The Future of UK-EU Defence Cooperation Post-Brexit: A Neoclassical Realist Approach

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Abstract

Although initially a key driver behind the development of the EU’s Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) at Saint Malo in 1998, the UK has since come to be criticized for paralyzing this aspect of the European integration project. This paper draws upon a neoclassical realist analytical framework (Rose 1998; Taliaferro, Lobell & Ripsman 2009), which in contrast to Waltzian neo-realism allows room for domestic as well as international variables to be taken into account, to examine the UK approach towards the CSDP. This builds upon the work of Cladi and Locatelli (2012; 2013; 2015) in arguing that EU member states have been incentivised by the international system to engage with security and defence cooperation, but finds that the scope and nature of their engagement is impacted by unit-level intervening variables. This paper specifically identifies security culture (Kraus 1999) as one such important domestic factor through which UK involvement in the CSDP may be understood. It argues that this has helped shape the UK’s role with regards to the CSDP, where it has acted as both an important limiter and facilitator of its development since its inception. Furthermore, the paper finds that the core structural incentives for the UK to engage in European defence cooperation remain and therefore we may expect moves to solidify UK involvement in European defence post-Brexit, with the specific nature of this being conditioned by domestic pressures including security culture.
Introduction

Through the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), the European Union (EU) has developed a military dimension that has included utilising civilian and military resources in the deployment of overseas 34 missions and operations across Europe, Africa and Asia since 2003. However, the UK has had a complex relationship with these developments as a member state of the EU, at various times supporting and frustrating aspects of the CSDP’s development.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the UK approach to the CSDP as an EU member, before going on to consider the impact of the impending ‘Brexit’ as significant for the future of the CSDP and UK-EU defence cooperation. It does this utilising a neoclassical realist perspective, which seeks to draw attention to incentives that may be viewed as significant for the development of cooperation in this area thus far but somewhat under-explored within the scholarly literature.

The paper begins byconcisely outlining the neoclassical realist analytical framework, before going on to consider extant realist approaches to the CSDP. Following on from this, the paper proceeds by examining the systemic and domestic pressures that may be viewed as impacting the UK’s approach to security and defence cooperation through the EU, before examining how these may be interpreted as intensified as a result of Brexit. Specifically, it makes the case that Brexit not only represents the potential loss of one of the EU’s most capable member states in security and defence, but also an influential player that has played a significant role in impacting the direction of the CSDP. The paper finally reflects upon CSDP developments since the challenge of Brexit became clear, the prospects for future UK-EU defence cooperation and concludes upon these findings.

Neoclassical realism: the analytical framework

A long-observed feature of debates in the discipline of International Relations (IR) has been the relation between domestic and international politics, the extent to which these factors are interdependent and whether the benefits of entirely separating these levels of analysis outweighs the costs in terms of sacrificing potentially richer
understanding.¹ This has most recently been the case within the realist tradition of IR scholarship, most prominently represented by the seminal work of Kenneth Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics*, which argues that the relative distribution of power among state’s in an anarchic international system is the key structural pressure impacting states (or units).² Put together with a privileging of analytical parsimony within Waltz’s work, the corollary of this has been for a long time a downplaying (to the extent of essentially ignoring) the importance of the domestic-level factors within realist analysis.

Whilst this Waltzian approach has many defenders and continues to be vibrant within the discipline of IR, it also attracted much criticism due to the omission in considering domestic-level factors.³ From within the realist approach, scholars have sought to rectify this through drawing on ‘classical’ realist literature and reintegrating focus from this analytical space on domestic factors - labelled a ‘neoclassical realist’ approach.⁴

Neoclassical realism does not dispute the importance of system-level theorising or the focus on power relations that characterises the realist tradition broadly, but does insist that to take this in isolation as is done by Waltzian realism presents a distorted picture. Neoclassical realist approaches instead asserts that systemic pressures must be processed through the domestic policy apparatuses in which the business of foreign policy making is actually conducted. This is not conceived of as a simple input-output system, by which policy makers respond to the system perfectly as pressures would seemingly demand. Instead, policy-makers are understood to operate under conditions of domestic pressure imperfectly. Schweller likens this process to a “transmission belt”, rather than a “conveyor belt” and opens up the possibility for unit-level variables to play an important role in understanding the development of foreign policy output.⁵

The neoclassical realist development within the realist tradition has not been without critics however, with some arguing it detracts from Waltzian parsimony and

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² K. N. Waltz (1979), *Theory of International Politics*, Addison-Wesley, Reeding (CA).
⁴ For an in-depth discussion on developing this neoclassical realist approach, see S. E. Lobell, N. M. Ripsman, and J. W. Taliaferro (2009), *Neoclassical Realism, the State and Foreign Policy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
‘elegance’. The counter-argument to this though is that such complexity adds greater explanatory richness. Gideon Rose borrows from the precept of Ancient Greek poet Archilochus that ‘The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing’, to liken the neoclassical realist to the ‘fox’ as opposed to the structural realist ‘hedgehog’. In effect the ‘big thing’ that structural realist analysis ‘knows’ is the importance of system-level pressures on states, but neoclassical realism sacrifices the parsimony of this to an extent in order to further understand a great ‘many things’ regarding the detail of individual cases of policy analysis.

Such assumptions may be viewed as underlining a number of case studies that have been utilised to analyse various foreign policy issues. However, for the purposes of this paper, these assumptions shall be used to explore the UK’s interaction with the CSDP from a neoclassical realist perspective, the emerging incentives for further EU security and defence cooperation in light of Brexit and consider the impact of domestic pressures in terms of the future of UK-EU defence cooperation.

**Realism and EU Security and Defence: systemic incentives for cooperation**

In accordance with the above, a neoclassical realist perspective begins by considering the traditional concern of structural realist analysis – the relative distribution of material power capabilities within the international system. Therefore, it is important to reflect upon extant realist analysis of this in relation to the development of EU Security and Defence cooperation thus far, before seeking to further the debate.

In seeking bring understanding to the development of a military dimension within the European integration project much realist scholarship embraced an understanding of CSDP centred around the concept of ‘balancing’. This may be defined as “the attempt…

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to counteract the power of another by increasing its strength to a point where it is at least equal, if not superior, to the other’s”.

The specific other in this particular instance being the US, understood as the predominant power in the international system across the post-Cold War period to the present day in which the CSDP has developed.

However, the plausibility of balancing being at play in the CSDP may be questioned on a number of levels. Where there has been division between the US and EU member states with regards to major issues in security and defence, such as regarding the invasion of Iraq in 2003, this has also been amongst EU member states rather than wholly along transatlantic lines. Nor has the CSDP resulted in the substantial build-up of military capability, for despite a number of attempts at addressing European capability shortfalls (the Helsinki Headline Goal and its Catalogue of forces, the European Capability Action Plan, the establishment of the EDA in 2004 and the Headline Goal 2010), the success of these initiatives thus far has been rather modest.

Furthermore, as Howorth and Menon point out, the maintenance of US-led NATO as the premier security organisation in Europe and support for continued US involvement in European security stressed by national and supranational policy makers on a regular basis suggests issues in the interpretation of balancing. In addition, were the US the target of balancing from EU states, it may be expected to steadfastly oppose development of greater European security and defence capabilities. Instead, the US has been broadly supportive of this, including to a degree through the auspices of the EU. Whilst stressing the importance of the EU not replicating or replacing NATO functions, successive US administrations have cautiously welcomed the development of the CSDP as a means by which to develop the capacity of its European allies to share an increased burden in the transatlantic alliance.

In the wake of such compelling criticism levelled at understanding the CSDP as a form of balancing, an alternative and more plausible realist perspective of the EU security


and defence cooperation was put forward by Cladi and Locatelli, centered instead on the concept of bandwagoning. This maintains a realist focus on EU member states cooperating under an environment of incentivizing pressure from systemic conditions related to US predominance, but whereas balancing relates to alignment against stronger powers, bandwagoning may be defined as alignment with stronger powers. This is not necessarily out of considerations of threat from the stronger power, for as Schweller recognises that whereas “the aim of balancing is self-preservation and the protection of values already possessed… the goal of bandwagoning is usually self-extension: to obtain values coveted”. The bandwagoning argument in relation to the CSDP is that EU states are not acting in response to a threat (indeed, scholars point to conflict with the US, or intra-European war being practically unthinkable), but rather incentivised by considerations of transatlantic alliance management. This relates to the dangers of the alliance security dilemma, whereby junior partners are vulnerable to overreliance (‘entrapment’) on the one hand through not developing sufficiently autonomous security and defence capacity and de-alignment (‘abandonment’) if their capacity contributes little to the alliance. To ameliorate this concern to an extent, states can build mutual dependencies with the senior partner (such as demonstrating value to contribute towards shared interests) and cultivate viable alternatives (such as building autonomy). This ultimately constitutes a limited form of bandwagoning with the greater power, but also a hedging of risk through diversifying the portfolio of tools available for security and defence.

*The UK and the CSDP: Systemic and Domestic Pressures*

The UK has traditionally, much before the Brexit vote, been viewed as having a difficult relationship with the EU. In 1998 George noted that the UK has long been understood as the EU’s ‘awkward partner’, whilst in 2015 Oliver characterises the UK

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approach to the EU as being one of “aloofness, vetoes and opt-outs”.

Unlike Denmark though, which opts-out from the CSDP, the UK has not only opted-in but functioned as something of a driving force behind this policy development (at least initially). Whilst the UK maintained certain provisos relating to the CSDP, much similar to the US regarding the importance of maintaining NATO as the premier defence guarantor for Europe and tool for high intensity out-of-area combat operations, it also claimed to be a key supporter for the development of a complementary European capability toolset in security and defence.

Whilst examination of bandwagoning through the CSDP has thus far focused upon initiatives such as the Battlegroup Concept, this argument may be furthered through reference to the particular case of interaction with the policy area from the UK. In line with the neoclassical realist perspective advanced above, this shall also take into account salient features of the domestic UK context that may be viewed as significant with regards to the UK’s defence relationship with the EU. In particular, it is possible to identify domestic security culture as one such important unit-level intervening factor, defined as the “enduring and widely-shared beliefs, traditions, attitudes and symbols that inform the ways in which a state’s interests and values with respect to security, stability and peace are perceived, articulated and advanced by political actors and elites”.

Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss and debate into detail UK security culture, it has been broadly identified as holding features such as scepticism towards increasing European supranationalization, privileging of an outsized leadership role in international affairs and lacking reflexive multilateralism through the EU (as a opposed to other states, such as Germany).

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In light of the above, the timing and sequence of UK policy moves in the post-
Cold War period towards a role for EU in security and defence may be understood in
reference to the alliance security dilemma as discussed above. This serves to demonstrate
the UK as increasingly recognising the need for greater European integration on security,
not wishing to undermine US commitment to European defence, but also reference to
domestic concerns.

The initial steps in this may be illustrated through the juxtaposition of two quotes
either side of the end of the Cold War – with Prime Minister Thatcher in 1989 noting
that, “all military matters should continue to be conducted through NATO and the
Warsaw Pact”, and Prime Minister Major stating in 1991 that “NATO must adapt to the
process of European integration. I am strongly in favour of Europe doing more for its
own defence”. 26 Such sentiment was initially pursued through a NATO framework, with
the creation of a NATO rapid reaction forced comprised solely of European troops – the
Allied Command Europe Rapid Reaction Corps. 27 However, as Saracino notes, this was
largely ineffectual in terms of leaving European forces heavily reliant on US capability
provided through NATO, specifically operational planning, transport and communications. 28

Following these developments, the UK supported an enhancement of European
capability in the Anglo-Italian proposal of October 1991, calling for a Western European
Union (WEU) force capable of power-projection. This too was closely to be linked to
NATO, as WEU units to were still to be NATO-available through ‘double-hatting’. 29 The

Debates and Beyond, Lynne Rienner, Boulder (CO), p. 271.
outcome of this was evident at Maastricht later that year, but the legal authority of the EU to draw on WEU capability was not utilised over the 1990s, despite numerous opportunities to engage this, not least in the Balkans.\textsuperscript{30} Subsequently the UK acknowledged the benefits of greater military cooperation through the EU directly, specifically evident in the UK’s 1998 \textit{Strategic Defence Review}.\textsuperscript{31} As Blair stated in 1998, “the military challenges we face are increasingly about crisis prevention, peacemaking and peacekeeping - about humanitarian operations rather than the collective defence of territory.”\textsuperscript{32} This may be read as implicit backing for greater EU role in dealing with military challenges, for a year earlier the UK had agreed to an EU contribution in dealing with such challenges with the integration of the Petersberg Tasks into the Treaty of the European Union at Amsterdam, marking a clear division of tasks with NATO’s Article V.\textsuperscript{33}

However, the core moves from the UK on EU security and defence cooperation came towards the end of 1998, first in October at an EU summit at Pörtschach where the UK supported fielding the of military force under an EU flag, a position maintained by the UK in an unprecedented meeting of EU defence ministers in Vienna that November, before being fully solidified with the British-French declaration at Saint Malo the following month. This called for an EU “capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises”, however, it also importantly highlighted that NATO remained “the foundation of the collective defence of its members”.\textsuperscript{34} Writing in 2000, Howorth observed that there was more progress on integrating European security and defence “in the 18 months since Saint Malo than the entire 50 years preceding the summit”.\textsuperscript{35} This bilateral initiative was later integrated into EU policy, through the CSDP,
and effectively signalled the end for largely ineffective efforts at creating a ESDI within NATO.

In this, the UK may be viewed as opting to respond to system-level incentives through means that would least imperil the US commitment to Europe, closely linking the development of European security and defence cooperation within the NATO context. This had limits, with the Petersberg tasks as a guideline and NATO’s primacy as a boundary in terms of moves towards pursuing a greater EU capacity in security and defence. This was demonstrated through early UK backing of an EU role in security and defence was illustrated through support and contribution to early EU operations once such NATO primacy had been made clear,\(^{36}\) playing an important role in developing the Battlegroup concept,\(^{37}\) founding of the EDA\(^ {38}\), and focusing upon the CSDP in its 2005 EU Presidency (which included the launch of a number of EU missions).\(^ {39}\) However, it is notable that such developments were framed by the UK as increasing NATO capacity. This was summed up by Simon Webb, policy director at the MoD in 2004 commenting that “Everything we can do to make the EU more usable actually provides a capacity that is available also to NATO”.\(^ {40}\)

The UK government’s eye on domestic pressures was illustrated in its presentation of the 1999 Helsinki Headline Goal to the home audience, which emphasised the opportunity for the UK to take an ambitious lead on the security and defence dimension of EU integration, whilst concurrently playing down the potential for EU independence from NATO. This was particularly notable as it differed substantially from the domestic legitimisation presented by other states. As Zielonka notes, France, in complete contrast to the UK, emphasised the positive possibilities for an EU defence independent from NATO.\(^ {41}\) This is also noted as differing from other EU member states,


such as the Netherlands, Finland and Sweden, in how these developments were framed domestically, suggesting that internal dynamics play an important role in shaping of UK interactions with EU defence cooperation.\textsuperscript{42}

Furthermore, the interplay of system-level and domestic concerns may be observed in UK attempts to address its own ‘ambition-capability’ gap via the CSDP, with its development allowing for the efficient utilisation of limited resources to fulfil a leading role in international affairs, within the EU and globally.\textsuperscript{43} As Blair stated, the UK believed “that by being part of Europe we advance our own self-interest as the British nation. This is a patriotic cause.”\textsuperscript{44} Such a reference to self-interest may be conceived of not only in terms of material power capability, but the reinforcement of grand ambitions within UK security culture. Indeed, as Dover points out, the security and defence area was identified as an important area that the UK could be seen to be playing a leading role internationally.\textsuperscript{45} Bearing in mind the circumstances under which moves towards EU security and defence were initially developed, White argues that such a regional leadership role for the UK in the European integration project had been made all the more pressing as it was already clear that the UK would not be joining the other major development at the time, the European Monetary Union.\textsuperscript{46} In contrast, the CSDP was an area in which the UK could fulfil ambitions to play a lead regional role, due to comparative advantages in the field; being one of the EU’s strongest military powers alongside extensive expeditionary experience.\textsuperscript{47} As Blair stated, the intention was to put Britain “at the heart of the European integration project”.\textsuperscript{48} This is also evident in UK strategic documentation, such as the 2002 ‘Strategic Defence Review: A New Chapter’, which made clear the UK government’s goal, “to shape the evolution of new multinational doctrine”, including through the EU’s emerging multilateral crisis management framework.\textsuperscript{49}

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[${\textsuperscript{42}}]$\textit{Ibid.}$ See also, G. Edwards (2000), ‘Europe’s Security and Defence Policy and Enlargement – A triumph of hope over experience?’, EUI Working Paper 69, European University Institute, Florence.
\item[${\textsuperscript{43}}]$S. Lehne (2012), ‘The Big Three in EU Foreign Policy’, Carnegie Europe, Brussels, 05/07/12. Available Online: \url{http://carnegieeurope.eu/2012/07/05/big-three-in-eu-foreign-policy-pub-48759}
\item[${\textsuperscript{45}}]$R. Dover (2007), \textit{Europeanization of British Defence Policy}, Ashgate, Aldershot, p. 49.
\item[${\textsuperscript{46}}]$B. White (2001), \textit{Understanding European Foreign Policy}, Palgrave, Basingstoke, p. 118.
\item[${\textsuperscript{47}}]$See, S. Croft (2001), \textit{Britain and Defence 1945-2000}, Routledge, London.
\end{enumerate}
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However, it must also be acknowledged that UK engagement with EU defence cooperation has diminished over time. This disengagement was witnessed clearly by 2007, where the UK opted not to contribute forces to EUFOR Tchad/RCA, since which time UK CSDP support has been very much on a case-by-case basis. The UK supported EU involvement in Iraq (EUJUST LEX) and Afghanistan (EUPOL Afghanistan), following US-led interventions in these states, but has opposed operational deployment and institutional development elsewhere. Defence Secretary Robertson remarked in 1999, “you cannot send a wiring diagram to a conflict”, whilst Pohl cites such scepticism among UK officials, particularly regarding opposition to EUFOR Tchad/CAR, achieving “no fundamental change in the security situation”, and instead only “distracted forces” from other important areas (namely Afghanistan and Iraq). Indeed, Faleg cites the scepticism of interviewed UK policy makers regarding EU capacity to realise, “impact on the ground”, rather than only making institutional and conceptual progress.

Diminishing UK support may in this way be linked to features of UK security culture, in the lacking of reflexive multilateralism to support an ever-closer and more independent CSDP. From this perspective, if the CSDP is not perceived to be capable of ‘deliverables’, then UK support may be indeed expected to waver. As Faleg concludes, if the CSDP is not understood to be providing ‘value for money’, there is little normative motivation for the UK to engage with it. However, financial and capability efficiency is not necessarily the whole story here. Perhaps the most notable instance of this being the UK’s wielding of a veto over the creation of a permanent and standing EU military headquarters. At present, the EU ‘borrows’ its OHQ from either NATO, through the Berlin Plus arrangement, from a member state acting as a ‘framework nation’, or, since 2004, may utilise an independent EU Operations Centre (OpsCen). This latter option, part of the EUMS, is not permanent and limited in size, thus can only manage operations of around 2,000 troops. The UK opposed the usage of OpsCen for several years though,

and has long blocked the creation of a standing EU OHQ, despite it being argued to be important to enable the EU to act militarily with haste and be capable of dealing with challenging operations.\textsuperscript{56} Indeed, the UK consistently opposed the creation of this, making the case that such a headquarters in Brussels would not only threaten the intergovernmental underpinnings of EU defence cooperation but also could be “antagonistic to, and potentially undermining, NATO”.\textsuperscript{57} British Foreign Secretary Hague described plans for an EU OHQ as a “red line” for the UK in 2011, stating that it would “block any such move now and in the future”.\textsuperscript{58} Whilst the UK not wishing to undermine NATO is consistent with system-level incentives related to bandwagoning, the US has urged the UK to be at the forefront of building a stronger EU defence capability, whilst other EU member states have pushed for this development most strongly.\textsuperscript{59} If it is accepted that the establishment of a permanent OHQ enhances the EU’s niche capability whilst also not being contrary to limited alignment with the US, it is therefore important to consider domestic security culture attitudes towards European integration as playing a role in shaping UK approaches towards EU defence cooperation.

In contrast to this though, the UK has supported CSDP developments that better integrate the EU with NATO structures. This has included the establishment of a Permanent Liaison Team in 2005 at the EUMS and, since 2006, an EU Cell operational at SHAPE.\textsuperscript{60} In addition, the UK was a key supporter of the Berlin Plus agreement allowing the EU to draw upon NATO assets and capabilities.\textsuperscript{61} Difficulties surrounding NATO-EU cooperation became clear soon afterwards though, not least following the


\textsuperscript{59} This point was made most strongly by US Ambassador Nuland at a speech in London, “You will think this is strange, a little suspicious -- to have the US Ambassador to NATO, standing here, urging you – the British and international leaders of the future to build a stronger EU... I am here in London today to say that the United States needs, the UK needs, NATO needs, the democratic world needs a stronger, more capable European defence capacity. An ESDP with only soft power is not enough.” V. Nuland (2008), ‘Bringing Transatlantic Security into the 21st Century’, \textit{Speech}, London, 25/02/08.


\textsuperscript{61} K. Longhurst and A. Missikmon (2007), ‘Same challenges, diverging responses: Germany, the UK and European Security’, \textit{German Politics}, p. 84.
accession of Cyprus in 2004 and a ‘veto game’ with NATO member Turkey being commenced. Effectively, as Aghniashvili argues, this limited the ability of the EU as an instrument through which member states could burden-share with NATO.\(^62\) Indeed, this can perhaps be used to frame the UK’s moves towards deeper bilateral agreements with European partners, notably the Lancaster House agreement with France in November 2010.\(^63\)

In sum, the UK may be regarded a supporter of EU defence cooperation in so far as there has been synergy with UK security culture and bandwagoning efforts with the US, such as with Atalanta, missions in Iraq, Afghanistan and dividing tasks with NATO in the Balkans. Such CSDP operations matched UK aspiration with EU capability to achieve concrete results in terms of delivering security goals, thus aligning well with UK domestic pressures. However, it is also clear that there have been difficulties for the UK with the CSDP in cases where such synergy is lacking, particularly where there is felt to be a danger of weakening transatlantic ties or encroaching supranationalization.

The Impact of Brexit on EU Security and Defence

This section of the paper examines the pending exit of the UK from EU membership, to make the case that this may be regarded as highly relevant to the future development of the EU defence cooperation and the future UK-EU relationship in this area.\(^64\) It argues that Brexit has the potential to intensify the alliance security dilemma facing EU member states, before the responses to these challenges are explored from a neoclassical realist perspective.

Following the outcome of the referendum asking the British electorate, “Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?”, a close-run victory for the ‘Leave’ campaign, it has been clear that there are

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certain challenges in forging the future EU-UK relationship.\textsuperscript{65} Whilst this referendum was not binding in and of itself, the notification by the UK government of Article 50 of the TEU on 29\textsuperscript{th} March 2017 set in motion the process of EU membership withdrawal, to complete upon completion of an agreement or two years subsequent to the triggering.\textsuperscript{66} It must be stressed that the process of negotiation between the EU and UK remains ongoing at the time of writing and thus the future configuration of this relationship ultimately remains in flux. Nevertheless, it is certainly possible to make the case that the now likely loss of the UK as an EU member state shall have an impact on the union, not least with regards to the security and defence aspect of the European integration project.\textsuperscript{67}

The severity of the impact of Brexit was acknowledged by the EU in the forward to the Global Strategy (EUGS), released only weeks following the Brexit vote, stating that the “purpose, even existence, of our Union is being questioned”.\textsuperscript{68} However, with little sign that other member states will follow the UK in submitting notification to withdraw from EU membership, the biggest impacts from Brexit with regards to EU defence cooperation most likely encompass the material capability and expertise that the UK contributes within the EU-28, potentially unavailable (or less available) for the CSDP upon conclusion of the withdrawal process.

From the standpoint of capability, the UK holds a significant capacity that is nominally available to the EU Force Catalogue for the planning and conduct of CSDP missions and operations, as we can observe from Figure 1. (below). In terms of R&D and procurement spending, it has been noted that the UK and France are in their own league with regards to EU member states.\textsuperscript{69} Furthermore, based on these estimates, the UK is


one of only a handful of EU-NATO states (the others being Poland, Greece and Estonia) to currently meet the commitment of spending 2% or more of national GDP on defence.\textsuperscript{70}


The point is further emphasised in relation to a number of specialist capacities that the UK armed forces contribute towards the overall portfolio of the EU members’ security and defence assets. This includes strategic airlift capacity, long identified as a vital area of concern for CSDP operations\textsuperscript{71}, where the UK accounts for around 50\% of heavy transport aircraft and more than 25\% of all heavy transport helicopters among the 28 EU member states.\textsuperscript{72} In addition, as Giegerich and Mölling identity, the UK has a number of comparative advantages across air, land and sea forces among the EU-28, with the UK and France being by far the closest member states to achieving full-spectrum military capability.\textsuperscript{73}

The importance of the UK within EU security and defence is further emphasised with regards to expertise, where the UK has demonstrated an ability and willingness to deploy its armed forces on high-intensity expeditionary operations around the globe, including acting as the lead nation for multinational divisions and brigades.\textsuperscript{74} With regards to intelligence, the UK has also been praised as a European leader in counter-terrorism related information collection, analysis and sharing across European jurisdictions.\textsuperscript{75} Indeed, the UK accounts for around 40\% of the EU-28’s electronic-intelligence aircraft and about 50\% of CISR (combat, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) unmanned aerial vehicles.\textsuperscript{76} The UK also holds Europe’s largest diplomatic service, an extensive and influential network judged to have been “immeasurably valuable” to the success of the CSDP through advocacy work in both the host countries and the neighbouring states of missions.\textsuperscript{77}

However, it should also be recognised that the UK’s substantial catalogue of military resources have by and large thus far not been made available to the EU for operational use. Whilst the UK hosts the OHQ for \textit{Operation Atalanta} at Northwood and

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textit{Ibid}.
\item B. Giegerich and C. Mölling (2018), \textit{op. cit.}, p. 6.
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has, as of July 2018, participated in 23 military and civilian CSDP missions and operations, it remains significantly behind both France and Germany in terms of contribution to operations.\textsuperscript{78} Indeed, the UK ranks only 11\textsuperscript{th} among EU member states for CSDP personnel contributions (accounting for 3.6\% of total contribution to military operations, 5.8\% to civilian missions, 15.5\% of common funding)\textsuperscript{79}, clearly not commensurate with punching at the weight of its capabilities as illustrated above. Nevertheless, it would be remiss to overlook the UK as being of importance to the vitality, credibility and future ambitions of the EU as an autonomous actor in security and defence.

Bearing in mind the realist approach discussed above, it may be argued that the alliance security dilemma facing EU states has been effectively sharpened by both the uncertainties surrounding the new Trump administration and the role of the UK in European security and defence post-Brexit.\textsuperscript{80} As perceptions regarding the risk of US abandonment have been strengthened through the remarks and actions of the Trump administration, the capacity of the EU to achieve a level of autonomy to effectively deal with this challenge have been somewhat undermined by the prospect of losing access to UK capabilities, expertise and influence.

A logical response to this in the form of the development of greater European capability in defence ultimately means greater accommodation of US demands for more effective transatlantic burden-sharing efforts on the part of European states on the one hand, whilst also developing a pathway towards a more autonomous European security and defence on the other. However, as shall be made clear with regards to Brexit, we should also expect to see the scope and nature of this cooperation shaped to an extent through unit-level concerns. In order to explore this further, the following section examines nascent EU initiatives towards the building of further cooperation in this policy area and the extent to which a neoclassical realist perspective may contribute towards our understanding of these developments.


\textsuperscript{79} European Parliament (2018), \textit{op. cit.}, p. 33.

Fresh Momentum on EU Security and Defence Cooperation Since The Brexit Vote

As Major and von Voss rightly identify, “ideas on how to improve the CSDP have flourished” in the time since the Brexit referendum.\(^8^1\) Firstly, the EUGS was published in June 2016, detailing policy proposals, an approach of ‘principled pragmaticism’ and restated the EU’s commitment to a rules-based international order based on universal principals and multilateral institutions.\(^8^2\) This was followed by a number of further actions to operationalise this vision, including a joint Franco-German paper that recommitted to “a shared vision of Europe as a security union, based on solidarity and mutual assistance between member states in support of common security and defence policy” and urged the EU to “step up their defence efforts” with the creation of a European Security Compact.\(^8^3\)

These initiatives were built upon at the European Council meeting in Bratislava on 16th September 2016, which issued a roadmap for greater European defence capacity and a vote in the European Parliament on the 22nd November 2016 that called for the establishment of a European Defence Union.\(^8^4\) This was further expounded upon in the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council on the 15th November 2016, which adopted the Security and Defence Implementation Plan (SDIP), and the European Commission published a European Defence Action Plan (EDAP) on the 30th November 2016.\(^8^5\) These implementation plans were later endorsed at the European Council meeting on the 15th December 2016, which set out concrete measures to further the EU in responding to external conflicts and building the security and defence capacities of partners.\(^8^6\) This

\(^8^1\) C. Major and A. von Voss (2017), ‘European defence in view of Brexit: Europe's military power might not suffer, but its political clout is at risk’, SWP Comments, Vol. 10, April, Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit, Berlin, p. 1.
included the launch of a coordinated annual review of defence (CARD), aimed at enhancing defence cooperation among member states and the establishment of a military planning and conduct capability (MPCC) to develop EU crisis management structures, viewed by some analysts to be part of the initial steps towards an integrated EU Military Command.\textsuperscript{87} Furthermore, this European Council meeting in December 2016 also saw the activation of permanent structured cooperation (PESCO), made possible under the Lisbon Treaty but never acted upon, in order to enable willing and able member states to deepen cooperation on a more limited multilateral basis, specifically in developing capabilities to implement the operational requirements of the CSDP.\textsuperscript{88}

Whilst there have been warnings from US officials against closer EU cooperation undermining NATO, or “distracting” from tasks in Afghanistan and Iraq, the overwhelming focus has been for all states to contribute their “fair share of the load” in security and defence.\textsuperscript{89} The EU has sought to reassure the US that the CSDP may prove a means to channel precisely this, and as would be expected in relation to bandwagoning argument advanced above, these developments from the EU are couched in a language of complementarity rather than competition to NATO and the US. Most notably, the EUGS recognises that,

“When it comes to collective defence, NATO remains the primary framework for most Member States. At the same time, EU-NATO relations shall not prejudice the security and defence policy of those Members which are not in NATO. The EU will therefore deepen cooperation with the North Atlantic Alliance in complementarity, synergy, and full respect for the institutional framework, inclusiveness and decision-making autonomy of the two.”\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{90} European Union (2016), \textit{op. cit.}, p. 4
This position has been solidified by further developments in EU-NATO inter-organisational relations through a joint declaration, signed 8th July 2016. This sought to “give new impetus and new substance to the NATO-EU strategic partnership” through identifying strategic areas to develop stronger cooperation between these bodies, whilst a further of 42 commonly agreed proposals were endorsed by both NATO and the EU in December 2016.

In sum, the CSDP has been significantly advanced in the time subsequent to the Brexit vote, and the alliance security dilemma provides a conceptual framework through which to understand the relationship between these developments; as a means to address to some degree the dangers of US abandonment and overreliance on the transatlantic relationship through increasing the capacity of EU states to act more autonomously in security and defence. Moving onwards from this though, and concluding this paper, it is important to consider future of UK-EU defence cooperation post-Brexit.

**The Future UK Role in EU Defence?**

Whilst the UK moves towards the EU exit, it is possible to make the case that the ‘divorce’ negotiations make a fascinating illustration of the interaction of system-level incentives for cooperation and domestic UK concerns. Specifically, there is an argument that the core structural incentives for the UK to engage in European defence cooperation remain in place and have potentially been exacerbated by uncertainties surrounding the transatlantic defence relationship under the Trump administration and increasing tensions between Russia and the West. This raises questions whether we may expect to paradoxically see the UK seeking to solidify or even expand upon its involvement in European defence cooperation post-Brexit, with the specific nature of this being conditioned to an extent by domestic pressures including security culture.

In terms of the direct impact of the pending ‘Brexit’ on UK involvement in EU security and defence matters, as the European Chief Negotiator for the UK Exiting the

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EU Michel Barnier has made clear, that there a number of “logical consequences” based upon existing institutional arrangements. Namely, these mean that a UK outside the EU’s formal membership structures shall no longer expect to be a full member of the EDA, nor able to act as a framework (lead) nation for either EU Battlegroups or CSDP operations. The UK shall also no longer be expected to be involved in CSDP decision making, nor be involved in the planning of EU security and defence instruments, whilst also losing the right to fully participate in the Foreign Affairs Council, Political and Security Committee and meetings of EU Defence Ministers.

For its part, the British government set out its position on the issue of continued UK involvement in EU security and defence cooperation through two major position papers, both published in September 2017. These outlined hopes for a “deep and special partnership”, effective as of 2019, with both Prime Minister May and the MoD stating repeatedly that the UK expected to have an “unconditional commitment” to European security post-Brexit. With regards to possibilities for UK involvement with the CSDP as a non-EU member, this may take place as a third-party contributor on an ad-hoc or bespoke basis, through NATO arrangements, or other multilateral or bilateral means, with at the very least UK resources potentially available to the EU through the Berlin-Plus arrangement or with the UK as a third-party contributor on a case-by-case basis. Such potential is illustrated by the EU Battlegroup rotation, where there is precedent for third-party states’ contribution, such as Ukraine with the Baltic Battlegroup from 2011-2014, as well as third-party involvement in a number of CSDP missions.

However, aligning with the neoclassical realist approach developed over earlier sections of this paper, it is possible to argue that an interaction of system-level and domestic pressures should also be observed with regards to Brexit. Specifically, the case

94 Ibid.
97 L. Chappel (2009), op. cit.
can be made that there exist systemic incentives for the UK (and other EU member states) to further develop this policy area due to the alliance security dilemma, but that domestic pressures shall impact the scope and depth of this. Such features may be observed in the rhetoric UK policy makers, policy documents and continued efforts as a member inside the EU to shape the parameters of cooperation in this area. Indeed, even limiting to the referendum campaign itself these features were evident, with US President Obama visiting London to support Prime Minister Cameron's campaign for the UK to remain a member of the EU, specifically citing CSDP work in East Africa as an important contribution to international security. Conversely, the prospect of greater supranationalisation of the CSDP (particularly the mythic creation of an ‘EU Army’) and narratives on ‘undermining’ the North Atlantic Alliance, were put forward in the British media as important arguments in the favour of the UK leaving the EU.

Following the referendum, this case can also be made, with the UK having worked to curtail the scope of the Military Planning and Conduct Capability over 2017, echoing long-running UK opposition to the creation of independent EU operational planning capabilities as identified above and linked to elements of UK security culture. Concurrently though, the UK has opted-in to participating in the Coordinated Annual Review of Defence trial, and indicated preferences to continue involvement with the European Defence Agency, Battlegroups and the nascent European Defence Fund.

However, the continuance of UK involvement in the CSDP shall be expected to face difficulties based upon current institutional arrangements that limit the scope for third-parties to play a meaningful role in policy formation, via direct participation in key institutions. Indeed, as Whitman notes, the EU only offers third-party states the opportunity to sign-up for CSDP operations “after decisions on content, scope and action

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have already been determined”.102 This is also the case with PESCO, where the UK is one of only three member states not participating, and therefore will have no power of voting rights on the strategic direction or projects of the cooperation mechanism, whilst governance structures for the inclusion of third-party states remain under formulation.103

Essentially on offer from the EU’s existing institutional arrangements is a ‘take-it-or-leave-it’ involvement with the CSDP that is not likely to be particularly attractive to the UK, as it poses issues as to how it may ‘plug in’ whilst maintaining the preference for developing greater decision-making autonomy.104 This preference has been made clear in the UK government’s emphasis on pursuing a strategy of ‘Global Britain’ post-Brexit, involving greater control over foreign, security and defence policy – although the details on the nature of this and how it shall diverge from the existing approach of the UK operating from inside the EU remains vague.105 This approach does, however, converge with expected UK preferences based on a reading of its security culture as playing an important role on its interaction with the CSDP.

In light of the above, it is understandable that Prime Minister May has sought to open a form of UK-EU security and defence cooperation that seeks to go beyond existing institutional arrangements and precedents. This approach was set out in major speeches at Lancaster House and in Florence respectively, the latter of which specifically calling for “a bold new strategic agreement” to provide a “comprehensive framework for future security, law enforcement and criminal justice cooperation”, reiterating that UK was “unconditionally committed” to European security.106 However, as per the neoclassical realist perspective advanced above, the success or failure of these efforts should not only be understood in the context of the structural incentives related to the shared challenges facing the UK and other EU member states, but also on the domestic ideational context

of divergent security cultures across the UK and EU-27 that would need to find agreement to forge such a meaningful reconfigured future relationship.

**Conclusions**

‘Brexit’, the impeding voluntary withdrawal of one of the EU’s most capable states in this policy area could have perhaps not have occurred at a more inconvenient time for the EU. Alongside this development, the EU faces challenges arising from uncertainties surrounding the transatlantic relationship under the Trump administration – not least with regards to US commitment to NATO and European defence and increasingly troubling relations between Russia and the West. Taken together, such developments may be taken represent an exacerbation of the alliance security dilemma facing EU member states; the dangers of US abandonment have deepened concurrently with the capacity of the EU to deal with this being called into question by UK membership withdrawal, the the potential loss of access to British capability, expertise and influence.

However, this paper has explored Brexit as also a potential catalyst for a renewed UK-EU defence relationship and the prospects of this from a neoclassical realist perspective. It is found that the core incentives for the UK to engage in European defence cooperation remain and therefore we may expect moves to solidify UK involvement in European defence post-Brexit, with the specific nature of this being conditioned by domestic pressures. Whilst these eventual outcomes of Brexit remain in flux, this paper has also pointed towards a number of observable EU developments that have sought to deepen cooperation on security and defence in the time since the British referendum. This identified a fresh impetus to develop the CSDP and related mechanisms, most notably the activation of PESCO, and how this has been both portrayed as a tool complementary to transatlantic relations and NATO – commensurate with a response to the alliance security dilemma. Questions nevertheless remain on the capacity of the EU to translate these recent ambitious steps towards greater integration on defence into concrete contributions of greater capability, interoperability and deployability. Further research from a neoclassical realist perspective may provide an avenue to deepen our

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understanding of such issues, as well as our knowledge of the interaction of contexts and systemic pressures impacting the EU and EU-27 member states.

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