Despite these and other continuing concerns on both sides of the Atlantic about the relationship between NATO and the WEU, ESDI was not a major topic of political discussion or controversy for more than two years after the 1996 grand bargain. But it suddenly reemerged from the bureaucratic doldrums on December 4, 1998, only a few weeks before the Euro was launched among 11 (now 12) of the 15 EU countries (known as “Euroland”), notably not including the United Kingdom. Presumably at least in part to demonstrate its engagement in a major project leading toward completion of European integration, the British government of Prime Minister Tony Blair reversed its long-standing position of remaining relatively aloof from ESDI and, indeed, of being a leading proponent of European skepticism about its prospects.¹ Blair and Chirac met at St. Mâlo and issued a brief statement that gave new life both to ESDI and to debate about it within the alliance.²

¹St. Mâlo gave Britain, which had not joined the European Monetary Union or subscribed to the Euro, a chance to appear committed to the European “vocation”; further, it enabled London to throw in its lot with Paris, where the latter had much at stake in its twin competitions for influence with Germany (the greater) and the United States (the lesser). Provided that Britain could convince the United States that it was not straying from its basic allegiance to NATO—or straining at the “special relationship” with Washington—this was a sustainable position. Indeed, on the morrow of St. Mâlo, one of its British negotiators said to the TPN meeting in London, with its clutch of U.S. members of Congress, that Britain would never countenance any interpretation of St. Mâlo that could weaken NATO’s primacy.

The St. Mâlo declaration was widely examined for what it included and what it left out. Indeed, its construction permitted a wide range of interpretations, and those by British and French officials immediately began emphasizing quite different parts of the declaration. Much of it drew on prior EU agreements, although they had rarely been gathered together and highlighted politically in this way. Also, St. Mâlo’s emphasis that decisions about the use of an ESDI would be made by the European Union and not by the WEU elicited comment, especially in Washington; but this position was consistent with EU decisions going back to the Maastricht summit of 1992.\(^3\)

At first reading, the St. Mâlo declaration was simply a call for speeding up the process of implementing what had been agreed upon at the June 1997 Amsterdam EU summit on CFSP, including the “progressive framing of a common defence policy.” The declaration also made the standard and obligatory bow to the Atlantic Alliance as “the foundation of the collective defence of its members.” But it also appeared to break new ground. While it honored the collective defense provisions of the Washington Treaty’s Article 5, it was silent on the Berlin-Brussels agreements about NATO’s (implicit) primacy and the notion that there should not be “two NATOs”—one for Article 5 and one for non-Article 5 tasks. Absent also was the explicit idea of an ESDI within the NATO framework that could make use of “separable but not separate” military capabilities. In addition, although the

\(^3\)See Treaty on European Union, op. cit., Article J.4:

2. The union requests the Western European Union (WEU), which is an integral part of the development of the Union, to elaborate and implement decisions and actions of the Union which have defence implications. The Council shall, in agreement with the institutions of the WEU, adopt the necessary practical arrangements.

3. Issues having defence implications dealt with under this Article shall not be subject to the procedures set out in Article J.3.

4. The policy of the Union in accordance with this Article shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States and shall respect the obligations of certain Member States under the North Atlantic Treaty and be compatible with the common security and defence policy established within that framework.

Note the ambiguity in paragraph 3, relating to the decisionmaking process (including qualified majorities) of the preceding section of the treaty.
The St. Mâlo declaration did mention in this context, as part of a list of sources for military capabilities, those “pre-designated within NATO’s European pillar,” it also asserted that “the Union must have the capacity for autonomous action” [emphasis added]. This phrase, appearing in the declaration for the first time—and not clearly defined—has continued to bedevil discussion across the Atlantic.4

At the same time, the St. Mâlo declaration argued that the European Union would need its own “appropriate structures and a capacity” to analyze situations, have sources of intelligence, and undertake strategic planning—clear references to areas where either NATO as a whole or the United States in particular had preeminence and where, therefore, the Europeans would be dependent on U.S. willingness to “release [U.S.] assets.” But the declaration also noted both that military action would take place “when the Alliance as a whole is not engaged,” and that these European capacities should be developed “without unnecessary duplication.” Remarkably, debate still continues across the Atlantic about ESDP regarding the issues covered by these two phrases, as though they had not been included in the St. Mâlo declaration or repeated several times since.5

Perhaps most important, however, was that the St. Mâlo declaration was agreed upon between Britain and France, with little or no ad-

---

4In retrospect, French Defense Minister Alain Richard argued that St. Mâlo stressed 4 important points: all nations of the Union were invited to take part, no loss of sovereignty was envisaged, new and real capabilities had to be built, the European security and defense policy was consistent with the role and responsibility of NATO (see speech by Alain Richard, French Minister of Defense, at the Annual Defense Dinner of the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry, London, May 17, 2001, www.info-france-usa.org/news/statments/eurodefe.htm).

5The term “when the Alliance as a whole” has subsequently been changed to “where the Alliance as a whole.” This could be seen as a distinction without a difference, but it has recently become a focus for debate regarding what the term “where” means: a geographic, temporal, or functional term. Also important in terms of later developments was the St. Mâlo call for a “strong and competitive European defence industry and technology.” On the issue of NATO’s primacy, as recently as Prime Minister Blair’s visit to the White House in February 2001, he repeated the formula—with the one “key” word change (“where NATO as a whole is not engaged”)—in his effort to offset continuing U.S. criticism. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, Remarks by the President and Prime Minister Blair in Joint Press Conference, Green Top Camp Dining Hall, Camp David, Maryland, February 23, 2001.
vance notice to anyone—and that it was agreed at the summit level, thus giving it more actual political weight than anything else done since Berlin-Brussels on developing ESDI. Indeed, St. Mâlo has acquired more symbolic than substantive significance, but it is nonetheless important. Under the circumstances, it was not surprising that the European Council, meeting at its Vienna summit a week later, did little more than welcome the St. Mâlo declaration, as part of a brief discussion of “the new impetus given to the debate on a common European policy on security and defence.” At the same time, the December 1998 Vienna summit’s *Presidency Conclusions* (in effect, the “communiqué” of a European Council summit) noted that

The reinforcement of European solidarity must take into account the various positions of European States, including the obligations of some Member States within NATO.\(^6\)

\(^6\)British officials argue that they did apprise the United States in advance of what was going to be agreed upon at St. Mâlo; but certainly it was not well known, and particularly not among those Americans—especially in Congress—who proved to be most concerned about what was agreed upon.

\(^7\)See Vienna European Council, *Presidency Conclusions*, December 11–12, 1998, paragraphs 73–76. The Vienna summit also agreed to appoint as soon as possible a new double-hatted official, secretary general of the European Council and High Representative for CFSP, and that this individual should be “a personality with a strong political profile.”