The UK and European defence: leading or leaving?

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The problem of European defence is that it does not work with the United Kingdom, but would not work without it either.

Unlike in other policy areas, in defence the issue is not British resistance to Brussels directives. Populist outcries against a mythical 'Euro-Army' notwithstanding, British sovereignty is not under threat. The real issue is that *other* European countries are not doing enough in spite of being urged from both sides of Brussels—by the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). 'Too many countries are failing to meet their financial responsibilities to NATO, and so failing to maintain appropriate and proportionate capabilities. Too many are opting out of operations or contributing but a fraction of what they should be capable of', in the words of Defence Secretary Philip Hammond.[1] Britain, on the contrary, is the leading European military power, accounting for 22.4 per cent of defence expenditure and 11.8 per cent of armed forces, and it is more willing than most to deploy those forces (providing 20.8 per cent of the average number of troops deployed),[2] including for combat operations. Its military clout enables the UK to lead the others—any scheme for European defence without it would indeed be severely handicapped. But does Britain want to lead? The paradox is that while the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) would not have come into being without British leadership, it would be much more effective without British reluctance to make full use of it. In contrast to most European countries, the UK has never stopped seeing European defence and the continued assurance of transatlantic partnership (in the shape of its special relationship with the United States and the NATO alliance) as a zero-sum game.

Assessing the British role in European defence 40 years after accession to the Community, the conclusion is that by leading the CSDP in order to limit it, the UK has manoeuvred itself into a dead end. It has effectively managed to block those dimensions of the CSDP considered contrary to its interests, notably significant autonomous military operations. Without British involvement, Europe's

potential to deploy where Britain does not want it to is limited; but so is its potential to deliver capabilities that are in the British interest. NATO has been equally unsuccessful in beefing up European capabilities. The UK finds itself back in its starting position, facing a fragmented European defence effort with limited deployable capabilities—but with one crucial difference. As the United States' strategic focus is shifting away from Europe to the Asia–Pacific region, the UK is much more dependent on its European allies. More than ever, it is in the British interest to take a leading role in European defence. This article will show how, in this new context, the CSDP can function militarily as the European pillar of NATO, under the political guidance of the EU—but only if Britain (along with France) provides strong leadership.

Subcontracting European defence

In 1973 defence played little or no part in Britain's accession to the European Economic Community (EEC). The existing member states had only just taken their first tentative steps in foreign policy, through European Political Cooperation (EPC), a political mechanism created alongside the formal Community institutions, which would gather momentum only after Britain joined, dealing with the political fallout of the Yom Kippur War and the subsequent oil crisis. In defence the EEC simply was not an actor—not because its members had opted for 'civilian power', but because after the failed attempt to create a supranational European Defence Community in 1954 they had decided to organize their common defence effort in another institution: NATO. The UK, France and the Benelux countries did create the Western European Union (WEU) in 1954, incorporating Germany and Italy into their 1948 Western Union. But the WEU, if not perhaps a beauty, was certainly sleeping, having abdicated all of its executive tasks in favour of NATO and the EEC. For the founding fathers, European integration as such was of course a peace project, crucial to Franco-German reconciliation. But while the UK welcomed this *idea* of European integration, with a view to the peace and stability of continental Europe, its eventual accession was mostly driven by economic considerations.

Only in the 1980s did Europeans begin to imagine European defence outside (but still closely connected to) NATO. As EPC developed, security issues naturally found their way onto its agenda, for example in the context of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, where the EEC as such was represented. In June 1990, impelled by the need to deal with the geopolitical turning-point of the end of the Cold War, the decision was made to organize an intergovernmental conference (IGC) on political union, including foreign and security policy. As if to underline the urgency, in the course of the IGC both the Gulf War and the civil war in the former Yugoslavia demonstrated the powerlessness of Europeans in the absence of firm foreign and security policy structures. Some member states were further motivated to explore a more autonomous European defence by a growing awareness that European and American interests, priorities and approaches do not

always coincide. At the same time it became clear that in the post-Cold War era the United States could not automatically be counted upon to solve European security problems. The United Kingdom, under a Conservative government throughout this period, became convinced that Europeans would have to organize themselves to shoulder a larger share of the defence burden and demonstrate their own commitment in order to ensure a continued commitment on the part of the United States.

Conflicting objectives were thus not only present from the start, but actually enabled European defence. The chosen vehicle was the WEU.[3] As an existing European organization separate from the EEC and closely tied to NATO, it was acceptable to all. Starting with the 1984 Rome Declaration, the political bodies of the WEU were brought back to life. The 1987 Hague Platform on European Security Interests stated its dual mission: a strong commitment both to European union, as set out in the 1986 Single European Act, and to NATO, stressing the indivisibility of Atlantic security. Embryonic operational structures were created, and 1988 saw the first European military operation, Operation Cleansweep in the Persian Gulf, followed by further maritime operations during the Gulf War and the wars in the former Yugoslavia. It should be noted, though, that in October 1991 the only really significant operation proposed, to deploy tens of thousands of troops to Croatia to halt the fighting and prevent it spilling over into Bosnia and Herzegovina, was vetoed by the UK, the Netherlands and Portugal.

In 1993 this process culminated in the Maastricht Treaty, which created the EU and transformed EPC into the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The WEU was written into the Treaty on European Union (TEU) as the default subcontractor for any military operations which the EU members would want to undertake. Simultaneously, at its November 1991 Rome summit, NATO welcomed the development of a European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) within the alliance, through the WEU, emphasizing again the indivisibility of Atlantic security, to satisfy British and American concerns.

Taking out the middleman

The Maastricht arrangement was strengthened by the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty, which de facto subordinated the WEU to the EU (though the ambitious proposal to abolish the WEU and transfer its competences to the EU was vetoed by five members, including the UK). The 1992 Petersberg Declaration had identified the types of operations which the WEU could undertake: basically all, including combat, from evacuation and humanitarian support to peacekeeping and peace enforcement. These 'Petersberg Tasks' were now included in the TEU. The WEU set up a Military Committee, a Planning Cell, a Situation Centre and a Satellite Centre, and created a catalogue of Forces Answerable to the WEU (FAWEU), which members could make available for operations on a case-by-case basis.

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[3] Alyson Bailes and Graham Messervy-Whiting, *Death of an institution: the end for Western European Union, a future for European defence?*, Egmont Paper no. 46 (Brussels: Egmont Institute, 2011).

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This elaborate system was put to use just twice, for operations of a limited scope: a police operation in the Bosnian city of Mostar (1994–6) and a de-mining assistance mission in Croatia (1999–2000). In 1996 the WEU agreed to support a UN-mandated force which was to protect the hundreds of thousands of Hutu refugees from the Rwandan conflict in eastern Congo, who were now threatened by a military rebellion against President Mobutu but prevented from returning home by elements of the former Rwandan regime mixed among them. As the new Rwandan government refused any force access to its territory and the greater part of the refugees eventually did make it home, the need and the will to intervene evaporated and the Security Council ended the mandate before the operation had been launched. In 1997, the EU/WEU missed the opportunity to take charge of crisis management in Albania; the UK and Germany in particular rejected intervention. In this crisis on its doorstep, in which the US declined to become involved, the EU/WEU could have taken the lead. Eventually, an ad hoc Italian-led coalition mounted Operation Alba. In 1998–9 the WEU, at the EU's request, put its Satellite Centre to use to obtain data on Kosovo but was not substantially involved in military crisis management there; this was undertaken by NATO as a logical continuance of its US-led military role in the Balkans.

The lack of collective will to make use of the WEU reflected the contradictory motivations of its members. France and Belgium attached priority to developing specific European strategies, to be implemented when necessary through autonomous operations. For the UK, the key function of the WEU was to stimulate an enhanced European effort in support of NATO. The net result was that neither objective was achieved. At this point, the EU had not adopted any strategic document and thus operated on an implicit grand strategy at best. This reflected the orientations that had emerged under EPC and were gaining substance through the CFSP: an emphasis on conflict prevention; a holistic approach linking trade and development with foreign policy and, increasingly, security; dialogue and partnership with other states and multilateral organizations. The EU/WEU did not have an explicit view of its priority responsibilities in terms of regions and types of crises. In the absence of a consensus on the operations in which Europeans were willing to engage, the debate about the respective roles of NATO and the EU/WEU could not be resolved.

Nor, therefore, could there be any consensus on the level of ambition in terms of military capabilities. This was the time when Europeans were cashing in the peace dividend and drastically reducing defence spending. Politically inevitable and principally right (with the disappearance of a vital threat to European territory, needs in other policy areas took precedence), successive defence cuts resulting in successive unfinished reform plans left many armed forces in disarray. The transformation from territorial defence (the function assigned by the United States and Soviet Union to their respective allies during the Cold War) to expeditionary operations (required to perform the Petersberg Tasks) was delayed. At the end of the decade Europe still could boast at most 10 per cent of deployable forces.[4]

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[4] Gabor Horvath, 'CSDP military ambitions and potentials: do we know what we have?', *Studia Diplomatica* 64: 1, 2011, pp. 55–60.

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It was this sorry state of affairs that prompted an unexpected change of course by the UK, now under a Labour government led by Tony Blair. First announced by Blair at an informal EU summit in Pörtschach in Austria on 24–25 October 1998 and reiterated by Defence Secretary George Robertson at the first informal meeting of EU defence ministers in Vienna on 4 November, it led to a Franco-British declaration (at St-Malo on 4 December) that heralded a new phase in European defence. Britain and France called for a capacity for autonomous European action within the institutional framework of the EU, including 'appropriate structures for analysis of situations, intelligence and strategic planning', while respecting obligations to, and avoiding duplication with, NATO.

The reasons for this change of course were mostly pragmatic.[5] The main British concern remained the viability of NATO and the continued involvement of the United States in the defence of Europe. The 1999 Kosovo campaign would put the spotlight on Europe's shortfalls. Europeans were actually more willing than the US to commit ground forces at an early stage, but then experienced great difficulties putting 50,000 troops into the field, in spite of their impressive overall numbers of uniformed personnel. London sensed that others could be more readily persuaded to step up capability development under the EU flag. In British eyes, the main criterion by which any EU scheme would be judged was the ability to produce capabilities rather than to conduct autonomous operations. For policy-making and operations, the UK continued to think primarily in terms of NATO, emphasizing the ESDI and the mechanism of Combined Joint Task Forces (CJTF) within which NATO command and control could be used for European operations. This remains the position today, as David Lidington, Minister of State for Europe, asserted in June 2012: 'First and foremost, NATO remains the bedrock of Britain's national security.' While this 'unbending support for NATO' is not considered inconsistent with the value placed on 'other European tools', the EU's role is deemed 'complementary' to NATO, 'the best tool for Europe to respond to high intensity conflict situations'.[6] At the same time, in 1998 this was also a way of pressing for reform *within* NATO (and perhaps partly a means of venting irritation with US blundering during the Kosovo campaign, for example in bombing the Chinese embassy in Belgrade).

A more political reason for the move was that by taking the initiative on European defence, a debate which was bound to re-emerge anyway, the UK was able simultaneously to play a leadership role and to steer the outcome closer to its traditional transatlantic course. Significantly, thanks to this proactive stance the UK was able to join forces with France (under President Jacques Chirac), traditionally—despite the two countries' shared global outlook—its opponent on defence issues. Thus a Franco-British axis emerged in addition to the Franco-German economic and financial axis. In fact, at this point Germany too, under

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[5] Sven Biscop, 'The UK's change of course: a new chance for the ESDI', *European Foreign Affairs Review* 4: 2, 1999, pp. 253–68; John Roper, 'Two cheers for Tony Blair? The political realities of European defence cooperation', in Geoffrey Edwards and George Wiessala, eds, *The European Union: the Annual Review 1999–2000* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001), pp. 7–23.
[6] David Lidington, 'EU Common Security and Defence Policy: the UK perspective', speech delivered by the Minister of State for Europe in Paris, 27 June 2012.

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Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, was pursuing a more voluntarist foreign and security policy, so the constellation was extremely positive. This strong dynamic resulted in the creation in 1999 of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) within the EU, as the civilian–military operational arm of the CFSP. The 2001 Treaty of Nice gave it a legal basis in the TEU and ended the 'contract' with the WEU, which would in 2011 lead to the end of the WEU as such, at the initiative of the UK.

ESDP: too much or too little?

The first years of the ESDP saw a flurry of activity, in which the 'big three' continued to play the leading roles. The internal division within the EU about the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 did not block this dynamic—indeed, it even contributed to it in respect of the adoption of the European Security Strategy (ESS) in 2003. The ESS resulted from the converging motivations of those in support of and those against the invasion, seeking to signal respectively that Europe cared about the same threats as the US, but did not necessarily address them in the same way. The same year of 2003 also saw the first autonomous ESDP operation, without the use of NATO assets, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Operation Artemis. Its format inspired the Battlegroup concept, a Franco-British initiative, to which Germany adhered, to provide the EU with two battalion-sized rapid response forces on standby. In 2004 the European Defence Agency (EDA) was set up to stimulate joint capability development, procurement, research and market integration.

An intricate capability development mechanism was created to achieve the 1999 Helsinki Headline Goal of 60,000 troops deployable within 60 days and sustainable for at least one year. At the strategic level, starting from the ESS and how the EU sees its role in the world, the European Council decides what the EU wants to be capable of doing, and what military capabilities are required to that end. At the planning level, it is established through a dynamic process, and on the basis of advice from the EU Military Committee (EUMC) supported by the EU Military Staff (EUMS), what capabilities members have made available to the EU (the Force Catalogue), what the detailed capability requirements are (the Requirements Catalogue), and, comparing the two, what the capability shortfalls are (the Progress Catalogue). Just as in the FAWEU, forces are made available strictly on a case-by-case basis. At the level of implementation, the EDA identifies the most promising solutions for the shortfalls. Finally, it is up to each member state in its national defence planning to make specific capability choices, to be implemented through national or multinational projects.

Ten years later, however, at the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty on 1 November 2009, the Progress Catalogue still listed more than 50 qualitative and quantitative shortfalls, mainly in the areas of survivability and force protection, deployability and transport, and information superiority. The operational consequences include a high to a very high risk of the objectives of an operation not

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being met, of delay in launching an operation, and of incurring casualties and loss of equipment. True, ten years is a short time to judge, because capability development is an inherently long-term process. But the question must be asked whether the mechanism will ever make the huge strides necessary to reach the goal.[7]

The main obstacle is the almost exclusively bottom-up nature of the process. Although the EDA is a key EU-level actor, national capitals are the drivers. During the European Convention (2001–2003) the intention, including in London, was to complement this indispensable bottom-up dynamic with top-down guidance and coordination. To this end a new mechanism, sponsored by the UK and France, was included in the draft Constitutional Treaty adopted by the Convention: Permanent Structured Cooperation. That is also why the EDA, which was included in the draft treaty, was set up in 2004, before its ratification. When the Constitutional Treaty and afterwards the Lisbon Treaty ran into difficulties, however, several member states swallowed their ambitions. The EDA was among the main casualties, as the UK in particular (consistently, given its resistance to common funding, but paradoxically, in view of its focus on capabilities) refused to countenance more than minimal budgetary and personnel provision. This made it very difficult for the EDA to perform its ambitious tasks.

The EDA has made a valiant effort, proposing multinational solutions to address the priority shortfalls and attempting to persuade member states to abandon or merge national projects. When members are willing to pool their efforts, in varying clusters according to the project, this approach yields important results. But in most cases capitals, including London, have not been willing to answer the call. Member states are not motivated to invest in a capability area simply because it has been identified as a priority shortfall at EU level. Each looks to the others to make the first move, fearing to contribute too much of its own limited defence budget to a collective programme as compared to the extent that it expects to have to draw on it. Meanwhile defence planning decisions continue to be taken in isolation, as a function of national requirements, without coordination with fellow member states. As a result, redundant capabilities (representing overcapacity or being non-deployable) are maintained while the strategic enablers are lacking. The conclusion is that coordination at tactical level, that is, on a project-by-project basis, is insufficient to achieve the ambitions of the ESDP.

The UK was rightly disappointed with the lack of effort on the part of many other member states. Yet the British-fed perception of useless ESDP structures that duplicate NATO must be taken with a pinch of salt. Thanks to its broad scope and its proximity to its 'customers', the EDA has achieved more results than Allied Command Transformation, its US-based NATO counterpart, with barely a tenth of the staff. The problem is not so much too many structures as a lack of willingness to use or fund them as intended, in the case of the EDA notably by the UK itself.[8] Through such delaying tactics, London has created the perception that it prevents

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7 Sven Biscop and Jo Coelmont, *Europe, strategy and armed forces* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 68–71.
8 Clara Marina O'Donnell, 'Britain's coalition government and EU defence cooperation: undermining British interests', *International Affairs* 87: 2, March 2011, pp. 419–33 at p. 424.

those member states that are actually willing to go further in deepening military cooperation among themselves from doing so, even when that would entail no commitment by the UK itself.

In terms of military operations, British reluctance has been less evident, even though the ESDP acquired a dynamic of its own, resulting in several autonomous operations outside the NATO framework. Prompted by the UK, the US had understood NATO to have a 'right of first refusal' *vis-à-vis* ESDP operations: that is, the EU could launch an operation only after NATO had explicitly decided to abstain from action. However, this understanding was not applied in the case of Operation Artemis, thus in effect doing away with any idea of a 'right of first refusal', to the chagrin of the US. Nevertheless, London did not block others from deploying under the EU flag in the Congo, the Balkans, Chad and the Horn of Africa. Fundamentally, though, London's view of the ESDP as a complement to NATO, mainly for low-intensity operations and civilian missions, became the reality, because many other member states too saw NATO as the only viable framework for large-scale and high-intensity operations. As the ESS provides very limited guidance about when and where to intervene and no specific ESDP strategy was adopted, decision-making on operations remained strongly ad hoc. While all ESDP operations have been useful, there is no guarantee that they were the most useful operations that could have been undertaken at the time. British participation in these operations remained limited, owing to the imperatives of deployment in Iraq and Afghanistan. Off the record, officials admit that the UK even stated, at a time when it had a Battlegroup on standby, that it did not envisage its deployment as the troops concerned had only just been withdrawn from Afghanistan. The exception is the continuing naval anti-piracy Operation Atalanta, of which the UK has assumed the command. In protecting European trade vessels, Atalanta directly concerns vital British interests.

Where the UK did (and does) play an active blocking role was in the debate about a standing operational headquarters (OHQ) for the EU. The proposal by France, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg to create a permanent OHQ, emerging from their February 2003 'Chocolate Summit', as the critics dubbed it, held in the midst of the Iraq crisis, was heavily resisted by London and Washington, which saw this as an unnecessary duplication of NATO. The resulting compromise still plagues EU crisis management. The EU must outsource the *conduct* or command and control of military operations to NATO. Under the 'Berlin Plus' arrangement between the EU and NATO, the alliance's Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) functions as the OHQ, liaising with one of the NATO force headquarters (FHQ). Or the EU can outsource to one of its five members that have made their national OHQ available, including the UK. Its own Operations Centre (the successor of the Civilian–Military Cell that was created after the 'Chocolate Summit') is a non-permanent capacity that can be activated to run at most Battlegroup-sized operations. For large-scale military operations a NATO FHQ will almost inevitably be required, but for lack of its own military–strategic level OHQ, the EU loses control of its own operations once delegation is made to the

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black box of SHAPE. What is often forgotten is that the lack of OHQ is also an obstacle for EU *planning*. While the Union has the capacity to plan for operations and missions that are decided well in advance, for example the training missions in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel, it has almost no capacity for planning across the whole range of possible responses, civilian as well as military, in crisis situations such as that in Libya. As a result, preventive and early action in emerging crisis situations is nearly impossible.

By the time the Lisbon Treaty finally entered into force in December 2009, the ESDP was generally perceived to have run out of speed. It is difficult to disagree with David Lidington, alas, when he states that 'too often EU Member States have sought to deflect attention with discussions on CSDP's future grandeur or even its existence, rather than what we can do to make it better'.[9] No progress in capability development seemed forthcoming. An attempt to adopt a new ESS in 2008 had failed; all that could be achieved was a report on its implementation containing little indication for the future.[10] No new operations were in the making (though one should take care in judging success by this measure: ideally, an absence of operations indicates an absence of crises). And the UK had clearly abandoned its leadership role.

From Lisbon to Libya: business as usual?

In the first stage of implementation of the Lisbon Treaty the UK continued along the same track. The treaty contains ambitious provisions on what is now baptized the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP); however, after years of institutional paralysis many member states' enthusiasm had waned.

Thus the UK was far from the only member to question Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the new mechanism for defence cooperation. The idea of PESCO is to allow a group of member states, by deepening cooperation, to accelerate transformation and generate more deployable capabilities more quickly, particularly in the shortfall areas identified at EU level. In contrast to the many existing multinational clusters of military cooperation, they would do so *within* the TEU, making use of the EU institutions. Those who joined—on a voluntary basis—would agree on criteria for their defence effort, to be assessed by the EDA, and would seek to harmonize their needs and pool and/or specialize their efforts. Given the limited budgetary resources, the commitments entered into in the context of PESCO would in effect be the determinants of national defence planning. PESCO would thus naturally lead to the strategic-level coordination of defence planning as a whole, which was what the bottom-up ESDP lacked. However, several member states, invoking the complexity of the mechanism and the need to avoid additional institutions—even though the point of PESCO is precisely to make use of *existing* institutions—vocally resisted its implementation.

[9] Lidington, 'EU Common Security and Defence Policy'.
[10] European Council, *Report on the implementation of the European Security Strategy: providing security in a changing world* (Brussels, 11 Dec. 2008).

With no real champion of PESCO emerging, even though Britain and France had pioneered the idea, by the summer of 2010 the debate ended in stalemate.

London also dug its heels in on another issue, even though on this it was almost completely isolated: the OHQ. As the practice of CSDP demonstrated time and again the suboptimal nature of the existing state of affairs, the debate inevitably re-emerged after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, pushed notably by France, Germany and Poland (the Weimar Group). By mid-2011 consensus seemed finally within reach on the basis of a proposal by High Representative Catherine Ashton for an increased standing capacity. But the UK rejected any compromise and maintained its red line.[11] All that was achieved was the activation for the first time on 23 March 2012 of the Operations Centre, with the aim of coordinating operations in the Horn of Africa. It was a breakthrough, but only a very symbolic one, as under this limited activation the Operations Centre has no command responsibility and just 20-odd staff out of a maximum of 103. Nevertheless, it might be the first step towards a more fundamental reform of EU planning and conduct.

London's main post-Lisbon initiative was a bilateral one, in line with the focus of the October 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review. On 2 December 2010, at the Lancaster House summit, France and the UK signed two treaties on defence and security cooperation, one creating the legal and institutional framework for cooperation in general and one specifically concerning cooperation on nuclear modelling.[12] Among the areas singled out for increased cooperation were aircraft-carriers (with the short-term aim of allowing aircraft to operate from carriers of both countries and of being able by 2020 to deploy an integrated carrier strike group) and a two-brigade Combined Joint Expeditionary Force. What mattered most for the European debate was that, over a decade after their groundbreaking St-Malo summit, France and the UK once again appeared to have found each other. But the Lancaster House meeting looked more like St-Malo in reverse, aimed at bilateral rather than European cooperation. France in its public diplomacy tried to frame the agreements in a European narrative. But for the UK, Lancaster House represented a choice for bilateral cooperation with the only other European country perceived to matter, to the detriment of multilateral cooperation with partners seen more as dead weight and within EU (or indeed NATO) institutions seen as the opposite of cost-effective. The cursory references to CSDP led to a negative reception in many capitals, yet also set people thinking. If the other capitals would not step up their own efforts, by joining up with Franco-British cooperation or by enhancing cooperation in other (new or existing) clusters, they risked being left completely behind, without deployable capabilities and thus without influence on decision-making in crisis situations. At the same time, those in favour of increased cooperation could now argue that if even the biggest military actors in the EU need each other to maintain certain capabilities,

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[11] 'Britain blocks proposal for permanent EU security headquarters', Reuters, 18 July 2012.
[12] Ben Jones, *Franco–British military cooperation: a new engine for European defence?*, European Union Institute for Security Studies Occasional Paper no. 88 (Paris, 2011).

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surely no other country could deny the necessity of cooperation.[13] On the British side, defence cuts were and are indeed one of the drivers of cooperation.

In combination with the immediate need to coordinate yet another round of defence cuts forced on most member states by the financial and economic crisis that began in late 2008, the bilateral Lancaster House treaties thus had the effect of stimulating a new multilateral process in defence cooperation. Building on (among other elements) a German–Swedish non-paper, the Belgian presidency creatively sidestepped the debate on PESCO and instead steered the Council towards agreement on the Ghent Framework (9 December 2011), prompting member states 'to consider: measures to increase interoperability for capabilities to be maintained on a national level; exploring which capabilities offer potential for pooling; intensifying cooperation regarding capabilities, support structures and tasks which could be addressed on the basis of role- and task-sharing'. Under the heading of 'Pooling and Sharing', this created a new dynamic in capability development. Shortly afterwards, at the 2011 Munich Security Conference, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen announced Smart Defence, very much as a reaction to the dynamic generated in the EU, and identical to it in aims and means.[14]

Pooling and Sharing started the only way a collective endeavour can, potentially, work: as a *political* initiative of the EU ministers of defence. It was then up to each minister, in a top-down manner, to steer national defence planning in the direction agreed upon with his/her colleagues. In many countries, follow-up was lacklustre and the national defence apparatus was left much leeway. Predictably this was used to slow down the integrative dynamic created at the political level. This was particularly so in Germany, even though the country had been instrumental in launching the Ghent Framework. France and the UK were both focused on their bilateral cooperation and so they did not assume a driving role either.

As Pooling and Sharing fizzled out, Smart Defence kicked in and gave new impetus to the same process in a different organization; but it soon went the same way. An indispensable condition for a NATO capability project to work is that the US contributes, with money, personnel and equipment. Then the European allies can be persuaded to put in their share. For the US, however, the point of Smart Defence is exactly the opposite: to persuade the Europeans to solve the European capability problem *without* American support. In the absence of American money, European enthusiasm for Smart Defence began to ebb as soon as concrete projects, and budgets, had to be defined. Nor did it help that the US attempted to use Smart Defence as a means of inducing Europeans to gain capability by buying American enablers. That might be seen as the normal way of things in the Atlantic-oriented capitals, but could hardly be expected to motivate those with defence industries of their own. The resulting divisions among Europeans made it even more difficult to achieve the critical mass for any project, under either Smart Defence or Pooling and Sharing.[15]

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[13] Biscop and Coelmont, *Europe, strategy and armed forces*, pp. 80–84.
[14] Anders Fogh Rasmussen, 'Building security in an age of austerity', keynote speech by the NATO Secretary General at the Munich Security Conference, 4 Feb. 2011.
[15] Sven Biscop, *As the EU said at the NATO summit*, Security Policy Brief no. 33 (Brussels: Egmont Institute, 2012).

Once again, no grand initiative seemed capable of pushing Europeans to make the leap in defence integration that would enable a commensurate leap in capabilities. British scepticism about European defence, indeed about all multilateral defence cooperation, and the resulting choice for bilateral cooperation with France appeared vindicated. Then the Libyan crisis arose and altered the perspective again.

From the halls of Justus Lipsius to the shores of Tripoli

One should not overstate the extent to which the UN-mandated intervention in Libya from March to October 2011 was a turning-point, but what was new about it was that it saw Europeans initiating action on a crisis in their neighbourhood. That may appear perfectly logical, except that in the past two decades Europeans, collectively, have been anything but decisive in dealing with their volatile periphery. Of course, France and the UK, military powers with a proven track record of force projection, took the lead and persuaded (indeed, had to persuade) the US to support them politically and militarily. Nevertheless, the eventual military success boosted *European* confidence at a time when the reigning image was one of tortuous progress in capability development and reluctance *vis-à-vis* the use of force (notwithstanding the thousands of Europeans fighting in Afghanistan). The wish to project an image of decisiveness, after the initial hesitant (and at instances downright mistaken) reactions to the Arab Spring, was probably one of the major drivers of the intervention.

Yet seen from another angle Libya was far less of a *European* intervention. First, politically, Europeans strongly disagreed, to the extent that Germany abstained from the vote on Security Council Resolution 1973 that mandated the intervention. Action under the political aegis of the EU was thus impossible. Once again, this demonstrated the lack of any collective European view on the scope of Europe's responsibilities as a provider of security. What matters most is not the debate about the flag under which deployment should take place (EU, NATO or the UN), but the absence of collective strategic insight on *why* to deploy. Indeed, when the debate subsequently shifted to NATO, and the US made it clear it would not take the lead, the Europeans inevitably replayed the same debate and remained as divided as before. Just a few allies took part in combat operations over Libya, of which NATO structures eventually assumed command, several days after the start of operations. But, without a consensus of EU or NATO members, the real *political* centre of gravity stayed in the ad hoc coalition led by Britain and France. Second, militarily, the campaign once again highlighted the European lack of strategic enablers (air-to-air refuelling, targeting, precision-guided munitions, etc.), 90 per cent of which had to be provided by the United States. Without massive American support, Europeans could still have flattened a substantial part of Libya, but operations would have lasted much longer and would have come at a much higher risk to their own forces and of collateral damage—and this against a relatively weak adversary. In other words, even so close to home they could not

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have run the campaign in a way that would have been politically acceptable to European public opinion, the Libyan opposition or the UN.

If Libya thus demonstrated that there still is not enough Europe in European security, either politically or militarily, it was also an indication that in the future there is likely to be less America in European security. As a decade of 'war on terror' is wound up, the United States is shifting its strategic focus to the Asia–Pacific region. Consequently, as Americans have repeatedly made clear,[16] they now expect Europeans to take charge of crises in their neighbourhood on their own. In David Lidington's words, the United States is 'looking to work in partnership with Europe, rather than providing security on behalf of Europe'. This strategic shift is partly dependent on Europe's ability to defend itself. True burden-sharing would see Europeans acquiring their own enablers, allowing US capacity to be diverted elsewhere. Therefore the prerequisite for the American pivot is European strategic autonomy, at least regionally. If Europe were seriously threatened, the United States would have no choice but to intervene, because of its own vital interests. In that sense, it remains a European power. European capitals, all too well aware of this, ignore at their peril the possibility that the US might decide to make the point by withholding its military support for a crisis management operation of importance to Europeans that does not threaten vital US interests—such as that in Libya.

The consequences of this shift for European defence and the possibilities it opens up are fundamental, prompting senior British military figures to state publicly that 'President Obama has changed the game and in doing this has surely shone a light on Britain's, and Europe's, defence nakedness'.[17] First of all, Europeans will obviously have to invest in the capabilities required by the autonomy that is forced upon them. Today, no single European country is capable on its own of generating significant new capabilities, particularly not in strategic enablers. The only feasible solution in today's budgetary situation, whether through the CSDP or NATO, is a collective European one, which underlines the importance of Pooling and Sharing/Smart Defence. But in order to make collective capability decisions, Europeans need to define a level of ambition for their autonomous role as security provider. The future capability mix (as well as intelligence and planning) ought to be determined by agreed priorities, both geographical and functional, for the most likely deployments, under any flag, as a function of Europe's common interests and its common foreign policy, of which the military is but an instrument. In other words, collective European capability decisions require collective European strategy. While the United States might not fully appreciate or welcome it, the pivot all but obliges Europeans to form a caucus on defence.

That caucus already exists: it is commonly known as the CSDP. A reappraisal of its potential in the light of the American pivot constitutes an excellent opportunity to reshape and thereby to reinvigorate the transatlantic security architecture.

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[16] In particular in Defense Secretary Robert Gates's Brussels farewell speech, *Reflections on the state and future of the transatlantic alliance,* at the Security and Defence Agenda on 10 June 2011 and in US Department of Defense, *Sustaining US global leadership: priorities for 21st century defense* (Washington DC: Department of Defense, Jan. 2012).
[17] Michael Graydon, Jeremy Blackham, Andrew Lambert and Allen Sykes, 'European and UK defence dangerously exposed', *Financial Times*, 19 Jan. 2012, p. 8.

In terms of capability development, the renewed urgency of the debate after Libya, in combination with new impetus in the EDA and the initiative of certain member states, particularly France, finally led to somewhat more tangible results of Pooling and Sharing in 2011. On 1 December that year, the Foreign Affairs Council welcomed member states' commitments to eleven projects facilitated by the EDA. French industrial interests undoubtedly play a role, but these projects directly address some of the key shortfalls in, for example, air-to-air refuelling, smart munitions, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (including space-situational awareness), and military satellite communications. Taking into account the impediments faced by Smart Defence, this development points once again to the logical conclusion that what Philip Hammond called in his speech at the Atlantic Council a 'European problem' can best be solved among Europeans, through the CSDP. In capability development, the CSDP could thus emerge as the European pillar of NATO while continuing to serve the EU as well, much as the UK hoped for at St-Malo. Smart Defence itself implies such an evolution, for it requires that a new level be introduced into the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP), taking into account collective targets and contributions by the European allies, instead of dealing only with individual nations. What is this level if not the CSDP?

Many might instinctively draw back from the dreaded European caucus, yet the CSDP and NATO are fully compatible. NATO remains the forum within which to initiate programmes to which both Europeans and Americans want to contribute, notably for collective territorial defence (such as missile defence). The new collective targets and capabilities for crisis management which Europeans set and create among themselves through the CSDP can be incorporated as such in NATO defence planning. The aim is not for all European members to contribute to all projects. European capabilities will remain a complex puzzle of national and multinational capabilities. In some multinational areas, pooling will take place in several clusters of a few members each; in others, requiring a larger critical mass, there will probably be just one cluster of a dozen or more members. Defence Secretary Hammond, in his Washington speech, called for 'greater pooling and sharing of capabilities; mission, role and geographic specialization; greater sharing of technology; cooperation on logistics; alignment of research and development programmes; and more collaborative training'.[18] But to manage this puzzle and to make sure that in the end it issues in a coherent set of European capabilities, tactical-level coordination of cooperation, project by project, will definitely not suffice.

In fact, both the Ghent Framework and Smart Defence explicitly call for a three-dimensional approach. Besides (1) pooling or cooperation, on which both processes now focus, there is a need to decide (2) which capabilities are to be maintained in the first place (prioritization) and (3) which capabilities will be provided by role- and task-sharing (specialization). Progress on these three fronts can only be achieved if member states complement the project-by-project approach

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[18] Hammond, 'NATO: the case for collective defence in the 21st century'.

with strategic-level coordination of national defence planning as a whole. Only a permanent and structured dialogue at the political level, between the EU ministers of defence, about long-term plans and intentions, can produce transparency, certainty and confidence. That will allow each minister to instruct his/her chief of defence: to focus the national defence effort on a reduced range of employable capabilities; to scrap redundant capabilities, of which there are far too many in Europe today; and to use the full potential for cluster-based pooling, thereby creating budgetary space to invest in the major new collective projects to acquire strategic enablers. In this strategic dialogue between national defence planning lies the true added value of the CSDP.

In terms of operations, the Libya campaign saw an ad hoc coalition make use of the NATO command structure—'Paris–London Plus' instead of Berlin Plus. On the one hand, this demonstrates that the choice of headquarters really is a technical issue and not a topic for political debate: headquarters should be identified on a case-by-case basis, as appropriate to the crisis of the moment. On the other hand, it shows that increasingly NATO is a technical organization rather than a political centre of gravity, a service provider (and a good one at that) for command and control. As the United States implements its pivot and expects Europeans to act autonomously, Europeans, certainly in their own periphery, regardless of the HQ chosen, will increasingly have to deploy on the basis of a collective *European* strategy, based in turn on a collective *European* foreign policy. It is simply logical that all collective European deployments take place under the *political* aegis of the EU. Even today, European troops are deployed in Kosovo under NATO command and in Lebanon under UN command; but Europe's comprehensive long-term political strategy for those countries is defined through the EU. The first implication is that Europeans collectively have to fill the gap in their strategic thinking, define a level of ambition and set priorities for crisis management; otherwise their internal divisions will continue to be an obstacle to rapid response under any flag. The second implication is that the NATO command structure (into which France has reintegrated) will increasingly serve European-driven operations. Rather than continue to block an EU military–strategic headquarters and insist on the primacy of SHAPE, it appears more and more logical to set up a permanent EU OHQ (of no more than 300 staff) capable of coordinating all intelligence, monitoring and planning for crisis management, civilian as well as military, and allow it to link directly to any member state or NATO force headquarters when Europeans decide on a military operation. In view of decreasing American involvement, to increase European ownership of NATO in this way is to make the most effective use of its prime asset, namely the command and control structure.[19]

In a way, the ESDI is being revived. Unlike the original concept, however, which saw the European pillar as a mere technical platform firmly anchored in and subservient to NATO, 'ESDI Plus' is anchored outside the alliance and receives its strategic guidance from the EU. Let us simply call it the CSDP, therefore.

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[19] Jolyon Howorth, *CSDP and NATO post-Libya: towards the Rubicon?*, Security Policy Brief no. 35 (Brussels: Egmont Institute, 2012).

Europeans should collectively define strategy, in the Council of the EU, and define their level of ambition for crisis management; they should collectively develop capabilities through the CSDP, double-hatting it as the European pillar of NATO in order to guarantee interoperability and incorporating their collective aims as such in the NDPP; and they should collectively deploy for crisis management, with a permanent EU OHQ assuring the link between the political–strategic level of the Council and the Political and Security Committee on the one hand and a NATO or member state FHQ (or of course the EU's Operations Centre) on the other hand.

A nightmare scenario for the UK—or is it?

Conclusion

In defence, 40 years of EEC/EU membership have seen a very inconsistent British policy, from resisting any European scheme to initiating one, only to slow it down again afterwards. Britain is consistent only in its orthodoxy, defending the primacy of NATO against the upstart CSDP which it parented. But the power which that orthodoxy aims to please no longer cares. The prevalent US attitude towards European defence is now one of benign neglect. Two decades since Maastricht, Washington has had it with Europeans talking about European defence, but it would certainly not be displeased if they would finally *do* it. Thus the United States is now more supportive than ever of European military cooperation and will see a British policy that blocks it as an irrelevance, a nuisance even. British policy on European and Atlantic defence has arrived at a crossroads, therefore. Defence Secretary Hammond restated the classic British motivation for any European scheme: 'The Europeans need to reassure the US that we are serious about defence.'[20] But today, that requires a change of course.

The UK could continue to block collective European efforts and focus instead on its bilateral cooperation with France, while trying also to develop similar bilateral frameworks in specific capability areas with other European countries that have serious capacity. As the Libya campaign has shown, however, the combined military power of Britain and France is far from sufficient to undertake modern-day crisis management operations of real significance. American support to fill the shortfalls will be less and less forthcoming, because of the US pivot. France and the UK alone can certainly not afford to acquire all the strategic enablers Europe lacks. To do that requires the critical mass that Europeans collectively can bring; but that will be wasted if London and/or Paris do not stimulate the other countries (which together account for the other 50 per cent of European defence spending) to come together. If it continues along its present road, therefore, Britain's leverage will be mostly negative. London will remain able to veto any EU initiatives that displease it. But the alternative will increasingly reveal itself to be an empty box, for as the United States turns away from Europe and NATO, even that alliance will become meaningless without an enhanced collective European effort.

[20] Hammond, 'NATO: the case for collective defence in the 21st century'.

   The alternative, then, is for London, together with Paris, once more to take the lead in the CSDP. These two governments alone can initiate the major collective capability projects to address the key shortfalls in enablers that will enable them to benefit from the contribution of other European countries. Together they can launch a serious strategic reflection on Europe's collective level of ambition. If London abstains or even distances itself from the EU as a whole, an EU-oriented Paris will certainly go ahead anyway, as its voluntarism in Pooling and Sharing has shown. London then really will be left in the cold. A jointly led CSDP, however, will be more comprehensive and have greater critical mass. If the Franco-British axis is turned to good use, the success of the Libya campaign need not remain the exception, and its deficiencies will be overcome.