

Ten years on from the Lancaster House Treaty - the future of Franco-British defence



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As we mark the tenth anniversary of the Lancaster House Treaties - a major milestone for Franco-British defence cooperation - the world is changing. Europe is striving to move forward, Britain has left the EU and the COVID crisis faces countries and international institutions with unprecedented challenges. . These are not reasons to scale back UK-French defence cooperation to an end, but rather to strengthen the ties that unite us.

We need each other. The French Ambassador to London, Catherine Colonna recently quoted the joint declaration made by Jacques Chirac and John Major in 1995: "we cannot imagine a situation in which the vital interests of one of our countries could be threatened without the interests of the other being threatened in the same way."

Our two countries face the same threats: Islamist terrorism, the Russian challenge to European security, the Chinese bid to dominate the next generation of technology. Our security depends on our capacity to respond to these threats and this capacity is strengthened when our efforts are united. The exchange of information is essential in the fight against terrorism. As maritime nations we play a key part in maintaining freedom of navigation on the high seas.

Whatever difficulties Brexit will cause in our bilateral relationship, geography dictates our need for strong links as recent history demonstrates.

There is no defence without a substantial budget. Together we account for more than half of the European military effort. But decisions on budgets are always difficult and the need to reduce deficits - aggravated by the COVID crisis - will put great pressure on defence spending. It therefore makes sense for our two countries to support each other and encourage each other in a major political effort, while saving and pooling resources wherever we can.

The Lancaster House agreements confirmed our common interests and set out an ambitious programme of practical cooperation. The case for working together is as strong now as it was then.

We are Europe's two nuclear powers and want to remain that way. The research programmes for radiographic cooperation demonstrates a capacity to cooperate in this most sensitive area. There are multiple exchanges between our armed forces. We share the understanding of the need to intervene and have the operational capacity to do so. British forces are at present working alongside the French in Operation Barkhane in the Sahel, and the French are working alongside the British in the NATO operation in Estonia. Lancaster House also created the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force, which

gives the operational capacity to mount a demanding military operation together, including air and naval units.

We have made progress with some defence industrial projects. This cooperation predates Lancaster House, but the Treaties gave it new impetus. The missile sector is a good example, with the light anti-ship programme announced in 2010 and a future anti-ship / cruise missile programme. The latter programme was the subject of an interesting political cooperation between the two defence committees of the National Assembly and the House of Commons. Progress is also within reach on other naval industrial programmes. But this has not always been the case for information systems and for several aeronautical cooperation projects; an area in which Lancaster House's ambitions of a joint project for a MALE (medium altitude long endurance) drone, and of a Future Combat Air System (FCAS) have not succeeded.

The threats we are confronted with, our awareness of defence issues, our ambitions in the world, the specific place of our two countries and our budgetary constraints are not changed by Brexit. Indeed, with France in the European Union and the United Kingdom outside, the need for understanding and cooperation is more essential than ever.

We need to move closer, so the Lancaster House process remains as relevant as ever. President Macron's proposal for a European Defence Initiative includes the United Kingdom. The Franco-British Defence Council, created in 2018, is very useful forum to maintain and strengthen cooperation.

The Franco-British Council Defence Conference on 26th November is not simply a commemoration of ten years of the Lancaster House Treaty. With the participation of the two Defence Ministers, Florence Parly and Ben Wallace, it is an important opportunity to contribute to the future.

The British Ambassador to Paris, Edward Llewellyn, recalled that in 1843 the then Foreign Secretary, Lord Aberdeen, called for a cordial Franco-British agreement which became the "Entente Cordiale" in 1904. The 2020s still need this understanding, especially in defence cooperation. It is about strategic interests, our place in the world, identity and the deep pride of each of our two countries.