Britain and Africa: The Search for New Forms of Engagement

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By the end of the First World War, Britain’s overseas empire covered a quarter of the earth’s land surface and included some twenty dependencies south of the Sahara. Given the sheer size of this empire, it is hardly surprising that Britain opted for a low-cost system of indirect rule in Africa and elsewhere. Yet, while Britain was reluctant to use taxpayers’ money to support its colonies, it was keen to prevent other industrialised powers from gaining a foothold in its dependencies. In essence, this desire to shore up influence meant that Britain had to develop its own approach to its colonies during the colonial era. In the early post-colonial decades, Britain maintained its predilection for a unilateral approach to its former African colonies but recognised the potential of multilateral agencies such as the World Bank. Britain’s appreciation of the value of multilateral, alongside unilateral, approaches increased in the post–cold war period but there was still no recognition of the value of joint or ‘bilateral’ approaches, where two donors would systematically get together to coordinate their policies for tackling the problems of Africa. This changed when, in December 1998, the United Kingdom, together with France, signed the Saint-Malo declaration, in which the two governments promised to enhance defence cooperation and ‘harmonise their policies towards Africa’.

The shifting forms of British engagement in Africa over the longue durée have attracted scant attention in the literature, with most studies homing in on British Africa policy in the post-cold war years, particularly under recent Labour governments (1997–2010). This article is the first to show how and why, over time, Britain has grafted on to its traditional approaches a joint or ‘bilateral’ mode of intervention. It begins by outlining the United Kingdom’s unilateral and multilateral approaches to Africa over the colonial and post-colonial eras. It then sets out the driving forces behind Britain’s decision to add bilateral approaches to its existing armoury for tackling the challenges of Africa, specifically poverty reduction, democratic deficits and chronic insecurity. Next, it explores the institutional and policy changes that the Saint Malo declaration has entailed. Finally, it sets out the

2 The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) weblink to the declaration omits the Africa chapter; see <www.fco.gov.uk/en/news/latest-news/?view=PressS&id=10435411> (accessed 20 October 2009). Full text obtained by the authors from the FCO.
constraints on, as well as the significance and likely future of, Britain’s ‘partnership’ with France.

Going it alone or throwing its lot?

This historical overview of the United Kingdom’s traditional approaches to Africa is broken down into three phases: the colonial era (marked by a unilateral stance), the post-colonial era (when unilateral approaches continued to dominate but multilateral engagement went in tandem) and the early post-Cold War period (when multilateral modes of intervention became an increasingly important dimension of British policy).

The colonial era

Britain’s African empire was always secondary to its possessions in Asia and its links with the Dominion territories (Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa). Even so Britain did secure, during the scramble for Africa in the late nineteenth century, the second largest empire in Africa. Its dependencies also accounted for more than 30 per cent of Africa’s population and included strategically valuable coastal territories such as the Gold Coast (Ghana) and Nigeria and valuable settler colonies such as South Africa and Kenya.  

From the late nineteenth century to Ghana’s independence in 1957, Britain, for all its rhetoric about the white man’s burden, viewed its empire largely in terms of realpolitik: Africa was a source of raw materials, minerals and human resources for the industrial revolution, the war effort and Britain’s great power status. The primary concern was with retaining influence through indirect rule (as developed by the likes of Lord Frederick Lugard), through the Sterling Bloc and through the transposition of British customs and values to Africa. The British government did spend small sums of money on development and poverty reduction. Thus in 1929, the Colonial Development Act allocated £1 million for infrastructural development and the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1945 provided an annual ceiling of £120 million for ten years for the economic and social development of the colonies.  

These were largely unilateral measures, even if the latter drew on American funding through the Marshall Plan and was supposed to open up the colonies and move them towards self-determination, as prescribed by the 1941 Atlantic Charter which British Prime Minister Winston Churchill had signed. Equally, British efforts at holding on to colonies in the post-war era were generally unilateral, as exemplified by Britain’s campaign against the Mau Mau in Kenya (1952-60). There were of course exceptions. Thus, the United Kingdom held Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Meetings at Chequers almost annually from 1944 to 1969. Even so, Britain retained something of its splendid isolation in its dealings with empire during the colonial era.

**The early post-colonial decades**

In the post-colonial era, the United Kingdom continued to pursue an essentially unilateral approach, even if multilateral modes of intervention were now recognised as important. While Britain continued to give priority to its realpolitik ambitions, it showed greater awareness of the need to address the problems of poverty, human rights abuses and instability in Africa. To illustrate, the United Kingdom, particularly under Labour governments, replaced its complex colonial bureaucracy with new structures, notably the Overseas Development Ministry in 1964 and a unified diplomatic service in 1968. Britain also established sizeable bilateral economic and military assistance programmes which focused heavily on the 17 African countries that had experienced British colonial rule. Following on from Harold Wilson’s War on Want campaigns, the Callaghan government established the Joint Funding Scheme in 1975 to provide support to British NGOs in Africa and elsewhere. At the same time, the United Kingdom was also receptive to some multilateral, particularly World Bank–led development, not least ‘basic needs’ in the 1970s, which fitted with the Labour government’s poverty concerns, and structural adjustment in the 1980s, which meshed with Thatcherite monetarist doctrine and was about the promotion of free markets.

As regards the promotion of human rights and democracy, the United Kingdom did bequeath Westminster-style governments to nascent African states. But this was never a priority for Britain which failed to stand up convincingly against white minority regimes in Rhodesia and apartheid South Africa. Indeed, in 1965, Britain rejected a call by African members of the Commonwealth to impose black majority rule on Rhodesia and, in the mid-1980s, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher ignored Commonwealth pressure to intensify sanctions against South Africa—the one sub-Saharan African country where Britain did have substantial economic and strategic interests. The United Kingdom’s characteristic approach was simply to turn a blind eye to human rights abuses (e.g., by Zimbabwe’s Robert Mugabe in Matabeleland in the early 1980s) and to hide behind the cover of the Cold War and the overriding need to keep African states within the Western bloc.

On the security front, the United Kingdom was a central pillar of Western collective security during the Cold War. Its efforts at retaining influence in its ex-colonies were part of a wider western effort to keep the USSR out. Yet, having withdrawn British forces from East of Suez by 1971 and abandoned its last African military base, Simonstown, in 1975, London had neither the will nor the capacity to become embroiled in African conflicts. Apart from efforts to stabilise Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda during the 1963-64 East African mutinies, Britain avoided military combat in Africa and steered clear of direct involvement in Cold-War trouble spots in the Horn and Southern Africa. Britain instead confined its activity to evacuating expatriates (e.g. Zanzibar, 1964), supplying arms (e.g. Nigeria, 1967-70), and deploying British Military Assistance Training Teams (BMATTs) on short-term, renewable contracts. Aside from intelligence sharing with the United States, the United Kingdom displayed little readiness to cooperate on this front, as was evident in its refusal to be drawn into a (US-led) UN military intervention in the Belgian Congo in the early 1960s.
The post–Cold War era

The early post–Cold War era saw a growing recognition of the importance of multilateral, alongside unilateral, approaches. The narrowly realist Conservative government of John Major (1990-97) reduced the development assistance budget to 0.31 per cent, its lowest-ever level as a percentage of GNP, and aimed for selectivity in the number and choice of bilateral aid recipients. Bound by the United Kingdom’s rising commitments to the European Development Fund (EDF), the British Overseas Development Minister, Lynda Chalker, talked up ‘the advantages of the multilateral approach’ and the importance of multilaterals ‘as the “natural leaders” in collective developmental efforts’. The United Kingdom did, moreover, operate increasingly through multilateral channels in areas such as debt cancellation and democracy promotion, even if market rather than democratic reform was the ultimate goal of the Conservative government. On security, the Conservative government was generally prepared to act alone, providing diplomatic support in peace negotiations (as in the Arusha Talks), supplying police training to over 30 African countries and deploying BMATTs more heavily in countries with which Britain had had no direct colonial connection (e.g. Namibia and Mozambique). It was, however, reluctant to intervene militarily and actually lobbied against a more concerted UN intervention in Rwanda in 1994 and Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo or DRC) in 1996.

Pressures for renewed engagement

The United Kingdom’s approach to Africa has become more variegated and multilayered since the late 1990s, with unilateral policies coexisting with multilateral approaches and, crucially from the perspective of this article, complemented by ‘bilateral’ and/or ‘bi-multilateral’ forms of engagement (where the United Kingdom and another power get together and then bring others on board). While these bilateral and ‘bi-multi’ modes of intervention are not entirely new, previous examples of such cooperation are rare, implicit and tacit as, for example, when the United Kingdom and the United States led the international community in arguing against international intervention following the Rwanda genocide in 1994. By contrast, the partnership with France that was announced at Saint-Malo in 1998 was explicitly and formally enshrined in the Saint-Malo declaration and the communiqués of subsequent Anglo-French summits, notably in 2001, 2004 and 2008. It is this form of bilateral intervention that is the focus of the rest of this article.

Before undertaking this analysis, however, it is worth stressing that Britain has continued with both unilateral and multilateral approaches over the last decade or so. The United Kingdom’s unilateral approach to poverty reduction can be discerned in the prominence of the Department for International Development (DFID) and the fact that bilateral assistance has, over the last 15 years, risen from just over half to almost two-thirds of the size of the overall British aid budget (see Table 1). While

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this has inevitably entailed a fall in the proportion of total aid taken up by multilateral assistance, it has not precluded significant rises in the absolute levels of multilateral aid over the same period. It was at least partly thanks to these increases that successive Labour governments were able to push forward key multilateral initiatives relating to Africa, such as the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, aid untying, the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. The United Kingdom has also been very active within the European Union (EU), together with the Nordics and the Netherlands, in building up the capacity of the African Union (AU) and making it into an effective political voice for Africa.

Table 1: UK net overseas development assistance or oda (US dollars, millions)

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<tr>
<td>Bilateral oda (&amp; % total)</td>
<td>1510 (55.7)</td>
<td>1697 (54.4)</td>
<td>1823 (55.0)</td>
<td>3214 (63.4)</td>
<td>6754 (72.4)</td>
<td>7160 (64.2)</td>
<td>7367 (64.1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multilateral oda (&amp; % total)</td>
<td>1198 (44.3)</td>
<td>1419 (45.6)</td>
<td>1489 (45.0)</td>
<td>1858 (36.6)</td>
<td>2573 (27.6)</td>
<td>3994 (35.8)</td>
<td>4133 (35.9)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2709</td>
<td>3116</td>
<td>3312</td>
<td>5072</td>
<td>9327</td>
<td>11154</td>
<td>11500</td>
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Source: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Development Cooperation Report, OECD, Paris, various years; and OECD, Peer Review: United Kingdom, Paris: OECD, various years. Provisional figures suggest that bilateral aid made up 66 and 64 per cent of total oda (11283 and 13763 US million dollars) in 2009 and 2010 respectively.

On the democracy promotion front, the United Kingdom has pressed unilaterally for reforms through its own diplomatic channels, through aid suspensions and through civil society building programmes. It has also, however, recognised the advantages of the multilateral approach, notably working through the EU Africa Working Group (AWG) and signing up to EU aid sanctions against states which abuse the electoral process (Togo, 2002), hamper democratic development in neighbouring countries (Liberia, 2000) or flout the rule of law (Zimbabwe, 2002).

The security picture has been equally mixed, with the United Kingdom intervening unilaterally in Sierra Leone and maintaining BMATTS in numerous countries. However, since the 2000 Sierra Leone intervention, the United Kingdom has had much more regular recourse to multilateral mechanisms to address African security issues, notably the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP).\(^9\) The United Kingdom committed itself to the creation of a European Rapid Reaction Force by 2003 and also entered into a Standby Agreement with the UN earmarking British forces for the purpose of emergency peacekeeping. The Blair government also laid out new guidelines on

\(^9\) With the entry into force of the 2007 Lisbon Treaty, the EU’s European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) was re-baptized the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).
arms sales; signed up to the 1998 EU arms code and worked hard—within the
UNSC and via conferences calling for the introduction of a global diamond
certification scheme (the Kimberley Process)—to prevent conflict diamonds from
being used to fund wars in Sierra Leone, Angola and the Congo.10

Given the complementarity, longevity and seemingly path-dependent nature of
these unilateral and multilateral approaches, it is worth asking why the United
Kingdom felt the need to introduce a joint or bilateral approach to the challenges of
Africa. What drivers were pushing the United Kingdom to cooperate with France on
Africa in the late 1990s?

In Britain’s case, the election of a reformist Labour government and its
creation of the DFID in 1997 signalled a new readiness to engage with and prioritise
Africa. In this context, the Labour administration espoused a ‘third way’ Africa
policy, with an emphasis on the interdependence between national and international
interest, on the ‘ethical dimension’ of foreign policy and on Britain’s role ‘as a
catalyst and advocate for positive change in Africa in multilateral bodies’.11 British
policy-makers equally acknowledged that they could only make progress on the
MDGs if they became more active in francophone Africa and engaged more
effectively with France, as the only other European power with the ability and will
to intervene south of the Sahara. They also realised that Africa, particularly on
security matters, represented a propitious domain for cooperation with the French
and a possible stepping stone towards making Britain ‘a leading partner in Europe’,
despite its failure to join the euro.12 Equally, they recognised that France, under the
modernising socialist government of Lionel Jospin (1997-2002), was anxious to
scale down its presence, at least in some francophone African countries, and keen to
realign its diplomatic and military efforts to its key commercial interests, which
were increasingly in anglophone African countries. After the debacle of its
involvement in Rwanda, France was also anxious to shake off its image as
‘gendarme of Africa’, reduce its military presence and ensure that future operations
took place within a UN or EU framework.

The United Kingdom and France also had common interests that were pushing
them to cooperate. As middle-sized powers, they had become aware of their inability
to cope—using unilateral or even multilateral channels—with the scale of Africa’s
crises and they were facing growing challenges to their privileged positions within
the UNSC, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. By working
together, they could garner a majority of the votes on the Security Council simply by
drawing on ‘a set of contacts and influences globally which were very
complementary’.13 Second, by cooperating within the EU, the United Kingdom and
France could swing votes within the Politics and Security Council (PSC) and the
AWG. Third, by presenting a united front, they could restrict the capacity of African
regimes to play them off against each other; avoid tripping each other up in their
attempts to resolve crises in former colonies such as Zimbabwe and Côte d’Ivoire,

10 PORTEOUS, Britain and Africa, op. cit., p. 47.
12 Tony BLAIR, Lord Mayor’s Banquet, 1 November 1997.
13 Personal communication, former UK official, New York, 2008.
and lower transaction costs at a time when the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) was suffering from the closure of a number of African embassies and the loss of 20 per cent of its staff working on Africa\textsuperscript{14} and the French administration, for its part, was losing African expertise through the absorption of the Development Ministry into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in 1998. Fourth, by joining forces, Paris and London can—in an age of media broadcasting—better respond to threats arising from Africa, whether from illegal immigration, terrorism, piracy, AIDS, drugs trafficking or money laundering. Finally, by pooling their resources, the United Kingdom and France could enhance their relative power and compensate for the fact that they have become a smaller part of African foreign relations, not least since the rise of dynamic new suitors, such as China, India, Japan and the Middle East countries. According to a former British Minister: ‘If we use our history cleverly, one plus one equals three. But that is still in a world where you need ten to score on a lot of problems’\textsuperscript{15}

The comparative advantages of cooperation came to the fore at moments of crisis. Thus, after the Al-Qaeda attacks of 11 September 2001, the United Kingdom and France placed increased emphasis on security in EU African policy and on the need for a more proactive Anglo-French stance on Africa, lest it become a breeding ground for terrorism. Subsequently, during the 2003 Iraq War, British and French policy-makers were keen to find common ground on Africa as a way of overcoming the divisions caused by this conflict.

**Establishing a new mode of intervention**

The Saint-Malo Declaration represented a pledge by the United Kingdom and France to set aside past rivalry and ‘harmonise their policies towards Africa’. It served as the catalyst for the development of closer formal and informal ties between policy-making elites in the two foreign policy establishments. The formalisation of these linkages can be seen in the inclusion of a distinct ‘Africa chapter’ at Anglo-French summits. There are, moreover, now six-monthly meetings between staff from the British and French Foreign Ministry Africa Directorates. Similarly, meetings are scheduled three to four times a year at a senior level between the DFID and French Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials working on international development. Equally, there is an exchange programme involving officials from, on the British side, the Africa Directorates of the FCO and the DFID and, on the French side, from the Africa and Globalisation Directorates of the MFA. Similarly, the French and British defence ministries exchanged chargés de mission from 2005-08. In addition, a French officer is embedded with British forces in Nairobi and a British officer was until 2009 seconded to French forces in Dakar.

Turning to informal links, these have been event-, issue- or personality-driven. They include occasional joint ministerial visits, the first of which involved a trip in March 1999 to Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire by the then British and French foreign ministers, Robin Cook and Hubert Védrine, and the most recent of which was by the

\textsuperscript{14} *The Observer*, 9 January 2005.

\textsuperscript{15} Personal communication, former UK Minister, 2009.
former British Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, and the former French Foreign Minister, Bernard Kouchner, to the DRC in November 2008. Equally, there have been joint ministerial statements by, for example, the British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and French President Nicolas Sarkozy on Sudan/Darfur (March 2008). 16 There is, moreover, a tendency for newly appointed British and French ambassadors to visit Paris and London respectively before beginning their African postings. 17 Many of these linkages have been possible partly because particular British and French policy-makers have perceived such ties as being in the common interests of Britain and France and partly because these same elites have ‘got on’ together. This was the case with Cook and Védrine and with Miliband and Kouchner. Other close links were forged between successive heads of the British and French Foreign Ministry Africa Directorates (e.g., James Bevan and Bruno Joubert) as well as between Africa advisers in Downing Street and the Élysée.

These informal ties have also been important within multilateral forums. To illustrate, senior British and French officials, usually from the DFID and the Élysée respectively, have engaged in regular bilateral exchanges in their capacity as G8 Africa special representatives—a grouping established in 2002 and reinvigorated ahead of the G8 summit in 2005. 18 These meetings, coupled with strong political will at the highest level, have helped the United Kingdom and France to keep Africa high up the G8 agenda, despite US lack of enthusiasm, and to ensure African representation at G8 summits, notably in Evian (2003) and Gleneagles (2005). 19 Within the EU, the United Kingdom and France have for some time engaged in informal exchanges between actual meetings of the Committee on Development Cooperation (CODEV) and the AWG. The scope for such consultation has increased in recent years as some meetings have become more frequent (e.g. the AWG has been convened weekly rather than monthly since July 2009) and as new forums have emerged. The latter include the twice-weekly meetings of the ambassador-level Political and Security Committee or PSC which has, since its creation in 2000, taken a lead role on ESDP missions in Africa.

Informal and institutional links between Britain and France are most closely intertwined at the UN. As permanent members of the UNSC, Britain and France are invited—at permanent representative level—to attend informal lunches hosted by the Secretary-General. 20 Furthermore, Britain, France and the United States make up the P3, an informal mechanism, launched in late 1997, which facilitates consultation on UNSC matters. According to one British official, ‘Within the P3, we sometimes speak first to the French and other times we speak to the US first. At other times all three speak simultaneously’. 21 With two-thirds of UNSC business relating to Africa, the P3 has been an important arena for Anglo-French cooperation, particularly when

17 Personal communication, FCO official, 2009.
18 Personal communication, DFID, 2009.
19 African leaders were instrumental in placing Africa on the G8 agenda as from the 2002 Kananaskis summit; see Alex VINES, ‘Into Africa’, World Today, March 2005.
21 Personal communications, FCO official, 2009.
the British and French ambassadors to the UN have enjoyed a good relationship. This was certainly true of relations between Sir Emyr Jones Parry (2003-07) and French Permanent Representative, Jean-Marc de la Sablière (2002-07). Their personal rapport was no doubt facilitated by the fact that neither man enjoyed good relations with the truculent US Ambassador, John Bolton. Indeed it was in fact regularly the case during the Bush presidency that the P3 initiative would see Anglo-French talks to coordinate positions as a prelude to trying to bring the United States on board.

There have, however, been clear limits to Anglo-French efforts to build institutional bridges. There is in fact a near-total absence of ‘institutional mechanisms that bring ministers, officials and institutions together’. Indeed, the main bilateral forum for exchange has remained the Franco-British summit, a gathering whose existence predated Saint-Malo by over a decade. It has also taken over ten years for the DFID and the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) to sign, in December 2009, an overarching agreement that focuses mainly on non-contentious sectors, such as health and education. There have, moreover, been no staff exchanges between the DFID and the AFD, and there have been problems with filling some positions, particularly on the British side: for example, the United Kingdom stopped sending a chargé de mission to the Defence Ministry in Paris in 2008 and ended its practice of embedding an officer in French forces in Dakar in July 2009. Significantly too, there has been no co-location of French and British embassies in Africa.

Clearly this lack of institutional architecture ‘does not mean that cooperation is not taking place’. However, it makes collaboration dependent upon officials and ministers actually ‘getting on’ or at least sharing a common appreciation of the benefits of closer cooperation. This has not always been the case. Relations were, for example, particularly difficult between British Secretary of State for International Development, Clare Short, and French Minister for Cooperation (‘Development Minister’), Charles Josselin.

In other instances, the ‘partnership’ does not work because of a lack of awareness of its existence or because officials express uncertainty as to whom their interlocutor should be. This phenomenon is less common in international organisations, but there have been many occasions when policy-makers have proven unable to square British and French positions. Thus while the French did sign up to aid and debt cancellation commitments at the Gleneagles Summit (2005), they were unhappy about the United Kingdom’s attempt to use this forum to sideline the recommendations of the NEPAD and impose the findings of the Blair Commission

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23 Personal communication, FCO official, 2008.
26 In personal communications with the authors, Ms Short commented that she was ‘not aware’ of any Anglo-French cooperation.
on summit participants. More generally, within the EU, DFID does not see France as an obvious partner on African development and is closer to the ‘likeminded countries’ (the Nordics and the Dutch). In the UN too, divergent interests were evident at the time of the 2003 Iraq War when, in the context of the proposed second resolution, Anglo-French competition over the votes of the three African UNSC members (Angola, Cameroon and Guinea) was ferocious.

Finally, both the United Kingdom and France have remained wary of pooling their resources. Thus, rather than merging its missions with those of the French or other European powers, as the logic of the emerging European Common Foreign and Security policy might suggest, Britain has instead opened new embassies in Africa (e.g. Eritrea and Mali in 2001; Guinea in 2003). Questions of national sovereignty have similarly prevented France from pooling its diplomatic resources in Africa.

**Towards partnership in practice?**

Having demonstrated that there is now a clearer framework for Anglo-French coordination, we will examine whether Britain and France have actually collaborated on their core priorities for Africa, namely tackling poverty, promoting democracy and building peace.

*Working together to reduce poverty?*

The United Kingdom and France have publicly supported each other’s high-profile poverty-reducing initiatives. For example on health, the United Kingdom backed France’s UNITAID proposal, which was formally launched in 2006 and aimed at financing vaccinations through a tax on international flights. By the same token, Paris supported the International Finance Facility for Immunisation, a scheme proposed initially by London in January 2003 and subsequently by Britain and France in 2006 as a means of funding programmes of the Global Alliance for Vaccination and Immunisation. Similarly, on education, the United Kingdom made a joint statement with France in March 2008, with Gordon Brown and Nicolas Sarkozy promising to help get 16 million children into school in Africa by 2010 and every child by 2015.

Alongside these strategic announcements, London has engaged in a three-way dialogue with Paris and the African Development Bank to coordinate support to this organisation, notably on the issue of debt sustainability. Equally, Britain and France have formed a ‘silent partnership’ (where one donor funds and another agency implements a programme) on education. With no diplomatic representation

28 Initially conceived by the French and Brazilian Presidents in 2003, UNITAID was subsequently launched by France, Britain, Brazil, Chile and Norway.
31 Personal communication, FCO official, 2008.
in Niger, the DFID provided 7 million euros to the AFD to promote primary education through the Fast Track Initiative.

Ultimately, however, Anglo-French collaboration on poverty reduction has remained limited. Thus, although London and Paris both espouse the MDGs, policymakers in the United Kingdom and France do not attach the same priority to these goals. While the DFID has recently toned down its near-exclusive focus on the MDGs, it has, since 1997, consistently made poverty reduction central to its aid programme, enshrining it in legislation (International Development Act, 2002) and providing unprecedented levels of aid (all untied), to the least developed countries (LDCs). In contrast, French policy-makers have remained sceptical about poverty reduction targets, which they see as unrealistic and overly technocratic. They contend that it is by promoting trade and growth that donors create the conditions in which African countries can fund their own social programmes. In line with this thinking, the French administration has retained policies that sit uncomfortably with the MDGs, not least aid tying and the allocation of a decreasing share of aid to LDCs. Moreover, the MFA has continued to prioritise French cultural projects, while the AFD, which has taken over many of the Foreign Ministry’s overseas aid-related functions, has retained a banking culture and a strong emphasis on hard loans and profitable investments.

Against this backdrop, it is unsurprising that joint initiatives on poverty reduction have not always been followed up. Thus, while the United Kingdom backed France’s UNITAID proposal, it did not introduce this tax itself but confined its support to a budgetary contribution. Furthermore, while France promised to match Britain’s commitment on school places, it only provided £50 million for one year compared to the DFID’s commitment of £500 million over three years. Anglo-French cooperation has also remained weak at the programmatic level: the British contribution to the education scheme in Niger is paltry when it is considered how large the DFID budget is: 13.8 billion US dollars in 2010 (see Table 1). That this has not happened comes down to an issue of trust. British officials had expected the French to follow up on the United Kingdom’s funding of the Niger scheme by financing a DFID-run education project in Rwanda, but this fell through when the French ambassador was expelled from Kigali in 2006. France was invited to suggest an alternative country yet failed to do so.

Promoting political reform: towards a common approach?

Over the last decade or so, the United Kingdom and France have also taken hesitant steps towards closer cooperation on the promotion of democracy and human rights. The key forum for Anglo-French exchanges has been the EU, particularly through the work of the AWG, the CODEV and more recently the Africa-EU Panel on Democratic Governance and Human Rights. In line with the EU Common Position of 25 May 1998 on human rights, democratic principles, the rule of law and good governance, the British and the French have cooperated on a number of

34 Personal communications, MFA and DFID officials, 2009.
African cases. In Kenya, for example, there was ‘good, close cooperation’ between Britain and France in the aftermath of the troubled elections of 27 December 2007, when the French ensured that the United Kingdom channelled its response through the EU, rather than adopting a more unilateral stance.\textsuperscript{35} The United Kingdom and France have also liaised regularly on Zimbabwe, particularly since 2004 when London and Paris effectively struck a deal whereby France backs UK efforts on Zimbabwe within the EU, while the British support France on Côte d’Ivoire in the UNSC.

Alongside policy coordination, there has also been limited Anglo-French cooperation at a programmatic level. The best example is a four-year silent partnership (‘Media for Democracy and Good Governance’) in the DRC (2007-2011) aimed at promoting political freedom via the media. The DFID has allocated £10 million to what is its largest media project in Africa, while France Coopération Internationale (FCI) has carried out the project.\textsuperscript{36}

However, active collaboration on democracy and human rights has been patchy.\textsuperscript{37} In 1999-2000, the United Kingdom was pushing for EU aid sanctions against Liberia, whose president, Charles Taylor, was supplying arms to Sierra Leonean rebels in their civil war against the democratically elected government of Tejan Kabbah. However, France ignored UK demands and only gave support when Taylor subsequently supported rebel forces in Côte d’Ivoire and began destabilising France’s wider sphere of influence in West Africa.\textsuperscript{38} In February 2003 the limits of Anglo-French coordination on Zimbabwe became clear when France invited President Mugabe to a Franco-African summit on the day European sanctions expired against this dictator. The United Kingdom, which had been lobbying for tougher measures, acquiesced in exchange for a promise of French support to prolong European sanctions after the summit.

British and French discourse on democracy promotion became more closely aligned with the appointment of the human rights-oriented Bernard Kouchner as Foreign Minister. Yet differences soon arose over the response to be taken to coups in francophone countries such as Mauritania in 2008; Niger, Guinea, and Madagascar in 2009; and Niger again in 2010. While the United Kingdom was openly critical, the French took a more softly-softly approach. The case of Madagascar was particularly revealing. Here the United Kingdom adopted a robust stance, with Lord Malloch-Brown becoming the only European minister publicly to condemn the coup from the outset. However, Britain had closed its embassy in 2005 and was thus at a disadvantage compared to the French, who had retained their diplomatic presence and ‘initially took an even softer line than the AU’.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{35} Personal communications, FCO (2009) and MFA (2008).
\textsuperscript{36} Personal communication, FCO official, 2009. The initial figure was $8 million; see <www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications/DRC-countryplan08-10%5B1%5D.pdf> (accessed 12 February 2010).
\textsuperscript{37} Personal communication, MFA official, 2009.
\textsuperscript{38} Personal communication, former UK official in New York, 2009.
\textsuperscript{39} Personal communication, former UK Minister, 2009.
In order to understand this relative lack of cooperation, it is worth pointing to what Fareed Zakaria refers to as ‘systemic, domestic and other influences’ that have constrained coordination.\(^4^0\) At the ‘systemic’ level, bilateral cooperation between the United Kingdom and France within the EU has been limited by the need to take into account the views of 25 other countries plus the European Commission. Divergent interests have further restricted the scope for a better coordinated Anglo-French approach. Thus, Britain has tended to adopt a less forthright stance on political freedom towards allies in the war on terror (e.g. Ethiopia) and towards countries in its ‘sphere of influence’ (e.g. Rwanda), while France has typically adopted a softly-softly approach towards its former colonies, notably in West Africa.\(^4^1\) As for domestic influences, coordination has been hampered by internal wrangling within the British and French systems. In Britain, the main problem has been competition between the DFID and the FCO which has led to parallel African policies, allegations by the DFID that the FCO is prioritising strategic and commercial interests over developmental needs, and accusations by the FCO that the DFID gives priority to economic development concerns over questions of political freedom.\(^4^2\) In France, there have also been divisions, with the Élysée typically being less forthright on human rights than the Foreign Ministry. This distinction was less obvious when the French ‘Development Minister’ Jean-Marie Bockel was leading the charge on human rights but the sacking of Bockel, and his replacement with Alain Joyandet, indicated a downgrading of human rights concerns.\(^4^3\) In turn led British policy-making elites to question whether they were only dealing with the more enlightened parts of the French political establishment, whilst other French actors are still acting in ways that are underhand and reminiscent of ‘la Françafrique’.\(^4^4\) Finally, ‘other influences’ include ideational factors, not least the fact that British and French policy-making elites have a different understanding of key concepts such as human rights and governance. To illustrate, the British emphasise civil and political liberties, with particular reference to women’s rights, whereas the French stress the economic and social rights of all citizens, alongside civil and political liberties. Furthermore, the United Kingdom sees governance in economic and technical terms as a way of ensuring a streamlined central state, whereas the French view this concept in more overtly political terms as a means of promoting robust local and central state structures that are legitimate and provide an effective legal framework (an État de droit).


\(^{4^3}\) Personal communication, MFA, Paris, 2009. Bockel’s dismissal came after his outspoken stance on human rights provoked protests by Omar Bongo, former President of oil-rich Gabon.

\(^{4^4}\) The Angolagate arms-for-oil scandal which came to court in 2008 is an example of this. See also ‘Entre Paris et Dakar’, *Le Monde*, 12 June 2010.
Co-constructing peace and security?

There have been two main forms of security collaboration: ESDP military missions and the training of African peacekeepers.\textsuperscript{45} To begin with ESDP missions, the United Kingdom and France have been instrumental in establishing the institutional framework within which European peacekeeping operations have been launched. Thus, they were the key players in the establishment of the PSC, the EU Military Committee (the supreme military body within the European Council) and the European rapid reaction force (initially proposed at the Saint-Malo summit).\textsuperscript{46} Equally, Britain and France have collaborated in actual ESDP missions. They cooperated actively on Operation Artemis (DRC, June-September 2003), which aimed to stabilise the humanitarian situation in Bunia (eastern DRC) following the withdrawal of Ugandan forces. This was the first ‘autonomous’ EU military operation (that is, without recourse to NATO assets) and the first ESDP operation outside Europe. The United Kingdom sent 100 engineers, who played a key role, resurfacing the runway at Bunia and thereby enabling supplies to be flown in. Britain also persuaded a reluctant Ugandan government to offer airport facilities at Entebbe.\textsuperscript{47} France was the ‘framework nation’, providing the operational headquarters and the majority—90 per cent—of the 1400-strong force for this operation.

Anglo-French cooperation was also significant in securing the launch of the other three ESDP missions in Africa to date. For EUFOR DRC (July-November 2006), which aimed to support the UN in supervising the 2006 Congolese elections, the French provided, together with Germany, the largest number of troops, while the United Kingdom made the largest bilateral contribution (50 million euros) to the cost of the elections. For EUFOR Chad/Central African Republic (CAR) (January 2008-March 2009), which was designed to ‘help create the security conditions necessary for reconstruction’ in Chad and the CAR before handing over to a UN force, MINURCAT II, France was again the largest contributor (2500 out of 3700 troops). Initially, Britain’s Ministry of Defence (MOD) blocked European funding, suspecting France of using the ESDP/UN to shore up its influence in Chad and the CAR. In the end, however, the United Kingdom co-sponsored the UN Resolution (1778) authorising the mission and London sent two staff officers to the operational headquarters (HQ) in Paris and two to the field HQ in Chad, as well as unblocking the money for the operation following a phone call from the French President to the then UK Prime Minister, Gordon Brown.\textsuperscript{48} The fourth mission was EU NAVFOR Operation Atalanta, which began in December 2008 and is ongoing. It seeks to prevent piracy off the Somali coast and is the first ESDP mission to be led by the United Kingdom, with Northwood as Command HQ. Britain appears to have become involved, partly due to pressure on the MOD from the United Kingdom’s diplomatic mission in Brussels, anxious that Britain had not participated militarily in


\textsuperscript{46} Full agreement was only reached on this force, with German support, in 2001.

\textsuperscript{47} Niagalé BAGAYOKO, ‘Les politiques européennes de prévention’, \textit{Les Champs de Mars}, vol. 16, p. 103.

\textsuperscript{48} Personal communication, UK official, December 2009.
the previous two ESDP military operations, and partly because of private sector lobbying for British engagement, since London is a major international hub for commercial shipping and hosts the International Maritime Organisation.

Anglo-French cooperation on ESDP missions has been facilitated by the fact that the European Council, rather than the Commission, is increasingly playing the lead role in EU African policy, as it is the Council, often pressed by France and with British support or acquiescence, that is tasked with planning and conducting missions. That said, collaboration did not begin in earnest until Operation Artemis in 2003, that is, after the United Kingdom’s unilateral operation in Sierra Leone in 2000 and France’s initial intervention in Côte d’Ivoire in 2002. In fact, even after Operation Artemis in 2003, Anglo-French collaboration has continued to be more about the coincidence of agendas than any agreement systematically to work together on African crises. There have, moreover, still been divergences, with the United Kingdom tending to look first to work with the UN on peacekeeping operations in Africa and France looking in the first instance to the EU.

Turning to the training African peacekeepers, here too there has been increased Anglo-French cooperation. By the late 1990s, the United Kingdom, France and, indeed, the United States, working within the P3, had recognised the need to harmonise their capacity-building programmes in Africa. In this context, they established in West Africa a regional network of training centres that would reduce duplication. Thus, the focus of the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre in Accra, for which the United Kingdom provided substantial start-up funding, is on operational level training; the École de Maintien de la Paix in Bamako undertakes tactical-level training (the United Kingdom is represented on the School board); and the National Defence College in Abuja undertakes strategic-level training. Significantly too, the United Kingdom and France have cooperated on military training exercises in Tanzania (2001) as well as in Ghana and Benin (2004).

At the same time, the United Kingdom and France have also provided support to regional and sub-regional organisations, such as the AU and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). They have provided support for the AU mission in Sudan, with funding from the Africa Peace Facility (a mechanism financed by the EDF and established with strong United Kingdom and French support in 2004). They have also backed AU efforts to create its own institutional framework, the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). Moreover, the establishment of the EURORECAMP programme to train African peacekeepers in 2008—with France as the ‘framework nation’, a French general as its director and a British officer as its deputy director—is also supposed to ensure a better coordinated EU approach to training AU peacekeepers.

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49 France nonetheless offered diplomatic support to the British intervention. The UK also backed France’s request for UN peacekeepers in Côte d’Ivoire; see Sébastien LOISEL, ‘Entente cordiale ou moteur européen?’, Le Champs de Mars, vol. 15, 2004, p. 52.

Ultimately, however, there have been limits to Anglo-French coordination on training. Thus, while the United Kingdom did replace its initial African training programme with a joined-up mechanism, known as the Africa Conflict Prevention Pool (ACPP)—where the FCO, DFID and MOD pooled their conflict prevention budgets—this scheme has continued to function unilaterally and without linking up with other powers on conflict management. Similarly, France has carried on doing a great deal of training on its own via its fourteen regional military training schools, all of which are based in francophone countries and use French as the language of instruction. With pre-positioned forces, totalling some 9000 personnel, in Dakar, Libreville, Djibouti, La Réunion and—at the time of writing (December 2011)—Abidjan, France has also been inclined to undertake capacity-building initiatives on its own. France thus provided a Local Area Network (LAN) to the East African brigade (EASBRIG) of the African Standby Force, without even discussing it with the British, despite the fact that the United Kingdom was playing the lead role in developing EASBRIG.51

**Conclusion**

The United Kingdom pursued a unilateral approach to its colonies during the colonial era and combined this with multilateral forms of engagement in the post-colonial and, above all, the post-Cold War eras. The election of Tony Blair’s first Labour government added a layer of sophistication to existing forms of unilateral and multilateral engagement and introduced joint or ‘bilateral’ cooperation with France on Africa. This new approach has ensured that formal and informal ties have developed between policy-makers in each country. It has also enhanced policy cooperation, particularly on security issues, though less so on poverty reduction and democracy promotion.

In practice, however, Anglo-French cooperation has been ‘uneven, often very personality-driven and event- and political interest-driven’, with collaboration often limited to high profile issues and major crises, such as the post-election debacle in Côte d’Ivoire in 2010-11 where the French took the lead but were careful to keep the British informed.52 National interests (actual and perceived) have helped to ensure that policy coordination has been restricted mainly to instances where the two countries have convergent agendas, notably in the peace and security field. As one ECOWAS official put it, ‘strategic interests always predominate and the United Kingdom and France only cooperate when it is to their mutual benefit to do so’.53

What then does the future hold for bilateral partnerships involving the United Kingdom? There are certainly grounds for arguing that the United Kingdom government should continue coordinating its efforts with other major actors in Africa, such as France. Such an approach would be broadly consistent with the logic of the European External Action Service and its efforts to ensure enhanced foreign policy coordination at the EU level. It would equally take stock of very real fiscal and resource constraints which mean that the United Kingdom can no longer afford

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51 Personal communication, FCO official, 2009.  
52 Personal communication, FCO, 2011.  
53 Personal communication, Abuja, 2009.
to bear the costs and risks of intervening alone on key issues, such as peace and security, migration, development, democracy promotion and climate change. The current British government has not been oblivious to these arguments, as the close alliance between David Cameron and Nicolas Sarkozy in the recent campaign in Libya clearly illustrated.

However, more systematic cooperation with the French on Africa seems unlikely for a number of reasons. First, Britain’s Conservative-dominated coalition government, with its openly anti-European credentials, will be wary of any partnership with France that might result in an increase in the number of autonomous ESDP missions and the possibility of a permanent European HQ to run such operations. Second, Anglo-French relations more generally have taken a downturn over disputes about the eurozone crisis, disagreements over the EU treaty aimed at consolidating a new fiscal pact and diplomatic spats over which country is more prone to have its triple A credit rating reduced. Third, while the two countries clearly do have shared interests in maintaining peace and tackling international crime on the continent, they are also—against the backdrop of the ongoing global financial crisis—economic competitors in Africa. The UK, with its ‘prosperity agenda’, and France, with its emphasis on developing trade and economic links, notably with South Africa and Nigeria, are in competition with each other for the lucrative trade and investment opportunities offered by some of the world’s fastest growing markets. The United Kingdom’s coalition government is also committed to a results-based and trade-oriented approach to aid. While this might offer scope for strategic collaboration with countries such as France on ways of reducing duplication and promoting regional integration, it is unlikely to encourage more direct programmatic forms of cooperation, apart from in the peace and security field, where there are clearly shared interests.

Given the doubts surrounding the future of Britain’s entente with France, it is worth asking whether there are any other donors with which the United Kingdom could forge a new bilateral partnership. In the Northern hemisphere, the prospects for such cooperation are not great, given that the United States is too ‘unpredictable’ on Africa and too uninterested in its developmental needs, while Nordic states prefer to operate on a multilateral basis. Where, however, there might be scope for such collaboration is with emerging economies such as China which are themselves becoming donors and which could complement the United Kingdom’s traditional approach to Africa and bring valuable insights and expertise drawn from their growing experience of South-South cooperation.

54 ‘French credit downgrade’, *The Observer*, 18 December 2011.
55 The official visits to Africa by Minister for Africa Henry Bellingham and Prime Minister David Cameron in 2011 to promote trade links with the continent are a clear sign of this new emphasis.
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