British-French Foreign and Security Relations: The Historical Legacy

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Introduction

At Lancaster House in London on 2 November 2010 Britain and France signed two security and defence cooperation treaties for a fifty year period.[1] Almost one hundred years previously in November 1912 Britain and France set out the basis for cooperation in naval deployment from the English Channel to the Mediterranean, thereby supplementing joint military conversations underway since 1905 for deployment of British land forces on the continent of Europe in the event of war with Germany (Keiger 1984: 110-116). Although the two agreements shared certain characteristics – naval and military – and certain motives – financial savings and retention of world power roles – the politicians who signed them and the civil servants who prepared them in 2010 were probably unaware of the historical connections suffering, it might be said, from 'historical attention deficit syndrome'. Just as the November 1912 naval agreements were a continuation of the 1905 British-French General Staff talks, so the 2010 Lancaster House agreements were the logical continuation of a longer process of British-French rapprochement in foreign and security policy since the 1998 Saint Malo agreements and more recently the close involvement of Whitehall in the preparation of France's 2008 White Paper on Defence and National Security (Mallet et al. 2008) and by France's return, encouraged by Britain, to NATO's integrated military command in April 2009.[2] There was then, as there continues to be today, a logic to the cooperation of Britain with France. But what is the basis for that cooperation and how has it worked?

The two states have been similar for at least a century. Two of Europe's oldest nation-states, they have since the nineteenth century been viewed as models of democracy and the rule of law while possessing the largest and second largest empires and exercising world roles. At the beginning of the twentieth century, of the six great powers in the world Britain was first and France third (Taylor 1971: tables I-X, xxv-xxxi). In 1910 they had

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1 Treaty between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the French Republic for Defence and Security Co-operation, London, 2 November 2010. The treaty entered into force on 1 July 2011. See http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm81/8174/8174.pdf [9.4.2012]. For the remarkably wide-ranging extent of the cooperation see the Declaration signed by the UK and France on the British Prime Minister's website: http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/uk%E2%80%93 france-summit-2010-declaration-on-defence-and-security-co-operation [8.4.2012].

2 France was designated a decisive partner in the *British Strategic Defence and Security Review*, published 19 October 2010.

populations of similar sizes, with Britain at 45 million and France 39. At the beginning of the twenty-first century their similarities are even more striking. Both have similar populations with the United Kingdom at 62.3 millions and France 65.3, making them respectively the twenty-second and twenty-first largest in the world, although representing a mere 0.89 and 0.93 percent of world population.[3] Both are permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, leading members of NATO and of the European Union, as well as heading up their own international organisations, the Commonwealth (54 member states) and *Francophonie* (56 member states). In 2010 France and Britain – according to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund – were the fifth and sixth largest economies in the world. They are the third and fourth largest nuclear powers, the fourth and third largest defence spenders in the world, the fourth and fifth largest exporters of arms, have armies of comparable size, as well as sharing imperial experience and legacies. Both carry sizeable degrees of 'soft power' based on anything from cultural reach, like the English or French languages to historical reputation as exemplars of democratic values. Consequently both like to think they 'punch above their weight' in the world. As Prime Minister Tony Blair, with more than a hint of personal hubris, told the French National Assembly in 1998: 'We are both nations that are used to power. We are not frightened of it or ashamed of it.'(quoted in Mangold 2001: 79).

In 2012 Britain and France represented some 50% of Europe's operational military capability, 45% of defence spending and 70% of research and development. In 2012 Britain is the second largest troop contributor (9500) to the NATO-ISAF force in Afghanistan and France the sixth largest (3500). The two states have long cooperated together in industrial defence, more than with any other European partner, including Germany. Franco-British cooperation in the key aerospace industry began in 1962 with the agreement to develop Concorde, but by 1967 included major projects such as the Jaguar fighter, Lynx, Gazelle and Puma helicopters, to name but a few (Hussain 1989: 129). Today that cooperation is expanding from more traditional military projects such as the A400M transport plane, to more long-term strategic ventures like the memorandum of understanding signed in March 2011 by BAE Systems and Dassault for the joint construction of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or 'drones'. But most significantly of all, collaboration is moving into the *sanctum sanctorum* of vital national defence for modern powers, the military nuclear area, with cooperation agreements underway for sharing nuclear simulation technology and the possibility in the long term of shared nuclear submarines and defence systems (Le Monde 2012; French Embassy 2011: 1-2). Nor is this joint power purely virtual. Over the last decade emphasis has been increasing on the interoperability of British

[3] See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_population [8.4.2012].

and French military forces with the recent establishment of a new Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (CJEF). That interoperability saw the light of day most recently in Libya where the Franco-British led coalition proved clearly that they were the cornerstone of European defence. From 19 March until 31 October 2011 Britain and France successfully put into operation the military partnership of joint operations outlined in the Lancaster House agreements of 2010 and led the enforcement of the UN mandate on Libya to impose a no-fly zone and protect the civilian uprising against Colonel Gadaffi's dictatorial regime. That interoperability extended to the diplomatic too with their coordinated spearheading in the United Nations Security Council of support for Resolution 1973 instituting the mandate. Nor is this diplomatic and military action a flash-in-the-pan. Britain and France had also been the second and third largest contributors to the First Gulf War against Iraq in 1990-91 with French, British and American planes enforcing the no-fly zones over northern and southern Iraq in the war's aftermath. It seems that the two states are at one of those moments in their history when they recognise their convergent national interests and when they realise that individual struggle against a particular foe, in this case relative decline, is no longer valid and can only be effective through much closer collaboration. That much is clear from the Lancaster House treaties in which the two states affirm:

> "We do not see situations arising in which the vital interests of either Party could be threatened without the vital interests of the other also being threatened." (Treaty between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the French Republic for Defence and Security Co-operation)

Is this then the beginning of a golden age of British-French collaboration? Perhaps, but false dawns and meretricious displays of public friendship in the past have co-existed with more negative examples of the 'Entente Discordiale'. If the fact that like poles repel is any indication similarity may not be a basis for longstanding collaboration. Over the course of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, London and Paris have had good reason to cooperate more closely, but equally valid reasons not to do so. This chapter will consider in very broad terms what has motivated London's desire for close cooperation with Paris on foreign and security issues and what have been the impediments to it. It will then consider what could be viewed as cycles of cooperation and rivalry that might be seen to characterise the relationship from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present.

Drivers and Blockers in British-French Cooperation Over the Twentieth Century

The historian of Franco-British relations in the twentieth century, Philip Bell (1997: 289), remarked that 'Those whom geography and history have bound together will not easily be put asunder.' But geography and history

can be double-edged swords in relations between two nations. Geographical proximity can make for common interests at particular moments of history, notably during Germany's rise at the beginning of the twentieth century and during the 1930s, while also being a source of regional rivalry, friction and conflict, as the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars demonstrated. But geography is an ineluctable determinant in deciding Britain's foreign and security relations with France. Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden made this plain in December 1953 as he battled to get Paris to accept German rearmament speaking of France positively as 'a geographical necessity' (quoted in Ruane 2000: 297).

An historical blocker to improved foreign and security cooperation with France has been Britain's long-standing superiority complex vis a vis her cross-Channel neighbour. Ever since the *Entente Cordiale* Britain regarded itself as the senior partner in its relations with France, confirmed in British eyes by French defeat and occupation in the Second World War. This meant on occasions that elements of the policy-making elite perceived collaboration with France at best as unnecessary, at worst below its dignity. Part of the problem has been that for most of the past century France has needed Britain more than Britain has needed France. Such an unequal distribution of power is not the basis for a happy marriage. But from the 1960s as France began to catch up with Britain economically and in terms of military power and projection, so Britain's patronising manner has been contained. To an extent the power roles were reversed when Britain went cap in hand to join the EEC and was rebuffed by France in 1963 and 1967. According to Philip Bell (1997: 180):

> "For the first time in the twentieth century, at any rate in peacetime, the success or failure of a vital British policy was [to be] decided by France."

France's newfound self-confidence and power was confirmed from the early 1970s when her economy caught up with Britain's marking the point of convergence of their respective great power statuses. Since the 1980s there has been more balance of esteem as both states have been forced into greater realism about their shared relative declines and converging vital national interests. This has provided an opportunity for wider and deeper foreign and security cooperation.

Axiomatic to British-French foreign and security relations has been Germany. The three largest and most important states in Europe are inextricably linked in a triangular relationship as they have been since 1871 when a united Germany joined the Great Power club. The drivers and blockers in Franco-British relations over the longue durée cannot be understood without the German dimension. When Franco-German relations are poor Franco-British ones tend to flourish; when German-British relations are good Franco-British relations tend to suffer. In this awkward *ménage à trois* the permutations are numerous.

Not all the organs of the British state involved in the policy-making and executing process perceive the advantages and disadvantages of foreign and security relations with France in the same way all of the time. Perceptions have varied according to time, to ministry and to personnel. Before the First World War there were two opposing currents of opinion amongst a mixture of diplomats and permanent officials in the Foreign Office: one in favour of closer relations with France, the other of better relations with Germany. At that time the former predominated (Steiner 1977: 171-189). Those two currents of opinion were at play again in the 1920s, but this time the latter current gained the upper hand in pushing for a democratic and economically restored Germany as an important trading partner for Britain; the Foreign Office grouping in favour of sealing an alliance with France was eclipsed. A Foreign Office memorandum to the Cabinet in May 1920 stated:

> "The Foreign Office conclusion is that our relations with France never have been, are not, probably never will be, sufficiently stable and friendly to justify the construction of a Channel Tunnel." (Keiger 2001: 171)

This see-saw movement was repeated at the end of the 1930s when eventually the pro-French lobby was able to regain the upper hand. They remained dominant into the early 1950s but from then on, in a replay of the early 1920s, the influence of the grouping in favour of restoring Germany politically and economically gradually gained the ascendancy and relations with France soured as they began to view the alliance with France as more a liability than an asset.[4]

Although it was the Foreign Office's role to lead on foreign policy, it did not have a monopoly on policy-making. Other departments, notably the economic ones like the Treasury and the Board of Trade, carried considerable influence in the decision-making process. In the 1920s neither of these departments of government had been sympathetic to the French, whom they viewed as wishing to make a new bid for supremacy in Europe. The pro-German and anti-French sympathies of the Treasury official and celebrated economist, John Maynard Keynes, are well-known (Keylor 1998: 485-487). The Bank of England, which was largely unsympathetic to France, was also influential in deciding attitudes to her in the 1920s (Keiger 2011). Other unsympathetic organs of the British policy-making establishment could be the Colonial Office, which continued to live in a state of pre-1904 imperial rivalry or, with a few notable exceptions, the British military. Opposition of this kind meant, for instance, that in the 1920s and the early 1950s France and Britain were never able to rekindle the close foreign and security relations that existed in the decade prior to the First World War.

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[4] For the transition in the early 1950s Foreign Office view, see Ruane 2000: 297.

This co-existence of sympathy and antipathy to France in the British Establishment, especially those elements directly influencing foreign and security relations, is to be found in Britain's relations with France throughout the twentieth century. Quite often it can be traced to the educational background of politicians and civil servants whose world views were often constructed at this time and carried forward into the British Establishment. Until the 1980s most senior civil servants in Britain had been educated at Oxford or Cambridge and further research needs to be done on how this might have influenced relations with either France or Germany. We do know that prior to the First World War Oxford University had a regular exchange of students with German universities cultivating sympathy for Germany that surfaced as opposition to war with her in 1914 and in the 1930s. Many Foreign Office officials had their university education supplemented with further study in either Germany or France. Of course, the role of education in building world views was not restricted to Britain. It is also found on the other side of the Channel within the French Establishment and for the same educational and cultural reasons (Keiger 1991: 255-266), making cross-Channel harmony on such matters particularly complex and difficult to engineer.

For any international foreign and security partnership to be successful and sustainable it must carry public opinion. But British-French foreign and security relations have over the last century been subject to the vagaries of the popular press that has dealt in stereo-types, emphasizing dissension and disagreement rather than cordiality and concord. Public memory on either side of the Channel is characterised by misunderstanding or forgetfulness. The British recall instinctively the June 1940 'French surrender', but seem to have forgotten how in May 1940 the French army's continuing resistance made possible the successful evacuation of Dunkirk leaving 30-40,000 French troops to be captured; many in France seem to have forgotten Britain's contribution to their Liberation in 1944.[5] The institutional efforts that have been made to overcome this, such as the Franco-British Council founded in 1972, have had their hands full in presenting a more positive view of the two states' relations.

A further blocker is of differing national philosophical outlooks. A keen observer of France in the 1960s Dorothy Pickles remarked:

> "That the British are pragmatic, empirical, and practical, the French juridical, deductive, and systematic, that the British are what they like to call 'outward-looking' where the French are 'continental' [...] are platitudes that have all at one time or another helped to explain as well as to complicate the uneasy Franco-British relationship, so ill-named *Entente cordiale*. Yet when issues are actually in dispute, the importance of these and other

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[5] For this public forgetfulness see the University of Cambridge conference of 26-27 September 2011 'Forgetful Allies: Truth, Myth and Memory in the two World Wars and After' and the forthcoming book of Robert Tombs and Emile Chabal (2012).

> recognized incompatibilities in the field of foreign policy is often underestimated, as is the importance of the cumulative effect of a long history of misunderstandings." (Pickles 1966: 1)

Examples of this are to be found in either state's conception of security policy at various moments over the twentieth century. London's tendency has been to favour 'traditional' avenues of security while France has been willing to countenance more 'multilateral' solutions to her security needs. Thus London has tended to seek security through defence and treaty alliances to construct or maintain a balance of power, while Paris has approached security through a more idealistic pan-European arrangement, as in the 1920s, the 1950s and the 1980s. This has led to estrangement between the two over a NATO versus a European guaranteed security, with Britain fearing that the Europeans, especially France, might trap them into an arrangement likely to encourage the USA to lapse into isolation, as in the 1920s. Traditionally Britain has believed that she had to choose between the US and Europe. But such differences in approach are beginning to abate. Jolyon Howorth (2000: 91) noted that:

> "When the British see the French setting up an institution, they become nervous. When the British insist on 'pragmatism', the French raise their eyes to heaven."

He suggests that nowadays these traditional ways of operating are not immutable, even if overcoming them requires additional political will or immediately pressing needs. This was the case for Britain and France in Bosnia in the 1990s, when Britain softened her sensitivity to a European security capacity and France realised that military intervention operations required of her a new relationship with NATO (Howorth 2000: 94). What is positive for closer British-French relations is that the philosophical gap between the two nations is diminishing, so that more than in the past France is able to embrace an Atlantic framework and Britain a European one in security issues.

Financial drivers have been critical in Britain's history of viewing France as a partner in foreign and security collaboration. Thus France's quest for a British military commitment in the event of war prior to 1914 was accepted in London because of the financial inability to maintain alone a two power standard of superiority over rival navies in the second decade of the twentieth century. 'Too many interests and not enough cash' (Grant 2009: 1-2), has continued to be Britain's plight in the post-Second World War world, as the 1957 defence review cuts demonstrated. Pursuing British interests as cheaply as possible was the 'British Way in Cold Warfare', as a recent book has pointed out (Grant 2009: 6). Budget restrictions have been a strong driver for closer defence relations with France, notably with joint arms manufacture projects in the 1960s and more recently the 2010 Lancaster House agreements.

Technological drivers have been an instrument of closer collaboration, even in that most sensitive of vital national interest, the nuclear arena.

Recent research has shown how Britain attempted to use military nuclear collaboration, where France had a technological deficit, as a lure to Paris to gain British membership of the European Community under prime ministers Macmillan, Wilson and Heath (Parr 2009; Stoddart 2007). Although General de Gaulle was tempted he still did not consider Britain's other membership criteria satisfied; nor was Britain at liberty to offer technological know-how to France without American consent, which was not forthcoming. Even after de Gaulle left power in 1969 British-French nuclear collaboration continued to be talked about but never really got underway. More recently, however, Britain has begun to feel wary of its over-reliance on US technology for its nuclear arsenal, while France has realised that it has neither the cash nor the technological capability to maintain alone its nuclear defences. There is therefore an opportunity for Britain to wean itself off dependence on American nuclear materiel since the 1962 Nassau Accords gave her access to the American Polaris and then Trident systems and for London and Paris to assuage their anxiety about America's growing preoccupation with the Pacific rim and decline of interest in Europe by cooperating more closely on nuclear matters. As early as March 1987 Sir Geoffrey Howe, the Conservative Defence Minister, emphasised the absolute necessity of not de-nuclearising Europe and with that in mind called for increasing partnership in nuclear defence between Britain and France (Boyer 1989: 24). The 2010 Lancaster House agreements take military nuclear cooperation very seriously.

Both Britain and France have shared a close relationship with the US as an ally since the First World War. But Britain's 'special relationship' with the USA has held back the development of closer more long term British-French collaboration, particularly in the defence and security arena. It was General de Gaulle in the 1960s who gave the Anglo-American partnership mythical status in French eyes, particularly after Washington made plain its willingness to share nuclear secrets and technology with London and not Paris (even if we now know that Paris did subsequently gain some US assistance). The uneven triangular relationship with the US, vaguely analogous to that with Germany, has one key aspect to it which remains an obstacle to closer British-French foreign and security collaboration, that of intelligence. France may have recently reintegrated NATO's military command, but it is a long way from sharing in one of Britain's vital defence and security assets since the Second World War, the 'Anglo-Saxon' intelligence community. London's desire to cooperate more fully with Paris on intelligence matters is ham-strung by the continuing commitment to the USA in this area, formalised through the UKUSA agreements after the war. Some intelligence sharing with the French occurs in the areas of human intelligence (HUMINT), notably on terrorism related issues. But on the more strategic intelligence, notably on satellite and signals intelligence (SIGINT) Britain's highly privileged sharing arrangements via the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) with the American

National Security Agency (NSA) make cooperation in this area very sensitive. The situation is the more complex because the SIGINT intelligence sharing extends, since the Second World War, to Canada, Australia and New Zealand. This complex intelligence matrix of the '5 eyes', which is not restricted to mere intelligence gathering, but also intelligence assessment, leaves little manoeuvre to integrate a sixth partner into this privileged Anglo-Saxon 'intelligence community'. It is made all the more complex due to the legacy of Britain's supercilious belief that France is potentially an unreliable, unsecure partner likely to leak secrets because for much of the post-war era she had a powerful communist party or because her politicians and civil servants were naturally given to indiscretion. An example of such views came in 1948, at a time of growing British-French collaboration. The British entered several weeks of secret talks with the United States and Canada about security in Europe from which the French were omitted and kept in ignorance partly because of fears about their security-worthiness. Ironically one of the British delegation was the Soviet spy, Donald Maclean (Young 2000: 268), one of the 'Famous Five' Cambridge spies. These recurrent spurs and brakes on British-French collaboration have been played out in cyclical fashion over the past hundred years.

Cycles of British-French Foreign and Security Cooperation and Estrangement

Before the 1904 *Entente Cordiale* there was no Franco-British peace-time military collaboration let alone coordination in foreign and defence policy. That did not exclude Britain and France fighting side-by-side in the Crimean War (1854-6), in China and the Middle East in 1860 and Mexico in 1861 (Tombs and Tombs 2006: 361-362). But it was only after the *Entente Cordiale* was signed and the myriad Franco-British imperial sources of tension were reduced that London and Paris could contemplate closer relations in foreign and security policy. Even then those relations did not evolve in linear fashion; instead they went through a series of historical cycles of amity and rivalry.

1904 to 1920: Friendship and Cooperation

Although the *Entente Cordiale* was no more than a settlement of imperial rivalries between Paris and London and contained no large-scale forward-looking commitment to coordinate foreign and security policy, this is effectively what it achieved. It was able to do so because of shared concern about the rise of Germany. The period from 1905 to the outbreak of the First World War was a period of joint defence planning for the eventuality of war with Germany. Joint British and French conversations between the two states' general staffs took place with the intention of coordinating a British Expeditionary Force's dispatch to the continent with the larger French army. From 1912 this peace-time army coordination between

general staffs was supplemented by naval coordination. In 1912 an agreement was signed between the two states coordinating their respective fleet dispositions in the Mediterranean and the North Sea. At pains financially to maintain its preeminence in the Mediterranean and home waters, Britain relinquished its naval presence in the Mediterranean to the French who, in exchange for protecting British interests there, were given the guarantee that Britain would protect French interests in the North Sea and Channel.

Not surprisingly, with the outbreak of war, British and French foreign and military coordination increased. The Pact of London on 5 September 1914 officially sealed a war-time alliance, the first time a formal alliance between the two countries had been joined for decades. But what is less widely known of this war-time collaboration is the economic and commercial integration of the two economies. Inter-allied commissions oversaw wheat, sugar, coal, credit and shipping in which a future father of European integration took a strong hand. Jean Monnet participated in the coordination of these integrated economic commissions and which subsequently would be regarded as formative for his ideas on European Union. Arguably, these four years drew the two nations' economies closer together than they had ever been or would be until after Britain joined the European Community in 1973.

1920 to 1938: Estrangement

At the end of the First World War there had been high hopes that Britain and France would continue to work closely together on foreign and security matters. The 1919 Anglo-American Guarantee Treaty with France, bolstering her security position in relation to Germany, looked like a step in the right direction, but the American Senate's failure to ratify meant that it was still-born. In the 1920s Germany's defeat, Russia's eclipse and US isolationism made London and Paris both potential allies and main rivals in international affairs. But of particular significance to the relationship was Britain's changing attitude to Germany. From wanting to see Germany punished for the war, British policy-makers led by Prime Minister Lloyd George now began to support her political and economic revival out of self interest as an important market again for British goods.

This changed policy was firmly at odds with France's fundamental sensitivity, borne of two wars, to a German revival. Despite French courting of Britain for a politico-military alliance, Britain was unwilling to respond and estrangement set in. Differences with France emerged on everything from policy in the Middle East to international finance and reparations. By the end of the 1920s, desperate to shore up her security by alternative means, France turned to a policy of working more closely with Germany first in the Locarno agreements and then in the 1929 Briand Plan as a means of tying Germany up in supranational institutions to reduce

her sovereignty. Britain's commitment to the first was only half-hearted and to the second non-existent.

This was not the last time that a parting of the ways took place between London and Paris over the German question. Hitler's coming to power in 1933 would gradually encourage Britain to work more closely with France, but appeasement of Hitler's Germany was the order of the day and it was not until the European situation became desperate by the end of the 1930s that Britain once again saw the importance of France for her own security. Even then the British tried to get the best of both worlds by using the French army as a shield while doing little to strengthen it. The Francophile Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden might stress that 'Anglo-French cooperation had to be done', but little happened before 1939 (quoted in Mangold 2001: 76). Nazi Germany's occupation of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 and the Nazi-Soviet pact on 22 August led to a new *Entente Cordiale* celebrated by the eponymous film of Marcel L'Herbier and the 14 July 1939 parade down the Champs Elysée with British troops (Vaisse 2006: 82), as had been the case in 1919 (and would be again for the centenary of the *Entente Cordiale* in 2004).

1939 to 1950: Entente

As in 1914 what peace could not deliver – a British-French alliance – war did. In 1939 a war-time alliance was sealed. From the war's onset a Supreme War Council and machinery for joint economic planning were put in place. On 6 December 1939 an Anglo-French Coordinating Committee was established (chaired by Jean Monnet); this was followed on 16 February 1940 by an Anglo-French trade agreement and on 8 March by an industrial council. Efforts were made to coordinate the resources of the two empires. *The Times* of 22 April talked in its leader of an 'ever closer union' between the two countries. Britain drew up a remarkable document which was presented to the French cabinet at Bordeaux on 16 June 1940. It called for an 'indissoluble union' between the two countries. The final text, endorsed by the British War Cabinet, stated:

> "The two governments declare that France and Great Britain shall no longer be two nations, but one Franco-British Union. The constitution of the Union will provide for joint organs of defence, foreign, financial and economic policies. Every citizen of France will enjoy immediately citizenship of Great Britain; every British subject will become a citizen of France." (quoted in Keiger 2001: 174-175)

The American Deputy Ambassador in Paris reported to Washington that 'it meant in reality a fusion of two great Empires. It might have marked the beginning of a United States of Europe' (quoted in Keiger 2001: 174-175). But France's military and her suing for an armistice killed off the project.

Nevertheless the years 1940 to 1944 saw the widely known British military and logistic support for French Resistance and for de Gaulle's Free French, even if the relationship was tempestuous. Britain provided this

support for its own survival, but also in the belief that after the war a strong France was vital to British and European interests. In 1943 Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden had predicted that 'in dealing with European problems of the future we are likely to have to work more closely with France even than with the United States' (quoted in Ruane 2000: 297). For her part, France seemed to acknowledge this. On 25 July 1944 in Algiers De Gaulle told the Provisional Consultative Assembly:

> "There is, between England and us, a clear community of European and world interests, which no defunct rivalry on some point of the globe should be able to disrupt." (quoted in Keiger 2001: 178)

The prospects for close collaboration on foreign and defence policy seemed propitious. By the summer of 1945 the British Foreign Secretary in the new Labour government outlined his plans for what he called a 'Western Union' made up of countries on the Atlantic and Mediterranean fringes of Europe, especially Greece, Italy, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Scandinavia. Ernest Bevin stated that 'It was necessary to make a start with France' (quoted in Greenwood 2000: 244). Although a defence agreement was only one aspect, an Anglo-French alliance was to be at its hub, something that had been circulating in the Foreign Office since mid-1944. Bevin's hope was that his 'Western Union' would keep a check on Germany and be able to rival the USA and the Soviet Union. The belief was that the colonial powers of Europe, led by Britain and France, would be able to construct a commercial and economic grouping with privileged links to Africa and the Middle East. As seen in the past, the sharpest opposition to such a venture came from the Treasury, the Board of Trade and the Colonial Office, the former two contending that economic relations with the US and the Commonwealth were more significant than with Western Europe, and the latter arguing that the colonies should move towards greater independence. The Chiefs of Staff were also reluctant to work too closely with France whose military effectiveness and trustworthiness they doubted (Greenwood 2000: 245). Nevertheless the Cabinet over-ruled them.

In the first instance this led to the 4 March 1947 Franco-British Treaty of Dunkirk, a venue chosen by the French Foreign Minister Georges Bidault to symbolise restoration of the *Entente Cordiale* where it had been so suddenly broken (Young 2000: 264). The fifty-year Dunkirk Treaty was Britain's way of winning French favours by providing her with a military alliance against a potentially resurgent Germany precisely as she had failed to do in 1920. A year later the treaty was extended to the Benelux countries as the March 1948 Brussels Treaty. This Brussels Pact was the basis for the arrangement called the Western Union comprising Britain, France and the Benelux countries. Although British-French foreign and security relations appeared to be consolidating the Brussels Pact would be eclipsed by the birth of NATO the following year. The embryonic

European security system led by Britain and France, with its international planning committees, was in the end undermined by sharp differences between Paris and London. Whatever the logic it became clear that neither Britain nor France wished to make their alliance the backbone of their foreign and security policy. Britain switched its loyalties to the US by late 1949 while France saw closer ties with Germany as the only real solution to the German question signing the Schuman Plan in May 1950 to create the European Coal and Steel Community to include Germany. This was the parting of the ways for many years (Young 2000: 265).

1950-1973: Estrangement to Engagement

At the heart of the divisions between London and Paris was once again Britain's insensitivity to France's plight over the German question, with an admixture of condescension. As in the early 1920s Britain switched its policy from wishing to keep Germany down to wishing to build her up. For France, whose fear of Germany was visceral, this was unacceptable. She felt she had no recourse but to pool her resources with Germany and to achieve security by binding Germany close to her in a pan-European organization, as she had attempted to do in 1929 with the Briand Plan. As a French Foreign Ministry report noted:

> "We have to abandon a part of our sovereignty to a democratic European organization which would render a new Franco-German conflict economically and politically impossible." (Memorandum, 30 November 1948, quoted in: Young 2000: 274)

This was the beginning of a surprisingly successful Franco-German partnership that would gradually leave Britain on the sidelines of Europe. It would take British policy-makers over a decade to realise their mistake, not just for Franco-British relations but also for Britain's standing in the world (Young 2000: 276).

For the moment the separation between the two states was more economic and political. But incompatibility of views on defence were apparent around the still-born European Defence Community (EDC) project of 1952-4. Here, in order to allow for German rearmament, Britain did everything she could to get France to ratify the EDC treaty, even if she would not join herself. In the end the effort Britain put into finding a compromise to assuage French fears on German rearmament was one of the last gasps of the relationship before Suez became the last straw. Franco-British plans for the retaking of the Suez Canal in 1956, recently nationalised by the Egyptian leader Nasser, appeared to suggest that the Franco-British foreign and security partnership was alive and well. The joint Franco-British (with Israel) military expedition was initially a success, but neither partner had calculated the international political fall-out. As the Soviet Union voiced its extreme discontent at this imperial demonstration by two colonial powers, the United States put considerable

financial pressure on Britain who withdrew from the expedition with France compelled to follow suit.

The French were mortified by Britain's disloyalty. Most remarkably, while that joint operation was being planned, there were discussions again of an Anglo-French Union, this time proposed by the French. When the Eden government rejected this idea, the French suggested joining the British Commonwealth (Bell 1997: 155-158). But the 1956 Suez episode was the intellectual parting of the ways for the two states, each drawing different conclusions from the experience: Britain took this as a sign that if it were to retain a world role it would have to draw closer and become more dependent on the US; France drew the opposite conclusion believing that the United States could not be counted on. Paris was confirmed in the belief that her regional security could only be secured by more European integration and by pursuing an independent defence path. On his return to power in 1958 General de Gaulle would convert that new outlook into a concrete policy of national defence based on independent deterrence and means. That policy saw the birth of the French nuclear bomb in 1960 and in 1966 France's withdrawal from NATO's integrated command. It also saw General de Gaulle displaying little sympathy for the Anglo-Saxons. Britain had had a window of opportunity for closer collaboration with France on nuclear weaponry following France's first test of a nuclear weapon in 1960. But as a result of Britain signing up to the Nassau Accords for the purchase of the American Polaris system, General de Gaulle, who would have welcomed British nuclear collaboration, was utterly unforgiving and this directly influenced his first veto of Britain's membership of the European Community in 1963 (Wright 2000: 328).

But the writing on the wall of great power decline was becoming patently clear to Britain. The 1964-8 Healey defence review planned Britain's withdrawal from east of Suez and in February 1966 it was declared that Britain would not undertake major operations without allies (Smith 1989: 125). France on the other hand appeared to be rebuilding her economy and international status through the very device she had denied Britain, the European Community. Thus British self-assurance on the way down met French self confidence on the way up. When in 1973 Britain eventually managed to clamber aboard Europe the British ambassador in Paris believed this would be the basis for 'our new entente' with France because Britain would be welcomed as a counter-balance to the 'disquieting prominence of Germany'. Thus Sir Edward Tomkins opened his annual report on France for 1972 most optimistically: 'This has been the year of our betrothal to Europe and through Europe to France.' He declared that 'On defence the present is still blocked but the future may contain promise.' Tomkins reasoned that because of the huge cost and technical difficulty of maintaining an independent nuclear weapon Paris was of the conviction 'that European defence depends essentially on France and ourselves.' (Tomkins 1973: 1, 7). But 1973 was a turning point

that did not turn. If betrothal it was, then it remained unconsummated. Relations with France remained strained under President Giscard d'Estaing from 1974 to 1981 as he privileged the German axis. Britain would have to wait until the election of Francois Mitterrand in 1981 before any real sign of friendship emerged from Paris in the defence arena.

It was April 1982 when Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher sent a major sea, air, and land task force down to the South Atlantic to retake the Falkland Islands from Argentinian occupation that France came to Britain's support. The Falklands expedition was a last gasp of independent great power bravura, but required specialised allied assistance. And it was the French who provided a good deal of that assistance first by rallying francophone African states in the UN to support sanctions against the Argentinian junta, then by affording Britain naval training facilities off the Brittany coast, as well as intelligence on French-manufactured Argentine *Super Etendard* planes and *Exocet* missiles (Thatcher 1993: 182-183, 227, 232). Common interests in retaining legacies of empire, like the Falkland Islands or France's myriad confetti overseas territories, were shared by London and Paris. Mitterrand, the arch-calculator, may also have foreseen that a demonstration of French support for Britain, when American support was ambivalent, was a lesson for Britain and thus an investment for France. This demonstration notwithstanding, the French would learn similar lessons about their lack of military autonomy during the 1990 Gulf War when it became clear that they were utterly dependent for their operational and tactical intelligence on the USA.

Britain was edging closer towards collaboration with France on foreign and security issues more by stealth than design. But as so often with Britain the driver was economic necessity rather than political inclination. Despite her 1963 and 1967 application to join the Common Market being snubbed by General de Gaulle, or perhaps because of that, during these years military-industrial cooperation with France got firmly underway with the Jaguar fighter-bomber and Lynx helicopter. In its *Statement on the Defence Estimates* for 1985 the Ministry of Defence listed twelve collaborative projects in service and fourteen under study of which about a half were with the French (Hussain 1989: 129), even if some did not materialise.

1990 to the Present: Entente Cordiale Again

With the yoke of Cold War superpower blocs lifted, there was more scope for Britain and France to operate internationally. They were thrown together on a number of international security issues: initially over slowing the pace of German reunification in late 1989 and then on the role of nuclear weapons in the post-Cold War environment. There had been virtually no nuclear collaboration between London and Paris since the 1962 Nassau Accords. But strategically they shared similar nuclear philosophies on the question of possession of nationally 'independent'

nuclear weapons and ensuring that those weapons were excluded from arms control negotiations between the two superpowers. Thus when the Cold War ended and NATO declared nuclear weapons to be 'weapons of last resort', both Britain and France were opposed, with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher calling it a step towards the fatal position of 'no first use of nuclear weapons'. Pushed together in this way they decided to establish the Joint Nuclear Weapons Commission, made permanent in the July 1993 Anglo-French Summit, to coordinate strategic concepts and issues of arms control and disarmament. The solidity of the arrangement was revealed in 1995 when the French resumed nuclear testing in the South Pacific provoking international condemnation. But Prime Minister John Major did not join this chorus, despite considerable pressure to do so from Commonwealth countries, particularly those like Australia and New Zealand who were most affected (Wright 2000: 337). Nuclear cooperation received its greatest fillip with the 2010 Lancaster House agreements.

The end of the Cold War also presented Britain with an opportunity for broader foreign and security cooperation with France, whose international outlook gradually softened from its Gaullist position of national independence and 'grandeur'. The Cold War environment had in fact suited France's foreign and security policy rather well, allowing her to play off the two superpower blocs (Keiger 2001: 215-216). But with the ending of that 'comfortable' position in the international system, France needed a like-minded ally. Britain fulfilled that role, not Germany, whose foreign and security role was limited. Cooperation materialised diplomatically and militarily in the former Yugoslavia, particularly Bosnia in the early 1990s. Former British Foreign Secretary and Co-Chair of the international conference on the former Yugoslavia, Lord Owen, stressed the importance of this military partnership on the ground, as well as the closer working relationship between the British and French foreign offices. In his assessment 'the old scars from the failed collaboration over Suez in 1956 have largely healed' (quoted in Wright 2000: 339).

That shared experience brought them even closer together on wider issues. The latter part of the 1990s saw the scaling down of what French Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine described as 'pointless Anglo-French competition' in Africa (quoted in Mangold 2001: 78-79). In a sort of *Entente Cordiale* one hundred years on, the two states attempted to eliminate rivalry on the African continent and pave the way for more shared policy. There was also greater convergence and common interest in the development of a European defence capability, although differences remained on the means, with Britain adhering to the NATO route and France championing an independent European entity. Once again the Bosnian experience helped reconcile the two positions when it became clear that divergent views could arise between Europe and the United States emphasising, not least to Britain, the need for some European security architecture. Then in 1994 it became clear, not least to France, that

even with substantial British and French ground forces no enforced settlement was viable without the United States and the might of NATO. To reduce further the differences in their positions on European security architecture, Britain worked behind the scenes to facilitate France's reintegration of NATO's command structure first under Mitterrand, then Chirac and finally successfully under Sarkozy in April 2009.

The Franco-British difference on European security has attenuated, albeit more in line with London's preferences. One has only to contrast the 1998 St Malo agreements signed by British Prime Minister Tony Blair and French President Jacques Chirac with the November 2010 Lancaster House agreements between David Cameron and Nicolas Sarkozy. St Malo was intended directly to use closer cooperation between London and Paris as a lever to push for greater European Union defence and security integration and autonomy; whereas Lancaster House emphasises primarily national policy, albeit independent bilateral cooperation (Jones 2011: 8), even if in the French mind, the latter agreement is seen as a staging post to greater European defence integration. Driving their cooperation on integrated European security is that old shared fear, dating from the post First World War, reinforced by the post Second World War and now the post Cold War, of the United States disengaging from Europe. Present anxiety about Washington's growing preoccupation and focus on the Asia-Pacific region while Europe remains militarily fragmented and ineffectual is coaxing further British-French cooperation.

Conclusion

Of course, presenting British-French cycles of cooperation and rivalry on foreign and security policy in such a schematic way is a gross simplification of the relationship. Most important of all is that these alternating currents of cooperation and rivalry mask the cross-currents and the undercurrents of cooperation that carried on between the two states even in times of antipathy and that did not surface fully or which only bubbled up at a later stage.[6] But these cycles do help locate, however crudely, the recurrent rather than the specific difficulties inherent in the fluctuating state of relations between the two states over the *longue durée* and what drove them. If one looks at Britain's foreign and security policy since the beginning of the twentieth century there is a strong argument to be made that it is all about managing decline. At certain moments during that century it has been in Britain's interests to look to France for support, because of geographical proximity, shared values and commitments, but also because France too has been managing her decline, albeit in a less controlled manner if her disappearance as an independent power from 1940 to 1944 is counted. In many ways, both are now regional powers with

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[6] On the subtlety required in analysing Franco-British relations in the 1920s, see John Keiger (2012).

global reach. For most of the century Britain as the dominant power has been the most diffident about the partnership. But since the two paths of decline converged in the 1980s new life has been given to developing a common foreign and security policy that may halt that decline in the near term. Nevertheless although in the last decade or so British and French outlooks on foreign and security policy objectives have converged there is not as yet alignment on the means and thus on longer term foreign policy. The Lancaster House agreements are viewed by some observers as 'primarily bottom-up, capability-centred agreements, without grand political aspirations' which could allow divergence in the future because the two states are not agreed on more strategic issues (Gomis 2011: 10).

For the moment, however, the outlook for British-French foreign and security cooperation looks optimistic. If either country is to maintain a world role, defence and security cooperation is needed for simple economic reasons. The gradual and growing awareness on the part of Britain that the 'special relationship' is increasingly unequal, that America's interests are focused more on the Pacific, makes France the natural foreign and security partner. With France having shaken off the Gaullist dogma of national independence collaboration in vital areas such as nuclear defence look increasingly likely. History cannot offer models of behavior, only examples, but it seems that, as in the past, for a real British-French partnership to grow necessity will be the mother of collaboration.

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