

Entente or Oblivion

Prospects and Pitfalls of Franco-British Co-operation on Defence

Etienne de Durand

Future Defence Review Working Papers

This series provides independent analysis and opinion on issues that are likely to feature in a Future Defence Review.

It seeks to promote a vigorous and comprehensive debate, unconstrained by any preconceptions of Britain's role in the world or the purposes of its armed forces, amongst political parties, the academic community, industry and the electorate as a whole.

Related analysis: www.rusi.org/fdr

Balancing Defence
Malcolm Chalmers

Capability Questions for the
Next Government
Michael Codner

Jointery in the Defence
Review
Trevor Taylor

Issue

France and the United Kingdom must exploit the present window of opportunity and substantially enhance defence co-operation.

Context

Operational demands and the consequences of the financial crisis mean that Britain and France can no longer preserve independent military capabilities that fully support their aspirations as global powers. If nothing is done, they will shrink beyond repair in volume and critical capabilities. Given extant capability gaps, traditional trade-offs will no longer suffice, and have actually already become counter-productive.

Key Findings

- Co-operation is now both rational, politically feasible and extremely urgent
- French 'European counter-weight' arguments and the UK's 'special relationship' with the US, which have stood in the way of co-operation, are no longer relevant
- Co-operation should be introduced pragmatically and progressively from low-key opportunities to those of greater political significance
- There must be political will in both countries for fruitful co-operation to work. However, a grand political bargain between the two countries, or one at the transatlantic level, is not necessary
- The primary objective is to ensure that French and British defence systems survive the coming decade relatively unscathed
- This 'New Model Entente' has the potential in due course to improve relationships with the US as well as to develop a possible future European defence capability.

Analysis

Since the days of the Entente Cordiale, the centuries-long enmity between France and the UK has been largely forgotten, replaced after 1945 by an almost constant alliance. Yet Franco-British relations to this day have nevertheless been marred by bitter disputes and frequent misunderstandings, which in no small part are responsible for the lack of progress on European defence capabilities writ large.

The main explanation generally advanced is that there is a fundamental political divergence on several substantive issues: Britain's 'special relationship' with the US, which arouses French suspicions, and France's insistence on European integration, perceived as a threat to national sovereignty by most Britons. However true these reasons may be, there is another one, every bit as important yet often neglected: the two countries vie for political-diplomatic supremacy as each aspires to claim for itself the leading strategic role at the European level.

This is about to end. For years Britain and France – each in its own unique fashion – have had the political and financial wherewithal to stand alone in those areas of defence that they valued most: nuclear deterrence for the French; top-notch conventional capabilities, interoperable with US forces, for the British. Even when resources have begun to dry up, they have found creative ways to stretch existing capabilities, save face and wait for more auspicious times. But as the 2008 French White Paper has suggested, and as Britain's Strategic Defence Review will doubtlessly show, these already overplayed games are no longer possible. Combined, the requirements generated by tough and enduring missions like Afghanistan and the consequences of the financial crisis on national budgets render it impossible to maintain even a slowly slipping status quo.

If nothing is done, British and French military capabilities will rapidly diminish beyond repair, both in terms of overall volume and critical capabilities. Given extant capability gaps, traditional solutions that revolve around the sacrifice of personnel numbers to pay for equipment will no longer suffice, and have actually already become counter-productive.

'Necessity is the mother of invention', it is said in both languages. There is therefore hope that the hard budgetary and military times that have befallen the two nations at about the same time will prove to be the opportunity to launch, in common, a serious initiative on defence. To succeed, this initiative must pass two critical tests: first, avoiding the temptation of grand political schemes; and second,

defining a progressive and pragmatic roadmap that ensures either financial savings or capability gains for the two partners all along.

Too Much Alike not to Differ

Co-operation is always difficult, but it is especially so in the case of France and Britain. Not only must bad memories and long-standing prejudices be gradually mitigated, but the traditional rivalry over leadership in European security affairs must also be set aside. Because the strategies carefully crafted and evolved by each nation since the 1956 Suez crisis have become irrelevant, it is from now on possible politically to explore options for significant bilateral co-operation on defence. Central to this development are the shortcomings of the European construct, as well as the evolution of US grand strategy itself (which has progressively moved away from its Cold War focus on Europe). The better these objective trends are realised, internalised and accepted, the sooner co-operation on defence between Britain and France will be able to move forward.

It was proved by the Saint-Malo agreement twelve years ago, or more concretely in Bosnia on the ground in 1995, that when the two leading military powers of Europe agree on something that is within their means, it gets done. Conversely, when they disagree, they typically end up paralysed, entirely dependent on the Americans, or forced to rely on their insufficient national means. Even influence in Washington is generally made much easier by joining forces first. Yet the often-fruitful nature of Anglo-French security relations tends to be concealed by the 'Franco-German couple', or the 'special relationship' – not to mention the frequent quarrels across the Channel over ideology, economic policy or EU evolution. It is no wonder therefore that public opinion on both sides should be so ignorant of the longstanding bilateral security relationship and of its achievements. The very discreet celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the Entente Cordiale, just one year after the major rift over Iraq, is perhaps a telling symbol of this degradation in perceptions within the general public and elites alike.

Overcoming or lessening mutual misrepresentations would be useful, but will take time and effort. In the meantime, it is against the backdrop of this long list of failures, disappointments, unreported successes, and distorted perceptions that a renewed partnership must now be founded.

A quick overview of the two countries makes it obvious how strikingly similar they are, whether in terms of capabilities, ambitions, or limits. Britain and France enjoy roughly the same size, population and GDP. Beside being prominent members of NATO and the EU, both of them have far-flung overseas territories, areas of influence inherited from their colonial past, and non-NATO allies such as

Kuwait or the Emirates, all of which might require defending in some circumstances. Whilst they have suffered a tremendous diminution of power in the course of the last century, and are still declining vis-à-vis emerging powers, they have constantly struggled over the past decades to maintain international influence and at least some of the elements and trappings that make up great powers.

Indeed, in addition to being nuclear powers, France and Britain are part of the very select club of countries that can project power worldwide. They have bases and basing rights on other continents and have retained some force projection capabilities. In contrast to most other European countries, they are interested in developing diplomatic and strategic influence on a global scale, and rely partly on their military prowess to do so. These shared ambitions go hand in hand with a keen sense of their national interests, a clear reluctance to abandon national sovereignty except when necessary, and sensitive national pride (albeit in different ways).

As if the previous points were not enough, France and Britain also share the exact same set of strategic problems: preserving their international influence within the Western family in general, and vis-à-vis the US in particular; assuming occasional leadership for European missions as framework nations; and doing all that at an affordable cost.

The Quest for Influence

Despite this convergence, the two nations part ways on the method each has followed for the last fifty years. Britain has generally striven to remain as close as possible to the US whereas France has traditionally sought to propose an alternative. These incompatible strategies stem in parallel from the same original trauma: the bilateral Suez intervention of 1956 and the ensuing diplomatic condemnation and financial destabilisation from the US. The two nations reacted in profoundly different ways. The UK decided to never again end up on the wrong side of the US, whilst France chose to build the means of strategic autonomy – specifically in the nuclear field. In many respects most of the disagreements that took place over the years can be traced back to this original divergence. For a half-century Britain and France have followed parallel tracks in their respective strategies, and have up to now set their military choices accordingly. Beyond the common willingness to rely on military prowess as a means to leverage international influence, the two countries have historically diverged in precisely how to pursue this quest for strategic importance at the political and military levels. Britain has traditionally gone for high-intensity forces and interoperability with the US, whilst France has focused first on strategic assets such as nuclear deterrence and strategic intelligence.

With the demise of the USSR and the end of the Cold War, the value attached to nuclear deterrence has declined, whilst the ability to participate to US-led coalitions at a significant level has seemed to emerge as the new coin of international influence, thus validating in part Britain's approach and leading to a reappraisal of the Gaullist roots of French strategy. In the wake of the First Gulf War France grasped that evolution and acted upon it, professionalising its armed forces in 1996 and gearing them up towards expeditionary missions. Yet, despite this convergence in the 'tactics' of international influence, both nations have found it increasingly difficult to maintain forces that could amount to a significant military contribution.

This explains why the UK and France have become especially keen to develop and retain lead- or framework-nation capacity for international coalitions. Until recently, however, their respective national strategies remained parallel and therefore incompatible at the core. France was trying to erect a European defence largely separated from the US, relying on NATO only when expedient (as in the Balkans), whereas Britain was keen on preserving and strengthening NATO, agreeing to European defence only in an auxiliary capacity. As the rift over Iraq was to prove in 2003, this strategic parallelism, or 'Suez Paradigm', endured beyond Saint-Malo and the creation of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP – now the Common Security and Defence Policy – CSDP).

The limits to these parallel ambitions are also alike, acting as a potent factor of convergence that has been at work underneath the strategic parallelism identified above. Indeed, both countries have found it more and more difficult to maintain great power status whilst relying on their own means. It is not just a question of relative size. For decades now defence investments have stalled or declined compared to other national expenditures: following the societal evolution of Western populations, health and education have progressively taken the lion's share of the national budget. There is no prospect whatsoever that these costs will subside in the future, as their underlying causes remain. In addition, the rising costs of public order, as well as the new demands generated by homeland security against international terrorism, have also increased steadily, to the point of sometimes competing with scarce defence resources.

The end of the Cold War has only accelerated this general trend, as the demise of the Soviet Union left Western governments with various weak or complex justifications for defence spending that, added together, did not amount to a compelling rationale easily communicable to the public. In budgetary realities as well as in public discourse, welfare has displaced warfare as the chief

rationale for public action and as the main source of legitimacy for the state. With the current financial and economic crisis on top of these enduring trends, defence spending appears even more as an uphill battle in search of innovative solutions to square the circle. In both defence establishments, the prospects for the coming decade seem bleak indeed.

To paint an even darker picture, it should be added that defence capabilities, both the 'legacy' systems inherited from the Cold War and the emerging requirements, have proved more and more expensive with each new generation of equipment. This has forced the two countries constantly to punch above their weight militarily and to be content with providing effective contributions to collective efforts for the most demanding scenarios. Far from helping in reducing the bill, 'Transformation' has made the situation worse, its effects even compounded by the unexpected rise of counter-insurgency operations and their associated costs. The negative trends of economic austerity, defence inflation and a demanding strategic environment are rapidly converging into a downward spiral that, if nothing is done, will prove the end of the defence game for the two middle powers of Europe.

Dead Ends, Distant Hypotheses, and the Only Way Out

Bilateral co-operation across the Channel will hopefully gain acceptance as one of the most promising venues for preserving defence and avoiding the worst. But it is easier proclaimed than achieved, as the method, implementation process and schedule are of crucial importance. In order to minimise friction and avoid costly mistakes that could very well derail the whole enterprise, it is first incumbent on the two sides to understand why co-operation is now not just rational, but also politically feasible – in other words, on what basis it ought to proceed. Second, and in line with those caveats, it should be understood that enhanced Franco-British co-operation in defence serves no hidden political agenda and in fact no other purpose than itself: it stems from a well-considered pragmatism. Finally, for co-operation to generate real savings or increased capability, it must be equally as pragmatic, to proceed in a bottom-up fashion and to follow deliberate steps of increasing ambition.

The End of the Suez Paradigm

There are several powerful reasons, both negative and positive, that explain why the way should now be cleared for meaningful defence co-operation between the UK and France. On the negative side, France for a long time tried to use European construction as a political counterweight to US influence. This policy met either with polite indifference or outright rejection from most of Europe. Even

when the French sought to advance European defence in its own right, as a force multiplier, they came to realise two things. First: that most allies, and Germany most importantly, were not terribly interested in investing beyond symbolic moves or rhetoric of ‘ever-deepening Union’ – as the failure to meet the 2003 Headline Goals made clear. Second: that even at the rhetorical level the most significant development had been crafted together with the UK at Saint-Malo. This lukewarm approach to defence across Europe implies that the advancement of a common defence policy can only mean, for the time being, the diminution of French capabilities or their delegation to Brussels. France cannot possibly pay for both its national capabilities and for increased European ones: it would have to sacrifice its freedom of action and sovereignty on the altar of the European project, in the distant hope that the EU should one day become a true political actor.

On the plus side, the creeping reintegration into NATO entailed by fifteen years of common operations, along with the tightening budgetary situation and the diminished saliency of nuclear issues within NATO, led President Sarkozy to end France’s special status within the organisation and reintegrate it formally. Advertised as a way to stop pitting NATO and Europe against each other, and to overcome the traditional deadlock between Atlanticists and Europeanists, this decision indeed went a long way toward removing the suspicions of several European Allies vis-à-vis French motives in promoting CSDP. That the Bush administration also came around and recognised that CSDP was not necessarily a Trojan horse devised to damage NATO helped as well. Putting to rest the twin illusion that European defence could advance quickly, and that CSDP would, for the foreseeable future, become more than a crisis management tool, as well as assuaging European fears and American qualms over French ambitions, have been the indispensable steps paving the way for an enhanced Franco-British defence co-operation devoid of ulterior motives and political plots.

Britain has had its fair share of disillusion as well. It faithfully followed the US into Iraq and Afghanistan, incurring in the process political divisions at home, huge financial costs and sizeable casualties, yet received in return very little to show for it. British ability to influence US policy and strategic decision-making processes has appeared very limited over the past decade. More generally, the ‘special relationship’ does not seem to deliver as much as it used to for the two countries. Britain cannot deliver a NATO Europe the way the US would like it, because Europe’s ability and willingness to commit military capabilities or defence spending is very limited. When shrinking military means are also factored in, it is no wonder that the strategic relevance of the European allies should be increasingly questioned in the US, as US Secretary of Defense

Robert Gates's recent comments have underlined – in all fairness, US interest in NATO and willingness to operate multilaterally is also rather limited. Truth be told, Britain's loss of influence over America has less to do with British power or prowess than it has with an objective evolution: the reduced salience of Europe in general for the US, which stands in stark contrast with the Cold War period, when the centrality of the European front mandated an enduring US need for a faithful ally.

Beyond periodic transatlantic quarrels and poor diplomatic moves by one administration or another, a slow estrangement between the US and Europe has taken place over the last twenty years, which no measure of goodwill can mend. US priorities no longer lie in Europe. Over time, the slowly declining importance of Europe to the US is bound to undermine the tenets of British strategy. Henceforth, European allies, including Britain, are worthwhile only up to a point, namely providing a modicum of international legitimacy and some additional, but limited, military capabilities. On the positive side, the benign indifference increasingly shown by the US also implies that the UK no longer has to make a grand political and strategic choice between the US and the rest.

This marks for both countries the end of what was referred to earlier as the 'Suez Paradigm'. For the short term at least, the foundations of French and British defence policies have in each case eroded, as influencing or opposing US power has proved equally and increasingly pointless and self-defeating whilst America is turning its attention elsewhere. On a positive and rather paradoxical note, this erosion of both national power and security strategy is the very reason why traditional political hurdles no longer stand in the way of bilateral co-operation between Britain and France.

The Case for Pragmatism

A new Entente eminently makes sense, provided the two countries do not lose sight of its main rationale and abide by a few important political caveats. Given the situation prevailing in Europe today regarding defence, with only six or seven countries having significant remaining capabilities, and an even smaller number ready to make an effort to stay afloat, only Britain and France fulfil both criteria. They stand out as having maintained a large industrial base, significant means of power projection, an array of military capabilities that is still respectable, and, as importantly, the political will to exert international influence. In this respect, it is not just the case that they are free to co-operate because the UK does not have to choose anymore between the US on the one hand, and France (or Europe) on the other; they should actually co-operate if only to preserve two crucial and mutually shared interests – first, to ensure that the US does not become completely disinterested in

Europe and European security, and second, to try and retain a say over security issues in Europe and on the international arena more generally.

This bilateral co-operation should not come with political strings attached – quite the contrary, in fact, as the two countries remain wary of falling into some kind of political trap, be it a creeping Europeanisation of national capabilities, or a further Atlanticisation of European security. British politics, and the recent entry into government of the Conservative Party, preclude thinking in European terms. Likewise, French politics demands a certain dose of prudence when relations with the US are concerned: any suspicion of ‘alignment’ could prove damaging. Thankfully, a full political agreement between the two countries is definitely not required. What could come in handy are a few symbolic concessions on both sides, as well as a measure of understanding for the respective domestic political contexts. As Nicolas Sarkozy has pledged to advance European defence, he might need some gestures from the UK, like renewed British participation in the European Defence Agency or a small civilian-military European headquarters – so as to show he has kept his promises, lest he be accused of betraying European defence for the sake of a bilateral Entente. Perceptions must be carefully managed on both sides.

Over the medium to long term, it is hard to predict with any measure of confidence the future evolution of European security. In principle, strong bilateral co-operation built around pragmatic initiatives does not preclude a potential extension to some other European countries – Germany comes naturally to mind, or the European Union down the road if the conditions are right. Then again, this extension is not self-evident. More to British liking, this cross-Channel axis of co-operation could also form the European basis of a revitalised NATO. What should be clearly understood from the start by political elites on both sides is that every effort should be made to ensure that pragmatic Franco-British co-operation centred on capabilities will not stand in the way of each nation’s pet project, be it another French attempt to advance European integration or a UK effort to redefine the special relationship – which, after all, is a matter for the UK and the US. Arriving at a genuine agreement on this ‘live and let live’ policy will not always prove possible of course, if only because of conflicting interests. Yet it is essential to try to get politics and ideology out of the way as much as possible. It is by agreeing to disagree and remaining flexible that political concessions and costs can be minimised and operational benefits maximised as planned.

Bilateral co-operation should be attempted in earnest, not just because it makes sense or is easier now than before, but more to

the point because it is the only pragmatic way out of the pressing financial conundrum that the two nations face. Put another way, the two military establishments risk ending the current decade amputated and shrunk beyond recognition. Only a good level of co-operation allowing for net gains in military capabilities will allow them to linger on.

A Menu of Military Options

All of the above is predicated on the ability of bilateral co-operation to deliver tangible results. Franco-British co-operation could be successful, provided the details are properly worked out and three starting provisos are kept in mind. First, co-operation must be firmly grounded on a bottom-up approach to capabilities that addresses military needs. It must also distinguish between short-term possibilities and mid-term prospects, and devise progressive steps accordingly, if only to build trust. Finally, an implicit bargain should be struck between the militaries and their political masters: whilst the former must commit to a genuine effort to warrant a convergence of specifications and doctrines, the latter would be well-advised to ensure that the savings generated by co-operation return to defence and are not diverted into the general budget. Doing otherwise would undermine the very rationale for pragmatic co-operation as well as the incentives for the institutional actors involved to participate in the enterprise in good faith.

In the short run, co-operation should focus on the sharing of military capabilities and equipment. Capability-sharing can take many forms: from resource pooling, to training together in national training centres, to bi-national crews or units.¹ Since initial misfires could entail damaging fallout for the whole process, and given that the two partners will want to retain independent means of action anyway, it is probably best to start with modest, low-profile projects. In this respect rumours about joint endeavours on nuclear deterrence, the Holy Grail of national sovereignty, are probably unhelpful. There are numerous low-key items on the menu of co-operation that attract far less media attention, but offer solid starting grounds: managing common expensive stockpiles, and then setting up joint stockpiles of PGMs,² would fit the bill. The Anglo-French Storm Shadow/Scalp cruise missile comes to mind, as well as British-procured JDAMs³ and French-produced AASM,⁴ provided combat aircraft are modified accordingly in both countries. Another interesting example is that of air tankers, which fall under the radar screen of political attention yet are both costly and indispensable. For the two armies, pooling together unglamorous, backstage items like bridging or engineering equipment might generate savings important enough to justify the retention of the personnel and units that man them, and therefore the preservation of know-how that is as critical as it is seldom needed.

More ambitious is asset or platform sharing. The former could range from strategic intelligence to tactical lift – once the mission in Afghanistan winds down, the French Army could for instance rent British Chinooks, knowing that it probably will never have the budget required to procure the heavy tactical lift it so badly needs. The latter implies either a bi-national crew (impractical in the utmost, and highly susceptible to political divisions), or a crew-swapping system that allows each country to benefit from the system or platform when it needs it. Instead of devising political preconditions on the use of these assets, which would be an obvious non-starter, a system of ‘drawing rights’ could be put in place, based on the respective financial contribution of each partner or compensated by other capabilities made available in the deal. To entail real savings, crew swapping should in priority apply to onerous and complex, ‘HDLD’ platforms (high demand, low density) such as naval vessels and large aircraft. To minimise risks, the process should first be attempted on assets that are not too visible or important, like minesweepers, sealift and strategic airlift. Only later on might it be conceivable to include major assets and national flagships such as carriers. Since the prime rationale for building a second carrier is the same for the two countries, namely ensuring that naval aviation is permanently available and not grounded whenever the carrier undergoes repairs, normal or otherwise, it would nonetheless seem sensible to envisage launching a third carrier owned in common but manned nationally, along with two non-overlapping cycles of repair for the carriers *Charles de Gaulle* and *Queen Elizabeth*.

In the mid-term, concurrently with the most ambitious platform-sharing options, common initiatives on procurement should be launched. Not much is currently possible in this regard, as most programmes and major ones in particular, are already under way in each nation. The few short-term opportunities that remain are likely to be unilateral or reciprocal acquisitions, according to the two nations’ respective fields of excellence or comparative advantage. For instance, the likely failure of the Future Rapid Effects System (FRES) programme could prove an opportunity for the British Army to settle on a less ambitious platform such as the Armoured Infantry Combat Vehicle (Vehicule Blindée de Combat d’Infanterie – VBCI). Like the FELIN⁵ outfit for individual soldiers, the VBCI exists in reality.

With regard to common procurement, it stands to reason that longer production series make for lower per unit costs. Accordingly, economies of scale entail savings, or alternatively ensure that the most expensive equipment remains affordable. Without the economies of scale generated by common procurement and the ensuing investments, it is almost certain that the insufficient

level of defence spending will hurt national defence industries. They will no longer be able to maintain R&D and expertise in the most demanding fields, let alone be competitive in international markets. In fundamental ways, the survival of British and French defence industry is a question of national sovereignty, especially in technological areas deemed critical.

Here again, it would be best to start with low-profile projects with immediate returns before turning to ambitious ones, however useful they promise to be. What should be avoided above all are grand projects launched primarily for their political and symbolic value, as well as multilateral projects that unnecessarily multiply military specifications and national demands of *juste retour*, which all cause prices to balloon.

Unlike the A400M transport aircraft, successful past examples like the Jaguar aircraft or the MILAN missile prove that co-operation is indeed possible and profitable provided the partners are few and agree on most specifications. Numerous capability areas could benefit from common procurement, from unmanned aerial vehicles and unmanned combat aerial vehicles (a critical gap currently) to ground vehicles. Jointly developing such crown jewels as attack submarines or a fifth-generation attack aircraft is altogether more ambitious, but could be very rewarding.

That said, there should be no illusion that common procurement will be easily achieved. National defence groups, and indeed the two nations, until recently have followed fairly divergent paths, with BAE Systems partially divesting itself from its participation in European consortiums and investing heavily in the rest of the world and the US especially. In turn, the creation of an important subsidiary in America raises questions regarding the possibility of BAE participating in joint projects, given severe export controls and restrictions in technology transfers in the US. Although it is to be hoped that the US will understand that its interest is best served by helping its traditional allies to survive militarily, and that it should in consequence ease some of its restrictions, there is no guarantee that such a proposition will pass Congress. Regarding joint Franco-British procurement, prudence is therefore *de rigueur* and possible options need to be explored carefully.

Role specialisation merits a brief mention – an extreme form of capability-sharing that generates savings by apportioning military capabilities and functions amongst participating nations, so that they can concentrate their meagre resources more efficiently. It would make perfect sense for a consolidated European Union, where the supranational level has prevailed. For now however, and as far as Britain and France are concerned, role specialisation would

prove, in all but the most dire circumstances, extremely difficult to contemplate, as it presupposes a very strong political agreement. As soon as it goes beyond secondary functions, specialisation almost invalidates the very possibility of an independent military policy and thus endangers sovereignty. Since preventing further national military decline is the very reason why France and the UK have an objective interest in co-operation, specialisation should mostly be shunned.

Conclusion

As always with policy recommendations, this paper goes only so far. Offering suggestions and exploring broad general options can hopefully stimulate a fruitful debate. Ultimately, however, only the military itself has the required expertise and legitimate responsibility to come up with a detailed and progressive roadmap allowing for concrete sharing options that will generate savings and preserve existing capabilities and force structures.

This can only happen, of course, if there is political will in both countries as well as a shared realisation amongst decision-makers of the conditions necessary for this arrangement to work. First, such a deal would have for its primary, indeed sole, objective to ensure that French and British defence systems survive the coming decade relatively unscathed. Second, in consequence it should be pragmatic and not wait for, or aim at, some grand political bargain or diplomatic reshuffling between the two countries or at the transatlantic level. Finally, precisely because it is politically neutral and devised to preserve British and French capabilities and credibility, this New Model Entente has the potential, down the road, to improve the 'special relationship' with the US as well as a yet-to-emerge European defence capability.

Thanks to the Strategic Defence and Security Review in Britain and the budgetary challenge confronting the two nations, a meeting of minds seems about to emerge. However, political alignments are by nature fleeting, and the preconditions and implications of a successful deal have not yet sunk in. Besides, it takes time to devise military options and set the technical details – whereas financial constraints are building up rapidly and inexorably. Britain and France must therefore hurry to take advantage of the current window of opportunity, which may very well unravel if nothing materialises quickly enough. All the actors involved must convince themselves that other venues are not in the offing for now and that a bilateral agreement is the only sensible way forward. For some time to come, it is either Entente or oblivion. 🌐

Etienne de Durand is Director of the Centre for Security Studies at the Institut Français des Relations Internationales, Paris.

Notes

¹ See Philippe Coquet, 'La Notion de Partage Capacitaire en Question', *Focus Stratégique* (IFRI, Paris: No. 8, June 2008).

² Precision Guided Munition

³ Joint Direct Attack Munition

⁴ Armement Air-Sol Modulaire (Air-to-Ground Modular Weapon)

⁵ Fantassin à Équipements et Liaisons Intégrés – Integrated Equipment and Communications Infantryman.

Future Defence Review Working Papers

**Royal United Services Institute for
Defence and Security Studies**
Whitehall, London SW1A 2ET, UK

Tel: +44 (0) 20 7747 2600
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7321 0943

The views expressed in FDR should not be taken to represent a corporate view of RUSI.

E-mail: michaelc@rusi.org
Web: www.rusi.org/fdr

Editor: Michael Codner

All RUSI FDR articles are the copyright of the Royal United Services Institute. They may be copied and electronically transmitted freely. They may not be reproduced in a different form without prior permission from the Institute.