

The fight for an independent UK continues...

*The Brexit Day celebrations are over and now it's back to work, for the threats to UK independence in the 'future relationship' negotiations are numerous. **David Banks**, researcher with **Veterans for Britain**, summarises these threats in the sphere of security and defence.*

Although Brexit Day last Friday was a welcome landmark, we are far from being able to celebrate the end of threats to UK decision-making autonomy in matters of security and defence.

Extensive defence arrangements between the UK and EU are proposed in the Political Declaration. These are found in Part III 'Security' and its subsections 90 to 105, and comprise the second largest part of the Political Declaration after 'Economic cooperation'.

These subsections contain all of the new EU defence structures and policies which the Civil Service and ministers of the May Government waved through after the Brexit vote under the excuse that we would be leaving them.

The proposed UK attachment to these structures, if agreed, would be 'subject to all corresponding EU decisions'. Together with the actions of the structures themselves, this would mean in effect the UK being retained by the EU as a member state in defence and foreign policy after Brexit. This was acknowledged by a Cabinet Office civil servant in 2018, admitting to EU diplomats at the LSE that the May Government aimed to keep the UK in Title V Chapter 2 of the Treaty on European Union – the part governing Common Foreign and Security Policy – 'with no gap'.

After these subsections first appeared in the May Government's Political Declaration, Veterans for Britain informed and mobilised widespread public and political opposition, which in turn resulted in the most threatening sections of the Political Declaration being downgraded to a mere 'consideration' for the UK in the Johnson Government's version of the Political Declaration.

However, the defence section was not deleted altogether. **Three key factors mean it could still be pursued in full and therefore remains a threat.**

Firstly, British political discourse is being encouraged by the EU and its backers to view the defence proposals as unthreatening to UK defence autonomy and defence industry. They are attempting to turn the argument against UK attachment to EU Defence on its head and consider themselves safe in the knowledge that most MPs and commentators have not kept pace with EU military-political developments. They even claim the UK's subordination to the EU Defence policy architecture would represent mere 'cooperation' and would 'create opportunities' and 'enhance interoperability' – a fake narrative to disguise a far deeper commitment.

Secondly, No. 10 is understood to want 'partial' attachment to EU Defence without regulatory ties – an impossible proposition under EU law, which is not on offer. Attempting to negotiate on this flawed basis would leave the UK open to manipulation and the risk that ministers could yield on more political alignment than they had intended.

Thirdly, any security components of the future 'deal' would be tied to the trade deal. Indeed, both sides are still emphasising a 'trade and security' treaty. The trade side of negotiations could also therefore be used as leverage to manipulate the UK's position and win for the EU what it wants in defence and security.

Autonomy in the sphere of defence and security is the keystone of sovereignty. While we have earned the right to celebrate the UK's legal departure from the EU, the fight for our independence from European integration still very much continues.