Demystifying the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy

*Executive Director of Veterans for Britain **Dr Lee Rotherham** provides an overview of the complex web that is the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy. Like much European integration over the decades, it represents integration by stealth, and will pose a risk to UK defence autonomy even after Brexit.*

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The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is like Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. It is a massively ambitious project, of great length, in a complicated language, that nobody wants to read. It also has lots of Russians loitering around.

Veterans for Britain has just relaunched its website, and we have taken this linguistic complexity into account. In order to make both the nature of the EU's ambitions and the very varied emerging risks of UK exposure more understandable, we have also added two new sections in order to better translate this immense work.

A fundamental part of the problem is the interlocking nature of EU policies, and in particular the EU's plans for integrating its Common Foreign and Security Policies; maritime and border management policies; and defence industry aspirations. It is a jigsaw, and Whitehall is right now considering which pieces to take out of the box. Like any jigsaw though, the more pieces you lock together, the clearer the picture. Or to mix metaphors; the more fingers you poke into the pie, the stickier your hands get.

It perhaps helps best to explain this if you break CSDP into **six areas**. The **first** is particularly acronym heavy, covering areas of what might be collectively called **Strategic Direction and Command**. They include the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC); the Political and Security Committee (PSC); the European Union Military Staff (EUMS); the European Union Military Committee (EUMC); the Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management (CIVCOM); the Politico-Military Group (PMG); the Crisis Management and Planning Directorate (CMPD); and the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC).

The **second** bracket are those features of CSDP that are associated with **developing integrated policy and doctrine**. These include the European Union Institute for Security Studies; the European Security and Defence College (ESDC); the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD); the European Capability Development Plan (ECDP); the collective collaborative programmes run under the rubric of PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation); the (supposedly-vetoed) Common Maritime Policy, with its coastal protection/surveillance elements; the Solidarity and Mutual Assistance clauses; and Defence programmes supported by offshoots of the EU's Erasmus funds.

These first two categories — policy and structures — underpin and tie together what follows.

Thirdly, there is what turns this into practice, and the **operational elements**. These include the EU SatCom Market; the EDA's GOVSATCOM; MARSUR; IESMA; the EDA's programmes of Exercises and training; EU Battlegroups; FRONTEX/ European Coastguard; and the MMF multinational multirole tanker fleet. There are also a range of military formations that have been established outside of the EU, but which are increasingly being identified as available to it, in effect generating **a mini standing army in all but name**. These proxy forces include Eurocorps, EATC, EUROMARFOR, EUROGENDFOR, and (amongst a number of other proposals) a nascent European Medical Command,

with support from FINABEL.

Fourthly, there are the aspects relating to **Intelligence**. These include the European Union Satellite Centre; Galileo; the EU Military Staff Intelligence Directorate; the Joint EU Intelligence School; and such elements should be considered alongside the security aspects and databases associated with JHA cooperation (for example Europol).

Fifthly, there is **Finance**. This is where we encounter the European Defence Fund (EDF); EIB lending, such as through the Programme for the Competitiveness of enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (COSME); European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF); and the Connecting Europe Facility (Transport previously, possibly more in the future).

Finally, there is the end product of the spending on **Research and Procurement**, increasingly orientated via the European Defence Agency (EDA). These include the Preparatory Action on Defence Research (PADR); the European Defence Research Programme (ERDP); EDIDP, on rationalising the EU's procurement sector; the institutional management role of the EDA; EDA REACH covering chemicals; the proposals arising from the EDA's Long Term Review; the EDA SME Action Plan; and so on.

Much of the latter elements are about establishing what the Commission styles 'Regional clusters specialising in industrial niches'. The untechnical explanation is that it is about **creating a Europe-wide defence industry**, with particular sectors uprooted and then concentrated in such a way that no one country is materially self-sufficient any more.

This is a blizzard of activity and it's no surprise if people get lost, or fail to spot the risk if these are aggregated. The Commission's ambition from its 2016 Action Plan has always been up front:

> *'The Commission is ready to engage at an unprecedented level in defence to support Member States. It will exploit*

the EU instruments, including EU funding, and the full potential of the Treaties, towards building a Defence Union.'

The risk to the UK

How at risk is the UK to all this? The threat is very varied, and it's a mistake to think that we are immune because we have kept out of the more celebrated elements. At headline level, the UK has for some time now made a point of ostentatiously steering clear of the top tables. Indeed we had been vetoing these areas for years, and only stopped when the Brexit vote happened.

Unfortunately that was also the moment when planners failed to consider risk down the line from whatever individual bilaterals the UK might subsequently sign up to: the working assumption seems to have been there wouldn't be any so there was no need to push for customary safeguards. By contrast, with operational elements, the UK did veto a HQ structure, but it was set up anyway under a different name.

How we end up associating with these evolving entities will be critical. It is important to remember as a starting point that much of the EU Defence infrastructure is deliberately being set up in a modular way, allowing integration to happen at variable speeds. The track record of this approach can be discerned by how far the EU has integrated since Maastricht. The process is inherently integrational and gravitational. Anyone who doubts that need simply look at a timeline on how CSDP has advanced over the years.

The declared UK policy is now one of establishing docking ports for occasional cooperation on specific tasks. But consider UK membership of the European Air Group (EAG). The EAG became of particular interest to EU planners once it developed into something larger than a bilateral with the

French, and the EU doctrinally now has a stated policy of trying to draw these European structures within its orbit. UK bilateral relations with EU member states outside of NATO structures will now be permanently exposed to EU ambitions. So too will any cooperation in intelligence, where the UK is the only European state within the Five Eyes community.

With several areas from the list, the UK may sign up to a partnership agreement. The more this happens, the greater is the risk that the EEAS, the EDA or the Commission will interpret it as requiring application of EU law or policy, drafted elsewhere within the EU's corridors. It might be on some contentious work standards issue; or implying a shift away from NATO as the partner of choice; unintentionally yielding on issues of maritime territoriality or airspace management; or endorsing EU strategic priorities. The problem is that we know the EU has track record on breaking its own treaties to push its own agenda at UK expense, from flouting Health and Safety regulation to get round the UK's Social Chapter opt out, through to using the Disaster Clause to get round the UK's opt out on bailing out the Eurozone. Those instances were deliberate and wilful, even malicious. There are plenty more far simpler cases of 'policy creep'.

But it's with the backdoor issues of money and industry where the risks really lie.

There are obviously the hundreds of millions that get spent in support of the EU's many military missions — peacekeeping, peacemaking, counterpiracy, and capability training. But the big money will be thrown at industrial policy and building up a corporate EU defence industry, managed of course through Brussels.

Just as the EU's diplomatic arm, the EEAS, is now bigger than the diplomatic corps of almost all EU member states, the EU's budget assigned to Defence is already set to be bigger than the Defence budgets of two thirds of EU27 countries.

EU Defence procurement funding has an unambiguous set of strings attached. It is designed to make the EU27 prefer to work with other EU27 countries. It is designed to channel R&D cooperation away from non-EU states (even if they are the tech leaders) — operating through EU-managed structures, run under EU-designed principles, to EU-drafted priorities. At its heart is the European Defence Agency, the EDA, which as we have already seen is also at the centre of cooperation on tactics, training, and strategic thinking.

In the CSDP, everything is interconnected. Procurement cooperation is not — alas — just about business opportunities or value for money. It is a component of the wider move to generate an EU Defence Union. The speed over the years may look jerkier than a learner driver, but the direction of travel is set. The ambition is expressly authorised under the EU treaties, and that permission was inserted for a purpose.

The more points of contact you have with the dozens of parts of the CSDP, the more you are caught in the wider Defence Union web. The hard task for ministers is managing that risk in the national interest. There are areas where the UK needs to form a point of contact, and with it perhaps establish some mechanism, because there will be times when cooperation is needed. But at a time when the EU is designing permanent foundations for larger constructs, it needs to be as tangential a contact as possible.

The EDA cannot be that building block. It constitutes the core of the EU's common defence industry plans, in direct competition with the intergovernmental model that operates through its non-EU counterpart OCCAR. It also forms the heart of the future CSDP. It would be going too far to call the EDA the EU's Pentagon; but of all the structures and institutions the EU has at its disposal, it is the entity that those most openly pushing Defence Union are saying will develop into one.

Our ambitions and interests lie elsewhere. If the famously-

neutral Swiss have been able to find a light-touch way to allow cooperation in areas of genuine common interest, not just in procurement but even for deployments, so too can we.

The Veterans for Britain website is at www.veteransforbritain.uk