

# How UK officials are trying to shackle us to EU military structures – despite Brexit

*Brexit must mean military independence, or it will be no real Brexit at all. But with the focus on trade issues, the public and even MPs have been blindsided by UK officials' attempts to shackle us to the EU's military structures post-Brexit, writes former CIB Operations Manager John Petley.*

Supporters of Brexit have disagreed with each other – sometimes quite vehemently – when it comes to trade issues. Which model shall we go for? WTO? Canada? Norway? Take your pick, but you'll find someone equally committed to Brexit who will tell you that you're wrong.

The focus of the Brexit debate has been trade, and no one would deny that our future trading arrangements with the EU and the rest of the world are an important consideration when it comes to life after 29 March 2019.

There are, however, other important issues related to Brexit which have received much less coverage. **Our relation to the EU's military structures is one of the most critical.** On this subject, Brexiteers ought to be united – our Brexit should be a very, very hard one indeed.

As a member of the EU, the UK has rightly been highly sceptical about EU plans for closer military integration – at least, that is, until after the 2016 referendum.

You would have thought that, following the Brexit vote, the EU would have done two things. Firstly, stepped up its plans for closer military integration now that the member most likely to drag its heels is leaving. And secondly, frozen the UK out of the discussion.

What has actually happened is rather different. The EU has indeed pushed ahead with closer military integration. But not only was the UK included in the discussion, but **UK officials have been happy to sign us up to closer military cooperation with the EU**. This has been done without most MPs even being aware of what was going on.

They are not alone. MPs from other member states have been equally shocked on discovering what their representatives have signed up to.

### **WHAT OUR GOVERNMENT HAS SIGNED US UP TO**

So, what have we signed up to? We did not sign up to PESCO, the EU's PERmanent Structured COoperation (note the word 'permanent'). But we *did* sign up to five separate EU Council agreements between 14 November 2016 and 22 June 2017, relating to Federica Mogherini's Security and Defence Implementation Plan and Jean-Claude Juncker's European Defence Action Plan.

Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty makes our signatures to the current arrangements null and void on 29 March 2019. But both the EU and its supporters in the UK are keen for us to sign a new treaty which includes a commitment to involvement in the EU's military ambitions. **This must be avoided at all costs, or else our military independence will be compromised.**

The EU will increasingly make decisions about defence, and the process of gradual integration into the EU military machine will affect a number of areas – ownership of assets, defence procurement, intelligence, asset development, budgeting and research, to name but a few.

### **BUT WHAT ABOUT BREXIT?**

So why did we sign up to anything after June 2016, considering we are going to leave?

It appears that some civil servants were not only happy to

sign on the dotted line, but actually **want to keep us tethered to the EU after Brexit.**

What about government ministers? They, including Prime Minister Theresa May, clearly have some very serious questions to answer.

When it became known that the UK had signed up to a number of structures within the EU Defence Union, the explanation given was that it was only a formality. We were leaving anyway, and so it was best not to show dissent. Once we left, anything to which we had signed up would cease to apply anyway.

This, however, is being economical with the truth. Let us be in no doubt. **Senior figures in both Whitehall and Westminster wish to see us shackled militarily to the EU after 29 March 2019.**

It is not too late to achieve the clean break which is an essential part of a genuine Brexit – indeed, it is vital that we do so. Cooperation with EU member states under the auspices of NATO is, by and large, very desirable. However, independence from the EU's Defence Union is another matter altogether. Why should we be involved with the EU's empire building?

The EU has claimed that if the UK pulls away from the EU's defence programme, we would be isolated militarily. This is utter nonsense. Not only are we members of NATO but, free from the EU, we could conduct cooperative defence research and development projects with any partners we chose.

What is more, we still have an excellent military – although parts of it are seriously underfunded – and we are of course a nuclear power. The idea that by withdrawing from the EU's defence programme we would be left weak and vulnerable is laughable.

**FIGHTING FOR OUR MILITARY SOVEREIGNTY**

Thankfully, these dangers are being highlighted by Veterans for Britain, a grassroots organisation set up to highlight the risks to the UK militarily if Brexit is compromised. Thanks to their campaigning, MPs are being made aware of the concerns expressed in this article. Many, sadly, are still unaware, particularly of the agreements signed since the Brexit vote and their implications for our future military independence.

We are heading for a turbulent period as Mrs May's Chequers proposal comes under attack from her own MPs. We are thus still a long way from any final sign-off agreement, and there is everything to play for. But with trade issues still dominating the press coverage of Brexit, it is vital that these other areas are not swept under the carpet.

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**Comment from CIB:** John Petley's informed expose is yet another illustration of why our long fight for UK sovereignty is far from over, even assuming a satisfactory Brexit in March 2019 (something which itself looks in great doubt). It is not only EU membership itself that poses a threat to our sovereignty, but our own Europhile politicians' and officials' willingness to surrender our independence by stealth to the European project in the guise of 'co-operation' and 'partnerships'. This is precisely why CIB has no plans to wind down post-Brexit. We have been fighting for UK sovereignty since 1969, and we will continue to do so as long as threats like those highlighted in this article remain.

Photo credit: European External Action Service