

What Future for Europe's Security and Defense Policy?

Written by Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni

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Britain's exit from the EU is likely to have important strategic consequences for Europe and for the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). Many have worried that Brexit will weaken the Union's already feeble capacity to develop a comprehensive global security strategy and instead force a return to the model of 'Civilian Power Europe'. Others have speculated that Brexit will boost defense cooperation among the remaining Member States, ushering in a stronger common security and defense identity among Europeans and a more potent CSDP.

In this symposium, six scholars reflect on what lies ahead for European security and defense taking different countries' strategic interests as their analytical starting point.

Sten Rynning argues that Brexit presents an opportunity—indeed a necessity—for Germany to step up to the plate and provide both political and military leadership of the EU.

An alternative scenario, explored by Sven Biscop, is that Brexit will accelerate an ongoing move towards more flexible cooperation among the most willing and able member states. This may create opportunities for Britain to participate in European security and defense cooperation on an ad hoc basis.

Current commentary on the future of CSDP roughly divides into an optimistic and a pessimistic camp. 'CSDP optimists' express high hopes that Brexit will clear away a major obstacle to forging a stronger European security and defense identity. Without Britain's constant misgivings, the EU-27 will find it easier to achieve consensus. Yet, as Anand Menon points out in this symposium, the notion that Britain has paralyzed CSDP may turn out to be flawed. Following Brexit, further process on CSDP may be blocked by other skeptical Member States that have so far been 'hiding' behind Britain's uncooperativeness.

Pessimists place more weight on the loss of the UK's military muscle. Without Britain's capable military forces and global strategic outlook, the Union may be reduced to playing a 'sub-strategic' role in international security. But pessimists may also be getting it wrong. As several contributors to this symposium observe, Britain's contribution to European security and defense cooperation has always been mostly theoretical. Since helping to launch the CSDP at St.Malo in 1998, Britain has made trivial contributions to most EU missions. One might therefore argue that Brexit merely formalizes Britain's longstanding rejection of the CSDP.

Perhaps the greatest spur to upgrade the CSDP may come—not from the absence of British obstructionism—but from an increasingly inhospitable strategic environment. As Sten Rynning argues, Brexit may embolden powers such as Russia to seek to undermine the unity of both the EU and NATO. At the same time, as Jolyon Howorth discusses, Washington's continued commitment to provide for Europe's defense through NATO looks increasingly doubtful. These dangers may serve as a wake-up call to Europeans, prompting them to increase their military muscle and reduce dependency on the US.

To Jolyon Howorth such a 'European awakening' would ideally usher in the merging of the CSDP into a 'Europeanized' NATO—run by Europeans, espousing European values and constituting a new and credible ally for

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the US. In this scenario, it is the EU that 'exits' CSDP, while the UK continues to play a vital role in providing for European security through a beefed up *European* NATO.

Another scenario in which Britain continues to play a central role in European foreign and security policy is offered by Christopher Hill, who argues that the London-Paris axis will still be load-bearing post-Brexit. Although the two countries differ on many issues, their individual aspirations to maintain a status as leading players in world politics and to avoid further alienating Washington implies they will continue to cooperate closely on foreign, security and defense political issues relatively unobstructed by Brexit. In fact, Britain has few other options.

The perhaps most optimistic outlook on Brexit is offered by Antonio Calcara who argues that when it comes to defense-industrial cooperation, Brexit may in fact have a positive impact, spurring greater investment on both sides of the channel. If true, this could in turn have positive knock-on effects on the CSDP as a whole.

Much is clearly at stake. How likely is it that Europeans will rise to the challenge? Here our contributors differ. What they agree on is that European countries will face ever-stronger incentives to 'get it together' in defense terms. Yet, post-Brexit they may encounter new obstacles—of both institutional and material nature—to doing so. Perhaps Anand Menon is right, then, when arguing that the 'net-effect' of Brexit will be neither to help nor harm the EU's CSDP. The CSDP's future success hinges crucially on whether the EU-27 will find the political will and financial resources to take the project forward. In this there is little new. But the stakes are steadily rising.

The first two symposium pieces by Profs. Sten Rynning and Sven Biscop will be posted this week. Contributions by Profs. Jolyon Howorth, Christopher Hill, Anand Menon and by Mr. Antonio Calcara will also shortly follow. Stay tuned!

About the author:

Dr. Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni is Senior Lecturer in International Studies at Cambridge University. Her research interests include international organization, international non-proliferation regimes, transgovernmental networks, international environmental advocacy and European security and defense policy.