

## **Why the UK must avoid defence union with the EU and why there are forces in government working for it**

*Although no longer a member of the European Union, there is an institutional desire on both sides to align us within the defence and security policies and establishment of that organisation. Such pressure should be resisted. Col. Frederick Chedham explains why such moves are not in the UK's interests.*

The Brexit scars run deep, no where deeper than in the institution in the UK's Civil Service where lingering sentiments stemming from Brexit leave some members of its ranks clinging tenaciously to the notion of closer alignment and keen on finding ways for closer integration with the EU. One such area identified as ripe for EU bargaining is the realm of defence and security. It is attractive that any alignment initiatives, can remain largely below the public interest, free from scrutiny. But using subtle diplomatic manoeuvre and the exchange of favours to gain wider agreement on other matters to achieve the integration goals of bureaucrats and politicians will likely compromise the UK's ability to safeguard its interests and assert its global military presence.

Despite the EU's supranational ambitions, a significant gap persists within the competency of military capability. The European Union's aspirations in the defence arena revolve around the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), which seeks to establish autonomous military structures. Let's not mince words, the EU's abilities in combat operations reveal challenges. Cumbersome strategic and operational level planning processes, resource limitations, and a lack of strategic enablers hinder effective military actions. European militaries lack originally designed for territorial defence lack agility in decision-making and combat culture, they struggle to adapt to global warfare scenarios. The lack of capability is demonstrated by the announcement with fanfare of the EU's annual Crisis Management Military Exercise. In reality such exercises provide tame fare with the deployable force elements small, with limited capability and stifled by an horrendous bureaucratic and decision making process. The reintroduction of the most powerful military in Europe would do much to fortify the limited capability. They need UK horsepower in the engine room. It knows that the inclusion of UK military capability would generate considerable horsepower it currently lacks.

But are such structures necessary? NATO as the predominant guardian of European defence for decades, has effectively ensured the security of European borders against various threats. Duplicating these efforts represents an egregious misallocation of resources, diverting them from a thriving organization into a vanity project that simply allows action without American support. The reason for excluding U.S. participation in crisis management or a warfighting mission is never articulated and seems difficult to comprehend.

The EU's drive to harmonize industrial and research capabilities across its member states may appear efficient on paper, but it too easily disregards the distinct operational requirements of individual nations, creating a chaotic landscape of multinational projects with fragmented component manufacturing scattered inefficiently across the continent causing engineering, political and commercial turbulence. It's ideological persistent to create a unified defence industrial base has no national interest benefit for the UK which has a defence industrial capability perfectly able to stand alone and operate in the national interest.

A bombastic announcement of an overt European Army is unlikely but rather, it proceeds as with all its federalist endeavours incrementally and with stealth through treaties, ultimately aiming to unify military capabilities and military industrial capability under its vision. Nations will wake up too late to

the fact that they no longer control the activities and missions of their own militaries which have been assigned through some form of shared competency words to a military staff in far away Brussels.

Despite the probable inevitability of this scenario, many in the UK establishment see our armed forces as a strong lever they can use to leverage EU concession on other matters. They know defence is not eye-catching with the public, therefore they can do what they will with little adverse attention. To many it is also a route back to eventual EU membership. Afterall, if the final guarantors of a nations freedoms and values were to become unified, there becomes little arguments for the other instruments of national power not to have similar alignment. Within this ambition the maintenance of credible national military capability is a secondary priority.

This thinking is both dangerous and wrong and must be resisted.

Firstly, the military capability of the UK's armed forces have already been steadily diminished by governments who bask in their achievements, rely on their availability but are unwilling to fund and resource them to the level required to the commitments they are given. There is not enough to go round. They have become exquisitely small, even for our own national needs.

Second, the UK's defence industry, with its global reputation, is operating below its potential. The sector is focused primarily on developing capabilities tailored to domestic requirements and is already over regulated and driven by political rather than operational thinking. Throwing in our lot with an industrial base operating under EU direction will result in pressure to purchase mediocre equipments acquired in numbers and cost to meet EU objectives, with programmes riven by the delays inherent in inefficient multinational projects and which once accepted will probably perform as an operational compromise.

Thirdly our world class training, education and doctrine gives us strategic advantage and is simply too good to dilute around formations and headquarters staffs which have been devised on the political distribution of flags. While the EU desperately wants our operational horsepower in the engine room of its military ambition, the UK needs it also.

Fourth, commitments to EU formations and training may hinder the UK's ability to support broader foreign policy objectives, such as its engagement with the Asia-Pacific region. The UK is forming new important trade, diplomatic and defence arrangements with countries like Japan, Australia, US Pacific Forces and the nations of South-East Asia. This strategic pivot will be fundamental to the UK's future position and influence in the world. To meet the challenges and opportunities presented the UK must possess armed forces that are lean, agile and lethal. Tying them in defence union arrangements which inhibit their use or dull their effectiveness would be a monumental error of judgement and abrogation of responsibility.

There is a powerful movement within government to bow to EU pressure and realign us with the EU through increasing and more complex defence initiatives. Using our armed forces to curry wider EU favour is irresponsible. Such a move would compromise national sovereignty, undermine strategic capabilities, and diminish the nation's global role. Resistance to these initiatives is necessary to safeguard the UK's interests and military prowess. It is cynical and shameful that our armed forces with their unblemished history of defending this ancient country are reduced to the role of a diplomatic and political bargaining tool as politicians and bureaucrats horse trade over finding compromises for their beliefs.