Anthony Tucker-Jones takes a close look at the defence and security implications of the UK's historic Brexit decision

BREXIT BATT

A month does not go by without there being a militant Islamic-inspired terrorist outrage somewhere in the world. A spate of attacks on public spaces, especially transport hubs, has hammered home the dire need for ever greater international cooperation. Ironically, just as the European Union seemed to finally be getting its act together (with the creation of the European Counter Terrorism Centre), the UK dramatically decided to pull the plug on its troubled relationship with the EU on 23 June 2016. Europe was left reeling with the response from the European Commission ranging from angry petulance to perplexed indignation.

The Remain campaign argued that an exit from the EU would severely undermine British security, as it would leave us fundamentally isolated from our European security partners (ie France and Germany). In reality, Brexit will be far more harmful and costly to Europe in terms of security than it will to the UK. The Remain campaign vehemently argued that the UK needed European cooperation in order to face down the dual threats of terrorism and illegal migration – unfortunately the EU's track record on this to date has not been good thereby undermining the Remain position.

A major factor that influenced the Leave vote was undoubtedly a feeling of loss of control when it comes to border safety. The final straw was Germany's unilateral decision last summer to open the floodgates to genuine refugees and economic migrants who poured into Southern Europe and the Balkans. Germany did this not only on humanitarian grounds, but also because all its neighbours felt compelled to start erecting border fences. This proved that the Schengen Zone was simply not working and was being eroded by outside forces. It also proved that member states put national self-interest and preservation above all else – so much for European cooperation.

While Europol, Eurojust and the Schengen Information System are useful, they are not essential to the defence of the realm. Much was made of the utility of the European Arrest warrant, which had reduced extradition times from 12 months to just a month and a half. However, confidence in the EAW had been undermined by its constant use for minor offences rather than concentrating on organised crime and suspected terrorists.

Talk of a European Army did nothing to allay British taxpayers' fears that they would have to pick up the burden for such an expensive and nugatory enterprise. Likewise, the British military establishment was at pains to point out that a European Army would drive a wedge between the UK and the US. It would undermine the Special Relationship with Washington, which has so long acted as the bedrock of British defence interests. Long term it could also have eroded America's security commitment to Europe. Notably the UK declined to be

party to half-hearted measure in the shape of Eurocorps.

However you look at it, the UK's decision to withdraw from the EU represents a potentially seismic change to the way the British Isles conducts its relations with the continent. It is notable that while the Brexit referendum was fought on the key issues of the economy and immigration, security proved to be a much thornier matter. Initial scaremongering by the Remain camp aside, many former senior defence and intelligence officials were at pains to state that any withdrawal from the EU would not affect the UK's security. Clearly this is not something they would say lightly.

America is the UK's key intelligence partner not Europe. The UK was not keen on the concept of a European-style Central Intelligence Agency, despite

The UK was never involved in the French/German-led Eurocorps army

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growing calls for such an entity. Source protection is paramount and there is little confidence an ECIA would be secure. Most intelligence on terrorists is derived from communications intercepts and human sources. European intelligence sharing/coordination remains painfully poor. The attacks in Paris and Brussels highlight this, as the same terror cell was responsible for both.

The UK has valuable bilateral intelligence sharing arrangements with its NATO allies and there is no reason to see these stopping. The UK's membership of NATO remains the same as does the UK's defence obligations in that an attack against one is an attack against all. Training facilities available to British Armed Forces in Europe will be unaffected.

It is hard to envisage our European partners not sharing intelligence of an imminent attack on British soil and *vice versa*. However, in light of Brexit the UK's relationships with the newly established ECTC and parent organisation Europol will have to be renegotiated. Both parties have a common interest in sharing information on organised crime and terrorism, however. In terms of intelligence sharing, Europe was always a beneficiary of the Five Eyes (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, UK and US) intelligence sharing agreement. Although London could not make the EU privy to this intelligence, it could offer the benefit of well-informed analysis.

In terms of freedom of movement, the UK is not party to the Schengen Agreement, which predates the EU. It is, however, party to the Schengen Information System that shares police data. The refugee crisis in the Balkans showed the flaws in Schengen when the member states could not agree a common approach to the burgeoning flow of desperate people. Six states were forced to re-instate border controls as a result.

Not being a member of the Schengen Agreement inevitably brought its own pressures when dealing with neighbouring France. The French admit they cannot cope with the flow of migrants largely via Italy and are unlikely to end bilateral cooperation with the UK on this issue. The UK has invested over £20m in Calais to try and curtail illegal economic migrants attempting to cross the Channel. This was after the desperate mayor of Calais threatened to start charging the UK for policing the besieged Channel port.

Crucially, Europe will find it very hard to conduct-large scale military operations without the participation of the UK, which has expertise in expeditionary warfare. Only France has comparable capabilities, but Paris will not want to take up the slack. In the past decade and a half there have been at least 30 EU-led military missions around the globe, many of which involved British troops. Both the Balkan and Afghanistan conflicts were initially directed as EUFOR operations. Both were taken over by NATO as EUFOR used NATO command and control facilities. EUFOR can only cope with a Corps size deployment (ie two divisions maximum), so is a marginal player compared with NATO. In Afghanistan the Americans also conducted Operation Enduring Freedom as a parallel, but wholly separate US military operation.

The UK did not support the concept of a European Army as this would duplicate NATO's role and would in any case have to rely on NATO's existing command and control structure. Building separate facilities from NATO's SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe) would understandably be seen as a snub by Washington and potentially damage America's long-term commitment to the defence of the continent. In fact, a fledgling European Army already exists in the form of Eurocorps based in Strasbourg; a command and

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control structure for a two divisional-sized operation, which has been operational since the mid-1990s. It is a French/German-led entity that has only five participating members. The UK was never involved with this.

Nonetheless, it should be pointed out that Britain was party to moves to boost EU common foreign and security policy. In 1998 Prime Minister Blair signed the St Malo Declaration with France, which potentially paved the way for a joint European Army. President Clinton saw it at the time as a betrayal by America's closest ally. Europe keen to capitalise on the post-Cold War peace dividend was not receptive to increasing defence spending and only France and Germany picked up the gauntlet. Germany's participation, however, was hampered by restrictions on its armed forces operating outside the country's borders.

The UK's post-Cold War draw down from Germany is unlikely to be affected by Brexit. A complete withdrawal is scheduled for 2020 and there is no reason for Berlin to push this forward. Germany already fears the sizeable economic dislocation the withdrawal of British forces and their families will have on local German communities.

The British military presence on Gibraltar is tiny and there is concern Brexit could increase tensions with Spain over ownership of The Rock. However, membership of the EU has not prevented Spain from closing the border on occasions, causing economic problems for the Gibraltarians. Tensions would remain high whether the UK was in the EU or not.

The UK's relationship with Cyprus is unlikely to change. The sovereign base areas are just that, Sovereign territory. The GCHQ and NSA-run intelligence gathering from the island will be unaffected. The site of this facility is on territory that juts into Turkish North Cyprus so is potentially more of an issue for the Turkish Cypriots rather than the Greek Cypriots.

The reality is that Britain's security relations with its allies will remain largely unaffected by Brexit. It is not in the interests of Berlin or Paris to turn their backs on current security agreements. They have been struggling as it is with Islamic terrorism and immigration, the last thing they want to do is cold shoulder British expertise in this area. Few would deny the Security Service (MI5), Special Intelligence Service (MI6) and the Government Communications Service (GCHQ) are world class organisations with proven international reputations.

The decline of British military power will do more to harm the UK's security than Brexit ever could. The British Government is responsible for this state of affairs not the EU. The Army, Navy and Royal Air Force are all greatly diminished to the point where power projection is now seriously hamstrung. Also, this weakening of capabilities does little to enhance the UK's standing within NATO.

Britain's enthusiasm for further foreign wars has been undermined after the outcome of the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts. The British public will be hard pressed to accept any rationale for war after the Chilcott report. Following Brexit, future British Governments will have to consider increasing defence spending and whether they want to reinforce the Anglo-American relationship to the detriment of Europe. Brexit will inevitably make Europe more dependent on NATO and, therefore, America for its security. Europe has every reason to be alarmed by the UK's departure – Brexit has battered its security.

The effects of the referendum have been far reaching, but British security remains in good shape

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