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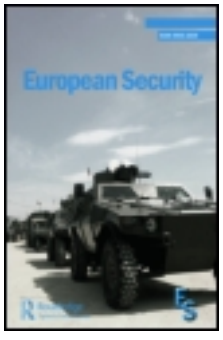

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Institutionalised cooperation and policy convergence in European defence: lessons from the relations between France, Germany and the UK

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Institutionalised cooperation and policy convergence in European defence: lessons from the relations between France, Germany and the UK

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What are the prospects for trilateral concord among Britain, France and Germany in terms of defence policies? Would more institutionalised links among them lead to more convergence of their defence policies? To answer these interrogations, this article investigates the relation between policy convergence and institutionalised cooperation, in particular by studying whether and when one is a prerequisite to the other. First, this article examines the extent to which these countries' defence policies have converged since the end of the cold war based on several indicators: their attitudes towards international forums, their defence budgets, the structure of their armed forces and their willingness to use force. Second, we study each of the bilateral relations between the three states to qualitatively analyse their degree of institutionalisation and the convergence of their defence policies. This article concludes that contrary to the arguments of many discussions, think-tank reports and political actors, there is no evidence that institutionalised cooperation leads to policy convergence as far as defence is concerned.

Keywords: European defence; France; Germany; UK; policy convergence; institutionalisation

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Introduction

Discussions about the future of the European defence usually emphasise the difficult triangular relationship between France, Germany and the UK. In fact, a global trilateral agreement between these countries is often seen as the key that would unlock the way to real progresses for European defence. The French journalist Edouard Pflimlin wrote in *Le Monde* about such a trilateral agreement that 'on the political level, the symbol would be exceptional. The British, the French and the Germans, who have been fighting for centuries, would finally collaborate to create a *triple entente*' (Pflimlin 2012). Yet, the difficulty is to identify whether and through what processes the positions of the three states could be reconciled.

Heir to the neo-functionalist tradition in European Union (EU) studies, most analysts encourage the creation of integrated institutions in the field of defence, with the hope that a spill-over effect would eventually lead to policy convergence and closer political views about European defence (Lelong 2012). If institutions could gather together France, the

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UK and Germany (as well as other states), sure enough there would be a convergence of political preferences, neo-functionalists argue. The belief in this spill-over mechanism has important theoretical and policy consequences, as it informs policy-making and discussions about the future of European defence. The question we investigate in this article is actually simple: which of policy convergence or institutionalised cooperation comes first in the field of defence? By studying the relations between France, Germany and the UK, we argue that, in fact, policy convergence is a prerequisite to effective cooperation, but that institutionalised cooperation does not necessarily lead to policy convergence.

These findings are important for future discussions about the European defence architecture, because they lead to a reassessment of theoretical and policy priorities. Contrary to the arguments of many discussions, think-tank reports and political actors, the creation of institutional structures does not necessarily lead to greater policy convergence. In fact, without policy convergence, those structures have every chance to become empty (and costly) shells. If progresses are to be made in European defence, the policy focus should be on how to accelerate policy convergence between states and not on discussions about which proper institutional framework to set up. Theoretically, this article opens new paths for research on the causes of policy convergence and its driving forces. So far, our findings conclude that despite a strong institutional framework, there is no evidence of policy convergence in the field of defence between France and Germany, but we observe between France and the UK, a strong convergence of their policy instruments prior to the institutionalisation of their cooperation. We find no evidence of convergence or institutionalisation between the UK and Germany. This analysis suggests that, at least for now, the emergence of similar political preferences in the field of defence among the three countries is an unlikely perspective.

This article proceeds as follows. First, we analyse the extent to which national defence policies have converged since the end of the cold war based on several indicators: attitudes towards international security forums, defence budgets, structure of the armed forces and willingness to use force. We then study each of the bilateral relations between the three states to qualitatively analyse their degree of institutionalisation and the convergence of their defence policies, which allows us to discuss the prospects for trilateral concord.

The convergence of defence policies in Europe?

In this paper, we define policy convergence in defence as the gradual adoption of similar policies in terms of doctrines (enunciated principles or discourses), means (or instruments) and practices related to the use of military force. We have selected France, the UK and Germany for several reasons. First, the three countries are unanimously considered as key European states, in terms of economic strength, as well as political and military power. They are members of the same international institutions [EU, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United Nations (UN)], but display significant divergences in terms of political institutions and historical experiences, making the comparison meaningful. Second, in the field of defence, the Franco–German relation has long been heavily institutionalised, the Franco–British defence relation has only recently been institutionalised, and the German–British relation is not institutionalised at all. By institutionalised cooperation, we mean links that are enhanced and formalised by bilateral agreements, that is, treaties or intergovernmental agreements.

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These differences in degrees allow us to clearly investigate the relation between policy convergence and institutionalised cooperation, in particular by studying if and when one is a prerequisite to the other. Because we are studying trends over a twenty-year period, this article looks at interstate relations at a macro level, leaving aside the role of specific political leaders on national policies. However, we do take into account the particularities of domestic political systems when they have a significant impact on external behaviour.

This study is centred on the field of defence and we focus the analysis on three key policy domains. The first policy element we are looking at is policy doctrine. We approach it through the lens of states' attitudes towards international security forums where military interventions are discussed and designed. Because the UN, NATO and the EU are permanent organisations, it is easy to compare the evolution of three states' attitudes over time. States are gradually embedded within a complex network of alliances and security institutions, which sometimes overlap (Hofmann 2011) or compete, and stated preferences towards one forum or the other do reflect general national orientations. For example, the relations between NATO and the EU have often been scrutinised through the lens of the French and British preferences towards either of these institutions (Major and Mölling 2007). The second policy component we look at are defence means, which comprise defence budgets, as well as the number and structure of national armed forces. Third, we analyse the three states' willingness to use force since the end of the cold war (i.e. use of defence instruments). Some analyses have already noticed a convergence among those countries in terms of defence means (for example, Dyson 2010 or King 2011), but our analysis is, to our knowledge, the first to explicitly address the three policy elements discussed above, while exploring the links between convergence and institutionalisation.

Attitudes towards international security forums

This section examines the evolution of national attitudes towards NATO, EU defence[1] and the UN in the doctrinal publications of the three countries from the 1990s to the early 2010s. We used the three last principal publications for each country (one per decade) with the aim to identify the key terms used to qualify: (1) the forum, in terms of its role, aims and possible limitations and (2) each country's view of itself in the forum.[2] The conjunction of the views of the forums and of the 'self' within them forms what we call national 'attitudes'. Our methodology is inspired by Daddow's 'public policy discourse analysis' – or Milliken's 'predicate analysis' (Milliken 1999) – which consists in identifying keywords in public discourses and putting them into context by studying the verbs, adverbs or adjectives attached to nouns. This in turn permits the identification of background narratives about the 'self' while in the meantime show how these narratives are reshaped and reinterpreted to face specific challenges (Daddow 2011).

Germany's view of itself is surprisingly invariable over the twenty-two-year period. The three main traits of its attitude are: being a committed and reliable contributor to NATO; being active and prepared to assume a greater role at the UN; and being committed to building autonomous European defence instruments. Throughout the 1990s and to the 2010s, German white papers have emphasised the importance of NATO as a 'foundation', 'cornerstone' or 'centrepiece' for European security (Federal Ministry of Defence 1994, 2006, 2011). Germany's contributions are supposed to lead to greater German influence within NATO. Germany's unchallenged public commitment to NATO can be understood given its dependence on the USA for assuring its security during the

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cold war (Haftendorn and Kolkmann 2004). Besides, its emphasis on reliability can be interpreted as part of reunified Germany's need to make a new reputation for herself as a strong but trustable ally. It is interesting to note, however, that the same discourse is used concerning Germany's position in the alliance throughout the period, despite the diplomatic crises of 2003 and 2011. Indeed in 2003, Germany, alongside France, refused to intervene in Iraq with the USA and other NATO partners; and in March 2011, the German government similarly refused to participate in the intervention over Libya coordinated by NATO. A strong ally of both the USA and France, Germany has traditionally coupled constant support for NATO with unremitting commitment to the development of autonomous European defence capacities. Thus, it has always been balancing 'Europeanist (France) and transatlanticist (USA/UK) commitments' (Bohnen 1997, p. 51, Longhurst and Miskimmon 2007, p. 80). Germany's federalist vision of European integration is reflected in its discourse throughout the white papers of the 1990s to the 2010s. The EU security policy is considered as a 'vital' 'framework for security'. It has been noted, however, that Germany still has to match its European policy goals with relevant instruments (Wagner 2005), although the professionalisation of its armed forces, decided in 2011, can be considered as a step in that direction. The fact that it is not a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) can also explain why Germany has been so supportive of both security organisations of which it is part. Indeed, its position as an outsider at the UNSC remains a feature distinguishing Germany from the two other major European players. Consequently, Germany's position towards the forum is guided by its wish to become a permanent member of the Security Council, on the basis that it is 'prepared to assume the responsibility associated with permanent membership' to the UNSC.

The most salient features of British attitudes towards international security forums are, on the one hand, the pre-eminence of NATO at the centre of UK defence and security policy throughout time, and, on the other hand, 2003 as a year of relative change in attitudes towards the EU and the UN. Over the period from the 1990s to the early 2010s, the centrality of NATO as the foundation of Britain's security is never questioned and similar language is used throughout the three white papers: 'cornerstone', 'foundation' or 'bedrock' (British Ministry of Defence 1998, 2003, 2010). This stability is comparable to Germany's, but in the way NATO is conceived rather than in terms of Britain's view of herself in NATO. While Germany would justify its centrality in the alliance on the basis of its financial and military contributions, British white papers refer to the country's 'leadership' in the organisation, on the basis of its close relation with the USA since the Second World War. It has always been clear that being a 'leading member' of NATO aimed at gaining and subsequently maintaining influence on the transatlantic partner, although the reality of Britain's position as an influent US ally has often, and increasingly, been questioned (Aronsson 2011). The British position towards European defence policy has mostly remained stable. Throughout the period covered, the EU has been presented as key to 'economic prosperity' and 'political stability' in British white papers, but the UK has never called for autonomous European defence capabilities. Yet in the early 2000s, we can note a more proactive stance towards the development of EU military capacities, with a British participation in concrete initiatives such as the European Security Strategy (ESS) and the European Defence Agency (EDA). This more positive attitude arguably reflects a mixed strategic posture towards European defence structures and capabilities: Britain has sought to prevent more integration in defence while taking an active part in order not to be ostracised from a forum that it could try to influence (Chuter 1997, p. 118, Hood 2008, p. 184). Britain's position towards the

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UN also changed in 2003. In the white paper, we can witness a less positive discourse, underlining the UN's 'limitations' and calling for greater 'flexibility'. We can link the 2003 change in discourse with the decision to intervene in Iraq alongside the USA in the absence of a mandate from the UN. The return to the previous position in 2010 can be attributed to the criticism that has surrounded Britain's intervention in Iraq both domestically and internationally.

France's attitudes towards the three multilateral forums are the least stable of all three countries. We can clearly note an evolution in French behaviour towards NATO and the EU security and defence policy from the 1990s to the early 2010s (French Ministry of Defence 1994, 2008, 2013). Only on the UN has France's position remained stable. The history of France's positions towards NATO is quite hectic, yet we can clearly identify a gradual abandonment of the Gaullist stance over time. The Gaullist rhetoric on the Atlantic alliance still transpires in the 1994 white paper, in which the French, despite acknowledging the 'necessity' and centrality of the alliance, emphasise France's 'particular situation' and call for the 'independence' and 'freedom' of NATO members. Yet, only one year after the 1994 white paper, conservative President Jacques Chirac made the first move towards France's normalisation in NATO (it reintegrated the North Atlantic Council and the Military Committee), before President Nicolas Sarkozy completed the process in 2009 with the return into all integrated structures. Sarkozy announced the decision in 2008 and hence it is not surprising that the white paper published the same year reflects a much more positive stance towards NATO. The forum went from 'necessary' to 'key', and France from a 'particular' member to a 'founding' one. The 2013 white paper, published under the socialist President Hollande holds up to a similar rhetoric, showing that the French attitude towards NATO has profoundly changed and that there is now a cross-party consensus on the benefits of full NATO membership. In parallel, although it could be thought that France's attitude towards EU security and defence policy has been one of continuous support, a scrupulous analysis of French white papers shows that successive governments have gradually lowered their ambition. In 1994 the Western European Union (WEU) was considered to be leading to a 'Common European defence' with 'autonomous' capabilities, which constituted 'a major political objective' for the country. The 2008 *Livre Blanc* maintained ambitious objectives – although 'common' defence was abandoned – but also underlined existing shortfalls. In the 2013 white paper, France has come even closer to the UK and further away from Germany as the document calls for 'a pragmatic revival' of the EU security and defence policy: France's project now is an 'efficient European defence', with no mention of a concrete political end objective. In fact, the EU security and defence policy is no longer an 'end' in itself, but it is only considered as an instrument. As for the UN, French white papers present the organisation as a keystone in international relations and justify French engagement towards the forum by its membership to the UNSC, which offers Paris a 'privileged status' and associated 'responsibility'. In all three white papers, though, French governments have warned that the organisation is 'in crisis' and insisted on the need for a reform of the UNSC. Especially, since the 2000s, France has publicly supported Germany's accession to the status of permanent member.

To conclude, the sole trilateral point of consensus over time is the UN: Britain, France and Germany agree on its importance for managing international relations, and on the need for a reform. We have also seen that France's recent reintegration of NATO structures has given way to harmonised discourse on the alliance among the three countries, as all consider it as the foundation of their security. Yet in several respects we

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can note that France's and Britain's positions have come closer, while Germany's has not changed much, creating a new gap between Germany and its partners on the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Indeed, in the past decade, France and Britain have converged on two major things: both wish to actively pursue the development of European defence capabilities in a pragmatic fashion, and both wish to use NATO as a power-multiplier, given their strong sense of 'self'. As the UK has not fundamentally changed its attitude towards the EU or NATO, we can note that it is rather France that has been *converging towards Britain*. Already in 1997, David Chuter was writing: 'in recent years, European experience has increasingly come to resemble that of the UK, especially in the disappearance of an identified threat and the likely obsolescence of conscript forces' (Chuter 1997, p. 110). As the following sections will show, it is especially the case for France, which, contrary to Germany, has adopted an expeditionary posture similar to the British one.

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Evolution of defence budgets

Comparing defence spending between countries is not a simple task, be it simply because 'different countries include different items in their defence budget' (Aufrant 1999, p. 81). Elements such as pensions, paramilitary forces, research and development, military interventions or off-the-shelf procurement may or may not be included. Hence, this section will look at *trends* in British, French and German defence spending over the period covered, rather than studying in detail the allocation of their respective defence budgets. When looking at the evolution of defence expenditures between 1990 and 2012, we can clearly notice a trend towards mimesis, a form of policy transfer whereby states confronted with a problem tend to borrow the solutions implemented by the majority of other states. Further, we can identify a sort of domino effect in defence spending, showing that defence budgets are not solely convergent but even interdependent. This is especially true for Britain and France.

The Figure 1 below shows the evolution of defence spending in Britain, France and Germany as part of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) between 1990 and 2012, with an indication of expenditures in absolute terms for the years 1990, 2000 and 2010 (in constant 2011 USD). A first remark concerns the German defence budget. Contrary to France and Britain, Germany does not possess a nuclear deterrent, which partly explains why its defence budgets are significantly lower than that of its two partners over the whole period.

However, nuclear deterrents do not account for the whole of the gap between German budgets and British and French ones. The cost of maintenance of their nuclear deterrence is estimated to cost Britain and France $3.4bn/year and $3.2bn/year, respectively; that is, 5–6 per cent of the British defence budget and 3–4 per cent of the French budget (Sénat 2006, Corbucci 2012, House of Commons Defence Committee 2013). Even if the cost of deterrence represented 10 per cent of defence spending, as in some estimates, there would still be a gap of several billion dollars (Corbucci 2012).[3] The cost of the nuclear deterrents aside, the gap between the German and the British/French curves is attributable to the latters' participation in military interventions. It is especially the case for Britain in most of the 2000s, when its commitment in both Iraq and Afghanistan cost up to $9bn (£4.5bn) in the fiscal year 2008/09 (Chalmers 2011, p. 35).

When looking at trends in spending curves, we first note a downward convergence of defence budgets in the 1990s. This trend is attributable to what is commonly known as the post-cold war 'peace dividends', whereby the disappearance of the Soviet threat

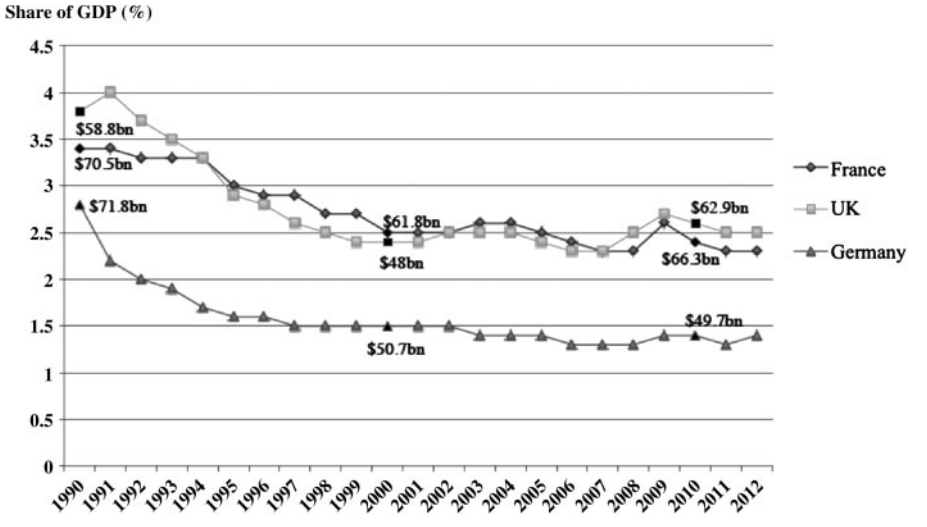

Figure 1. Defence spending 1990–12.
Source: SIPRI Military expenditure database 1988–12.

allowed for the reinvestment of defence spending in other sectors of the economy, which translated into lowering defence budgets in Western countries for about a decade (Knight *et al.* 1996). Hence, in the period from 1990 to 2000, the British budget was reduced by $10.8bn (from 3.8 to 2.4 per cent of GDP), the German budget by $21bn (from 2.8 to 1.5 per cent of GDP) and the French budget by $8.7bn (from 3.4 to 2.5 per cent). In the period from 2000 to 2010, we notice a first divergence between Germany and its two neighbours. German spending stagnated or decreased in that period, while French and British budgets increased in absolute terms. In 2000 the French budget was $13bn above the British one; in 2010 the gap was reduced to $3.4bn. The 19 per cent increase in UK budget took place during the Blair years (1998–08) and can be explained by good economic situation, greater international ambitions, heavy engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan and an increase in procurement costs (Chalmers 2011, pp. 34–40). The resemblance between French and British defence spending, both in terms of volume and evolutions, has continued in the early 2010s, but with a downward trend. The two countries were hit by the global financial crisis more than was Germany, and as Eléa Dion has showed, the effects were felt on defence budgets two years after the crisis began in 2008 (Dion 2012, p. 12). As a result, British and French defence spending decreased by $5bn and $7bn, respectively between 2009 and 2012, whereas the German budget has been maintained, decreasing by only $0.5bn over the same period; it has even increased as a share of GDP.

As this section has shown, British and French defence expenditures have converged – downwards and upwards – in the past two decades, and especially since 2000. We can argue that even more than converging, the two countries' budgets have become increasingly intertwined. Indeed, British Ministry of Defence officials and heads of defence companies have recently expressed fears of drastic reductions in French budgets during the preparation of the 2013 *Livre Blanc*, because this would encourage the British government to further lower UK defence expenditures.[4] Moreover, there was also fear in both the British and French defence communities that if the UK and France lowered their budgets too much, Germany would find herself with the highest defence budget in

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Europe, which would make no sense given its relatively limited strategic ambitions.[5] There is thus a shared understanding in Britain and France that they both ought to prevent a mutually encouraging spiral of cuts and to maintain a certain level of spending in accordance with their common ambitions.

Structure of the armed forces

Since the end of the cold war, several observers have noticed a relative convergence between the French, British and German armed forces. First of all, the volume of the armed forces has been drastically reduced since the end of the cold war. As Figure 2 below shows, there is a clear tendency to reduce the format of the armed forces, consistent with budget reductions and a post-cold war military thinking emphasising deployability, reactivity and expeditionary warfare in contrast to the high-intensity mechanised warfare for which armed forces trained during the cold war.

The simultaneity of budgetary cuts and the evolution of the strategic context led to strong structural changes for the French, German and British armed forces. The three forces are marked in particular by processes of concentration (they all abolished conscription, the first being the UK in 1963 and the last being Germany in 2011), transnationalisation (with the influence of alliances such as NATO) and similar approaches and vocabulary for operational planning (King 2011). Doctrinally, European countries selectively emulated the US-led Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA; Dyson 2010). In particular, three elements of the American RMA were partially and selectively emulated: modularity, network-centric warfare (NCW) and effects-based operations (EBOs). Modularity refers to the possibility of drawing from several resources in order to build effective and reactive force packages, going beyond the traditional division between services in the armed forces. The concept emphasises inter-services cooperation, also known as 'jointness', and expeditionary warfare capabilities. NCW 'is the notion that a "system of systems"; connecting sensors, information processing centres, and shooters operating as one network across the whole of the battlespace, will replace

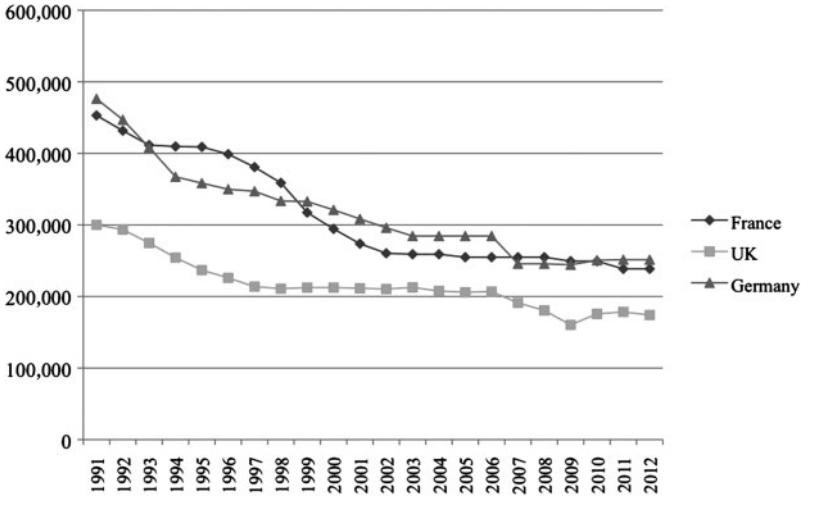

Figure 2. Evolution of the size of French, British and German armed forces.
Source: Data compiled from the *Military Balance* (1990–13), published by the IISS.

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platform-centric warfare conducted by large, self-contained military units' (Farrell and Terriff 2010, p. 5). NCW is intrinsically linked to the search of information superiority and assured access to the area of operations. Thinking about EBOs originally emerged in the US Air Force, which tried to improve the effectiveness of the strike by disabling, instead of destroying, the targets. The meaning of the concept of EBOs evolved since its first inception, and 'began to focus on how to shape the behaviour of the enemy, not only through the use of force, but also through non-military options' (Dyson 2010, p. 17).

Europe's emulation of the American RMA has been selective, some analysts even noting a 'transformation gap' between the US and their European Allies (Terriff *et al.* 2010). The adoption of the key elements of the RMA has been filtered by local military cultures and budgetary constraints. The British armed forces have incorporated the EBO doctrine, under the name effect-based approach to operations, and are conducting a network-enabled capability programme, albeit on a much smaller scale than the USA (Farrell and Bird 2010). The French armed forces are also engaged in such a process, by developing expeditionary warfare capabilities, and cautious network-enabling capabilities. France also developed its own understanding of EBOs, by emphasising the 'synergy of effects' (Rynning 2010). The German scorecard on transformation is mixed. On the one hand, the German armed forces claim to have adopted key aspects of the RMA. Yet, the process seems to be stalled because of a lack of promoter within the German armed forces, specific problems of human resources management, and poor strategic communication by the German Ministry of Defence (Borchert 2010).

Moreover, recent developments in the structure of French, German and British armed forces suggest that the French and the British are now in a category of their own, with the German armed forces being less capable. Both the French and the British are committed to retain full-spectrum and combined arms manoeuvre warfare capabilities, which implies the development of new families of medium-armour vehicles and networked-enabled infantry capabilities. While French and British planners have different preferences towards the balance to find between high technology and the overall size of the armed forces (France emphasising the size of the force and the UK being more inclined to rely on high technology), they share a commitment to maintaining full-spectrum capabilities. In contrast, although German armed forces profess their attachment to a force model which would be similar to the French one, they are in fact leaning towards limiting their capability to stabilisation-type operations (Shurkin 2013). While the raw numbers on the size of the armed forces seems to suggest a Franco–German convergence, they are to be treated carefully. First, Germany had a conscription army until 2012, and it is too early to observe the effects of the end of the conscription on the size of the German armed forces. Moreover, a qualitative analysis of the structure of the armed forces shows that French and British forces are much closer from each other than from the German forces, due to differences in the type of warfare these forces are prepared to wage.

Overall, the study of the structure of the armed forces, while revealing similar processes, also highlights a relative convergence between the French and British forces, while the German armed forces do not have the same level of capabilities and ambitions.

Use of force

This section examines the way the UK, France and Germany have been willing to use military force. Once again, we observe deep similarities between the UK and France, and diverging German preferences.

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The UK has been deployed in two dozen mid- to high-intensity operations since 1945. The tempo of operations has been relatively intense, so much so that only in 1968 have British servicemen or women not been killed on duty (Cornish 2013). Such operations included, amongst others, the campaigns in Malaya or Oman, the operations in Northern Ireland or the Falklands war. The end of the cold war has not been marked by a decrease of operational activities. In fact, significant operations of various intensities for the British forces took place over the past two decades: the Gulf War (1990–1991), Bosnia (1992–1995), Iraq (1998), Kosovo (1999), Sierra Leone (2000), Afghanistan (since 2001), Iraq (2003–2009) and Libya (2011). In each of these operations, the UK has been a key participating nation or intervened alone in the case of Sierra Leone. For example, during the Gulf War, the UK deployed around 35,000 personnel and 13,500 vehicles organised around the British 1 armoured division, and although the British troops were initially supposed to fight alongside the US marines in the diversionary effort in Kuwait, British commanders managed to convince the political level to coordinate with the Americans and reassign their troops to the main action (De la Billière 1992, Gordon and Trainor 1995). During the air campaign for Kosovo, the UK was the second largest European contributor, and one of the very few countries willing and able to fly night missions and deliver precision-guided munitions (Peters *et al.* 2001). The intervention in Sierra Leone was conducted autonomously (Dorman 2009), which signaled a willingness to use force, if deemed necessary and possible. The UK has also been a strong supporter of the US policies in Iraq and Afghanistan, contributing 46,000 troops to the invasion in 2003 (Fairweather 2011) and gradually increasing its contribution to the Afghan district of Helmand from 3150 soldiers during the initial deployment in 2006 to 9500 in 2010 (Farrell 2013). The willingness and the ability to use force leave no doubts, as well as the emphasis on operational flexibility in order to remain credible in the Americans' eyes. As Paul Cornish puts it: 'The UK can scarcely be said to have been reluctant as far as the use of force is concerned' (Cornish 2013, p. 379). This willingness to use force goes hand in hand with a decision-making process that leaves a large deal of autonomy to the executive, as the military policy is the result of the interactions between the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer (who heads the Treasury) and the Secretary of State for Defence. The government has inherited from the Royal prerogative of pursuing the public good, including through the use of armed force, and it 'can declare war and deploy armed forces to conflicts abroad without the backing or consent of Parliament' (House of Lords Select Committee on the Constitution 2006, p. 5). The British system then combines legal flexibility with the willingness and capabilities to use armed forces.

The French case is quite similar to the British one. Just like the UK, France has been engaged in various conflicts since 1945, for example, in Indochina, Algeria, Chad, Mauritania, Zaire or Lebanon. Since the end of the cold war, the French armed forces were deployed, amongst others, in the Gulf War, Bosnia, Rwanda (1994), Comoros (1995), Cameroun (1996–2007), Iraq (1998), Kosovo (1999), Afghanistan (since 2001), Cote d'Ivoire (since 2002), Democratic Republic of the Congo (2003), Lebanon (since 1978 and a reinforced presence since the beginning of the FINUL II mission in 2006), Chad (2007), Libya (2011) and Mali (since January 2013). These military activities ranged from the training of local forces (Cameroun) to high-intensity manoeuvre warfare (Gulf War), and comprising air campaigns (Kosovo and Libya), peacekeeping operations (Lebanon) and short and violent interventions (Chad, Mali). Although France is always keen to secure legal support for military interventions, there is also no doubt that there is usually little resistance to use military force in the French policy-makers' minds. The

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French strategic rationale is driven by the somehow contradictory predicaments of a missionary self-understanding and the search of autonomy heir to the Gaullist tradition (Irondelle and Schmitt 2013, pp. 125–138). These two conflicting aspects of the French security policy are reflected in a contribution to US-led operations just good enough to stay credible as a military power but still appearing as being autonomous, while in the meantime conducting independent military actions, in particular in Africa. For example, the French contribution to the Gulf War was marked by an intense difficulty during the force generation process, in particular because of President Mitterrand's decision not to engage the conscripts. Also, the French tanks were too lightly armoured to sustain an assault against the Iraqi T-72s, which led the American planners to assign the 12,500 soldiers of the 'Division Daguet' to the protection of the coalition's flank. Although the Gulf War revealed objective military difficulties for the French (Yost 1993), a French expert expressed a widely shared opinion when he argued that 'the direct, graduated, personalised, mediatised and perfectly successful management of the crisis is an example of the role the French can play on the world stage' (Prater 1991, p. 453). The French contribution to Afghanistan also remained limited to 4000 troops, even after France took responsibility for the Kapisa and Surobi districts. Yet, France was the first European contributor to Operation Allied Force in Kosovo, in terms of aircraft contributed, missions flown and munitions delivered (Peters *et al.* 2001). France was also instrumental in initiating Operation Odyssey Dawn that culminated in the fall of Muammar Gaddafi (Notin 2012), helped remove Laurent Gbagbo from power after the election of his rival, Alassane Ouatarra, in Cote d'Ivoire, and launched an intervention in Mali to prevent the country from becoming a safe haven for terrorism. Like in the British case, a permissive legal framework that makes the French President the head of the armed forces facilitates the French interventionism. The decision-making process regarding the use of force is highly centralised within the executive, and the parliament holds little oversight power despite the 2008 constitutional revision according to which the government must request the authorisation of the parliament if a troop deployment exceeds four months. In practice, the members of parliament are 'trapped' by the effective deployment of troops on the ground and are unlikely to vote against the mission (Irondelle and Schmitt 2013).

In contrast to the French and British cases, Germany still has more difficulties towards the use of force. Germany has been called a 'civilian power' because of its preferences for multilateralism and reluctance to use military force (Maull 1990). The post-cold war era has witnessed a gradual, albeit limited change in this position. A legal debate that ended up in authorising the deployment of troops abroad under control of the parliament took place between 1991 and 1994. From this moment on, German troops participated in a number of peacekeeping missions such as the Implementation Force (IFOR) and the Stabilisation Force (SFOR) in Bosnia, and even to Operation Allied Force in Kosovo, albeit on a limited scale. However, the German contribution to an operation that did not receive the legal blessing from the UN was seen as a tipping point towards a more assertive Germany (Longhurst 2004). The most important operation for the German forces has undoubtedly been the mission in Afghanistan, for which Germany was put under heavy criticism for imposing too many caveats on its troops, despite an improvement since 2008–2009 (Rid and Zapfe 2013). In the meantime, Germany provided limited contributions to the United Nations Interim Force In Lebanon (UNIFIL) II in Lebanon and to the Operation Atalanta, reluctantly participated in the European Force (EUFOR) Congo mission in 2006 (Schmitt 2012) and refused to join its French, British and American allies in Operation Odyssey Dawn in Libya. Germany's unease

about the use of force is also marked by the forced resignation of Federal President Horst Köhler in 2010 after he declared in an interview that he would find normal that Germany increased its participation to a multinational military intervention if larger German interests (such as economic interests) were at stake. This idea, which would be considered normal in any other Western country, sparked an intense debate about the purpose of the German armed forces. Moreover, the scope of autonomy for the executive is much more limited in Germany, where the parliament votes a yearly renewable mandate before any troops deployment, and can even change details of the operational plan prepared by the executive (Junk and Daase 2013).

To conclude, France and the UK are much closer from each other than they are from Germany. It is no surprise that they are the two countries to be classified as 'expeditionary' by Anthony Forster (2006), which reflects the dominating mind-set within the policy and security circles. In contrast, Germany is still reluctant towards the use of military force. More generally, we can argue that a variety of factors have led Britain and France to converge since the end of the cold war: demonstrating similar perceptions of their position in the international system, both countries have held similar conceptions of their national interests; yet, because they have been facing the same budgetary and strategic constraints, they have developed close defence policy practices and goals. On the other hand, Germany has had a very different conception of its international status and interests, which has led it to pursue different goals, with different practices of defence policy. Now, we can wonder how these similarities and differences among Europe's bigger player relates with their bilateral and trilateral ties, and more precisely the degree of institutionalisation of defence cooperation between them.

Understanding the relations between policy convergence and institutionalised cooperation

It is generally acknowledged that (economic or strategic) necessity encourages increased cooperation among states, and that increased contacts between them foster the convergence of their national policies. This section questions whether the former indeed leads to the latter. We first look at the dyadic relations between the three countries under study. We observe three degrees of institutionalised cooperation: non-existent between the UK and Germany, heavily institutionalised without policy convergence between France and Germany, and nascent institutionalisation following strong policy convergence between France and the UK. Finally, we explore the prospects of a trilateral concord defence policies among Europe's three main players.

British–German cooperation

German–UK relations in the field of defence are virtually non-existent. In fact, as a joint report from a British and a German think-tank (Royal United Services Institute [RUSI] and Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung) states:

> one of the most shamefully underdeveloped bilateral security and defence relationships within NATO is that between Germany and the United Kingdom. Bilateral defence co-operation between them is almost non-existent, and this is despite longstanding military ties, training, close industrial relations, shared values and common interests in a secure Europe at the heart of a rules-based international order. (Aronsson and Keller 2012, pp. 1–2)

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As was mentioned above, there is no observable degree of policy convergence between the UK and Germany in the field of defence. The structure of their armed forces and their preferences towards the use of force are still markedly diverging. Compounding the lack of policy convergence is the absence of shared institutional framework that would be comparable to existing institutionalised cooperation between France and Germany or France and the UK. The two countries belong to the same 'clubs' (NATO, EU), but have not been able to create a shared institutional framework. In fact, as Parkes (2012) notes, the UK and Germany are the key European members respectively in NATO and the EU, but also the main outsider of the other club. Each country struggles to integrate the reluctant other to their own club in order to maintain their key position. Yet, because of the diverging nature of the goods provided by NATO and the EU, the mechanisms for regulating relations within these clubs are different. NATO provides non-excludable goods (collective security), which can encourage free-riding behaviours. The coercion mechanisms within NATO are thus limited and rely on a common ethics and the naming and shaming of deviant behaviours. On the opposite, the EU provides excludable goods (such as the common market), which facilitates the imposition of strict regulations. The UK and Germany are then trading blows within NATO or the EU, based on the rules to maintain good behaviour specific to each institution.

This underlying climate of tension between the two countries certainly prevents the creation of structures of institutionalised cooperation in the field of defence, which would in any case be based on no existing policy convergence.

Franco–German cooperation

Contrary to the British–German relation, the Franco–German relation in the field of defence is heavily institutionalised since the 1963 Elysée treaty signed between the two countries. The treaty itself had a strong ambition on defence issues, including the creation of joint doctrinal centres (which were never established), the regular exchange of personnel and a strong cooperation on defence procurement (Gauzy-Krieger 2012). Due to a number of strategic differences between France and Germany during the Cold War, the Elysée treaty has always had more political significance than a real and meaningful military content (Soutou 1996). Because of the primacy of the political symbol, a number of institutions have been set up, officially aiming at facilitating a convergence between the French and German security policies. For example, the Franco–German Defence and Security Council, composed of the Foreign affairs ministers, Defence ministers and head of staff of both countries, was created in 1988, and is supposed to meet twice a year. In 1989, the Franco–German brigade, a 5000-strong unit located in both France and Germany was created. Because of linguistic differences, the only truly binational unit of the brigade is the 'Combat command and support battalion', located in Mülheim (Germany), where French and German soldiers are collocated and work together in both languages. The other units composing the brigade are nationally manned and placed under this binational command. Politicians and military officials often describe the Franco–German brigade as a 'laboratory' for European defence cooperation and for interoperability. Many official discourses also emphasise its political and symbolic dimension. Yet, its operational record is limited at best, with only elements of the Control and Command structure deployed in Bosnia and in Afghanistan (Kabul). Despite French efforts to deploy the brigade in Africa, the German government has refused so far to engage the brigade in missions that could involve the use of force. This mixed record led

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the French national audit office (*Cour des Comptes*) to recommend the brigade's suppression in its 2011 yearly report (Cour des Comptes 2011). Despite the existence of high-level coordination and an actual bilateral military unit, it is impossible to observe a convergence between the French and German defence policies.

France and Germany refer to each other as 'special partners' and emphasise the special nature of their relations in official documents. Yet, actual practices show otherwise as was discussed above: France and Germany drift apart in terms of defence budgets, use of force and structure of the armed forces. Franco–German relations in the field of defence are the polar opposite of Franco–British relations: they are heavily loaded with political signification, which led to an impressive degree of institutionalisation (often presented as such in official discourses), but this institutionalisation is not accompanied with an observable degree of policy convergence.

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Franco–British cooperation

We have seen in the first sections of this article that there have been two-way transfers between France and Britain over the period from 1990 to 2013, both in terms of policy goals, instruments and practices. France has converged towards British attitudes in international security forums, especially in the last five years; Britain and France have had similar experiences in military interventions; and their defence means have come to be increasingly similar. Convergence started in the late 1990s and the 2000s confirmed this tendency. There has been no breach in the process, except for the diplomatic crisis over the war in Iraq in 2003.

Parallel to this convergence process, Britain and France have developed bilateral defence cooperation. This started in the late 1990s with the Saint-Malo declaration, which formed a public recognition of converging goals regarding the defence of Europe, as well as a common search for enhanced cooperation. Following Saint-Malo, in the early 2000s, Britain and France led or at least participated in European initiatives for developing defence cooperation, along with other European partners including Germany. The deepening of the Anglo–French relation in defence recently culminated with the signing of the bilateral Lancaster House treaties in 2010, two treaties that aim at further developing cooperation in all areas of defence, including nuclear testing.

In view of the above, it is interesting to look at the way Britain and France have referred to one another in their last three white papers. In the 1990s, both seemed to recognise the importance of the other without adding too much to it: Britain considered France, like Germany, as 'a major European partner' and the French 1994 *Livre Blanc* stated that 'cooperation must be enhanced' with this 'comparable… neighbour' (British Ministry of Defence 1998, p. 240, French Ministry of Defence 1994, pp. 32, 136). It added, 'all possible convergences must be explored' (French Ministry of Defence 1994, p. 124). In the 2000s, we can witness no political rapprochement in the language used: France is not even mentioned in the British 2003 white paper, and France underlines that it has the same 'vital interests' as 'the other nuclear power in Europe' (French Ministry of Defence 2008, p. 70). But in 2010 and 2013, that is, when or after the Lancaster House treaties were signed, the terminology used by both countries contrasts sharply with the past documents: France becomes Britain's 'key ally' and 'strategic partner', and Britain turns into France's 'privileged partner' with a 'high level of mutual trust' (British Ministry of Defence 2010, p. 60, French Ministry of Defence 2013, p. 21). The two countries' language shows that *de facto* convergence on defence means and the use of

force has not been *the consequence* of an improvement of their relation in policy discourses, but that such improvement happened *simultaneously or subsequently.*

To conclude, the combination of both quantitative and qualitative indicators on the evolution of French and British defence policies seems to indicate a correlation between policy convergence and cooperation, whereby the two are mutually reinforcing. In this context, the signature of the 2010 bilateral cooperation treaties appears as the crystallisation of a policy convergence initiated more than a decade before.

Are there hopes for trilateral concord?

As we have shown so far, relations among Europe's three main defence players can be approached as 'pairs of binary relations' (Haftendorn and Kolkmann 2004, p. 469) of which the Anglo–German is the weakest and the least institutionalised, but what about trilateral relations? What have been the joint defence initiatives involving all three players? Is there hope for a trilateral concord in European security and defence? EU-level defence cooperation has been in a deadlock for almost a decade, yet arguably any new European initiative would require the inclusion and leadership of Britain, France and Germany.

The decade from the late 1990s to the late 2000s seemed to bring some signs of effective trilateral concord and leadership on defence cooperation and diplomacy involving Britain, France and Germany. In terms of EU defence policy instruments, in 1997, Britain, France and Germany, along with Italy, agreed on the development of a multinational organisation to undertake common procurement and foster a more competitive European defence industry: the *Organisme conjoint de coopération en matière d'armement* (OCCAR) was established in 1998 and the EDA in 2003. In 2003 too, the three countries worked jointly to define common European defence guidelines (the ESS). In 2004, they jointly announced plans to build EU 'battle groups', that is, 'small, self-contained force packages… available within 15 days to respond to a crisis' (Cornish and Edwards 2005, p. 804). In terms of common diplomatic positions, Britain, France and Germany have converged and collaborated on matters such as the negotiations on Iran or the recognition of Kosovo's independence in 2008 (Matlary 2009, pp. 196–197). Yet, the year 2010 appeared as a turning point for British–French–German trilateralism. The multiplication of limited cooperative initiatives in which the three countries have not all come together makes their alignment seem increasingly unlikely: there have been the Lancaster House treaties (France and Britain) in November 2010, the Swedish-German letter in the same month, the Weimar letter (France, Germany, Poland) in December 2010, and several other initiatives involving none of the three, such as the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO) since November 2009 or the Visegrad Group, revived in May 2011.

Hence, despite the hope born from this period of trilateral concord in the 2000s – excluding the 'Britain versus France-Germany' diplomatic crisis over Iraq in 2003 – time has seemed to play against trilateral convergence. On the contrary, the past few years have seen Britain and Germany increasingly falling apart, and France having trouble keeping them together. It seems that France could do the link between Britain and Germany, because it has strong links with both and it is today an active member of both Germany's favourite club (the EU), and Britain's one (NATO; Parkes 2012). Besides, it has showed a greater tendency towards adaptability than one would have expected in the 1990s with France's 'Gaullist' heritage. Hence, France could play a key role in bringing together Britain and Germany under common initiatives. It has been trying to do with the

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Saint-Malo Declaration in 1998 – bringing the UK into EU defence matters – and more recently since the signing of the Lancaster House treaties, which it has sought to open to Germany. However, Paris faced both London and Berlin's opposition. Hence, as of today, we can hardly see how the postures of Europe's three main players could be reconciled other than in an ad hoc manner to form a trilateral 'directoire' on European defence issues.

Conclusion

Because convergence and cooperation have rarely been studied together, the link between the two policy processes has been undertheorised. In this article we have sought to identify how they relate, asking whether institutionalised cooperation leads to policy convergence or the contrary. To do so, we have traced the evolution of British, French and German defence policy doctrines, instruments and practices since the end of the cold war to identify whether we witness a convergence of their policies and how this convergence relates to the institutionalisation of their bilateral relations. We have first demonstrated that, as far as attitudes towards international security forums are concerned, France's policy doctrine has gradually been converging towards that of Britain, rather than that of Germany. Second, in terms of defence means, Britain and France's budgets, number of armed forces and structures have become increasingly similar over the period under study, while Germany has been following a particular path away from its partners. This process has been closely linked to the states' willingness to use force and experiences at war. Because France and Britain both have expeditionary postures and have intervened in the same operations, they have made similar use of defence instruments, while Germany has mostly maintained its 'civilian power' posture. Against this background, it is not surprising that British–German cooperation be little, if any, institutionalised. The two countries have been following persistently diverging policy paths and the London-Berlin axis has clearly remained the weakest of the three pairs. What appears more surprising, however, is that the early institutionalisation of Franco–German defence cooperation in 1963 has not led to an obvious convergence of their defence policies. At least, institutionalisation has not prevented French and German policies from diverging gradually since the end of the cold war. On the other hand, the recent institutionalisation of Franco–British defence cooperation appears as the crystallisation of the convergence of their defence means and practices – due to similarities in their self-conceptions and the constraints they have faced – followed later by a convergence of their policy discourses, with France converging towards Britain rather than the contrary. Thus in the Franco–British case, convergence has not been a policy goal per se, as has been the case in French–German relations. Yet, we observe that converging policy paths are leading a nascent institutionalisation of their cooperation. At the trilateral level, while France would in theory be in a position to bridge the gap between NATO's main European member and the EU's biggest economy, this has proved impossible so far given the strong and lasting divergences between the two countries.

Hence, what we conclude in this article may seem counter-intuitive. Indeed, this article shows that there is no evidence that institutionalised cooperation leads to policy convergence as far as defence is concerned. On the contrary, policy convergence appears more as the result of a resemblance in practices, potentially leading to an enhancement of

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cooperation. And finally, we have shown that in order to properly trace convergence processes, one should differentiate between policy doctrines, instruments and practices, to the extent that convergence can exist *de facto* before it appears in political discourses; or it can be a stated wish with little consequences on the ground.

Notes

1. The EU was approached through its successive institutional developments, that is, first the WEU, then the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) (since 1992) and finally the CSDP (after 2009).
2. The three latest national publications we used are:

    - For France: Livre blanc sur la défense (1994); Défense et sécurité nationale: le livre blanc (2008); and Livre blanc défense et sécurité nationale (2013). We used the French versions of these publications.
    - For the UK: Strategic defence review (1998); Delivering security in a changing world: Defence white paper (2003); and Securing Britain in an age of uncertainty: The strategic defence and security review (2010).
    - For Germany: Weißbuch zur Sicherheit der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und zur Lage und Zukunft der Bundeswehr (1994); Weißbuch zur Sicherheitspolitik Deutschlands und zur Zukunft der Bundeswehr (2006); and Die Verteidigungspolitischen Richtlinien (2011). We used the official English versions of these publications.

We searched for keywords associated with each forum, for instance: 'NATO', 'Atlantic alliance'; 'WEU', 'European defence'; 'United Nations', 'UNSC'. The same methodology was used to trace the evolution of political discourse towards the two other partners of the triangle. For instance, in German white papers we looked for 'United Kingdom', 'Britain', 'UK', 'British' and 'Anglo-' and for 'France', 'French' and 'Franco'. This will serve in the second part of the analysis to identify potential links between a convergence of national policies and increased bilateral or trilateral links between Britain, France and Germany.

3. Assuming that nuclear deterrence would cost France and Britain 10 per cent of their annual defence budgets they would still be significantly higher than Germany's. If we subtract 10 per cent of British and French defence budgets, for instance for the year 2010, we would have: Britain, $56.6bn; France, $59.7bn; and Germany, $49.7bn.
4. British officials, interviewed by the authors in London on 21 March 2013.
5. French official, interviewed by the authors in London on 21 March 2013.

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