

Defence



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Supporting our Armed Forces; Revitalising Nato; Avoiding EU duplication

“Of course, for the UK, our relationship with the United States, in the context of NATO, will remain critical for our security. It is our most important and prized strategic relationship.”

Rt Hon Liam Fox MP,
Secretary of State for Defence, Singapore, 5 June 2010

Britain's Place in the World

Britain is one of only two European powers with global military reach, with an independent nuclear capability and with a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. We have a unique security relationship with the United States and maintain close links with the 54 countries of the Commonwealth, including India, Australia and Canada.

Since its foundation in 1949, NATO has enlarged from its original 12 members to 28 today. Its vital core roles are the defence of its members' territory and crisis management. Crucially, it binds the United States to the security of our nations.

The newest and most controversial ingredient in our defence relationships is the EU. You may be surprised to hear that the EU has a defence role. Although mentioned in the Maastricht Treaty, it was never imagined that a British government would actually allow EU involvement in defence. This reckoned without a Labour Government seeking to burnish its EU credentials.

The deepening of EU defence integration has occurred while the Conservative Party was in Opposition. We therefore had no say in either the direction or the speed of travel of EU defence integration and now have to try and make the best of a difficult situation that is yet another part of Labour's dismal legacy.

Common European Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)

In December 1998, Mr Blair tripped across the Channel to meet French President Chirac in St Malo. Between them they agreed that the EU should have an autonomous military capability. We have yet to discover what Britain got in return for this major concession to a long-standing French foreign policy ambition. Certainly there was no obvious direct benefit for us from a strategic, military or economic standpoint. On the contrary, the dangers were clear – there would be further call on scarce defence resources and NATO primacy would be eroded.

From 1999 onwards, the development of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) – has been high on the EU agenda.



Britain's planned Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carrier



Geoffrey Van Orden MEP visiting troops in Afghanistan

Conservative MEPs have been at the forefront of those opposing this EU meddling in defence – a divisive and wasteful distraction at a time when resources are stretched and we need to focus on meeting real security threats. CSDP is primarily an instrument of European political integration and ambition, dressed up as an effort to improve military capabilities.

We are the first to recognise that engagement with our continental European allies, including Norway and Turkey, is vital for our security. But that goes beyond the EU and does not need the involvement of EU structures such as the Commission, Parliament, and Court of Justice in our defence matters.

There is no military excuse for CSDP. 21 of the EU's 27 members are also NATO members. Even the 4 EU 'neutrals' have participated at some stage in NATO operations. Even France, has now rejoined the integrated military structure of the Alliance.

The EU brings no additional military capabilities to the table. I cannot say this often enough. Instead it is yet another call on the same diminishing pool of national armed forces. The EU has had to establish military headquarters and staffs, again drawing on our national armed forces, which merely duplicate what NATO already provides.

So why is the EU involved in defence? It is quite simply as a further expression of its ambition to play a state-like role on the world stage. It is purely political.

When I am told I am exaggerating, that military decision-making rests with national governments, I recall the words of the German Foreign Minister in February this year. He was speaking at the

Munich Security Conference and stated that 'the long term goal is the establishment of a European army under full parliamentary control.' You cannot get any clearer than that.

CSDP generates no additional military capabilities

The EU owns no military forces. These belong to the nations. There is only one set of military forces in each nation for the full range of military tasks. If troops are made available for an EU operation then clearly they are not available for NATO or other tasks. EU talk of a 60,000 strong rapid reaction force or indeed its less ambitious 'battle group' concept is smoke and mirrors in that these draw on precisely the same forces that a country might also make available for NATO, UN or indeed national military tasks. CSDP merely places an additional burden on our existing armed forces and does not generate any additional capacity.

Unnecessary EU Military Operations

The EU has created a plausible narrative of CSDP. It would be too easy to take this at face value. The EU boasts that 'with some 20 missions on 3 continents the EU's role as a security player is rapidly expanding'. Yet most of these 'EU operations' are on a small-scale, most are civil missions operating under the CSDP mandate, and only a handful has been purely military in nature. These are either French operations which have been sub-contracted to the EU; recent NATO operations which have effectively been wound up or with which the EU seeks to compete; or the result of the EU scouring the globe for opportunities to plant its flag – sometimes all three of these. In fact, few CSDP missions stand up to critical scrutiny. Let us look at 3 of the major examples:

CHAD In early 2007, the UN was persuaded to invite the EU to send a military force to protect refugees in Chad. French military HQ in Paris began planning for this. After numerous EU 'force generation' conferences a patchwork force was eventually assembled, mainly from France, and dispatched in January 2008. Crucially, given the size of the area to be covered, there were insufficient helicopters and Russia had to be asked to provide assistance. The mission cost over €1 billion and achieved very little. In January 2009 it was wound up and responsibility returned to the UN – many would argue that is where it should have been all along.

CONGO This operation took place in 2006 and involved 2,400 troops, mainly from France and Germany and cost €100 million. It was supposed to contribute to stability in the capital, Kinshasa, during the Congolese elections. In fact, the force

consumed most of its energies protecting itself. Meanwhile, the real conflict was raging elsewhere – on the Congolese eastern borders. International observers claimed that the EU force ‘did not do enough to prevent the violence from escalating’ and that it was essentially a cosmetic operation – ‘more to do with French-German cohesion and the EU’s desire to bolster the credibility of European Defence Policy’.

ATALANTA France was anxious to give the EU a naval dimension during its EU Presidency in 2008. As its main military base in Africa was on the Red Sea coast, the growing threat to shipping from pirates in that region presented an opportunity. EU Naval Force ATALANTA was set up in December 2008 drawing on ships from national navies, including the Royal Navy.

But NATO had already deployed one of its Standing Naval Maritime Groups to the Red Sea with warships from Germany, Greece, Italy, UK, Turkey and the US. And NATO continues to provide a major presence under *Operation Ocean Shield*.

Questioned by me in September 2009, Chairman of the EU Military Committee, General Henri Bentegeat, admitted that the fight against piracy off the coast of Somalia was a regrettable case of multiple military operations, and that EU and NATO missions were ‘sometimes competing and harming’.

So there is no real military justification for any of these operations. CHAD and CONGO should have been a UN or African Union operation and anti-piracy in the Red Sea is best left to NATO or a wider international coalition operating under UN auspices.

EU Justifications for its Involvement in Defence

The EU contributes no additional military capabilities – it merely draws on diminishing national armed forces in order to pursue its own political ambitions and foreign policy agenda. It has had to duplicate NATO command and control structures in order to do this. The arguments to justify the EU role are varied to suit the audience:

1. More Influence in the World through Joint Action?

It is argued that European nations would have more influence on the world stage if they combined their military and diplomatic resources to speak and act with a single voice. But this presupposes a common ‘European’ strategic interest or foreign policy distinct from the other democracies, with our armed forces increasingly showing allegiance to the EU. This



Geoffrey Van Orden MEP visiting British Forces in Iraq

also neglects the inconvenient fact of life in the real world, ‘national interests’.

Of course, where 27 EU nations or 28 NATO nations can deliver a common message, that is to be welcomed. But the essential difference between NATO and the EU is that the former is an organisation of sovereign governments while the latter, the EU, seeks to act as a government in its own right. And too often, commitment to an EU mission means distraction from a vital NATO operation.

“NATO members who are already falling well below expectations in their military budgets must not be allowed to divert scarce resources away from NATO towards EU capabilities”

Rt Hon Liam Fox MP,
Shadow Secretary of State for Defence,
London, 11 February 2010

2. Common EU Structures and Procurement will save money?

It is suggested that closer EU co-operation in security and defence matters leads to efficiency savings, in procurement, in communication systems, in HQs, and in role specialisation.

In fact, EU involvement produces the opposite effect. The EU – with its EU Military Committee, EU Military Staff, and EU Operations Centre – duplicates NATO.

In terms of equipment procurement, there may well be budgetary and industrial merit in collaborative equipment schemes, although this is open to challenge. But it certainly does not require the involvement of the institutions of the EU. And the important requirement for ‘inter-operability’ of military forces acting in coalition extends well beyond the EU. Britain is more likely to be fighting alongside US troops in any future conflict.

3. The EU can go where the US can't?

There may well be occasions when nations other than the US must take the lead in a crisis, but this does not automatically lead to a role for the EU. There is a plethora of more appropriate organisations, including the UN, AU, ASEAN and MERCOSUR. And there is no good reason why European members of NATO should not opt to take the lead and use NATO structures and assets when the US decides not to get involved. You will recall that this was the idea behind the European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) initiative in 1996 – a 'separable but not separate' part of NATO.

4. CSDP can use a 'Comprehensive Approach'?

The EU has money and NATO doesn't. But that money has come from the nations. The EU can, for example, buy support through programmes such as its €12 billion European Neighbourhood Policy or through trade incentives, humanitarian aid and development programmes. This is the area that it should focus on, leaving military operations to NATO. A division of labour rather than duplication would be helpful. If the EU had co-ordinated its civil missions in Afghanistan with NATO and got them right – development projects, police training etc – the situation there might have been improved.

5. CSDP enhances European nations' military capabilities?

The European Defence Agency (EDA) has the task of enhancing military capabilities but, again, it duplicates a role already being performed at NATO.

The armed forces of European countries will only become more capable when they are flexible and properly financed. NATO member countries are supposed to spend a minimum of 2% of GDP on defence. Most European countries fail this test. The UK is an exception. However, even the UK – among the most active military powers – is already spending less now on defence as a proportion of national wealth than at any time since the 1930s.

A favourite mantra of the EDA is that it is not the size of a defence budget that matters but how it is spent. I find very few people who imagine that an EU responsible for CAP and Common Fisheries Policy and with a decade of accounts that the auditors have refused to sign off, might somehow spend defence funds more effectively than national governments.

"We will release spending on unnecessary and bureaucratic EU defence initiatives and spend the money on our Armed Forces. As part of that process, we will re-evaluate our position with the European Defence Agency."

Conservative Party Manifesto 2010

6. NATO and the US support CSDP?

It is true that NATO and the US offer CSDP qualified support – provided it does not conflict with NATO or try to replicate NATO functions. But remember that our representatives at NATO carry out government policy, and governments of EU Member States decided to support CSDP. There is, therefore, a vicious circle of self-debilitating compliance. The US wants European allies to assume a greater share of the defence burden – it was told that was what CSDP was all about. The US was misinformed.

What 'EU defence' already costs

EU Member States that have contributed to CSDP operations have borne over €1.5 billion in costs on the basis that 'costs lie where they fall', as well as contributing to some €200 million of 'common costs', over and above their regular EU contributions.

In addition, a further 16 civil operations (that serve to inflate the concept of 'CSDP operations') have been funded from the EU budget at a cost of €1 billion.

The Prospect

We live in a dangerous world – we need strong military forces with global reach, working closely with capable and reliable allies. Britain has special responsibilities and sets an example.

We cannot afford to waste scarce resources on the EU's vanity project but European countries, through NATO, must show their willingness to share the defence burden more equably.

NATO is weakened by the constant distraction of a competitor in the same city, drawing on the same scarce resources.

CSDP is established but not yet entrenched. If Europeans are serious about meeting the defence challenges of the coming years then they should concentrate on revitalising NATO. The EU should focus on civil missions leaving military tasks to NATO. 🟡🟢

COMMENT AND CONTACT

Geoffrey would like to hear your views on these issues.

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