supposed failure is depicted as the reason why France launched the initiative for the Union for the Mediterranean in the first place.⁴³ Interestingly, the renewed relationship with Italy in the context of the Quirinale Treaty (2021) is referred to as an essential lever to consolidate their “common strategy in the central Mediterranean” (Sénat, 2022).

Another key document regarding French MENA policy is the *Revue nationale stratégique* [National Strategic Review], the latest version being from 2022. It outlines French interests and challenges from a security perspective, yet with political implications taken duly into consideration. Several references to the Mediterranean underscore the geostrategic importance of the area (*zone prioritaire*), also depicting it as an area of “strategic confrontation”, while arguing for partnerships to tackle this competition. The document details the importance of “stabilité de notre voisinage compte tenu des répercussions immédiates que toute crise y émergeant aurait sur notre propre territoire, métropolitain comme ultramarine [stability in our neighbourhood, given the immediate repercussions that any crisis emerging there would have on our own territory, both metropolitan and overseas]” (République Française, 2022, p. 19). Notably, it makes a single reference to Germany – in the context of the need to build a European defence (République Française, 2022, pp. 43-46).

In light of these documents, the partial focus of French foreign policy on the Mediterranean can strongly be derived from security policy and geostrategic considerations, although one of the main thrusts of recent years has been the development of relations with the Arab Gulf states. In fact, whenever the EU – or Germany for that matter – is not an option to further its policy goals, including on the Mediterranean, France opts for ad hoc partnerships, such as those with Egypt and the UAE. With these two players, one of its main points of entry, based on a convergence of interest, is a shared anti-Islamist sentiment. In the case of the emerging geopolitical competition with Turkey, France effectively weaponises its secular tradition to oppose a political and economic opponent (Alaranta, 2022). Yet, even though this has allowed France to project power in the Mediterranean – above all in Libya – some fundamental cleavages between its own principles and those of its partners – as well as the ongoing reconfiguration of the international security architecture – leave these partnerships on a weak footing (Alaranta, 2022).

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that French analysts also apply the Mediterranean lens, for instance when looking at the evolving Chinese and Russian roles in the MENA region, or when analysing Turkey’s geopolitical posture (see, respectively, Marangé & Pina, 2024; and Kaya, 2022). From the French perspective, this geographic area is considered from a geostrategic vantage point, combining more traditional geopolitics (such as on NATO’s southern and south-eastern flank, or the EU’s southern neighbourhood) with the conception of the sea as a main thoroughfare for international trade, as well as a south-north axis of irregular migration to be taken into account.

In the Mediterranean realm, tensions have materialised between Italy and France concerning their policies oriented towards Libya. On the one hand, Italy favours close cooperation with the UN-supported, Islamist-leaning GNU (Government of National Unity), allowing it to control irregular migration through cooperation with local militias under the formal umbrella of the Tripoli government. On the other hand, Paris prefers to cooperate in practice with Marshal Khalifa Haftar in Eastern Libya, considering him a reliable partner to counter Jihadist and Islamist

43 In fact, the Tunisian and Moroccan economies are among the most closely intertwined with European value-added chains, including with French industries.

tendencies. Notably, France's positioning is not in line with Western and EU consensus, and is also in contradiction to Berlin's stance – but aligns with its strategic partners Egypt and the UAE. Nevertheless, these tensions were formally overcome in 2021, when Paris and Rome signed the “Quirinale Treaty”, a bilateral agreement that also addresses shared concerns in the Mediterranean (Alcaro, 2021). Furthermore, in the same year, Paris and Madrid signed a similar agreement. While some German media have drawn a parallel to the Aachen Treaty, its content cannot be compared one-to-one. Nevertheless, it somehow does put the Franco-German Treaty into perspective – although the common thrust in the Quirinale Treaty is more clearly foreign policy-oriented, and above all “Mediterranean” in outlook and purpose (Alcaro, 2021).⁴⁴

This hedging of sorts certainly corresponds to the French Mediterranean policy described by Lepenies in his monograph as a means to counterbalance German supremacy within the EU, by seeking Southern European partners – accompanied by an “apotheosis of the Mediterranean” (Lepenies, 2016). Indeed, the myth created around the Middle Sea is also a living one, and a useful one to create a platform for the projection of French power. The question therefore remains what significance French activities across the HDP spectrum can play in this region, given that French foreign policy in the region seems to be determined, or at least characterised, by a strong security policy component.

3.3 *Zeitenwende* in Berlin: the central European view of the Southern Neighbourhood

In analogy to the previous subsection, this subsection describes Germany's foreign policy towards the MENA region. To do this, essential strategy documents are taken into account.

The implications of the geopolitical turbulences caused by the attempted full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian military in 2022 have been captured by Chancellor Scholz as a *Zeitenwende*, a type of paradigmatic shift, opening into a new era. In fact, not only does this “historical turning point” correspond to an uncertain evolution of the European security architecture; it comes in tandem with a reconfiguration of Germany's post-World War II foreign policy posture. The most significant element of this turnaround is Berlin's strong military support for Ukraine, placing it second to the United States, in addition to the massive planned upgrade of its armed forces (Martin, 2022). These budgetary allocations and new priorities carry significant implications for the funds available across the HDP spectrum. A reduction in respective budgets is foreseeable, as indicated by the previous Secretary of State Baumann in November 2024, announcing an intended sweeping cut of up to 50 per cent of the humanitarian budget – a file managed in Germany by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 2024). Nonetheless, already a year earlier, the announcements for the 2024 Budget in 2023 corresponded to a major cut of financial means available to both the development and humanitarian sectors, slashing them by EUR 940m and EUR 400m, respectively (Save the Children, 2024).

Foreign policy implications of the Zeitenwende

A visible sign of Berlin's new posture in “global affairs” has been the elaboration of a National Security Strategy (NSS), a document presented in 2024. It not only offers a glimpse of the future role envisaged for development cooperation, conceived as part and parcel of a renewed security policy; it also stresses the intention to align German development policies more closely with its

44 In contrast to the Quirinale Treaty, the Aachen Treaty is not only a complement to the foundational Elysée Treaty, it also carries a much stronger bilateral orientation, due to its crucial role in post-war reconciliation.

strategic goals, and to take into consideration the nexus between the economy and national security. The proposed functioning logic portrays development policy as a tool for “sustainable security policy”, and as a means to enhance stability in fragile environments – thus contributing indirectly to Germany’s security interests, such as securing access to critical resources (see Auswärtiges Amt, 2023, pp. 43-44). In the subsection “Our insecure environment”, the strategy refers to countries confronting war, crises, and conflict, specifically Libya and Iraq. These fragile states allow armed non-state actors and terrorist networks to flourish and potentially endanger Europe and Germany (Auswärtiges Amt, 2023, p. 23).

A stark reminder of the French *Revue nationale stratégique* in 2022, the document refers to France only once, underlining the relevance of the amicable relationship for European integration. In fact, a French analysis of the strategy underscores the difficulties of overcoming the strong autonomy of the ministries in the federal German system when conceiving the strategy – but considers the outcome the “best result possible”, under the given circumstances. The strategy should enable a clearer appreciation of priorities and could set the basis for the evolution of German strategic thinking (Barbin, 2024).

In general, the new German stance is considered to have put an end to its (quasi-)doctrine of military restraint (Martin, 2022). Notably, this switch could also represent an entry point for defence cooperation with France – fully in the spirit of the Aachen Treaty and its many quasi-stipulations. More broadly though, the adjustment of German foreign policy in light of the war in Eastern Europe will affect foreign policy priorities. According to some analysts, this could mean increased efforts in multilateral formats, and a balancing role in Europe (Martin, 2023, pp. 24-27). Furthermore, the German *corps diplomatique* has already been grappling with major cuts (Interview 10),⁴⁵ and is at risk of facing further reductions, with potentially negative implications for its humanitarian activities.

As a result of the *Zeitenwende*, an increasing alignment between foreign and security policy can be observed in Berlin. This also brings Germany much closer to the prevailing logic of France’s posture in international affairs, which has always relied on a strong military component (Fayet, 2022). On the other hand, some analysts in Germany foresee the need for a German focus on territorial defence, necessarily reducing the potential scope for “international crisis management” operations (Kaim & Kempin, 2024).

The question here is, to what extent might the change in German posture impact its previous reluctance to join military interventions in the MENA region (as in Iraq 2003, or in Libya 2011). And, more generally, how will Berlin’s securitised approach affect its foreign and development policies across the MENA region, including its various interventions across the HDP spectrum. A critical assessment of the issue in an article in *Internationale Politik Quarterly* put it the following way:

The consequences of a constant wait-and-see approach to foreign policy are serious. A passive Germany has to live with the consequences of the actions of others. Syria, Libya, Yemen, the Red Sea, [...], North Africa, Afghanistan, the Sahel – German and European interests were and are affected everywhere, *but it is others who assert their will because they are able and willing to act.* (Lange, 2024 emphasis added)

Evolving German perceptions of the MENA region

In the wider context of the Arab world, Germany has emphasised a special relationship with Israel, elevated to the rank of *Staatsräson* [reason of state], thus enjoying a distinct profile that

45 In this interview, the interlocutor expressed the hope that the post-*Ampel* government represented a small chance of reducing the possible cuts.

no Arab state is bequeathed even remotely. As the eminent scholar of the Middle East, Udo Steinbach, put it: “[...] die Gestaltung der Beziehungen zur arabischen Welt [...] blieb eine Funktion der Sonderbeziehungen zu Israel” [[...] the shaping of relations to the Arab world [...] remained a function of the special relationship to Israel] (Steinbach, 2007, p. 495).⁴⁶ The North African region only started to enter German foreign policy considerations in a more distinct manner following the Jihadist terror attacks of 11 September 2001 in the United States. As for the Middle East, these evolving foreign policy positions occurred in parallel to the development of European cooperation instruments and programmes (Schumacher, 2007).⁴⁷

Since the terrorist attacks committed by Hamas and other militant groups on the 7 October 2023 in Israel, Germany has stood shoulder to shoulder with Israel, despite the latter engaging in a widescale, uninhibited revenge attack against the entire Gaza strip. This unconditional support for Israel has lost Germany many sympathies in the Arab World, which widely considers the official German stance as uncompromising – and strongly biased towards Israel (Casey, 2024). As a matter of fact, both Chancellor Merkel and her successor Scholz have been clear that Israel’s security is part of Germany’s core foreign policy (Casey, 2024). Germany’s abstentions from early calls for a ceasefire in Gaza at the United Nations have complicated the picture further – even though Chancellor Scholz, at least rhetorically, followed the United States once they became more critical of Israel’s onslaught during the late phase of the Biden administration in 2024.

Some observers claim that the reputational damage incurred for Germany will take some time to repair (interviews 3 and 4). Yet its reputation has been constructed over decades with soft-power instruments, ranging from the roles of cultural institutes and political foundations, to the pro-active engagement in support of development and as a sizeable humanitarian actor. Even though Berlin’s support for Israel has always remained beyond doubt, its current siding in the war with a radical and partially extreme-right wing government in Israel has laid bare substantial differences (Schneider & Grimm, 2024). Some of the latest polls suggest that the German image has been tarnished “virtually beyond repair” (Doha Institute, January 2024).⁴⁸ This is indeed remarkable since German reputation has been firmly built around support for the Syrian refugees, the lack of a colonial past – at least in MENA – and previous abstentions from military interventions (Schneider & Grimm, 2024). Yet, before the Gaza war, critical voices also spoke of a problematic attitude against the background of Germany’s brisk arms sales to wealthy buyers in the region. This dilemma also applies quite specifically in connection with the German hypothesis of a mutual condition between “sustainable development” and the observance of human rights (Bosen, 2021).

Traditionally, German foreign policy – also on the Middle East – is built around a few key principles – to which the orientation towards a “feminist foreign policy” has recently been added (Breckenmacher, 2023). Those fundamentals are: diplomacy through multilateralism; European integration; and a set of values (human rights, democracy and rule of law). Yet critics contend that Germany has developed a “tradition” of denying and obfuscating its own national interests, making the search for common ground with partners or allies all the more demanding (Lange, 2024). For instance, the interest in limiting migration flows from the MENA region or the need to cooperate on counter-terrorism are often not clearly articulated (Doha Institute, 2024, January). From the perspective of an expert on the Middle East, German foreign policy goals should be more clearly formulated: avoid nuclear proliferation; support stability to pre-empt refugee flows;

46 It was only in the 1970s that the principle of “fair balance” (*Ausgewogenheit*) began to be implemented in German foreign policy towards the entire region.

47 In this context, Schumacher refers to the EMP (Euro-Mediterranean Partnership), also known as the Barcelona process.

48 Here 75 per cent of respondents view the German position as negative.

and cooperate on counter-terrorism (Steinberg, 2009). If the recently engaged “realist turn” of German foreign policy turns out to be sustainable, and its normative positions possibly lose their previous prominence, such calls might be heeded.

German development policy and HDP policies

The reduction plans for humanitarian funds referred to above are based on a strategy paper published by the German ministry of foreign affairs in 2024 (Auswärtiges Amt, 2024). This document also contains information on the merits of the HDP nexus, as part of the section entitled “*Die Transformation des humanitären Systems hin zu mehr Effizienz und Effektivität gestalten* [Modelling the transformation of the humanitarian system towards increased efficiency and effectiveness]” (Auswärtiges Amt, 2024). Notably, no reference is made to specific bilateral coordination. Rather, the document points out the domestic reasons for choosing the HDP nexus approach as an instrument to enhance coordination between concerned actors inside Germany, while also insisting on Germany’s expectation (*sic*) towards other international actors to embrace this logic of action. In addition, the United Nations is referred to as a customary environment for HDP nexus implementation. Here it is worth mentioning that both the AA and the BMZ have set up nexus units (*Nexus-Referate*), which both underscore the relevance of the triple nexus in fragile environments (Kobler, 2023).

In the MENA region, the situation remains tense and Germany is being seen with a more critical eye. Nevertheless, “[a]s one of the biggest Western funders of civil society in the Arab world, Germany will continue to be a major influence in the region” (Casey, 2024). The work for German organisations in the field has indeed become a challenge – as it seems also for internal reasons:

Three current and former staff members at GIZ told Foreign Policy that Germany complicity in the [Gaza] war has caused outrage within the development agency. [...] One described an ‘authoritarian’ atmosphere that has led some staff to fear speaking out and others to quit. (Casey, 2024)

The German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development [BMZ], which funds GIZ and the party foundations’ work abroad, has said partner organizations are subject to ‘close scrutiny’ and checked for any statements that are antisemitic, deny Israel’s right to exist, or support BDS [The Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement]. (Casey, 2024).

In the southern periphery of Europe, French and German postures and strategic cultures might take some more time to converge. However, their interests are actually defined by a range of commonalities. In order to address fragility, to ensure reconstruction and to foster peace in the MENA region, divergences should be overcome and approaches better coordinated to allow each player to display his relative strength in a complementary manner.

4 French-German cooperation along the HDP spectrum: heading south together?

The fourth section of this Discussion Paper delves into the question of to what extent the divergences and complementarities between French and German foreign and development policy orientations distilled above, and respective MENA policies in particular, allow for deeper cooperation along the three HDP pillars, as well as via the triple nexus approach. The geographic focus here is on Libya and Iraq, with additional reflections on potential applicability in Syria in view of the ongoing political transition (see Mühlberger, 2025).

4.1 Triple nexus implementation in fragile and MENA theatres

The triple nexus is commonly considered an ideal way to achieve cooperation in fragile settings. Hence the first part of this section is devoted to this approach. Hereby, the focus is less on conceptual issues but more on the challenges and advantages linked to its practical application. The respective approaches of France and Germany in the MENA region receive special consideration to allow conclusions to be drawn about the potential for bilateral cooperation. The particular challenges of taking into account the “peace pillar” of nexus projects are also reflected upon.

Since the inception of the nexus approach, a widely shared consensus has emerged among practitioners and researchers that it makes most sense to use it in fragile settings, caused by protracted, multilayered conflicts or due to severe post-conflict rifts, where a combination of humanitarian needs and development deficits, as well as a certain level of hostilities coexist (Flasbarth, 2023). In such an environment, the operationalisation of the HDP nexus allows various actors engaged across the entire spectrum – at least in theory – to interact with each other, as well as with national and local authorities in a more coherent manner. In fact, the underlying rationale of the nexus approach is to create practical synergies by *thinking* holistically and by *acting* in a complementary manner, to the advantage of both: beneficiaries *and* implementing agencies. Ideally, the former should enjoy increased resilience, while the latter should accrue gains in efficiency. One way of achieving synergies lies in the definition of and work towards “collective outcomes”. Also, by partnering with local actors, a truly holistic approach can be achieved in the complex context of fragile settings (Brugger, Holliger, & Mason, 2022).

Why the need for efficiency?

Over the past couple of years, the number of people exposed to conflict has been steadily on the rise, as are those living in fragile settings.⁴⁹ In line with the increased needs and vulnerabilities, the United Nations has been more than doubling the amounts in its calls for humanitarian financing over a period of ten years, reaching close to USD 29 billion in 2020 (Hövelmann, 2020). At the same time, as security concerns related to fragile environments have increased over the previous two decades, the means allocated to fragile countries alone quadrupled from 2000 to 2018 (Brugger et al., 2022). This trend towards considering fragility is also one of the reasons why the “P”-component was eventually added to the double humanitarian-development nexus – while it equally induced a relative “securitisation” of the field.

The particular combination of increased needs versus competition over limited funds has been an initial driver for seeking a more efficient approach, as the funding actually available for the full range of HDP activities has been declining over the past decade (NRC, 2023). This trend has been reinforced by the Ukraine war, resulting in a shift of budgets to hard security and defence expenditure. For instance, within the EU context, the European Peace Facility is used for channelling support to Ukraine’s defensive efforts, rather than, as the name might suggest, to finance peacebuilding activities. However, the instrument was designed as a CFSP (Common Foreign and Security Policy) instrument (European Union External Action, 2025, 30 April).⁵⁰

49 According to the CSS study by Brugger et al. (2022), 1.5 billion people live in fragility.

50 See also <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/european-peace-facility/>. In the Middle East, the EPF supports the Lebanese, Jordanian, and Egyptian armed forces with non-lethal equipment.

Triple nexus implementation challenges

The nexus approach resembles a flexible framework, requiring tailor-made applications, rather than corresponding to a one-size-fits-all “user guide”. The latter can only be created reasonably in a context-specific process by involved parties. However, the underlying goal of creating a more or less seamless transition from post-conflict emergence support to more long-term-oriented development and peacebuilding activities continues to be constrained by at least three major factors: different administrative systems working in parallel (complicated by national differences between donors and agencies); varying financing instruments; and mandates that sometimes work at counter-purposes (Kaplan, 2020a). Yet, the purpose of the triple nexus logic is precisely to overcome these challenges (Hövelmann, 2020).

Adding a layer of complexity to the nexus approach, no single definition exists of what the P (peace) component actually corresponds to. In practice, agreeing on “conflict sensitivity” to be mainstreamed across the double H-D nexus emerged as an option to address this supposed lack of clarity (Kobler, 2023, p. 3). However, any basic “do-no-harm” consideration – which should already have been streamlined across the H and D components of the triple nexus – cannot replace the well-thought-out inclusion of the peace dimension in accordance with a genuine triple nexus logic. This would only be a smallest common denominator-approach, shared by both humanitarian and development actors, yet not in line with the complementary and synergetic logic of the triple nexus approach. However, as the inclusion of the P element seems to represent a major hurdle (Böttcher & Wittkovsky, 2021, pp. 23-25), this rather pragmatic streamlining approach is increasingly recommended and applied in practice. With regard to the peacebuilding component, it is also assumed that the application of the HDP nexus is a suitable instrument for international crisis and conflict management. In multilateral organisations such as the United Nations, this approach is reflected in the 2030 Agenda (for instance, SDG 16 – Peacebuilding) and in the increasing link between fragility and development policy (Böttcher & Wittkovsky, 2021, p. 7).

In practice, these various – real and perceived – conceptual inconsistencies and challenges mean that peacebuilding actors – more often than not – continue to operate along their distinct agendas and *modi operandi*, neither engaged in systematic cooperation nor in coordination with humanitarian and/or development actors.⁵¹ Nevertheless, financial bottlenecks, the increase in violent conflicts and of those affected by humanitarian emergencies are a continuing reason to push ahead with the implementation of projects based on the triple nexus.

Implementing the triple nexus approach represents a practical challenge for two other reasons. First, the theoretical construct of the nexus is based on a number of assumptions that do not necessarily stand up to the empirical test (Fitzpatrick et al., 2021).⁵² Second, there is little empirical data to support the claim that the additional necessary effort to ensure coordination throughout the nexus process is compensated by increased efficiency (Morinière & Morisson-Métois, 2023).⁵³ In fact, empirical implementation assessments on the basis of the still relatively

51 Informal exchange with the director of a MENA department in a peacebuilding foundation (December 2024), corroborating the view (though empirically in a non-representative manner for the sector due to the limited “sample size”) that peace actors remain the weakest link in HDP nexus operationalisation.

52 With regard to the assumed thematic interlinkages, for instance, a recent USAID study points out that the graphic representation of overlap between the three domains (H, D and P) is by no means as symmetric as suggested by the “standard model”. Rather, the three spheres might have different sizes, and overlap in an irregular manner, thus creating a *sui generis* nexus (the physical overlap corresponding to a thematic interface) in each and every case. See the graphs and discussion in Fitzpatrick et al., 2021, pp. 20-23.

53 Though this might be due to the range of challenges to properly implement the HDP nexus approach. See Morinière and Morisson-Métois, 2023.

recent nexus practice indicate a number of challenges, as well as limited achievements. A first “meta-evaluation” (evaluation review) of HDP project implementation, conducted eight years after the official launch of the concept at the United Nations, pointed out only three areas with progress: clarification of peace linkages; the establishment of the Nexus Academy⁵⁴; and of the IASC (Interagency Standing Committee) Nexus Task Force. Also, a fair number of implementation barriers were referred to, ranging all the way from lacking “operational guidance” to “entrenched policy silos” (Morinière & Morisson-Métois, 2023). On the positive side, efforts to apply systems thinking and the increasing relevance of the resilience concept were mentioned. Nevertheless, in practice, the triple nexus often resembles double-nexus interventions, with H-D or D-P twinings (Morinière & Morisson-Métois, 2023, pp. 13-14). In addition, the same study underscored that development policy is increasingly viewed as a foreign policy instrument, also by donors.

Proposed solutions to the dilemma

In light of these various implementation constraints, some practitioners have been arguing for a complete overhaul of the concept (Damien, 2024). However, even if evaluations have been highlighting recurrent misunderstandings – especially on the implementation level – it remains essential to define “collective outcomes” via a participative process among all engaged actors. So-called “silos” follow an institutional logic and should be seen from the angle of professional specialisation, required to realise a joined-up approach in a way that leverages the actors’ competitive advantages rather than being an impediment to holistic thinking and action. In the conclusion put forward here, the problem seems to be more of a practical nature, than a theoretical-conceptual deficiency.

Some implementing agencies, such as the SDC (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation) in Switzerland and DFID (Department for International Development) in the United Kingdom, have opted for an institutional solution, deciding to merge humanitarian and development activities or development and foreign affairs in a single organisation, respectively (Damien, 2024).⁵⁵ Yet, under the new Merz Government, this option is not a way forward for Germany during the current legislative period. Neither would it be an option in France, where the core of foreign policy remains vested in the president, unlikely to be merged with “lesser” development affairs.

Nor does this type of “twinning approach” allow the thorny P-dimension issue to be systematically addressed.

The technical dimension of financing HDP nexus activities has also been part of the larger debate. Concerns relate at least to two dimensions: first competition among actors for funds; and second, rigid budgets, according to so-called silos. Regarding the latter, a couple of flexible financing mechanisms have been put in place to enable double or triple nexus approaches. For instance, the EU’s ECHO (European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations) and (former) DEVCO (Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development) initiated cooperation via the EUTF (European Union Trust Fund), and the EIB, AFD and KfW set up the MRI (Mutual Reliance Initiative) to allow for flexible flows of funds between agencies (Poole & Culbert, 2019).

Lastly, one proposal to solve the issue has been to embrace geographic projects that bundle funds available for regionally defined HDP projects, to overcome thematic fragmentation. An alternative method has been flexible project funding that is only disbursed on the basis of a credible HDP nexus approach proposal and allows for funds to be attributed flexibly as the

54 Germany plays a key role in funding the nexus academy. See Flasbarth, 2023.

55 DFID was merged with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in 2020, establishing the FCDO (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office).

project moves on. In the Syrian context, regions with a particular combination of HDP needs, for instance Idlib, could be a starting point for Franco-German cooperation following a triple nexus logic.

Academic enquiries: a mixed bag

In addition to the wealth of policy reports and analyses provided by agencies and research outfits, the academic literature also covers a wide range of topics in relation to the HDP nexus. The literature briefly reviewed below focuses on specific themes that practitioners also *tend to* consider of relevance – or as a challenge – for the operationalisation of the nexus approach. The chosen articles link the broader HDP approach to practice-relevant themes such as fragility, localisation, peacebuilding, multilateral cooperation, resilience, conflict sensitivity, climate change, and the SDGs. These thematic areas relate to the HDP Nexus in different ways. They are either a motivational element or even a formal prerequisite for applying the nexus, determinants of aid allocation (fragility, climate change), represent a method for achieving objectives (localisation, multilateral cooperation), and an intended outcome (resilience, SDGs), or are a pillar of the approach itself (peacebuilding).

In fact, in many cases, fragility has evolved into a semi-formal prerequisite for HDP nexus operationalisation. A detailed empirical study found that not only do “DAC donors reflect fragility in their ODA allocations” but also that the motivation by fragility is a function of its measurement (Yabe, Opršal, Harmáček, & Syrovátka, 2024, p. 10). In addition, the same study concluded that single countries – aka donors or agencies – do not have sufficient clout to address fragility in an encompassing manner. Therefore, it suggests that cooperation is required and that such an “effort [...] should be collective, consistent, and coordinated in a way that ensures each actor plays a pivotal role in generating synergies” (Yabe et al., 2024, p. 10). Importantly, another analysis also finds that the most pronounced nexus overlap occurs in highly fragile settings – marked by “complex, protracted crises in under-developed contexts”, providing a rationale for operationalisation of the nexus under specific conditions (Fitzpatrick et al., 2021, p. 22). Similarly, climate change and environmental degradation, often representing a driver of fragility or of armed conflicts over scarce resources, has become an important motive to consider an HDP nexus approach. It has thus been suggested that one should incorporate an environmental and/or climate dimension into needs assessments (Joiremann & Haddad, 2023, p. 3).

Nexus implementation often occurs within the context of multilateral inter-agency cooperation. In fact, some of the challenges faced by nexus operationalisations are due to its complex set-up. The author of a study argues: “[T]he Nexus is the first institutional three-sectoral, multi-stakeholder and multi-policy level endeavour” (Baroncelli, 2023, p. 22). Against this complex background she identifies a host of related challenges: the need for joint financing; the lack of implementation effectiveness; issues around leadership; and accountability. On the other hand, the nexus, ideally, would allow each organisation to play out its “comparative advantage” (Baroncelli, 2023, p. 22).

Among the specific outcomes potentially achieved by the HDP nexus are contributions to the United Nation’s SDGs. Here the author of a related study comes to the conclusion that, depending on the intensity or phase of the conflict, either nexus-sensitive actions or genuine nexus activities are appropriate (Howe, 2019). His plea is therefore in favour of a situationally adapted application of the concept. This would also allow its strengths to be utilised to achieve certain SDGs.

A thorny issue relates to one of the three HDP pillars itself, which is the peace dimension. In general, it has been argued that the P has been lacking clarity of definition, rendering a fully-fledged triple nexus all the more challenging (Norman & Mikhael, 2023; Brown, Mena, & Brown, 2024). In light of this perceived ambiguity, the discussion around the integration of this dimension to achieve a complete triple nexus approach has been intense. One of the reasons

provided for difficulties to integrate the P is the need for all involved actors to think in a systemic way, and to accept possible shifts in their respective organisational cultures (Brown et al., 2024). A more fundamental critique considers the “late addition” of the P pillar to the double HD nexus as a root of the problem, as actors of these two original pillars tend to share a more narrow definition of what peacebuilding means, for instance excluding stabilisation activities (Böttcher & Wittkowsky, 2021, pp. 23-24).

In certain cases, respective reflections are also tied to intended outcomes like resilience, and methods such as localisation. As Norman and Mikhael argue in their analysis, this is of particular relevance in settings of protracted conflict or ongoing violence, and hence also closely linked to the peace(building) component of the triple nexus. According to the authors, the best way of integrating the P element into a triple nexus approach is to opt for a localised approach because “it was clear from our research that the most effective conflict/peace interventions were those at the hyper-local [*sic*] level.” (Norman & Mikhael, 2023, p. 261). Furthermore, they argue that the HDP’s integrative logic carries the potential to “foster cross-nexus elements like resilience and human security” (Norman & Mikhael, 2023, p. 261).

However, it remains appropriate to bear in mind not only the difficulties of practical implementation, but also the conceptual question marks of the nexus. Accordingly, some authors called for humility, as a wide range of exogenous factors determine HDP outcomes, not least with regard to the P-component (Howe, 2019). This detailed discussion of questions regarding the integration of the P dimension into the HDP nexus also reflects the development of the wider peacebuilding architecture (Richmond, 2021). Among other things, the increase in complex, protracted conflicts and growing fragility, including in the international system, has created a dynamic that makes the HDP approach appear to be a potentially useful instrument – despite its weaknesses.

Still, the various challenges related to the triple nexus – conceptual ambiguity, lacking empirical evidence of added value, the need for leadership and for motivation to “go the extra mile” – indicate that nexus operationalisation will be demanding. In the regional MENA context, some of these challenges and opportunities play out in their own peculiar way.

The triple nexus across MENA

In conflict-affected countries of the region, implementation of the nexus approach faces a particular set of challenges. Amongst others, the number of low-intensity to high-speed conflicts, various humanitarian catastrophes, and the ongoing need for economic development underscore that several countries of the region remain particularly fragile and are home to vulnerable population sections/segments.

In practice, the cost of war corresponds to the widespread destruction of infrastructure, huge lags in education levels, rising poverty, encroachment of non-state armed actors, and developmental drawbacks. In addition, the implications of a youth bulge and climate change effects exert a heavy toll on an overburdened job market. Last but not least, the authorities are often perceived as lacking legitimacy, the reason why programmatic cooperation with them may raise questions of adequacy (Kittaneh & Stolk, 2018).⁵⁶

Paired with poor governance and several protracted conflicts, the MENA region also experiences heightened levels of water stress, both due to uncontrolled demographic trends and the increasingly detrimental effects of climate change. Furthermore, some of the intense conflicts tend to spread humanitarian emergencies to their direct neighbours, complicating the

⁵⁶ CARE is a dual-mandate NGO, enabling it from an internal administrative angle to consider the significance of the nexus approach, in particular the dual HD nexus.

picture further (ICVA, 2022, p. 7). As a study from 2022 stated, these emergencies “[a]re significantly protracted, requiring both humanitarian and development assistance, with linkages to peace building and peace keeping initiatives” (ICVA, 2022, p. 7).

On the basis of a cross-regional overview, the same study concluded that a set of particular HDP implementation challenges occur in MENA. These include perceived “conceptual ambiguity” and “complexity”; achievements being based on individual initiatives rather than on systematic institutionalisation (that is, “ad-hocism”); as well as problematic, “counter-productive” and sometimes lacking engagement with government actors. In addition, whereas humanitarian actors are said to coordinate well amongst themselves, this is not the case for HDP projects – due to a lack of joint activities. Also, the DAC recommendations are perceived as “too generic” (in other words, not adequate for MENA environments) and the hope has been expressed for international financial institution (IFIs) to become more involved to supporting nexus actors (ICVA, 2022, pp. 13-14). In addition to conceptual issues, the practical question of lacking project leadership negatively affects HDP implementation, as does the ongoing principled reluctance of humanitarian actors to get engaged with peacebuilders (ICVA, 2022, p. 38).

The wars and recurrent episodes of fighting in Iraq and Libya respectively, have not only held back economic development but also created massive internal displacement and related vulnerabilities. While both countries can rely on the luxury of oil rent income to finance their generous budgets, economic diversification remains limited, as is the quality of governance or trust in institutions. The next and final thematic subsection lines out the triple nexus implementation in these two MENA countries.

4.2 HDP and triple nexus operationalisation in Iraq and Libya: potential for French and German cooperation

This synthesis subsection allows one to draw conclusions about the level of, and potential for, bilateral cooperation between France and Germany from the drivers and constraints presented above. To this end, the tools and strategies used in the HDP spectrum are examined and compared for possible compatibility – with a relative focus on French policies and practices. Geographically, the spotlight is on Iraq and Libya, with additional considerations relating to Syria. In turn, the findings from this subsection serve as a basis from which to derive recommendations for cooperative action in the final chapter.

French and German roles in the Iraqi and Libyan transitions

More than twenty years ago, both France and Germany opposed participation in the war in Iraq in 2003. At the time, President Jacques Chirac and his minister of foreign affairs, Dominique de Villepin, expressed their rejection, as did the German chancellor Gerhard Schröder and his minister of foreign affairs Joschka Fischer. Until the mid-1990s, though, France had been part of enforcing the Southern and Northern no-fly-zones in Iraq – but decided to abstain from joining the USA-led invasion, fearing a destabilisation of the region.⁵⁷ Much later, both nations actively engaged in the fight against Daesh – with France also joining Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) in 2014 – mostly out of security concerns related to so-called foreign fighters who had joined the ranks of the Islamic State organisation, as well as in connection with the risk of their return to Europe. In their fight against the Islamic State organisation, the German armed forces also closely operated with and trained Kurdish units in the KRI (Kurdistan Region of Iraq). Since the military defeat of ISIS in 2017, Germany has been among the top three major donors for

57 In February 2003, Dominique de Villepin made his famous speech at the United Nations Security Council, expressing his opposition to war in Iraq.

reconstruction and stabilisation efforts in Iraq, spending around EUR 3bn from 2014 to 2024 (BMZ, 2024).⁵⁸ France on the other hand, took a much lower profile. In 2021, French ODA figures for the entire Middle East did not exceed EUR 400m/year. The latest figures provided for Iraq alone put French ODA at EUR 34.2m (Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, n.d.-b). In Iraq, the two countries thus play in entirely different leagues.

In Libya, the situation evolved quite differently, with former President Nicolas Sarkozy having been a vocal proponent of military intervention on an R2P (Responsibility to Protect)-basis in 2011 – whereas then German minister of foreign affairs, Guido Westerwelle, argued against Germany taking part and instructed his ambassador at the United Nations to abstain from the vote at the Security Council (Schwennicke, 2016). Eventually, as the North African country incrementally descended into political chaos and power fragmentation, a certain competition emerged at the highest political levels in relation to “peacebuilding” activities. President Emmanuel Macron hosted a meeting between rival factions in 2017 in France, while Germany organised a first high-level “Berlin Conference” in 2020, though without representative Libyan participation.⁵⁹ In mid-2021 a second iteration of the international Berlin format took place (Deutsche Welle, 2021). Strictly speaking, both tracks have turned out to be dead ends, with various regional and international actors continuously using Libya for power projection purposes, be it for ideological, anti-Islamist sentiment (like Egypt, the UAE, and France) or for geopolitical reasons (Russian Federation), or for leveraging domestic prestige with Islamist grandstanding (President Erdogan).

Despite a wide range of HDP activities over considerable stretches of times, provided by both France and Germany, the countries remain highly fragile political entities, with Libya characterised by a de facto division into two rival parts, and Iraq marked by the ongoing dispute between the Kurdish-dominated region and Baghdad, among other things. This means that the “ideal” conditions for implementing the HDP nexus approach are basically in place in both cases, even though the immediate post-conflict humanitarian needs – in Iraq post-2017, in Libya post-2020 – have been greatly reduced to date thanks to massive external support. In addition, both countries have received reduced humanitarian aid since 2022, as they belong to the category of lower-middle income countries. Nevertheless, varying humanitarian needs persist in both countries – either linked to Sub-Saharan refugees in Libya or IDP return issues in Iraq. In addition, renewed demand could arise as a result of newly escalating violence, as numerous non-armed state actors vie for influence in both countries. Against this complex backdrop, the NRC speaks of a “transition phase”, characterised by a reduced H-component within the triple nexus (NRC, 2023).

Despite clear contextual differences, a comparison of the Libyan and Iraqi cases indicates a number of parallels. Firstly, the transition away from humanitarian funding and projects has been justified by reduced needs, limited funds, and the classification of both as (lower) middle-income countries, due to their respective, extraordinary hydrocarbon wealth. Secondly, both also demonstrate that their governments either lack “the capacity or the willingness [sic] to provide services to all population groups” (NRC, 2023, p. 82). Accordingly, a debate continues on how best to address persistent humanitarian needs, either via development projects, or through dedicated humanitarian projects. Notably, both transition processes were perceived by certain actors as “rushed” and “UN-driven”, that is, not sufficiently “participatory” or “bottom-up” (NRC, 2023, pp. 32, 52). Furthermore, differences in the transitions emerged with regard to the capacity of NGOs to have a say in the process (with a strong role in Libya, and a very weak one in Iraq), and concerning the terminology in use – with a strong focus on HDP in Libya, while framed around “durable solutions” in Iraq. Relevant for both remains the need to ensure protection of

58 Out of this sum, EUR 2bn were spent by the BMZ alone.

59 The Libyan interim government was only invited to the second iteration of the conference a year later.

the most vulnerable, as both governments have been embroiled in protection violations (NRC, 2023).

The Iraqi and Libyan theatres: French and German HDP strategies and instruments

Since 2019, two years after the military defeat of Daesh, a trend toward development and recovery, away from humanitarian projects, set in in Iraq (NRC, 2023). In 2021, the United Nations started to put in place a “durable solutions” framework aimed at providing a stronger focus on resolving internal displacement, and in order “to bridge the humanitarian-development-peace nexus [components]” (ICVA, 2022, pp. 27-28). In general, the previous strong emphasis on humanitarian action – despite the prevalence of related needs – has been phased out to allow a focus on longer-term development and peacebuilding projects (ICVA, 2022).

The most recent report on nexus implementation was published in the “IASC 2024 Iraq Country Brief”, corroborating this trend. As the analysis details, the transition away from humanitarian aid is being implemented in close cooperation with the Iraqi government. A Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) continues its work (also in relation to climate change-induced conflicts) but the consensus is that development strategies are more suitable to address ongoing needs – also taking into account a substantial reduction in humanitarian funding. The analysis also highlights the finding that the coordination and complementarity of financial instruments remain inadequate within a triple nexus logic, possibly due to the strong role of bilateral donors, including the German KfW (IASC [Interagency Standing Committee], 2024a pp. 3-4).⁶⁰ While bottom-up approaches have been activated successfully (in the “area-based coordination groups”), the deteriorating trust between civil society and the government represents an additional obstacle to HDP implementation.

In 2024, BICC (the Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies) looked into triple nexus implementation in Iraq (originally an EU pilot project in 2017), finding that the process has been UN-driven and enacted in a top-down manner – in contradiction to the original idea of fostering localisation and bottom-up approaches (Meininghaus, 2024). Another relevant finding underscored that the nexus insufficiently presented peacebuilding as a “political process”, even though, in practice, it is often perceived as “highly sensitive” and tends to “raise objections by armed and political actors” alike (Meininghaus, 2024, p. 4). The study concluded that, in the Iraqi context, the nexus approach “is primarily geared towards finding ‘durable solutions to protracted displacement’” and that the localisation rationale of the original concept does not receive adequate consideration in practice (Meininghaus, 2024, p. 17).⁶¹

The French approach across the HDP spectrum in Iraq

Following the military defeat of the Islamic State organisation, France opened a new chapter in its support to Iraq. Already in August 2017 a budgetary loan of EUR 430m was announced by French officials, in addition to EUR 60m for humanitarian aid. At this early post-conflict stage France supported NGOs to foster reconciliation via the Minka Peace and Resilience fund, established that same year (Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, n.d.-c).

In France, official humanitarian action rests with the *Centre de crise et de soutien* (CDCS) at the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs (Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, n.d.-

60 The same study refers to “competing financial priorities” as an impediment to enhancing coordination (IASC, 2024a, p. 4).

61 As the USAID/Tufts study (Fitzpatrick et al., 2021) referred to has highlighted, the actual nexus is not only context-specific but also actor-dependent. Hence it should not come as a surprise if one specific dimension of the triple nexus receives stronger emphasis during a certain period of its implementation.

d).⁶² The most recent policy document, the *Stratégie humanitaire 2023-2027*, stresses the goal of reaching a contribution of EUR 1bn in 2025 (Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, n.d.-e). In addition, the need to coordinate internationally along the nexus is emphasised: “*Cette approche nexus restera le cadre d'action privilégié en équipe France* [This nexus approach remains the favoured action framework of the French team]” (Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, n.d.-e, pp. 6-7, emphasis added). It also underscores the role of the UN's “Grand Bargain”, to which both France and Germany are signatories. France also aims to strengthen interministerial cooperation at the national level (Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, n.d.-e, pp. 24, 27). Importantly, an evaluation of the previous programmatic period (2018-2022) concluded that the implementation of the double HD nexus approach is still “*une pratique discrète* [a guarded approach]”. It equally recommends making (better) use of the CSDS to coordinate H-D double nexus projects and advises donors to ensure financing that ties H and D projects together in a logical manner (De Geoffroy Catteau, Foin, & Grünwald, 2023, pp. 29-31). In the Iraqi context, humanitarian action had a strong focus on Sinjar and other territories liberated from Daesh up until 2017 (interview 17).⁶³ In addition, France launched a programme to support Iraqi human rights defenders (Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, n.d.-f).

As for all other actors in development assistance, the overarching frame for French development cooperation is defined by the UN's SDGs (Agenda 2030). For France, support for development is structurally part of the so-called *3D-approach*, that considers it in combination with diplomacy and defence.⁶⁴ A similarity with Germany is the preference for loans in bilateral aid: “[À] noter que les aides bilatérales britanniques et américaines sont basées sur le don, alors que les aides japonaises, allemandes et françaises utilisent largement les prêts [(It) should be noted that British and American bilateral aid is based on grants, whereas Japanese, German and French aid largely uses loans.]” (Gazembe, 2024, p. 6, emphasis added). In the Iraqi context, the two French official players, the AFD which provides financing and Expertise France (EF) that implements projects, ultimately aim at improving the Iraqi state's capacity to deliver services (AFD, n.d.; interview 8). In practice, this constitutes an approach very similar to the GIZ (for example, the ARILA project in Anbar), potentially opening avenues for cooperation and coordination, including avoiding overlaps and inefficiencies. Furthermore, the AFD has developed a “Middle East regional strategy” for 2020 till 2030. Its three main objectives are social cohesion; equitable growth; and shared resource management.

In the wider field of peacebuilding, French actors have been working until recently on the basis of the *Prévention, Résilience et Paix Durable (2018-2022)* strategy. It outlines the policies and activities of a “*approche globale de réponse à la fragilisation des États et des sociétés* [comprehensive approach to the fragilisation of states and societies]” (Ministère de l'Europe et

62 In cases of urgency, the CDCS coordinates French humanitarian interventions abroad and liaises with non-governmental entities in the humanitarian sector. See <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/politique-etrangere-de-la-france/action-humanitaire-d-urgence/>

63 Interview with a French national working in an Iraqi peacebuilding organisation (interview 17)

64 The AFD website also contrasts German and French approaches as follows: “*En Allemagne, c'est plus une posture de générosité et de redistribution, pour une nation à l'économie florissante. En France, on pense plutôt contribuer à réguler la mondialisation, perçue parfois comme une source de dangers* [In Germany, it is more a stance of generosity and redistribution, for a nation with a thriving economy. In France, the thinking is more about helping to regulate globalisation, which is sometimes perceived as a source of danger.]” See AFD website: <https://www.afd.fr/fr/laide-au-developpement> (accessed in May 2025).

des Affaires étrangères, n.d.-g).⁶⁵ Specifically for Iraq, it refers to the Minka Peace and Resilience fund, and a related project “SAWA” (Arabic “together”). The report also highlights France’s role in setting up the EU’s trust fund Madad for Syrian refugees (Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, n.d.-e, pp. 27-28). Notably, EF devotes around 26 per cent of its projects to the wider peacebuilding sector, under the heading “*paix, stabilité et sécurité*” [peace, stability and security].

The goal of the French Minka peace fund of the AFD, set up in 2017, is to support conflict prevention and resolution. It has been dedicating financial means to Iraq as part of its Middle East Initiative, mostly to address the issue of Syrian refugees (AFD [Agence Française de Développement], 2022). During the period 2017 to 2023 the fund dedicated EUR 78m to Iraq, with a focus on “forcibly displaced persons and their host communities”. Among the intended beneficiaries were women and children, defined as a “priority cohort”. The 2023 Minka activity report also stressed that “[t]here will be improved links between the Minka instrument and the Team France tools working on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach” (AFD, 2023, p. 11).

As usual, the French policy approach towards stabilisation also contains a strong defence component. Operation Chammal, the French contribution to OIR, has been supporting stabilisation in Iraq by military means, adding an advisory component to its mission in 2022. Yet, France has also been supportive of the Baghdad Conference format, which allowed regional adversaries like Saudi Arabia and Iran to meet for peace negotiations in Iraq (Elysée, 2022).⁶⁶

Germany in Iraq

German organisations maintain a strong presence in Iraq, in particular GIZ and KfW, with Germany being the second largest donor to Iraq, after the United States (ANDD [Arab NGO Network for Development], n.d., p. 18).⁶⁷ In practice, both organisations implement projects beyond the strict delimitations of technical or financial assistance, often seeking to bridge various dimensions, such as development and social cohesion (GIZ), or reconstruction and peacebuilding (KfW). In Iraq, the triple nexus approach is an instrument for implementation, whereas the transition away from humanitarian assistance is also embodied in the use of the *Übergangshilfe* [transition aid], bridging humanitarian action with longer-term development support (interview 11).⁶⁸ German activities in the MENA are informed by strategic documents such as “Building for Peace” from 2021. In addition, the KfW has developed its own concept of how post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding can be combined.⁶⁹ Whereas the GIZ aims at combining support for IDPs with social peace, or to enable the state to improve service delivery, the KfW has been focusing on reconstructing infrastructure destroyed by the IS organisation, or during the fighting that led to its military defeat in 2017. This is also the reason why, until 2022, the sums dedicated to Iraq have been considerable (interview 11).

65 The document refers four times to the *contiguum*, details the meaning of its “*approche globale*” [comprehensive approach], yet makes a single reference to a P-H-D (*sic*) nexus. Libya is not mentioned a single time, whereas Iraq is mentioned three times, also as part of MINKA.

See https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/meae_strategie_etatsfragiles_bd_web_cle091a27.pdf

66 Macron’s speech to French Ambassadors, 2022.

67 US aid peaked at USD 819.3 per capita in 2005, decreasing to USD 56.7 in 2019. These figures are subject to change in view of the recent US policy decisions of President Trump.

68 The interlocutor confirmed that one *Übergangshilfe* [transition aid] project was co-financed with the AFD.

69 However, its website does not establish a link between its activities in Iraq and SDG 17. For the concept, see the KfW Brief by Prigge-Musial, 2020.

External support for Libya's transition

Following the UN-brokered ceasefire in autumn 2020, a transitory focus on humanitarian operations set in in Libya. However, even though the number of conflict-related IDPs has been substantially reduced by now, more than half a million migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa are present in the country, often living under dismal conditions due to their criminalisation under Libyan law (NRC, 2023). Earlier attempts to implement a triple nexus programme in Sebha (Fezzan) were abandoned in favour of another HDP project in Tawergha, though its implementation was also curtailed early into the process.

A more recent, yet salient feature of the Libyan context is the shrinking space for civil society actors. Though NGOs enjoyed relatively strong leverage in HDP processes thanks to their organisation as the LIF (Libyan Independent Forum), the general setting is increasingly adverse to NGOs, representing an obstacle to the bottom-up rationale of the triple nexus, as well as to peacebuilding in particular.

As with Iraq, the most recent report on triple nexus implementation in Libya has been published as the "IASC 2024 Country Brief". This overview confirms the ongoing transition away from the humanitarian element of the nexus. It also highlights the problematic role played by Libyan authorities, a dynamic that "increases fatigue among development partners" (IASC, 2024b, p. 1). A dedicated HDP Nexus Advisory Group was set up as part of the transition, with two collective outcomes having been defined via joint analysis. Nevertheless, financing remains a challenge, even though the United Nations has managed to oblige the Libyan Government to provide its own financial means through its Reconstruction Fund (IASC, 2024b, pp. 2-6).

Two recent studies from 2021 and 2022 outline the challenges of implementing a nexus approach in Libya. With a focus on the Southern Fezzan region, the former analysis highlights the deleterious effects of relative anarchy on various vulnerabilities of the population. Being a highly fragile entity, the use of a triple nexus approach appears adequate. In this context, the organisation has helped to define "intermediate collective outcomes" that make it possible "to narrow efforts specific to an organization's capacities and comparative advantage" (WeWorld & GVC, 2022, p. 1). The latter report, though based at the time on the assumption of forthcoming elections (to be held in late 2021), and hence expecting increased political stability, correctly identified an expected reduction of humanitarian funding, while highlighting the need for enhanced coherence of international assistance in general. Also, due to its previous conflict-related prevalence, "the humanitarian pillar [had] the most robust coordination architecture" at the time, while the Germany-driven Berlin process allowed the introduction of "several well-functioning coordination groups" of the peace pillar (Schreiber, n.d., p. 10). Despite the failure of the roadmap foreseeing parliamentary elections in Libya at the end 2021, an International Follow-up Committee on Libya (IFCL) was instated to ensure the relative continuity of dialogue. The IFCL consists of four thematic working groups, including an economic, a security, an HR/IHL (human rights/International humanitarian law), and a political group.

Notably, another study from 2022 found that "the international agenda in the North of Africa region tends to be more focused on migration management and development than humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding" (Altai Consulting, 2022, p. 4). Concerning Libya, it found that "[a]cross the region, Libya is the only country with serious multisectoral needs and where concrete attempts to implement the triple nexus are in place" (Altai Consulting, 2022, p. 4). While "[t]he EU has also strengthened its triple nexus approach in Libya through some of its EUTF-funded community stabilisation programmes" (Altai Consulting, 2022, p. 20) overall nexus implementation is impeded by a fragmented actor landscape, leading to the politicisation of HDP actors, supposedly affiliated with or close to certain Libyan parties.

France's HDP approach in Libya

Compared with its differentiated approach to post-IS Iraq, French foreign policy on Libya follows a distinctly geostrategic logic, informed by the ongoing latency of the conflict and related security concerns. In Iraq, having solved the potential threat emerging from returning foreign fighters by kinetic means allowed for a less securitised approach in the post-conflict setting (interview 17). Libya, on the contrary, continues to be viewed by Paris from a highly securitised and anti-Islamist angle, prioritising ad hoc alliances with regional authoritarian players such as Egypt and the UAE, also to counter mounting Turkish influence, in part due to its Islamist undergirding. This viewpoint also explains the French nurturing of the relationship with Marshal Khalifa Haftar, who opposes the internationally recognised rump-government in Tripoli. However, as an interview partner pointed out, the reduced role of France across the Sahel carries the potential of changing France's approach to Libya in a less securitised way, possibly leading to an improved alignment with the German position (interview 12).

Following a spike in humanitarian needs during the last large-scale military confrontation until 2020, the current situation leaves little room for humanitarian action, not least because of the uncondusive local policies for external actors (Amnesty International, 2024).⁷⁰ Yet issues such as IDP remnants and, above all, international migrants remain high on the agenda. Also, the difficulties of operating in Libya are a reason for cooperation via UN agencies.

Due to Libya's limited economic diversification (almost two-thirds of GDP is borne by the hydrocarbon sector) Expertise France has a strong focus on economic development, with micro-finance projects to foster entrepreneurship. In analogy to the Middle East, the AFD implemented a "North Africa regional strategy" during the 2021 to 2025 period. Its objectives, as indicated in the specific logical framework are threefold: enhance resilience; improve the social contract; and promote economic opportunities. The overarching aim is to "respond to challenges common to France and North Africa" (AFD, 2021, p. 23). Concerning Libya, it specifically intends to ensure "sustained activities", hinting at a challenging operating environment.

So far, the French approach to peacebuilding in Libya has been shaped by its geostrategic outlook on the country and its role in the wider region, including in the Sahel. Therefore, high-level, official mediation roles have been played by Paris, bringing together key Libyan actors. This approach corresponds to a reduced profile in the lower-key peacebuilding sector, despite needs related to reconciliation, climate change and water resources. Still, the French NGO Promediation has been active in the Fezzan, though with Norwegian funding. Unlike Iraq, the Minka fund has not been used to finance peace support in Libya. However, the MEAE (Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères) has been financially supporting the DCAF (Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance) North Africa trust fund since 2018 to support SSR/G (security sector reform/governance) projects in Libya (DCAF, n.d).

At the highest political level, the UN-led peace process remains the only multilateral framework for peacebuilding in Libya. Following the second Libya conference in Berlin in 2021, the IFCL was set up to ensure adherence of the signatories to the final declarations. The actual follow-up by regular meetings of the four thematic working groups are supposed to contribute to stabilisation, or peaceful dialogue, depending on the reading. France, for instance, co-chaired the Security Working Group in 2024.⁷¹ In addition to the French organisation Promediation in Southern Libya, the German Berghof Foundation has also been active in Libya.

70 Even after the flooding in Derna in 2023, providing humanitarian aid was virtually impossible.

71 See <https://libyasecuritymonitor.com/security-working-group-explores-ways-to-support-libyan-security-institutions/>

Germany's role in Libya

In addition to high profile diplomacy, and support for the multilateral peacebuilding efforts of the United Nations, German organisations have also been active across the HDP spectrum in Libya. Between 2015 and 2020 – thus at the height of the so-called 2nd Libyan civil war – Germany provided EUR 280m in assistance, out of which EUR 70m was for humanitarian aid, making Germany the largest humanitarian donor in Libya. Humanitarian support briefly rose following the Derna floods (2023) but more generally lost in relevance after the October 2020 permanent ceasefire, and especially since Libya has been classified as middle-income country. In the field of development assistance, GIZ has been implementing and supporting health, decentralisation and renewable energy projects – though doing so remotely from Tunis due to security considerations. In the peacebuilding and conflict resolution realm, German foundations like Berghof have also been present (Berghof Foundation, 2022).

In general, the German level of diplomatic activity and the scope of its development support might come as a relative surprise, since – compared to France – Berlin's foreign policy in Libya is neither linked to geostrategic (for France these are their role in the Mediterranean Sea as a naval power, and the Sahel policy – until recently at least) nor to particularly strong economic interests.

5 Conclusions: findings and recommendations

This study has provided a detailed discussion aimed at drawing conclusions about the potential for bilateral co-operation between France and Germany outside Europe. To this end, similarities and differences between German and French development policy have been systematically analysed on three thematic levels: bilateral relations; respective MENA foreign policies; and activities of both across the HDP spectrum in Iraq and Libya. This final section presents a reflection on the most relevant findings and proposes recommendations for enhanced Franco-German cooperation in international development.

The chronological starting point of the study was the Aachen Treaty of 2019, which contains a number of development policy “guidelines”, but which remained by and large at the declaratory level. An ideal practical starting point for comprehensive bilateral cooperation, which would make itself felt through improved coordination, would be the activation of the Development Policy Dialogue, provided for in the agreement. Geographically, the focus of this study lay on the MENA region with Iraq and Libya, although considerations were also made regarding Syria, due to recent political transition. Events such as Trump's development policy decisions in the United States and the inauguration of German Chancellor Merz have also been taken into account.

Recent developments such as the dissolution of USAID or USIP do not detract from the conclusions or recommendations of this study. On the contrary: all the trends cited in the study – budgetary restrictions, geopolitical tensions and climate change, all indicating a more pronounced convergence of interests – point to the structural need to flexibly promote bilateral and multilateral cooperation, including across the HDP spectrum. This is the best way to provide the necessary support to those most affected worldwide and to take concerted action against the ongoing instability in the region immediately south of Europe.

Franco-German convergence trends and shared interests

Shared interests are a basic prerequisite for co-operation between states. These are usually defined along political, economic and military dimensions. With regard to the so-called Southern Neighbourhood, Paris and Berlin have a number of common interests, albeit to different degrees

and depending on the country in question. For example, both states have a fundamental interest in managing migration flows, combating Jihadist threats and ensuring access to sources of energy. Attempts are also being made to achieve these interests through the targeted economic and political stabilisation of particularly fragile countries. Development policy measures across the HDP spectrum, which are generally regarded here as soft-power foreign policy instruments, also serve this purpose. Observable differences are mostly noticeable at the level of methods, historical trajectories, and, therefore, also in the varying interpretations of conflicts and their causes, rather than being characterised by actual divergences of interest. The basis for bilateral cooperation – also in the Arab world – could therefore hardly be better.

Firstly, at the bilateral level, the Aachen Treaty provides a political framework that can be implemented in practice, thereby laying the foundation for cooperation in the field of international development. Going beyond its declaratory character by effectively launching the Development Policy Dialogue, an important body would be created to hold regular consultations between relevant stakeholders to discuss content and methods and to either prepare decisions at higher echelons or actually to make them themselves.

Secondly, there is the noticeable rapprochement in foreign policy between Paris and Berlin, primarily caused by the Russian attack on Ukraine – and recently reinforced by the renewed potential for close cooperation between President Macron and Chancellor Merz. In addition, President Trump's erratic and unpredictable behaviour reinforces the need for European leaders to close ranks. Harmonising the reading of conflicts in the MENA region would be a useful side-effect of this rapprochement, in order to put coordinated development cooperation on a solid foundation. For instance, the former German Foreign Minister Baerbock's visit to Damascus and Macron's invitation extended to Al-Shar'a express virtually identical readings of the post-conflict situation in Syria. This could lay the foundation for a more coordinated approach to reconstruction and peacebuilding between Paris and Berlin.

Thirdly, a certain securitisation of development policy has prevailed for more than a decade due to geopolitical shifts, particularly in Germany. This trend has prepared a convergence of the views and positions of both countries in foreign affairs, as France traditionally thinks and acts more strongly in military categories in the foreign policy domain.

Fourthly, France has suffered considerable geopolitical setbacks in traditional spheres of influence such as the Sahel. As a result, Paris could detach its North Africa policy, especially in Libya, from historical path dependencies and adopt a more anti-Russian orientation. Ultimately such a stance would facilitate the identification of common ground between Paris and Berlin. In addition, the lessons learnt from Mali, Iraq and Libya could potentially be used to set up a cooperative engagement in Syria – based on the shared position regarding the interim government in Damascus.

Cap sur le Sud: *heading South together?*

In view of the international situation (the war in Ukraine; President Trump's disruptive aid policies; and Russian attempts to carve out a new place for itself in MENA, and the adjacent Sahel) and implications thereof described in this study (Franco-German rapprochement in Russia policy; increased defence expenditures at the expense of HDP funds; reinforced geopolitical competition in MENA), it is essential that Berlin and Paris join forces on the international stage in the near future. Although the incentive to do so ostensibly stems from a complex geopolitical situation, the drivers for cooperation cannot be reduced to this alone, as described in detail here. Since, in the foreseeable future, the focus of Franco-German cooperation will be primarily on foreign and security policy, these conditions represent an ideal starting point for thinking together about development policy agendas to support the safeguarding of shared interests. In such an approach, the application of the *triple nexus/continguum* approach could also be given the necessary room for manoeuvre.

Military developments in Eastern Europe in recent years mean that in all likelihood Germany and France will primarily realise joint armaments projects. This is by no means in contradiction to the Aachen Treaty, as outlined above. However, the likelihood of tighter budgets for activities within the HDP spectrum represents an additional driver to apply the efficiency-enhancing tools such as coordination and cooperation, including by means of the triple nexus. The nexus approach would have the advantage of not only being able to proceed in a way that is gentle on resources but would also support combatting vulnerability in geostrategically relevant areas – such as MENA countries – in a targeted manner, thereby “showing a clear edge” to competing actors such as Russia, or China.

Furthermore, the systematic application of the HDP nexus approach as a development policy instrument would allow one to improve the balance between hard security interventions and soft-power measures in the “global South”. From that perspective it would also allow French and German approaches – until now marked by varying levels of securitisation of foreign policy and militarisation of interventions – to be “married”.

Against the backdrop of the geopolitical and national drivers, discussed in detail above, Franco-German cooperation – also and especially in development assistance, be it bilaterally or in multi-lateral contexts – is high on the agenda. Bilateral cooperation in extra-European contexts can gain additional momentum thanks to an increasing convergence of the way that international challenges are interpreted. As this study has shown, the application of the triple nexus in practice is linked to the fulfilment of certain prerequisites and faces a number of obstacles. However, these hurdles are due much less to conceptual ambiguities or even methodological weaknesses than to organisational issues.

Key findings

The following key findings can be drawn from the three parts of this analysis.

Firstly, France and Germany are confronted with a number of similar challenges at the global, European and national levels, as well as on the southern periphery. In recent years, these developments have not only led to an increasing convergence of interests (based on the war in Ukraine), but also to a rapprochement of interpretations of international conflicts due to the relative securitisation of foreign and development policies, in particular in Berlin. For these reasons, some basic foreign policy prerequisites for in-depth cooperation have been fulfilled and these could also be extended to the area of soft-power instruments in development policy.

Secondly, both intraregional developments (Arab Spring upheavals) and the increased influence of external actors in the MENA region (Russia, Iran, UAE, Qatar, Turkey) over the last fifteen years have tended to exacerbate the challenges facing Berlin and Paris on the southern periphery. The continuing fragility in the target countries of European development policy leads to persistent vulnerability and a series of constantly shifting and mutually reinforcing needs along the HDP spectrum. Furthermore, migratory pressures and counter-terrorism challenges represent core shared challenges. In order to effectively tackle issues in these three areas, which are often closely interwoven in terms of their causes, adequate instruments and coordinated action are required to allow the players to apply their respective strengths at the appropriate time.

Thirdly, even though a variety of instruments and strategies are in use by France and Germany to solve the same kind of issues in fragile environments, sufficient overlap exists to coordinate them in a synergetic manner. In particular, the French *approche globale* [comprehensive approach] has many parallels with the German HDP nexus approach. Furthermore, France traditionally uses a so-called *3D-approach* (development-diplomacy-defence), while it also applies the *contiguum* or HD(P) nexus approach. Hence, in function of the specific intended cooperation theme or geography, the similarities between instruments represent a workable and

pragmatic basis to enhance cooperation and coordination, without the necessity of creating full conceptual alignment.

Fourth, the Chancellorship of Friedrich Merz in Germany presents a unique opportunity for enhanced cooperation with French President Emmanuel Macron. Coming from similar political families and being much closer in character and outlook will allow them to overcome the *Je t'aime moi non plus*-predicament between Chancellor Scholz and President Macron.

Fifth, after ten years of project implementation, a reasonable amount of practical experience of the HDP nexus approach has been accumulated across fragile environments, including in the MENA region. On the one hand, this facilitates a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the instrument. On the other hand, the usefulness of the approach in fragile environments has been empirically established, and could now be based on numerous lessons learned, for instance in Syria.

Overall, this list of findings speaks in favour of a stronger and coordinated development policy presence of France and Germany in the southern periphery of Europe. Accordingly, the analysis closes with a number of specific recommendations to enhance Franco-German cooperation in the field of international assistance across the three pillars of the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding spectrum, and for triple nexus approaches.

Recommendations

Based on the three thematic sections and the discussion of the findings above, this closing section distils recommendations to improve bilateral, Franco-German cooperation in times of budgetary constraints, geopolitical competition, and ongoing fragility in several MENA states. The following are practical steps to enable meaningful and effective bilateral cooperation between Germany and France across the HDP spectrum. A distinction is made between the political, institutional and operational levels, while recommendations for triple nexus cooperation are also proposed.

The political and strategic level

- Against the backdrop of geopolitical uncertainty, it is all the more important to clearly define common interests in the MENA region in order to be able to use these as a basis for coordinating strategy and a cooperative approach across the HDP spectrum.
- No new treaties or agreements need to be devised to this end. Rather, the key points of the Aachen Treaty should actually be implemented. Ideally, the vigour of the newly required security cooperation could be flanked by development policy measures that also address shared interests in the international realm.
- Drawing the public's attention to the practical benefits of development work would also make sense. In times of reduced budgets, there should be a broad public understanding of the topic, and attention could be drawn to programmatic issues such as combating migration causes. Fragility in the neighbourhood cannot be combated by military means alone but requires longer-term efforts for sustainable development, and peacebuilding approaches.

The institutional level

- The Commissioner for German-French cooperation, Gunther Krichbaum, who works on common foreign policy initiatives in the context of his role linked to preparations for the French-German Council of Ministers, could also leverage his bilateral ties – including those to his counterpart Benjamin Haddad – to propose HDP-related topics for collaboration in the

international field. This approach could serve to complement earlier bilateral initiatives in the fields of European Security and Defence Policy, energy and climate, or migration.

- A practical step should be the initiation of the “development policy dialogue”, provided for in the Aachen Treaty, ideally with a thematic extension to the MENA region. Without a suitable instrument for Franco-German dialogue, the only alternative would be to make use of the existing European Union-level with the relevant DGs (Directorates-General) and meeting formats.
- Until the “Development Policy Dialogue” has been firmly established, existing instruments can be used to structure the bilateral exchange. The Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly is a suitable option for this purpose.⁷² Meanwhile, at a higher level, the Franco-German Ministerial Council could also play a role in such deliberations.
- Instead of trying to devise new arrangements, the most efficient way is to make best use of existing agreements and previously foreseen instruments. The goal should be to enhance the alignment of development assistance policies. As the Aachen Treaty further makes references to “mutual obligations”, these should be underpinned by commonly agreed compliance mechanisms.

The operational level

- In the operational domain, joint cooperation experiences in the MENA (for example, those of the KfW and AFD) and Sahel regions could be used to strengthen bilateral collaboration in new fields of potential application such as Syria. In the latter case, this would also apply to the Qudra project and the SRTF (Syria Recovery Trust Fund).
- Thematic areas of cooperation could also be defined, such as water resources or climate change. A joint approach by Germany and France could also lend more weight to the topic of “water diplomacy”, especially when cross-border conflicts are under discussion.
- To effectively launch a French-German HDP and/or nexus cooperation project, a needs-based project or programme should be a starting point. If applicable, this template could be taken forward in similar fragile contexts of interest to both Berlin and Paris. Currently, Syria could be such a field for cooperation, as humanitarian needs persist, development and reconstruction are urgently required, and peacebuilding approaches across the board are high on the agenda, as well.
- Incentives for cooperation must also be created for stakeholders along the HDP spectrum, in particular for engaging in demanding triple nexus projects. Cooperation and coordination should not only depend on individual initiatives (as is often the case in nexus endeavours) but should be part and parcel of the project and programme design, that is, they should correspond to a basic formal requirement (for instance, for donor bids).
- In order to address questions such as conceptual ambiguity, added value, and the need for leadership in nexus projects, the existing data material should be systematically analysed to prepare an empirically sound basis for decision-making – as well as for motivation to “go the extra mile”.
- By now, both countries can draw on a rich portfolio of lessons learnt from the bilateral cooperation level, for instance in Mali and the Sahel, ready to be leveraged. However, any debate on Franco-German cooperation must start by asking the right questions, including

⁷² Those participating in interview 15 stressed that the assembly is a useful format to discuss thorny issues on the basis of mutual trust.

from a needs perspective. Establishing clarity on the expected contribution of bilateral cooperation certainly is a first step. To go beyond the lessons learnt aspect, both Berlin and France should co-finance academic research projects and enable meta-evaluations of HDP and triple nexus projects.

- Following the signature of the Aachen Treaty, a number of priority actions have been defined. At this stage of bilateral cooperation, following ten years of various activities, a new set of priorities with regard to collaboration could be debated, either by the Franco-German Ministerial Council, or, ideally, in the context of the newly established Development Policy Dialogue.

Triple nexus cooperation

In order to improve the application of the HDP nexus on the basis of the existing prerequisites for cooperation, the following aspects should also be taken into account. The triple nexus is essentially a flexible coordination instrument that enables different actors to work towards a jointly defined goal (“collective outcome”). Different mandates, time horizons, practices, financing instruments and cooperation habits do not represent a weakness in themselves but rather enable cooperation, if properly coordinated within the nexus.

The basic premise here is to think systemically – that is, in interrelationships or holistically – but to act in a specialised and complementary manner at the core. This requires more than just an agreement on a leadership function and flexible financing instruments. The stakeholders involved must also have the necessary understanding of how their project partners work, or learn this at the beginning, in order to be able to create synergies in the future. This first step will enable the subsequent development of shared goals.

- Although the development policy approaches between Paris and Berlin are not congruent, there are certain convergences between their approaches. In particular, the French comprehensive approach [*approche globale*], the 3D-approach and the *contiguum* show strong similarities or overlap with the HDP nexus approach, which is very much in the spotlight in Germany. This similarity would be a good starting point for seeking more in-depth cooperation with France. To start with, this could take place within the framework of the Nexus Academy, for example.
- The interviews conducted for this study clearly showed that internal organisational learning is a basic prerequisite for the application of the triple nexus. Just as the actors involved in Germany first had to get to know each other, and this is currently also happening inside France, a cross-border exchange between the relevant ministries, advisors, donors, agencies, and so on can only take place to foster mutual learning at a more advanced stage. Hence, the (nexus) problem seems to be more of a practical nature, rather than a theoretical-conceptual deficiency. However, intra-organisation and intra-institutional learning to create HDP-literacy remains a core prerequisite before complex bilateral collaboration in the international sphere is attempted.⁷³
- Internal adjustments are necessary on the operational level to enhance the appreciation of the potential benefits of cooperation and coordination. This will also entail ensuring mutual understanding among the various HDP actors operating on the basis of their different *modus operandi*. The result of such a process should lead to “trilingual” experts, able to navigate the three HDP dimensions, and hence potentially able to embrace leadership functions in various projects and programmes. This type of literacy will also facilitate the ability and willingness to design context-specific, collective outcomes.

73 Feedback from interview 13.

- On the level of incentives, it will be key to provide flexible funding instruments that allow swift transfers of funds between the three HDP dimensions in tune with contextual developments and evolving needs. A geographically limited project – to a vulnerable region – could be the basis for such an approach. The existing financial instruments, such as funds and others (MRI, and so on) should be scrutinised for their effective contribution to HDP nexus projects to date. Such financial frameworks need to be complemented by incentives at the personnel level, where exchanges are part of career opportunities
- As the literature and the feedback from the interviews suggest, particular attention should be paid to the insertion of the P-dimension into triple nexus endeavours. Here, a slight departure from overly process-oriented methods preferred by some peacebuilding actors towards a more goal-oriented orientation would be a good starting point. However, even if the question of the P must be clarified, it should be done by means of “do-no-harm” or “conflict-sensitivity” policies alone, as these should already be standards in humanitarian and development projects.

List of interviewees

1. Expertise France (EF): Coordinator SEA – *P2S/Paix, Stabilité et Sécurité* (Peace, Stability, Security)
2. EF: Project Manager Libya (Tunis-based)
3. BICC (Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies): two MENA & Iraq researchers
4. GIZ (HQ, Eschborn): Head of Programme - BMZ MENA Strategy Development
5. KfW (*Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau*): Economist Peace, Flight and Fragility (*Sektorökonom Frieden, Flucht und Fragilität*)
6. Independent consultant and trainer, H-D-P expert
7. IDDRI (Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations): Policy Research Lead on sustainable development, governance, international cooperation, and financing
8. AFD (*Agence Française de Développement*): Project Manager ME conflict sensitivity and Iraq project portfolio/Fragility, Crisis, Conflict Department
9. EF and *Quai d'Orsay/MEAE*: Diplomatic advisor to the deputy MD
10. Federal Foreign Office (*Auswärtiges Amt*): Head of Cooperation and Culture with Libya
11. GIZ (Erbil, Iraq): Head of Cluster Reconstruction, Peacebuilding, and Governance
12. RUSI (Royal United Services Institute, London): Expert on Libya and French foreign policy
13. CHA (Centre for Humanitarian Action, Berlin); Director & Chair
14. BICC: Senior Researcher on Sahel & Mali
15. KAS (Konrad Adenauer Foundation France, Paris): Project Manager/*Chargé de projet*
16. *Stiftung Genshagen*: Executive Director
17. PPO (Peace Paradigms Organisation, Erbil, Iraq): Project Manager (French national)

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