

# HOW TO PREVENT A BREXIT TRAIN-WRECK FOR EUROPEAN SECURITY

“Safer Together - The United Kingdom and the Future of European Security and Defence”, by Paul Taylor, published by Friends of Europe, Brussels, on June 21, 2018

British and European Union negotiators have only a few months left to prevent a train wreck in European security when the United Kingdom leaves the European Union in March 2019, and they've barely even begun discussing the challenge.

A study for the Friends of Europe think-tank highlights the risks of a breakdown in practical cooperation on crime-fighting and counter-terrorism after Brexit, and of serious longer-term damage to British and European defence industries unless both sides get off their present confrontation course.

The report by veteran Paris-based journalist Paul Taylor, a columnist for POLITICO and former European affairs editor for Reuters, offers a series of proposals to limit the Brexit damage for both British and European security. It highlights the UK's interest in continuing to work as closely as possible with the EU in foreign, security and defence policy, rather than pursuing illusory alternatives based on closer ties with the United States or the Commonwealth.

**“Hubris and factional in-fighting in London combined with legalistic inflexibility and industrial protectionism on the continent could thwart the practical cooperation needed to keep Europe and Britain safe,” Taylor writes. “The battle over Britain’s future participation in the EU’s Galileo satellite navigation system illustrates how easily relations could turn sour.”**

Britain's international influence and value as an ally of the United States are bound to be diminished when it is no longer at the table of Europe's central organization for economic and political cooperation. London can mitigate that loss by establishing a special partnership with the EU on issues ranging from sanctions and development assistance to crisis management and counter-terrorism. But to do so will mean crossing some of the red lines set out by Prime Minister Theresa May. Otherwise, both sides will be losers.

The report is based on more than 40 interviews with policymakers, legislators and experts, as well as an opinion survey of some 200 stakeholders in defence and security affairs. It analyses the darkening strategic situation of the United Kingdom and the European continent, the strains on the UK armed forces, which face a tighter budget squeeze because of Brexit, and the endangered position of the defence industries.

Senior officials in London, Brussels and European capitals insist they want pragmatic cooperation to keep European citizens safe, and voice confidence that the professionals will find practical solutions, but no one knows how. An impasse over the Irish border and UK cabinet feuding over what future trade relationship to seek have delayed negotiations on these vital issues.

Assumptions among British politicians that not much will change on defence and security because NATO will remain the backbone of European defence, and bilateral relations with France, Germany and other European partners will pick up the slack, are deluded.

Many vital UK security interests, including the fight against terrorism, organized crime and illegal migration, as well as cyber security and efforts to stabilize Europe's fragile neighbourhood, require daily cooperation with the EU.

The first area where Brexit could hit security is if Britain loses access to EU-run databases on criminal suspects, police investigations, DNA and fingerprints, passenger name records, travelers entering and leaving the Schengen zone of open border travel, and the European Arrest Warrant rapid extradition system.

No third country currently gets direct access — not even Norway and Switzerland, which are part of the Schengen area. To have any chance, Britain would have to commit to continuing to abide by EU data protection rules, including those made after it leaves, and conclude an agreement on handling confidential information, accept the European Court of Justice's direct jurisdiction over these agencies and pay a full share of their budgets.

Having long obstructed European defence integration, the UK suddenly wants to secure a say in EU military operations and armaments cooperation now it is leaving. While EU countries would like to have British forces alongside them in crisis management, they are not prepared to give the UK a veto, or to share command and control of EU operations with a third country.

The defence industries are likely to be among the collateral casualties. Without a customs union with the EU, their cross-border supply chains face potentially severe disruption from non-tariff barriers that may force transnational companies such as Airbus, MBDA and Leonardo to shift production and sourcing to the continent, and will cause problems for BAE Systems and Rolls Royce. The exclusion of British-based companies from future work on Galileo is just a foretaste.

UK firms are set to be shut out of the planned multi-billion European Defence Fund for military R&D except if invited to tender as sub-contractors on individual projects where they have unique capabilities. Britain can still retain a role in European defence cooperation if it offers to participate in Franco-German plans for a future air combat system, a joint European tank and other major weapons systems. But UK industry will be in a weaker position.

While EU governments say they want close cooperation with the UK in security, foreign policy and defence, they have so far done nothing to press the Commission to show more flexibility while Britain sticks to its red lines on leaving the single market and the customs union, rejecting ECJ jurisdiction, controlling immigration and refusing large budget contributions.

As veteran strategic thinker Sir Lawrence Freedman says in the report, "The more acrimonious the Brexit, the worse it will be for defence and security."

**British leaders will have to choose between security cooperation on the EU's terms and the obsession with national sovereignty. Above all, the UK must avoid any temptation, having decided to leave the EU, to try to weaken or sideline the Union. The EU will remain its neighbour, by far its biggest economic partner and a like-minded supporter of a rules-based international order in a dangerous world. By working closely with the Union and in bilateral and multilateral partnerships with its main members - France and Germany - Britain can limit the damage from Brexit to security and defence.**