

The future of the French-German axis and its implications for European security and defence

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Introduction

This paper identifies four potential future scenarios for the Franco-German axis and their implications for European security and defence. Based on these scenarios and their drivers, it develops elements of a strategy toolbox to influence developments in a desirable direction.

The Franco-German axis is key to European defence for a number of reasons. In the absence of the leadership of others, it brings sizeable capabilities and industrial capacity to the table. More generally, minilateral cooperation has acquired growing importance inside and outside of the wider frameworks of the European Union and NATO.

Nonetheless, Franco-German defence cooperation has delivered mixed results. Their different strategies lead to divergent policies and outlooks, which trickle down to the areas of military capabilities, industrial projects and operations.

Several developments have triggered renewed attention for the Franco-German axis, mainly the need for Europe to respond to a substantially changing threat environment, the recent political momentum gained by EU and European initiatives proposed by France and Germany, and the declared ambition of both to provide the backbone for future progress on European defence. Progress on policies, capabilities, industries and operations will only be possible, however, if policy



directions change to allow greater convergence or at least increased complementarity between the two.

The four scenarios put a spotlight on potential developments, based on the assumed course that the main drivers take. The bandwidth spans from extrapolation from the status quo, to negative developments, more positive change and up to highly positive developments presented as a European Defence Union. The scenarios therefore demonstrate the tremendous possible damage to European defence that negative developments can cause; but also the fundamental change that would be needed to arrive at a genuine Defence Union.

The scenarios build the basis for and identify examples of strategic options and choices, while also seeking to influence developments with a 2025 time horizon. We point out that the next 12 months will be key for conducting the groundwork, especially in Germany.

In a final step we invite those political actors interested in influencing developments to define in more detail what they would like to achieve or avoid with regard to the Franco-German axis. In the final analysis, this leads to a renewed scenario/strategy cycle, with scenarios shaped and outcomes identified according to clearly defined preferences and estimates.

The Franco-German relationship: difficult but key to European security and defence policy

The idea that Franco-German cooperation will drive European security and defence policy has once again become a fashionable

topic in Europe. The issue has been back since 2015/16 due to four concomitant developments: (1) the decision by the EU and its member states, after the launch of the EU Global Strategy and the decision of the United Kingdom to launch negotiations on leaving the EU, to make security and defence the core area for new steps towards integration; (2) the general deterioration in the security environment; (3) concerns that the election of US President Donald J. Trump has raised about the reliability of US security commitments and the role of the USA more generally; and (4) President of France Emmanuel Macron's own initiatives on strengthening European defence.

Many observers expect the Franco-German duo to play a crucial role in driving European defence forward into a new era. This is mainly for three reasons:

1. Other traditional leaders are reluctant to take the lead. The UK will be tied up with domestic issues for the foreseeable future and has largely retreated from the international stage. Even the rhetorical ambition of a “global Britain” cannot hide domestic problems linked to ‘Brexit’. Poland pretends to be a regional leader, but struggles to deliver and in particular to gain recognition from its partners.
2. France and Germany clearly still represent different groups on European defence. France's security priorities lie in the South and focus on the fight against terrorism – particularly since the 2015 Paris attacks – and on operations. Germany, by contrast, is taking tentative steps in the East and South,

but clearly prefers the classical collective defence challenges of Eastern Europe. If either can succeed in presenting joint projects, they could mobilise a wide group of countries that would find their interests represented.

3. In recent years, traditional cooperation frameworks, be they NATO or the EU, have lost significance as organisational frameworks for defence cooperation. Minilateral frameworks have regained importance as drivers of policy development. Such small groups can serve as the nucleus for larger cooperation groups, or allow a group of countries to progress in certain areas.

Nonetheless, while France and Germany have launched several initiatives since 2015/16, such as on Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the expectation that this constitutes a revival of the Franco-German engine does not lack a certain irony. In the past, the Franco-German duo has not been particularly successful in shaping European security and defence policy. While both governments constantly refer to the bilateral relationship as the vital axis of security and defence policy, and their commitment to European security, they have few common objectives, only a modest capacity for cooperation and little mutual understanding. All this affects their European leadership potential. In fact, the bilateral misunderstandings and different priorities in defence not only damage their own capacity to act, but also threaten the political and military basis of European defence and security politics in NATO and

the EU. The two must clearly decide how they want to take European defence forward. If not, current initiatives are unlikely to deliver.

Bilateral cooperation is currently facing an additional challenge. Since the election of September 2017, Germany has been unable to form a new coalition and is currently being led by a caretaker government. The result is deadlock. President Macron has put his ideas on Europe and defence on the table but, with only a caretaker government in charge, Germany has been unable to take a clear position, and will be unable to do so until a new government is formed. The current permissive muddling through is not a serious answer to French long-term ideas on Europe. Europe will thus have to wait until (hopefully) the spring of 2018 for a new German government to answer the French proposals, launch new bilateral or European initiatives or implement current ones.

Many Symbols, Few Results: The Background to French, German and European Defence

Franco-German defence cooperation and commitment to Europe have an ambivalent track record. A lot has been achieved since the signing of the bilateral Elysée Treaty in 1963, but structural problems and current impediments continue to arouse frustration and prevent such cooperation from becoming fully operational. In fact, both partners still tend to underestimate the scope of their differences – in priorities, strategic culture and domestic pressures. These underestimated differences also explain why the vast friendship structures do not seem to deliver in proportion to the effort put into them.

A long history of close cooperation with mixed results

The bilateral defence cooperation between France and Germany touches on more areas than is generally known: politics, structures and personnel, among other things.¹ Berlin and Paris have established an extensive political network. The highest forum is the Franco-German Defence and Security Council, created in 1988. Its task is to jointly develop concepts, to ensure coordination on European security issues, to improve cooperation among the armed forces and to deepen the cooperation between the defence industries.

This political commitment is translated into numerous personnel exchange programmes; for example, French and German officers accomplish parts of their education and training together. It also translates into bilateral and multilateral military cooperation projects, the best known of which are the 1987 Franco-German Brigade (FGB) and the 2010 European Air Transport Command (EATC).

Nonetheless, the results have often been mixed and while the bilateral network is indeed very dense, it does not seem to be that successful at delivering. First, **defence industrial cooperation** has for the most part been the stepchild of Franco-German defence cooperation. This might be

changing, since the 2015 merger of land warfare equipment producers KMW and NEXTER to become KANT, and the decision in July 2017 to jointly develop a next generation fighter jet.² The difficulties of industrial cooperation are mainly due to stark differences in industrial structure. Whereas small and medium-sized enterprises and family businesses prevail in Germany, in France big state-controlled or state-nurtured firms mould the defence industry landscape. Besides, difficulties result from substantially different perceptions on the role the state occupies in business, with France being rather hands on, and Germany preaching the free market without state intervention.

The second shortfall is that Germany and France hardly ever agree when it comes to **operations**, mainly due to their different strategic cultures and, in turn, different threat analyses. Even when both countries are at the scene of the action (as in Afghanistan or Mali), they tend to engage with different mandates and in different areas. Moreover, the German decision to deploy in support of French missions has more often resulted from a sense of obligation to its close ally, rather than in genuine support of the French security narrative behind an operation. Debates such as that in NATO on whether priority should be given to collective defence in the East or anti-terrorism and stabilisation commitments in the South reflect existing differences. (Germany is more in favour of

¹ Major, C. and Mölling, C. (2015). Zwischen Krisen und Verantwortung: eine erste Bilanz der neuen deutschen Verteidigungspolitik, Note du Cerfa, no. 127, Institut Français des Relations internationales, Paris. Retrieved from <https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ndc_127_major_molling_de.pdf>.

² Beschlüsse des Deutsch-Französischen Verteidigungs- und Sicherheitsrates. (Juli 2017). Retrieved from <https://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/_Anlagen/2017/07/2017-07-13-abschlusserklaerung-d-f-ministerrat.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=4>. Major, C. and Mölling, C. (2017). A Revolution for Europe's Defense Industry. DGAP Standpunkt. Retrieved from <<https://dgap.org/en/article/getFullPDF/29848>>.

the former and France the latter.) These differences have been partially reconciled by the French contribution to the German-led NATO EFP battalion in Lithuania, and the German contribution to the anti-Islamic State group (IS) coalition and the operation in the Sahel, but some observers still see Germany's current strong commitment to NATO's deterrence and defence measures in the East a way to avoid real combat in the South. In turn, France's slow decision to contribute to the deterrence and defence measures on NATO's Eastern flank and its priority for the South match the prejudice that France only cares about Africa.

The different strategic cultures also affect defence **policies**, particularly in the areas of nuclear weapons, EU defence integration and the overall role the countries are seeking in international security and defence. When it comes to military matters, Paris and Berlin still display very different mindsets.

Although German security and defence policy became more active in the legislative session that just ended, it remains a long way from French strategic culture. Since 2014, Germany has accepted that its dominant position in Europe, particularly in economic terms, comes with more responsibilities in the security realm. It recognises that as a central European power, dependent on global networks and a rules-based global order, it should be ready to do more for the security and stability that others have been providing for decades and

from which the country has benefited greatly.³

Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the crisis in Ukraine pushed Germany to put its rhetoric into action. What followed was a remarkable political commitment, such as in the Minsk accords and Normandy format aimed at ending the fighting in Ukraine. Berlin then substantially shaped the political and military course of NATO's return to territorial defence, which the organisation agreed at its 2014 Wales summit. Change is also visible in Germany's military missions: Berlin now participates in operations more often, in different forms and more offensively. Within a short timeframe, Berlin has crossed some traditional red lines, shifting the frame of reference for military deployments.

However, this new leadership seems to be more reactive than proactive. Overall, Germany has been most active when partners or external events have created the necessary pressure, such as during the crisis in Ukraine, which forced Berlin to take on diplomatic and military leadership. In other cases, such as the fight against IS, Germany only became active when the crisis became a domestic issue, for instance, as refugee flows to Europe increased, or when it was critical to the interests of an important partner – for example, following the November 2015 Paris attacks. Nonetheless, compared to France, Germany has a far more Eurocentric view, with fewer

³ Major, C. (2017). Germany, the (not so) timid leader. In: Strategic Europe, Carnegie Europe. Retrieved from <<http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/67896>>.

Major, C. and Mölling, C. (2015). Zwischen Krisen und Verantwortung: eine erste Bilanz der neuen deutschen

Verteidigungspolitik, Note du Cerfa, no. 127, Institut Français des Relations Internationales, Paris. Retrieved from <https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ndc_127_major_molling_de.pdf>.

ambitions for an international role, and always sees its role as embedded in multilateral frameworks.

In contrast, France still views itself as a mid-sized power with active defence-related engagement, which it claims it should be able to carry out, to a certain extent, on its own. Paris clearly claims an understanding of security policy with a global reach. France defends the concept of national strategic autonomy and sovereignty, which its national nuclear weapons guarantee. Nonetheless, since Macron took office, Paris has also shown a greater willingness to engage in cooperation and in establishing defence cooperation in Europe in pragmatic ways, thereby recognising that national sovereignty is in reality limited and has to be redefined at the European level.⁴ As a result, France is developing the concept of European sovereignty, which supports and enables national endeavours.⁵ In sum, in European defence cooperation, the French doctrine of strategic autonomy meets the more cautious German narrative of ‘taking more responsibility’ for international security.

These differences also affect the realm of **capabilities**. Converging capability needs would pave the way for joint procurement, but France is one of the militarily most active European states, with one of the biggest defence budgets in Europe – which President Macron promised to increase to 2 per cent of GDP by 2025. French capabilities are mostly geared to what France perceives as its highest priority:

defence and counterterrorism operations in Africa, such as operation Barkhane in the Sahel. In contrast, Germany has reorganised its Armed Forces since the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 with a clear focus on collective defence and deterrence – entailing a notable capability reorientation in terms of heavy equipment. This is a clear shift from the previous German focus on crisis management, which was adopted as a consequence of the operations in the Balkans and Afghanistan. While the German Armed Forces still aim to be ready to act in various scenarios, the 2016 White Book on defence clearly reflects the return of collective defence as the main ambition underlying the preparedness of the armed forces.

Recent hopes

Nonetheless, in spite of these considerable differences, recent developments nurture the hope that Paris and Berlin can reconcile their views and drive Europe forward. The power of the Franco-German duo has never been in the convergence of ideas, but rather in the ability to find compromises in partly opposing positions, which have then allowed other European states to buy in. Since 2015, France and Germany have been joining forces to achieve progress on European defence and launched a number of initiatives together, both inside the EU and beyond.

In terms of **policies** inside the EU, both countries supported PESCO, the European Defence Fund (EDF) and the Common

⁴ Major, C. and Mölling, C. (2017). Pragmatic and European: France sets new goals for a European defence policy. DGAP Standpunkt Nr. 14, Oktober 2017. Retrieved from <<https://dgap.org/en/article/getFullPDF/30100>>.

⁵ Revue stratégique de défense et de sécurité nationale, Paris, 2017. Retrieved from <<http://www.defense.gouv.fr/dgris/politique-de-defense/revue-strategique/revue-strategique>>.

Annual Review on Defence (CARD), which led to the adoption of these instruments in 2017. There is valid criticism that the compromise between Paris, calling for ambitious and exclusive cooperation, and Berlin, pledging an inclusive and integrationist model, watered down the initiatives. However, they were clearly able to drag the other EU member states on board to implement PESCO, which had not happened since the Lisbon Treaty first mentioned the possibility of such cooperation.

Nonetheless, the French focus on operations has led to initiatives that focus more on pragmatic results than institutional development of the EU. One example is the European Intervention Initiative (EII), which should enable EU member states that are willing and able to do so to act militarily, independently of the existing institutional frameworks of the EU or NATO. The objective is operational readiness, not EU integration on defence (as envisaged by PESCO and so on).⁶

With regard to **industries**, the 2015 decision to merge the French and German land-warfare systems suppliers KMW and Nexter systems appears to be a break with

the failed cooperation pattern of the past.⁷ This was followed in July 2017 by another landmark decision, when President Macron and Chancellor Angela Merkel took the Franco-German defence partnership to a new level with the bombshell announcement that they would jointly develop the next generation European fighter aircraft. This is the biggest armament project imaginable in Europe at the moment. The new jet is supposed to replace the current jets of both countries in the long term and the project will be open to the participation of other, especially European, countries.⁸ Moreover, it would underpin the political ambition of the EU to achieve strategic autonomy in the industrial realm too.

Overall, German solidarity with French security concerns has increased, and is also visible in **operations**. When Paris decided, in the aftermath of the November 2015 attacks, to invoke article 42.7 of the Treaty on European Union, Berlin quickly decided to support France, not least in its anti-IS mission. Later on, the two countries joined forces on the G5 Sahel initiative.⁹ They also cooperated on NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence Battalions (EFP), which Germany

⁶ Major, C. and Mölling, C. (2017). France Moves from EU Defense to European Defense. DGAP Standpunkt. Retrieved from <<https://dgap.org/en/article/getFullPDF/30276>>.

⁷ Wiegold, T. (2015). Deutschland und Frankreich stützen Zusammengehen der Panzer-Hersteller beider Länder. Retrieved from <<http://augengeradeaus.net/2015/12/deutschland-und-frankreich-stuetzen-zusammengehen-der-panzer-hersteller-beider-laender/>>.

⁸ Gemeinsame Erklärung zum Deutsch-Französischen Ministerrat, Paris, 13 Juli 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/_Anlagen/2017/07/2017-07-13-abschlusserklaerung-d-f-ministerrat.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=4>.

Major, C. and Mölling, C. (2017). A Revolution for Europe's Defense Industry. Paris and Berlin want to jointly develop a European fighter jet. In: DGAP Standpunkt 7. Retrieved from <<https://dgap.org/en/article/getFullPDF/29848>>.

⁹ Tull, D. (2017). Mali, the G5 and Security Sector Assistance. Political Obstacles to Effective Cooperation, SWP Comments 2017/C 52, December 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2017C5_2_tll.pdf>.

leads in Lithuania and to which France contributes.

Concrete new projects in the area of current **capabilities** remain rare. Few are mentioned in the Franco-German Declaration of 2017. In the area of transport current needs have led to a joint air transport wing operated by the two air forces. Within NATO, France and Germany want to continue to deliver jointly to NATO's EFP.

Potential areas of progress: Industry, Capabilities, Operations and Policies

Franco-German cooperation on security and defence could progress in four areas: industry, capabilities, operations and policies. The drivers of these four areas are internal (European) and external, such as the future role of the USA and the threat environment.

Industry and exports: Cooperation must not only overcome a policy framework that focuses primarily on the national level, but also involve industrial partners from both sides. Exports are the single most important and controversial issue, with Germany having a far stricter policy than France. The defence industry needs access to the global market and production capacities to deliver world class products, but also to refinance the industry.

Capabilities: Converging capability needs to pave the way for pooling and sharing in many areas, from training to maintenance via operations.

Operations: Operations are a palpable expression of political will and military capability. Joint operations demonstrate a willingness to share the risk and burden of security, and convergence over means and ends.

Policy areas: are those international and domestic policies linked to security policy aims and means, institutions and foreign policy.

Table 1: Key drivers of the future Franco-German axis in Defence

Key drivers of a future Franco-German axis in Defence	Impact (low to high)	Uncertainty (low to high)	Current policy direction Similar direction in Germany and France?
Defence industry			
Defence industrial policy	High	Low	Contradiction
Defence exports	high	Low	Contradiction
Capability			
Shared needs	Medium- high	Medium	Partial convergence
Geostrategic developments			
Threat environment	High	High	Partial convergence
Role of the United States in European Security	High	High	Partial convergence
Brexit	Medium	Medium	Partial convergence
Common policies and institutions			
Strategic coherence / convergence / Culture	Medium	Low	All tendencies can be found convergence complementarity, contradiction
Development of a coherent CSDP	Medium	Low	Partial convergence; part contradiction
Domestic politics: priority of defence among other topics	High	Low	Contradiction
European integration	High	Medium	Partial convergence; part contradiction
NATO + EU + Multinational: Which framework to act in?	Medium	Low	Partial convergence; part contradiction
Reciprocity in operational and deterrence engagements	Medium	Medium	Partial convergence; part contradiction

Policy directions and cooperation

The alignment of Franco-German positions can range from convergence to complementarity, contradiction and competition. As the Franco-German axis becomes more important, more substantial cooperation can take place. This report assumes that cooperation can take place when either **convergence** or **complementarity** of interests exists.

Table 1 (above) links the policy areas and the drivers we have identified. It also shows that the interests and policy substance in many areas between Germany and France are fairly divergent. This may be a priori an indicator of areas where progress is more likely.

Future of the axis: Scenarios for 2025

Scenario 1 – Weak and hollow axis: Nothing more than political

It is 2023 - Macron and (still) Merkel meet to mark the 60th anniversary of the Elysée Treaty. They leave after five minutes, Merkel to Brussels, Macron to Djibouti. Their respective ministers issue declarations on the significant progress that all the Franco-German working groups have made on thematic and horizontal issues. French and German counterparts are convinced that these intense exchanges of views will finally lead to enhanced capabilities through joint projects based on common military requirements and the appropriate participation of industry, from which not only the Franco-German axis but also European partners will profit. While the two countries have signed a series of significant bilateral declarations in recent years and identified concrete project

proposals in the industrial realm (the future fighter jet and next generation main battle tank), the essentially different nature of the German and French defence cultures and the national interests of spoilers in Berlin and Paris work together to ensure that the Franco-German axis remains unchanged, and that proposals do not yield any meaningful projects.

Policies: Mutual goodwill, but essentially different cultures dominate

The security relationship remains superficial, which leaves the French-German defence axis strong on paper but weak when it comes to joint policy and action. The new German governments in 2018 and 2021 renew political declarations on closer Franco-German security and defence cooperation, but this results in very limited implementation. In this scenario, President Macron will push for France and Germany to adopt a common stance on a European strategic outlook – but this will hardly move beyond a half-hearted attempt to exchange views on threat perceptions. Eventually, persistently contrasting strategic cultures will block meaningful convergence on security policy.

Industry: Searching for dialogue but achieving little

Both governments insist that closer cooperation between their defence industries is a central goal. At the political level, they announced multiple bilateral armament projects at the French-German Ministerial Council meeting in July 2017, and the 2017 French *Revue Strategique* emphasised the necessity of cooperation.

In addition, both sides have realised that they must address the stark industrial differences between their two countries. In this scenario, a multi-level dialogue brings both governments and their respective defence industries to the table to discuss central points of contention, most notably arms exports. This dialogue leaves both sides better informed but unwilling to enter formats of closer cooperation. Defining what types of arms export are acceptable to both countries, for example, remains a fundamental obstacle.

In this scenario, the desire for political symbolism – both as a confirmation of close Franco-German partnership, and as a flagship project of the EDF – motivates France and Germany to initiate a joint armaments project in the land forces domain (such as developing ‘le Leo’). The development of a European drone fleet remains a possibility.

While it would have had great symbolic value to put the Franco-German project to

develop a next generation fighter jet under the EDF, both countries abstain from doing so because of their fear of interference from the European Commission. They hence opt for a multinational approach involving other nations such as Spain and Sweden, but along classical cost-share/work-share lines. Here the negotiations become very complicated as the diverging interests of the user nations and the long timelines reduce the pressure to generate palpable results.

Capabilities: some smaller projects might follow

A new wave of pooling and sharing of capabilities becomes possible – heavy lift helicopters and ground-based air defence – but the cyber domain is also a growing option as Germany is enhancing its capabilities. More ambitious projects such as combined forces, however, are left out. France aims to pursue this with the UK, Spain and Italy on the basis of the Lancaster House treaties and the EII. Moreover, the pooling and sharing comes with huge

Scenario 1: Impact on European Defence

The political momentum and enthusiasm for defence initiatives within the EU framework is currently at its highest point – the launch of PESCO, CARD and the EDF appear to reassure Europeans that concrete steps are being taken. However, a clear discrepancy exists between rhetoric and actual willingness to promote convergence in the areas of industry, capabilities, operations and policies. The overarching trend in European defence is one in which broad consensus backs weak institutions and commitments, which are blatantly lacking in capability.

As Germany and France focus on their capability pet project, the duo fails to take a European lead on the bigger issues of standardisation and the interoperability of European weapon systems. Without Franco-German leadership in this domain, the cycle of capability planning through the instruments of PESCO, CARD and the EDF is neglected. PESCO remains a political forum for defence cooperation and some of the 17 projects are successfully implemented – but the format remains short of a significant contribution to European Security.

Rather than pushing for a substantive PESCO, Germany and France focus on their separate initiatives: the Framework Nation Concept and the European Intervention Initiative. European partners are increasingly forced to choose. Fragmentation of effort is the consequence.

caveats on use in operations: both sides insist on being able to disband the arrangement at short notice and no larger institutions such as command structures or infrastructure will be built.

Operations: Solidarity on a case-by-case basis

In this scenario, German support for French interventions continues on a case-by-case basis where German interests are at stake, or where solidarity with its partner does not allow rejection/ disengagement. However, Germany maintains a clear division of labour whereby it will focus on providing capability-building support to French interventions but continues to hesitate strongly when it comes to combat roles.

Scenario 2 – Broken Axis: Classical German or French security attitudes return

Harmony between France and Germany has eroded via multiple points of contention, exacerbated by external events or reinforced by changes in government. Clashes over European integration, division of industrial participation and the handling of migration and stabilization of the Southern neighbourhood lead Paris and Berlin down the path of estrangement. The ‘broken axis’ illustrates the state of the Franco-German axis if one or two factors trigger dynamics of differentiation between the two countries. Differences between Paris and Berlin security agendas which the two considered reconcilable before are now increasingly viewed as historically incompatible – being different and doing different than the other receives positive

connotations and feedback in domestic audiences.

In this scenario, although still the two most important military players in Europe, Germany and France rarely see eye-to-eye when it comes to regions of strategic interest, readiness to intervene, or even the direction and grand scheme that European security and defence initiatives should pursue.

Policies: The return of French strategic autonomy and the decline of German responsibility

After European efforts of strengthening EU defence do not come to fruition, France renews its ambition to achieve strategic autonomy nationally, or with ‘willing and able’ partners in ad hoc coalitions, as set out in its call for a European Intervention Initiative.¹⁰ Meanwhile, pacifist voices in German public opinion cause the German government to end their support for French approaches to European security. Both strategic and public debates in the two countries diverge increasingly, and Germany and France lose sight of any commonalities in their defence agendas. Reciprocity is no longer a concern for both governments, but protecting the national identity in security, i.e. a distinctively “German Way” of thinking and doing security is put forward as a narrative and put in opposition to a “French Way” – and vice versa.

Industry: Industrial competition trumps common needs

Common armaments projects fail to materialise because of national interests and a fear of letting any deal go to Paris or

¹⁰ Revue stratégique de défense et de sécurité nationale, Paris, 2017. Retrieved from

<<http://www.defense.gouv.fr/dgris/politique-de-defense/revue-strategique/revue-strategique>>.

Berlin. The industries increasingly find themselves in direct competition with each other in Europe and also on the world market. Despite the domestic German pacifist tone, arms exports increase, legitimised as the preferred way to support partners in NATO and the EU. Both governments subsidise national companies. KMW-Nexter splits up again, with France declaring a national effort to preserve industrial autonomy to justify the introduction of an extra defence tax. On global naval markets, France helps DCNS and Thales to dominate the supplier side. Germany manages to keep its submarine industry but only with financial support from Israel. Germany eventually decides to buy US fighter jets, including the security guarantees, thereby abandoning the idea of jointly developing with France and other partners the next generation future combat air system. France postpones the decision to upgrade the Rafale jet. Airbus undergoes a decade of shake-ups in its management structure and business strategy, losing many contracts due to a lack of political support.

Capabilities: The beauty falls asleep

The still only limited cooperation on capabilities is on hold: mainly the Franco-German Brigade, joint training of attack helicopter pilots and the sharing of heavy lift helicopters. Germany withdraws frigates and submarines from the French carrier battle group to send them in support of Norway into the North Atlantic. This puts France into serious military trouble, as they cannot deliver the offered support for an operation by other southern European in the Mediterranean Sea. As a result, Germany is not only facing Paris' frustration. Also Rome, Madrid and Greece angrily criticise Berlin for this decision which they perceive not only as a lack of solidarity, but as leading to a serious security problem in the Mediterranean.

Operations: Expecting – and rejecting – a solidarity crisis

Against the background of a growing distance between the two countries in terms of policy, security, and capabilities, the cooled relationship is put to the test by a political crisis. In 2020, France decides to intervene in Central Africa to stop a paramilitary force of 3000 soldiers that is threatening to attack refugees in a camp close to the southern Libyan border. Instead of reacting immediately and jointly, Germany demands a discussion in the UN Security Council and condemns the proposed unilateral action. In Berlin, many political players warn that the French are, once again, dragging Germany into an African adventure. When the Security Council backs immediate military action in the light of systematic crimes already committed in Central Africa, Germany abstains and refuses any thought of a military solution to any of these problems. Germany's position gains in visibility, given its election as a non-permanent Security Council member that year.

The new French operation exacerbates the overstretch of French forces. As a consequence, Paris withdraws its forces from NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence, causing Germany trouble first with how to replace French troops and then by putting it in the position of lead nation in Northern Europe. However, the majority of Northern countries now see France rather than Germany as the guarantor of credible deterrence against Russia, because of what they perceive as Germany's growing hypocrisy vis-à-vis Russia, embodied for example in Germany's support for Nordstream 2. Moreover, the USA – tied up in its conflict with North Korea – is questioning the extended nuclear deterrence it has traditionally offered Europe. In reaction, NATO members and partners in

the North try to involve France and the UK to an even greater extent, in order to counterbalance Germany and seek reassurance. A variant of such a scenario would be a France that becomes more inward-looking and re-nationalising after Macron fails to reform the country or to succeed at the EU-level, and the French electorate turns to Le Pen (Marine or Marion). This would lead to a German EU/Europe but with less weight as many partners would not feel fully comfortable with Berlin taking the de facto lead. They fear the German conception of a PESCO governance structure that favours inclusive projects among the EU 27 in non-kinetic areas – rather than ambitious projects that close existing capability gaps.

Scenario 3 – Strong Axis: Paris and Berlin drive and back European defence

The political commitments of the past years are promising, action is taking place – while in early stages they go into the right direction and have visible support by both governments. The Franco-German motor is starting to shape substantive progress towards more effectiveness of European defence. The following scenario imagines what European defence could look like if France and Germany were to embrace the newly formed institutions and declare mutual support for their security agendas, following a trend of policy convergence in the realm of security and defence.

Policies: Understanding the other and supporting its aims

Germany and France engage in a regular strategic dialogue in the realm of security and defence to steadily work towards the vision of ‘European’ strategic autonomy. Berlin increases the number of exchange

civil servants in France, particularly in the active military domain, in order to grow, together with France, a European strategic culture bottom up, nurtured by joint operational experiences. Each agrees to strengthen the other’s agendas. The French government decides to participate in the German Framework Nations Concept (FNC). Paris also take the lead of the formerly British-led Battalion within NATO’s Enhanced Forward Presence, which London is forced to abandon due to budget problems linked to Brexit. At the same time, Germany backs French ambitions to improve European intervention capacities and mechanisms, including EU funding for operations.

While Germany maintains a certain degree of scepticism towards French interventionist tendencies, it agrees to strengthen its already increased role in the Sahel region and to support France more substantially when it comes to counterterrorism missions in MENA and West Africa. Germany backs French efforts to bind the UK into existing EU security frameworks and initiatives, and accepts to offer a tailor-made opt-in to CSDP, including the planning of missions, and the EDF.

Capabilities: Push for a European planning process and encourage others to join projects

After successfully forming a new government around Easter 2018, Germany’s first move is to seek rapprochement with President Macron and to turn the ambitious bilateral defence projects agreed on in July 2017 into key priorities. France and Germany decide to enhance interoperability by jointly

procuring key strategic weapon systems such as the new generation of fighter aircraft, a common drone fleet, and so on, and to expand their training beyond the French-German Brigade. At the European level, France and Germany commit to a significant financial contribution to the EDF. Within the PESCO format, they push for a strategic analysis of key capabilities (CARD) and a subsequent buy-in from their partners into the planned Franco-German armaments projects.

Industry: Joint offers for partners but also increasing pressure on European companies

Following on from the newly agreed projects, a mix emerges of a new division of labour and joint ventures/ mergers. Hence there is no competition between French and German companies, but often joint bids supported by domestic orders. For partners in the EU and NATO, but also beyond, a political commitment is made that Germany and France will develop joint defence partnerships. Together or individually, these partnerships will support other countries through the joint export of products.

Operations: Germany opts for more kinetic engagement

In this scenario, Germany is willing to consider stronger support for French missions in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and West Africa, geared towards counterterrorism and possibly involving active combat. Moreover, Germany is willing to take the lead in a UN-backed mission with a massive French combat contribution, thus taking responsibility for the use of force vis-à-vis

France but also the UN Security Council. France actively supports Germany in the deterrence mission on NATO's Eastern flank.

Scenario 4 – The Surprise Scenario: Defence Union in sight

This scenario diverges from some of the limits we have assumed for the drivers of the scenarios – especially regarding the limits on convergence of policies. It is the result of the extraordinary efforts of political leaders, but also highlights the inherent risk of failure. This may be the consequence of a very swift and sharp change in the international environment. It is not backed by mature policy convergence, but more a bet on the future and a response to urgent and drastic change. As a consequence, many things become imaginable.

Policies: US ambiguity triggers a CFSP push and nuclear cooperation between Berlin and Paris

US President Trump's weariness of his country's collective defence commitment to Europe persists, and eventually results in a gradual decimation of US troops on the European continent – the debate of whether or not the US nuclear shield in Europe is still there, dominates the security discourse, with ambivalent messages from the US. At the same time Russia invites the US, China, Germany and France to Yalta for a conference to restart talks over the final status of Crimea and Ukraine, and the future zones of influence to ensure long lasting and harmonious co-existence among great nations.

This extreme change in geopolitical circumstances pushes Berlin and Paris to start talks on developing common policies in the area of nuclear policy, including a nuclear sharing arrangement.

On a larger level, it becomes clear that Europeans must speak with a united voice and step up their common defence efforts. The duo therefore agrees on a series of foreign policy proposals to re-energise the EU's CFSP and deliver palpable results through the EU frame.

To fill capability gaps, gain political legitimacy and engage the UK, France and Germany reactivate the narrative of the European Directorate of the Big Three that has existed since the 1990s in EU / European Security.

Industry: Defence industry super-merger

In the industrial domain, Germany and France oppose and fight against the fast-growing defence industrial domination of the USA and China by merging their naval industries. Spinning this even further, heads of state may even see the industrial domain as one in which to send a long and echoing signal about how seriously they take European defence, and that the UK remains a central part of it, by reviving the idea of a merger between BAE Systems and Airbus, plus possible add-ons from the naval and cyber domains. Germany paves the way for the success of such a merger by tabling a proposal on intergovernmental criteria for defence exports among Germany, France and the UK. Moreover, Germany publishes a national defence industrial policy as an input into Franco-German and EU policy development.

Capabilities: France and Germany pool their nuclear-capable jets

In reaction to the growing uncertainty about a potential withdrawal by the USA from its role as a provider of nuclear deterrence, Germany and France overcome their opposition in the nuclear realm. They also blur the main distinction between a nuclear and a non-nuclear power. While Germany will not have a finger on the trigger, it will be involved in the nuclear planning and decision making by the French President. German aircraft can work under French command to carry nuclear weapons as part of NATO defence, thereby redefining the concept of nuclear sharing in an exclusively European way.

Operations: Germany crosses the security-defence divide; France discovers the value of mediation

Germany decides to join France in counterterrorism operations in North and West Africa, contributing special forces to active combat missions. Moreover, Germany leads a large EU operation and contributes substantial combat forces. At the same time, France co-leads its first civilian mission: a mediation mission between local inhabitants and Boko Haram. A joint and comprehensive operational concept guides the further development of the G5 initiative. When the initiative suffers setbacks, both Berlin and Paris take responsibility for failures.

Table 2: Overview of the scenarios

	Weak/hollow axis: Nothing more than political	Broken Axis: Classical German or French security attitudes return	Strong Axis: Paris and Berlin drive and back European Defence	The Surprise Scenario: Defence Union in sight
Policies	Mutual goodwill, but essentially different cultures	Return of French strategic autonomy and the decline of German responsibility	Understanding the other and supporting its aims	US ambiguity triggers nuclear cooperation and a CFSP push among Berlin and Paris
Industry	Searching for dialogue but achieving little	Industrial competition trumps common needs	Joint offers for partners but also increasing pressure on European companies	Defence industry super-merger
Capabilities	Some smaller projects in sight	The beauty falls asleep	Push for a European planning process and encouraging others to join projects	France and Germany pool their nuclear-capable jets
Operations	Solidarity on a case-by-case basis	Expecting – and rejecting – solidarity in times of crisis	Germany opts for more kinetic engagement	Germany crosses the security-defence divide; France discovers the value of conflict mediation
Impact on European Defence	Continued fragmentation of effort between Member States – following a slow downward path	Existing structures break up, re-organisation of MS in mini-lateral camps – too small to make a difference. Decline speeds up	The European defence framework will see a flourishing of parallel but interlinked and mutually reinforcing structures. Less efficiency but more effect	The EU as a framework and actor will be strengthened. More common policies with palpable impact.

Towards strategic choices: options for influence and direction

The above scenarios put a spotlight on future development. A prerequisite for developing strategic options is to define the aim, that is:

- what should be achieved,
- by whom and
- in what timeframe.

Developing strategic options

Having a clear aim is the crucial precondition for developing strategies out of the scenarios and also sharpening the scenarios themselves. We can only assume that the objective is to develop greater potential in European defence, which the states can then use within the EU but also within NATO and among European partners. Eventually, it is about enabling Europeans to have the right tools in the right place to defend the way of life in Europe.

German engagement is critical in this respect, but it is also uncertain – and currently possibly more uncertain than French engagement. The 12 months from February 2018 to January 2019 will be key to setting German politics in the “right” direction. The first step is obviously to seek channels of influence. That is why we are focusing on a preliminary assessment of how to influence the key drivers of the scenarios. Some suggestions for third parties are presented below.

Table 3: Strategic options to influence the future of Franco-German relations in defence (Examples)

Key drivers of future Franco-German axis in Defence	Impact (low to high)	Uncertainty (low to high)	Similar policy direction in Germany and France?	Options for influence by third parties
Defence industry				
Defence industrial policy	High	Low	Contradiction	Join common projects Take action to shape the final design of the EDF
Defence exports	High	Low	Contradiction	Participate in norm-setting Lower the pressure by harmonising procurement within the EU
Capability				
Shared needs	Medium to high	Medium	Partial convergence	Enter into capability projects, propose your own, which are in line with German and/ or French priorities Push for a capability audit and a capability landscape designed for delivery Participate in and push for implementation of CARD among PESCO members
Geostrategic developments				
Threat environment	High	High	Partial convergence	Raise awareness of diverging priorities Enable discussion of threat perceptions and the consequences of leaving them unaddressed
Role of the USA in European security	High	High	Partial convergence	Seek consultation with EU partners on a united position on the US role in Europe
Impact of Brexit on common policies and security	Medium	Medium	Partial convergence	Mitigate and channel the impact through own contributions, joint contributions and alternative ways for UK to participate Gauge possibilities of including UK in new EU security initiatives
Common policies and institutions				
Strategic coherence / convergence / culture	Medium	Low	convergence complementarity contradiction	Envisage long-term engagement to shape the convergence of cultures (perceptions and means to address them) Initiate and participate in European strategic dialogue – building on French demands
Development of a coherent CFSP	Medium	Low	Partial convergence / part contradiction	Put pressure on both France and Germany to align interests and formulate proposals and initiatives for EU Foreign Policy
Domestic politics: priority of defence among other topics	High	Low	Contradiction	A high number of third actors currently contact Berlin and Paris – but only if they are conceived from a long-term perspective are these engagements likely to have an impact
European integration	High	Medium	Partial convergence / part contradiction	Continually pursue and address implementation of the new EU security initiatives – the danger of losing momentum is high
NATO + EU + Multinational: which framework to act in?	Medium	Low	Partial convergence / part contradiction	Raise the bar for acting in multilateral formats, incentivise action in existing formats – the EU and NATO Push for improved coordination between existing and emerging frameworks
Reciprocity in operational and deterrence engagements	Medium	Medium	Partial convergence / part contradiction	Consider joining Germany or France in operations or deterrence engagements to increase the legitimacy of the engagements in Paris and Berlin Increase reciprocity and solidarity between North and South within the EU and NATO

A policy maker's choice: Defining the direction, convergence, complementarity, contradiction or competition

Having identified options for influence by third parties and examples of ways and channels (table 3) a final step towards developing a toolbox is to identify which policy direction would be most desirable for the drivers. Which policies should France and Germany avoid or seek to achieve between now and 2025: *convergence, complementarity, contradiction or competition?*

Only a political actor can conduct this final step, marked by “???” in the table below (table 4) that needs to be filled by political decision makers, once they have defined their interests and answered the core question of what sort of end-state they are seeking to achieve as of 2025, and what resources they are willing to commit.

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Table 4: Policy direction to affect key drivers of Franco-German relations in defence

				???
Key drivers of the future Franco-German Defence Axis	Impact (low to high)	Uncertainty (low to high)	Similar policy direction in Germany and France?	Policy direction to achieve or avoid among Germany and France: convergence complementarity, contradiction, competition
Defence industry				
Defence industrial policy	High	Low	Contradiction	
Defence exports	High	Low	Contradiction	
Capability				
Shared needs	Medium to high	Medium	Partial convergence	
Geostrategic developments				
Threat environment	High	High	Partial convergence	
Role of the USA in European security	High	High	Partial convergence	
Brexit	Medium	Medium	Partial convergence	
Common policies and institutions				
Strategic coherence / convergence / culture	Medium	Low	All tendencies can be found convergence complementarity contradiction	
Development of a coherent GASP	Medium	Low	Partial convergence / part contradiction	
Domestic politics: priority of defence among other topics	High	Low	Contradiction	
European integration	High	Medium	Partial convergence / part contradiction	
NATO + EU + Multinational: which framework to act in?	Medium	Low	Partial convergence / part contradiction	
Reciprocity in operational and deterrence engagements	Medium	Medium	Partial convergence / part contradiction	

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