

# The French-German Duo and the Search for a New European Security Model

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At one level of analysis, French and German security cooperation has never been closer. Paris and Berlin both rejected the American-led invasion of Iraq. Going several steps further, they were together at the heart of the active and ultimately successful opposition to the Security Council's legitimisation of the use of force against Iraq: indeed, in his blunt language, Donald Rumsfeld heaped scorn on the two countries lumped together as "old Europe".<sup>1</sup> In this context, it is not surprising that French and German popular attitudes on the respective security roles of NATO and the European Union have also drawn strongly together, as is evidenced by the opinions polls conducted in 2002 and 2003 by the German Marshall Fund of the United States: whereas Germans used to be staunchly atlanticist, they now see the EU as the most important strategic point of reference.<sup>2</sup>

The traditional opposition between a Gaullist France and a pro-American Germany appears to have been largely subsumed into converging streams of pro-European rhetoric, popular attitudes and government policies. Within

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<sup>1</sup> "You're thinking of Europe as Germany and France. I don't. I think that's old Europe." Donald Rumsfeld, Statement to the foreign press corps, 22 January 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Issued on 4 September 2003, the "Transatlantic trends 2003" survey was conducted in June 2003 <[www.transatlantictrends.org](http://www.transatlantictrends.org)> The EU was seen as "more important to their vital interest than the US" by 81% of Germans in 2003 (versus 55% in 2002). 45% of Germans (versus 68% in 2002) thought that "a strong US leadership role in world affairs was desirable".

only days of the fall of Baghdad, France and Germany, along with Belgium and Luxembourg, found it possible to incur the displeasure of the militarily victorious Bush administration by announcing the establishment of a purely European operational military headquarters within shouting distance of the residence of the US Ambassador to NATO in Tervuren, Belgium. On the same occasion, subsequently derided as the "chocolate summit" by the State Department spokesman, the leaders of the countries involved launched a wide-ranging set of defence and security initiatives to be developed either as part of the European Union's security and defence policy (ESDP) or as enhanced cooperations between a smaller set of countries. This was to include somewhat over-ambitiously, "the creation, by June 2004 at the latest, of a European command for European air transport".<sup>3</sup> Later in the year, the United Kingdom joined this movement for European defence, a development which could be interpreted as bearing witness to the new-found dynamism and attractiveness of the French-German couple.

These developments were buttressed by concrete military developments, both in terms of actual operations and from the defence-industrial standpoint. Germany had, by 1999, shed the shackles of its self-imposed refusal to use lethal military force for reasons other than strict national or allied defence: like their French comrades, German airmen and soldiers fought in Kosovo and Afghanistan. Robert Kagan's characterisation of Europeans as coming from "Venus" in contrast to Americans coming from "Mars"<sup>4</sup> was arguably plausible in former years. Some Europeans, not least the Germans, were hardly eager to fight in Third World conflicts during the Cold War. However, the post-1990 record shows a Germany which moved from non-involvement in the Gulf War to gradually more direct engagement in several theatres of operations during the subsequent dozen years or so.

More generally, French and German military concepts and doctrines have evolved in a converging manner, with the emphasis being put, as elsewhere in Europe, on force projection. This makes a big change from the days in which the best the French and the Germans could do was to decide in 1992 to set up a Eurocorps<sup>5</sup> designed to guard the Vosges and the Black Forest against a non-existent enemy, with at its core, the Franco-German brigade as a military language school. The Eurocorps (and the brigade) still exist, but with command structures that have been transformed for force projection

<sup>3</sup> Joint Statement of the Heads of State and Government of Germany, France, Luxembourg and Belgium on European Defence, 29 April 2003.

<sup>4</sup> R. Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Knopf, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Declared operational in 1995, with Belgian, Luxemburghese and Spanish participation.

purposes, capable of assuming command of NATO's European and US forces in Kosovo (KFOR).

In defence industrial terms, France and Germany have also drawn ever closer. The first truly European defence firm was established in 1999 with the creation of the European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company (EADS), which merged France's Matra-Aérospatiale, Germany's Daimler-Chrysler Aeronautics (DASA) and Spain's CASA. Through this decision, France and Germany moved at breakneck speed from purely national defence industrial bases to a fully integrated largely Franco-German industrial powerhouse. Developments at the programme level have been somewhat less spectacular given that, ever since the late 1950s, France and Germany have been engaged in a host of joint weapons projects (Roland, Milan, Hot, Transall, Alphajet, Tiger, and others). However, the A-400 M military transport aircraft developed by EADS will represent a new milestone: this seven-nation project, with French and German requirements (and industry) at its centre, is symbolic of the new priority given to force projection. Thus, the operational, industrial, and strategic aspects of defence come together most impressively with this programme.

This list of achievements masks a situation which is rather less promising. The underlying reality is that of a largely worn-out French-German relationship and the trend that of a decreasing ability on the part of the Paris-Berlin couple to set the tone of European security developments. There is no doubt that these concerns flow in large part from the mechanics of EU enlargement which neither France nor Germany can alter at this stage: the move on 1 May 2004 to a 25-nation EU makes it more difficult for any combination of two countries to exercise a decisive influence on all-Union compromises. Already with only 15 Union members, the Franco-German couple hardly functioned consistently: the years 1996 to 2001, including the disastrous negotiation of the Nice Treaty, bear witness in this regard. Nor has the couple proven able, after its revival in 2002, to lead Europe as a whole: after all, "Old Europe" was countered by "New Europe" during the Iraq crisis, precluding the establishment of an all-European consensus against the US war. Paris and Berlin may be agreeing more than ever on security and defence, but this doesn't give them a firm grip on the broader European reality. Worse, this split developed largely as a direct consequence of the "New European" states' refusal to accept what they saw as the excessive power of the French-German combination: the couple has thus even proved to be counterproductive to some extent. The effects of enlargement are accompanied by other qualitative developments within both the French-German couple and the ten new member states. It is on these developments that this article focuses, before suggesting policy actions and responses.

### The reasons for success and failure

What made the French-German couple the driving force of European integration from 1950 to the early 1990s is also, to a large extent, what explains its current limitations. The power of the French-German combination in the past flowed from the interaction of two very different forces: the scope of divergences and the intensity of the will to achieve compromise.

It is easy to forget how broad and deep the divergences separating France and Germany were in the first decades following the Treaty of Rome (1957), in terms of both their vision of the European integration process and their practical interests. West Germany's vision was that of a supra-national, federal European state, of which the constituent member countries would have been the functional equivalent of what Germany's *Länder* are to the *Bund*. "National interest" was an expression that did not figure in Bonn's politically-correct *Lexikon*. The French perspective was at its Gaullist extreme, that of "*L'Europe des Patries*" of the Fouchet Plan. In today's vocabulary, this was a *souverainiste* vision. Of course, these ideal-types were not always so starkly put; Mitterrand and Giscard were less *souverainiste* than either de Gaulle or Pompidou; and Schmidt was not a clone of Adenauer. In practice, national interest was not absent from German policy; similarly, even a *souverainiste* de Gaulle was no enemy of the supra-national Commission, after all, the Commission was the child *par excellence* of French *technocratie*.

Nonetheless, France and Cold War West Germany were working towards very different European endpoints. This divergence was no less apparent in terms of practical differences of interest. In the original European Community, Germany was the *Milchkuh*, and France, notably through a Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) imposed upon a reluctant EEC by de Gaulle's *politique de la chaise vide*,<sup>6</sup> was the archetypal consumer of European budget expenditure. In the realm of "high policy", France maximised the utility of a European integration process (designed largely to its own specifications) as a lever of French political and strategic interests in Europe and abroad: France could eat its European cake while pursuing its go-it-alone national policies – French influence through the combination of European integration on one hand and the *force de frappe* on the other (at a time when nuclear weapons were the hard currency of power). West

<sup>6</sup> From July 1965 to January 1966. One of the consequences of the *politique de la chaise vide* was the institutionalisation of national veto power in EEC decision-making (the so-called "Luxembourg compromise").

Germany benefited from its own version of this combination of respectable, politically-correct Europeanisation on the one side (with the EEC, along with Cold War NATO, providing the cover under which the historically embarrassing issue of the "national interest" could be avoided) and national assertion on the other, through the power of Germany's hard currency with the ascendancy of the Deutsche Mark (DM). This "symmetry of asymmetries" (to use Stanley Hoffmann's expression) worked on both sides of the Rhine until reunification: and even then, the kinetic energy of the couple was sufficient to maintain momentum until the mid-nineties, including the negotiation of the Maastricht Treaty, the establishment of the European Union and the launching of monetary union. These widely divergent visions and deeply different interests (CAP and nukes on one side, European respectability and the DM on the other) were as broad (and usually broader) than the differences of visions or interests existing between or with any other EEC member states.

Admittedly, this became less obvious as the Community's ranks grew: Heath's Britain was no less *souverainiste* than Pompidou's France, and post-dictatorship Portugal, Spain and Greece were even more budget-hungry than France. Eventually, and most clearly with the enlargement to 15 members in 1993, the ability of France and Germany to cover the full spectrum of major divergences within the EEC/Union was largely negated.

The reason why this didn't happen earlier was linked to another component of the French-German duo, that is the shared sense that on all major issues, France and Germany had a mutual obligation to strike a compromise upstream of broader European deliberations. Although occasionally honoured in the breach, this rule was the indispensable complement to the broad range of Franco-German divergences. Even in the difficult period (November 1989 to April 1990), during which President Mitterrand tried to block or delay German unification, this sense of *ardente obligation* led France and Germany to produce the big push which led to the Maastricht Treaty and the Euro.

From 1995 to 2001, this ceased to be the case, for a number of reasons: personality (for instance the Chirac-Kohl combination was not particularly close); change of generation (Jospin and Schröder have no personal memory of the Second World War); political socialisation (Jospin's and Schröder's political careers had kept them largely outside of European and Franco-German affairs prior to their assumption of top-level responsibilities in 1997); and domestic politics: *cohabitation* between Chirac and Jospin (1997-2002) limited France's manoeuvrability while bringing to the fore the more Eurosceptic traits of both Jospin and Chirac.

After the French (April/May) and German (September) elections of 2002,

the French-German couple apparently reverted back to its *modus operandi* of the "golden years" of the relationship: first, the Schröder-Chirac agreement on how to handle the CAP (October 2002), then the joint proposals in the constitutional Convention (November 2002), and the apex of French-German togetherness during the Iraq crisis, notably in Versailles on the occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Élysées Treaty (22 January 2003). Yet, this restored Franco-German relationship did not lead to a united European position, but rather to widespread rejection of the resurgent couple, not only by the acceding states but also by "old" members. Five of the signatories of "letter of the eight" published in the Wall Street Journal<sup>7</sup> a few days after the Franco-German liturgy in Versailles, were "old" members (Britain, Denmark, Italy, Portugal, Spain).

This state of affairs is in large part a consequence of the Franco-German hiatus of 1995-2001 (essentially President Chirac's first term), which forced other EU members to operate in a landscape no longer structured by the smooth functioning of the great compromise-producing Franco-German machine. A fast-growing budget-balancing Spain under a dynamic leader, an Italy with an iconoclastic new premier, and a Britain seeking greater influence through the impetus of a highly talented prime minister: such countries needed little prompting to fill the void during this period. This yielded initiatives such as the Blair-Schröder manifesto undercutting Jospin's leftist platform on the eve of the European elections in 1999. Needless to say, those who had developed substitute strategies in the *interregnum* of 1995-2001 were not going to rejoice at the return of the old Franco-German couple. The accession countries, which only became immersed in EU affairs during the period of Franco-German separation, were suddenly confronted with the emergence of what was for them an unfamiliar power centre. And since this happened in the middle of the worst-ever crisis in transatlantic relations, their natural reaction was to reject what seemed not only to be an unwanted *directoire* but one which appeared to be bent on splitting NATO.

In addition, the simple fact of the "separation" of 1995-2001 made the subsequent French-German honeymoon appear less an *ardente obligation* than a vehicle of convenience for the two governments. Worse, new EU members were unlikely to draw any positive inspiration from the spectacle of the two states acting together in breach of their own solemn undertaking, the Stability Pact, initially crafted by an overconfident Germany to ward off the supposedly fickle members of the "Club Med".

If one adds to these considerations the mechanical effect of a 25-member

<sup>7</sup> 30 January 2000.

EU on the pulling power of France and Germany, the picture is dismal – quite unlike the one painted in the opening lines of this article: the view ahead differs substantially from that in the rearview mirror:

- France and Germany no longer come close to covering the broad spectrum of differences in EU affairs in general, and in security and defence affairs in particular. As was pointed out in the opening remarks, there is an enormous amount of common, rather than diverging, ground between France and Germany. This can, of course, make it much easier to craft a joint position: but at the same time it reduces the ability to co-opt those who happen to be on very different positions. In security and defence, Britain or Poland are atlanticist in a way that Germany has ceased to be: agreement between Berlin and Paris in itself is not enough (and in the Iraqi crisis, was worth less than nothing) in terms of attracting Warsaw or London.

- More negatively, much of France's and Germany's common ground occurs in a form which is as debatable in security and defence terms as the breaching of the Stability Pact is in institutional terms. Paris and Berlin, along with most other EU countries, have not taken any decisive measures against the threat of terrorism of mass destruction (*hyperterrorisme*). Homeland security organisation and funding levels have not been substantially altered as a consequence of "9/11" and "11 M". This is clearly not a specific French-German shortfall but a general state of European affairs. Nonetheless, Paris and Berlin cannot claim to be leading through example in this crucial field! In more traditional military affairs, lofty ambitions (such as those contained in the 29 April 2003 Declaration at the "chocolate summit") are not always followed through. National practices are not particularly encouraging: Germany's defence budget remains heavily overweight in personnel overhead and legacy system expenditures, and severely underweight in terms of research, equipment and force projection. It has taken close to four years for the main recommendations of the excellent Weizsäcker report<sup>8</sup> to be endorsed as policy. We shall now see how long it will take to implement them. Although the French defence budget has increased in 2002, 2003 and 2004, it remains to be seen whether France has actually shaken its old habit of dropping its defence spending commitments in mid-course.

In one area at least, there remains a deep popular (if not necessarily governmental) divergence between France and Germany, that is the

<sup>8</sup> "Gemeinsame Sicherheit und Zukunft der Bundeswehr – Bericht der Kommission an die Bundesregierung, Berlin, 23 May 2000.

readiness to use force. It is true that since 1999, France and Germany have been militarily involved in theatres such as Kosovo and Afghanistan. France as a whole is quite comfortable with the rough and ready use of force even without much preparation of public opinion (this has been the case from 2001 onwards in the Ivory Coast). It is sufficient for the operation to be presented in a credible manner by the executive branch: experience in Africa and the Balkans demonstrates that legislative approval or even UN authorisation are not of the essence. In Germany, such readiness existed in the Kosovo war, undertaken without explicit UN Security Council authorisation because of the highly-visible humanitarian implications. But this appears to have been an exception, if one is to judge from the September 2003 German Marshall Fund survey.

The following question was put: "Imagine Iran has acquired nuclear weapons. The (a) United Nations Security Council (b) NATO (c) United States government has decided to attack Iran to force that country to give up these weapons. Would you support a French-German government decision to take part in this military action or not?". The French response was (a) the UN, yes 56 percent; (b) NATO, yes 54 percent; and (c) the US, no 52 percent; whereas the Germans gave a triple negative: (a) no 51 percent; (b) no 67 percent; and (c) no 66 percent. The French response was closer to the British response ((a) yes 70 percent; (b) yes 66 percent; and (c) yes 51 percent) than to the German one.<sup>9</sup> Multilateralism and the acceptability of the use of force are not as strongly correlated as would be suggested by some of the arguments used during the Iraq crisis by those denouncing "America's war" for its unilateralism. However, this area of difference is not specifically Franco-German (the British are even more prone to support the use of force than the French and some of the neutrals are more wary of its use than Germany – witness Austria's refusal to grant NATO overflight rights during the Kosovo air war). More to the point, in strategic terms, the degree of (non)alignment on US policy is a discriminating factor of at least as great importance as perceptions concerning the use of force and, as seen before, Germany is no longer representative of the atlanticist end of the spectrum.

If the French-German couple is no longer the driving force in Europe in the field of security and defence, what can be done in the future? The answers will be dealt with here not as alternatives, but as complementary approaches: it will be argued that even if revitalisation of the relationship

<sup>9</sup> Questions 13 e, f, and g; topline data of "Transatlantic Trends 2003" survey <[www.transatlantictrends.org](http://www.transatlantictrends.org)>



will not lead to a recreation of its previous incarnations, an effective alternative to the traditional relationship cannot be viable unless it contains a strong French and German dimension.

### **The way ahead: new approaches and institutional arrangements**

A European security model will not flow automatically from a quest to re-establish the traditional priority given to the French-German relationship. It will only occur if European countries make a deliberate attempt to sort out those issues that are most directly relevant to Europe's security and defence today. Three areas are of particular importance.

- *Revisiting the threat assessment and alliance relations.* The 11 March attacks in Madrid demonstrated that Europe, no less than the US or indeed many other parts of the world (witness the geographic spread of al Qaeda bombings internationally since 11 September 2001), lives in the shadow of a major terrorist outrage, possibly involving the sorts of casualties associated with the use of weapons of mass destruction. The corresponding level of urgency and gravity needs to be factored into European security assessments. In this regard, the watering-down of the draft European Security Strategy document between March and December 2003 was not an encouraging sign – with Germany playing a significant role in this dilution.<sup>10</sup> In the wake of "11 M", the Europeans should jointly take a hard look at the threat environment, in a visible manner, that is opening a formal strategic dialogue bringing together both official analysts and non-governmental think-tanks.
- The same recommendation should apply to another, vital facet of the security equation: *alliance relations with the US*. During the Iraqi crisis, France and Germany found themselves at one in resisting the American war, thereby fuelling the crisis in the transatlantic relationship. Given the level of the resulting collateral damage, since then there has been a tendency in both Paris and Berlin to attempt to restore the relationship with Washington. In itself, this is an obviously positive development. However, it has tended to be largely bilateral and reactive or opportunistic, with little consultation or coordination between France and Germany (witness German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer's speech on the Greater Middle East Initiative

<sup>10</sup> Notably on the issue of preventive action: European Council, Brussels, 12 December 2003, "A Secure Europe in a Better World, European Security Strategy".

<sup>11</sup> Speech at the 40th European Security Conference in Munich, 7 February 2004.

containing an opening towards the US at the *Wehrkundetagung* in February 2004<sup>11</sup> or France's joint political and military action with the US in Haiti). After the US presidential elections, a coherent and longer-term vision of a revitalised European-American partnership should be discussed. This in turn would require a concerted European approach in the months preceding the January 2005 US presidential inauguration.

- *The organisation of homeland defence.* Europe's collective preparations against a mass destruction terrorist attack have been limited and slow. This is not to say that they have been non-existent: the decisions in the autumn of 2001 to establish the European arrest warrant and to provide a common, legally operative, definition of terrorism are important, as was the setting up of an anti-terrorism coordinator alongside Javier Solana after the "11 M" attacks. However, the legal measures have been implemented in an incomplete manner: it was shocking to "discover" after "11 M" that several EU countries had not yet incorporated them into their domestic legislation and regulations. Furthermore, the legal and intelligence coordination measures of the EU leave aside the whole field of crisis-management and consequences-management of a hyperterrorist attack. No doubt many, and possibly most, of such management functions are of a local or national, rather than EU nature: thus the Madrid bombings did not call for the mobilisation of European assets. But what is precisely at stake today is Europe's ability to deal with either a cross-border terrorist attack (such as an infectious biological attack) or an attack of such magnitude that it would call on the mobilisation of assets from all over the continent. There exist elements of a European approach in this regard, with some coordination between national civil defence or transportation authorities. Thus, the Commission has launched a significant R&D initiative in the field of homeland security<sup>12</sup> with the aim *inter alia* of fostering interoperability between the various crisis management and response mechanisms at the local, regional and European levels. For now, these initiatives remain piecemeal and disjointed.

Initiatives in these areas will not lead to a return to the old-style Franco-German leadership position for the reasons alluded to above. In effect, the

<sup>12</sup> See "Commission Decision of 3 February 2004 on the implementation of the Preparatory Action on the Enhancement of the European industrial potential in the field of security research", Brussels, 3 February 2004 (2004/213/EC).

approaches suggested below aim at replacing old-style Franco-German relations with a combination of changed emphasis and new frameworks.

First, European security and defence policy should be broadened to homeland security. Much along the lines of the successful defence approaches of the nineties between France and Germany (for example, the Eurocorps, defence industrial base), like-minded European countries can take specific initiatives (coordination of civil defence networks, etc.) which over time can either become forms of enhanced cooperation or all-Union policies. Significant difficulties have to be overcome in order to do this, much more than in the field of military defence which is in all cases a matter for the central state. In the field of homeland security, such simplicity does not prevail. In all European countries, the bulk of homeland security assets are decentralised. Even in Jacobine France, local government (mainly the *départements*) spends nearly 10 times as much on civil defence as the central state. Therefore, any cross-border undertaking would have to involve the sub-national actors alongside the central governments (which would in turn presumably have to involve ministries such as Health and Transport, alongside the Interior). Furthermore, such sub-national actors will be not only public (municipal, provincial, regional, etc.) but also private (that is, operators of critical infrastructure).

Second, the European *avant-garde* will have to operate within a broader framework than the Franco-German duo in order to have traction in influencing all-Union security and defence policy. The current expression of this broader framework is the newly established British-French-German "triangle". Born shortly after the end of the Iraq war, on the occasion of the first Blair-Chirac-Schröder summit in Berlin on 20 September 2003, this is still a fragile creature. It will take several years of common work to consolidate it. However, the triangle has demonstrable current value for its participants: it gives Britain the image of a player at the heart of Europe while helping to position Germany and France in a constructive transatlantic stance. It has the intrinsic virtue of bringing together the three largest European defence players, representing substantially more than 50 percent of the EU 25's defence expenditure. No less importantly, the members of the triangle straddle highly divergent positions in terms of alliance relations, defence spending (and defence reform) and readiness to use force. In other words, with some luck and a high level of political will, the triangle looks like an appropriate successor to the "old" French-German relationship. Indeed, the accusations by some member countries against a purported new *directoire* bear a strong resemblance to the criticism traditionally levelled at the Franco-German couple.

However, the triangle has two basic limitations. First, it doesn't include

any of the EU's new member states even though geography, location and size play an essential role in security and defence, above and beyond defence spending and force levels. Thus, excluding a country like Poland from the inner core would not be advisable.

Second, the triangle includes countries which have strong defence industrial bases; as a result, their interests as arms producers<sup>13</sup> are different from those of most of the other EU-25 which are arms consumers. In other words, if one wants to cover the full spectrum of substantive divergences in the EU, the interests of the "importer" community have to be represented in the inner core. Poland (as well as the other new members) fits that description.

Therefore, over time – and assuming that Poland will see and conduct itself as an active contributor to the European integration process – , the inner core of the 25-plus European Union may well be a Quadrangle, rather than a triangle, with Berlin, London, Paris and Warsaw as the players.

However, in the field of security and defence – whether for homeland protection or force projection – there is one condition which does not and will not change. Nothing lasting can be achieved without continuity and seriousness in the treatment of security and defence affairs. Although money for defence has been scarce and defence reform slow in coming (notably in Germany), there has been a degree of continuity and some seriousness in the strictly military arena: the French have made a significant budget effort since 2002, and countries such as Italy and Germany are finally committing to full-fledged defence reform. It now remains to be seen whether these qualities can be brought to bear in the vital field of homeland security. Politicians would be well advised to see to this: if, or when, a catastrophic, terrorist attack were to take place, they would be held to account. That is one message from the recent Spanish elections which should not be lost sight of. Taking policy initiatives now may help reduce the punishment inflicted by the electorate later.

<sup>13</sup> The interests of the "arms producers" are for the most part represented by the six signatory countries of the "Letter of Intent" (LOI) process, i.e. Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Sweden.