GERMANY, THE UK AND EUROPEAN SECURITY: THE END OF THE '*STILLE ALLIANZ*'?

Key points

- Throughout the 1990s, British and German perspectives on strategic issues in Europe began to re-converge. This was largely as a result of the UK's positive engagement with the EU under Prime Minister Tony Blair, as well as the German government's shift away from its rigidly negative stance on out-of-area military operations,. Within the broader political context of ideological proximity between Blair and Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, cooperation, under the leitmotif of 'ethical foreign policy', fairness and global justice seemed likely in the security policy.
- 9/11 and the subsequent US-led war on terror however, exposed the fundamental differences between British and German strategic cultures, the limits to change in Berlin's approach to the use of force and the resilience of the UK's adherence to the special relationship with the United States.
- After the failure of the EU's collective voice over Iraq, both Britain and Germany became committed to emboldening the EU's security and military capacities, in the form of European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). However, whilst Berlin and London have both supported a broad range of institutional and doctrinal developments, post-Iraq there is more that divides Britain and Germany on matters relating to ESDP than brings them together, especially in the context of an enlarged EU.
- Both the UK and Germany are key players in European security and as such, along with other large states, are crucial for the further development of EU security policy and ESDP, though the prospects for an exclusive bilateral British-German dialogue is low. Not only do British and German perspectives diverge quite sharply, but EU and NATO enlargement has introduced a larger number of actors with a wider range of issues. This diversity has given rise to new and changing coalitions, as well as dyads, with implications for Germany, Britain and European security.

Looking back: the *Stille Allianz*

Karl Kaiser and John Roper's conception of British and West German defence cooperation as a 'quiet alliance' (*Stille Allianz*) accurately described the nature of this bilateral relationship at a time when security relations were conditioned by the Cold War. Firmly anchored within the Atlantic Alliance and underwritten by the US security guarantee, West German and British defence and security thinking were aligned in the face of a common threat.[1] Within this overarching framework, cooperation between Bonn and London was also shaped by relations with the US and France. As Kaiser and Roper noted, although the British-German relationship was never as vibrant or visible as the Franco-German tandem or the US-UK 'special relationship', from the 1960s onwards, especially after the French withdrawal from NATO's integrated command structure, the UK and West Germany emerged as the most significant European actors in the alliance working together to formulate common positions on a number of key strategic issues. This persistent yet discreet partnership became a close and effective bilateral relationship which endured until the end of the Cold War.

The 1990s: a decade of change

With the end of the Cold War the strategic context within which the *Stille Allianz* had operated transformed fundamentally. The removal of the Cold War overlay initially prompted often diverging British and German responses to how new security 'threats and challenges' could best be met. German unification and the re-acquisition of sovereignty presented an opportunity for German elites to construct a more 'active' and independent foreign and security policy and to a certain degree this occurred. The course of the 1990s, however, saw Germany 'get to grips' with the use of force, but also witnessed the federal government commit to deeper European integration, including efforts to forge a Common Foreign and Security Policy, as well as to the continuation and enlargement of NATO. As a result of this evolution by the end of the decade British and German security policies, whilst remaining qualitatively quite different, especially in terms of military capacities were relatively complementary. Bolstered by synergies at a governmental level, personified in Blair and Schröder and the discourse of the Third Way / *Neue Mitte* and idea of an 'ethical foreign policy', British and German policies converged on key foreign policy questions of the time, such as NATO and EU enlargements.

By the end of the 1990s it seemed that the *Stille Allianz* had been recalibrated into an effective, yet flexible partnership, with the UK and Germany seeing eye-to-eye on many strategic issues. Crucially, after 1998 Franco-British summit at St. Malo and in the light of Kosovo, Germany appeared to be evolving into the kind of security player UK policy could increasingly rely upon and, in turn, the UK

[1] Karl Kaiser and John Roper (1987) (eds.), *Die Stille Allianz: deutsch-britische Sicherheitskooperation* (Bonn: Europa Union Verlag); also Karl Kaiser and John Roper (1988) (eds.), *British-German Defence and Security Cooperation* (London: RIIA/DGAP)

government's more positive approach to the EU pointed to the potential for enhanced German-British partnership on issues in European security.

The impact of 9/11

The connection between British and German security perspectives that had transpired at the end of the 1990s was virtually swept away by the effects of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent radicalisation of US foreign policy. As the war on terror expanded and as Europe's common voice faltered and ultimately failed, the EU became polarised, with Germany and the UK in opposing camps.

The contrasting British and German positions reflected both deep-seated strategic cultures, threat assessments and in the case of Germany a recently acquired confidence and willingness to define and articulate German interests, which for the first time clashed dramatically with those of its original transatlantic mentor – the United States. Contrasting approaches to the use of force and the relative importance attached to multilateralism and international law, together with domestic and electoral pressures, which in the case of Germany strongly militated against German involvement in 'America's war', gave rise to British and German discord after 2001, which was part of a broader European divide between 'old' and 'new' Europe.

In this way, 9/11 brought into sharp focus the underlying differences in British and German perspectives on the use of force in particular and the role played by national strategic cultures. As the Euro-Atlantic community ruptured, Germany and the UK faced stark and undesirable choices between Atlanticist versus European solutions.

Enlarging the EU – external and internal diversity

NATO and EU enlargements in 1999 and 2004 brought into the mix not only a larger number of states, but also rendered these institutions more internally diverse. In this context, the question of leadership and the role of big versus small states became prominent, with implications for the UK and Germany. The diminution of the Franco-German tandem within a more fluid EU brought the question of leadership in the enlarged EU to the fore. Within the area of foreign policy and diplomacy what has since transpired has been the emergence and high profile role played by Germany, France and the UK taking the EU foreign and security policy agenda forward. On the question of Iran, the effectiveness of the trio derived not only from direct diplomacy on the ground, but also because it was underpinned, this time, by a coherent EU strategy which was distinct to the American approach to Teheran. Beyond the area of foreign policy, strategic leadership in the enlarged EU is more difficult to identify in the current context of ambiguity about the future shape and direction of integration in Europe. As large states, however, German and the UK, together with France, Italy and possibly Poland and Spain

whether together or not will be key to the shaping of and capacity building for EU security policy.

EU enlargement altered the foreign and security policy detail of the EU by challenging existing priorities and approaches to CFSP and ESDP, with direct implications for the UK and Germany. New member states from East Central Europe brought to the EU an overwhelming desire to bolster the EU's eastern policy. Ukraine's EU membership was brought onto the table and the need for a coherent EU as opposed to divergent national policies towards Russia was lobbied for. A recalibrated eastern policy finds resonance in both London and Berlin, which together with Poland as the regions key power, possibly provides common ground for British-German cooperation in this particular field.

The question of further EU enlargement, beyond Romania and Bulgaria, reveals both convergences and divergences between British and German perspectives with implications for any fruitful cooperation. London remains pro-enlargement and is currently positive about Turkish membership, whilst Berlin maintains a principled commitment but currently remains mute on questions of actual detail and commitment. What is clear from a German perspective, and this is where there is a clash with the UK, is that on the question of Turkish versus Ukrainian membership, it is the latter that is 'more like us' and therefore preferable. Germany's enlargement policy is at a crossroads. Which route it takes will either open up or close down the prospect of partnership on this issue with the UK.

Enlargement therefore brought into focus the question of leadership in the EU. In an EU of 25 members, alongside other states, the UK and Germany have been and will continue to be leading states, especially in the broader foreign policy field. Further EU enlargement presents an opportunity for closer British and German cooperation; however, on the crucial issues of candidates and timeframes, the two sides diverge

The European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP)

When the seeds of ESDP were sown at St. Malo in 1998, chiefly through a convergence of British and French perspectives, the expectation was that the EU's international voice through the introduction of a military dimension would become more credible. Despite the virtual negation of the EU's collective voice after 9/11 and the war on terror, ESDP was further developed 'on the ground' through a variety of missions in Europe and beyond.

From both British and German viewpoints the further elaboration of ESDP was a welcome development. At this early phase, London and Berlin supported, contributed to and led EU missions. A shared perspective also held on the broad issue of the NATO-ESDP relationship, and the indispensability of the Transatlantic partnership; NATO remained essential for wider combat missions, whilst EU forces should focus upon the Petersberg Tasks.

America's war on terror and the Iraq war in particular set British and German perspectives apart, bringing into greater focus fundamental differences and the complexities of British-German-French relations. The previous closeness that had prevailed in policy and perspectives between London and Berlin diminished as the broader *modus vivendi* amongst the large states waned on ESDP. Despite progress on ESDP 'in action', knotty questions of institutional arrangements and decision making stalled advances and threw British and German perspectives into opposing camps on most fundamental issues.

Despite this distance between immediate British and German ESDP perspectives, as large states both share a fundamental goal in making ESDP work through the leadership of the large EU states. Not so much 'less America, than more Europe' is a view which brings British and German perspectives on CFSP/ESDP into proximity, a stance which tends to sideline France. The UK and Germany also see eye to eye on Iran, where military force is not an option. Althea and the other ESDP deployments to date have gone well and will forge further co-operation.

Ultimately what obviates against a longer term strategic partnership between the two states are the fundamentally different visions of ESDP. Whilst Germany seeks to 'europeanise' ESDP, and ultimately fully integrate it into the EU, the UK position remains staunchly intergovernmentalist and disposed to a more *a la carte* approach. The 'reach' of ESDP; global versus regional and the question of pre-emptive military force also divide Berlin and London and are factors which will continue to dominate the European security agenda.

Germany, Britain and European security: the open questions

British and German perspectives on European security issues present a mixed picture. Numerous factors bring national perspectives together, but an equal number set them apart. Relations with the United States and with France bring further complexities to this bilateral relationship.

In the search for solutions in European security, Britain and Germany may face similar challenges, especially in the age of global terrorism, sustained instability and uncertainty at Europe's borders, German and British starting points and long terms goals often differ. As leading European states, with the capacity or potential capacity to shape European security there is scope for closer cooperation in the context of CFSP/ESDP.

For a more productive German-British dialogue to occur within a broader EU context, much depends on the German side's willingness and capacity to modernise both its 'thinking' and capabilities for military action. The 'resource crunch' in Germany's defence and security planning, a result of a near stagnant defence budget in comparison with that of key allies and partners, tarnishes Germany's image as a useful and reliable partner in both NATO and EU contexts. Both the UK and

Britain need German support and real input into making ESDP work. Despite Chancellor Schröder's forceful rhetoric, especially at the time of Iraq, a fundamental change in German thinking about defence and security issues has not transpired. A self confident foreign policy style has not meant a more active and far reaching policy; Germany's ambitions for ESDP remain quite limited and the question of deployments to Africa remain unresolved.

The modernisation of German security policy is necessary on every count. Without an upgrade of capabilities and political will, Germany's voice within European security will be limited and will run the risk of alienating the UK, France as well as the United States. An important decision which Germany needs to confront soon is the continuation of conscription. An indication that the draft will be abandoned sooner rather than later will enhance the perception of key allies that Berlin is ready to get serious in its commitment to European security.

From *Stille Allianz* to an ambiguous relationship in an enlarging EU

The EU needs leadership. The role of the large states to take foreign and security policy forward remains essential and is an issue upon which Germany and the UK agree. A meeting of minds between the UK, Germany and France is essential for success in this respect within an enlarged EU. Foreign, security and defence policy is an area where there is less potential and desire for an exclusive UK-German dialogue which could lead to concrete measures. Germany is likely to remain between a number of poles, since the long terms perspectives on CFSP/ESDP differs quite fundamentally to that of both France and the UK. Real resources and the political has meant that France and the UK have moved ahead on capacity building for ESDP, despite their divergences on key long term issues and the role of the US in European security.

Overall, the notion of a *Stille Allianz* no longer finds resonance in British-German relations in the field of defence and security policy. The changing context of European security and the arrival of new actors and factors has brought ambiguity, rather than renewal to this relationship. Yet at the same time, there is new scope for German-British collaboration on the broad question of EU enlargement and neighbourhood policy, a decisive area which may bring both sides into close collaboration with a range of new member states

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