

by Roger Morgan

In March 2006 the Franco-British Council assessed French and British co-operation on defence, with a special interest in developments since St Malo. The findings were by turns exasperating and encouraging.

The seminar was chaired by (the late) Lord Garden, Liberal Democrat Defence Spokesman in the House of Lords, and Général Rannou, former Chef d'état-major de l'armée de l'air. There were contributions from Gerard Errera, the French Ambassador in London, and Lord Robertson, former Secretary General of NATO and former Secretary of State for Defence.

The points emphasised included :

The public preoccupation with internal security must not be allowed to continue draining investment from Defence, lest Europe lose its technological defence base and, eventually, its ability to defend itself independently of America. A better organised operational and industrial co-operation between the two countries would make use of the available resources more effectively and demonstrate that defence spending is linked to economic activity and employment. The spirit of St Malo remains intact and the ESDP is now a fact, despite changes in the geo-strategic context. Since St Malo, the EU has made undeniable progress with the ESDP in its capacity to make decisions and act on them. The foreign missions in which it is currently engaged are very encouraging in this regard. In this context, the ever-present question of the relationship between NATO and the EU should stop seeming like an obstacle to the progress of Europe. In industrial matters, we must make a great effort to promote joint R & D. Too little is done in this area, even though the preservation of Europe's technological base is at stake. France and the UK must co-operate more. They are in a good position to provide important leadership in the EU, but they will continue to do this only if they are backed up by a clear political will.

For an overview of the opinions and comments of the participants, and the conclusions reached, [click here](#)