British and German approaches to European security provision

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The United Kingdom and Germany are, together with France, the so-called E-3: in fact, these are the states with the most advanced economies of Europe, and those who, from the point of view of European security, face the highest expenses and are provided with the most numerous and best equipped armies on the continent. The present paper aims to analyze the approach of the United Kingdom and Germany to the European security policy. Describing the historical context in which they shaped their policies, I will compare the strategic cultures that the two countries have developed and the national interests they tried to defend and promote.

The analysis will take account of the changed international scenario occurred from the end of World War II, the Cold War and its demise, and the terrorist attacks of 09/11. The first two had a fundamental impact on the role of geo-political and international aspirations of what will be the reunited Germany in 1990, again at the centre of Europe; the latter affected more the British choices, especially in relations to the 'special relationship' with the United States.

The paper will then proceed analysing British and German foreign and security strategies in the light of their relationships with the European context. As a consequence, at the end of this process, conclusions about eventual analogies and differences that characterised the policies of the two states will be drawn.

Main Discussion

The United Kingdom, one of the four victorious allies, went out of the Second World War as a member of the winning coalition. Nevertheless, it suffered a clear deterioration of its economic, moral and geo-strategic situation: undoubtedly had lost the world leader position held at least until the end of the nineteenth century. The war, fought alongside the United States, cemented the tie that will be decisive in the coming years: the special relationship with the Americans. The United Kingdom, indeed, took part in shaping the new international order: therefore came as a permanent member, in the Security Council of the newly formed United Nations (with USA, France, China and the USSR), and, with the signing of the Atlantic Charter, contributed to establish the core values and criteria of what will become the main instrument of security of the Western bloc, NATO, from the late 1940's.

The trigger of the Cold War was, paradoxically, a benefit for the United Kingdom. Integrated in the American security system, UK could enjoy strength and privileged location in a historical moment in which its global pre-eminence was definitely lost, due to the disruption of its colonial empire and the slowly emerging power weakness. It could also preserve for a long time the status quo of winning power. (Eliassen, 1998, p. 125).

The attitude of the British against the new European institutions was, however, very different. The United Kingdom was sceptical, if not opposed, to the process of continental integration. For centuries it had been a status quo power, which had interest in keeping unchanged the world order and whose concern was to maintain the European continent free from the hegemonic aims of a country or group of countries. In the light of this consideration, it is possible to understand British interests towards the Dunkirk Treaty of mutual defence with France (1947) which will then be extended to the Benelux countries (Brussels Treaty, 1948): Europe had to be defended from the fears of a resurgent Germany and later from the fears of a Soviet expansionism created by the following Berlin crisis (White 2001, p. 4). The nature of the Brussels Treaty, an intergovernmental based one, fully satisfied the British aspirations to co-operation and did not harm in any way what was considered the cornerstone of continental security, NATO.

The end of the Cold War did not change the British attitude. It was obvious that Europe was going to encounter a new type of security issues: "The balance of immediate security threats switching from East-West axis to North-South axis [...], (and) a significant danger of the development of a 'new Cold war' with Russia" (Eliassen 2001, p. 127) linked to the enlargement processes of EU and NATO. Risks no longer regarded territorial defence, but rose from the situation of a new Europe. United Kingdom acted following its identity of status quo power, with the aim of maintaining three core issues. First, the U.S. involvement in European security issues: actually European actors, as evidenced by the crisis of Bosnia, could not replace the U.S. military and economic resources. Britain accepted the development of a European Security Defence Identity, but only to be used in those cases in which the United States was not interested in intervening. This is the reason why British government fought for the pillarisation of the security and defence sphere in the Maastricht Treaty (1991) and only if it was conceived as separable but not separate from the NATO commitment. Second, United Kingdom sought to protect the special relationship with the United States, which granted the American cooperation in the field of intelligence, development of nuclear weapons and of the three armed forces. Third, moving on the intergovernmentalist path, Britain sought to secure political and military manoeuvring space in the face of new and rather different security challenges.

The lines of continuity of the development of Britain's European policy can be found primarily in its aversion to a "step change from intergovernmentalism towards supranational decision-making "(Manners and Whitman 2000, p. 45) because of the fear of losing control of its policy in favour of a super-state that does not share its values and its identity.

Pragmatism was always at the heart of the British policy: being always in the middle of a choice between an Atlanticist line and an Europeanist one, Britain tried to maintain an equidistant position. Revising the Churchill three circles theory, Blair assessed that United Kingdom had to assume a pivotal position in Europe, as a bridge between Europe itself and United States. On one side opposing the path toward full European integration, while on the other strengthening its position in Europe in order to gain a stronger role in its relationship with the United States. This allowed United Kingdom to pursue a policy of "pick and choose": use the institution that best fit in accordance the situation.

Germany came out from the Second World War not only as the main losing power, but as the country who committed the crime of the Holocaust and blamed for both world wars of the twentieth century.

As a consequence, post-war Germany "developed a strategic culture largely non-military based. Deeply influenced security thinking" (Howorth and Menon 1997, p. 53). To understand the dynamics of this strategy, we can consider three aspects that contribute to the common foreign and defence policy of Germany from 1945 onwards and, in particular, after the end of the Cold War: the historical context, the concept of identity, national interests.

At the end of the Cold War, Germany was reunited after many years at the centre of a Europe no longer divided into two blocs: it was no longer so, the border with the Soviet enemy, but a country surrounded by a series of friendly countries. The threats to national security were not a territorial but rather related to the problems of the power vacuum created by the collapse of the Soviet Union: Ethnic Conflicts, Refugees from former Soviet states, nuclear proliferation and WMD.

In this historical context, a new identity was constructed, since the post-War period, in opposition to the Third Reich

period: the one of a country "based on civic political rights […]and firmly belonging to 'Europe' and the 'West' (Manners and Whitman 2000, p. 66). The idea of European identity was strongly characterised by notions of a shared European destiny.

German focus, indeed, was Central and Eastern Europe, rather than Western Europe. Moving in multilateral institutions and Pan-european cooperation, Germany had "a National interest in peaceful International relations governed by sets of rules of international law, preventive crisis management, arms control and effective International institutions (Gillessen quoted in Hyde-Price 2000, p. 28).

Given these circumstances, Germany developed a concept of security not related directly to defence matters but relying on non-military aspects. "Germany has traditionally emphasised 'soft power' as an instrument of foreign policy, for example, trade policy and economical and political assistance to strengthen democratic structures (Manners and Whitman 2000, p. 68). German grand strategy was based on multilateral integration and strategic partnerships, especially with France. The former relied first of all on the commitment in promoting European Integration, preserving and adapting NATO and developing a European Security and Defence Identity. European integration was fundamental in German plan in order to overcome the traditional mistrust of its closer neighbours, especially France.

The cornerstone of German security was NATO for a long time: it was deemed as the best way of maintaining United States engaged in continental security: US military presence was vital for peace and stability counterbalancing with Russian military power and also useful for facing new threats which emerged after the demise of the Cold war. Commitment to the Atlantic Alliance was functional to reassure its neighbours and to include former Soviet states in the European security community.

The strong German interest in developing an ESDI since 1990 had similar reasons to the promotion of the European integration. It was necessary "to enable the Europeans to meet the challenges that they have faced, to fulfil their International responsibilities; […] continued integration is indispensable for stability and lasting peace on the continent itself; […] the development of an ESDI (was) necessary to ensure that countries of Europe dispose of an efficient sets of instruments for safeguarding a common foreign and policy defence" (Duffield 1998, pp. 127-128). Those are the reasons why Germany had a leading role, together with France, in the elaboration of a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) for the European Union that would have wanted, in franco-german plans, the Western European Union (WEU) as the military arm of the EU. Strategic partnership played, also, a substantial role. The security partnership with the United States always had a vital role in German security thinking. On the other hand, the close "french-connection" was of existential importance, in the commitment to European Integration and in the developing of a cooperation extended to security affairs within the EU and outside NATO and WEU. "As the most expression of this engagement, the two countries agreed in 1987 to form a joint brigade, which was activated in October 1990" (Duffield 1998, p. 133).

Conclusion

It is possible to argue that both United Kingdom and Germany used the process of European Integration and the development of a Common Foreign and Security Policy to pursue their national interests, shaped by their identities and strategic cultures.

The United Kingdom moved through its realist and pragmatic tradition: that of a country who always had its interests outside of Europe. By the end of the Cold war, with United States disengagement from Europe and involved in the economic integration, British governments sought to control the security developments of the Union, stopping them from moving towards a supranational path. The St. Malo Anglo-French (1998) summit declaring the necessity for Europe to have the capacity for autonomous action and the New Labour's Strategic Defence Review (1998) can be seen as the attempt not to be excluded of the control over security cooperation developments of Europe. British closest ally has always been United States, and after the attacks of 09/11 the special relationship seemed to be strengthened back.

Germany, instead, after having considered Europe as a need, committed itself to the European cause as providing the multilateral framework for the resolution of the "German problem". Seeking to gain a major role leading the process of integration, together with France, sought the opportunity both to ensure its territory and to develop the "civilian nature" of its strategic culture since the end of World War II. "The concept of Zivilmacht refers to a strong commitment to multilateral cooperation, institution building and supranational integration [...] Civilian powers seek to 'civilianise' international relations by constraining the use of military force and strengthening the rule of law, the peaceful resolution of disputes and human rights" (Hyde-Price 2000, p. 121).

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