

Anglo-French defence cooperation is a useful supplement for broader multilateral European schemes, but is not a replacement for them. To exert real influence over international security affairs Europeans must act collectively.

Recent actions in Libya have shown Europe's reliance on the United States to support military actions that have a European interest. And while the UK's reaction to massive cuts to defence spending has been to forge a closer relationship with France, [Anand Menon](#) argues that it is Europe as a whole must collaborate much more closely in defence procurement and operations if it is to exert independent influence over international security affairs.



On 2 November 2010, David Cameron and Nicolas Sarkozy announced their intention to sign a Defence & Security Co-operation Treaty to enhance bilateral defence collaboration between the two countries. Some five months later, the two states took the lead in the military intervention in support of Libyan rebels attempting to bring down the regime of Colonel Gadhafi. It is in the area of bilateral defence cooperation with France that the coalition government's European policies have perhaps been both most visible and most bold. Yet, bilateral collaboration, whilst a useful supplement to broader multilateral European schemes, is in no sense a replacement for it.

The agreements forged in London last November have their origins in several factors. First, and most obviously, both states need to make significant savings in defence expenditure. Defence budgets in both are facing serious shortfalls. The French defence budget will rise by only 1% a year in real terms between 2012 and 2025. In Britain, meanwhile, the coalition government has announced cuts amounting to 8% of defence spending over four years.

Budget cuts have certainly been the most significant driving force behind the decision by both states to undertake more far-reaching cooperation with partners. Other factors, however, help explain why it is that Franco-British bilateral collaboration was its chosen form. Both states are jealous of their standing as global powers, and both are more willing than many of their European partners to contemplate the deployment of military force as a tool of international statecraft. Both, however, are suffering from a declining ability to intervene effectively in military conflicts. Problems in finding the requisite number of troops for interventions in theatres such as Afghanistan, or (on EU missions) in sub-Saharan Africa testify to their declining ability to deploy hard power.

At the same time, the policies of the two countries have gradually converged. Certainly, there still remain differences of priority in their foreign policies (apparent to an extent in their preferences over the institutional venue for any Libyan intervention). Consequently, both Cameron and Sarkozy were anxious to stress that the London treaties do not limit the autonomy of either capital over defence matters. Yet, equally, whilst the last decade and a half has seen London reconcile itself to the need for Europeans to have some defence capabilities of their own coordinated via the European Union. Paris, for its part, began a halting rapprochement with NATO that culminated in President Sarkozy's 2009 decision to take his country back into the alliance's integrated military structures.

The text of the London declaration testifies to a further possible convergence. As important as what was actually agreed at the meeting is what was not mentioned. Strikingly, and in stark contrast to the bilateral that had occurred in December 1998 between Tony Blair and Jacques Chirac, no mention was made of the European Union or the fledgling defence policies that had effectively been launched by that meeting at the French coastal resort of Saint Malo.

The rationale for the creation of a European Union defence capacity was that it might help improve European military capabilities. Dismay at the inability of Europeans to intervene effectively to halt conflict in the Balkans, capped with frustration that a sex scandal in the United States could stymie western responses to the unfolding drama in Kosovo combined to impel British and French political leaders to seek solutions to the capabilities gap opening with the United States. And in London, fears that this gap might lead to American disillusionment with, and conceivably even disengagement from, NATO added a sense of urgency to this quest.

From this emerged the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), intended as a means of inspiring other member states to engage seriously in a process of capability improvement. The EU, however, has little to show for over a decade of solemn declarations emphasizing the determination of member states to enhance their military capabilities.

The problem is not particularly one of inadequate spending *per se*. In 2006, EU member states together spent the equivalent of 60% of the total US defence budget – almost a quarter of global defence spending. Rather, it is one of spending that fails to address the requirements of modern warfare. Yet, although European Union member states have some half a million more men in arms than the US, around seventy per cent of their land forces cannot operate outside national territory.

Even those forces that exist and can be deployed cannot always work together effectively. Four European states use Chinooks, but with different configurations, meaning that spare parts are not interchangeable. Over a decade after its inception, there is little evidence that ESDP has had the impact hoped for on military capabilities or even on the will of the member states to invest in improving these. Collaboration over procurement and manufacturing remains limited, member states remain reluctant to share military capacities, and the pooling of equipment is still little more than an (admittedly oft-repeated) rhetorical ambition.

Perhaps most significantly, the ESDP has remained profoundly hamstrung by divisions between EU member states concerning the legitimacy of the use of armed force and the need for unanimous agreement between these same member states before an operation can be launched. The conflict in Libya provides merely the most recent and most public illustration of what has been a consistent theme. Not only were member states profoundly divided in terms of their political reactions to the unfolding crisis – with Italy, Malta and Cyprus initially resisting calls for sanctions – but Germany abstained from the vote on UN Security Council Resolution 1973, and only 10 of the member states have committed themselves to military action (of which some have, as yet, to provide a contribution).

Little wonder, then, that London and Paris, the two most militarily powerful EU member states, the states generally most willing to countenance the deployment of significant military force, and, consequently the states which bear the brunt of European military interventions, seem to have chosen bilateral cooperation as a way of attempting to loosen the increasing constraints upon their national defence policies.

Yet for all its attractions, and whilst bilateral cooperation represents a useful supplement to broader cooperation within the European Union, it is not enough, and certainly does not represent a viable alternative to the kind of multilateral initiative represented by ESDP. For one thing, even larger member states increasingly struggle to act alone. The need to mobilize the resources of as many member states as possible has been all too clearly underlined by the problems Britain has encountered in maintaining its contribution to NATO's mission in Afghanistan whilst attempting to muster sufficient numbers of strike aircraft for Libya. Moreover, all states (including the US) increasingly need the 'cover' provided by an international organization in order to ensure the legitimacy of military interventions. Several states – including, initially, the French – felt NATO was an unsuitable multilateral forum for intervention in Libya, the implication being that an alternative would need to be found.

Of course, Britain and France are the leading military powers in the EU. Between them, they account for some 45% of all European military spending. Yet, purely bilateral cooperation thus excludes more than half of Europe's military potential. And it is precisely amongst the other member states that there is the most need for the kind of stimulus that collaborative schemes could, conceivably, provide.

In order that EU interventions be more effective, what is urgently needed is the more effective and coordinated manufacturing, purchase and deployment of military resources. And the obvious means of accomplishing this is via the European Union. Multilateral institutions represent the only way of cajoling states into making painful reforms to their procurement policies and opening up their markets to their partners. Even basic information sharing between member states opens the prospect that painful cuts to national defence expenditures are coordinated. Meanwhile, the underused European Defence Agency has the potential to provide institutional support for initiatives aimed at liberalising and rationalising the European defence market.

If Europeans, including the French and British, aspire to exert real influence over international security affairs, they must do so collectively, or not at all. And for this to happen, Europe's most powerful states must take the lead in attempting to revitalise CSDP, committing themselves to working with their partners in an attempt to ensure that all member states pull their weight and work collaboratively to maximise the capabilities the Union can bring to bear in the event of a need to intervene with military force. The Conservatives in particular need to put the national interest above eurosceptic prejudice and recognise the real limits of bilateral cooperation.

An earlier and more detailed version of this argument can be found in A. Menon, '[Double Act: Anglo-French Cooperation Pact](#),' Jane's Intelligence Review February 2011. The author would like to express his gratitude for funding the research upon which this article was based to the ESRC (Research Grant RES-062-23-2717).

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