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European Military Integration: Implications for the UK

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Summary

- **Recent British commentary concerning the imminent creation of a "European Army" is misplaced and fails to recognise the diversity of visions of military integration held by European political leaders, not least between key advocates Germany and France.**
- **The focus of the new Permanent Structured Co-operation (PESCO) mechanism on rebuilding joint capabilities has the potential to strengthen European collective defence at lower levels of expenditure, avoiding the moribund "2% of GDP" spending debate and offsetting potential for an arms race with Russia.**
- **Despite the UK's exit from EU institutions, such developments will inevitably pose significant choices for British defence and security policy in the near term, including participation in European Battlegroups, maritime operations and access to the new European Defence Fund. It should not be assumed that the EU, member states or European industrial interests will welcome UK involvement in these.**
- **Over a longer timescale, European military integration will, if successful, pose even larger questions about the UK's role as a global military actor. Reduced salience of its role as Atlantic bridge between US and EU may be one driver of "Global Britain's" resurgent interest in supporting the US in the Asia-Pacific region.**

Introduction

On 13 November, 23 EU member states signed a joint notification on Permanent Structured Co-operation (PESCO)[1]. This is the latest step in facilitating greater defence and security co-ordination between EU states which opt to do so. The European Council is expected to adopt PESCO formally on 11 December, crowning several months of heightened debate on European military integration. A flagship speech[2] by French President Emmanuel Macron at the Sorbonne on 26 September called for a combined force as one of several components of a future vision for Europe. This came hard on the heels of speeches by Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker[3], EU Foreign Policy Representative Federica Mogherini[4] and others all calling for further military integration of the bloc. Well received in much of Europe, this predictably aroused the ire of segments of the British press, and earned a swift rebuke[5] from the incoming British chairman of NATO's Military Committee, Air Chief Marshall Sir Stuart Peach. Common criticisms are that such a development would be, first, unworkable and, second, by undermining NATO's primacy, would be undesirable.

When examined critically, the prospect of a more integrated European military, while envisioned differently by key actors, is politically viable to the extent that these different visions are not mutually irreconcilable. Indeed, such a development has the potential to strengthen collective

defence on the continent and might thereby enhance the credibility of the North Atlantic Alliance, buffeted by President Trump's ambivalent commitment to European defence, Turkey's courtship of Russia and Iran, and the UK's acrimonious divorce negotiations with its key European partners.

This may offer opportunities for the UK to rethink its defence policy after Brexit, recognising that, while likely to remain one of the top two European security actors in the medium term, UK strategy will continue to be pulled in various directions. Given the momentum for European defence integration, the idea must be engaged with seriously as the British government considers how to balance post-Brexit security co-operation with Europe with its ambitions to assert itself as a global security actor.

Competing visions of European defence

Despite the flurry of European strategy and vision statements since summer 2016, it is important to acknowledge that the main players – the European Commission, France, Germany and Italy – are not articulating a common vision for post-Brexit European defence. However, this is not to say that such visions are necessarily contradictory or irreconcilable, either within the EU or with the dominant role of NATO.

The depiction of a common European Army commanded by Brussels that characterises portrayals of European military integration in many British newspapers[6] is to some extent articulated by Commission President Juncker. A declared federalist, Juncker wants a European Defence Union by 2025 and often references need for a European Army in support of European common foreign policy[7]. This view has some support from the German government, the German Commissioner for EU Budget and Human Resources, and a few smaller states of the EU core like Belgium and Juncker's Luxembourg.

Federica Mogherini, Commission Vice-President and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, has responsibility for developing the EU's 2016 Global Strategy[8] and the Implementation Plan on Security and Defence[9]. This takes a long-term approach to incentivising closer integration of European military planning, procurement and deployment, as well as integrating diplomatic and defence functions. Her language is quite different to Juncker's and perhaps reflects the pragmatic approach of the Italian government, whose primary concern is to bolster low-intensity "stabilisation" missions in the Middle East and North Africa.

The German approach is low key but potentially far-reaching. Rather than vision statements, it focuses on practical short-term integration of German units with those of neighbouring countries, including France, the Netherlands, Czech Republic, and Romania. This takes the NATO Framework Nations Concept that Berlin initiated in 2013-14 rather further towards the EU Army vision, reinforcing German armoured land forces. The core of NATO capabilities from the 1960s to 1990s, these declined hugely after the Cold War and as Germany restructured for involvement in NATO-led operations in Afghanistan. The concern in Berlin is again very much Russia's more assertive military posture on the EU and NATO's Baltic frontier.

The French approach under President Emmanuel Macron is articulated in more visionary terms but centres on building capabilities around a common 'strategic culture' (based on French doctrine and practice) that by 2020 will be more willing and able to support rapid response expeditionary missions. The concern in Paris is the sustainability of the heavy French commitment to counter-insurgency and peace enforcement operations in Africa, especially the Sahel-Sahara. It also reflects French worries that the country is over-dependent on US support in key areas to project and sustain external "crisis

management" operations, not least that such dependence may condition a quid pro quo support for US-led interventions in the Middle East and Asia.

Traditionally, such pressures for defence integration would be blocked by the UK government, reflecting its imperative to maintain the strongest possible US presence in Europe. In the Brexit context, London has ceased to veto proposals for European defence integration, assuming that it will not be bound by them. However, there remain a periphery of strongly pro-US EU member states distrustful of Franco-German or federalist initiatives that might undermine NATO's dominant role or national sovereignty. Poland is chief among these, with others including the Baltic States, Bulgaria and Denmark, which alone has opted out entirely from Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) arrangements. Some believe Poland has only acquiesced to PESCO in order to obstruct it from within[10].

Significantly, none of the competing visions for Europe's defence identity from within the EU suggest that NATO should be replaced as the primary military alliance in Europe. While there are differences of tone in terms of reliance on the United States for continental defence and mounting and sustaining external operations, these reflect a common concern[11] that US commitment to Europe's defence is no longer axiomatic and is waning as President Trump continues the Obama-initiated 'pivot to Asia'. Even with the current American commitment, many worry that NATO would not be able to initially counter Russian military aggression[12], or defend the Baltic states[13]. Growing estrangement between the EU, not least Germany, and Turkey, which has by far the largest army in European NATO, is also of concern.

The spending debate – neither cause nor cure

The Trump Administration has been outspoken in calling[14] for European states to increase military spending to meet the NATO minimum commitment of 2% of GDP. However, military spending is hardly a weakness of the EU relative to its neighbours or the rest of the world. In 2016, the aggregate spending of the EU 27 on defence was $198 billion, making the group easily the third largest military power in the world in dollar terms, after the United States and just behind China. Even excluding the UK's contribution (the largest in the current EU), the bloc still spent nearly triple the Russian defence budget of $70 billion. Other than Saudi Arabia, which is critically dependent on European and US technology and support, no other neighbourhood country spends more than one-tenth of what the EU spends on defence.

Focusing on numbers does not capture the problem, which is capability. As two former US officials recently put it[15], "measuring what the allies spend on defence as a share of their economies tells us nothing about the capabilities they are buying." Specifically, as highlighted[16] by Mogherini in her speech on 21 September, Europe (including the UK) spends roughly 50% of what the United States does on defence, but this results in only 15% of the capability. This is replicated by asymmetries between European states, with Germany, the third largest European defence spender, getting extraordinarily limited capability even for its restrained budget.

Moreover, for European states to standardise military spending at or above 2% of GDP would raise at least two distinct geopolitical problems. The first is that Germany, given its economic weight, would become easily the largest military player. Given its dominant role in the common financial institutions and the problematic history of German militarism, this is an outcome that neither Germany nor its neighbours aspires to. At most, by 2024 Germany is likely to spend 1.5%, which would give it spending equivalence to France and the UK, if they spend at 2.0%.

The second is that Russia's aggressive posture and military spending under Putin is at least partly driven by feelings of inferiority relative to expanding NATO and EU. Expansion of either's military budget is likely to provoke a militarised response from Moscow. This could be a further growth of Russian armoured formations or perhaps a boost to its non-conventional advantages in cyber/hybrid and nuclear capabilities.

Fragmented capability

There is thus a need to refocus the debate on the outcome required (enhanced European capability) and away from the output (higher national defence spending). The capability gap generally comprises shortcomings in the deployability and sustainability of European forces: getting them from A to B and then maintaining them on an operational footing. For example, a 2016 RAND[17] study found that it would take nearly a month for the UK, France and Germany to each deploy an armoured brigade to defend the Baltic States from potential Russian aggression. In each case, maintaining such a formation in theatre would cause major strategic strain and rely heavily on US airlift capacity.

A key problem here is duplication. Each country has its own procurement process, training infrastructure, military research and development establishment and command structure. Each country also gears its defence planning to a national strategy. This can lead to medium-sized countries trying to do everything in maintaining "full spectrum" capabilities, while smaller countries are obliged to maintain minimum conventional forces instead of specialising[18] in niche strengths that complement rather than repeatedly duplicate existing capacity maintained by their allies.

One illustration of the problem was highlighted in Junker's 9 June speech[19] to the Defence and Security Conference in Prague. European armed forces employ 178 different weapon systems, compared with the US' 30. These diverse systems include 17 different types of Main Battle Tank (MBT) compared with the US' single model, and "more helicopter types than there are governments to buy them." Every modern weapons system entails an enormously expensive supporting infrastructure, including training, ammunition, maintenance and spare parts.

Fragmented production

A major problem is the fragmentation[20] of Europe's military industries. This in turn stems from national concerns over strategic autonomy, maintaining employment in the defence sector and retaining technical expertise. Defence contractors and their unionised workforces are very powerful political lobbies in all of the major EU states and many of the smaller ones, enjoying cosy relations with politicians. While a few of the biggest will see opportunities in unified procurement, most will feel threatened by loss of their monopoly status in local markets. Given the dependence on sales to Middle Eastern autocracies, there will also be concern about tighter arms export regulations should the standards of the strictest states apply to all.

The result has been that 80% of defence procurement and 90% of military R&D[21] costs currently remain uncoordinated at the national level, and significant savings could be made by shifting these competencies to the European level. The European Commission estimates that pooling[22] procurement costs alone could save 30% of annual defence costs. Going further, and rationalising training infrastructures and chains of command, and the establishment of a unified order of battle, in short the creation of an integrated European force, could be a more effective way of increasing European military capabilities without spending more money. Indeed, it could make expenditure *reduction* a reality. The argument is that economies of scale can thereby be realised in Europe's defence establishment, which incremental spending

increases divided among 27 individual countries would be unlikely to achieve.

The long-term trend is certainly towards consolidation and economies of scale. As technology has advanced, military equipment has become far more expensive. As aerospace expert Norman Augustine[23] famously observed in 1983, based on a linear projection of the exponential growth of unit costs for fighter aircraft, by 2054 the entire US defence budget would be able to purchase a single airframe. Within Europe, only France and Sweden have independently developed a combat aircraft since the 1960s and the United States is the only NATO state even trying to produce a fifth-generation fighter aircraft.

This said, Europe has a long history of collaboration in producing military equipment, not all of which has come close to achieving the desired results. For example, the Eurofighter (UK, Germany, Italy Spain), NH90 helicopter (France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands) and A400M transport aircraft have all been plagued by problems of delays, cost over-runs and arguments over performance. Answering to multiple clients has tended to leverage the advantage of contractors. It remains to be seen if common EU institutions could really reverse that advantage.

Problem #1: It cannot be done

The first objection to the concept of a European army is that it is politically unworkable unless there is a supranational European Government with its own defence ministry. Without this, it would be impossible to secure the agreement of all 27 countries on whether to commit such a force, or on the rules of engagement even if they did agree.

Current difficulties are demonstrated[24] by the inactivity of the EU Battlegroups. These are 1,500- to 3,000-strong standing formations, designed to be deployed at ten days' notice for missions lasting up to 120 days. One battlegroup from a roster of 18 is on standby at any one time, based around a single lead country, rotating every six months. Ten years since the concept was supposedly operationalised, they have yet to participate in any operations.

The crisis in Central African Republic (CAR) in late 2013 was the most recent, major missed opportunity for the deployment of a battlegroup. However, the reasons for inaction are instructive of the limitations of recent EU security policy. Two formations on stand by for the periods July–December 2013 and January–June 2014 were led by the UK and Greece respectively. The UK blocked the deployment because it would play badly with Eurosceptics and Greece could not justify the cost to a domestic audience stricken by major cuts to services[25].

To address such deficiencies, a raft of EU proposals and policies has been initiated since June 2016 with impetus from Mogherini, France and Germany.

The lessons for **EU battlegroups** are clear: to work, they should not involve governments that object to them on a point of principle, and should be wholly funded by the whole EU membership, not by the country in the "hot seat" when a deployment is required. Increasing the number of battlegroups on standby to deploy could help to address these problems. Macron sees the solution in inculcating a more proactive strategic culture among deployment-averse European states as well as developing a common budget to fund them.

There is already some central capacity for supporting EU Battlegroup deployments through the **Athena mechanism**, but this covers only 10–15% of costs. Reviewing and increasing such central allocations and thus alleviating the country on the spot of expenses incurred "where they fall" has been identified as a priority for the end of 2017. Member states asserted their commitment to bearing the costs of EU

Battlegroup deployment jointly at the EU Summit in June 2017, through an expanded Athena mechanism[26].

As to ensuring the political willingness of participants, the June Summit also saw the establishment of the **Permanent Structured Co-operation** (PESCO) mechanism that was then endorsed by 23 member-states in November. As discussed above, this permits the engagement of like-minded member states on deepening defence integration without requiring other member states to follow suit. More importantly, it does not allow non-participants to veto such efforts. Such co-operation does not[27] require the unanimous agreement of the European Council, for example. 23 of 27 enduring EU members signed up to PESCO in November, with Ireland and Portugal likely to join them soon.

The **European Defence Fund** (EDF), also announced in June[28], will have a pooled annual budget of €1.5 billion from 2021 to support coordinated military research, development and procurement. This is effectively a "carrot" designed to attract national defence industries into more regular and systematic cooperation.

The newly established European military Headquarters[29] in Brussels now hosts a **Military Planning and Conduct Capability**[30] (MPCC) designed to strengthen European crisis response. This is not a rival to the vast NATO command structures already hosted in Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy (both Joint Forces), Germany (Air), Turkey (Land) and the UK (Maritime). MPCC is intended – at least at this stage – only to command and coordinate the EU's overseas security missions.

Work is also underway to establish a European "**Co-ordinated Annual Review of Defence**[31]" (CARD), on a voluntary basis initially, to "deepen cooperation in defence, including by fostering capability development addressing shortfalls, and ensure more optimal use, including coherence, of defence spending plans."

None of this is going to engender a united European Army any time soon. While full integration of all 27 militaries might be viewed as a pipe dream, functional EU military integration that begins with six to nine countries, a "coalition of the willing[32]" in the words of the European Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Elmar Brok, is a simpler prospect under PESCO. It is not difficult to imagine the likely contenders for such a grouping: the Treaty of Rome founders (Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg) plus Spain and potentially the Czech Republic[33] and Romania. In addition to the multinational battlegroups, much practical integration is already conducted between these countries under national and EU aegis:

- Romanian, Czech and Dutch troops are already permanently[34] attached to German formations, including the Romanian 81st Mechanised and the Czech Rapid Deployment Brigades with the German Rapid Response Forces and 10th Armoured Division respectively.
- The Netherlands has integrated two of its three Army combat brigades under German command, while the German Sea Battalion (marines) has been integrated with the Dutch Marine Corps. Both navies share the *Karel Doorman* joint logistic support ship and their armies have jointly developed and procured armoured vehicles.
- The Benelux countries have established a joint air command for Belgium and the Netherlands to share air policing of the three countries. Luxembourg's one aircraft will be part of the Belgian Air Component and it is co-financing tanker aircraft with the Netherlands. Procurement and manpower of the

three militaries is coordinated according to specialisms.

- France and Germany host units of a joint Franco-German Brigade along their frontier and are setting up joint air force units to fly a common purchase of C-130J transport aircraft.
- The European Air Transport Command (EATC) now has operational control of over 200 transport and aerial refuelling aircraft from the Belgian/Luxembourg, French, German, Italian, Netherlands and Spanish air forces.

There is thus already much work underway between at least nine EU states to integrate military capabilities. While not inevitable[35], a combined European force in some form is thus hardly the unrealistic vanity project depicted by its detractors[36].

Problem #2: It should not be done

The second argument against establishing an integrated European military force is that the Europeans should not do it. The most common rationale here is that such a development would "duplicate", "challenge" or "disrupt" NATO, a position epitomised by Air Chief Marshal Peach's comments[37]. However, it is rarely made clear exactly how it would have this kind of impact. In crude terms, NATO decision-making occurs at two levels. The first is political. The 29 member-states decide on the implementation of NATO missions and then whether to allocate troops from their own forces. The second is operational. This includes permanent NATO military posts, including Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) who is by convention always a senior American officer, with other posts staffed by different countries on a rotating basis. It also includes command staffing for NATO missions like ISAF/Resolute Support in Afghanistan.

Recalling the membership of a hypothetical European "coalition of the willing", they are all NATO members and would presumably be no less willing to commit forces to defend Europe via EU mechanisms than via NATO mechanisms. There may be the concern that certain countries would independently be more likely to support non-European operations but, as part of a single military structure, would be prevented from doing so by more conservative partner states. This issue should not be exaggerated. European refusal to contribute forces to out of area operations has been historically rare. Apart from withholding NATO mandate and troops contributions to the 2003 Iraq invasion, "Old Europe", in Rumsfeld's phrasing, contributed heavily to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. France, Germany and Italy account for the fourth, fifth and sixth highest numbers of military fatalities in Afghanistan to date.

European leaders have repeatedly stated their continuing support for NATO. The recent French Strategic Review reiterates[38] France's commitment to the Alliance. EU statements concerning the new military integration mechanisms mentioned previously consistently emphasise the need for co-ordination with NATO. EU and NATO leaders agreed a Joint Declaration[39] on cooperation in July 2016 and this is physically demonstrated, inter alia, by the recent establishment of a joint EU–NATO centre[40] focused on "hybrid" threats in Finland.

If a single European force would not pose additional constraints on NATO's political decision-making, at the operational level it would greatly simplify matters. Having a single force structure across six to nine contributing members with common kit and logistics would remove a significant number of "inter-operability" problems. This is before considering the benefits deriving from the enhanced European capability that such a combined force might provide.

This debate is a proxy for the far larger question of NATO's purpose and strategic

priorities. Is it more important to the United States and NATO that European states are able to make minor commitments to out of area missions or for European states to maintain a powerful and proportionate conventional deterrent to Russia in Europe without relying on a standing US military presence? That the US government has generally been circumspect in its articulated views on European military integration is telling.

As *Table 1* demonstrates, a more or less integrated military force solely based on the Treaty of Rome Six would have a budget nearly twice that of Russia, and also represent a core around which other participating national EU battlegroups could coalesce. Such an arrangement would represent a significant increase in European capability, reducing its reliance on American assets, strengthening the conventional deterrent against Russia and permitting a draw-down of forces from the US European Command.

Table 1: National Defence Expenditures in 2016 in constant (2015) USD (billions)

Country	Military expenditure
United States	596
EU 27	198
EU 9 "Coalition of the Willing"	155
EU "Inner Six"	138
Russia	70
UK	54

Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute[41]

This would also enable the Europeans to do even more of the tasks the United States would prefer not to be involved in, including peacekeeping, monitoring and capacity building missions[42]. The EU already maintains 16 military and civilian[43] missions around the world addressing these tasks. In short, military integration could simultaneously further European, NATO and US strategic goals. In the words of German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen, "It is a question of self-reliance, which does not distance ourselves from the Americans, but makes us a more relevant partner.[44]"

Reconciling French, German, Italian and British visions

For all Macron's talk of a common strategic culture, it is pretty clear that the EU member states, including the core six, are kilometres apart in both their threat perceptions and their propensity to use or threaten to use military force – what Britain and France like to call "ambition". Does this mean that the Commission and member states are working towards quite different, even irreconcilable, objectives when they talk about defence integration or a Defence Union?

There are certainly fundamental differences between Berlin and Paris over what they would want a European military to do. Germany emphasises collective continental defence on the eastern frontier, incorporating troops from other states into the Bundeswehr to enhance the credibility of its own dilapidated capabilities to deter Russian aggression. France emphasises the need for a European "intervention force", probably with burden-sharing in West and Central Africa in mind. Italy and Spain worry little about Russia and much about North Africa.

These different visions are not mutually exclusive and, in the event, might even be settled at the formation level, with units selectively tasked to different roles and theatres. A comparison to current British strategic thinking as represented in the Joint Force 2025 and Army 2020 Refine concepts

is useful in unpicking how the different articulations might fit strategically into a coherent structure that combines rapid response, responsive and adaptive formations.

- Macron's emphasis on developing the culture and resources for expeditionary operations, presumably outside Europe, echoes the British emphasis on **very high readiness** formations like the Air Assault Brigade and Royal Marines.

- The German emphasis on developing deployable and sustainable heavy armoured and mechanised infantry, presumably for deterrence of Russia or collective defence of northeast Europe, echoes the British emphasis on **"responsive"** war-fighting forces at high readiness.

- The Italian emphasis on developing capability for stabilisation and peacekeeping missions to some extent parallels the new British interest in deployable, regionally focused **"specialised infantry"** battalions with niche capabilities within an "adaptive" force.

- It appears that the bulk of European militaries, especially land forces, are still intended to remain essentially unintegrated and within national formations, at least in peace time. This parallels the non-deployable light infantry component of the British Army **"adaptive"** force, which constitutes the low readiness half of the army prioritised for national territorial defence.

With the exception of France, no future EU member state currently or foreseeably has the resources or desire to cover all of these bases alone, but many aspire to contribute to more than national territorial defence. The Netherlands, for example, may choose to integrate its airborne special forces with France for rapid response operations while integrating its mechanised forces with Germany for continental defence. Similar opt-ins may well be available to the UK, even from outside the EU. Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, Turkey and Ukraine already opt in to EU Battlegroups and/or the European Defence Agency.

Implications for UK defence policy

Whatever the economic risks, the British decision to leave the EU has a silver lining for that majority of core European states that wishes to include defence and security within the "ever closer Union". UK opposition to defence integration has long stymied exactly the kind of initiatives that are currently beginning to make some headway under PESCO. With the EU and NATO endorsing EU military integration, the United States at worst acquiescent, and even Poland endorsing PESCO, is the UK alone in perceiving negative outcomes?

In the short term, a great deal depends on the manner of the UK's exit from the EU and the nature of the relationship afterwards. There are already questions[45] about the feasibility of the UK-led EU battlegroup slated to be put on readiness for deployment from July 2019, only weeks after the expiration of the Article 50 negotiation period. On the other hand, Michael Fallon's testimony[46] to the Defence Select Committee on 25 October emphasised an apparent determination to safeguard UK access to joint European funding made available through the EDF to British firms, as well as to strengthen bilateral defence relationships with France, Germany and Poland.

The French Strategic Review has similarly emphasised[47] the importance of the UK relationship in defence matters "despite the Brexit." However, in the event of an acrimonious split, Franco-British co-operation on a Combined Joint Expeditionary Force[48] may stall, perhaps indefinitely. Such fears may be one driver of Macron's push to

develop the rapid reaction capabilities of other member states. Currently, the UK continues to provide strategic transport and intelligence support to French forces in the Sahel and, goodwill permitting, existing bilateral agreements would probably cover this in the longer term irrespective of French efforts to get an EU input to its counter-insurgency operations there. The key regional partnership is France-USA-UK, with the UK very much the junior partner, except in Nigeria.

The entirely separate UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force[49] (JEF) may fare slightly better, including as it does countries like Finland, Sweden and Denmark which are likely to remain on the periphery of EU military integration for the foreseeable future. The thrust of the UK's medium-term engagement with European security seems to be very much in this north-eastern direction, playing anchor to the smaller Nordic and Baltic states on Russia's frontier. The Northern Group concept[50], which seems to have regained favour under Theresa May, links the UK and JEF partners to Poland and Germany at the core of European landward defence.

There is much to navigate in terms of UK-German-Dutch cooperation, not least in the shifting sands of amphibious warfare capabilities and ambitions, but this can all be done within NATO, just as Danish and Polish forces currently integrate with the Bundeswehr in the Multinational Corps Northeast. Indeed, the key northern relationships for the UK will continue to be with NATO allies the US, Norway, Denmark, Canada and Iceland, none of which is directly involved in EU defence integration. Moreover, the key domain for British military activity in northern Europe will be maritime, especially anti-submarine operations, a US-dependent sphere in which the EU is unlikely to tread on NATO's toes.

What is most striking about HMG's 22-page "Future Partnership Paper" on Foreign policy, defence and development[51], issued in September, is how little it says about what Britain might want from future security relations with the EU. It makes a strong case for the UK's commitment to European security but suggests little that stands to be lost and little beyond civilian intelligence-sharing that needs to be renegotiated. There is a willingness to be part of joint CSDP (peace support) missions, which has been welcomed by the EU, despite the UK having been a minor contributor to most of the many such missions that have been organised in the past 15 years.

The main exception so far has been naval: migration-control operations between Libya and Italy, and anti-piracy operations off Somalia, where Operation Atalanta has operated alongside missions from NATO (Operation Ocean Shield, until 2016) and another US-led multinational coalition (CTF-151). The Royal Navy has contributed to, and at times led, all three, with the Royal Navy's NATO Maritime Command HQ at Northwood playing a key role. While France and the EU covet and plan their own operational command facilities, involvement in operations to deter illegal migration into Europe and to secure maritime trade routes, are very likely to remain high priorities for UK governments beyond Brexit.

The EU, then, has tended to gain little from UK input into EU-flagged operations, at least onshore. Britain does not seem sure of what it would want from a future defence relationship with the EU. Both are keen to reassure the other that their commitment to NATO is unwavering. Other than ships and command infrastructure, the UK's main offering seems to be its military research and development budget, with a potential risk to each side should British firms be locked out of collaborative R&D grants. Yet this may also be seen as an opportunity for BAE Systems' continental rivals, who's government allies will have the upper hand in negotiations on access to the European Defence Agency's funding mechanisms.

Conclusion: Just enough Fog in Channel

Over the longer term European military integration will provoke larger questions about UK defence policy and the UK's identity as an international actor. A combined European force will reduce the UK's relative importance as a defence partner in the North Atlantic. This will be perceived axiomatically as a threat to UK interests, which is probably why British senior officers are far more outspoken in their criticism of the project than their American counterparts.

Perhaps they need not worry, given the desire of key European actors to maintain an un-British critical distance from US global policy. Much has been made of the EU Global Strategy's apparent bid for "strategic autonomy", presumably from the US. This needs to be seen in the context of the Strategy's caveated phrasing of "an appropriate level of…", not in absolute terms. The French Strategic Review, which deploys the phrase 26 times, helps to clarify what autonomy Paris desires. As much as operational support, it seeks to maintain the intelligence and analysis capacity to know when it should, and should not, deploy military force. An implicit critique in Macron's rhetoric of the Anglo-American intelligence relationship was recently made explicit[52] by the Strategic Review's lead author, Arnaud Danjean; France needs to know when to say no to the United States.

Thinking beyond the shackles of the UK's assumed role as the crucial strategic link between Europe and North America, a successful European Defence Union would offer up opportunities to UK defence planners of both hawkish and pacific persuasions. A newly "Global" Britain, if it felt able to leave the defence of Central Europe to the EU, would be freed of a major operational demand, allowing it to fully specialise in global aerial and maritime operations and perhaps follow the Americans further to the East to bolster efforts to confront Iran and contain[53] a rising China.

An alternative – and historically far less likely – political temptation might be for the UK to become the ultimate defence "free rider", slashing defence expenditures behind an EU shield and adopting an Irish or Austrian approach of shielded neutrality. For many in the peace movement, this is the kind of pacific role that the EU ought to play and which recent militarising initiatives have betrayed.[54]

Clearly, either of these two outcomes would be of more than passing interest to the United States, as well as the EU. Given the UK's military heft within NATO, neither would currently welcome the latter option. Washington would seem to have a strong, though largely silent, interest in the UK contributing to its own focus on the rebranded "Indo-Pacific" sphere.[55] Focusing on the Russian border, the Mediterranean and Africa, the EU would almost certainly be relieved if a bit more fog in the Channel cut it off from such global military entanglements. Increasingly bypassed as the crucial bridge across the Atlantic, it is still an open question as to whether the Brexiting government's new focus on engagement with Asia is driven by the need to increase its strategic relevance to the United States in the latter's preferred theatre.

An alternative path for the UK might be to pursue a strategy based on a new vision of its place in the world, playing to niche strengths like diplomacy, international development, cyber-defence and intelligence gathering and aiming to complement an emergent collective defence-oriented EU military capability, not least in the maritime domain. Eschewing the expeditionary warfare route, the UK might opt to contribute more effectively to peacekeeping and capacity-building operations in Europe's near abroad, taking advantage of a partnership with Italy, France and Spain to compensate for increasing capability gaps in

its own wide-spectrum approach. Incentives to bridge such gaps are only likely to grow if the outcome of the now delayed National Security Capability Review[56] is, as widely expected, a reduction in some of the UK's conventional capabilities.

Fundamentally, a single European military is not on the horizon for the foreseeable future. Existing measures to strengthen EU military integration are unlikely to run against the interests of either the UK or the United States. If implemented sensibly, these measures have the potential to strengthen European collective defence, possibly while also permitting an absolute reduction in military spending across the continent, deterring Russia without aggravating it. They also pose a number of important choices for the UK, both in terms of how to adapt concretely to this increasing integration, including its relationships with mechanisms like CARD and the EDF, and far broader questions concerning the UK's global role. These choices cannot be wished away, regardless of how much segments of the British media and military establishment might wish to do so.

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