

Ahead of the Franco-British Summit, a new RUSI Briefing Paper calls for Britain 'to work harder to maintain its key relationship with France, even in areas that lie outside the scope of the EU.' The paper recommends that the two countries step up joint work on defence, security and nuclear deterrence policy.

Written by Lord Ricketts, former National Security Adviser and UK Ambassador to France, the Briefing Paper states that 'Brexit will not weaken the case for close UK–French defence and security cooperation, but it will change the context and create the risk of the two countries drifting apart.' There's a summary, recommendations and conclusions, plus a link, on the next page.

Entitled 'National Security Relations with France After Brexit', the Briefing Paper outlines the current state of cooperation in the areas of defence, security and foreign policy, and makes some specific proposals for how these should be further developed in the post-Brexit period.

Defence is one area where 'the similarities between Britain and France are most striking.' The two countries have also worked together on operations and defence reform that have been mutually beneficial. However, the paper observes that 'it is over European defence that Britain and France have had different views, at least about longer-term objectives.'

While 'France's ambition has always been European military autonomy', Britain has been concerned that this should not undermine or duplicate NATO. The paper calls for a 'pragmatic approach to finding a new relationship, recognising that Britain's military capabilities and longstanding role in European security puts it in a different position from other non-members.'

To limit the possibility of drift, the paper calls for more 'structured ministerial consultations, for example in a two-plus-two foreign and defence minister format, [which] would be a useful way of reinforcing cooperation.'

Defence, security, foreign policy, and the nuclear and defence industries are the main pillars of security cooperation between the UK and France.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS:

* **Nuclear Cooperation:** for the two countries to bring the Teutates programme agreed in 2010 to full operational capacity on schedule in 2022, and to ensure that both countries derive full benefit from it.

* **Britain and France,** as Europe's two nuclear powers, should step up their consultations on the implications for their nuclear deterrence policy of the changing strategic environment, in particular a more aggressive Russia, the emergence of North Korea as a nuclear power, and the uncertainties about the longer-term US commitment to NATO following President Donald Trump's hesitations over re-affirming the Article V commitment. They should take a joint initiative on nuclear deterrence policy at the July 2018 NATO Summit.

* **Armed Forces:** The successful development of a Combined Joint Expeditionary Force gives Britain and France a highly trained pool of forces capable of a wide range of missions up to high intensity combat. To keep up the momentum of the initiative, it will be important to find an opportunity to employ the capability.

Given the troubled state of international security, opportunities should not be lacking, whether as part of a multilateral operation – for example, under UN or NATO auspices – or as a bilateral deployment in circumstances where both countries had interests at stake.

* **Defence Equipment:** The Unmanned Combat Air System programme is a flagship for UK–French defence equipment cooperation, aiming to deliver a key capability for the 2030s. It supports innovative research and vital defence industrial skills. The two governments should maintain the programme during the current demonstration phase to produce airframes by the early 2020s for operational testing; a withdrawal by either side at this stage of such a significant programme would undermine confidence in the wider Lancaster House defence equipment programme.

* **Security and Intelligence Cooperation:** Bilateral cooperation between the intelligence and policy communities of the two countries on counterterrorism and cyber threats is long established and has become even closer in response to recent terrorist attacks. It is crucial that Brexit does not adversely affect this.

* **Borders:** France is bearing the brunt of the problems and costs of ensuring the security of the juxtaposed British border controls at Calais. Britain should continue to contribute to the costs, to help with humanitarian issues and to take joint action against the traffickers.

* **Diplomacy:** Post-Brexit, Britain will have to work harder through bilateral contacts to influence EU decision-making, and it will have to become more entrepreneurial in foreign policy if it is to exert real influence. The UK should aim to strengthen its foreign policy partnership with France, in the UN Security Council, in NATO and through small-group diplomacy.

The RUSI Briefing Paper, 'National Security Relations with France After Brexit', is available at: <https://rusi.org/FranceBrexit2018>

The author of the paper is Lord Peter Ricketts, who was British Ambassador to France from 2012–16, and was previously National Security Adviser (2010–12) and Permanent Under Secretary at the Foreign Office (2006–10). He is now a crossbench member of the House of Lords, a Visiting Professor at King's College London and a Senior Associate Fellow of RUSI.