

# The divide: France, Germany and political NATO

STEN RYNNING

When in December 1967 the North Atlantic Council (NAC) approved the report on ‘the future tasks of the alliance’—the Harmel Report—it did so in the briefest of terms, in a short paragraph of two sentences void of acclamation. Perhaps this was because, as NATO’s Secretary-General Manlio Brosio shortly thereafter remarked, ‘There is nothing spectacular in it, nothing unforeseen.’<sup>1</sup>

Yet the report was remarkable: it defined a political role for NATO in addition to its role as a defence shield, making the organization the indispensable focal point for any changes to Europe’s security order. The Harmel Report did so by connecting defence and detente *and* privileging the former: NATO’s ‘first function’ is to provide for defence and deterrence and thus create ‘a climate of stability, security, and confidence’, the report noted; only then, it asserted, can NATO ‘carry out its second function’ of relaxing tensions and solving underlying political issues.<sup>2</sup> To a NATO entrepreneur like Brosio, this was perhaps nothing spectacular, but to the two key continental European allies, France and Germany, it was.

By cementing NATO’s political role in European security, the Harmel Report in effect institutionalized a divide between French and German thinking which continues to be of continental consequence. ‘Political NATO’ signifies intent by the allies to use NATO as a framework for the coordination of key national security policies; it also signifies that Europe’s political organization cannot take place in opposition to NATO. This political NATO became a premise for the Harmel Report. France, however, had no appetite for ‘political NATO’ which it saw as a military toolbox that served strong and politically independent nation-states. Germany—that is, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG)—was not so sure. It wanted more than a toolbox: a stronger NATO than that sought by France, but not quite the fully fledged Atlantic community pushed by strong Atlanticists. The FRG was in fact uncomfortable with strong political visions because it stood at a crossroads of Atlanticism and Europeanism, of East and West, and of diverging domestic hopes for geopolitical equilibrium.

<sup>1</sup> NATO, *The future tasks of the alliance* (Harmel Report), final communiqué, 14 Dec. 1967, para. 2; Manlio Brosio, ‘Past and future tasks of the alliance: an analysis of the Harmel Report’, *Atlantic Community Quarterly* 6: 2, Summer 1968, pp. 231–7.

<sup>2</sup> NATO, *The future tasks of the alliance*, para. 5.

The FRG's approach to NATO emerged from Germany's position as a divided nation in Europe's midst and the FRG's dual objectives of western strength and German unification. This complicated position caused the FRG to be of two minds, quite visibly so in 1966–9 when it was governed by a 'grand coalition' between the conservative Chancellor Kurt Kiesinger and the Social Democratic Foreign Minister Willy Brandt, the latter being more eager to explore East–West contacts. France had a distinctively different and single-minded policy with its roots in Gaullist misgivings about Europe's 'Yalta order'—a reference to the Yalta Conference of February 1945 that did not include France and which allegedly had hardened into the Cold War confrontation. When Charles de Gaulle returned to power in 1958, this resentment became part of his strategy for extracting France from Algeria and renewing French foreign policy by way of a degree of disengagement from NATO and enhanced dialogue with the Soviet Union. In 1966 France duly announced its withdrawal from NATO's integrated command and expelled NATO institutions from French soil.<sup>3</sup> These included the NAC, hitherto based in Paris, which moved into a new headquarters in Brussels and, at its first meeting there in December 1967, approved the Harmel Report.

The story of the Harmel Report is thus the story of NATO making a collective attempt to define a political role for itself; of France resisting and seeking transformation; and of Germany being of two minds, hoping to resolve tensions by bridge-building. If this sounds familiar, it is because the Franco–German divide on political NATO lives on as a context for the two countries' effort to craft a response to Russia's renewed challenge to Europe's security order, Britain's decision to leave the EU and loud American calls for enhanced burden-sharing across the Atlantic. The answer to these challenges, France and Germany proclaim, is a strong Europe—in fact a 'European Security Compact'.<sup>4</sup> If we are to believe that the two countries will deliver on their promise, we must be convinced that they have been able to overcome their divide on political NATO—and thus on NATO's role as the bedrock of European defence and detente.

This article will trace the history and current relevance of the Franco–German divide. To set the stage, the article begins with a section on the origins of debates on political NATO. Three thematic sections then follow, examining French and German policy with regard to, in turn, the nature of NATO consultations, with a focus on EU–NATO relations; the purpose of detente, focusing on relations with Russia; and the relevance of NATO for the management of global affairs, focusing on coalition operations.

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Yves Haine, 'A new Gaullist moment? Bandwagoning and international polarity', *International Affairs* 91: 5, Sept. 2015, pp. 991–1008.

<sup>4</sup> French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault and Federal Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, 'A strong Europe in a world of uncertainties', joint statement, 27 June 2016, [https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Europa/Aktuell/160624-BM-AM-FRA\\_ST.html](https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Europa/Aktuell/160624-BM-AM-FRA_ST.html) (unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 12 Dec. 2016); Gabriela Baczynska and Robin Emmott, 'Germany, France seek stronger EU defence after Brexit: document', Reuters, 12 Sept. 2016; 'France, Germany to table defence plan at Bratislava ministerial meeting', EurActiv, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/france-germany-to-table-defence-plan-at-bratislava-ministerial-meeting/>, 27 Sept. 2016; Robin Emmott and Sabine Siebold, 'Britain's fear of European army muddles EU defence plan', Reuters, 27 Sept. 2016; Robin Emmott, 'Post-Brexit, EU's military powers argue for common defences', Reuters, 12 Oct. 2016.

## Political NATO

To underscore NATO's political nature is to state the obvious in so far as NATO is a political alliance, formed on 4 April 1949 as a result of national commitments to the principle of collective defence. Yet, while NATO's character as an instrument of collective defence is uncontroversial, the scope of its political profile is not. Should NATO be the forum for wide-ranging and potentially transformative political dialogue with an adversary, and should it more generally be a forum for the coordination of allied foreign and security policies on any number of issues that could adversely affect the alliance? Affirmative answers imply a strong political approach to NATO that certain members have found at times undesirable and at times inconvenient, but to which a sufficient number of allies have adhered in order to safeguard NATO. 'Political NATO' captures this tension between national flexibility and alliance solidarity. Its focal point is the extent of policy coordination and consultations in NATO, and its history unfolds from the treaty of 1949 through political reforms in 1951–2 and clarified principles for consultations in 1956—all of which set the stage for the Harmel review in the late 1960s.<sup>5</sup>

The Atlantic Treaty envisages coordination and consultation but is vague on details. The treaty's Article 4 defines a framework for security consultations to which any threatened or concerned ally can appeal.<sup>6</sup> This framework is at one and the same time inclusive, given the broad range of issues that can lead to consultations, and restrictive, given the implicit reference to emergency situations. To resolve this ambiguity, Article 9 establishes a Council, on which all allies are represented, 'to consider matters concerning the implementation of this Treaty', with the added proviso that it should 'be able to meet promptly at any time'. In short, NATO should be open to wide-ranging and also prompt consultations, but their context was up to the Council to sort out.

The Council was initially made up of NATO foreign ministers, who could only meet on occasion. Therefore, at their fourth meeting, in May 1950, the foreign ministers agreed to set up a more appropriate mechanism of prompt political consultations, which by definition had to include foreign minister representatives gathered in some type of permanent forum for political consultations. This became the Council of Deputies, which met for the first time in July 1950, in London, under the chairmanship of the US Ambassador to NATO, Charles M. Spofford.

With the permanent mechanism for consultation came a more acute challenge of how to define the nature of consultations. The foreign ministers' deputies required guidelines on their mandate to share policy details from their own respective capitals and offer feedback on those from allied capitals. Given the national

<sup>5</sup> NATO Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs to all Delegations, *Monograph on 'The evolution of NATO political consultation 1949–1962'*, NATO Secret NHO/63/1, original 2 May 1963, reissued 28 April 1967. Classified NATO documents cited in this article are drawn from NATO's online historical archive of nine volumes of Harmel-related documents: <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/80830.htm> (hereafter cited as NATO Harmel Archive).

<sup>6</sup> 'The Parties will consult together whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened.'

interests involved, this was a matter of considerable delicacy. Among the questions to be considered were whether nations should consult if they had security engagements outside the North Atlantic Treaty area that could potentially have repercussions that might affect the alliance; and whether consultations involved not merely the right to information but also a right to contest or challenge positions that a member found undesirable. To answer these questions in the affirmative was to make NATO a potent clearing house of Atlantic security policy and thus to affirm political NATO.

It soon emerged that these questions could not be adequately addressed within the Council of Deputies in London, which lacked institutional support and was rapidly being outpaced in terms of institutional development by NATO's military framework. NATO was born with a Military Committee alongside the Council, and this committee had acted fast to respond to the Soviet threat. As early as 1949 it began work on a strategic concept for the alliance, which in turn led to the organization of a three-nation standing group (formed of the United States, Britain and France) working out of Washington DC for the purpose of crafting military strategy. To balance NATO's institutions, the Council needed reinforcement. This came at the Lisbon summit of February 1952, where the allies agreed to transform the Council of Deputies into a North Atlantic Council (NAC) with ambassadors as 'permanent representatives' to keep the NAC in permanent session. Moreover, to simplify the range of ministerial inputs into NATO—including finance and economics as well as foreign and defence policy—the permanent representatives were henceforth to represent their entire respective governments and not simply the foreign ministers. The NAC thus became the sole ministerial body of the alliance, and was thereby able to coordinate positions more effectively. In addition, the NAC gained the support of a newly created international staff and a secretary-general, both institutional innovations that enhanced the potential for consultations. This new NAC with its supporting institutions was located in Paris.

Institutional reinforcements improved NATO's civil–military balance but once again accentuated the challenge of defining the nature of NAC political consultations. In September 1951 the allies set up an Atlantic Community Committee (ACC), incorporating representatives of five of the twelve founding states, to propose ways to address this challenge. The ACC early on took note of certain disagreements among allies—some being favourable to 'worldwide' consultations while others preferred to focus on NATO's 'special regional responsibilities'—and the fact that 'no firm rule could be laid down'. Instead, the allies would have to build a 'habit of consultation' to strengthen 'the solidarity of the Community as a whole'.<sup>7</sup> The final ACC report emphasized:

- that 'discussions of foreign policy within NATO cannot be restricted to the North Atlantic area';
- that consultations must not be restricted to the extreme emergencies envisaged

<sup>7</sup> Report of the Working Group of the Atlantic Community Committee, North Atlantic Council Deputies, Restricted Document AC/10-D/1, 30 Oct. 1951, p. 8, <http://archives.nato.int/atlantic-community-committee;isad>.

by Article 4 of the Treaty but must involve ‘frequent consultations’ that advance common interests;

- that ‘more powerful members of the Community’ have special responsibilities in respect of consultations.<sup>8</sup>

The basic issues thus laid out called for political engagement. NATO’s first Secretary-General, Lord Ismay, tried to nurture this engagement by introducing flexible NAC formats (normal, restricted, informal) and developing his own entrepreneurial role as an honest broker.<sup>9</sup> Political relations, however, hit stumbling blocks in the form of such difficult issues as the failure of the European Defence Community, the FRG’s inclusion in NATO, the Soviet decision to form the Warsaw Pact, and the hopes and frustrations of the ‘peace’ summit of July 1955 among the four Second World War victors. NATO consultations, clarified in principle, became politically stuck in these tensions and ambiguities.

In May 1956 the allies once again appealed to expert advice, this time from a committee of three ministers known as ‘wise men’: Lester Pearson of Canada, Gaetano Martino of Italy and Halvard Lange of Norway. They were ‘to advise the Council on ways and means to improve and extend NATO co-operation in non-military fields and to develop greater unity within the Atlantic Community’.<sup>10</sup> It was not long after their appointment that the Suez Crisis provided further illustration of how badly things turn out when allies—in this case France and Britain on the one hand and the United States on the other—fail to consult and coordinate. The ‘wise men’, harking back to the ACC’s work of 1951, recommended five principles and practices for NATO consultations:<sup>11</sup>

- members should inform the Council of developments that significantly affect the alliance as a preliminary to effective political consultation;
- members have a right to bring matters of common interest to discussion in the Council;
- members should consult before adopting policies or positions that significantly affect the alliance or any of its members;
- members should take into account the diverse views of NATO members as expressed in NATO consultation, even in the absence of consensus;
- where consensus within NATO is achieved, it should be reflected in the formation of national policies; if this is not possible, members should offer an explanation to the Council.

<sup>8</sup> Interim Report of the Committee on the North Atlantic Community, North Atlantic Council Deputies, Confidential Document AC/10-D/2, 16 Nov. 1951, pp. 2–6, <http://archives.nato.int/atlantic-community-committee;isad>.

<sup>9</sup> Between April 1952 and July 1954, for instance, the Council held 185 meetings, of which 57 were informal. See Lord Ismay, *NATO: the first five years, 1949–1954*, ch. 6. Ismay’s book is available at <http://www.nato.int/archives/1st5years/>.

<sup>10</sup> North Atlantic Council, summary record of a meeting of the Council held at the Palais de Chaillot, Paris, 5 May 1956, NATO Secret Summary Record C-R (56) 23, available as Terms of Reference in NATO archives on The Committee of Three, [http://www.nato.int/archives/committee\\_of\\_three/index.htm](http://www.nato.int/archives/committee_of_three/index.htm).

<sup>11</sup> Report of the Committee of Three on Non-Military Cooperation in NATO, 13 Dec. 1956, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_17481.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17481.htm), para. 51.

At this point in time the allies had recourse to reinforced institutions and elaborate principles of consultation. What they lacked was agreement on ‘political NATO’: should the alliance be the harbinger of an ‘Atlantic community’ with strong constraints on national foreign policy-making, or should NATO be no more than a military toolbox offering nations full freedom of foreign policy manoeuvre?

In 1956 the allies were probably inclining towards a no-risk compromise at a mid-point between these two extremes. Several related shockwaves disturbed this potential compromise, however, and set the alliance on course for the tense discussions that preceded the Harmel Report of 1967. The first was the high hopes for transformation generated by Stalin’s death in 1953 and the detente of the mid-1950s, which emboldened some leaders to test established alliance strategy.<sup>12</sup> The second was the Suez Crisis, which demonstrated the real risk that collective institutions could be taken hostage by Great Power policy. The third was the inability of even strong NATO secretaries-general such as Paul-Henri Spaak (1956–61) to resist national French efforts to sidetrack collective consultations. The fourth was the Cuban Missile Crisis, which led to a prolonged period of detente but also starkly exposed the degree to which alliance security and consultations were in the hands of Washington.

The promise of detente in the 1960s was thus accompanied by accumulated political anxieties with regard to the nature and role of NATO consultations. In May 1963 US Secretary of State Dean Rusk assured NATO allies that NATO would be fully involved in the establishment of detente after the Cuban Missile Crisis, but anxieties concerning Europe’s possible marginalization lingered nonetheless. In the course of 1966, as France pulled out of the integrated command and Germany’s two political wings began their cohabitation in the grand coalition, and as NATO was approaching its 20-year anniversary in 1969, at which point allies would have a right to withdraw from the treaty, the Belgian government took the view that a case existed for renewed reform. In December 1966 it accordingly proposed to its allies a new defence and detente review, to be led by its Foreign Minister Pierre Harmel. Harmel offered the NAC a prudent but also determined effort to ‘decide whether it was necessary to improve consultation within the Alliance’.<sup>13</sup> This effort successfully identified the persistent issues that NATO allies would need to confront if they wished to sustain the alliance. It is to these issues that we now turn, taking a Franco–German perspective.

## Europe’s role in the alliance: pragmatism vs vision

High on the list of the Harmel Report’s tasks was to define its approach to the vision of an Atlantic community that had hovered in the background of NATO diplomacy from the beginning of the alliance, and thus its approach to the question

<sup>12</sup> Frédéric Bozo, ‘Defence versus security? Reflections on the past and present of the “future tasks” of the alliance (1949–1999)’, in Gustav Schmidt, ed., *A history of NATO: the first fifty years*, vol. 2 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), pp. 65–80.

<sup>13</sup> NATO, Council in Ministerial Session, extract from C-R (66)68, NATO Secret, 15 Dec. 1966, paras 14–15, NATO Harmel Archive.

of Europe's relationship to North America. It is a question of enduring relevance. In July 2016 NATO and the EU promised to act in unison in response to 'urgent' issues such as 'hybrid' and other complex threats. However, the declaration lacked depth because—behind the scenes—the EU could not muster a consensus in agreement to the hybrid war 'playbook' that NATO had proposed.<sup>14</sup>

The Harmel Report did not attempt to square this European circle. It was a statement not of vision but of pragmatism. It did underscore consultations as a means to bring about 'cohesion and solidarity', but also stressed that NATO was a 'forum and clearing house for the exchange of information and views'.<sup>15</sup> This was not a vision of an Atlantic community. The question we must ask, therefore, is whether the Harmel approach—defining NATO as an anchor of defence and a framework for detente—was the proper, pragmatic framework for containing distinct visions of Europe. It only barely was, and the story primarily involves France, Germany and then the United States.

There were at least two, and in fact probably three, visions of Europe in play. The third vision arises in connection with the particularities of the Nixon administration, to which we shall return. The two classical visions were those of an Atlantic community and a Europe of strong states. The latter vision was distinctively French, as we have seen, but has since gained in popularity. It involved President de Gaulle's attempt to cultivate a detente dialogue with the Soviet Union—which faltered with the Soviet intervention to crush the Prague Spring of 1968—but also an earlier attempt to refashion the alliance. In September 1958 de Gaulle suggested a triumvirate of the three big allies (Britain, France and the United States), in the shape of a reinvigorated standing group, to run not so much NATO as Atlantic and global strategic affairs. Obviously, this proposal—submitted only to London and Washington—would have sidetracked the NAC's 'habit of consultation'; it also jarred with the 'genuine community' sought by NATO Secretary-General Spaak and also the community of two bonded pillars—western Europe and North America—espoused by President Kennedy in his short tenure (1961–3).<sup>16</sup> Spaak returned to the game as rapporteur of subgroup two for the Harmel Report, but could not get beyond the laconic conclusion that: 'As long as this fundamental divergency of views exists, no real progress can be made.'<sup>17</sup>

A third vision—if such it was—bears mentioning because it had a considerable impact on post-Harmel NATO diplomacy, and its contours can be traced in current affairs as well. At issue is the Nixon administration's doctrine, as it evolved in 1967–9, of 'shared responsibilities' with 'regional middle powers' such as Japan and the states of western Europe. At face value, this doctrine might seem to be just

<sup>14</sup> 'Joint declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization', 8 July 2016, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133163.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133163.htm). On the 'playbook' failure: author's background interview with Danish defence ministry official, Aug. 2016.

<sup>15</sup> NATO, *Future tasks of the alliance*, paras 6, 7.

<sup>16</sup> Paul-Henri Spaak, *Why NATO?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959), p. 38; Frédéric Bozo, *Two strategies for Europe: de Gaulle, the United States, and the Atlantic alliance* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Paul-Henri Spaak, 'The ideological foundation and the unity of the alliance', 19 Sept. 1967, p. 17, NATO Harmel Archive.

another version of the Atlantic community vision. However, in practice the Nixon administration proved stubbornly reluctant to share power with US regional allies towards which the President proved ambivalent.<sup>18</sup> US policy rubbed up against the instincts and interests of European allies in the administration's escalation of its Asian engagement (in the Vietnam War), in its desire to engage directly with the two big communist states, China and the Soviet Union, with its own version of detente policies, and in its disdain for further work towards European unity following Britain's entry into the European Economic Community.<sup>19</sup> The idea of governing the Atlantic community from Washington was tantamount to an 'Atlantic fantasy'; and yet this was Nixon's policy, and it facilitated the French effort to portray Europe as something that had to be constructed in opposition to the United States.<sup>20</sup>

The Harmel Report was able to contain the first two visions but was vulnerable to the introduction of the third because that so clearly prompted the alliance leader, the United States, to step outside the framework of consultations. If France and Germany were struggling to compromise on political NATO, the third vision derailed them by provoking and emboldening France and opening a chasm that Germany could not bridge, however much it wanted to. There is a lesson here for observers of current affairs.

France and Germany have today reached a tenuous compromise on European security, which must be strengthened, they argue, to respond to Russia's assertiveness, Britain's EU exit and the US pivot to Asia.<sup>21</sup> Their compromise can be traced back to the European Council meeting of December 2013, at which the EU countries concurred that past efforts in this area had failed and that new impetus was needed. The Council therefore laid down three tracks for improved EU cooperation: a more comprehensive and capable crisis management policy; work on strategic capabilities such as drones and air-to-air refuelling; and the advancement of a European defence-industrial base.<sup>22</sup> The 2016 effort under Franco-German leadership to respond to the British referendum vote of June 2016 to leave the EU and Russia's annexation of Crimea (which took place in March 2014 but which was politically digested only with the EU's Global Strategy, also published in June 2016)<sup>23</sup> with a reinforced European defence option must be understood as an accelerated augmentation of the 2013 defence plan and above all a refusal to give way politically in the face of adverse events. The question is how

<sup>18</sup> Robert S. Litwak, *Detente and the Nixon Doctrine: American foreign policy and the pursuit of stability, 1969–1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 136.

<sup>19</sup> President Nixon and his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger agreed in December 1971 that 'one of the worst mistakes we made was to push Britain into the Common Market', and Nixon argued in March 1973 that 'from an American point of view, additional European unity was no longer desirable'. See Luke A. Nichter, *Richard Nixon and Europe: the reshaping of the postwar Atlantic world* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 123.

<sup>20</sup> David P. Calleo, *The Atlantic fantasy: the US, NATO, and Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970).

<sup>21</sup> Tuomas Forsberg, 'From *Ostpolitik* to "frostpolitik"? Merkel, Putin and German foreign policy', *International Affairs* 92: 1, Jan. 2016, pp. 21–42.

<sup>22</sup> European Council, 'Conclusions', Brussels, 20 Dec. 2013, pp. 1–10.

<sup>23</sup> *Shared vision, common action: a stronger Europe. A global strategy for the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy* (Brussels: EU, June 2016).



France and Germany aim to square improved EU capacities with NATO: whether France once again views NATO as a toolbox for EU development, and whether Germany is uncomfortably seeking compromises. The empirical record indicates that France has become more pragmatic about NATO only to a limited extent, and that the big dilemma for France concerns its strategic patience in building up the EU. Germany, meanwhile, is gaining in confidence as a security actor and has become more explicit in its endorsement of political NATO.

Early on in his presidency of France, François Hollande commissioned the former foreign minister (and a fellow Socialist) Hubert Védrine to examine France's reintegration into NATO's command structure, which came about in 2009 on the watch of Hollande's predecessor, the Gaullist Nicolas Sarkozy. The Védrine Report served two purposes: to claim renewed French influence in NATO affairs and thus embed the choice of NATO reintegration, which President Hollande had no intention of reversing; and then to energize French policy in respect of EU security and defence.<sup>24</sup> France thus set itself up for the European defence summit of December 2013. However, marked notes of exasperation began to appear in French statements with regard to the level of European solidarity behind the French-led interventions of 2013 in Mali and in the Central African Republic, indicating a certain degree of French discomfort with the EU option that had seemed so easy during the Cold War.<sup>25</sup> In recent years, France has seemed to be more pragmatically focused on opportunities to build common strategic capabilities and use them in flexible formats. Such pragmatism prevailed in the French response to the terrorist attack on Paris by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in November 2015. France did not appeal to NATO's solidarity clause (Article 5), which, considering the history of French reservations *vis-à-vis* NATO, is perhaps not surprising; more surprising is the fact that in the EU, France invoked the common defence clause, Article 42.7 of the Lisbon Treaty, rather than its more binding solidarity clause, Article 222. The reasoning in Paris, sources indicate, was that Article 42.7 has an inherently flexible and interstate character (as it emerges from the defunct Brussels Pact of 1948), which allowed France both to call for solidarity measures and to retain its hard-line national preferences in its war on ISIS.<sup>26</sup>

While France is vacillating between the desires for European and national autonomy, Germany is preparing for more active leadership that will be consistently exercised, the government affirms, through both NATO and EU frameworks.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Hubert Védrine, *Rapport pour le président de la République française sur les conséquences du retour de la France dans le commandement intégré de l'OTAN, sur l'avenir de la relation transatlantique et les perspectives de l'Europe de la défense*, 14 Nov. 2012, <http://www.rpfFrance-otan.org/Le-rapport-Vedrine>.

<sup>25</sup> Oliver Schmitt, 'The reluctant Atlanticist: France's security and defence policy in a transatlantic context', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 2016, published online ahead of print, DOI: 10.1080/01402390.2016.1220367; Leo G. Michel, *Cross-currents in French defence and US interests*, INSS Strategic Perspectives no. 10 (Washington DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, April 2012); Hugh Carnegie, 'EU military reticence frustrates France', *Financial Times*, 17 Dec. 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Nicolas Gros-Verheyde, 'Pourquoi invoquer l'article 42.7?', *Bruxelles2*, 22 Nov. 2015; this interpretation was confirmed in the author's off-the-record talk with an official from the EU's Political and Security Committee, 22 Aug. 2016.

<sup>27</sup> Robin Allers, 'The framework nation: can Germany lead on security?', *International Affairs* 92: 5, Sept. 2016,

The government laid out the contours of this activism in early 2014—before the Ukraine crisis—with speeches at the Munich Security Conference by Federal President Gauck, Foreign Minister Steinmeier and Defence Minister von der Leyen that very effectively signalled Germany's readiness to shoulder greater responsibilities, including in matters of defence. It would take two and a half years for the government—again a grand coalition of conservatives and social democrats—to prepare its version of a German national security strategy, which, revealingly, is very forward-looking in its praise of NATO's role in European security: the alliance is referred to as the 'indispensable guarantor' of German and allied security, and its effective collective defence as 'vital to our existence'.<sup>28</sup> The government also considers ways to enhance NATO's European pillar and EU foreign and security policy, but the priority accorded to the alliance in the 2016 strategic paper is unmistakable. A German official who had worked at length on the report and who spoke on background described the German approach as 'leading from the centre', explaining that Germany was ready to lead in military operations as long as they emerge out of these institutional frameworks.<sup>29</sup> The strategic paper has the feel of a modernized version of Konrad Adenauer's policy of attachment to NATO. Significantly, it was signed off by the social democrats, led by Steinmeier, indicating that Germany's grand coalition could be more united today than its counterpart of 1967. However, as Patrick Keller of the German SWP institute notes, if this policy is to be validated, it must now be translated into concrete support for both military modernization and European defence-industrial consolidation—issues that traditionally have posed a challenge to Germany.<sup>30</sup>

There is thus tension underneath the Franco-German compromise on the relaunching of EU defence cooperation. For now, the two countries are managing to sustain it, but the question must be asked how it might be affected by US policy. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Nixon administration, enthused by its own self-confidence, caused a degree of division within Europe. The same could happen again, though in a different manner. The key factor is the kind of 'transactionalism' or business approach that has crept into US policy with regard to NATO: namely, the idea that if we do this for you, you must do this for us. The starkest face of this de facto criticism of European defence efforts came from Donald Trump during his campaign for the presidency, when he questioned US commitments to alliance solidarity if allies did not invest more; but the impulse itself did not originate with Trump (now President-elect). It has been growing stronger through the years of the 'war on terror' in Iraq and Afghanistan, prompting the outgoing Secretary of Defence Robert Gates to warn of the United States' 'dwindling appetite' to serve as Europe's heavyweight partner, just as it prompted President Obama to define a 'hybrid' approach to interventions,

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pp. 1167–87.

<sup>28</sup> German Federal Government, *White Paper on German security policy and the future of the Bundeswehr* (Berlin, 13 July 2016), p. 64.

<sup>29</sup> Author's discussion with German defence official, Copenhagen, 18 Aug. 2016.

<sup>30</sup> Patrick Keller, 'Germany', in Jorge Benitez, ed., *Alliance at risk: strengthening European defence in an age of turbulence and competition* (Washington DC: Atlantic Council, 2016), pp. 17–22.

‘widening the goals but tightly scoping America’s involvement’—also known as leading from behind.<sup>31</sup>

This businesslike or paymaster approach to Europe tends to empty ‘political NATO’ of substance in the same way that President Nixon’s approach did, reducing the essence of transatlantic relations to talk of money and burden-sharing. Unsurprisingly, NATO came up with a 2014 ‘defence pledge’ to increase spending. Equally unsurprisingly, this gives increased currency to the idea—dear to many in France—that political consultations are better run inside Europe and flexibly across the Atlantic, than in NATO format, at the same time as it fuels problems for centrist forces in German politics. In sum, at a moment when France and Germany are in need of a political framework within which to advance EU–NATO issues, the range of contending visions of transatlantic relations is debilitating and the Harmel framework of ‘NATO defence and detente’ is not strong enough to provide direction.

### Dealing with Russia: detente as end or means?

Detente implies an adversarial relationship that holds a promise of stabilization and possibly transformation into partnership. It was a hope in the 1950s following Stalin’s death, in the 1960s following the Cuban Missile Crisis, in the 1990s following the demise of the Soviet Union, and perhaps today it is a hope that the Ukraine crisis has peaked.<sup>32</sup> This hope of detente is thus part and parcel of strategic relations, but it is also at heart ambiguous. On the one hand, detente can be a gradual step-by-step approach to reducing tensions and opening relationships—a means to enable change, in other words. On the other hand, detente can be all about envisioning a future—an end—unlocked by a peace deal, but with the understanding that this future will not begin until all pieces in the puzzle can be put together in one grand movement.

Whether detente was to be envisaged as a means or an end constituted a puzzle for the allies in their Cold War relationship to the adversary, the Soviet Union, just as it does today in their relationship with Russia. Today, the question is whether western sanctions and NATO adaptation measures should continue unabated until Russia and the West reach an agreement on Russian disengagement from Ukraine, including Crimea, or whether these sanctions and measures can be gradually relaxed to enable a dialogue with a view to partnership. For those who stand firm, gradual opening amounts to appeasement. For those who seek engagement, continued sanctions imply radicalization.

The Harmel Report quite clearly aligned with the former view, prioritizing defence over detente, albeit subtly and with diplomatic openings. ‘Defence first’

<sup>31</sup> ‘The President came up with the idea himself’, White House adviser Derek Chollet argues in *The long game: how Obama defied Washington and redefined America’s role in the world* (New York: Public Affairs, 2016), pp. 99–100. On Robert Gates, see Michael Birnbaum, ‘Gate rebukes European allies in farewell speech’, *Washington Post*, 10 June 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Sakwa, ‘The death of Europe? Continental fates after Ukraine’, *International Affairs* 91: 3, May 2015, pp. 553–79; Sten Rynning, ‘The false promise of continental concert: Russia, the West and the necessary balance of power’, *International Affairs* 91: 3, May 2015, pp. 539–52.

became NATO's collective approach, but only because a number of contingent factors pushed the allies together. French President de Gaulle's policy consisted of moving beyond the blocs, which implied an opening of engagement with the East and a sidelining of the two alliances, NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Clearly, this ran in opposition to the Harmel doctrine. If France in the end accepted the doctrine, it was because of two primary factors. One was US policy, which needed to demonstrate NATO's political relevance in opposition to French policy and in particular France's withdrawal in March 1966 from NATO's military command. In October 1966 President Johnson thus outlined a 'broader vision of peaceful engagement', including a number of steps the two blocs could take together to shape 'an entire new political environment'.<sup>33</sup> Johnson's detente policy in effect offered itself as a gradualist and reassuring alternative to de Gaulle's transformative and bold policy.

The FRG became in many ways the pivotal player in this contest between detente French and US style. Most political forces in the FRG had harboured reservations about the close Franco-German security cooperation sought by Chancellor Adenauer and President de Gaulle in 1963, fearing it would pull the FRG away from NATO. This fear of drift was further stoked by France's decision to part from NATO's military command.<sup>34</sup> By 1966, then, the question in the FRG was not whether to pursue detente via NATO but how to do so. The FRG's legacy was to stand firm on 'detente as an end'—to make German unification a precondition for detente and East–West normalization, as reflected in the FRG's Hallstein doctrine of 1955, according to which it would not open diplomatic relations with countries that recognized the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The Soviet bloc's repeated attempts through the mid-1960s to demand the FRG's recognition of the GDR—and thus of two Germanies—as a price of detente effectively cast the FRG and its Hallstein doctrine as obstacles to progress. The 1966–9 grand coalition led by Chancellor Kiesinger thus carefully sought change, warming to normalized East–West relations—for instance by establishing diplomatic relations with Romania in January 1967—but on the strict understanding that the FRG would remain anchored in NATO and western Europe. To Kiesinger, detente described the quality of a new order—an end—and NATO had to stand firm. This West German intransigence bedevilled subgroup one of the Harmel investigation, addressing the topic of East–West relations. A majority of allies felt the need to counter Soviet propaganda by accepting the prospect of a comprehensive East–West conference (which became the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, CSCE, later OSCE), even as they were aware that this effort to end 'the division of Europe' could encourage the eastern push for a neutral and unified Germany in Europe's midst and thus risked pulling the FRG out of NATO.<sup>35</sup> The

<sup>33</sup> Thomas A. Schwartz, 'The de Gaulle challenge: the Johnson administration and the NATO crisis of 1966–1967', in Helga Haftendorn, Georges-Henri Soutou, Stephen F. Szabo and Samuel Wells, eds, *The strategic triangle: France, Germany, and the United States in the shaping of a new Europe* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006), pp. 127–48.

<sup>34</sup> Helga Haftendorn, 'The NATO crisis of 1966–1967: confronting Germany', in Haftendorn et al., eds, *The strategic triangle*, pp. 77–102; also Helga Haftendorn, *NATO and the nuclear revolution: a crisis of credibility 1966–1967* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), ch. 5.

<sup>35</sup> The final report of subgroup one thus welcomed 'mutually beneficial minor arrangements' between East and

FRG resisted this gradualist approach (detente as a means) and only reluctantly signed up to the idea of a comprehensive conference at the very end of the Harmel process.<sup>36</sup>

The Harmel Report thus in effect managed to achieve consensus because both France and the FRG had run out of good alternatives. France could not oppose detente, having itself done so much to promote it, even if NATO detente differed from French detente; and the FRG had no choice but to anchor detente in a solidified alliance, even if NATO was tempted by the gradualism of detente dialogue.

The contrast to the present is notable. Today, Germany, situated between US and French policy, has ample opportunity either to define the political centre or to tilt in either a US or a French direction. The US position is a hard-line stance of 'detente as an end' that can be realized only once the Putin regime significantly changes its behaviour. In contrast, the French position is tempted by the prospect of East–West gradualism that would open up the opportunity to focus on threats to the south that, in the French view, are more fundamental and urgent. Germany—for now—is camping on Harmel territory, emphasizing dialogue as a consequence of western unity. But as Germany's allies adopt positions that scratch at the surface of unity, Germany's centrist position becomes more difficult to sustain. In this context, the Harmel doctrine can be thought of as a framework for policy development, but one that falls short of providing structure and direction.

Germany's current Russia policy is the outcome of a complex combination of traditions. Chancellor Merkel's own party is heir to the tradition of western anchoring; but the Chancellor must also grapple with Germany's *Versteher* tradition of 'understanding' and accommodating Russia. This tradition has multiple sources, including Germany's unification in the nineteenth century as a power balancing between East and West, the later desire after 1945 to regain national control of German issues, and the sustained exposure of large segments of the German business community to the distinct type of 'political market' opportunities that Russia and some other eastern countries offer. The outcome has been a current among both political actors and businesses of empathy with Russia, including most prominently former Chancellor Schröder and also the new anti-immigration, anti-EU party Alternative für Deutschland, as well as a significant group of German business interests that use lobbying organizations and political relationships to shape policy—becoming, in the view of one expert, 'the key driver of German policy toward Russia'.<sup>37</sup> Considering how deeply rooted this tradition is, the analyst Ulrich Speck has noted, it is quite possible that the more

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West but emphasized the priority of 'wider and deeper forms of co-operation designed to establish a durable settlement guaranteed by an adequate security system'. The report's section on 'The German problem' likewise links German unification to 'progress in overcoming the present division of Europe'. This was moving detente in the direction of the 'end' sought by the FRG but within a context that allowed for both gradualism and a comprehensive security conference. See NATO, 'East–West relations, detente and a European settlement', paper issued as part of AC/261-N/13(Rev) (i.e. up-to-date version of Sub-Group 1 Final Report), Nov. 1967, NATO Harmel Archive. On the danger of a new Europe, see 'Secretary-General's comments to Mr Watson on the work of Sub-Group 1, PO/67/709', 22 Sept. 1967, NATO Harmel Archive.

<sup>36</sup> Haftendorn, *NATO and the nuclear revolution*.

<sup>37</sup> Stephen F. Szabo, *Germany, Russia, and the rise of geo-economics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 47. See also Roula Khalaf, 'The German club of Putin understanders', *Financial Times*, 3 Dec. 2014.

'America confronts Russia to defend the principles of international order, the more Germany will distance itself from America'.<sup>38</sup>

The worst fears of Russia-facing empathy taking control of German policy did not come to pass, however, not least because the downing of Malaysian Airlines MH17 in July 2014, killing 298 people, including 194 Dutch, virtually closed off the opportunity for *Versteher* to debate whether Russia's annexation of Crimea in March reflected past injustices inflicted on Russia. As Russia was quite apparently complicit in the MH17 affair, German political debate turned to focus instead on how Germany could provide stable European leadership, in effect positioning Germany for the 'leading from the centre' policy that emerged with the national security strategy of July 2016. However, this centre includes Berlin, where Chancellor Merkel co-governs with her Social Democrat Foreign Minister Steinmeier. The latter has come to symbolize *Versteher*-type pragmatism, if only in small doses. For instance, in launching Germany's OSCE presidency in January 2016, Steinmeier appealed to the comprehensive and pragmatic outreach of his predecessor Willy Brandt and in effect indicated that the East–West crisis was one not of clashing interests but of broken communication.<sup>39</sup> Later the same year, in June 2016, Steinmeier likened NATO exercises in eastern Europe to 'sabre-rattling and war cries', and urged re-engagement with Russia on issues of disarmament and arms control.<sup>40</sup>

Chancellor Merkel's position is a carefully crafted compromise. To keep the door open to dialogue, and thus to give pragmatists a stake in policy, Merkel has sought to privilege the EU track and sanctions as opposed to military strategy; to maintain the overall framework of NATO–Russia partnership (the 1997 Founding Act); and to focus Ukraine negotiations—the so-called Minsk accords—on eastern Ukraine as opposed to Crimea.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, to avoid appearing soft on Russia, Merkel has invested markedly in the maintenance of EU sanctions, which come under review every six to eight months, depending on the type of sanction; in the centrality of promises made in the Minsk accords; and in the range of measures adopted by NATO to reassure the eastern allies. Thus, whereas in mid-2014 Merkel rejected prospects of a permanent NATO troop presence in eastern Europe, by mid-2016 she had signed up to NATO's 'Enhanced Forward Presence' (EFP), which puts four battalion-sized NATO battlegroups in, respec-

<sup>38</sup> Cited in 'How very understanding', *The Economist*, 10 May 2014. See also Matthew Karnitschnig, 'NATO's Germany problem', *Político*, 8 July 2016, <http://www.politico.eu/article/natos-germany-russia-problem-german-foreign-minister-frank-walter-steinmeier/>.

<sup>39</sup> German Foreign Ministry, *Dialog erneuern, Vertrauen neu aufbauen, Sicherheit wieder herstellen: Schwerpunkte des deutschen OSZE-Vorsitzes 2016*, <http://www.osce.org/de/cio/215801?download=true>, p. 1; Lila Shevtsova, 'Is the time of the *Russlandversteher* over?', *The American Interest*, 16 March 2016, <http://www.the-american-interest.com/2016/03/16/is-the-time-of-the-russlandversteher-over/>.

<sup>40</sup> German Foreign Ministry, 'Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier on relations between NATO and Russia', press release, 19 June 2016, [https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Infoservice/Presse/Meldungen/2016/160619\\_BM\\_Bild\\_am\\_Sonntag\\_engl\\_version.html](https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Infoservice/Presse/Meldungen/2016/160619_BM_Bild_am_Sonntag_engl_version.html); Bojan Pancevski, 'German minister tells Nato to stop sabre-rattling on Russia's doorstep', *Sunday Times*, 19 June 2016.

<sup>41</sup> The Minsk agreements of September 2014 (Minsk I) and February 2015 (Minsk II) grapple with the issue of attaining a ceasefire and beginning the process of disarmament in the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk but became stuck in procedure: Russian-backed rebels want constitutional reform before ceasefire and disarmament, the government the reverse.

tively, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.<sup>42</sup> The EFP forces were designed to fit within the 1997 Founding Act, offering Germany the opportunity to uphold the Act while also offering German forces as the battalion framework in Lithuania.<sup>43</sup> Germany had previously volunteered to serve as the first and interim framework nation for the ‘very high readiness force’ (VJTF) that NATO designed in 2014 in response to Russia’s aggression in Ukraine.

German policy as of 2016 thus parallels that of 1967: it is negotiated in a grand coalition in which the senior partner seeks East–West dialogue through a framework of western strength (detente mostly as an end) while the junior partner is tempted to dash for dialogue (detente mostly as a means). Willy Brandt, upon becoming chancellor in 1969, dashed for dialogue. Diplomatic and trade achievements followed; but so did a degree of rupture in allied policy as the main players pursued distinct styles of detente policy, offering the Soviet Union scope for manipulating the allies separately in turn, first France in the mid-1960s, then Brandt’s Germany, and finally the United States once President Nixon got around to articulating a detente policy. At that point, in 1972–3, ‘superpower detente’ became the main game, and European efforts faltered.

Today, French pragmatism could pull Germany in a similar direction as in 1969, from a Harmel position of detente as an end to detente as a means. None of the current major political forces in France has come out in favour of a firm policy of demanding Russian changes before opening up to detente (i.e. detente as an end). At the opening of NATO’s July 2016 summit, President Hollande went so far as to state that Russia was neither ‘an adversary’ nor ‘a threat’, adding that France was heavily preoccupied to the south, in the Middle East and North Africa, and that he expected other allies to do the heavy lifting in the East. President Hollande will not seek re-election in 2017, but all major contenders have played to the same tune. The Gaullist front-runner, François Fillon, has sought to maintain a critical distance from the Putin regime but has also been quite clear about the need to partner with Russia, in view of its culture and history and also its current capabilities. Fillon’s rival in the presidential primaries, former President Nicolas Sarkozy, has more bluntly recognized Crimea’s annexation by Russia.<sup>44</sup> Fillon’s key rivals in the race to the presidency travel the same path of reconciliation: centrist Emmanuel Macron has urged it, and nationalist Marine Le Pen has long warmed to Russia, arguing that a ‘Trump–Putin–Le Pen’ trio ‘would be good for world peace’.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> The forces committed to battlegroups will rotate but the battlegroups will be ‘present at all times’. The EFP measure comes without a sunset clause and is thus permanent until NATO decides otherwise. See NATO, ‘Warsaw summit communiqué’, press release (2016) 100, 9 July 2016, para. 40; ‘No permanent NATO troop presence in Eastern Europe, Merkel says’, *Deutsche Welle*, 3 Sept. 2014.

<sup>43</sup> The 1997 Founding Act offers NATO provision for collective defence by way of reinforcement and interoperability rather than by ‘additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces’. EFP forces are both light and rotational, NATO allies maintain, also pointing to the hedging clause of the Founding Act that NATO’s statement took note of the ‘current and foreseeable security environment’: NATO, Founding Act, 27 May 1997, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_25468.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25468.htm).

<sup>44</sup> ‘Sommet de l’OTAN: la Russie n’est “pas un adversaire, pas une menace”, selon Hollande’, *Le Monde*, 8 July 2016; Tristan Maupoil, ‘Nicolas Sarkozy légitime l’annexion de la Crimée par la Russie’, *Le Figaro*, 10 Feb. 2015; Marc de Boni, ‘Fillon sur la Russie: “un pays dangereux qui n’a jamais connu la démocratie”’, *Le Figaro*, 23 Nov. 2016.

<sup>45</sup> ‘France’s Macron wants closer ties with Russia’, *EU Observer*, 1 Dec. 2016; Ingrid Melander, Simon Carraud, Michaela Cabrera and Gerard Bon, ‘Le Pen says “world peace” would gain from a Trump–Putin–Le Pen trio’,

For now, France remains at Germany's side in the Minsk negotiations—and did cancel its own sale of two Mistral warships to Russia in 2014–15. Moreover, the brutality of Russia's bombing campaign in Syria hindered France's drive for European pragmatism because Russia is meddling in and undermining French efforts to combat Islamic extremists. As a result, and at the last minute, President Hollande cancelled President Putin's planned official visit to Paris in mid-October 2016.<sup>46</sup> For now, French pragmatism on East–West detente is on hold; but the pull towards pragmatism—the desire to stabilize Europe in order to focus on southern threats, reinforced by the Gaullist tradition of reimagining Europe's order from the Atlantic to the Urals—remains significant. It continues both as a political outlook and as a policy that seeks to attract Germany. If US policy hardens to the point where Germany has to give up on its centrist stance and choose more definitively between detente as an end and detente as a means, France's position along with Germany's own balance of internal political forces makes it more likely that Germany will opt for pragmatism.

All this points to the conclusion that NATO's current detente profile is defined not so much by the Harmel compromise of 1967, which privileged detente as an end, as by the decade of debate that preceded it. We really need to go back to the 1956 report of the 'three wise men' to understand NATO's current diplomacy and the role of France and Germany within it. The 1956 report urged substantial consultations to pre-empt political divergences—such as that on detente—from harming the alliance. At present it is uncertain whether the leading allies are willing to play by this rulebook, even though Germany's heralded move to greater activism is premised on it. If the allies fail to resolve this issue of consultation, they will in effect have challenged 'political NATO' in a fundamental way. The difference between current circumstances and the 1950s, when 'political NATO' was in formation, is that today the military necessity of NATO is less obvious to at least some allies, and the risk of fragmentation has thus increased.

## Global NATO: to be or not to be?

NATO has gone out-of-area in a big way since the end of the Cold War—commanding more than 100,000 troops at the height of its engagement in Afghanistan in 2010–11—but the underlying question of how this role is to be justified and pursued continues to disturb. One way to clarify matters is to link NATO to global interests and human rights. This framework is strong on legitimacy but weak on history: NATO has always resisted being pulled in as a 'regional arrangement' beholden to the authority of the UN Security Council.<sup>47</sup> Another way is to claim a right of influence and self-defence for the Atlantic community. This line of argument is strong in its appeal for regional cohesion in an unpredictable

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Reuters, 16 Nov. 2016.

<sup>46</sup> Anne-Laure Frémont, 'Vladimir Poutine décide finalement de reporter sa visite en France', *Le Figaro*, 12 Oct. 2016.

<sup>47</sup> As prescribed in the UN Charter's Chapter VIII on 'regional arrangements'. See also Lawrence S. Kaplan, *NATO and the UN: a peculiar relationship* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2010).



world, but also jars with those who do not identify with a strong Atlantic community. Finally, therefore, there is a fallback position of viewing NATO as a toolbox for coalition operations. Toolbox NATO has never been a favourite option of the NATO collective, but the lack of consensus and a Franco-German divide have consistently pushed it to the forefront of debates.

The defining issue for Pierre Harmel and his subgroup four, addressing global NATO, was the extent to which the principle of consultations also applied to events taking place outside the treaty area, whether in Suez, Cuba, Vietnam or elsewhere. This subgroup was led by a Dutch scholar, Constantijn L. Patijn, who was an ardent advocate of strong NATO consultations, like Paul-Henri Spaak; but both failed to garner allied support for their reports, which instead became their individual contributions to the Harmel exercise.

Patijn found that security developments outside Europe and the North Atlantic area had grown in importance and that 'lack of unity' among NATO allies was 'one of the main reasons for the present weakness of NATO'. The point was not that NATO had to generate collective international operations (these came later), but that it needed 'to devise common policies for its members'. Among the steps he advised NATO to take to promote such common policies was a fine-tuned 'variety of forms of consultations', whereby only the most able and interested allies would be involved in consultations on certain issues or geographic areas. In effect, NATO was in need of 'a number of restricted groups working on specific regions or subjects outside the Atlantic area'.<sup>48</sup>

This language was later toned down in response to comments from allies. West Germany, for instance, sought the replacement of 'restricted groups' by 'specialized groups', arguing that restricted formats would lead to interminable discussions in the parent body—the North Atlantic Council—as to their membership. In West Germany's view, 'all member countries had a concern in every problem that affected the interests of the Alliance as a whole'.<sup>49</sup> West Germany's focus was not on global NATO, though, as its centre of gravity was the division of Germany into two countries and a policy for overcoming that division that would not at the same time detach Germany from its western allies. As we have seen, the FRG was in two minds as to how this could be achieved, and most of their efforts in the Harmel process were accordingly channelled into subgroup one on East–West relations, where they had to share leadership with Britain. The diverging European positions of Germany's key allies complicated matters, naturally, and added to the disincentive for German investments in debates on global NATO.

Where the FRG thus approached global NATO issues from a reticent and collective angle, France was more comfortable denying NATO a global role and instead seeking to merge new issues of French and European leadership.

<sup>48</sup> *Sub-Group IV: Developments in regions outside the NATO area*, report attached to letter to NATO Secretary-General Brosio from the Netherlands delegation to NATO, 31 Aug. 1967, NATO Secret, paras 3, 13, 35, NATO Harmel Archive.

<sup>49</sup> *Fourth meeting of Sub-Group No. 4 on developments in regions outside the NATO Area (AC/261)*, to NATO Secretary-General from Secretary of Sub-Group No. 4, Sept. 1967, NATO Confidential. The final report of subgroup 4 with this revised language was submitted to NATO's Secretary-General on 5 Oct. 1967: NATO Harmel Archive.

President de Gaulle more or less gave up on the European Community in 1963 following his failed attempt to refashion its institutions, and instead privileged Great Power relations between France, the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union. De Gaulle's successor, Georges Pompidou, who learned from the frustration of these designs, instead sought recognition of France by the United States as the 'spokesman' of the European Community.<sup>50</sup> For a brief moment President Pompidou felt encouraged by the dash for change under the *Ostpolitik* of West German Chancellor Willy Brandt, as it portended a European momentum for change. However, as the Soviet Union took advantage of *Ostpolitik* to legitimize its political control behind frontiers that West Germany and others now offered to recognize, and as the United States failed to support France as Europe's leader, France fell back into the vacillating position sketched earlier of sometimes urging Europeans to cohere, sometimes preferring coalitions to institutions. Specifically, the European Political Cooperation (EPC) that France did much to organize in 1973 as a means to encourage a 'European identity' in foreign affairs was not anchored in the European Community but took shape as a type of coalition mechanism for European opposition to US Middle East policy.<sup>51</sup>

This Franco-German combination of outright opposition to and benign negligence of global NATO at different times undermined meaningful allied consultations on global issues. Once again it is only fair to contextualize these countries' policies with reference to US policy, which in the early 1970s was unilateral and often improvised, for instance when, early in 1973, National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger made the impromptu suggestion of a new Atlantic Charter that ran in contradiction to both German historical sentiments (the original 1941 Atlantic Charter having been directed against Germany) and French ambitions to be seen as Europe's pre-eminent voice. Nonetheless, these approaches undermined any chance NATO might have had of developing substantial consultations on global security issues. It took renewed concerns with the Middle East in the 1980s to prompt the allies to develop a practice of coordination in respect of that region, and even that amounted only to 'back-filling' in Europe in order to enable a US military buildup in the Gulf.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, the same political line-up has continued from the 1990s, when out-of-area debates became very prominent, to the present. The stakes in the out-of-area debates of the 1990s were high because they concerned NATO's role *vis-à-vis* the EU especially; if NATO won out, it was because of the urgency of events on the ground and the limits of European capacities. Divergent views on the issue of global security consultations continued through the 'war on terror' and into NATO's 2011 engagement in its 'near abroad'—with Operation Unified Protector in Libya in 2011.

In 2011, when the Arab Spring raised hopes, but also fears of a political descent into chaos, NATO had been engaged in Afghanistan for almost a decade and was

<sup>50</sup> Georges-Henri Soutou, 'President Pompidou, Ostpolitik, and the strategy of detente', in Haftendorn et al., eds, *The strategic triangle*, pp. 229–57.

<sup>51</sup> The Single European Act did eventually bring the EPC into the EC, but not until 1986.

<sup>52</sup> Sten Rynning, 'NATO and the broader Middle East: the history and lessons of controversial encounters', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30: 6, 2007, pp. 905–22.

more than ever poised to serve as a platform for allied political coordination. Yet in March 2011, when French President Sarkozy took the lead in spearheading military action against Libyan leader Gaddafi, he also sought to block any prospect of NATO involvement. At first Sarkozy tried to hand the impending intervention to the EU, but soon changed track and appealed to the bilateral Franco-British Treaty on Defence and Security Cooperation of 2010.<sup>53</sup> There was plenty of reluctance among other NATO allies, including in Berlin where the liberals, the junior partner in the government, took the lead in opposing Germany's involvement via either the UN—where Germany held a rotating seat on the Security Council, which authorized the international intervention in Libya—or NATO, which nonetheless took command of the intervention two to three weeks into the crisis of March. Thus, if NATO did gain a role, it must be explained with reference to a lack of better options. NATO became a toolbox of last resort. This was precisely the condition that had caused Dr Patijn some 50 years earlier to warn that allied neglect of NATO in global affairs could disrupt the alliance at home and thus to prescribe new formats and ways of consultation. In spite of the limited enthusiasm they evoked then, these prescriptions continue to be of both analytical and political relevance.

The terms on which NATO engaged in the Libya campaign are revealing of the toolbox approach and how the principal allies accepted it. These terms were defined at a London conference on 29 March 2011 involving all the principal actors. That conference resulted in a decision to set up a division of labour between a broad Libya Contact Group, which would lead the international effort and reach out to Libyan parties, and NATO, which was to provide executive direction to operations. NATO's involvement was thus about command and control, not high diplomacy.<sup>54</sup> This toolbox approach ran in line with President Sarkozy's blend of political activism and pragmatism, according to which NATO could play a role as long as it was a minor one and the centre stage was left to the big nations. Moreover, European states' limited capacities and coherence in the Libya campaign once again disappointed France and exacerbated the pragmatic streak in its policy in favour of Great Power bilateralism. As we saw, this pragmatism has also marked President Hollande's search for war options against ISIS.

The problem for most of the allies is how to square a toolbox approach to NATO with their commitment to 'political NATO'—an alliance in which political consultations are meaningful and substantial. Strong NATO adherents such as Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom might argue that involving NATO in the Libya campaign was a way to maintain the relevance of the alliance; but these same countries have joined the global coalition fighting ISIS, which does not coordinate positions through NATO and which, remarkably, is controversial in NATO to the point where for a long time the organization was unable to establish a consensus on its air surveillance AWACS

<sup>53</sup> Jolyon Howorth, "'Opération Harmattan" in Libya: a paradigm shift in French, European and transatlantic security arrangements?', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 12: 4, 2014, pp. 405–17.

<sup>54</sup> Sten Rynning, 'Coalitions, institutions, and big tents: the new strategic reality of armed intervention', *International Affairs* 89: 1, Jan. 2013, pp. 53–68.

planes transmitting data to the global coalition. If coalitions thus outpace NATO in terms of operational tempo and political design, it will inevitably become a mere toolbox.

The expert group chaired by Madeleine Albright in early 2010, whose brief was to sketch options for a new Strategic Concept, foresaw this difficulty. In its report it zoomed in on the need to soften the veto power of NATO allies on issues that are 'less vital' or that have been cleared at a high level and thus are subject to implementation.<sup>55</sup> This broke a kind of taboo in NATO where hitherto consensus had been a holy grail. In the end the holy grail remained just that, because NATO could not agree to change its decision-making procedures. However, discussions did take place through 2011–12 and resulted in a number of options for change to decision-making procedures. One of them was qualified majority voting, which promised flexibility, but also meant that the United States could find itself outvoted. Even on 'less vital' issues, then, it was not a feasible option. Another possibility was to let coalition participants form a NATO Contributors' Committee (NCC), upon full NAC approval, to run non-Article 5 operations more smoothly. The trouble with this proposal was that it could not be insulated against the corrosive effect of token contributions buying full NCC membership or against predictably perverse effects on NATO defence planning, which would become laxer and less stringent as a result of flexibility.<sup>56</sup> Given the failure of any of these decision-making options to attract sufficient backing, NATO is effectively back at the position articulated by Germany in 1967—that all allies have an interest in issues that affect the alliance as a whole, and that no one is willing to open the door to restricted formats, one way or the other.

There is a striking similarity, therefore, between the fate of the thinking of Constantijn Patijn and that of the Albright group. Both sought ways and means to incorporate flexibility into NATO's decision-making to manage global or out-of-area issues, and both failed to achieve reform. This cannot be good news for an alliance dependent in part on out-of-area engagements. Perhaps Germany's fresh commitment to leadership 'from the centre' can bring some relief, as Germany might be able to tie coalitions to the collective institutional framework. This applies not only to Germany's political decision to offer leadership but also to its plan for using a so-called 'framework nation concept' to generate capability coherence and, one might think, common operational approaches among flexible groups of allies. However, Germany does not have a track record of operational leadership and remains wedded to 'the responsibility of restraint'—'law' over 'power'—in the words of Foreign Minister Steinmeier.<sup>57</sup> Thus the German 'framework nations' approach does not have the same operational edge as that of Britain, which has brought a group of allies together to focus on effective and full-spectrum deploy-

<sup>55</sup> Group of Experts on a New Strategic Concept for NATO, *NATO 2020: assured security; dynamic engagement*, 17 May 2010, <http://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/expertsreport.pdf>, p. 35.

<sup>56</sup> Leo G. Michels, 'NATO decision-making: the "consensus rule" endures despite challenges', in Sebastian Mayer, ed., *NATO's post-Cold War politics: the changing provision of security* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 107–23.

<sup>57</sup> Frank-Walter Steinmeier, 'Germany's new global role', *Foreign Affairs* 95: 4, July–Aug. 2016, pp. 106–13.

ments. Germany's framework approach takes a longer view and it has been likened to one of capability development.<sup>58</sup> Framework nations could therefore become simply another tool in NATO's toolbox.

The literature on coalition warfare establishes a number of reasons why coalition leaders—such as the United States—should want to maintain military alliances such as NATO: alliances have a competitive advantage in terms of legitimacy, burden-sharing, sustainability, and access to networks of friends and partners.<sup>59</sup> However, the pre-eminent challenge facing NATO is not this range of rationales but the more basic political willingness to work with them. For now, Germany has declared its intention to deliver leadership but has no track record to show for it, and France is more tempted by the pragmatism of Great Power relationships. NATO as a whole, therefore, is stuck, pondering a choice in favour of consultations that was made in the 1950s but whose institutional consequences are stubbornly elusive.

## Conclusion

The Harmel Report, now approaching its 50th anniversary, should be understood as representing both a remarkable doctrine of NATO political pre-eminence and a fleeting allied compromise on issues that have dogged the alliance since 1949.

As a doctrine, the Harmel Report cemented NATO's role as Europe's collective defence anchor and as an indispensable forum for Euro-Atlantic political coordination. In a Franco-German context, it was a doctrine more in line with German than French policy because it offered NATO as the political framework through which detente could be exercised and, not least from a German perspective, controlled: with Harmel, West German leaders could claim that inter-German dialogue would not happen at the expense of West German security. The Harmel doctrine of detente through western strength is essentially the story foretold of how German unification would happen in 1990–91, though with a degree of German initiative and Soviet weakness that was difficult to foresee. As one of four Second World War victors exercising control over German unification, France was always in a formal position of influence. However, with Harmel, it ceded an opportunity for flexible Great Power detente and granted NATO pre-eminence. It did so with an element of lasting regret.

Stripped of its Cold War constraints, the Harmel legacy became one more of testable compromise than of incontestable doctrine. France questioned the relevance of 'political NATO' and pulled back against Germany's inclination to seek compromise on the middle ground between its principal western partners. Inevitably, Germany became both France's partner in developing a vision of EU security and defence policy and the United States' partner in cementing NATO's

<sup>58</sup> Allers, 'The framework nation'; Jon Rahbek-Clemmensen and Sten Rynning, 'Le partage des capacités militaires: impasse ou avenir?', *Politique étrangère* 80: 1, 2015, pp. 49–60.

<sup>59</sup> Sarah E. Kreps, *Coalitions of convenience: United States interventions after the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Patricia Weitsman, *Waging war: alliances, coalitions, and institutions of interstate violence* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013).

role as Europe's pre-eminent security institution. The basic tenets of the Harmel doctrine were on the table—NATO as a political entity somewhere between a fully fledged Atlantic community and a mere military shield; detente as mostly an end, granting NATO privileges in continental diplomacy; and a need for solidified NATO consultations to manage global affairs. There was always a divide in Franco-German policy on these issues: the Harmel doctrine institutionalized it; the end of the Cold War challenged it.

In terms of NATO as an entity between Atlantic community and military shield, France was at the lower end of the spectrum and Germany in the middle. If the two countries managed this divergence of perspectives, it was because Germany was never inclined to support the vision of a full Atlantic community as articulated by President Kennedy and Secretary-General Paul-Henri Spaak, among others. Moreover, the Harmel exercise produced a compromise that avoided strong positions, enabling diplomacy to generate a habit of consultation while granting France a degree of freedom to explore European options. The quest for a reasonable level of coordination as opposed to full political community is one of the lasting contributions of the Harmel Report, and the greatest threat to this legacy lies in the culture of transactionalism that sometimes creeps into NATO. This tends to come about because the United States gets frustrated with, or is domestically driven to confront, Europe's limitations in generating collective power. These debates on power—on defence budgets and military hardware—are inherent in alliance management but also tend to detract from the political coordination of foreign policy priorities and engagements that Harmel and others saw as the lifeblood of alliance solidarity. In other words, it is within the power of key allies to exercise the restraint that enables foreign policy consultations.

In terms of Russia and the East–West balance, France and Germany differed considerably in so far as France was confident it could reach out to the Soviet Union and control change, whereas the FRG feared lest it be manipulated into neutrality. Both were thus hostile to the Harmel exercise of importing detente policy into NATO—France because it feared the cementing of the Yalta blocs, Germany because it feared the dilution of its western security anchor—and both in the end signed up to the Harmel Report with reluctance. Today, the cards are dealt differently. Germany is in the middle, straddling France's incipient pragmatism and the United States' inclination to stand firm. For now, Germany is maintaining its equilibrium, but the most likely scenario of change is one in which Germany moves a step or two in the direction of pragmatism. This would represent a contrast with the Harmel approach and signify an erosion of the Harmel doctrine's most heralded tenet: defence first, then detente.

In terms of global NATO, France and Germany were in alignment in so far as neither supported an extensive new range of consultation mechanisms to manage global affairs, though France's opposition had a grander rationale than Germany's. The two countries thus helped push NATO into the position where nothing much happened. This neglect of global NATO inevitably drove the allies into improvising it as a type of toolbox to be opened whenever their wider global interests

necessitated some type of alliance engagement. France appears comfortable with this state of affairs, but it should be of concern in Germany, where the ambition to 'lead from the centre' presupposes strong collective institutions, especially given that Germany lacks a national tradition of and capacity for out-of-area leadership. On this issue, therefore, Harmel defines a horizon of consultative opportunities that Germany can seek to pursue but that, 50 years on, will be challenging to bring to life.

Perhaps the most instructive lesson of the Harmel experience is the degree to which the alliance debate on consultations in the 1950s remains relevant. This early effort to look beyond immediate threats and insulate the alliance against geopolitical turbulence was prescient: clearly, to maintain NATO even in its regional context, the allies needed consultation and coordination on other big issues. The early effort to define principles matured with the 1956 report of the 'wise men', and from this point on consultation became really a question of execution. The 1966–7 Harmel exercise is one chapter in this story, and France and Germany—on which this article has focused—have been central to it. They continue to be at odds on the desirability of political NATO, but they also hold the keys to it—all the more so as Britain heads for exit from the EU and the United States continues its rebalancing to Asia. Germany can be trusted to invest in procedures of allied consultations, on account of both its history and its declared ambition; France, if it can sort out its preferences for institutional and ad hoc procedures, can add operational punch. These countries thus embody Europe's embrace of 'its own divisions' and affirm the pluralist and contingent character of political NATO.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Henry Kissinger, *World order* (New York: Penguin, 2014), p. 12.

