



Plugging in the British: EU defence policy

by Sophia Besch

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The European Union and Britain both want to carry on co-operating on defence after Brexit. But working out how will be challenging and require a constructive approach on both sides. That is the key conclusion of a new research paper '[Plugging in the British: EU defence policy](#)' by the Centre for European Reform that explores how this mutually important defence relationship might develop after Britain exits the bloc.

The UK wants a new partnership that will enable it to work with the EU in deciding and planning joint operations, such as Operation Sophia against people-smugglers in the Mediterranean. But that would go beyond the arrangements the EU currently has with non-members. The EU's ambitions for defence autonomy and the business interests of some member-states also risk shutting out third countries like Britain that want to participate in the development of new military kit, like the next generation of fighter jets. For the EU's part, it has an interest in working with the UK as it is one of the few European states with specialist battlefield capabilities, like airlift, or surveillance and reconnaissance, and a sophisticated defence industry.

The CER paper recommends the EU avoids treating the UK as just another third country after Brexit, and instead establishes a new arrangement that balances British commitments to provide troops and hardware with UK involvement in planning and decision-making. The two sides will also need a new agreement on information sharing to allow the UK to participate in sensitive future defence-industrial co-operation. The research paper also makes a series of other suggestions, including for the UK to continue to pay into Athena, the EU's financing scheme for military operations, and an agreement on satellites including access to Galileo's Public Regulated Service.

"Theresa May and her government have, since Brexit, repeatedly stated their commitment to European defence. The EU should take the British at their word. Defence co-operation after Brexit should be a positive-sum game," said Sophia Besch, CER research fellow and author of the paper.

'Plugging in the British: EU defence policy' is the second in a series of publications from a joint project with the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Great Britain Office that explores how the EU co-operates with partners outside the bloc in areas other than trade with a view to informing Britain's Brexit options. The first paper focused on foreign policy, and the third will look at law enforcement and counter-terrorism.

Note for editors:

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