

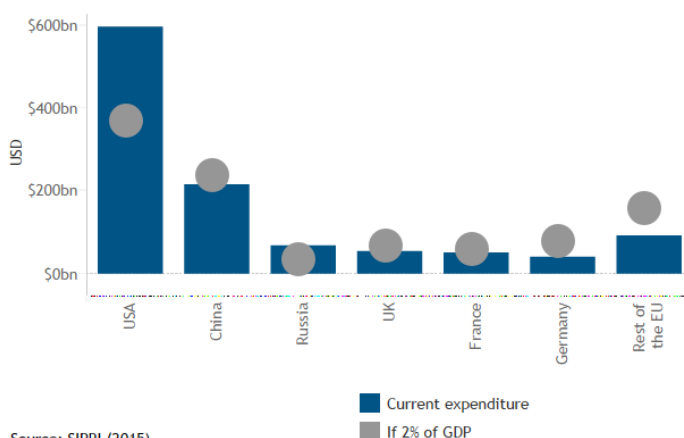
A Franco-German motor for EU defence policy

Blog post by Adviser Tom White, 03 February 2017

Manuel Valls' elimination from France's Presidential race meant one certainty in an unpredictable election: on 7th May voters will choose a 'change' candidate. It may mean the 'new politics' promised by Emmanuel Macron, eschewing left/right party structures. It may be the 'new economy' promised by François Fillon, with radical structural reforms. Or it may be the 'new social model' offered by Benoît Hamon, guaranteeing a Universal Basic Income. But the most immediate change could be a more coherent and assertive foreign policy, driven by a refreshed relationship with Berlin.

A round of GC consultations in Paris this week revealed a pre-occupation with changing France's role in Europe, driven by profound structural shifts in the EU27. Some see an opportunity to rebuild the alliance with Germany around defence and security cooperation. For Hollande, the primary challenges for Europe have been in the internal cohesion of Europe, notably dealing with the Greek sovereign debt crisis and the introduction of fiscal rules for the Eurozone. Foreign policy, by contrast, has largely been conducted outside the EU structures, with targeted unilateral interventions in Africa and the EU institutions' role in Ukraine and the Middle East largely confined to implementing economic sanctions. However, the next administration will need to respond to a series of external shifts that risk exposing the EU27's lack of military credibility, with key allies distracted or even opposed to France's strategic interests. Most obviously, Russia's interventions in Ukraine and Syria have finally killed the hopes of the mid-2000s under Chirac and Schroeder of a partnership built on energy inter-dependence and non-intervention. Meanwhile the new US Administration expresses unprecedented scepticism about NATO, which Mike Pence is likely to repeat at the Munich Security Conference on 17th February. Closer to home, the UK Government is pursuing a clean break from EU institutions, and the Turkish Government is increasingly assertive and unpredictable.

Military expenditure in the EU and selected countries



Source: SIPRI (2015)

Seen from Paris, this requires a relaunch of Franco-German cooperation on defence and security policy. Macron would most likely pursue this through new institutional structures in Brussels, perhaps with an eye on the need to manage some of the nervousness that would inevitably arise if Germany ever met its NATO commitment to spend 2% of GDP on defence and became the world's fourth military power. Fillon, by contrast, would seek to restore the Elysée-Kanzleramt partnership that characterised the Sarkozy years, while Hamon may be interested in harnessing increased spending as a source of further 'flexibility' in the

Fiscal Compact and the potential for increased spending to provide fiscal stimulus. These are of course not mutually exclusive. In any event, we expect the EU's anticipated 'relaunch' for the 27 at the Rome Summit at the end of March to include sufficient scope on security cooperation to accommodate either of these changes in French strategy.

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