

# FRANCE'S NATO REINTEGRATION

Fresh Views with the Sarkozy Presidency?

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Edited by Alexis Crow



Royal United Services Institute

Richard Lounsbery Foundation

OCCASIONAL PAPER

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The views expressed in this paper are the authors' own, and do not necessarily reflect those of RUSI. Comments pertaining to this report are invited and should be forwarded to: Alastair Cameron, Head – European Security Programme, Royal United Services Institute, Whitehall, London, SW1A 2ET, United Kingdom, or via email to [alastairc@rusi.org](mailto:alastairc@rusi.org).

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## Foreword

The genesis for this report stems from discussions held a year ago in Paris when the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, in partnership with the Association France-Amériques and with the support of the Richard Lounsbery Foundation, co-hosted a conference entitled 'France, the EU and NATO: Fresh Views with the Sarkozy Presidency?'.

Discussions focused at the time on France's potential return within the NATO Integrated Military Command Structure, as well as President Nicolas Sarkozy's perspectives on France's role within the Alliance. The event provided an early opportunity to identify the substance behind the French President's proposals and consider the extent to which these were truly reflective of a wider strategic revision of France's military and foreign affairs.

One year on, a French return to NATO at the Alliance's Sixtieth anniversary seems to many observers to be a foregone conclusion, yet little has been made regarding post-summit arrangements. Having seen the release of France's Defence and National Security White Paper, witnessed France's commitment to further support ISAF operations at the NATO Bucharest Summit, as well as taken the measure of France's six-month Presidency of the European Union over the course of 2008, this report is intended to discuss some of these themes, as well as mark the evolution of the reintegration debate. As France draws closer to outlining the terms of its full reintegration, the report addresses both the current nature of France's participation and the expected benefits of a full return to NATO in order to ensure a successful French reintegration at the Alliance's sixtieth anniversary at Strasbourg/Kehl in April 2009.

Held in February 2008, the Paris conference brought together academics and officials from

France, the UK and the United States, as well as senior foreign policy experts and military officers from NATO and European Union.

Speakers included:

- **Lieutenant General David Leakey** (Director General of the EU Military Staff)
- **Bruce Weinrod** (US Secretary of Defense Representative, Europe and Defense Advisor to the US Mission to NATO)
- **Robert Walter MP** (President of the European Security and Defence Assembly and UK Member of Parliament)
- **Michel Miraillet** (Director of the Délégation aux Affaires Stratégiques, French Ministère de la Défense)
- **Jonathan Eyal** (Director, International Security Studies, RUSI)
- **Guillaume Schlumberger** (then Director of the Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique)
- **Andrew Mathewson** (Director of Policy for International Organisations, UK MoD)
- **Jean Bétermier** (President of the Section Sécurité Défense, France-Amériques)
- **HE Richard Duqué** (Permanent Representative of France to the North Atlantic Council, NATO)
- **HE Mr Jacques Andréani** (former Ambassador of France to the United States of America and President of the United States section of France-Amériques)
- **Sir Paul Lever** (former Ambassador of the United Kingdom to Germany and Chairman of the Royal United Services Institute).

## Assessing France's Current and Future Role within NATO

Alastair Cameron

France's relationship with NATO has long been shaped by the country's defence of its conception of national sovereignty, yet a review of the country's role within the Alliance reveals a more dynamic and complex story.

France has indeed been a significant strategic, political, and financial contributor to NATO in the last few decades with 3,000 troops currently under NATO command in Kosovo and Afghanistan, and France among the five leading troop contributors to NATO operations. In monetary terms, France is the third largest contributor to the common budgets funding Alliance operations, while France also plays an active role in NATO exercises, supporting the rotations of the NATO Response Force (providing 13 per cent of the manpower of the NRF); and in September 2007, France took command of the 16,000 KFOR troops operating in Kosovo. France's perceived lack of engagement in the Alliance is thus outdated, and it is an unsung story which French political, military, and diplomatic officials have been keen to portray more effectively to the rest of the transatlantic community, as much as to their own voting publics.

Part of the complexity is that despite France having been a founding member of NATO in 1949, President De Gaulle withdrew his country from the Alliance's integrated military structure in 1966. Chief amongst the reasons explaining this step was France's refusal to integrate its air defences within the NATO system and its opposition to the positioning of nuclear missile launch sites in France. At the time, France was busy developing its own independent nuclear deterrent and opposed the very concept of NATO's graduated response doctrine. The doctrine assumed that an escalating conventional military conflict would precede a nuclear

one, with mainland Europe becoming a giant battlefield. Disputing this doctrine, France declared itself in favour of employing early and dissuasive use of its own independent nuclear deterrent in order to snuff a new World War in the bud.

General De Gaulle's decision was intended to uphold France's strategic autonomy vis-à-vis the superpower status of the United States, with the withdrawal from NATO's integrated military command structure expected to reflect the full strategic independence of France. Within the context of the Cold War, his ambition was to represent a 'third voice' between the two antagonistic US and Soviet blocs. The move effectively dissociated France from the rest of the Alliance, without completely removing the country from its political structures, nor the collective security guarantee of Article V. Serving the particular interests of France at the time, De Gaulle initiated a policy shift that would then become a long-standing tenet of French defence and foreign policy – known after him as Gaullism – which stated there would be no possible compromise when it came to upholding France's national sovereignty.

### *Fresh Perspectives with the Sarkozy Presidency?*

General de Gaulle's decision in 1966 was not a historical anomaly, particular to a certain time and place, but rather a declaration of independence from what France interpreted as foreign pressure. While France's attitude toward NATO in 1966 and onwards may have been shaped by concerns over national sovereignty, the contemporary strategic environment however demands attention elsewhere.

The realities of transnational threats and globalised risks mean that individual states, such as France, should co-operate more in terms of security and defence if they are to effectively tackle global strategic challenges. A better relationship between France and NATO therefore reflects France's interests in the modern world.

Albeit with a new Atlanticist spin, President Sarkozy's actions constitute a continuation of former government policy. France's return to NATO's integrated military command structure is indeed more of an evolution, than a revolution in French strategic thinking. France's rapprochement to NATO is thus not a new policy of the Sarkozy team, with President Jacques Chirac having already initiated such moves in 1996. Negotiations fell short at the time as a result of US objections to the specific conditions sought by France in terms of command post allocations. Contrary to President Chirac, Nicolas Sarkozy was originally careful not to name an individual price for his current rapprochement other than broad developments in the field of European defence capabilities, a priority pursued tenaciously during the French EU Presidency which ended in December 2008.

France's policy towards NATO is thus not 'fixed', but is dynamic and evolving. Its choice to reintegrate NATO's integrated military command structure reflecting a transformed security context, one in which multilateral security arrangements are best suited to cope with evolving security environments.

More than a diplomatic exercise, the decision whether or not to fully reintegrate NATO reflects a modernisation of France's foreign policy objectives. As part of a wider strategic revision, Sarkozy is in fact progressively reshaping France's strategic outlook:

- The new Defence and National Security White Paper for instance, redefines France's military reform agenda over the next 15 years, and brings it in line with re-assessments regarding France's security and operational doctrine.
- The creation of a Defence and National Security Council (Conseil de Sécurité Nationale) restructures France's security and defence apparatus, along with a complete reorganisation of France's intelligence and security service community.

- The country's geo-strategic posture is being updated finally, with the relocation of foreign military bases along an 'arc of crisis from the Atlantic to the Sea of Oman and Indian Ocean', as well as the redrawing of France's national military basing structure.

*How will French Reintegration be Perceived within the Alliance?*

In tone at least, President Nicolas Sarkozy has articulated a very different perspective on transatlantic issues from that of his predecessors, with President Sarkozy's course of action standing for instance in stark contrast to that of President Chirac. While his predecessor gained much domestic – as well as international – political capital from opposing what many interpreted as unbound US hegemony at the time of the Iraq crisis in 2003, Sarkozy has largely gone about rebuilding bridges with the United States since his election in 2007. Through careful manoeuvring and timely demonstrations of France's good intentions towards the Alliance, President Sarkozy has won public support from the United States towards French reintegration. Emerging reports in the press since February 2009, confirmed within diplomatic circles, suggest that discussions between General James Jones, President Obama's new National Security Advisor, and Jean-David Lévitte, Diplomatic Advisor to President Sarkozy and Head of the newly created Conseil de Sécurité Nationale, are close to bearing fruit with Elysée officials hoping to secure the appointment of a French general at the head of Allied Command Transformation (ACT) and a regional NATO Response Force (NRF) command based in Lisbon after the next Summit.

With anti-Americanism rife in much of the French political elite, as well as within public opinion throughout the Bush years, it's important not to underestimate how much the French President has set about reshaping old mindsets in France. Going against much of the entrenched view from both left and right of the political spectrum, President Sarkozy's shift of

policy has brought him little domestic advantage and even today carries some political risk. President Sarkozy has yet explicitly rejected and for now turned the tide on a French foreign policy in any way shaped by anti-Americanism. Significantly, President Sarkozy has also reaffirmed the principle – until recently questioned by his predecessor in favour of a multi-polar world representing checks and balances on a US superpower – that France considers itself wholeheartedly as part of the ‘Western’ sphere.

The general tendency amongst official commentators has nonetheless been to consider France rejoining NATO’s integrated military command simply as a question of sovereign choice. While certainly a prerogative of the French Government to make the decision, the debate in reality encompasses a much wider spectrum; this attitude ultimately misses the point of what France is actually calling for from its Allies. It is not France’s renewed participation in the two remaining sub-committees it left in 1966 (the Defence Planning Committee and Nuclear Planning Committee) which is at stake here, but rather an opportunity to reaffirm the nature and strength of the Transatlantic community.

On balance, Allies have so far failed to acknowledge this ‘grand bargain’ and demonstrated only positive, yet measured, reactions to such a new articulation of French foreign policy. Encouraged by the opportunities that greater French participation in the Alliance would bring, all remain sceptical however as to what France might expect in return. France’s general perception as a NATO outsider – as well as its past practice of using its political influence within the North Atlantic Council (NAC) to constrain a number of NATO’s operations – has left a lasting feeling on the part of some member states that France will continue to assert its own national security agenda without necessarily contributing further to the Alliance’s structures and operations.

Hopeful that such a paradigm shift would have received more encouraging support from its NATO Allies, France has been disappointed by the lukewarm reaction given most notably by the United Kingdom. With virtually no public discussion having occurred in the UK regarding France’s expected reintegration, the ‘classe diplomatique’ has no doubt been reluctant to discuss it openly during the French Presidency of the EU for fear that it would reopen scars over Europe within the domestic press. Reservations on what France actually means when it talks of rejoining NATO reflects ultimately a certain ‘wait and see’ attitude, as much as the need to cater for national sensibilities. The fact that reintegration is tied to vague developments in the European Defence arena unwittingly places British officials on a back footing, with sensitivities regarding the European security debate in the UK tantamount to those represented by the Atlantic defence debate in France.

With the euro-limelight now having shifted away from France, with the transfer of the EU Presidency to the Czech Republic in January 2009, current public reservations towards France’s NATO initiative should however be dropped. This could indeed be potentially damaging in the short term with NATO and Government officials failing to offer President Sarkozy any substantial gains for his NATO rapprochement.

In an effort to reassure French parliamentarians in February 2009, NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer was thus invited by President Sarkozy to speak before the defence and foreign affairs commissions of the Assemblée Nationale to confirm that France’s return to the NATO command structures would neither threaten France’s national sovereignty nor its freedom to decide on whether it should engage French troops in allied operations. As one gets closer to the April summit, political and strategic debates in France focus especially on this topic, raising the issue as to whether or not President Sarkozy enjoys the support of his

own majority, let alone others in the political class, for what many in France see as a needless rift with the spirit of Gaullism.

More importantly than just offering the French President a helping hand to placate his domestic detractors, such a strategic opportunity as this should not be missed. NATO allies as a whole are indeed not engaging sufficiently in the kind of intellectual and practical response required in order to take full advantage of French proposals.

*What will France's Reintegration Look Like?*

Over a year since initial suppositions have been made by the French President, the jury is still out as to what exactly France's return to NATO would entail. Will France accordingly boost its contributions to Alliance operations? Will it invest in NATO transformation more substantially, by expressing a NATO-friendly yet Eurocentric agenda?

The highly contentious problem of burden-sharing in Afghanistan highlights some of these issues, with NATO allies having repeatedly called for more troops to be sent to support ISAF operations. Using this issue at the Bucharest Summit to demonstrate France's renewed Atlanticist vigour, President Sarkozy agreed to step up France's commitment to ISAF with the dispatch of an extra 700 French troops to Afghanistan. Such a move set a positive example for other ISAF mission partners to follow, although few have, and is likely to be pressed further by the US President this April when he asks Europeans to strengthen their efforts despite adversity on the ground.

As NATO fast approaches its sixtieth anniversary, what would France's reintegration to the military command structure involve? In terms of having equal weight, would France seek to contribute equivalent personnel to the various military commands? The UK and Germany for instance have much larger numbers of staff and senior leadership positions at NATO Headquarters.

Noting the 54,000 Armed Forces personnel cuts outlined in the new French White Paper, the number of available French commanders is likely to go down rather than up. Contributing the same amount thus seems unviable and instead, France envisages its return ultimately under the aegis of a wider NATO transformation. Much like the view it takes on its own Ministry of Defence, France perceives NATO HQ to be a top heavy institution, with the number of staff operating civilian tasks disproportionately to those available to perform military duties. Rather than match the number of UK or German officers therefore, the presumption would be that the overall number should instead decrease, alleviating the requirement to find scores of new officers.

Allied command positions going to French generals such as ACT or Lisbon would represent a substantial strategic achievement for France in exchange for Sarkozy's efforts. Yet neither are these secured appointments – in that they may still be tributary to the agreement of allied nations – neither do they address French political disenchantment in terms of NATO reintegration being perceived as a US alignment.

France's full reintegration has not been a rushed affair until now; and with the country undoubtedly holding certain expectations, an Allied commitment to NATO reform appears to be a pre-condition for France's reintegration. What would be the potential barriers to French demands, and at what price can these be bought? This will depend in part on the response given to France by Allies, the changing strategic context and the readiness within the Alliance to offer certain counterparts. If carried out successfully, France's reintegration should constitute an important landmark in the reform process of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

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## Behind the Politics of France's Relationship to NATO

Jean-Pierre Maulny

On 27 August 2007, before the fifteenth ambassadors' conference, French President of the Republic Nicolas Sarkozy evoked the necessity of rethinking the relationship between France and NATO, thereby reopening the debate concerning France's reintegration into NATO's military structure. From a foreign perspective, France's status when it comes to NATO can seem anachronistic, even esoteric. Why does France insist on maintaining its own specificity towards this organisation? This attitude is often identified as distrust towards the United States, and can make reassuring words uttered in France concerning the compatibility of the European defence project and NATO seem doubtful. This often leads to irritation with the French attitude – a critical, almost grumpy attitude – which sees us opposing a good number of projects concerning the evolution of the Atlantic Alliance.

Finally, the last critique: this distance towards the Atlantic Alliance would be detrimental to the dialogue between NATO and the EU. So what is going on? Why does France behave like an implacable Gaul resisting the Roman Empire – much like the comic strip-inspired Asterix – in its interactions with the Alliance? In fact, one cannot understand France's specificity without revisiting the origins of the French withdrawal from the military structure and without taking into account the difficult, albeit not necessarily conflicting, relationship between France and the United States.

France withdrew from NATO's integrated military structure on 7 March 1966 while remaining a member of the Atlantic Alliance. At this time, facing the strategic nuclear balance between the United States and the USSR, the Americans looked to escape Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), by developing

the strategy of graduated response. Applied to Europe, it meant that in order to avoid a strategic nuclear exchange between the US and the USSR, the Americans accepted that a conflict involving tactical nuclear weapons could unfold in Central Europe. The strategic concept behind French nuclear deterrence was diametrically opposed as it envisaged using nuclear weapons from the very beginning of a conflict with the USSR, in order to stop if possible a massive conventional attack. As a result France felt that it was necessary to leave the committee governing NATO's nuclear plans, and as NATO's defence concept coupled the employment of conventional forces with nuclear forces, it was equally necessary for France to withdraw entirely from the permanent military structure.

Since the end of the Cold War, the question of France's relationship with NATO has come up several times. During the same period however, France has also favoured the construction of European defence, which it sees as a constituent element of European policy, the foundations of which have been in place since the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. France's European partners believe that collective security, because of the presence of the United States, should continue to be a matter for the Atlantic Alliance and what was to become the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) should confine itself to crisis management, or what are called the 'Petersberg missions'.

France's first attempt to return to NATO's integrated military structure took place between 1995 and 1997 at the initiative of President Jacques Chirac. This attempt was a failure however when faced with the American refusal to grant the French NATO's South Regional Command in Naples. The episode was followed by the Saint Malo declaration, which resulted in a clear acceleration in the construction of European defence. From December 1998 through December 2003, the European Union thus equipped itself

with autonomous capacities for conducting military operations through the creation of security and policy-making authorities, as well as military structures, and elaborated its own European security concept. Since 1 January 2003, nineteen military and civilian-military operations have been led within the ESDP framework. Sometimes these operations are led by operational planning using NATO's chain of command, thanks to a mechanism called 'Berlin plus' (which are, militarily speaking, the most important operations).

Similarly, since 1998 France has progressively reinvested itself in NATO without reintegrating fully into the organisation. This reinvestment was due primarily to the fact that exterior military operations multiplied during the post-Cold War period, and France was thus brought to participate in NATO-led operations due to the role it wanted to play on the international scene. The necessity for 'interoperability' meanwhile imposed even further rapprochement. French political resistance to NATO seemed therefore to present less of an interest.

Today, France is present in a large number of NATO structures, with two exceptions: the nuclear planning group and the committee for defence planning, which is responsible for operational and strategic planning (which is to say capacity planning for intervention-type scenarios). Finally, France does not participate in the permanent command chain, which constitutes the bulk of the integrated military structure. On the other hand, France has actively participated in the Allied Command Transformation, created during the 2002 Prague Summit and has supplied troops to the NATO Response Force (NRF), which functions on the basis of a rotation of standby forces. This investment means that France represents the third largest contributor of NATO forces and the fourth largest financial contributor.

The question of France's status within NATO

has been posed explicitly in the White Paper on Defence and National Security, whose appointed committee presented its work to the President of the Republic in June 2008. Related to this question are many others however: that of the future of NATO, that of the future of European Security and Defence Policy, that of the relations between the EU and NATO, and finally the question of how the status of France in NATO relates to all the issues above.

It is today officially proclaimed that there is no longer any competition between NATO and the EU. One asserts in fact that the more relevant question is that of a necessary co-operation in the field. This is true in Afghanistan, with the EU police force deployed in Kabul, but also in Kosovo with regards to the European Union's police assistance mission and NATO's KFOR operation. Taking into account these necessities, France made several proposals to its NATO partners in the autumn of 2007, so as to reinforce the links between the EU and NATO. This initiative would tend to demonstrate that France no longer wants to block NATO, for which it had so often been criticised.

This does not keep a certain number of questions from being put forward concerning the future of European defence and NATO:

Some consider that the long-term objective of the European Union is to create a system of common defence, which means that the EU would one day be competent in matters of collective security. Even if this project does not seem credible today in military terms, it is in some ways inscribed in the 'genes' of the European Union, which is a political construction. Considering that it is moving in such a direction, this implies that the EU should not confine itself to security missions that are predominantly civilian, despite this seeming to be more and more the case. Considering equally that some 'necessary duplication' with NATO is required if one wants more rationality and

efficiency within EU operations, this implies the creation of an operational planning cell, even if it is to be slight.

Do we consider NATO as a sort of global security agent or do we consider Article V as the heart of the Atlantic Alliance? Whether one favours one or the other, the policies in terms of enlargement will not be the same and the non-military means to which NATO can turn will not be the same either. The United States, as a member of NATO, with its imposing military weight, and with its military budget representing 60 per cent of the military expenses of all other NATO countries combined, has a strong impact on the global image of NATO. For questions of political opportunity, it is without any doubt necessary in certain cases to turn to the EU instead of NATO, even if the operations will be predominately civil or predominantly military.

Today, it is easy to see that the debate taking place in France concerning the return to NATO is political rather than technical. Since 1966, not a single French political party has thought that the particular status of France towards the Atlantic Alliance has handicapped the organisation in any way, a critique that is yet commonly made in other European countries. In fact, since 1967, the Ailleret-Lemnizer agreements have structured contacts between major states in the event of a conflict in Central Europe. Moreover, throughout the Cold War, France was on the side of the Atlantic Alliance and no one should forget François Mitterrand's speech in the Bundestag supporting the deployment of Pershing II and cruise missiles during the Euromissiles affair.

This is a political debate once: the question concerning France's influence at the heart of NATO. For some, a return of France to NATO would allow our country to have a larger influence within the organisation. For others, this argument is of negligible value, and to this end they recall the 1999 Kosovo operation

where France, in spite of its status, defined the limits of the NATO air strike by refusing to target the bridges of the Danube and the ports of Montenegro.

This is a political debate twice: the rising distrust of European partners towards ESDP, as a result of our status towards the Atlantic Alliance. This argument carries evidently more weight because France cannot hope to create a European defence alone, and it must convince its European partners. French politicians are very sensitive to this argument, even though they themselves cannot do much to change the situation.

This is a political debate third and foremost: What would be the political interpretation of a French return to NATO? This is an important argument that should not be neglected and which concerns the historical culture of the French people. The exit from NATO was undertaken in 1966 so as to allow a certain level of autonomy in French politics where it concerned the United States. The return to the organisation might be perceived as an alignment with American politics, made all the more complicated by recent US-led coalition failures in Iraq. This is ultimately the argument of former French Minister of Foreign Affairs Hubert Védrine, who guarded President Sarkozy against a non-negotiated return to NATO in the very early days of his presidency.

Today, the debate is well underway in France concerning the question of reintegration. Many people consider this to be a political question, instead of thinking of it as an issue which would allow for better efficiency within the Alliance. Reinforcing the political role of the organisation as a result of French reintegration would moreover not necessarily be welcome by some Frenchmen. In reality, there is without a doubt consensus in France, that with or without NATO, the most important issue is the ability to reinforce

European defence capabilities. That is to say, for example, creating the conditions whereby other Allies and partners would accept the creation of an operational planning cell and a permanent chain of command for EU operations. What this would mean more generally is the establishment of an equilibrium, which would be to the profit of the Europeans, and constituting as such a true renovation of NATO. Finally, some would argue that the main difference between those on the right or the left of the political spectrum in France

is that tenets on the right believe that such a change is possible in the current political climate, while those on the left mostly believe that the United States and others will never accept the development of ESDP, and that the political cost of reintegrating would be much greater than the expected benefits.

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