

**France, NATO and European Security:  
Status Quo Unsustainable; New Balance Unattainable?**

*Jolyon HOWORTH\**

In January 1947, British and French officials met to discuss draft versions of the Treaty of Dunkirk. A sticking point emerged over the precise conditions under which the proposed mutual defence clause could be invoked. For the French, the simple *threat* of territorial invasion should trigger British support. For the British, however, only an *actual invasion* could warrant the implementation of alliance solidarity. This seemingly arcane distinction already presaged the fundamental difference of strategic approach between Paris and London which was to result in fifty years of stalemate in European defence. For the United Kingdom (U.K.), too strong a statement of European resolve risked demotivating the United States (U.S.) and encouraging U.S. isolationism. For France, a strong Europe was the logical prerequisite for a strong Alliance. Europe needed to balance U.S. power—in the interests of both parties. Thus, from the outset of the post-war period, France expressed confidence in Europe's ability to safeguard her own future, whereas Britain worried that the old continent could never be secure without the permanent entanglement of the new<sup>1</sup>. Contrary to a great deal of mythology, France was never opposed to the “involvement of the new”—indeed the mainstream of the political class, including Charles de Gaulle himself, actively pressed for the creation of NATO and for the construction of an Atlantic partnership. What France in general (and the General in particular) could not accept was an *imbalanced* alliance in which one of the

---

\* Jolyon Howorth is Jean Monnet Professor of European Politics at Bath University and Associate Research Fellow at the French Institute of International Relations (Ifri).

<sup>1</sup> John W. Young, *Britain, France and the Unity of Europe, 1945-1951*, Leicester University Press, 1984, pp.44-51; S. Greenwood, “Return to Dunkirk: the origins of the Anglo-French Treaty of March 1947”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 6 (1983), pp.49-65.

allies was considerably “more equal” than the others<sup>2</sup>. For France, greater balance would achieve three mutually reinforcing objectives: it would act as a *national* force multiplier; it would restore *Europe* to her true place at the international table; and it would act as a counterweight against excessive U.S. *unilateralism* around the world. In one sense, French strategic diplomacy since 1949 has involved an unending quest for greater balance across the Euro-Atlantic area<sup>3</sup>. The instrument for the achievement of that objective has been the construction of *European* political and military capacity.

That quest has involved three separate challenges. First, France has had to struggle to get her European partners to accept the very *principle* of balance. Some—perhaps most—European countries have preferred clear US leadership. Behind the principle of balance is, of course, the *motivation* underlying it. Hidden agendas have regularly been detected in London, The Hague and other capitals: was the quest for balance not simply a pretext for undermining the Alliance? On this fundamental point, France has not proved adept at reassuring her would be partners-in-balance. Second, inherent in the task of persuading partners to accept the principle of balance is the issue of the *substantive focus* of balance. Imbalance—or more properly asymmetry—has existed at several distinct levels: geo-strategic (the differential vulnerability of Europe and the U.S.); strategic and military (U.S. forces were configured for power projection, European forces for forward defence); technology (the quality of weapons systems); structural and institutional (SACEUR is also U.S. COMEUR); and above all political (the excessive influence over Alliance decisions inherent in hegemony). These substantive elements have been exacerbated by the very

---

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Colard & Gérard Daille, “Le général de Gaulle et les alliances”, in [Institut Charles De Gaulle ed.], *De Gaulle en son siècle. Tome 5: L'Europe*, Paris, Plon, 1992.

<sup>3</sup> Frédéric Bozo, *Deux Stratégies pour l'Europe. De Gaulle, les Etats-Unis et l'Alliance Atlantique (1958-1969)*, Paris, Plon, 1996; Frédéric Bozo, *La France et l'OTAN: de la guerre froide au nouvel ordre européen*, Paris, Masson, 1991; Jolyon Howorth, “France and Gaullist ‘Euro-scepticism’: re-reading the French blueprint for a united Europe”, in Michael Adcock et alii (eds), *Revolution, Society and the Politics of Memory*, University of Melbourne Press, 1997, pp.9-19.

different politico-military cultures prevalent in Paris and in Washington<sup>4</sup>. Clearly, Paris has never aspired to achieve strict Europe-U.S. equilibrium in all these areas. In broad brush terms, the objective has been to generate greater balance in Alliance *structures*, in *capacity* for responding to crisis scenarios, particularly in the European theatre, and in transatlantic *political influence*<sup>5</sup>. The debate between Paris and her European partners (particularly the British) on these objectives has swung back and forth and has been charged with considerable ambivalence. Yet, eventually, in the mid-1990s, the Europeans appeared to have signed up to both the principle and the substance of such a rebalancing. Thereafter, the third challenge remained the greatest yet: the *implementation* of balance. The task has been a formidable one.

For fifty years (1947-1997), that French quest for balance involved projects as diverse as the Memorandum of 1958, the Elysée Treaty, the Fouchet plan, the adventure of “*tous azimuts*”, the Pompidou-Heath discussions on Franco-British nuclear co-operation, the notion of *dissuasion concertée*, and of course various schemes involving the Western European Union (WEU). None was successful in achieving its objectives, essentially because France and the U.K.—indispensable partners if balance is ever to succeed—never resolved the fundamental contradiction in their strategic thinking which had emerged in 1947. By contrast, the apparent success story of the late 1990s was the result of growing strategic convergence between Paris and London. It began in the mountains of Bosnia in 1992, was consolidated at the NATO ministerial meeting in Berlin in June 1996, and appeared to have achieved a happy ending in Saint-Malo in December 1998. Today, however, even this episode seems to many to

---

<sup>4</sup> In France, close political control over the military is a logical corollary of post-war military blunders. Such control is unacceptable in the USA where the example of Vietnam has enabled the Joint Chiefs of Staff to lay down the conditions under which they are prepared to respond to political requests for the use of armed force (the “Powell doctrine”)

<sup>5</sup> See the majority of the essays in [Institut Charles de Gaulle, ed.], *De Gaulle en son Siècle. Tome 5: L'Europe*, Paris, Plon, 1992.

be yet another chapter in a never-ending tale of frustration and failure<sup>6</sup>. Such a judgement is premature and misguided.

### **Rebalancing the Atlantic Alliance in the post-Wall World**

During the Bosnian War, France and the UK arrived at two common conclusions. The first was that it was no accident they were in the same place, doing the same job, at the same time. In the post-Cold War world, crisis management, peacekeeping activities and the actual deployment of military force had become the new strategic reality. Both countries agreed that this new challenge would have to be assumed essentially by *Europeans*—since Uncle Sam was unwilling to be involved. But they also agreed that it would be most effectively carried out through co-operation with NATO, since the strategic means to conduct crisis management (planning, logistics, C4I, lift) already existed in the Alliance and there was little point in re-inventing it. The second conclusion, therefore, was that Europe needed to negotiate a new arrangement with the U.S. in which: 1) Washington would agree to retain a presence in Europe (rather than withdraw) so long as: 2) Europe organised its own collective security capacity. From that double conclusion, two further consequences stemmed: France needed to rethink its relationship with NATO; and the U.K. needed to rethink its relationship with Europe. For the first time since the Alliance was founded in 1949, the U.K. appeared finally to have accepted the desirability of the principle<sup>7</sup> of greater transatlantic balance.

France delivered on its side of the bargain as early as spring 1993 when it rejoined Nato's Military Committee—even though the French representative switched off whenever the committee talked “integrated military structure” talk. Further steps towards reintegration had to await December 1995 when France announced its intention of participating in the meetings of NATO's defence and

---

<sup>6</sup> IISS, *Strategic Survey 2001/2002* speaks of the “near absence of real progress” (p.134). The U.S. received wisdom considers ESDP to be an “irrelevance”.

<sup>7</sup> Or was it simply the *inevitability*—a key distinction for what was to follow.

foreign ministers<sup>8</sup>. The U.K. delivered a first down payment on the new bargain in June 1996 when, in the run-up to NATO's Berlin ministerial, London brokered an agreement with Washington on a reform of NATO's structures to allow European only forces to engage in military missions borrowing NATO (*i.e.* U.S.) assets—and a promise was held out of further shifts in the command structure to give more responsibility to European officers. In exchange, France signalled its willingness fully to rejoin NATO. The French Minister of Foreign Affairs Hervé de Charrette declared at that time: “*Mesdames, Messieurs, la France est satisfaite. Aujourd’hui, c’est une alliance nouvelle qui se constitue. Dans cette alliance nouvelle, la France est prête à prendre toute sa place*”<sup>9</sup>. France’s post-1996 security revolution involved an effort to capitalise on the balancing potential of Berlin: *rapprochement* with NATO, abandonment of conscription, rationalisation and restructuring of the defence industry. This story is well documented.

The new European project got off to a very inauspicious start. The AFSOUTH crisis in 1996-1997, Tony Blair’s veto, at Amsterdam in June 1997, of the Franco-German proposal to merge the WEU with the European Union (E.U.), and stalemate over “Berlin Plus” suggested that ESDI would be very short-lived<sup>10</sup>. However, on 3-4 December 1998, Tony Blair and Jacques Chirac jointly signed the “Saint-Malo Declaration” which was to kick-start the rebalancing process in ways which had been unimaginable only months earlier. The Declaration involved a double trade off. The U.K. signed up to a French

---

<sup>8</sup> On France’s “return to NATO”, see Louis Gauthier, *Mitterrand et son armée 1990-1995*, Paris, Grasset 1999, especially pp.77-85 (“Les Compromis avec l’OTAN”) and Shaun Gregory, *French Defence Policy into the Twenty-First Century*, London, Macmillan 2000, especially pp.104-125 (“France and NATO after 1994”)

<sup>9</sup> *La Politique étrangère de la France*, mai-juin 1996, conférence de presse du ministre des Affaires étrangères, Berlin, 6 juin 1996

<sup>10</sup> On the AFSOUTH crisis, see Michael Brenner & Guillaume Parmentier, *Reconcilable Differences: US-French relations in the new era*, Washington DC, Brookings, 2002, pp.52-56, and Gilles Delafon & Thomas Sancton, *Dear Jacques, Cher Bill: au cœur de l’Elysée et de la Maison-Blanche, 1995-1999*, Paris, Plon, 1999, pp.194-218. On Blair’s veto, see Jolyon Howorth, “Les relations UE-OTAN: le point de vue du Royaume-Uni”, in Jacques Beltran et Frédéric Bozo (eds), *Etats-Unis-Europe: réinventer l’Alliance*, Paris, Ifril, 2001, pp.133-156. The pessimism of the moment is best expressed in Philip H. Gordon, “Europe’s Uncommon Foreign Policy”, in *International Security*, 22/3, 1997-8, pp.74-100.

proposal that the E.U. “must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises”<sup>11</sup>. France signed up to a U.K. statement that, “in conformity with our respective obligations in NATO, we are contributing to the vitality of a modernised Atlantic Alliance”. Four factors explain this seemingly revolutionary Euro-Atlantic breakthrough. The first was the growing U.K. conviction that, without the creation of serious European military capacity, the Alliance itself was dead in the water. The second was the fact that Tony Blair, having finally been briefed on defence matters, discovered in the process that Kosovo was about to blow apart and that the E.U. was incapable of doing anything about it. The Kosovo War obligingly took place shortly after Saint-Malo, confirming both the Europeans and the Americans in their conviction that the existing imbalance was non-viable<sup>12</sup>. Thirdly, both France and the U.K. had come to the conclusion that crisis management in Europe was here to stay—and that the U.S. basically did not wish to be involved. Finally, both countries had realised that the WEU, which they had earlier assumed would be part of the solution, was actually part of—if not *the*—problem. European defence and security had to be managed directly—by the Union itself. This alone represented a major revolution in that it reversed fifty years of unremitting British opposition to a defence role for the E.E.C./E.C./E.U. Saint-Malo ushered into European history a new acronym: ESDP<sup>13</sup>, whose objective is stated explicitly in the Saint-Malo Declaration: “*The E.U. needs to be in a position to play its full role on the international stage.*” However, for France, this was above all a European project, while for the British, it was a last-ditch

---

<sup>11</sup> For the text of the Saint-Malo Declaration (and all subsequent important documents), see Maartje Rutten, *From Saint-Malo to Nice: European defence: core documents*, Paris, [W]EU-ISS, Chaillot Paper 47, 2001

<sup>12</sup> After Kosovo, the U.S. and Europe both vowed “never again”. Never again would the U.S. allow itself to fight a “war by committee” in which several heads of government would have an input into bombing targets. Never again would the Europeans allow themselves to be in such a position of military subordination to their U.S. allies. The U.S. has delivered on its vow. The Europeans have not.

<sup>13</sup> ESDP must not be confused (as almost all commentators have done and many continue to do) with ESDI, which is essentially a technical mechanism within NATO allowing the E.U. to borrow assets from the U.S.

attempt to salvage the Atlantic Alliance. Therein lay the seeds of confusion further down the road. Saint-Malo constituted agreement on the *principle* of balance. But it did not reflect agreement on either the *motivation* or the *substance*, let alone on the details of *implementation*.

### Implementing Saint-Malo

Implementation of Saint-Malo demanded two major developments: an E.U. institutional mechanism allowing the Union to take foreign-policy-driven security and defence decisions; and military capacity. For much of the period June 1999 to December 2000, France played hard-ball over institutional architecture. In the struggle to get the infant ESDP on its feet, it was Paris which acted as the self-appointed nursemaid against mainly U.S. attempts to assume parental control. On the details of the new institutional framework of ESDP, on links between that framework and NATO, on the “*right of first refusal*”, on the involvement of “*third countries*” and many other issues, France fought hard to prioritise *European* criteria in the name of genuine rebalancing. The U.S. reaction was invariably informed by traditional Atlanticist precepts<sup>14</sup>. On all these issues, pragmatism eventually prevailed, usually introduced into the debate by the U.K.—and usually involving a compromise which allowed France to claim at least half a victory<sup>15</sup>. The debate about the substance of balance remained ongoing.

But institutions were only half of the problem. As George Robertson stressed, “*you can’t send a wiring diagram to a crisis*”. The key to balance was military capacity. It was France which pressed hardest—at least at the level of rhetoric—for an ambitious E.U. procurement programme. Drawing the “*Lessons of Kosovo*”, Paris proposed that, in every area where the Europeans lagged

---

<sup>14</sup> Julian Lindley-French (ed.), *Paris Transatlantic Forum: European Defence—European and American Perceptions*, Paris, WEU-ISS, Occasional Paper No.17, September 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Jolyon Howorth, *European Integration and Defence: the Ultimate Challenge?* Paris, WEU, Institute for Security Studies, 2000 (Chaillot Paper 43). There are those among the British security community who believe that French “maximalism” on these issues was essentially a tactical bargaining position designed to ensure that, after the necessary trade-offs, the eventual agreement would be close to the real French bottom line. Interviews in Whitehall.

behind the US, an effort should be made to close the gap<sup>16</sup>. But the challenge was formidable. Although the E.U. collectively spent about 60% of the U.S. defence budget, the duplication and wastage within that 60% resulted in the E.U.'s only packing about 10% of the U.S. punch. The gap, in reality, was enormous—and growing<sup>17</sup>. Even before 11 September 2001, the incoming Bush administration was committed to huge defence spending hikes, in part (but only in part) to fund the proposed missile defence system. After 9/11, the Quadrennial Defence Review of 2001 proposed pushing U.S. defence spending towards \$470 billion by 2007, against the E.U.'s projected total of less than \$200 billion<sup>18</sup>. The increase will make the U.S. defence budget superior to that of the next *thirteen* countries in the world. Yet nowhere in Europe were governments (many of whom had been free riders in NATO for years) hastening to increase funds for defence. In France, the Jospin government was applying the brakes even while the Elysée was attempting to apply the accelerator. Yet, the logic of Saint-Malo and the objective of balance would remain still-born without an E.U. increase in military capacity. The December 1999 Helsinki “Headline Goal” represented an initial thrust in that direction. Yet new disputes arose over the ultimate objective? Those who remained nervous about the entire project bore in mind the warning delivered by Strobe Talbot in October 1999: “We would not want to see an ESDI that comes into being first within NATO, but then grows out of NATO and finally grows away from NATO, since that would lead to an ESDI that initially duplicates NATO but that could eventually compete with NATO.”<sup>19</sup> Did autonomy necessarily imply rivalry? Was balance the first step towards disintegration? On the even of the Nice Council meeting in December 2000, a very public disagreement broke out between Jacques Chirac, who claimed that the RRF was intended to act *independently* of NATO (strictly correct since this was indeed its entire purpose) and Tony Blair, who retorted that it would only act

---

<sup>16</sup> French Ministry of Defence, *Les Leçons du Kosovo*, November 1999

<sup>17</sup> David Yost, “The NATO Capabilities Gap and the EU”, *Survival*, 2000, Volume 42/2. For an alternative analysis, see Robert Grant, “The Revolution in Military Affairs: Europe can keep in step”, Paris, WEU-Institute for Security Studies, *Occasional Paper* 15, June 2000.

<sup>18</sup> IISS, *Strategic Comments*, Volume 8, Issue 2, March 2002, “The US Defence Budget Debate: how much is enough?”

*in harmony* with NATO (also true and not incompatible with Chirac's statement, but informed by very different assumptions). The fact remained that, despite tight co-operation between Britain and France on the implementation of Saint-Malo, deep mutual cross-interpretations persisted, not only about the motivation behind and the substance of transatlantic balance, but also about its implementation.

Meanwhile, the U.S. elections threatened to change in fundamental ways the very nature of the project to be balanced. The incoming Bush administration, with its emphasis on the national interest<sup>20</sup>, its focus on Asia, on rogue states and missile defence, its clear disinterest in Europe and even in NATO, its ominous campaign warnings about the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Balkans, and its apparent lack of regard for the constraints of multilateralism, caused many in Paris to begin to wonder just what remained of the structure that France was attempting to "balance". The new US administration, replete with veterans of the Cold War, had little but contempt for ESDP<sup>21</sup>. Did NATO have a future at all—balanced or otherwise?<sup>22</sup> Before anybody could begin to answer that question, along came Osama bin Laden.

### **The Impact of 9/11 on France's quest for ESDP-NATO balance**

11 September 2001 changed in fundamental ways the underlying structures and conceptual assumptions of transatlantic relations. That this would be the case was not obvious on 12 September when *Le Monde* published its famous editorial, "Nous sommes tous américains"<sup>23</sup>. Yet that instinctive, emotional, generous identification of France's—and Europe's—core values with those of

---

<sup>19</sup> See text of this speech in Maartje Rutten (reference in f/n 11), pp.54-59

<sup>20</sup> Condoleeza Rice, "Promoting the National Interest", *Foreign Affairs*, 2000, 79/1

<sup>21</sup> Rumsfeld's speech to February 2001 *Wehrkunde* - Alexander Nicoll, "US Cautions Europe over proposals for force outside NATO", *Financial Times*, 05/02/01

<sup>22</sup> See Julian Lindley-French, *The 2001 Paris Transatlantic Conference* ("Transatlantic Relations and the Bush Administration"), WEU-ISS, June 2001.

<sup>23</sup> "Comment ne pas se sentir en effet, comme dans les moments les plus graves de notre histoire, profondément solidaires de ce peuple et de ce pays, dont nous sommes si proches et à qui nous devons la liberté, et donc notre solidarité", *Le Monde*, 12 septembre 2002

the wounded superpower-ally concealed deeper divisions which were gradually to emerge in the months ahead. Jacques Chirac, as the first foreign leader to visit Washington after the attacks (18 September), also expressed an emotional reaction to the events<sup>24</sup>. But Chirac made it clear to Bush that while France expressed total solidarity, she reserved judgement, and he already insisted on two things: that the U.S. retaliation should avoid creating a clash of civilisations; and that it was necessary before formulating a retaliatory strategy, to reflect on the root causes of 9/11<sup>25</sup>. The attitude of the French political establishment was probably best summed up by François Bayrou on the occasion of the first parliamentary debate on the crisis (3 October 2001): “100% ally of the U.S. Eyes 100% wide-open.”

Philip Gordon has noted the principal arguments which almost all mainstream French leaders used in the early weeks of the crisis: i) the need for the primacy of *political and diplomatic* as opposed to military instruments in responding to the attacks; ii) any military response must be limited to specific Al-Qaeda targets; iii) the military operations should not be extended beyond Afghanistan; iv) the need for a UN mandate; v) the need for renewed efforts to deal with the Israel-Palestine crisis<sup>26</sup>. It was on these and many other issues that a significant gulf progressively appeared between the U.S. and most of its European allies—spearheaded by France—in the months after 9/11. The gulf widened even further once “victory” in Afghanistan encouraged the US administration to believe that God—or at any rate, right was on its side. As this gulf yawned ever wider, the project of a “balanced” transatlantic relationship suddenly became more and more devoid of any reality.

---

<sup>24</sup> After visiting Ground Zero, the French president remarked: “*Quand on voit cela, on a envie de pleurer*”, *Le Monde*, 21 September 2001.

<sup>25</sup> Afsané Bassir Pour, “M. Chirac ne montre pas d’inquiétude quant aux intentions américaines”, *Le Monde*, 21 September 2002. Hubert Védrine, who accompanied Chirac, hit exactly the same notes in an interview with *Le Monde* on 22 September. See also, on the reactions of these two men, “Good for the (French) President”, *The Economist*, 22 September 2001.

<sup>26</sup> Philip H. Gordon, “France, the United States And the ‘War on Terrorism’”, Brookings, October 2001

First, where was the Alliance in all this? The Bush administration's reaction to NATO's historic invocation of article 5 on 12 September 2001 was a direct result of the U.S. experience in Kosovo. At a military level, the Alliance was short-circuited, article 5 an irrelevance as the allies watched from a distance their foremost member engage in war-fighting without them<sup>27</sup>. Second, whereas many had hoped that 9/11 would persuade the U.S. of the attractions of multilateralism, by late November 2001, unilateralism was once again running amok. It is easy to caricature the U.S. approach to multilateralism, but a recent study by one of NATO's staunchest friends, sums up the feelings of many: "*American thinking about international organisations these days goes something like this. The U.S. is the force for good in the world, therefore constraint upon the U.S. is bad. International organisations by definition constrain their members. International organisations, therefore, are bad.*"<sup>28</sup> From a French perspective, however, the major question raised by such an approach to international relations was whether the U.S. was indeed producing *order* in the world or in effect exacerbating *disorder*<sup>29</sup>. Third, reflection on the linkage between the roots of terrorism and renewed engagement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which France in particular had stressed, was rejected out-of-hand in favour of an ideology which amalgamated suicide bombers in the West Bank and Al-Quaeda fighters at Tora-Bora<sup>30</sup>. Engagement was, in any case, increasingly defined in Washington in military terms, highly selective and dictated exclusively by the national interest. In this new approach to the rest of the world, partnership was no longer on the agenda. At best, there would be a new division of labour in which the U.S. would do the war-fighting and the E.U.

---

<sup>27</sup> There were, of course, small numbers of allied troops involved in the Afghan campaign, but they were there as *national* contingents and not as *NATO* troops—which, of course, merely drove home the message that the Alliance had been short-circuited.

<sup>28</sup> Julian Lindley-French in European Union *Institute for Security Studies, Newsletter* 03/04, September 2002, p.3

<sup>29</sup> Dominique David, "Un an après le 11 septembre: dix fenêtres qui s'ouvrent sur un monde pas si neuf", *Politique étrangère*, 3/2002, p.563.

<sup>30</sup> George Bush emerged as an unsuspected fan of Maxime Le Forestier: "*Tu sais qu'il n'y a ici bas que deux engeances: les gens bien et les terroristes ... parachutistes*".

would do the dishes. This was hardly the balance that France had had in mind for the previous fifty years<sup>31</sup>.

No longer, apparently, was there to be any serious question of *military* “interoperability”. Technically, the U.S. arsenal is now so far in advance of the rest of the world that fighting with allies has become a serious constraint. France awoke slowly to the revelation that the U.S. defence budget, even *before* the Bush increases announced in early 2002, had overtaken the entire budget of the French Republic. And the new message was driven home by Paul Wolfowitz: “*The mission must determine the coalition, the coalition must not determine the mission.*”<sup>32</sup> NATO, it seemed, would henceforth have little role to play other than as an *enabler of coalitions*. Throughout the 1990s, the Europeans in general and the French in particular had resisted constant U.S. proposals to turn NATO into a global alliance. Senator Richard Lugar had insisted in 1993 that NATO must “either go out of area or go out of business”<sup>33</sup>. But no Europeans, not even the British, were prepared to transform an alliance designed to secure European order through American engagement, into one designed to secure an American global order through European engagement.

Meanwhile, ESDP appeared to go into a state of suspended animation. The relative renationalisation of defence policy which accompanied the U.S. response to 9/11 was best symbolised in the “pick and mix” policy which Washington adopted to the involvement of E.U. forces in the Afghan campaign. Most of the E.U. measures adopted in the wake of 9/11 to counter the threat of terrorism related not to security and defence but to the realm of Justice and Home Affairs. Tony Blair, for reasons connected both with London’s sense of its “pivotal” role between Europe and America, and with Britain’s specialised

---

<sup>31</sup> David C. Gompert, “America and Europe: Partnership, Division of Labor—or worse?”, Speech to Ifri, 8 March 2001

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.securityconference.de/konferenzen/reden/rede.asp?id=69&sprache=eng>

<sup>33</sup> Senator Richard G. Lugar, “NATO: Out of Area or Out of Business: A Call for US Leadership to Revive and Redefine the Alliance”, Text of speech to the Overseas Writers’ Club, Washington, D.C., 24 June 1993. On the US proposals for a global NATO, see David Gompert & F. Stephen Larrabee (eds.), *America and Europe: a Partnership for a New Era*, Cambridge University Press, 1998

military capacity, elected to prioritise relations with the U.S. ally rather than to focus on the cause of ESDP. The inertial thrust developed by the two Capabilities Conferences (November 2000 and November 2001) resulted in the E.U. continuing to engage in force planning along the lines of the Helsinki goal even though many were beginning to suggest that, after 9/11, the E.U.'s genuine requirements in terms of military capacity needed to be fundamentally rethought. The December 2001 "Statement on Improving European Military Capabilities"—introducing the "European Capability Action Plan" (ECAP)—which was unveiled at Laeken<sup>34</sup> was a blandly conservative (and highly optimistic) assessment of progress towards the basic Headline Goal. Moreover, neither that Capabilities Statement nor the parallel "Ministerial Police Capabilities Conference Declaration" issued at Laeken made the slightest reference to 9/11. The June 2002 Seville Council reports suggested that there had been little progress on ESDP in the first semester of 2002. While it is undoubtedly unrealistic to expect procurement miracles to happen overnight, there was, in 2002, a growing consensus among independent defence experts that the E.U.'s biggest failing is in the area of military hardware—not so much in the raw numbers as in the operational coherence<sup>35</sup>. Some experts argued in favour of de-emphasising the procurement process defined by Petersberg and the Helsinki Goals (essentially product-driven) and of focusing instead on a new "grand strategy" arising out of a new threat assessment (essentially mission-driven or market-driven<sup>36</sup>). Such an approach might concentrate on assets such as special forces, human intelligence and signals intelligence, assets for

---

<sup>34</sup> The "Statement on Improving European Military Capabilities" appears as Annexe I to the *Draft Presidency Report on European Security and Defence Policy* which can be found at: <http://ue.eu.int/newsroom/newmain.asp?lang=1>. The "Declaration on the Operational Capability of the CESDP" is to be found as Annexe II to the Presidency Conclusions, pp.27-29.

<sup>35</sup> "Achieving the Helsinki Headline Goals", *Centre for Defence Studies Discussion Paper*, Kings College, University of London, November 2001; International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, "The European Rapid Reaction Force", *The Military Balance 2001-2002*, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp.283-291.

<sup>36</sup> Julian Lindley-French has pioneered the distinction between product-driven and market-driven approaches to procurement, arguing that "for the past ten years Europe has acted as though it only seemed prepared to recognise as much threat as it could afford", in "Terms of Engagement: The paradox of American Power and the Transatlantic Dilemma post-11September", Paris, EU-ISS, *Chaillot Papers* 52, 2002, p.63.

engaging in network-centred warfare. Other experts continued to argue that the Headline Goal remained as valid as ever. There was a danger that the E.U., which *replaced* the WEU because of the latter's perceived political and military inadequacy, would eventually replicate the WEU story—but with a different outcome: faced with yet another incoherent and potentially undeployable force structure, E.U. member states might abandon ESDP and either revert to nationalism or indeed seek to reinvent NATO as an entirely different organisation from the one they had tried to rebalance after 1999. U.S.-driven events appeared to push in the same direction, rendering the French quest for a re-balanced Alliance less and less relevant.

### **American grand strategy and the challenge to France's European Project**

In November 2001, over the skies of Afghanistan, the U.S. “went global”—unilaterally. Various nations and organisations were eventually aligned with the U.S. in the “war on terror”, but the prospect of such nations constituting a counterweight to U.S. strategy was non-existent. There were no “allied” discussions over strategy, nor was there even a framework for such discussions. The UNO, NATO and other bodies were kept at arms length. NATO found itself faced with the most significant choice in its entire history: a “choice” between alignment with the US (basically becoming the military arm of U.S. *global* policy), or disintegration as a consequence of Europe's refusal to go along with such a scenario<sup>37</sup>. The continued pursuit of the classic French project of a balanced partnership between Europe and America seemed less realistic than it had ever been. In 1996 and again in 2000 France came as close as she had ever come to achieving such a balanced partnership. 9/11 blew that project out of the water—and with it NATO as it had been known until that moment.

---

<sup>37</sup> See, for an elaboration of this analysis, Frédéric Bozo, “La relation transatlantique et la “longue” guerre contre le terrorisme”, *Politique étrangère*, 2/2002

“The Alliance is Dead. Long Live the New Alliance”<sup>38</sup>, proclaimed one major commentator in September 2002. In the course of that month, three major developments offered insights into the next stages of France’s bid to engineer a counterweight to U.S. influence on the global stage. The first was the publication (significantly, on 11 September 2002) of the new government’s “*loi de programmation militaire 2003-2008*”<sup>39</sup>. Following the U.K. government’s announcement of defence budget increases in summer 2002<sup>40</sup>, the French programme had several objectives. First, it was explicitly geared to narrowing the gap between British and French military capabilities. Global influence, it had apparently been decided in Paris (with a steady eye on London), comes through the ability to fight alongside the U.S. equipment expenditure is the great beneficiary of the *loi de programmation*, rising from €12.5 billion to €15 billion. The overall percentage of GDP taken up by defence will rise from its current low of 1.9% to around 2.2%. Within the equipment budget, the great beneficiary will be the French navy<sup>41</sup>. With a second aircraft carrier (ideally built in co-operation with the U.K.) and 60 naval *Rafale* combat aircraft, 4 strategic nuclear submarines armed with the new *M-51* missile, 17 new *Horizon* class frigates and 6 new nuclear attack submarines, the navy in 2015 will—at least on paper—boast 80 surface vessels and 136 support aircraft. The objective, it seems, is for France to become a more effective ally of the global giant that the U.S. has already become<sup>42</sup>. The war on terrorism is a global war requiring global reach. The lessons of the Gulf, the Kosovo and Afghanistan have finally been learned in Paris. Influence comes not through discourse or rhetoric but through serious military capacity.

---

<sup>38</sup> Josef Joffe, “The Alliance is Dead. Long Live the New Alliance”, *New York Times*, 29 September 2002

<sup>39</sup> See <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/dossier/d140/index.htm>.

<sup>40</sup> U.K. Ministry of Defence, *The Strategic Defence Review: a New Chapter*, London, 2002.

<sup>41</sup> Jacques Isnard, “La Royale choyée par la programmation militaire”, *Le Monde*, 14 September 2002

<sup>42</sup> Victor Mallet, “Defending the good name of France”, *Financial Times*, 13 September 2002; Dominique Moïsi, “France befriends its old adversary”, *Financial Times*, 22 September 2002; Jacques Isnard, “89 milliards d’euros pour l’équipement des armées”, *Le Monde*, 12 September 2002. See also the extensive interview which Jacques Chirac gave to the *New York Times* on 8 September 2002.

The second development was that on 25 September 2002, Donald Rumsfeld proposed to a NATO meeting in Warsaw that the Alliance should create a new force—the NATO Reaction Force—with global reach to act as a support system for US forces engaged in global crisis management<sup>43</sup>. Many commentators saw in this announcement the death knell of ESDP, and particularly of the still embryonic European RRF<sup>44</sup>. Several European governments, concerned about the cost of the ERRF, welcomed the U.S. plan as a cheaper alternative—with the added advantage of retaining U.S. hegemony. France's reaction was different. The French minister of Defence, Michèle Alliot-Marie, hailed the Rumsfeld initiative, but insisted that it was a *complement* and not an *alternative* to the ERRF. France also expressed reservations about its deployment outside of NATO's geo-strategic limits, as well as rejecting any thought of using the new strike force for pre-emptive military action<sup>45</sup>. This was the third significant development in September-October 2002. The battle against the new U.S. doctrine of "pre-emptive action" was the major battle that France decided to fight in the renewed quest for influence over U.S. policy. To a very large extent, it was the refusal of France (along with Russia and China) to endorse the Bush proposals for a pre-emptive strike against Saddam Hussein that persuaded the U.S. President to play the United Nations card. Whether the Bush administration genuinely wishes to see the return of Hans Blix and his team to Iraq, or whether the presumed inadequacies of the inspections process is designed as a pretext for war is an open question<sup>46</sup>. France could certainly credit herself, in the fall of 2002, with having successfully shifted the timetable, if not the determination of the U.S. preparations for a military strike on Iraq.

---

<sup>43</sup> See <http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/2002/0209-wrsw/0209-wrsw.htm#ov>.

<sup>44</sup> Glenn Frankel, "New US Doctrine worries Europeans: decades of coalition-building seen at risk", *Washington Post*, 30 September 2002; Judy Dempsey, "Rumsfeld to press reluctant NATO on new strategy", *Financial Times*, 23 September 2002; David Wastell, "US plans NATO rival to Blair's 'Euro-army'", *Daily Telegraph*, 02 June 2002; "Europe Joins Drive to Build NATO's Military Muscle", *New York Times*, 4 June 2002; Bronislaw Geremek, Jacques Lanxade, Peter Mandelson, Margarita Mathiopoulos & Klaus Naumann, "A Global Future for a Balanced NATO", *International Herald Tribune*, 6 June 2002

<sup>45</sup> Laurent Zecchini, "Les Etats-Unis proposent à l'OTAN de créer une force de reaction rapide", *Le Monde*, 25 September 2002

<sup>46</sup> Gerard Baker, "Washington's fear of weapons inspections", *Financial Times*, 10 October 2002.

In short, developments since 9/11 have forced France to play a completely new balancing game. There is no longer any question of creating, inside the Atlantic Alliance, the balanced partnership which had, until 9/11, been the fixed vision of post-war French strategic diplomacy. Henceforth, France will attempt to influence U.S. policy in three distinct ways. First, as a senior member of multilateral organisations, primarily of the UNSC, but also of a post-expansion NATO which, with 26 members, will inevitably become more and more of a talking shop. In this capacity, Paris will expound the virtues of international law and warn of the extreme dangers of ignoring it. Second, as a growing martial power, through her practical value to the U.S. as a military partner, possibly even via NATO's new reaction force, but above all bilaterally. Third, as a prominent member of a E.U. whose clout on the world stage will continue to grow, whatever the precise future trajectory of ESDP—a project which, in the context of unrestrained U.S. unilateralism, becomes more rather than less relevant.

In all of these endeavours, France will attempt to work in close concert with all her European partners but especially with the U.K. In February 2002, Jean-Marie Colombani, concluding a retrospective on his 12 September 2001 editorial, "*Nous sommes tous américains*", commented: "*Nous ne sommes ainsi qu'au début d'un nouveau et long feuilleton où se joue rien de moins que la recomposition de tous les équilibres géostratégiques de la planète.*"<sup>47</sup> France's strategy in this brave new world seems relatively clear. But, as before, the success of that strategy will require close Franco-British co-operation. This is where the story began: with the Treaty of Dunkirk. The big question (as always) remains: can the U.K. ever become a truly European partner?

---

<sup>47</sup> Jean-Marie Colombani, *Tous Américains? Le monde après le 11 septembre 2001*, Paris, Fayard, 2002, p.88