A snapshot of international perspectives on the implications of the UK’s decision to leave the EU

Defence and security after Brexit

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On 23 June 2016, the United Kingdom (UK) held an historic in–out referendum on its membership of the European Union (EU). With a turnout of 72.2 per cent, the UK electorate voted to leave the EU, with 51.9 per cent of voters electing to leave and 48.1 per cent voting to remain.

The aftermath of the UK’s referendum vote has been characterised by pervasive uncertainty across the political, diplomatic and economic spheres. In the immediate term there has been considerable economic and political upheaval, both in the UK and elsewhere. The long-term impacts of a UK exit remain unclear, the widespread sense of uncertainty being compounded by a lack of clarity over what Brexit means and the manner in which the UK will eventually extract itself from the EU.

Since the referendum, the impact of Brexit on defence and security for the UK, the remaining EU member states and other interested states, has been the subject of much discussion, both in the media and policy fora. This RAND Perspective explores the primary issues as perceived in a number of selected countries both within and outside of the European Union. It comprises three ‘essays’, on France, Germany and the United States (US) (produced by RAND researchers from those countries) along with a brief overview of perspectives from other countries both inside and outside the EU. The essays were informed by literature review and author interviews with a range of officials and analysts (whose contributions have been fully anonymised). They are not intended as a detailed analysis, but rather as a snapshot of international perspectives as expressed in the immediate aftermath of the June 2016 vote.

This RAND Perspective was produced in conjunction with a more detailed publically releasable study, Defence and Security after Brexit: Understanding the Possible Implications of the UK’s Decision to Leave the EU (2017).¹ This wider study explores:

• What might be the defence and security implications of the UK leaving the EU for the UK and Europe, or globally?
• What steps could policymakers in the UK, Europe, and globally, take in the short term to address, mitigate or extract the most benefit from the implications of Brexit for defence and security?

• What research questions merit closest attention by defence and security policymakers and the research community in the context of deep uncertainty about Brexit?

The purpose of the wider study is to identify those specific policy areas, strategic concerns or military capabilities that might be most affected by Brexit, as well as to explore and define the spectrum of possible outcomes in each area. Rather than trying to provide predictions about the future after Brexit, the study seeks to identify those issues most sensitive to potential change and the credible options in each – as well as the drivers, challenges and interdependencies that will determine how any change unfolds. The goal is thus to help policymakers both inside and outside the UK to understand the key questions provoked by Brexit, and to inform how defence and security actors begin to plan for, mitigate and address these uncertainties as the UK begins negotiations to leave the EU.

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**French perspectives on the potential defence and security implications of Brexit (Jeremy Ghez)**

**The France–UK bilateral relationship**

The two 2010 Lancaster House Treaties between the UK and France have turned the Franco-British defence and security partnership into one of the closest and most crucial bilateral relationships for Paris.²

The first treaty is a defence and security agreement which promotes closer cooperation between the two countries’ armed forces through a series of joint efforts, including exercises and training, work on military doctrine, military personnel exchange programmes, equipment sharing and pooling, common procurement programmes, the facilitation of one’s access to the other’s defence market, and force and capability pooling in military operations. In addition, the treaty aims at enhancing industrial and armament cooperation in an effort to develop both countries’ industrial and technological bases, as well as to lower costs and increase efficiencies and the competitiveness of the industries of both countries. The treaty also includes provisions on information exchange during military operations as well as the performance of defence equipment.³

The second treaty aims at enhancing cooperation between the UK and France on nuclear weapons safety and security, on stockpile certification and on nuclear or radiological counterterrorism efforts. The two parties also agreed to build joint radiographic and hydrodynamics facilities that they will operate jointly.⁴ In a joint declaration that followed the conclusion of the treaties, the two countries also stated their intention to extend cooperation to cybersecurity and wider (i.e. non-nuclear related) counterterrorism,
important areas of common interest which are mentioned in the
treaties only in passing.\(^5\)

The treaties have translated into concrete results, even with
a change of presidents in France, with François Hollande replacing
Nicolas Sarkozy in 2012. The most important is perhaps the
development of a Combined Joint Expeditionary Force with land,
maritime and air components. The Force is intended for bilateral
operations, as well as North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO),
EU and United Nations (UN) missions. The Force is designed
to ‘stimulate greater interoperability and coherence in military
doctrine, training and equipment requirements’.\(^6\) Since the treaties
were signed, additional developments have shown the significance
this force holds for both countries. In 2012, the two countries
announced the creation of a deployable Combined Joint Force
Headquarters. In addition, the efficiency and relevance of each of
the components of the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force have
also been tested in multiple, large-scale exercises: the naval com-
ponent in October 2012, the air force component in October 2013
and the land component in May 2014. The latest exercise took place
in April 2016 and involved all components and 5,500 military
personnel. It demonstrated officially the high degree of interoper-
ability between the two armies.\(^7\) Beyond the development of this
Combined Joint Expeditionary Force, the joint military interven-
tion in Libya as well as British logistical support in Mali and in the
Central African Republic have also represented successful tests for
this bilateral cooperation.\(^8\)

A series of additional announcements since the conclusion of
the treaties have further deepened the relationship between the
two countries. In 2012, the two countries announced an increase
in the number of officer exchanges as well as a joint combat drone
development programme.\(^9\) In 2014, the two countries agreed ‘to
initiate a feasibility study for a Future Combat Air System’,\(^10\) that
will involve Dassault and BAE Systems.\(^11\) This has received £120m
in joint funding for the period 2014–16, with the potential for
follow-on development and eventual procurement of an unmanned
system.\(^12\) Similarly, in 2015, both countries agreed to integrate
their missile industry around multinational manufacturer MBDA,
including joint Anglo-French development for a Future Cruise/
Anti-Ship Weapon.

\[\textit{Since the treaties were signed, additional developments have shown the significance this force holds for both countries.}\]
Not all treaty commitments have translated into practical success, of course. The UK’s decision to ‘install catapults and arresting gear to its future operational aircraft carrier’ was another stated achievement of the Lancaster House Treaties, given that it would have increased the ability of the French Navy and the Royal Navy to operate together. However, this decision has been reversed, given a drastic increase in estimated costs of such conversion.

This overview of the current state of the defence and security relationship between France and the UK shows that in spite of having been historically attached to a common defence and security for the EU, France has not pushed this option in recent years, privileging strong ties with key partners, as shown by the Lancaster House Treaties and the developments that followed. This cooperation is therefore less institutional and more ad hoc, and is far more bilateral than it is European.

In theory, as a result, this bilateral relationship should be unaffected by the 23 June vote on Brexit. In practice, however, complications may occur.

**French reactions to Brexit**

As one official put it, Brexit has created a dilemma for French authorities. On the one hand, France adopted a very firm political stance on the need for the UK to invoke Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union as quickly as possible so as not to create any precedent in which a non-member state would get a better deal than a member state. On the other hand, the French calculus on the question involves more pragmatic considerations: Paris does not wish to see the Lancaster House Treaties and the broader bilateral relationship between the UK and France unravel. France also recognises that the current UK government is not facing an easy task considering the complexity of the British political landscape, while at the same time being conscious of its own difficulties with Euroscepticism, including the recent rise in popularity of the far-right Front National led by Marine Le Pen.

This dilemma sheds light on what drove the country’s reaction to Brexit in the aftermath of the 23 June vote, as France seeks to set the right balance between the two contradictory objectives of firmness and pragmatism. In fact, the reactions of French Ministry of Defence (MOD) officials revolved around the same two talking points, namely that France’s defence and security partnership with the UK was strategic and crucial, and that Paris was particularly concerned about a possible British strategic retreat from the European and international stage.

The first point, emphasising the Franco-British bilateral defence and security relationship’s crucial importance to France, was made clearly by French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian in a July 2016 press conference, in which he stated that ‘this partnership exists and will continue to exist’ given the will on both sides to pursue and even further cooperation. This statement stands in striking contrast to France’s firm political stance on the consequences of Brexit and Article 50.

More generally, officials were keen to emphasise that the UK and France remain two nuclear powers that sit together as perma-
member nations on the UN Security Council. In addition, the two countries are arguably the only European nations that have the capacity and the willingness to maintain a current and credible defence policy in Europe, as well as to project force further afield.\textsuperscript{19} They also pointed to a wide range of common initiatives in the past, such as the 2011 intervention in Libya, and in the near future, such as those shaping NATO’s agenda on the questions of Russia and cybersecurity. This shows clear alignment of interests between both countries on a wide range of security and defence issues.

French officials have emphasised that the Lancaster House Treaties provide a pragmatic framework to coordinate efforts and that the interventions in Libya, Mali and the Central African Republic showed the different degrees of cooperation that could occur in practice. This partnership is working independently of the European institutions given how interdependent France and the UK have become. In the words of the Lancaster House Treaties, which French Minister of Defence Jean-Yves Le Drian has stressed for the benefit of a British audience,\textsuperscript{20} the UK and France ‘do not see situations arising in which the vital interests of either Party could be threatened without the vital interests of the other also being threatened.’\textsuperscript{21} As a result, from the standpoint of the French, the Lancaster House Treaties, as well as this wider bilateral relationship, are largely ‘Brexit-proof’.\textsuperscript{22}

Nevertheless, officials fear that the Brexit vote signalled the UK’s intention to withdraw from European and international affairs and potentially shift towards a more isolationist stance. In particular, interviewees expressed concerns over the future levels of defence spending on the British side and the degree to which those levels would be compatible with London’s commitments to the Lancaster House Treaties.\textsuperscript{23}

Some French officials also wonder about the possibility of harder times ahead on questions related to internal security. The UK has always demonstrated significant interest in the Schengen information exchange mechanisms, though the country is not part of the Schengen area (which is not bilateral but European). The current focus on economic questions, and the issue of access to the single market tend to overshadow these security challenges that Brexit is likely to make acute nevertheless.\textsuperscript{24} Others, however, argue that it would not be inconceivable to rely on existing bilateral agreements on information sharing and to develop these further, given the significance of the security challenge both countries are facing.\textsuperscript{25}

Brexit could also create complications for the defence industry. An Airbus senior executive, Marwan Lahoud, expressed fears in a closed forum about the future of his company in the aftermath of Brexit. Considering that the wings of Airbus airliners are assembled in Wales, an Airbus without the UK could become merely a ‘bus,’

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\textbf{Interviewees expressed concerns over the future levels of defence spending on the British side and the degree to which those levels would be compatible with London’s commitments to the Lancaster House Treaties.}
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he quipped. In particular, Lahoud wondered whether Airbus teams would be able to continue to circulate without visas and how easy, administratively speaking, it would be to employ a British citizen in one of the company’s most important sites in Toulouse, France. Similarly, he asked, would Brexit mean the return of trade tariffs that would apply to any piece of material going across the Channel? Unless Brexit does not induce greater complexity, significant coordination and competitiveness issues for both defence industries could arise.26

This fear is indicative of the broader concerns about the wider ramifications of Brexit on the capability of European partners to continue cooperating on key industrial projects in the future. The vulnerability of the European defence industry was demonstrated by the failure in 2012 of the BAE Systems–Airbus (then known as EADS) merger, which showed how hard it was for European partners to coordinate their efforts in this realm. A Brexit is unlikely to make such collaboration any easier. MBDA (which has become a unique integrator of French and British interests and savoir-faire, and which remains a priority on both sides of the Channel) is an illustrative example of what the two countries were able to achieve in a past, more favourable environment and what may be more difficult to achieve in the future.

Finally, other officials and analysts noted that though they did not expect the UK to turn isolationist per se, the uncertainty surrounding the terms of separation between the EU and the country could open the door to a protracted period of negotiation that would not be helpful to cooperation, as it would create additional complications.27 In particular, they insisted, France is unsure of how and on what terms Brexit will take place, and French officials are always keen to point out that the British position itself is often not very clear.28 They especially fear the prospect of a very messy ‘divorce’ that would sour relations as well as the possibility that resulting tensions will spill over to other dimensions of the relationship – in particular the bilateral defence and security relationship (not least the industrial component) – between France and the UK. A messy divorce could undermine the notion, at the heart of the Lancaster House Treaties, that convergent interests between the UK and France will increasingly replace the rivalries and divergences of yesteryear.29

The French approach to European defence and security after Brexit
There is very little evidence to suggest that anyone in the French government believes the messy divorce would be in France’s interest, or that there is any willingness to question the relevance of
the Lancaster House Treaties in a post-Brexit world. Three of the main outcomes of the treaties, namely the agreement on MBDA, the Future Combat Air System project and the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force are still significant priorities for French MOD officials.

The alternative, positive scenario would be one in which the UK is able to ‘opt in’ to some European defence policies. France would have some interest in allowing this to happen, as there would be complementarities between the France–UK military alliance and the France–Germany political alliance. In addition, French officials have suggested that this option is conceivable in practice, considering that non-EU members, such as Canada, Norway, Brazil and Georgia, have participated in EU operations in the past. This model could be replicated for the UK, allowing for the country’s involvement in future operations post-Brexit. But as one analyst was keen to point out, historically the UK has not been a significant contributor to EU missions. Canada, for example, contributed more personnel in the 2003 Artemis operation in the Democratic Republic of Congo in spite of the fact that it was a substantial military operation with clear rules of engagement, in other words, the kind of operation the UK has tended to view as more significant. In the eyes of several interviewees, the UK may have already lost significant leverage to influence European operations, even before Brexit.

The role that the European Defence Agency (EDA) will play in a post-Brexit world is also a crucial question, though it may not have been raised explicitly yet in the negotiation process. As one analyst suggests, the country has often opposed efforts to increase the agency’s budget. If a Brexit occurs and limits or puts to an end British involvement in the EDA, the agency and European partners may decide to increase ‘pooling and sharing’, especially if the Germans and the French find a new compromise on this question. The UK would not have more access to the European market than the Israelis or the Americans, this analyst argued. This, too, would mean less influence for the UK in EU affairs – in particular if, again, Berlin and Paris find a workable agreement as to how to operate.

These observations suggest that the evolution of the Franco-German relationship will be particularly indicative of the trajectory that European partners will choose. As one analyst argued, the notion that France will play a greater leadership role may be undermined by the fact that Germany may become the only power with the ability to act and to shape wider EU approaches in the aftermath of Brexit. The centre of gravity may be shifting to a point between Berlin and Frankfurt, this analyst added.

In practice, French officials, led by François Hollande, are pushing, for example, for defence spending to be taken out of deficit calculations, in order to provide European partners with more leeway to guarantee security at the borders of the continent. The French have also put forward a proposal on a European defence fund that would allow European partners to pool investments. If this were to succeed, the defence component in EU relations could potentially grow and give European partners significantly more weight. It is particularly striking that both François Hollande him-
self and French officials recognise that Germany may be becoming more open to reform the way the EU functions on these issues than before. This would create an opportunity for France to redraw the contours of European defence policy – thereby limiting further the UK’s influence.

Ultimately, it is worthwhile noting that with the UK potentially out of the EU, French officials see their country playing a fundamental leadership role in European defence policy, as the only nuclear power remaining in the Union. As a result, as one unnamed official has hinted, France would want to become the real strategic partner of the US within Europe. French Minister of Defence Le Drian also stated his will to develop European defence policy ‘as a response to Brexit,’ in order to unify EU members around a particular goal. The set of joint proposals that France and Germany put forward during the September 2016 Bratislava European Summit, which are designed to strengthen EU defence, are a step in this direction: the proposals allow France to maintain its current influence in the EU process and to demonstrate that the country still intends to exert its leadership and to play a unifying role in the aftermath of Brexit. The expectation is that this would also create a positive momentum for the European defence industry as a whole (in particular for Airbus and for MBDA) by introducing some clarity in a climate characterised by high uncertainty.

But as one analyst suggested, in a global cost–benefit analysis of the effects of Brexit for France and Europe, it is unlikely that the disappearance of the British veto and unwillingness to act on European defence policy issues will be enough to compensate for the loss of the British military force within the EU. This would leave significant room for finding additional creative ways to work and to further current ad hoc arrangements. Barring the scenario of a messy divorce, there do not seem to be any hurdles prohibiting this in a post-Brexit world, given the enduring bonds of common interest and the recent effort invested into deepening cooperative ties between Europe’s two largest military powers.
German perspectives on the potential defence and security implications of Brexit (Magdalena Kirchner)

The German debate on the security implications of the Brexit vote has been split between two competing narratives. On the one hand, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen have been quick to announce that, now that the UK is set to leave the EU, a Franco-German initiative will take the lead for further integration in the field of Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). This includes the establishment of Permanent Structured Cooperation as a framework for interested Europeans nations to move forward with a collective approach to defence issues.43 On the other hand, experts doubt whether Berlin and Paris can implement their ambitious plans, as both the current security challenges and different strategic cultures and capabilities continue to make the UK the ‘indispensable European’ for military cooperation. While it is therefore highly likely that bilateral security cooperation will be enhanced in the context of NATO and beyond, officials avoid explicitly discussing a possible ‘special status’ for the UK at this stage, in order to deter ‘cherry picking’ in the upcoming Brexit negotiations and a wider contagion to other member states.44

On 25 June, von der Leyen stressed that current military cooperation with the UK is ‘very close,’ which ‘applies despite the Brexit’.45 Especially in the past two years and partially modelled on the 2010 Lancaster House Treaty (see Chapter 2), several bilateral steps have been taken towards deeper partnership in defence and security – one intended to endure after another kind of ‘Brexit’, the departure of 9,920 British military personnel from Germany by 2020.46 While some of these initiatives might even gain further momentum after Brexit, those that are tied to trade issues and CSDP may need to be revised or could become difficult to implement at all.

Towards enhanced and deeper cooperation

Those who expect the UK to undergo a radical isolationist shift assume that this will increase pressure on Germany to boost defence spending and military deployments while simultaneously losing a key partner in establishing and maintaining a working sanctions regime against Russia.47 Those who do not anticipate a British shift towards isolationism foresee a stronger emphasis on NATO as the preferred security alliance for the UK and corresponding German alignment.48

In the past months, both countries have generally converged in their position on sanctions and the need for enhanced resilience vis-
à-vis hybrid warfare, and have supported initiatives towards rapid deployment based on the German–Dutch Framework Nation Concept (FNC) or the UK’s Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF). Both also took leading responsibility for NATO’s Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), and in October 2015 the UK joined the US–German Transatlantic Capability Enhancement and Training (TACET) initiative, where it provides the lead for airfield defence and armoured infantry capabilities and will support Germany on the mine-countermeasures naval capability.

Cooperation at operational levels is also reinforced by the British military presence in Germany, which is being scaled back with troops returning home, but will still leave an important residual footprint. If the British Army, as announced in the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), retains a continental posture for its equipment at Moenchengladbach, as well as a training and experimentation presence at the Sennelager training area beyond 2020, these UK facilities in Germany could serve as a ‘jumping-off’ point for multilateral, NATO and bilateral exercises in Poland and the Baltics. While Brexit and additional tariffs could negatively affect local service providers, the UK presence is legally based on a NATO Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA, 1951) and a Supplementary Agreement of 1959 (revised 1993), and is thus not directly affected by any Brexit. Furthermore, a new roadmap signed by the Chief of the British General Staff and the German Inspector of the Army sees progression of mutual training opportunities and exchange officers at HQ level and between the German 1. Panzerdivision and the 3rd (UK) Division, deepening operational and personal ties between the two armies.

Germany also has a strong interest in ongoing cooperation and securing British expertise and capabilities in the wider alliance against so-called Islamic State (ISIS, or Daesh). The UK has carried out some 950 airstrikes against ISIS positions since September 2014, co-chairs the coalition’s counter-messaging working group (which aims to reduce the flow of foreign fighters to and from Syria), and can share knowledge and experiences in training and equipping local partners in Jordan, Northern Iraq or Libya. In the fields of strategic communications and cybersecurity, Germany’s recently established Cyber and Reconnaissance Command could similarly benefit from exchange with the UK’s 77th Brigade, which entered active service a year earlier to develop corresponding capabilities, as well as the cyber capabilities of Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ).

**New rules of (dis-)engagement**

In the 2015 SDSR, the UK pledged to explore ‘future equipment collaboration’ with Germany and to deepen ‘cooperation on equipment, enhancing capabilities’ in order to reduce the support costs of common aircraft such as the Eurofighter Typhoon and A400M. A significant step in this direction had been the establishment of the Ministerial dialogue on Equipment and Capability Cooperation (MECC) in January 2016. Amid tight defence budgets, the MECC is intended to strengthen both governments vis-à-vis their respective defence industries, and to reduce costs. While most observers see
Brexit causing a number of practical headaches for European projects like the Typhoon and A400M, the relevance of strictly bilateral agreements is likely to increase. Thus, one suggestion by UK officials (made before the Brexit vote) had been the establishment of a single joint European hub for Boeing’s service support for Chinook helicopters, following a German decision to replace its current CH-53 with the Chinook. Beyond strictly bilateral projects, European defence integration could however be severely complicated until an overall solution for the UK’s future role in the single market or a satisfactory association agreement has been reached that would allow the UK to access continental defence markets.58

The 2015 SDSR praised Germany as an ‘essential partner’ and outlined a specific agenda for bilateral security cooperation. After the Brexit vote, security experts strongly recommended that the UK continue on this path. Quite on the contrary, the UK was rarely mentioned in the 150 pages of the new German White Paper, released three weeks later. Berlin signalled that it had moved on quickly, pushing instead for a German–French-led initiative among the remaining member states for further integration into a ‘European Security and Defence Union’, something the UK had rejected for years.61

The official narrative of the post-UK CSDP was outlined in the White Paper and the ‘European Security Compact,’ a joint contribution by Steinmeier and his French colleague Jean-Marc Ayrault. This argued that ‘out of deference’ to the UK, which ‘had blocked rigorously anything that had EU written on it,’ other member states had postponed defence integration as outlined by the Lisbon Treaty Articles 42(6) and 46, allowing for them to ‘make more binding commitments to one another’. With London out of the picture, Berlin calls for a Permanent Structured Cooperation, reflected in institutions ranging from a permanent civil-military operational headquarters to ‘standing maritime forces’.63

Many doubt, however, that Berlin and Paris will be able to implement their ambition that the EU should ‘invest more in preventing conflict … and stabilising its neighbourhood’ in the near to medium term. This is not least because of upcoming national elections and other pressing issues such as terrorism, refugees and unemployment. Furthermore, different strategic cultures are likely to create dissent between France and Germany on the geographic scope as well as the adequate means of and optimal approach to stabilisation. Furthermore, Berlin sees military integration as a goal in itself, a political achievement for wider European integration. This stance contrasts with French views of cooperation as primarily
Germany will have a strong interest in keeping the UK involved in future CSDP missions, especially given its expertise in out-of-area deployments, preventive diplomacy and peacemaking.

a means to an end, namely more military effect. Germany is also still reluctant regarding the deployment of robust military force and has, despite an increase in defence spending, expressed little interest in meeting the NATO spending goal of 2 per cent of GDP. Therefore, it seems extremely unlikely that Germany will follow in the footsteps of the UK as the leading military power in Europe in the near future, potentially leaving France an outlier within the EU and promoting a continued preference for cooperative ties with London on security issues.65

In order to maintain and be able to deploy sufficient military capabilities, Germany similarly has a significant interest in including the UK in selected CSDP missions as a third-party contributor, as has been done previously, for example, with Albania’s contribution to the EU’s Training Mission in Mali.66 Despite the small numbers of troops contributed to CSDP missions by the UK in recent years, this could be vital for certain ongoing missions. Most notably, a UK withdrawal would require the establishment of new command structures for maritime operations, especially the anti-piracy mission EU NAVFOR Somalia – Operation Atalanta and the anti-migrant smuggling operation EU NAVFOR MED – Operation Sophia, both of which are based out of Northwood in the UK.67

Berlin looks to critical UK capabilities and expertise in other areas, too. Germany will have a strong interest in keeping the UK involved in future CSDP missions, especially given its expertise in out-of-area deployments, preventive diplomacy and peacemaking. In these areas, most EU members and the European External Action Service are just developing capabilities.68

An uncertain Anglo-German future in defence and security

The ‘cold shoulder’ approach Berlin chose vis-à-vis London in the initial post-Brexit debates on security and defence might not reflect an actual German disregard of the necessity to cooperate closely and more intensively in the future. Rather, it echoes nervousness about contagious disintegration and the need for a strong signal towards further integration. Until it is clear exactly when London will invoke Article 50 and negotiations will start, neither the German MOD nor the Foreign Ministry are expected to make explicit how they plan to engage the UK in the post-EU era.

When the smoke of the current uncertainty has cleared, and German leaders take the wider threat picture and strategic challenges into account, Berlin is likely to adjust to the need to coordinate with the UK on matters of ‘policy, capability development, and operational delivery’.69 German Minister of State for Europe, Michael Roth, recently indicated that given the UK’s ‘size, significance and its long membership in the European Union, there will probably be a special status which only bears limited comparison to that of the countries that never belonged to the European Union’.70 In that sense, Germany might extend its existing bilateral or even trilateral and not exclusively membership-based platforms, such as the French–Polish–German Weimar Triangle, to serve as bridges of engagement and consultation with the post-Brexit UK.
US perspectives on the potential defence and security implications of Brexit (Michael Shurkin)

The US and the UK enjoy unusually strong defence and security ties, which grew out of a close wartime partnership and the economic and security frameworks built in the aftermath of the Second World War. These bilateral ties deepened further during the Cold War, closely knitting together the British and American security establishments, militaries, defence-industrial bases and intelligence communities from the highest strategic to the lowest working level. Indeed, if NATO is, to use President Obama’s words, the ‘cornerstone’ of American security, the UK–US alliance forms the core of that stone. Therefore any significant change in the UK’s relationship with the rest of the world or its status as a world power has the potential to affect significantly America’s own interests. Britain’s recent vote to exit the EU is potentially just such a change, and hence invites, if not demands, consideration of its ramifications for the US.

The UK–US alliance and what is at stake

The UK and US have an enduring relationship which offers value to both partners. One can readily point to the more obvious advantages of the so-called ‘special relationship’, which include close coordination on the diplomatic stage to promote mutual interests and shared values, robust intelligence cooperation and sharing as part of the Five Eyes alliance, and a proven ability and willingness to go ‘once more unto the breach’ together. Much of the value of these things stems from the UK’s ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ power.\(^7\) These are in turn derived from the country’s wealth, its commitment to spending a relatively large share of that wealth on its military (making it arguably Europe’s most capable power),\(^7\) and its permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (a status often associated today with the UK’s nuclear arsenal, despite predating it). Also of value is Britain’s commitment to what might be described as liberal internationalism and preserving a rules-based international order.\(^7\) To date, indeed, one expression of that commitment has been the country’s membership in the EU.

It must be stressed that Britain’s membership in the EU, rather than diminishing the value of the UK–US alliance, generally has been seen as a boon to the US.\(^7\) The UK has consistently served as a bridge between the US and the EU and arguably has helped steer the EU in a direction that, for the most part, has aligned with US policies rather than run counter to them. The UK, for example, has helped reduce the potential threat the EU represents for NATO with respect to competition for resources and possible duplication of effort. The UK has also been a strong voice within the EU for sanctions against Iran and Russia.\(^7\) As for the UK’s military contributions to EU missions such as the Atalanta anti-piracy mission off the coast of Somalia and the training missions in Mali, some commentators have argued that they have tied up British military resources and that Brexit will free them up for NATO.\(^7\) It should be remembered, however, that most if not all EU military missions align with US interests, and presumably the UK, as a contributor

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If NATO is, to use President Obama’s words, the ‘cornerstone’ of American security, the UK–US alliance forms the core of that stone.
to EU missions, has had a voice in internal EU debates regarding if and how the EU would engage militarily.

Setting aside the EU, Britain’s long-term commitment to European defence and security historically has been of the utmost importance. The whole edifice of the post-First World War international order, for example, rested on the concert between Britain and France, backed by the US, and with a Germany willing to play by the rules set by the Allies. That order fell apart in part because Britain drifted away from France (and America turned isolationist), leaving France to counter Germany. After the Second World War, Britain again played an important role, alongside France and backed by the US, in containing any residual German threat and diffusing power.

In military affairs, the UK–US alliance translates into close collaboration in a broad range of areas ranging from weapon systems development and procurement to training and operations. Of all the US’ allies, the UK military is unique (with the possible exception of its French counterpart) in its expeditionary outlook and force structure, meaning its willingness and ability to deploy and sustain force overseas. Britain also retains the ability to conduct operations across the entire spectrum of conflict (despite concerns over cuts to capabilities in recent years), meaning everything from high-intensity conventional warfare to peacekeeping and humanitarian disaster relief. These, along with a number of other factors including simply the high quality and professionalism of British forces, are why the US routinely looks to Britain to contribute to military operations alongside US forces. Lastly, one should not discount the UK’s contribution to securing the North Atlantic, the North Sea and the Norwegian Sea, which entails an important geopolitical and strategic role in the transatlantic alliance.

The potential impact of Brexit

Experts interviewed agree that Brexit per se is not a significant problem for the US given that most US–UK cooperation is either bilateral or conducted through NATO. The 2015 SDSR, after all, signalled the UK’s interest in maintaining its global commitments by protecting key capabilities, and it is difficult to imagine Britain reversing more than 60 years of internationalism after one referendum. Since the Brexit vote, indeed, the UK government has reaffirmed its commitment to buying the P-8 Poseidon Maritime Patrol Aircraft, AH-64E Apache helicopters and the Trident programme. British leaders have also reaffirmed their commitment to

HMS Ocean during Exercise Trident Juncture. NATO’s largest exercise in 20 years, Trident Juncture 2015, is one of a series of long-planned exercises to ensure that NATO Allies and their partners are able to work effectively together to deal with any emerging crisis, from any direction.
NATO and efforts to strengthen deterrence in Eastern Europe, as well as to the growing collaboration with France heralded in 2010 by the Lancaster House accords, which features the development of a robust combined expeditionary capability. In other words, the UK may be leaving the EU, but it is not walking away from Europe, the Atlantic Alliance or its French and American allies. US experts, however, are less sanguine about the broad range of secondary and tertiary effects that could have profound consequences for Britain, Europe and the US in the medium and long term.

**Economic concerns**

US officials consistently point to one potential development that, perhaps more than any other, they regard as likely to precipitate other issues that could affect US security interests: a Brexit-induced recession. Brexit already has hurt the UK economy, and further damage is plausible because of the combined effects of possible drops in trade, reduced foreign direct investment, the flight of capital and companies that had been attracted to Britain in part because of its access to the EU, and exchange rate fluctuations. No one really knows how much Brexit will hurt (assuming it does), nor for how long, but most experts predict at least some pain: several research organisations forecast drops in the UK’s GDP ranging from 0.3 per cent to 5.5 per cent.

Any significant decline in UK tax revenues could have a knock-on effect for British defence spending, with potentially profound consequences for the country’s military capabilities. Before the referendum, the Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne warned that leaving the EU could mean that the government would have to cut defence spending by between £1bn and £1.5bn.

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Subject to major cuts that have already stretched its force structure and ability to generate, deploy and sustain forces. Already the military has been obliged to make a number of cuts to finance important modernisation efforts (the Royal Navy’s new carriers and submarines are but two examples), in effect taking out a mortgage on some present capabilities for the sake of future ones. There is, in other words, little left to trim without causing significant harm. Any reduction in the defence budget could therefore be expected to result in the abandoning or at least delayed receipt of certain capabilities, with serious long-term effects.

A diminished British military would in turn affect the UK’s ability to engage militarily on a global scale, and, perhaps as a consequence, its interest in doing so. A less capable Britain may well be a less ambitious one. A diminished economy would also have an unpredictable effect on British politics, potentially resulting, for example, in isolationism or a weakening of the nation’s commitment to the Atlantic alliance or European security if it were to turn inward to focus on domestic economic issues, or else to find diplomatic relations with the EU strained by disputes over post-Brexit trading terms.
**Diminished diplomatic weight**

A second concern is that Brexit would reduce the UK’s diplomatic stature, both because leaving the EU necessarily would strip the country of a vote in EU policymaking fora, and because of the possible decline in the country’s ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ power. It is possible that the UK, by means of vigorous diplomatic work, could cultivate its bilateral relations with EU members and with the EU to such a degree that it effectively neutralises the damage wrought by Brexit. Similarly, the US could cultivate and invest in bilateral relationships with all the EU’s remaining members to offset the loss of London as an interlocutor, but the UK’s unique role as a bridge and facilitator of transatlantic consensus may be difficult if not impossible to replicate, at least in the short term.

One scenario mentioned by interviewees was the possibility that without the UK’s influence, the EU would become more assertive regarding its role in determining European defence policy and move to develop EU defence capabilities in competition with NATO.86 This would diminish American influence while also resulting in a diversion of scarce resources. In the near term this scenario is perhaps unlikely given current commitments to NATO by its EU members and France’s shift in focus from building an EU ‘European’ defence to its bilateral relations with Britain and the US. As for the longer term, however, considerable uncertainty remains and defence has emerged as a central issue for EU leaders in attempting to reassert European relevance after Brexit.

**Threat to the liberal centre and the rise of centrifugal forces**

Another major US concern is the broader direction of UK and European politics. Europe’s liberal political ‘centre’, represented by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President François Hollande and until recently Prime Minister David Cameron, faces growing competition from a number of quarters, all of which are likely to be emboldened by Brexit or reactions to it. For example, European ‘federalists’ might want to take advantage of the departure of the British to push more aggressively to build the EU’s authority relative to member states and potentially in competition with NATO. Eurosceptics of all political persuasions no doubt would baulk at such a move and perhaps attempt to break or even reverse the EU’s development. And then there is the far right, which generally is hostile to the EU and already shows signs of being emboldened by Brexit.87

The current refugee crisis provides a perfect example of what might happen. Chancellor Merkel, whose party has already suffered defeat at the hands of the far right in recent local elections, is under fire because of her defence of relatively open immigration and related EU policies.88 If the migrant crisis continues to strain national and EU institutions, or if there are further incidents along the lines of the Paris terrorist attacks of November 2015 – ahead of which some of the perpetrators entered Europe posing as refugees – then this may only strengthen the Chancellor’s domestic opponents, including those hostile to the EU and, above all, the far right.89

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A turn away from liberalism would have far-ranging consequences for European nations’ approach to foreign policy and security. Far-right parties tend to be inward-focused and espouse a variety of well-armed isolationism. France’s Front National, for example, advocates high military defence spending but is hostile to NATO and would end many of France’s on-going military operations. They also tend to be more sympathetic to President Putin of Russia, hostile to Israel and critical of the US approach to fighting terrorism. The far left, which could also gain from a weakened centre, arguably differs only in regard to defence spending. Political shifts encouraged by Brexit might weaken EU members’ commitment, while perceived German dominance in the absence of a British counter-weight might also fuel anti-EU sentiment.

Relatedly, there are concerns in the US that Brexit could lead to the strengthening of the centrifugal forces that threaten the unity of the UK and Europe. The UK itself could break apart if Scotland (which favoured remaining in the EU by a wide margin – with 62 per cent of the votes in favour of continued membership) and possibly even Northern Ireland (56 per cent) or Gibraltar (96 per cent) were to break away, an eventuality that would diminish the power, stature and wealth of the rump nation, to say nothing of the complications associated with the UK nuclear submarine facility in Faslane, Scotland. This Royal Navy base is host to Britain’s Trident submarines and its new Astute-class attack submarines, which are important for the UK’s anti-submarine capability. Although the UK and an independent Scotland certainly could work out an arrangement that would enable London to keep its boats there, nothing is certain. The Scottish National Party (SNP) is vehemently hostile to funding Britain’s nuclear deterrent and wishes to expel at least the Trident vessels. Prior to 2014, the SNP also was hostile to the suggestion of membership in NATO.

**Diminished decisionmaking capacity and threat of introspection**

Another concern is the extent to which upcoming negotiations and the attendant debates – indeed all the actual work of exiting the EU – will soak up significant portions of the bandwidth of UK and EU leaders and tie down their respective bureaucracies. The UK and EU might be inclined to turn inward or simply pay less attention to global affairs. They might find it difficult to focus on and forge a consensus about how to respond to global challenges such as the Russian threat or countering ISIS. Similarly, some experts have expressed concern that Brexit will have a negative effect on arms procurement and military-industrial cooperation simply because of the uncertainty Brexit introduces and the need to review and possibly revise countless agreements and activities.

Even if Brexit does not lead to a damaging relationship between the UK and EU, then the complexity, uncertainty and difficult negotiations involved in forging that new post-Brexit settlement could leave many of the US’ closest allies distracted and inward-looking, restricting opportunities to build a proactive transatlantic approach to other strategic issues.
Other international perspectives on the potential defence and security implications of Brexit (Anna Knack)

The potential defence and security implications of Brexit explored within France, Germany and the US have equally been the subject of discussion in other countries and regions in the months since the UK referendum.

Other initial responses to Brexit within the EU

Sometimes described as the third member of the EU Three (with France and Germany), Italy has reiterated its support for the vision of closer defence integration and the establishment of a joint permanent European multinational force. Since the UK referendum result, some in Italy have portrayed the prospect of a UK exit from the EU as a blessing and an end to the UK’s obstruction of further military integration. Although the Lisbon Treaty includes provisions for defence integration among consenting member states via ‘Permanent Structured Cooperation’, Italy holds that the decision-making systems it would take to apply these provisions via the Lisbon Treaty remain complex. Instead, Italy’s call for a ‘Schengen for Defence’ is envisaged as an acceleration of a core group of EU member states’ defence integration on the basis of an ad hoc agreement, with opportunities for other interested EU member states to join at a later stage, similar to the procedures in the original Schengen Agreement. Furthermore, prior to this, Italy had already been calling for financial incentives such as tax breaks and EU financing for joint European defence procurement and research, which appears to be in line with the Brussels institutions’ push for greater defence and security cooperation.

The Visegrad Four (V4), comprising the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, have also been vocally supportive of the creation of an EU force to secure their borders. These calls have been reiterated after the Brexit referendum, particularly with the hosting of the EU Bratislava Summit. The Czech Premier Bohuslav Sabotka recently stated that ‘only EU-wide armed forces will allow us to defend our interests on our own’. Hungary’s Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in August expressed the sentiment that ‘we must prioritise security, and let’s start by building a common European army’. Further, Slovakia recently expressed aspirations for a new border and coastguard force to be deployed at the EU’s outer borders after EC chief Jean-Claude Juncker announced that such a force would be deployed in Bulgaria by October 2016. While such calls existed prior to the June Brexit vote, Brexit represents both a potential opportunity to those who have viewed the UK as a handbrake on progress towards further EU defence integration and a threat to those who question EU security after the withdrawal from the Union of its most powerful military member. However, the apparent focus of some Visegrad
leaders on using European defence integration to combat migration runs counter to visions for an EU military elsewhere in Europe, with many EU leaders particularly concerned by the related tensions arising from Hungary’s recent referendum vote to reject EU policy on migrant quotas (see below).

The **Baltic States** of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were dismayed by the Brexit vote. The UK is considered one of the core partners guaranteeing Baltic regional security, and despite undertakings that Britain will maintain, if not intensify, its commitment to the NATO Alliance, the Baltic States have two primary concerns: that Britain’s withdrawal from the EU will herald a re-evaluation of its participation in other cooperative frameworks with a possible resultant decline in the UK’s NATO commitment; and that with Brexit, one of the strongest advocates for economic sanctions against Russia will be lost from EU deliberations. This prompts wider concerns regarding the future position of the EU towards Russia and whether this will soften with the departure of one of Moscow’s strongest critics. The Baltic States are also concerned that the UK’s referendum could set in motion a disintegration of the EU resulting from increasing support for populist parties in countries like France and Germany. They have also been concerned that with Brexit the balance among the three largest European powers, Germany, France and the UK, will be lost. This would likely require further lobbying and pressure by the Baltic capitals to ensure a robust stance is maintained, straining already limited diplomatic resources. On the other hand, the restated commitment by the UK to NATO, expressed both prior to and following the Brexit referendum, should go some way to reassure the Baltic capitals, at least in the short term. Britain is supporting the Enhanced Forward Presence initiative announced at the NATO Summit in Warsaw, providing a 500-strong battalion to be based in Estonia (and a further 150 troops to be stationed in Poland) on an enduring basis. The UK has also pledged to continue its involvement in the Baltic Air Policing mission until 2018.

**European responses to Brexit reflect many concerns but also different visions**

It should be noted that the path to closer integration of European defence and security capabilities is not straightforward. While there is broad consensus among the countries discussed above regarding the aspiration for a more integrated approach, there has been little planning on how such initiatives might work financially, legally or practically. The issue is further complicated by the frictions that
exist within and between EU member states on a range of issues, many of them unconnected to defence and security. For example, there is friction between Italy and the Germany–France dyad including over economic policy and the migration crisis. Since Turkey began actively preventing people from sailing for Greece from Turkey, Frontex reported that the numbers of migrants entering Greece have decreased by 90 per cent, and that 23,000 migrants entered Italy in August. The increase in migrants entering Italy has exacerbated discontent in Rome about the lack of progress by the EU on migration. Tensions were noticeable during the Bratislava summit on 16 September 2016, when Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi refused to share the podium with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President François Hollande. Similarly, tensions are apparent between the Visegrad countries and those EU members advocating greater burden sharing in relation to the migration crisis. The Visegrad countries have been openly hostile towards the quota system of relocating asylum seekers under the terms of the European Council’s Emergency Response System. In early October 2016, Hungary held a referendum on the migration quotas and, while turnout at 40 per cent fell short of the 50 per cent minimum to legitimise the vote, 98 per cent voted against the quotas. This stance has created tensions with other European members and discomfort around Visegrad suggestions for steps towards a European Army, with concerns that it could become a political vehicle for further confrontation with Brussels over border security. Such tensions have potential ramifications for closer defence integration and also indicate fundamental divergence of views at a time when the EU seeks to demonstrate unity.

**Initial responses to Brexit from Russia, China and Japan**

Outside of the EU, **Russia** has outwardly tempered its satisfaction over the UK referendum result, but there is wide recognition that a weakening of European resolve plays into Russia’s hands. Russian President Vladimir Putin has been measured in his response, saying that Brexit would have both ‘positive and negative consequences’ for Russia. Although the EU and the UK have both supported the continuation of sanctions since the referendum result, Russia perceives the possibility that the removal of the UK, the most zealous proponent of sanctions against Russia, from EU circles will weaken the sanctions regime overall, though Putin himself has suggested that EU decisionmaking may be too ‘highly concentrated’ for this to be the case. Others within the Russian establishment have suggested that Brexit will ‘tear the EU away from the Anglo-Saxons, that is the US’. This might imply the weakening of NATO or at least the erosion of Alliance resolve. Certainly, the preoccupation of the UK and EU with the modalities of Brexit negotiations could create openings for an opportunistic Russia, with the West temporarily distracted and forced into a more reactive than proactive strategic approach. There is also the possibility and concern that, in the midst of such internal European uncertainty, the Ukraine crisis will slip further down the EU’s priority list. Some Russian experts argue however that ‘strategic turbulence is not in Russia’s interests’ after Brexit, with a concern that Brexit
could serve to catalyse remaining EU members into a newfound unity that could lead to an even tougher stance on Russia or increased cooperation with the US.\textsuperscript{112}

In the Far East, China’s leaders had urged for the UK to remain in the EU, but Beijing has since indicated it is likely to maintain strong economic ties and a solid relationship with the UK regardless of its EU status. Japan meanwhile perceives a possible negative impact on regional security in Asia resulting from diminished British involvement in the EU. With ongoing antagonism between China and Japan over territorial conflict in the East China Sea’s Senkaku Islands, Japan is concerned about the dangers posed by a weakened EU, stripped of its militarily strongest member. There are fears that, without the UK, the EU may decide to take a less assertive stance in territorial disputes, while a weakened UK could also be less able to fulfil its ambitions for an enhanced role in Asia-Pacific security and the promotion of a rules-based international order.\textsuperscript{113} Japan also fears that Brexit may lead to the end of the EU’s arms embargo on China,\textsuperscript{114} which some members may be open to dispose of in exchange for more Chinese investment.\textsuperscript{115}

\textbf{Conclusions}

The perspectives outlined above constitute a snapshot of initial perspectives in selected EU and non-EU states regarding the potential defence and security implications of Brexit, as expressed in the months following the June referendum. Although the issues at stake differ from country to country, several recurrent themes may be identified:

- There are \textit{concerns regarding the future of bilateral initiatives and arrangements}. Much significance is placed on these existing ties, some of which have resulted in practical collaboration (e.g. the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force) and others of which are more intangible but no less significant (e.g. the UK’s informal role as an interlocutor between the US and the EU). Although many such initiatives are unlikely to be directly affected by Brexit (since they exist outside of EU institutional structures), indirect effects (such as Brexit-induced economic decline or the diminution of British power and influence overseas) could damage these arrangements to the detriment of both parties. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that EU members are torn between, on the one hand, a desire to take a hard line in order to demonstrate EU unity and deter others from exiting and, on the other hand, pragmatism regarding the need to protect and perpetuate important security relationships.

- There is also \textit{uncertainty regarding the likely institutional impacts of Brexit}. There are questions over Britain’s future role, if any, in EU defence and security missions and initiatives as well as the ability of the EU to deliver military effect in the absence of UK military capabilities. The proposals for a
permanent EU military force have become more vocal in the post-referendum period, although there appears to have been little detailed work to date on what this might look like in practice. Uncertainty extends to NATO with some questioning whether Brexit heralds a wider strategic retreat by the UK with concomitant impacts for NATO, and whether the Alliance will inevitably be weakened by the diversion of European defence resources into the creation of a standing EU military body.

- Despite the removal of the UK’s ‘dissenting voice’, for remaining EU members achieving agreement on issues of defence and security is likely to be no more straightforward after Brexit. Wider tensions will continue to complicate the debate, particularly in relation to migration and defence economics. The Franco-German relationship will be critical in this regard: reconciling divergent interests and different strategic cultures will likely continue to prove challenging, while the loss of the UK from the EU dynamic will require new diplomatic strategies and political groupings, even if London remains an important non-EU partner.
Notes

1 Black et al. (2017).
2 Author interviews, September 2016, Paris, France.
6 Ibid.
7 Barluet (2016); The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (n.d.).
8 The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (n.d.).
9 Ibid.
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11 Guibert (2016).
12 Svitak (2014).
14 Hoyos (2012); Katz (2016).
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17 These talking points appeared in particular in: Bauer (2016a); Cabirol (2016); Guibert (2016); de Raguenel (2016).
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20 Le Drian (2016).
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24 Author interviews, September 2016, Paris, France.
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26 Cabirol (2016); Reuters (2016b); Sengès (2016).
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29 Author interviews, September 2016, Paris, France; Briançon (2016).
30 Author interviews, September 2016, Paris, France.
31 Author interviews, September 2016, Paris, France; Cabirol (2016).
32 See in particular Claire Chick’s argument in Guibert (2016).
33 Author interviews, September 2016, Paris, France; Agence France Presse (2016b).
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44 Luyken (2016); Wohlgemuth (2015).
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The F-35 is the most obvious example of weapons system collaboration; another is the significant US role in the development and manufacture of the Royal Navy’s new Astute class of attack submarines. The UK’s submarines are armed with US-made Trident and Tomahawk missiles.


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About This Perspective

This RAND Perspective provides a brief exploration of selected international perspectives on the possible defence and security implications of Brexit. Produced in the wake of the June 2016 referendum vote that the United Kingdom should cease its membership of the European Union, this Perspective is part of a wider RAND Europe study seeking to identify those policy areas, strategic concerns or military capabilities that might be most affected by Brexit and to explore the spectrum of possible outcomes in each area. The aim, both of this Perspective and the wider study, is to help policymakers both inside and outside the UK to understand the key questions provoked by Brexit, and thus to inform how defence and security actors begin to plan for, mitigate and address these uncertainties as the UK begins negotiations to leave the European Union.

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