

## DOES ANGLO-FRENCH MILITARY POWER HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY ON THE GLOBAL STAGE?

par **Bruno L.G. CARRÉ** / Chercheur associé à l'IRIS

*“Does Anglo-French military power have a role to play on the global stage?” was a subject proposed to the author by the Franco-British Students Association (Cambridge, Oxford, LSE, HEC, ESSEC, Polytechnique, Sciences-Po) to be discussed in one of the workshop on the occasion of their 12th December 2008 summit, this year held in Cambridge. The text given below is the core of the lecture discussed with the students.*

## **“Does Anglo-French military power have a role to play on the global stage?”**

Before engaging in the minefield of putative Anglo-French military power, it is worth refining the geopolitical semantic content of Power itself. It is best defined as “the conscious capacity to exert a net influence<sup>1</sup>”. The influence needs to be consciously exercised otherwise it makes no rational sense and then becomes a psychiatric pathology. A capacity to exert this influence is required; and the result of this influence must be net. That can be done by many means, as a results of choices, more or less costly to oneself and to the society.

In the context of Military Power, this net influence can be obtained directly through the actual use of military means, or indirectly through the capability of making the others be convinced that the considered Nation-State has both the military means and the will to its declared ends.

In other words as Carl von Clausewitz wrote it is “the sum of available means and the strength of the will”. To us, that strength is both objective and absolute, and subjective and relative. Objective and absolute is the real fighting capability. Subjective and relative is the capability to bluff the opponent. Both our countries have built such a military power and that at growing alternative costs to each one. But for what aims and are they common to both Nations?

First, to obtain an objective essential net effect and then, secondly, to get a subjective desirable net effect.

In having a military power and being willing to use it, both the French and the British first and foremost aim at defending their vital interests against currently identified or foreseen potential threats. In this context, Military power is the ultimate indispensable tool to any such Nation-State such as the UK and France surviving capability or the *primum vivere* effect.

Today 99,99% of those threats are common to the two Nation-States. They are more and more often of asymmetric nature. They are increasingly interconnected. Their bases are both in homeland as well as out of area.

*De facto*, it leads those two countries to embed, as well, the concept of preventive operations into their strategies, more as a rule than as an exception. Those preventive strikes are at the border of the Objective Essential Net Effect and what can be regarded as a Subjective Desirable Net Effect, or as the “*deinde extendere*” effect of the Military Power.

Indeed, when two Nation-States such as France and Britain build a Military Power and think of using it on the global stage, they also seek to interfere and infringe in other States’ affairs, in the name of what they generally truly believe to be universal moral principles and common values.

In our view though, this net effect is Subjective and “only” Desirable as opposed to Objective and Essential. Thus, one has to be extremely cautious and discerning in one’s approach of what is, in many respects, a very subjective and philosophical matter. And indeed, what did and does today constitute a just war is still a very acute, pertinent and legitimate question? As recently rediscovered by Dr Kouchnér, the current French Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, it is judicious to avoid confusing Governments policies - made of a mix of limited idealism, much Realpolitik and some Rationalism - with true NGO’s pure idealism.

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Lhomme, 1966

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Furthermore, even when there is a genuinely good intention behind a military deployment, the net effect might well be negative. Democracy as seen and lived in the US might be the answer to many problems but democracy under coercion has many and most unfortunate side effects.

So in essence, both concepts of preventing strikes and the so called "duty of infringement" are double edged knives.

Indeed, should we intervene in Zimbabwe? Should we reinforce our military presence in the Democratic Republic of Congo? Should we reinforce our presence in Darfur? Should we land on the Somalia shores to stop the pirates? Why didn't we go to Georgia? Should we send even more troops to Afghanistan? To what net effect? What will happen if and when the coalition leaves Iraq? What about Lebanon, Syria and Israel? What about Israel and the Hamas in Gaza? Should we send more troops everywhere our occidental feelings and philosophy are hurt?

Most probably no. And that is because, to think that Britain and France are and must remain major players is one thing. To have the mean to be so, is another.

In relative terms, both our countries still have today a strength to be reckoned with, and is so by the vast majority of the world Nation-States. Still, for several decades now, we have been simultaneously widening the scope of our Forces operations whilst questioning a bit more everyday our budgetary capacity to keep on having multi-roles, multi scenarios, multi tempos, multi theatres Armed Forces. In essence, we can no longer afford the mean to our ends.

Its is only few weeks ago, that the currently in chair UKCDS, Sir jock Stirrup, firmly stated on the BBC that "the British armed forces are stretched. We are doing more than we are structured and resourced to do in the long term. We can do it for a short period, but we can't continue doing it ad infinitum"

As for the equipments, the CVF Aircraft Carriers program has been postponed by (at least) two years, the FRES Utility Armoured vehicle project is (once again) being revamped, the fleet tanker requirement is being deferred, the METEOR Beyond Visual Range missile In Service Date is being postponed, so on and so forth.

All the same, let's make no mistake, a significant part of the on going French Forces restructuring and Paris government's admission that it can not afford to order a second new aircraft carrier testifies to the squeeze.

Both countries clearly acknowledge that they have finite resources to meet their aims.

In economic terms, it translates in the cost of opportunity of having the right military capability instead of building schools, hospitals, roads etc. is fast increasing whilst each Defence investments' return is disproportionally decreasing. The diversity of threats and of our conflicts involvements push the budgets up to such levels, that it finally makes the overall opportunity cost of the Defence investments unbearable.

Thus, to reverse the trend and to be of increasing economic utility and military efficiency, there is a compelling necessity that each and every additional unit invested is part of a larger, bigger and stronger group. But sadly, as soon as we escape from the fate of the law of decreasing returns in using the economic theory of alliances, we fall under the control of the Game Theory and the cruel obligation it puts our Rulers to make thorny geostrategic choices!

And here is where it hurts when talking about Anglo-French military power playing a role on the global stage! In essence, both our Nation-States play a double barrel strategic game but loaded with different calibre bullets, so to speak!

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The difference between the two cooperative strategies is that most British deciders still base Britain's relative power and strength on the so called "special relationship" with the US, and on their illusion that a duumvirate is ruling NATO. And, this is how, in their best dream, they hope if not believe, it should remain. Come the worst they will, reluctantly though, swallow the pill of having to accommodate the French fully at the commands to form a Triumvirate, but they will certainly deny that to the EU as such. Indeed, it would mean that the UK influence would be dissolved whilst the EU would replace them in the duumvirate. All things utterly unacceptable.

And in this respect, I am not sure that everybody in this country welcome the Americans recent softening towards a genuine EU defence. Meanwhile, a tighter collaboration with the French is an effective way to mark them and prevent them, today as in the past, to be the dominant military power in Europe.

The French, know that, well. However, they also know well that their power does reside in remaining a, if not the, dominant Armed Force in a strong EU joint military capability, which, in turn, they see as becoming a springboard for an increasing power within NATO. Thus, they are seeking to have a specific relationship with the UK which would enable the building of an Anglo-French dominated powerful EU, whilst endeavouring to convince the Americans that this game actually benefits NATO and thus, them as well.

In this context, is there really today a specific UK-France military relationship?

Well, to be honest, one can't see any on the horizon. Progress made so far on Anglo-French collaboration are not negligible, but they not quite what one would expect when looking at the ambitions of the St Malo initiative and at the numerous Anglo-French declarations which have followed. It seems that as soon as bilaterally agreed policies are confronted to reality, they are blown up into pieces! And, let's not be deceived by the much ado about almost nothing of our politicians.

Most unfortunately, the past still too frequently casts a cold shadow over the future leading to distrust and mistrust. That is well kept alive by the Medias and not just by the tabloids. Furthermore, more often than ever, domestic lobbies do not help either.

And still, there are many good, logical and rational reasons to press on for a far tighter Anglo-French military Power to be built and be used on commonly agreed ends, beneficial to both countries and to the world.

Let suggest at least nine logic factors behind it:

1. they both have very similar if not the same aims in keeping a fairly credible military power
2. they both have the same ambition to remain significant actors on the global stage
3. they both have limited mean to their ends
4. they both need NATO and the EU and vice versa,
5. they have similar conventional Forces and a nationally controlled nuclear deterrent capability,
6. they both have little if no reluctance to use their armed forces worldwide
7. they both have spheres of influences which could be complementary,

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8. they both have a defence industry suffering from the narrowness of their domestic markets
9. their relevant technological capabilities are falling behind the world's best

From the rationale point of view, clearly both Nations would benefit.

- On the geopolitical strategic chess board, in so doing,
  - a) the UK would conveniently monitor both France's ambitions over the EU military power and the rise of an integrated EU military power itself, whilst conversely France would gradually still be pulling Britain in her game. Non zero-sum game pay-off.
  - b) it would help to enforce cooperation between NATO and the EU. A critical benefit.
  - c) it would contribute to the consolidation of the various Forces composing the European Forces whilst taking into account the British apprehension towards any kind of integration of their Forces in an European Army,.
  - d) news of an Anglo-French operational capability and common determination to deploy joint Forces would have a world resonance serving both the objective and subjective net effects sought for by both Nations.
- From the economic perspective
  - a) investments in joint and thus larger programmes would reduce the costs whilst it Economy of scale, even though not very large would increase the overall Returns on Investments of Defence investments.
  - b) the opportunity cost of choices made in favour of defence investments, instead of more socially palatable investments could be reduced by pooling their resources together;
  - c) similarly, those opportunity costs would be better accepted at home, as they would be seen as the result of rationalised public choices between two allies and thus better managed public resources.
  - d) The two countries would have a much more viable and powerful industry, and a far more efficient R&D/T which, with the human factor, is the basic factor to keep their military power edge.
  - e) It would enhance the EU Defence market whilst smoothing the transatlantic path
- From the military angle
  - a) the striking power would be greater
  - b) the armed forces would be far less stressed
  - c) the probability of getting more of the right kits at the right time within improved budgets would increase

But as the current CGS, General Sir Richard Dannat, once underlined: "There is no point of dreaming about great ambitions and concepts that have no start point in reality."

So let's be practical and suggest 10 areas to work on which might help the two Nations to play an even more legitimate, affordable and still efficient military role on the global stage.

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1. Work even more and faster towards a common Anglo-French FSDP applicable by both countries with as little reservation as possible. Improbable result but not impossible task.
2. Work on a common military Doctrine. It is still unbelievable, that both countries do use their capabilities in such different ways on the same operating theatres, that they can not even acquire the same equipments. Operations in former Yugoslavia, in Africa and in Afghanistan help the “get to know each other” but remains utterly insufficient in terms of doctrine.
3. Deepen talks on the nuclear capability of each country and global disarmament, although with no illusions as it is an existentialist question!
4. Form an experimental joint Air, Naval or Land Battle Groups. Unthinkable for many and still feasible. Challenging, even provoking, but what a step forward it would be!
5. Pool existing resources at least in support areas e.g. Airlift capability, utility helicopters...
6. Seek to swiftly narrow the gaps in acquisition policies. Long time overdue!
7. Stop duplicating acquisitions and seek for economy of scale when acquiring in buying together e.g. Light Armoured Vehicles (LAV). How is it, that the two countries are acquiring two different LAV for nearly the same usage?
8. Equip the Forces with at least interoperable kits. Even better, with the same systems. The recently agreed common policy on Urgent Operational Requirements between the DGA and the DE&S acquisitions organizations should help. Accelerate the process.
9. Accelerate further and much deeper industry capitalistic cross borders restructuring.
10. Seek for much more bilateral R&D/T works. The results of the High Level Working Group are disappointing.
11. Revisit the possible collaboration/joint acquisition of the Aircrafts Carriers and their aircrafts, as well as the British support into the military usage of Galileo.
12. Have far more exchanges of genuinely fluent in English and French Officers between UK and France, in Whitehall and in Bd St Germain.

All that furiously resembled to what the French proposed but at EU level. With few exceptions, that is true. But that it can be done at much faster pace on bilateral terms than on a multilateral one.

The French and British Forces have fought together on many, many fronts for a century and a half. Twice, have we been tempted to unify our two countries and Forces. Once, in the darkest hours of our defeat in June 1940, as suggested by De Gaulle and Jean Monnet, and supported by Winston Churchill. And, a second time, just after the 1956 Suez affair, when the project of an Anglo-French Union was resurrected by the French Premier Guy Mollet.

In both cases the Union was proposed under considerable pressure, and that is probably one of the reasons why it didn't work. Fortunately, the situation is quite different today. Nor can or should any such thing as an Anglo-French Union be envisaged. It would be a dangerous historical nonsense to form such a sub circle within the EU.

Still, if the two countries intend to continue to play a role on the global stage, either indirectly, as sponsors of regional forces for regional settlements, or directly as UN, NATO or as EU leading actors, they have barely any choice but to make an Anglo-French Military Power a reality. The sooner the better.