



# Clingendael Policy Brief

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The Clingendael Institute

## Bridging the Channel

### British-French Defence Cooperation as the Core of European Military Capabilities

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With the United States shifting its strategic focus to the Asia-Pacific area and national defence budgets being cut, European defence cooperation has become a matter of necessity. France and the United Kingdom (UK) have taken the lead. They acted as Europe's avant garde during the military intervention in Libya. The Lancaster House treaty of 2010 brings their capabilities together in a structural manner. Franco-British defence cooperation is crucial for the future of Europe's military power, which other European countries seem, so far, to be ignoring. When joining European-led interventions these countries' forces will have to operate with the core provided by Paris and London. The Benelux countries and others need to align their plans and initiatives to ensure connectivity. At the same time, France and the UK should be ready to open up their bilateral programmes to other European partners, with a pragmatic approach and on the basis of concrete contributions from these other countries.

#### New realities

In addition to the eurozone crisis Europe is facing a defence crisis. Failure to address this crisis will seriously undermine military capabilities and limit the tools Europe needs for playing its role in the world. Unless adequate action is taken, security and stability – in its immediate neighbourhood and beyond – will be at risk.

In the past the United States provided the core of international intervention capabilities, from the Balkans to Afghanistan. But the days are over when Washington would automatically lead such operations. The Libyan uprising of 2011 already showed that instability and conflict in Europe's backyard will be left to the Europeans to sort out, albeit with US support when needed. President Obama's security strategy for the 21st century has codified the strategic shift to the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, US

forces in Europe will be further reduced and American military presence in the Pacific will grow.<sup>2</sup> America's guarantee to support Europe's territorial defence through NATO still stands, but the idea of a threat in the shape of massive tank armies invading the old continent is now no more than a fantasy.

1. *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, Department of Defense, January 2012.
2. The US has decided to withdraw two of its four combat brigades from Europe. Deployment in several Asian countries will increase. The balance of naval forces (Pacific:Atlantic), currently 50% to 50%, will change to 60% to 40% by 2020. See: *Shangri-La Security Dialogue – Speech delivered by Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta*, Singapore, 2 June 2012.

While responsibility for its own security increases, Europe is facing another challenge: declining national defence budgets resulting from financial-economic pressure to reduce government spending. The 'big three' (France, Germany, the UK) face cuts of 4–8%; in southern Europe the percentages are even higher. The Netherlands is cutting its defence budget by 12%; new cuts might follow after the September 2012 national elections. Across Europe armed forces, procurement, training and deployment are all being reduced. In some countries specific capabilities have been completely lost. The UK has abandoned its maritime patrol capability; the Netherlands has reduced the number of its main battle tanks to zero.

In such dire circumstances the political will to cooperate across national borders has increased considerably. Speeches by European defence ministers all seem to express the same belief: 'Multinational cooperation is a matter of necessity, no longer a matter of choice.' Even France, Germany and the UK are unable to maintain all capabilities on a national basis. In the 1990s the motto for maintaining armed forces was 'use them or lose them'. Twenty years later it is 'collaborate or evaporate'. The financial-economic crisis is forcing defence communities to explore measures beyond traditional solutions. In the words of the British Secretary of State for Defence: 'Prioritising ruthlessly; specialising aggressively and collaborating unsentimentally. [...] Working together to do more, with less.'<sup>3</sup>

However, a wide gap remains between stating the obvious as to what is needed – more international cooperation – and taking the necessary action to achieve this. The European Union's (EU's) Pooling & Sharing and NATO's Smart Defence initiatives have resulted in some steps forward but not in a quantum leap.<sup>4</sup> Many nations argue that 'Brussels' is too slow and too bureaucratic. Often they use this argument as a smoke-screen for covering their own lack of willingness to commit themselves to EU or NATO projects. On the other hand, nobody can deny it is easier to cooperate with one partner than with a multiplicity of countries. Similarity of strategic culture, trust, solidarity and other factors determine to a large extent the success of multinational defence cooperation.<sup>5</sup> One could add that the more countries operate with the same equipment, the 'deeper' their cooperation can be. The Belgian and Dutch navies have the same type of frigates and mine-sweepers; this has made it possible for the two countries to integrate their

training, maintenance and repair facilities.

### Franco-British response

European countries are now re-energising bilateral and regional cooperation arrangements. Among these, the Franco-British agreement on defence and security cooperation, signed by the UK's prime minister David Cameron and France's President Nicolas Sarkozy in London on 2 November 2010, stands out as the most far-reaching effort.<sup>6</sup> The Lancaster House treaty covers a wide range of topics, from operations and training to equipment programmes, technology and industrial cooperation. More concretely, the two countries agreed inter alia:

- to create a Combined Joint Expeditionary Force and to cooperate on aircraft carriers;
- to align procurement plans and investment for unmanned aircraft systems, maritime mine counter-measures, satellite communications and other capabilities;
- to stimulate cooperation between their defence industries;
- to collaborate on research and technology.

There is no other example in Europe of such a comprehensive and wide-ranging defence cooperation agreement.

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3. *Shared Security: Transforming Defence to Face the Future*. Speech delivered by Secretary of State for Defence Philip Hammond in Berlin on 2 May 2012. See: [www.mod.uk](http://www.mod.uk)
  4. The European Defence Agency has achieved some positive results, but primarily in training (helicopters) and small-scale projects. NATO's Smart Defence package consists mainly of training and education projects. Larger programmes such as missile defence and the Alliance Ground Surveillance (AGS) were brought under the Smart Defence umbrella at the Chicago Summit (20 May 2012), but in fact they had been launched long before this.
  5. Tomas Valasek, *Surviving Austerity – The case for a new approach to EU military collaboration*. Centre for European Reform, April 2010.
  6. The London Summit resulted in several agreements for cooperation in the areas of defence, nuclear stockpiles, counter-terrorism and security policy. This Policy Brief addresses only that relating to defence cooperation, also known as the Lancaster House treaty.

But the importance of the Franco-British accord stretches beyond its content. France and the UK dominate European defence efforts. Together they account for approximately 50% of defence spending, 55% of procurement and 90% of research and development (R&D) investment in Europe. London and Paris deploy about half of the total of European forces involved in operations abroad. They share very comparable strategic cultures – expeditionary by nature – and they are willing to use force when needed. Thus, it came as no surprise that London and Paris took the lead in the military intervention in Libya. Moreover, it has set the example for the future: ‘France and the UK are determined to play a leading part in this new context and are united in our belief that Europe must play a full role. [...] Our cooperation in Libya has been a defining moment – and one on which we will continue to build in the future.’<sup>7</sup>

### ‘Camerollande’

Does the French commitment to the Lancaster House treaty still stand, now that President François Hollande has moved into the Elysée, backed up by a comfortable majority in the national parliament? So far, President Hollande himself has kept a low profile in relation to security and defence matters, but his foreign and defence ministers have pointed to the need for new initiatives to revitalise the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). There is no doubt that a strong CSDP profile on the part of the new French government will upset London. It might provoke British Conservative political leaders to react. Is Franco-British defence cooperation at risk?

So far, continuity seems to dominate French policy. President Hollande’s first appearance on the international security stage at NATO’s Chicago Summit indicated no return to old French policies regarding the Alliance. French combat forces will be withdrawn from Afghanistan by the end of 2012 but, in general, France’s commitment to NATO stands. The new *Livre Blanc* – expected in the autumn of 2012 – might mark a French policy shift back to the CSDP, but initiatives are more likely in the foreign policy area than with regard to defence cooperation. French disappointment with the lack of progress in EU military capability development, in particular with Germany’s attitude, played a role in France’s decision to strike a deal with London.<sup>8</sup> Cross-Channel cooperation is too important from the capability perspective to be

sacrificed for a fundamental realignment with Berlin. That does not mean that France will focus solely on the UK. It will most probably even expand its defence cooperation with Germany, Italy and other countries, in particular in areas of common industrial interest.<sup>9</sup> But the UK will remain its prime partner for military interventions. Rebalancing rather than changing the focus of French security and defence policy seems to be the best description of what can be expected in the near future.

Equally, the issue of opening up bilateral projects to other European partners as called for by the Minister of Defence, Jean-Yves Le Drian,<sup>10</sup> will not unravel Franco-British cooperation. Again, it is a French gesture in the direction of Germany and other European countries. Practically, Paris agrees with London that other countries can only participate in projects after France and the UK have completed the design phase and have passed the point of no return.<sup>11</sup> This does not exclude consultations and exchange of information with other potential partners being carried out beforehand. Furthermore, a mature project – such as the bilateral service support contract for the A400M transport aircraft – can be opened up within a short time frame.<sup>12</sup> Maintenance and repair costs could be further reduced if other A400M purchasers, for example Germany, Italy, Spain and Belgium, were to join the contract.

Implementation of the Lancaster House treaty will continue.

7. UK-France declaration on security and defence, 17 February 2012, paragraphs 4 and 6.

8. Information received during interviews at the British and French ministries of defence in May–June 2012.

9. On 14 June France and Germany signed a Letter of Intent to step up their cooperation in areas such as satellites, missiles, tanks, artillery and helicopters. See: Sabine Siebond, *Germany, France to deepen defense cooperation*, 14 June 2010, [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com).

10. Interview with Jean-Yves Le Drian, French Minister of Defence, in *Le Monde*. Source: *European Diplomacy and Defence*, No. 520, 7 June 2012.

11. See footnote 8.

12. France will receive its first A400M aircraft in 2013. France and the UK are negotiating a service support contract with Airbus Military which should be in place before delivery of the first aircraft.

President Hollande might adopt a lower public profile – the ‘Sarko-show’ is not his style – but his commitment to the Franco-British defence agreement seems to be secure. At the press conference after his first visit to London on 10 July 2012 President Hollande stated: ‘We also committed to cooperating in defence matters. We are in Europe the two great countries which have a defence potential as well as a nuclear strategic force. It means we have to act in solidarity and be responsible. So we will keep sharing information, our technology as well, to increase our defence effort without spending more.’<sup>13</sup> He also announced that the UK would be involved in the preparation of the *Livre Blanc*. It seems that ‘Camerollande’ is in place, succeeding the close cooperation set up by President Sarkozy with his British counterpart in November 2010.

### Progress during 2012

Even with the continued commitment of both capitals to implement the Lancaster House treaty, one should not expect a smooth ride. First, success will most likely be measured by actual use of British-French forces in crisis situations. The complexity of crises – see Syria compared with Libya – and domestic political factors can hamper action. The media and the public will quickly regard this as ‘failure to act’. Second, any cooperation agreement is liable to run into setbacks and delays, and it is equally likely that new projects will enter the scene. One should be careful not to make too quick a judgement about success or failure. Creating multinational defence cooperation takes time, even at the bilateral level. Generally speaking, implementation of the 2010 agreement is on track, but a closer look at four central areas of cooperation reveals ups and downs in practical progress.

#### *Combined forces*

Operational cooperation is moving forward at cruising speed. Perhaps the often heard dictum – the military are the military and they understand each other – explains the progress made with the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (CJEF) and its deployable Joint Force Headquarters (JFHQ). British and French air and naval forces are used to cooperating. However, for both armies the situation has been quite different. For a long time the French Army was focused on cooperation with Germany and other conti-

nental countries like Belgium. Over the last decade the British Army primarily worked together with the US Army in Iraq and Afghanistan. Land forces’ cooperation across the Channel forms the most challenging part of building the combined intervention capacity.

Generally, plans for the CJEF and the JFHQ are on track for reaching full operational capability by 2016. The development of common concepts and doctrine has moved forward rapidly. Communications and information systems are synchronised. Only at the strategic command level (the Joint Operations Headquarters in Northwood and Paris) do secure connections still remain to be arranged, but this seems to be just a matter of time.<sup>14</sup> In exercises like ‘Corsican Lion’ in 2012 the CJEF will be tested live. The JFHQ will be fully integrated, while the CJEF itself will be composed of national contingents – ready to operate side by side but not integrated. A modular approach will guarantee maximum flexibility in terms of composition and configuration of the CJEF, depending on the particular situation. The level of ambition has been defined as ‘an early entry force capable of facing multiple threats up to the highest intensity, available for bilateral, NATO, European Union, United Nations or other operations’.<sup>15</sup> The CJEF will be composed of quickly transportable air mobile forces, probably in the order of 10,000 troops. Its nature as a joint force will be visible in its combined air and naval assets, but real-life deployment will be tailor-made to each situation as it arises.<sup>16</sup>

#### *Aircraft carriers*

In November 2010 the UK expressed readiness to adapt its future aircraft carriers to catapult-launching. It would allow British aircraft to operate from French (and US Navy) aircraft carriers and vice versa.<sup>17</sup> This turned out to be too ambitious a goal.

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13. Press conference and Q&A given by the Prime Minister, Mr David Cameron and the French President, Mr François Hollande at 10 Downing Street on Tuesday, 10 July 2012. See: [www.number10.gov.uk](http://www.number10.gov.uk)

14. See footnote 8.

15. *UK-France declaration on security and defence*, 17 February 2012, paragraph 10.

16. See footnote 8.

17. The UK would procure the catapult-launched version of the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF-C or F-35C) instead of the vertical take-off and landing version (JSF-B or F-35B STOVL).

Further calculations showed that adapting the British carriers would entail a huge cost increase – estimated at £2 billion – and considerable delays in converting them to handle the conventional take-off variant.<sup>18</sup> Hosting the French Rafale aircraft on British carriers would also require adjustments to the technical and operational support for the aircraft, for which the British vessels did not have enough space. Equally, the French aircraft carriers would face problems in receiving British Joint Strike Fighters.<sup>19</sup> Practical, financial and operational reasons explain the UK's decision to return to its original plan of building aircraft carriers for vertical take-off and landing. This case also proves that 'deeper' cooperation – in this case flying from the same platform – requires the two sides to operate the same aircraft and, thus, to procure the same equipment. What now remains is the realisation of integrated aircraft carrier strike groups by the early 2020s: one country's aircraft carrier, supported by frigates and other ships from the partner country. In other words, operational cooperation between platforms, not on the same platform.

#### *Unmanned air systems*

Among the equipment programmes, that for unmanned air systems (UAS) occupies a prominent place. The short-term objective is to jointly develop a medium-altitude long-endurance (MALE) drone, to become operational in the timeframe 2015–20. The long-term focus is on unmanned combat air systems (UCAS) – a capability that Europe currently lacks. Here, the horizon for operationality is from 2030 onwards. The UAS-UCAS projects are important for several reasons. First, use of UAS is increasing both for defence and for wider security purposes.<sup>20</sup> Second, there is a technological dimension. UAS technology is sensitive and European countries cannot afford to be dependent on outside suppliers that place restrictions on technology transfer. Third, industrial interests are at stake. No new programmes beyond the current fifth generation of European fighter aircraft (Eurofighter-Typhoon, Gripen, Rafale) are foreseen. It is essential to maintain European industrial capabilities in the air combat sector for military and wider purposes. According to a study initiated by the European Defence Agency these capabilities and technologies are already at risk.<sup>21</sup> All these reasons explain why the UAS-UCAS projects occupy a central place in the London-Paris agreement, including close industrial cooperation between British Aerospace (BAe) Systems and the French Dassault-Aviation company.

Strong political and industrial leadership will be required to ensure the UAS-UCAS initiatives are successful – beyond France and UK. Germany and Italy are working on their own UAS-UCAS.<sup>22</sup> There is a real danger that Europe repeats the mistake of building different fifth-generation fighter aircraft in the area of unmanned air systems. Sooner or later the UAS-UCAS efforts will have to be brought together in the interests of Europe's security and the economic survival of its defence industries.

#### *Industrial cooperation*

There is no doubt that the industrial chapter of the 2010 agreement is the most difficult one. First, the two countries have different industrial policies: France has a long tradition of protecting and sustaining its national defence industrial base while for the UK competition and openness to suppliers from abroad are dominant features. Second, industrial relations bring a whole set of other issues to the table, such as jobs, ownership, technology control and wider national and European economic interests. It comes as no surprise that Franco-British industrial cooperation has evolved at a slower pace, although some initiatives look promising.

In addition to the UAS-UCAS projects, the best short-term potential lies in the missile sector, for which one European company already exists, the British-French-German-Italian MBDA Missile Systems.

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18. MOD announces change of Joint Striker FighterJet, Statement by Secretary of State for Defence Philip Hammond, 10 May 2012. Consequently, the UK returned to the plan to procure the JSF-B. The US Marine Corps and the Italian Navy will also fly JSF-Bs from their aircraft carriers.

19. See footnote 8.

20. The EU is investing in UAS technologies with a view to their future use for border control, maritime surveillance, environmental monitoring and other security-related tasks. Combat UAS are already used, primarily by the United States. More than half of the US air combat missions in the Middle East are carried out by UCAS.

21. Meeting future European defence and security challenges requires a strategic approach to the Aeronautics EDTIB, FAS4Europe Study, FAS4Europe-027 Issue 2, Feb 2012. See: [www.eda.europa.eu](http://www.eda.europa.eu)

22. Including industrial cooperation between European Aeronautic and Space Defence Company (EADS) and Finmeccanica.



France and the UK have agreed to work towards a single European prime contractor for their complex weapons, with the aim of achieving 30% efficiency savings. MBDA is taking its first steps. It aims at creating industrial interdependency through optimising its capacities and the creation of 'centres of excellence' for engineering. This might provide an example for other industries, although the road to consolidation and restructuring will be long and tortuous. Fragmentation continues to dominate European defence industries, in particular in the land and naval sectors. France and the UK have taken important initial steps, but ultimately Europe at large needs a network of single prime contractors for building platforms and complex weapon systems, supported by highly specialised small- and medium-sized enterprises in the supply chain.

### European interests

Franco-British defence cooperation is crucial for improving European military capabilities. But what about other European countries? They will have to cooperate closely with Franco-British forces in any wider European coalition intervening in faraway conflicts. Interoperability and standardisation of forces – in simple terms the ability to talk, to walk and to fight together – is not just a matter of importance for London and Paris; it is crucial for all military forces in Europe. In capitals across the continent there seems to be little awareness of the potential impact of the Franco-British cooperation. Smaller nations like Belgium and the Netherlands will be completely dependent on their larger European neighbours when it comes to military interventions for which the US no longer provides the core.

The Benelux, Scandinavian and other groupings should take the Franco-British defence cooperation much more seriously than they have done to date. Cooperating in bilateral and regional clusters is the best way forward, in particular for combining operational capacities. However, unless clusters are connected there is a risk of national fragmentation being replaced by regional fragmentation in Europe; in other words, a step forward but also a chance missed. Countries and their clusters should look outside, not only inside. National plans and regional cooperation initiatives like the recent Benelux Defence Declaration should be re-evaluated in order to maintain or realise connectivity with British and French capabilities. In particular this would apply to communica-

tions, intelligence, reconnaissance and command and control but also to complex weapon systems, including unmanned air systems.

The other essential factor is Franco-British willingness to open up to other European partners. Of course the contributions of these other countries would have to be concrete and firm. Free riders should stay at home. The CJEF and its headquarters should be given priority for several reasons. It is Europe's future intervention force. Unlike in the case of procurement projects, joining the CJEF does not involve industrial complications. The progress made with the British-French combined forces makes it likely that London and Paris will open the door for partners to join the CJEF within the next few years. No time should be lost in reaching this point. Belgium and the Netherlands are already planning to combine training and exercises of their paratroopers and air mobile forces. These quickly deployable forces will fit perfectly in the CJEF, as will the Netherlands Marine Corps, who already have a long-standing bilateral cooperation arrangement with the UK's Royal Marines in the UK-NL Landing Force. The Benelux countries should open talks with London and Paris in order to start their own preparations for joining the CJEF later on. In addition, their long-term procurement plans, especially in the air combat sector, should be aligned with British-French projects. The same applies to other European countries. The Lancaster House treaty remains a Franco-British affair, but cooperating with other European partners is in the interests of all and, most importantly, of Europe's security.

### Conclusions and recommendations

- The United States' strategic shift to the Asia-Pacific area implies that Europe will have to take more responsibility in crisis management, in particular for safeguarding security and stability in its neighbourhood. With declining defence budgets the only choice left for European countries' armed forces is to cooperate or evaporate.
- The Libya case has accelerated and strengthened British-French leadership in military interventions, supported by the United States. Politically and militarily, Paris and London will provide the core of Europe's intervention capacities.
- Further military integration in Europe will primarily take place in bilateral or regional clusters of countries. Franco-British defence cooperation is the most far-reaching of all. It aims at full interoper-

erability of intervention forces and it encompasses operational, technological, procurement and industrial cooperation.

- Under President Hollande the French commitment to implement the November 2010 Lancaster House treaty still stands. Initiatives to revitalise the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy and defence projects with other countries such as Germany will rebalance Franco-British cooperation but not reverse it.
- The Combined Joint Expeditionary Force and its integrated headquarters will be the most visible short-term achievement of the British-French collaboration. The CJEF will constitute the central part of Europe's intervention capabilities.
- British-French cooperation on aircraft carriers has been reined back to more realistic objectives, driven by costs and the desire to avoid operational risk. The lesson learned is that platform integration requires that both sides have the same equipment, which should become the long-term goal. The integrated Belgian and Dutch navies – same frigates, same mine-sweepers – are showing the way ahead.
- Franco-British projects on reconnaissance drones and on unmanned combat air systems are crucial to the future of Europe's air combat capacities. This requires further industrial consolidation in the aerospace sector, aiming at one prime contractor in Europe for unmanned air combat systems.
- Difficulties in defence industrial cooperation between France and the UK require a step-by-step approach and continued high-level political pressure. The missile and air sectors might show the way ahead through developing industrial interdependence.
- Other European countries, in particular smaller nations like Belgium and the Netherlands, should seek cooperation with London and Paris as early as possible. More specifically, they should explore the potential for Belgian paratroopers and Dutch air mobile forces and marines to join the CJEF.
- Paris and London should open up their bilateral projects on a case-by-case basis to other European countries willing to commit themselves to participating. This will be crucial for creating broader capacities needed for Europe's security.

### About Clingendael

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