



# Ambassador's Activities

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Speech by HE Bernard Emié,  
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom

at the FRUK Defence Forum Roundtable

London, 19 Septembre 2012

It's not easy to be invited at a week's notice to close a conference we haven't attended, in the presence of so many experts! But let's get back to the basics of our strategic defence relations, which remain an absolute priority for the French authorities that emerged from the elections of May and June 2012.

## **I/ The solidity of Franco-British defence cooperation**

I'd like, first of all, to recall a few simple and basic facts about Franco-British defence cooperation. It's a solid partnership rooted in a shared vision of the great defence and security challenges. It's a partnership that will continue to play a key role in the long term.

A/ First of all, our two countries' strategic proximity reflects the similarity of the challenges we face :

- **We are of similar size.** But on the new world stage, we no longer reach the critical mass;
- **We have similar values and similar responsibilities.** Our two nations are permanent members of the UN Security Council, key members of the European Union, key members of NATO;
- Both our nations have a **nuclear deterrent**, which places us in a category of our own, with specific responsibilities and a specific policy stake in the complex world of counter-proliferation;
- **We face similar challenges and threats.** Asia and the emerging countries are on the move. America's focus is increasingly shifting towards the Pacific. Threats remain, as we're seeing with Iran and Syria: nuclear proliferation, terrorism and regional instability.

B/ This strategic complementarity was enshrined by the Lancaster House treaties.

Each pillar of these treaties testifies to the trust and ambition driving our two countries in the defence and security fields:

- **The nuclear treaty** is a very clear signal of this strategic trust. It shows our political leaders' desire to work without taboos and rule out no options. The Minister of Defence, Jean-Yves Le Drian, described this cooperation to French parliamentarians as a "considerable step forward" and an "intellectual revolution" (Hearing before the National Assembly National Defence and Armed Forces Committee on 5 July 2012). Our aim is to make progress on all aspects of this cooperation, without ruling out new initiatives.
- **The general defence and security treaty**, whose scope is very broad, shows the ambition of this cooperation: to develop cooperation between our armed forces, sharing and pooling equipment, building joint facilities, mutual access to each other's defence markets, and industrial and technological cooperation.

On the operational side, the engine and goal is the creation of a **Joint Combined Expeditionary Force** to respond to jointly identified threats and capable of intervening in operations, whether they be to support the United Nations, NATO, the EU or indeed an ad hoc coalition.

This ambitious operational goal presupposes a process of convergence in many fields – such as doctrine, concepts and training – and this of course requires enhanced interoperability. In Libya, we demonstrated that we were stronger together, and we'd scarcely even begun this work of convergence. Imagine what a lever we'll have in the future, when we've successfully concluded this work and put this Joint Combined Expeditionary Force fully in place by 2016. In just over a month's time, our Defence Ministers will be attending a joint exercise off Corsica, which will again demonstrate the many steps forward taken in less than two years.

- **In the procurement field**, the treaty took us onto a whole new level of cooperation, in a more systematic search for cooperation and results. The whole spectrum of possible cooperation is under examination, and we're moving ahead in many fields. After the progress made in the area of naval mine warfare, two agreements were signed on 24 July; they represent a new, positive step in Franco-British cooperation on Unmanned Air Systems:

- One MoU represents the first phase of a demonstration programme for a **Future Combat Air System (FCAS)**;
- The other was signed to enable cooperation on the **Watchkeeper** Tactical UAS. In this field of UAS the Ministers also discussed the potential for military cooperation between specialized units of the two armies using the same systems.

## **II. The unfailing support of the French political authorities**

### A/ The permanence of our political commitments

Franco-British defence cooperation has enjoyed and still enjoys unfailing political support, reaffirmed on a regular basis by our highest political authorities.

The French President – who has visited the UK three times since he was elected and had meetings with Prime Minister Cameron each time – has expressed his determination to see this partnership deepened.

On 10 July, for example, on an official working visit, President François Hollande repeated here, alongside David Cameron – and I quote:

“I have come to affirm once again the strength of relations between France and Britain. These are tied up with history. (...) I wanted here today to remind you of the strength of our ties and particularly of the good relations we have established for a long time now between our two countries' successive leaders. There may be changeovers of political power between parties in France, and in Britain, but they don't impair the quality of our relations.

“I want as well to underline the fact that the British Prime Minister and I will be further intensifying, improving and deepening our relations, particularly in defence. This is significant cooperation which has been sealed by several successive agreements: what is

known as the Saint-Malo agreement and then the Lancaster House Treaty; this, I might add was ratified virtually unanimously [by our parliament] in 2011, which makes it even simpler for me to pursue its application.”

The cooperation guidelines confirmed in that visit by President Hollande were discussed during the visit by Jean-Yves Le Drian, Minister of Defence, on 24 July. His meeting in London with Philip Hammond, the first at bilateral level, was an opportunity to discuss all subjects of common interest and sign the two significant agreements previously mentioned (Watchkeeper and the FCAS).

Let me add that we're aware of the long-term nature of the British commitment, over and above certain changes of staff – and I'd like to pay tribute in particular to Nick Harvey and Peter Luff, who were both driving forces behind the success of the Lancaster House agreements – but we're convinced that under the leadership of the Prime Minister and Philip Hammond, the Ministry of Defence and its new Ministers, Andrew Robathan and Philip Dunne, will very much remain driving forces behind the deepening of our exchanges.

B/ Political trust that will enable us to tackle new challenges together

This high degree of political and strategic trust also reflects the spirit of partnership in which we consider together – unambiguously and in full transparency – the new challenges for which we'd like to combine our thinking and our efforts.

This trust is all the more crucial in these times of choices about capabilities, profound reforms of our defence tools and big decisions for the future.

Today we're working in a strategic but also an economic and fiscal context that requires us to adapt the parameters of our defence and security. This is the whole purpose of the new White Paper, which corresponds to the Strategic Defence and Security Review carried out by the British government after it came to office in 2010.

President Hollande set out its goals on 13 July when the work on it was launched, and I quote:

“The objective is to define our defence strategy and force capabilities for the next 15 years, based on our analysis of the threats in a particularly unstable world facing a plethora of challenges.

“The crisis places heavy budget constraints on our economies.

“Military spending is growing all over the world except in Europe.

“WMD proliferation programmes, particularly those involving nuclear and chemical weapons, are endangering whole regions of the world.

“Terrorism is constantly taking new and more threatening forms.

“Preparedness for this new scenario will allow appropriate action to be taken when the time comes.

“This is the purpose of the White Paper, which will be drawn up in close consultation with the military community.

“I might add, of course, that the work will have to be carried out in a clear European framework: we will call on our partners so that our defence and security policy takes account of the EU’s shared interests and even, after several years of stagnation, renders possible a relaunch of Defence Europe.”

It was in this spirit that President Hollande asked Prime Minister David Cameron and Chancellor Angela Merkel “to appoint senior officials to be involved in a number of discussions” – in the UK’s case Sir Peter Ricketts, my counterpart in Paris, whom I have the pleasure of talking to again this evening. Everyone is delighted that Sir Peter was Mr Cameron’s natural choice, and he’ll be involved in the work led by Jean-Marie Guéhenno, former Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and a great expert on defence issues.

### **III. The relaunch of Defence Europe stands out as a priority**

But this exceptional bilateral partnership obviously doesn’t prevent us – quite the contrary – from also working on the necessary relaunch of Defence Europe. It’s a subject where we may have slight differences or even disagreements, but we want to develop a practical and pragmatic approach.

A/ Why must we relaunch Defence Europe?

Camille Grand recalled last week the challenges to be tackled by the committee responsible for preparing the White Paper (article in Le Figaro on 11 September 2012: “Défense : l’heure des choix” [”Defence: decision time”]).

To the comments made by various people I’ll add my own: this exercise is all the more eagerly awaited and will shape tomorrow’s France and Europe all the more because it is nothing less than the first exercise of strategic reflexion by a Western nation in a context of persistent economic crisis, post-Arab Spring thinking, NATO reforms (decided in November 2010 and confirmed in May 2012) and decisions to be taken on what must be expected of Western armed forces following the engagement in Afghanistan, where we’re now witnessing the conclusion of combat actions.

The ambition for a “relaunch of Defence Europe” originates with President Hollande and is being promoted by, among others, our Foreign and Defence Ministers. The objective reasons behind it are the same as those which led to the preparation of the Franco-British treaty. This cooperation must serve as an example; France would like it to play a driving and pioneering but inclusive role.

B/ How to relaunch Defence Europe ?

The work undertaken by the French authorities with their European partners since June is an integral part of this approach.

Today, three key priorities appear decisive in furthering Defence Europe: operations, capabilities and industrial policy. For all these three key priorities, there is no denying that Franco-British cooperation has a central role to play:

- First and foremost, deploying the European Union effectively in operations. The example of piracy off the Horn of Africa demonstrates that when there is a shared approach, Europe is capable of finding the resources to act and thus shows its added value in defence terms. At a time when threats are taking shape on Europe's borders – as the news reminds us every day in the Sahel region – we must consider any possible changes in Europe's operational deployments that might be capable of responding to those crises.
- We must also increase the availability of capabilities in Europe. Indeed, deploying in operations requires the Europeans to have credible military capabilities. This shows how particularly relevant Franco-British cooperation is. It provides an example to all those in Europe who still have ambitions.

Thus, the work undertaken by France to give a fresh boost to defence cooperation is being done pragmatically, transparently, inclusively, with all the European partners with whom we share operational or industrial traditions. The exemplary nature of the Franco-British partnership plays its full role in this dynamic.

- Finally, it's essential to consolidate the industrial and technological base of European defence and help develop the European defence market. Here again, our two countries will together make a major contribution to this effort. We have a duty to provide all our support to the European Defence Agency in this ambitious task it also has of consolidating and maintaining our European expertise.

And while I'm on this crucial issue for European defence, a word about the plan for a possible merger between EADS and BAe. As far as EADS is concerned, the plan is under in-depth examination by the French authorities, in close liaison with the Germans, to consider the strategic aspects of the merger: its industrial impact, possible areas of fruitful cooperation that could emerge from it, the governance of the entity, and the future of our defence industry. We're well aware of Britain's concerns about this ambitious project, which our Economy Minister discussed on Monday with your Chancellor.

A few words, too, on NATO. I know some people regard the relaunch of European defence with a touch of concern, particularly about our commitment within NATO. For us, there's no reason for that fear.

Quite the contrary: fruitful areas of cooperation between our commitment to NATO and strengthening Defence Europe are one of the central focuses of our strategic thinking. In this spirit, on 8 July President Hollande entrusted M. Hubert Védrine, former Foreign Minister, with the task of assessing France's return to the Atlantic Alliance's integrated military command and the development of the transatlantic relationship in the coming decade.

The conclusions of this work will be submitted to President Hollande at the end of October and passed on to the committee responsible for drawing up the new White Paper on National Defence and Security. As you're aware, building a strong Defence Europe is in harmony with France's determination to strengthen the Atlantic Alliance.

In conclusion, let me to express to you my confidence in the prospects for Franco-British defence cooperation. This shared ambition has persisted through the changeovers of political power in both our countries and is following its course, because this convergence is in our mutual interest. We each have our political and fiscal constraints and our vision of Defence Europe and of our NATO links, but let's make a simple, overall observation. Our long-term security and our respective roles in the world will be better assured through a defence cooperation that grows ever deeper and is continually reinvented, while strictly complying with the treaties signed./.