FRANCO-BRITISH RELATIONS AT SEA AND OVERSEAS

A Tale of Two Navies

Alexandre Sheldon-Duplaix

In 2009, financial restrictions forced France to close its naval attaché office in London, the job being transferred to another sailor, the admiral who serves as France's defense attaché in the United Kingdom. Paris's first naval attaché across the Channel had been posted unofficially in 1856 and formally four years later. Back then, the two competing empires in Africa and in the East had many shared interests, be it to keep the Russians out of the Mediterranean and fight the Crimean War, suppress the slave trade in the Gulf of Guinea, open China to their trade, or to work together to protect their nationals and their investments overseas. During the American Civil War, Paris and London had closely coordinated their policies to assess and finally accept the Union blockade against the South. The two navies also planned for a possible confrontation with the North or its strategic partner, Russia, in the aftermath of the Polish insurrection in 1863. At the same time, London was envious of France's famed naval engineer Dupuy de Lôme and his *Gloire*-type armored frigates. Britain had embarked on an ambitious program to eventually reclaim its leadership in naval technology, while selling to France steam engines and sharing expertise in naval gunnery. As a junior engineer, Dupuy de Lôme had worked in a British shipyard—another example of competition and cooperation altogether.[1]

One hundred fifty years have elapsed, and except for the erosion of British naval might, the relative situations of the two countries and their navies are not all that different. Two future sixty-six-thousand-ton

Alexandre Sheldon-Duplaix is a naval historian at the naval section of the French Defense Historical Service at Vincennes, near Paris. He lectures in naval history at the French Joint Defense Staff College in Paris and at the Combat Systems and Naval Weapons School near Toulon. A graduate of the Paris Institute of Political Studies (Public Service), he has a master's in history and two predoctoral dissertations (history and political science) from the Sorbonne. His two most recent books are Hide and Seek: The Untold Story of Cold War Espionage at Sea *(coauthored with Peter Huchthausen, 2009) and* Histoire mondiale des porte-avions *(2006).*

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Queen Elizabeth aircraft carriers should eventually allow the Royal Navy to deploy larger platforms than the single forty-four-thousand-ton French carrier *Charles de Gaulle*. Like the armored frigates of the 1860s, the British carriers were ordered with an urgent concern not to be second to the French in terms of capital ships and tonnage, especially when it comes to choosing a flagship for an allied force.

TWO OLD COMPETITORS WITH COMPARABLE STRATEGIC INTERESTS

On the strategic level, the situations of the United Kingdom and France are comparable. Their economies are on a par, as are their defense budgets, at £40.4 billion (2.5 percent of gross national product) and €42.52 billion (2.6 percent), respectively. The strengths of British and French militaries are close, at 240,200 and 250,582 men, respectively, including 39,320 and 42,866 for their sea services. Their geostrategic heritages, commitments, and approaches are very similar. As Captain Jean Nicolas Gauthier, France's last naval attaché in London, explains, "Britain and France share the same nostalgia of a lost grandeur and have their own particular views on the world."[2] Both the United Kingdom and France have national interests that justify deploying forces outside of NATO. Their militaries are shaped for force projection on a national basis. Despite London's 1967 vocal withdrawal from "east of Suez" and its focus on NATO, the United Kingdom remains present overseas through the Commonwealth. Outside the United Kingdom, Elizabeth II is the queen regnant of fifteen independent sovereign countries: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Jamaica, Barbados, the Bahamas, Grenada, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Belize, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Antigua and Barbuda. Likewise, France remains politically influential within many of the twenty-eight French-speaking countries.

Other European nations have been increasingly active in Africa, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Indian Ocean. But their actions have been prompted by transatlantic or European Union solidarities, not by those nations' historical interests and commitments. Germany, aside from supporting actively its industry abroad, has no distant strategic issues that would justify projecting its forces outside of an allied operation. The same is true for Spain and Italy, but not for Britian and France.

As recent operations have shown, France and the United Kingdom keep important bases overseas and are committed by strings of military agreements. Cyprus has proved to be a key position for projecting British forces to the Middle East and farther out to Afghanistan. Likewise, the French DOM-TOM—the nation's overseas departments and territories—can play the role of "fixed aircraft

carriers" and effectively provide French forces with logistic bases across the globe. British garrisons are maintained on Ascension Island, Cyprus, Diego Garcia, and the Falklands, and in Belize, Brunei, Canada, Germany, Gibraltar, Kenya, and Qatar. Despite the 1967 withdrawal, Britain remains committed in East Asia by the Five Power Defense Arrangements signed in 1971, whereby the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, and Singapore will consult each other in the event of external aggression against the latter two. The British military can recruit personnel among the Commonwealth nations, and British servicemen serve in other Commonwealth armed forces. France has military agreements with Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Comoros, Djibouti, Gabon, the Ivory Coast, Kuwait, Qatar, Senegal, Togo, and the United Arab Emirates. A traditional player in the Arabian Peninsula, with its military links to Oman, Britain is closely matched there by France, which has a presence in Djibouti—on the Horn of Africa—and in a newly established naval and air base in the United Arab Emirates. Similarly, Britain retains a defense commitment in Belize, to deter Guatemala's ambitions, while France is an active partner in the West Indies, with naval units based in Martinique that participate alongside the occasional British frigate in the U.S.-led antidrug effort. France and the United Kingdom have intervened together in such distant theaters as East Timor. London remains committed to the defense of the Falkland Islands, while Guyane makes of France a South American neighbor.

A FRAMEWORK FOR A CLOSER NAVAL RELATION

For all those reasons, a closer Franco-British naval cooperation makes sense. The Royal Navy and the Marine Nationale are the two largest navies in Europe, and they have had for decades a common goal of working together. If it were not for the sad memories of Mers-el-Kébir—when a reluctant British admiral was summoned by Winston Churchill to attack the fleet of an ally who had been forced into an armistice by the stunning defeat of its army—and its aftermath, the two navies would have remained at peace ever since Napoleonic times. For most of those years, the two navies have sailed in neighboring waters, solving problems together. They have also fought five wars as allies, including three together with the United States.

As Captain Gauthier explains, "The relation to the United States is at the heart of the Franco-British naval cooperation." First, the reference to America enables France to celebrate its last major naval victory, at Chesapeake Bay in 1781, giving a convenient response for Britain's annual Trafalgar commemoration, where French officers have to outwit their former foes. Second, the relation to the U.S. Navy is strong in both. As Gauthier puts it, each feels like "an older junior brother of the U.S. Navy." The Royal Navy can bolster the "special

relationship" that exists between these two countries separated by a common language. Britain has always taken pride in its ability to influence the United States. In that connection, the British diplomatic representation in Washington is about ten times more numerous than the French. Nevertheless, gratitude to Lafayette, de Grasse, and Rochambeau and, more recently, sixty years of close naval cooperation, especially in naval aviation, have forged deep connections between the navies of the American and French republics.

If Argentina's successful French-made Exocet missiles caused popular resentment in the United Kingdom during the 1982 Falklands War, London's defense secretary at the time praised Paris for its role: "In so many ways [President François] Mitterrand and the French were our greatest allies," wrote Sir John Nott. France made available to Britain Super Étendard and Mirage aircraft so that Harrier pilots and Royal Navy ships could train against them. Nott also praised the cooperation with the French secret service that had produced "a remarkable worldwide operation to prevent further Exocets being bought by Argentina," most notably from Peru, Buenos Aires's strategic partner. In contrast, Nott expressed disappointment at the pressure from the White House and the U.S. State Department to negotiate: "They could not understand that to us any negotiated settlement would have seemed like defeat."[3] If Nott acknowledged the role of Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger in supplying vital Sidewinder air-to-air missiles to the British, he seemed disenchanted with the "special relationship": "For all Margaret Thatcher's friendship with Ronald Reagan, he remained a West Coast American looking south to Latin America and west to the Pacific. Sometimes, I wondered if he even knew or cared where Europe was." The British recapture of the Falklands—a very close call—remains the defining accomplishment that to this day justifies procuring aircraft carriers and amphibious ships. Despite (or thanks to) the Exocet, it also showed the value of French support.

In the past fifteen years the Franco-British naval relation has been further strengthened. As a former defense attaché in London, Vice Admiral Yann Tainguy explains, "It is with the Royal Navy that the French Navy has the most structured relation to work effectively." In 1996, in Saint-Malo, the commanders in chief of both navies signed a letter of intent that set up the framework for this structured naval relation. The agreement covers a wide range of activities including operations, and twenty formal working groups have been established under the direction of the British and French chiefs of naval staff. They cover future aircraft carrier development, operational planning, training between surface fleets, submarines, naval aviation, communications, personnel exchanges, amphibious operations, and antisubmarine, antiair, and antisurface warfare doctrine. An operations cell at the Commander-in-Chief Fleet headquarters at

Northwood is manned by French officers to facilitate liaison and cooperation with the French Navy.[4]

The intent of the agreement was to establish effective cooperation at the working level between the two navies, mainly among midlevel officers. The working groups meet every year, usually in the aftermath of a rugby match between the two navies—a contest won by the French side in 2010. People meet and follow a road map for their discussions. The navies exchange their operational programs, although they do not yet have coordinated burden sharing.

The dialogue has sometimes stumbled on the specificities of both navies. For instance, France has tried to push the relations in terms of common training. France and Germany have developed a joint education system for four to five young officers who spend five years in the other nation finishing their secondary studies and graduating from the naval academy. France and Italy also trade specific courses for officers and petty officers. With the United Kingdom, however, common training and naval education have proved so far nearly impossible, because its system of education is entirely different. British naval officers are recruited after university. Basic naval education lasts only about forty weeks before students earn access to their first positions as naval officers. The best are later retrained to prepare them for longer careers with the appropriate qualifications. The French system remains based on the "Grande École" concept; graduates of the naval academy are expected to serve full careers, with the consequence that French junior officers are usually overqualified for their first assignments. The British system is more open—the first diploma does not matter so much. Forty weeks of training provide the basic seamanship required.

When France held the presidency of the European Union (EU), it tried to establish a military-education exchange similar to the Erasmus study-abroad system that exists among European universities. It worked well with Germany, Italy, and Spain; it failed with the United Kingdom. The plugs just did not fit; the education systems were too different. Captain Philip Stonor, the British assistant defense attaché in Paris, concurs:

> We have the challenge of similar but different approaches to the same culture. We are broadly the same people, we have the same motivations but we think in different ways: the Baccalaureate scheme is very Jacobin, very Cartesian: you are told what to do; most fit in; but some don't—that is not British who tend to like diversity. The French system tends to be elitist. But what's the point of having an elite: does it make things work better? The British system is based on a looser more interactive base with a pragmatic approach. If you want to join the Navy, they tell you, go to sea, not sit in a classroom—that way you will learn what you need to do not how you should do it if you ever get out of the classroom.[5]

The combat training and qualification system of the Royal Navy is very demanding, and Britain would not wish to parallel the French, Spanish, or Italian equivalents to certify Her Majesty's ships. On the other hand, France takes advantage of the British system. The Marine Nationale participates in the second level of the JOINT WARRIOR exercises, which take place in Scotland. French submarines attend Perisher, the submariners' command course, and the two silent services exchange officers.

Although all expectations have not been fulfilled, the Saint-Malo mechanism has proved so satisfactory that the two nations' armies and air forces followed this path, signing similar agreements in 1997–98.[6] Moreover, in effect the 1996 naval agreement has been recapitulated at the political level. The two ministers of defense have always asked to be briefed on this cooperation, which remains political in essence.

In this context, the past decade has put the Franco-British relationship to a test. President Jacques Chirac's opposition to the American-British intervention in Iraq provoked a split and a misunderstanding not only in transatlantic relations but also in cross-Channel diplomacy. IRAQI FREEDOM caused a deep rift between the allies. Military relations between the United States and France were nearly suspended, and general officers of each ceased to travel to the other country. The situation did not get to that point between the French and British militaries, but the flow of information was considerably reduced. As a consequence, cooperation became more difficult and France was barred from learning the very important operational lessons of the military operations under way in Iraq.

Ever since, both militaries have known distinct paths of evolution. The French Navy has remained more visible than the Royal Navy, whose seagoing role has been shadowed by ground operations and bad luck. While training the born-again Iraqi navy on the Shatt al Arab and protecting a vital Iraqi offshore platform, a Royal Navy detachment was captured by Iranian Pasdarans during the Easter vacation. This was simply a matter of poor timing, but the incident served poorly the image of the service at a time of budgetary discussion. The usual detractors questioned the usefulness of Royal Navy missions such as those that had led to this embarrassment.

On the other hand, the Royal Marines built up their experience and influence by taking a major role in the Iraq war. They outnumber by far the French naval commandos and Fusiliers Marins, and they constitute a definite specialization of the Royal Navy ground capability that does not exist in France, where the Troupes de Marine belong to the Army.

Despite the 2003 split over Iraq, Paris and London worked very hard for the creation in 2004 of a European Defence Agency (EDA). At the political level the main difference between the two countries lay with the French position

regarding Europe. France supports the view that Europe should develop capabilities to conduct global military operations of its own. Britain and the Royal Navy have always had an inclination toward the American "special relationship." The United Kingdom has always considered any duplication of existing NATO capabilities as a waste of resources. Paris views Europe's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) as having a better chance to address global issues than NATO, with its American dimension. London feels uneasy about combining the CSDP with NATO, while the United States has put forward the three *D*s: no duplication, no decoupling from the United States or NATO, and no discrimination against non-EU members, such as Turkey.

The purpose of EDA is "to support the Member States and the Council in their effort to improve European defence capabilities in the field of crisis management and to sustain the European Security and Defence Policy as it stands now and develops in the future."[7] Unlike NATO, EDA has a bottom-up approach. The idea is an organization with concentric circles and different levels of entry that would reflect the levels of interest of new members and investments that they would be ready to make. Depending on interest and their financial possibilities, members would proceed toward the inner circle of countries fully committed to developing a certain type of equipment. In this respect, Britain and France seem to be the two most committed of the larger members of EDA.

The purpose of EDA is to help develop a military industrial base and a military capability that can be used to serve the European Union's strategy and the CSDP, which was created in the aftermath of the Chirac-Blair meeting in Saint-Malo in 1998.

From a British perspective, the core of this effort has been supported by France and the United Kingdom. Germany is also a very important member, but the question has always been whether Germany would go all the way to deploying troops. As a result of Operation ARTEMIS in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, European nations have contemplated a permanent force that would be ready for deployment at any time, like EURFOR, EUROMARFOR, or the Franco-German Brigade.[8] So far, the problem has remained at the national level. Some nations are ready to commit troops and ships but will not pay the costs. Other nations cannot be trusted, because they may back down for political reasons.[9] From a French perspective, however, Paris has always tried to promote the creation of a European Union structure for planning and joint operations, while Britain has resisted duplicating an existing NATO capability.

THE QUEST FOR THE HOLY GRAIL OF INDUSTRIAL SYNERGIES

In an ideal world British and French naval industries should be merged, because the two navies' needs are identical: aircraft carriers, strategic submarines,

nuclear attack submarines, antiaircraft destroyers, general-purpose frigates, amphibious assault ships, and seagoing replenishment ships. Both British and French standards for acoustic silencing are much stricter than those of other European nations. In that sense, an ideal consolidation of European naval shipbuilding might include Britain joining France, on the one hand, with Germany merging its capabilities with Italy's, on the other hand. Still, this will most likely never happen.

One French participant refuses to view the termination in 1999 of the Horizon air-defense destroyer program as a failure: "Put the Type 45 *Daring* [(D32), the first Type 45 unit] and the *Forbin* [(D620), French lead ship of the Horizon class] side by side: they just look alike and share the same weapon system. We worked very hard to have a common weapon system and unfortunately we were not able to agree on the combat system. But this is certainly not a failure: we created a wealth of contacts and relations that have been extremely useful for the industry and that could be reactivated at will." Through the Horizon program France learned to write detailed specifications and contracts. In the past, past navy-military procurement procedures were very simple, with the navy putting its requirements very briefly—two hundred pages for the *La Fayette* frigates. With the Horizon written specifications, of six thousand pages, the French Navy transformed its relations with the industry. Aside from this learning experience, cooperation on warship programs is always difficult, because of legitimate national concerns about safeguarding expertise, jobs, and shipyards. But some in France think that both countries could have gone farther. Cooperation on Horizon was rocked by a series of difficulties.

For one, the industrial partners did not have the same status: the then Directorate for Naval Construction (now DCNS) was part of the French state, whereas GEC, its British counterpart, was not a shipyard and belonged to the BAE aerospace group. Some on the French side felt that GEC was unfamiliar with the naval domain. Moreover, the British naval industry was in trouble, having been unable to restructure and cut down the number of its shipyards. More numerous and smaller yards meant duplication and a smaller critical mass that did not fit the ambitious research and development (R&D) effort required for the Horizon program.

The national calendars diverged. With Masurca air-defense missiles reaching the end of their lives and the SM-1 Tartar being less capable of defeating cruise missiles, France initially wanted its Horizon antiair destroyers by 2004 and had to order them in 1998. The British had already decided to stretch the lives of the Type 42s and had planned to order their Horizon destroyers only in 2000.

The partners were overoptimistic as to the numbers they could afford. Britain wanted twelve units, Italy pretended to buy six, and France had planned on four (to replace altogether the two *Suffren* and the two *Cassard* frigates), for a grand total of twenty-two. Only ten—four Horizon and six Type 45—will come out in the end.

Rolls-Royce's TR21 gas turbine was selected, but it would not be ready in time for the French program.

France and Italy wanted the European Multifunction Phased Array Radar (EMPAR), while the British side supported its own Sampson (an "active electronically scanned array" radar being developed by BAE Systems). Actually Britain was ready to spend more on its R&D, because expertise had been lost due to financial restrictions under Margaret Thatcher. London was hoping to install the Sampson on all twenty-two ships.

At first, Britain was uncertain about the missile itself. Going with Aster would close the door for the SM-3 and Tomahawk, two important weapons for their antitactical-ballistic-missile and land-attack capabilities. The SM-3 and Tomahawk required a broader hull. Although the British did choose Aster, with its sixty-four-cell Silver vertical launch system (VLS), designed by DCN, the Type 45 is broader than the Franco-Italian Horizon and could eventually accommodate, with modifications, the Mark 41 VLS with SM-3 and Tomahawk.

The combat-management system (CMS) seemed, however, to have been the main obstacle. Both France and the United Kingdom wanted to take the lead for the CMS. Initial trouble with the Type 23 CMS had led Britain to show an interest in the French CMS, owned by DCN. Being a public company, DCN could not head the overall program consortium but wanted to lead the CMS. GEC claimed the leadership, while the French partner felt that it was more experienced in this particular area. Transferring DCN's know-how on CMS to GEC, a potential competitor, would not be profitable for France.

In the end, Horizon and its half brother the Type 45 reflect different philosophies and cultures. France accepts a ship into its navy when its weapons and systems have been integrated, tried, and certified. Having an aviation culture, BAE favored an incremental process, as for aircraft prototypes. The first Type 45 was commissioned with its main radar untested and without an electronic warfare suite. Sampson was first tried on the testing barge *Longbow* in 2009, when *Daring* was already in commission. Instead of a CMS, it carries a command-and-control system capable of handling the Principal Anti-Air Missile System. Earlier, the Type 23 frigates also lacked combat-management systems at the beginnings of their lives.

Despite its termination, the Horizon program created a momentum that the two countries tried to use for their aircraft carrier programs. Politically, then-president Jacques Chirac wanted cooperation with Britain. The choice of conventional gas turbines instead of nuclear propulsion (as in *Charles de Gaulle*) made by an interministerial committee proved the French desire to pave the way toward a common design. The French carrier would still have had to produce additional steam for its catapults (which the *Queen Elizabeth*s were not supposed to have at first), but the committee had concluded that it was best to have a larger carrier than *Charles de Gaulle,* because future planes would be larger. This also explains why the Franco-British design displaces sixty thousand tons and why *Charles de Gaulle*'s propulsion plant would not be powerful enough for a nuclear variant of what would have been France's much-larger number-two carrier.

The aircraft carrier cultures of the two nations proved surprisingly distinct. In France the aircraft carrier is a warship in itself. The captain is in charge of both the platform and the air group and directs all operations. In the United Kingdom two separate worlds coexist, the platform and the air group. Each world has its own operational life, and there are two hierarchies, one for the ship and one for the air group. This explains why the British carrier design has two islands, with combat information centers in both islands.

The British notion that air operations can be distinct from the ship's operations is seen as heresy on the other side of the Channel. Captain Stonor acknowledges this difference: "We have yet to find the happy balance between the RAF [Royal Air Force] way of operating and Naval procedures. There are two big differences: RAF are very reluctant to do non-diversionary flights when embarked; and the RAF has yet [to] be convinced of the advantages of 'hot refueling.' No doubt for their own good reasons they don't want to do things the Naval way."[10]

Notwithstanding this philosophical difference, the British architecture has its advantages. Antennas have to be set apart anyway to avoid problems of electromagnetic incompatibility. The two-islands concept is also better for survivability in case of a hit.

The French side argued that building the three hulls (i.e., two British, one French) in Saint-Nazaire would halve the overall costs, but Britain could not let down its own shipyards. In the end both sides made concessions, and the final design showed a commonality of about 80 percent. This meant significant saving, but once again the political tempos did not match. In 2006, one year before the French presidential elections, London was not ready to order. When Britain gave its go-ahead, the French elections were a couple of months away and Paris could not follow suit. The newly elected Nicolas Sarkozy postponed his decision to 2011–12, a move that was confirmed in June 2010. Everything is still possible, but the synergy is lost, at least partially.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES OUT OF DIFFICULT TIMES

Although the "special relationship" was put to the test back in 2003 in Iraq, where the American ally did not listen to British concerns over the lack of post-war planning, it remains profitable for Britain. As a British source comments, "The best way for the United States to deal with Europe is to use Britain as a tool to apply pressure in return for the British doing their bidding with the Europeans. The British view is: it is a hassle to go through the US Congress etc. . . . but in the end, the net gain is superior: we are better off. And this is currently making Britain reticent towards working closer with Europe."

Like the French Navy, the Royal Navy is going through difficult times. The defense focus and allocations are going to ground and air operations. Unlike their father, uncles, and granduncles, the royal princes are serving in the British Army and not in the Royal Navy. The sea service awaits the forthcoming 2010 strategic defense review with anxiety, hoping that its carrier-based navy concept will be reaffirmed. The army and the RAF are against the carriers, which compete for funding with their ground operations. But as Captain Stonor explains, "The Icelandic volcano [i.e., the eruptions that intermittently disrupted European air traffic beginning in April 2010] has shown that geographically fixed air bases have, as we always knew, serious limitations. The value of the carrier remains intact; moreover, in Afghanistan, the Allies still use the carriers to support ground operations and we are waiting for the *Charles de Gaulle* at the end of this year."

Captain Gauthier believes that those difficulties create a window of opportunity for British-French naval cooperation:

> British pragmatism should acknowledge that the defense posture of both nations is closely interdependent: we share the same fate. The fact that our two navies operate the whole spectrum of platforms from aircraft carriers to strategic submarines and amphibious assault ships means that if one nation loses one of those components, the other nation will lose a justification to retain it: its public opinion will not understand why this component is still valid if its neighbor has done away with it. Therefore, both nations have to support each other. Everything is possible and everything can be lost.[11]

The British defense review has announced further cuts that should give an incentive to explore mutually advantageous cooperation. Even the Tories now acknowledge that Britain cannot produce all it needs for its defense. Captain Stonor believes that there is "a lot to be gained to try to move towards a British-French research and development effort that Europe has yet to produce." In his view it would be well to go along with the lines envisaged by Prime Minister David Cameron and President Sarkozy.

The carrier issue is of paramount importance to both navies. Clearly the future of the Royal Navy is at stake. For both Britain and France it is also a matter of credibility in their partnership with the United States. The construction of *Queen Elizabeth II,* Britain's first of the new carrier class, is moving fast. But the prospects for the F-35B short-takeoff-vertical-landing (STOVL) aircraft under development are gloomier every day, with spiraling costs and a small number of participants.

If the F-35B STOVL collapses, the F-35C CTOL (conventional takeoff and landing) or the F-18 would be likely choices for Britain. France might harbor some hopes for the Rafale, especially if Brazil takes it for its own carrier. Through EADS, France is also a partner in the Eurofighter. Making a naval version of the latter might prove too expensive. In any case, the return to a CTOL carrier implies for the Royal Navy a necessity to relearn skills that the United Kingdom originally introduced in carrier aviation. Captain Stonor considers that *Prince of Wales,* the second carrier, could if required still be fitted with a catapult, most likely electromagnetic.

This decision will bring the two nations back to a similar carrier design, opening the door for further cooperation. Suggestions have been made that the two nations could share one of the two British carriers. But they don't seem practical. The United Kingdom will need to train its pilots, and France might be a closer and cheaper option than sending them to the United States. *Charles de Gaulle* has demonstrated its ability to cooperate closely with U.S. aircraft carriers. During recent exchanges, French Rafales have had their engines removed and replaced by French aircraft maintenance teams deployed on American aircraft carriers. There is perhaps a future for trilateral American-British-French cooperation on carriers. Britain might want the French to train their flight-deck personnel, and the United States might view that favorably.

Britain has improved six of its thirteen Type 23 antisubmarine frigates, thanks to the Thales Group's French-made Type 2087 towed passive array. Collaboration with France on Britain's Future Surface Combatant seems unlikely, though. On paper, the Type 26's specifications are closely similar to those of the DCNS's FREMM multimission frigate. But for industrial reasons, Britain has decided to go its own way and turn down a proposal to join the Franco-Italian design. Britain will not buy Aster 15 either. Instead, a new short-range air-defense missile will be developed with MBDA, the multinational missile-systems group. The logic is commercial. The United Kingdom is willing to offer the Type 26 for export. If the British had put Aster 15 on Type 26, they would have had the inconvenience of seeking French and Italian approval before exporting the ship. The Type 26s will also carry Tomahawk land-attack cruise missiles, a logical step given that the Royal Navy would not want to have

two different types of cruise missiles in its inventory if it were to buy France's SCALP naval air-launched cruise missile.

France's full reintegration within NATO should favor the development of European interoperable systems. It may find a common ground with Britain through EDA. In the replacement of their replenishment ships, so far Britain and France are going their own ways. In mine-countermeasures vessels, there is a potential area of cooperation, both nations having considerable experience. For drones, France and Britain could cooperate, but BAE has clearly chosen the United States as its partner.

On the operational side, cooperation has always been easier. As Captain Gauthier explains, "We don't always have interoperable systems but we do integrate our forces. At sea you have less borders and more character." NATO has always been the base for Franco-British naval cooperation. As a matter of fact, the return of France to the NATO military organization has been transparent for the Marine Nationale, which works on a daily basis with NATO procedures.

For both Britain and France, the operational priority is to retain their skills. The danger is the focus on certain missions that distract both navies from practicing and retaining some of their important skills, such as antisubmarine warfare. So far, exchanges for naval training have not worked properly. Sources in the French naval industry see a commercial obstacle. Unlike in France, the United Kingdom's naval education is being run by a private company named Flagship, which belongs to BAE, a competitor of DCNS. From that perspective, the lack of training exchanges may explain the difficulties encountered in developing joint programs. Captain Stonor maintains, however, that the main challenge is cultural and not commercial.

Despite those limitations on training exchanges, each country has had, for the past years, seven or eight exchange officers in the other navy. As Captain Gauthier explains, "This is a high mark of mutual confidence to entrust the watch of a major warship to a foreign officer: it creates a network of people who know each other and keep in touch to facilitate mutual understanding while they grow up." The French and British navies are also each providing a frigate to escort the other nation's aircraft carrier during deployments.

Another opportunity came out of an embarrassment. The British and French nuclear ballistic-missiles submarines *Vanguard* and *Triomphant* collided in the Atlantic on 3 February 2009. (Both were submerged and, according to Britain's Ministry of Defence, moving "at very low speed.") The accident made it clear that the two countries did not coordinate their underwater strategic patrols, a fact that Commodore Stephen Saunders, the editor of *Jane's Fighting Ships,* criticized harshly, given the possible consequences.[12] Interviewed by journalists, the French defense minister suggested that both countries could "think about their

patrol zones."[13] Recent talks are said to have included the idea of "sharing deterrence," although this may prove politically too sensitive.[14]

On the (metaphorical) ground, British and French forces—including the navies—are again fighting side by side. French naval commandos were active in Afghanistan until 2007, when President Chirac decided on their withdrawal. French naval aviation has been involved on the Afghan theater, with attack aircraft—Super Étendards and Rafales—and airborne-early-warning Hawkeyes operating from *Charles de Gaulle* or from land during the carrier's yard period. The Ministry of Defence in the United Kingdom is experiencing the stress of long-term ground operations that have been moved from the Iraqi to the Afghan battlegrounds, with ten thousand troops engaged in a tough province. France has smaller forces in Afghanistan, with 3,500. France's contingent has now gone from the Kabul area to a riskier zone, where it is taking casualties. Sadly, sharing losses also strengthens bonds.

France plays an active role in the antipiracy mission off Somalia. For the Royal Navy, given the limited number of its platforms, the piracy mission was not a priority, but its command-and-control contribution is praised. Under Rear Admiral Philip Jones, the command center at Northwood has been credited with doing a remarkable job in directing ATALANTA, the EU operation against piracy off the Horn of Africa.

The United Kingdom and France are separated by the Channel wherein they work together. Unlike France, Britain has a dedicated coast guard service—the Maritime and Coastguard Agency—and the Royal Navy does not share with the Marine Nationale the mission of safeguarding the maritime domain. But the countries charter together, and share the operating costs of, the tug *Sea Monarch* and are planning together for the security of the London 2012 Olympics.

The past decade has been tough for Franco-British naval relations, with a political split over Iraq and with differing industrial and political agendas that led to the termination of the cooperation on the Horizon program and a failure to build three aircraft carriers together.

France and the United Kingdom have common interests and objectives, but their realization is complicated by decision-making processes that often do not match the political tempos on either side of the Channel. Unifying the European naval landscape has proved impossible so far, despite a promising approach through the European Defence Agency. Thales and MBDA have been able to merge the aerospace sector, but the naval sector remains very much a national symbol— there are no lasting and reliable alliances when it comes to cutting the metal to keep yards working.

On the operational side, cooperation has always been strong. As France's last naval attaché to London summarizes it, "Both navies work well together. We have built up a trusting relationship. We both know that we would support each other in case of necessity." In French eyes, the Royal Navy remains very powerful and very capable. Its training is rigorous, and the French Navy is eager to learn from it. For Britain's part, as the assistant defense attaché in Paris notes, "within Europe, the FR-UK naval relation is moving faster."

At the time of this writing the British government was considering cutting down the size of its fleet in order to save at least one new carrier, with the second being either converted into a helicopter carrier, mothballed upon completion, or discarded. The Trident replacement plans should remain intact. Those prospects should encourage the Royal Navy to increase its interoperability with the French Navy. Fitting a catapult to one of the carriers could be part of that effort. The carrier may receive the less expensive CTOL version of the F-35 and perhaps have the capability to host the French Rafale and American F-18. Senior British officers have already underlined that further reduction of the order of battle would force the Royal Navy to abandon certain missions, such as the Armilla patrols in the Persian Gulf and the Caribbean deployments.

NOTES

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not reflect endorsement by the French Navy or Ministry of Defense.

1. See Alexandre Sheldon-Duplaix, "French Naval Intelligence during the Second Empire: Charles Pigeard Reporting on British and American Shipbuilding (1856–69)," *Mariner's Mirror* 94, no. 4 (2008). Britain transformed its naval attaché office into an assistant defense attaché position, prompting France to close the naval attaché posting to London.
2. Capt. Jean Nicolas Gauthier, interview with author, 10 June 2010.
3. Quoted in George Jones, "How France Helped Us Win Falklands War," *Daily Telegraph,* 13 March 2002.
4. U.K. Defence Ministry, "UK-French Bilateral Defence Cooperation," 6 September 2000 (released as the background to the 6 September 2000 visit by the French defense minister, Alain Richard).
5. Capt. Philip Stonor, interview with author, Paris, 30 June 2010.
6. Arrangements between 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines and the French Army's Troupes de Marine (the 9th Division d'Infanterie de Marine, or DIMA) had been signed in 1995.
7. "Background, " *European Defence Agency,* www.eda.europa.eu/.
8. EURFOR (European Force) is a multinational mission deployed to various regions by the EU since 2004; see *Council of the European Union,* www.consilium.europa.eu/. The EUROMARFOR (European Maritime Force) was created by France, Italy, Portugal, and Spain in 1995; see *EUROMARFOR,* www.euromarfor.org/. The mechanized Franco-German Brigade was formed in 1987 as part of the Western European Union's Eurocorps.
9. See "Background," *European Defence Agency,* www.eda.europa.eu/.
10. Stonor, interview.

11. Gauthier, interview.
12. Stephen Saunders, "Executive Overview: Fighting Ships," in *Jane's Fighting Ships 2009–2010* (Coulson, Surrey, U.K.: IHS Janes, 2009), p. 29.
13. Charles Platiau, "France's Defence Minister Herve Morin Attends a News Conference in Paris, July 24, 2008," Reuters, 17 February 2009.
14. Stephen Saunders, "Executive Overview: Fighting Ships," *Jane's Fighting Ships,* 29 April 2010, www4.janes.com/.