

The Armed Forces, NATO and the EU

What Should the UK's Role Be?

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Introduction

International relations theorist Hans Morgenthau, in his 1948 *Politics Among Nations*, argued that, 'alliances are a necessary function of the balance of power operating within a multiple-state system' and whether nations decide that they will or will not pursue alliances is 'a matter not of principle but of expediency and that a nation will leave an alliance if it believes that it possesses the capability to go alone or if the commitment of the alliance is likely to outweigh the advantages to be expected.'

Although written in 1948, Morgenthau's reasoning can be applied to the way we view international relations today. The default position for the UK is, and will be, to operate as a partner within one alliance or another.

However, the UK does have unique national interests and we cannot always, nor should we always expect, to depend on our partners when Britain's direct national interests are threatened. For this reason, the assumption in the recently published Green Paper, *Adaptability and Partnership: Issues for the Strategic Defence Review*, that Britain will always operate as part of an alliance, should not be accepted.

Most of the time we will engage in operations as part of a coalition: whether it is through NATO, the EU or Coalitions of the Willing. Our global interests and position require us to operate in a variety of groupings. There are an estimated 12 million British citizens living overseas. We are also an international hub for financial activity, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, the G8 and G20, the Commonwealth, the European Union and a leading member inside NATO.

A very important part of this relationship is found close to home in Europe. This *Address* will discuss how a future Conservative Government would view the interaction of three important dynamics pertaining to defence: the role of the EU, the role of NATO, and the importance of bilateral relationships with our European Allies.

When talking about 'European defence' it is important not to confuse 'political Europe' and 'geographical Europe'. It is in Britain's national interest to co-operate fully with all of our European neighbours. It is not in our interest to hand over our security to any supranational body. That means that engagement with our continental European allies is vital for our security. These include Norway and Turkey who do not belong to the EU. No organisation can be serious about European defence without the full and uninhibited participation of these two nations.

The Evolution of EU Defence

Consider the recent evolution of EU defence. Since the agreement in 1998 at the

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French port of St. Malo, integrationists have slowly been constructing institutions to build an EU common defence policy. A 'European Security and Defence Identity' became 'European Security and Defence Policy'. With the Lisbon Treaty we have what is now called 'Common Security and Defence Policy'. This may seem an arcane change but through its foundations the EU integrationists are leaning away from NATO.

It is often contended that I am unduly Eurosceptic to believe that the ultimate aim of the federalist is to have an EU Defence Force under an EU flag. Yet at the Munich Security Conference, on Saturday 6 February 2010, the German Foreign Minister, Guido Westerwelle, stated that 'the long term goal is the establishment of a European army under full parliamentary control.' Nothing could be clearer than that.

This deepening of EU defence integration has occurred while the Conservative Party has been in Opposition—we have had no say in the direction or speed of travel of EU defence integration. Quite naturally the Conservatives take a different view – over, in particular, some of the defence aspects of the Lisbon Treaty. In the House of Commons less than six hours was spent debating the foreign, security and defence policy aspects of the Treaty on 20 February 2008. The Defence Secretary at the time, Des Browne, neither attended nor spoke.

Fortunately, from a defence point of view, many of the elements found in the Treaty are either meaningless or voluntary. Consequently, we will reconsider such provisions as Permanent Structured Cooperation and the European Defence Agency closely if we form the next Government, to determine if we see any value in Britain's participation.

There are also concerns about the democratic legitimacy of the EU and about defence issues.

Under the Lisbon Treaty the EU Foreign Minister, Baroness Ashton, is not only a Vice President of the supranational EU Commission but has the right of initiative to propose military operations, and is the Head of the European Defence Agency (EDA). This blurs the line between what is supranational and what is intergovernmental inside EU defence planning and it is something we have always opposed. This Commission foothold in the EDA will present problems for a future Conservative Government.

In addition, some of our other EU Defence commitments must be reconsidered if for no other reason than to determine their practicality and utility. Most people would be shocked if they knew what the Labour Government has committed us to in the EU over the last decade. Currently Britain has 12,500 troops, 18 warships, and 73 combat aircraft¹ earmarked for the, admittedly fantasy, 60,000 strong force set out in the Helsinki Headline Goal². We have provided an EU Military Staff 'certified' EU

¹ *Hansard*, 20 Nov 2000 : Column: 8W, on Common European Security and Defence Policy

² The HHG was built on the bilateral 1998 UK-French Joint Declaration at St Malo. This stated that the EU should have the capability to launch 'autonomous action backed up by credible military forces' as part of a common defence policy. At the December 1999 Helsinki European Union Council meeting, Member

Battlegroup—totalling 1500 troops—on standby on three separate occasions. Are either of these commitments realistic in this era of overstretch and high operational tempo? Should we mislead ourselves or our European allies into believing that these are commitments we could seriously carry out?

42 Commando, the unit currently providing our EU Battlegroup requirement, is also fulfilling our commitment to the Small Scale Contingent Battle Group—Britain’s rapid response capability allowing us to react to the unexpected outside the EU or NATO.

So who gets priority: the EU or the UK? That would present me with no difficulty.

Double or even triple hatting the same forces does not produce any increased capability and may ultimately create competition for the same resources. Any EU military capability must supplement and not supplant our national defence and NATO. NATO members who are already falling well below expectations in their military budgets must not be allowed to divert scarce resources away from NATO towards EU capabilities.

Nor should the UK allow European NATO members to believe that there is a soft security option of peacekeeping with the EU rather than war fighting with NATO. If you want to be a peacekeeper you have to have peace in the first place. That peace, history tells us, requires a willingness to fight and sometimes die for it.

Role of NATO

A future Conservative Government will make NATO reform a key strategic priority. With the American Administration focused on immediate global economic and security priorities we cannot always assume or expect that the Americans will take the lead on NATO transformation.

Britain must take a lead in the debate about the future shape of NATO alongside other European nations who share our view. Because of NATO’s difficulties in force generation for Afghanistan, and the increasing focus on EU defence initiatives by many of our European allies, there has been some debate here in the UK about whether Britain’s future is best served with NATO. The Conservative party’s view is that NATO is the cornerstone of our security. The transatlantic alliance remains the most important strategic relationship for United Kingdom. Despite the current difficulties that NATO is facing we should not turn our back on an alliance that has underpinned the security of Western Europe and the United Kingdom for the last 60 years.

NATO is no luxury. It is a necessity. As Secretary Madeline Albright told the European Parliament recently ‘NATO is the relationship that keeps the United States

States established a military capability target, known as the Helsinki Headline Goal and deploying 50-60,000 troops.

in Europe.³

American involvement in Europe's security is something that Europe cannot afford—either literally or figuratively—to lose. If NATO is to succeed as a modern security alliance it will need the capability and flexibility to adapt continuously to new challenges and threats. NATO's transformation must be based on this premise and the next Strategic Concept must reflect this reality.

NATO does have relevance in the 21st century but the alliance's capabilities are only as good as its members' commitment. Although in need of renovation, NATO is not ready for demolition. However, there are areas that need to be addressed.

There is an ongoing debate inside NATO about expeditionary warfare versus continental defence. Should NATO worry about security issues in the Arctic or focus maritime security in the warmer climates where piracy is a problem right now? Do we have the mechanisms inside the alliance to deal with emerging asymmetric threats such as cyber warfare, space, and energy security? What about nuclear proliferation and what should NATO's nuclear posture be in the 21st century?

Many of the questions NATO, as an alliance, should be asking itself are the same types of question its member states should be asking about their domestic security and military arrangements. NATO may need more than a Strategic Concept and perhaps the equivalent of a full Strategic Defence Review.

The end of the bi-polarity of the Cold War means that NATO will have to work harder at its external relations. NATO must improve and expand its relations with Russia, the UN, and the EU, as well as its partners further field like the Gulf States or the Contact countries like Japan, New Zealand and Australia.

Perhaps the biggest challenge facing NATO is solving the series question of burden-sharing. We need to get away from the idea that burden-sharing means that we all must take an equal share in everything we do militarily. There is little point in NATO summits having sterile debates about who is failing to live up to their promises even if it is entirely understandable. There are some (though only some) member states who have genuine historical and constitutional difficulties with fighting expeditionary warfare. Others are better equipped and more militarily experienced for such capability but may want to divest themselves of Cold War legacy liabilities. A balanced, creative and constructive approach to burden-sharing will be needed if the alliance is to adapt to the challenges of the 21st century.

NATO must maintain its primacy as the cornerstone of Europe's defence. I agree that there are security missions that NATO cannot undertake but the EU should only act when NATO either cannot or chooses not to. In terms of defence the EU must avoid duplicating the functions that NATO already performs.

Though a statement of the obvious, it is important to emphasise that there should be

³ Sec. Madeline Albright speech to the European Parliament, 'NATO's Future Role' 27 January 2010.

no doubt about the UK's position under a Conservative Government. Any attempt to give the EU 'mission creep' at the expense of NATO will be met by firm opposition. As Secretary Clinton told an audience in Paris on 29 January:

'I think the US view is that we would not want to see anything supplant NATO. If it were able to supplement NATO, that would be different. But given the strains that already exist on NATO's budget and military expenditures in our countries, we think it's smarter to figure out how to use the resources we have more effectively, use the alliance that we're members of in a more strategic way.'⁴

Across the EU defence spending as an average of GDP is 1.4 per cent. Defence spending as a share of public spending across the EU amounts to only 3.2 per cent. Consequently, European countries need to concentrate and focus scarce defence resources on fixing NATO. Until we fix the alliance which has guaranteed Europe's security for the past 60 years, further EU defence integration outside NATO, when there is duplication and no additionality, should wait.

Bilateral Relationships

In addition to improving NATO a future Conservative Government will aim to build enhanced bilateral relations with key European partners. For this there are two tests, do they invest in defence? And do they fight? Too few European allies pass both these tests.

What is the position vis à vis Britain's key defence partners in Europe?

First, for the UK its relationship with Norway in particular is very important. Imports from Norway represented 51 per cent of all oil imports to the UK in 2008. 70 per cent of all natural gas imported into the UK comes from Norway. Both oil and gas imports from Norway have increased since 2006. Norway plays an important role in Afghanistan with its use of Special Forces, a deployment of 500 troops. It also leads a Provincial Reconstruction Team.

With ice melting in the Arctic, and increased piracy in the shipping lanes of warmer climates, the shorter shipping routes in the High North will become more appealing for commerce. Already, more than 11 million tonnes of oil per year pass through the Barents Sea alone. Because 92 per cent of British international trade in goods travels by sea, we must maintain a strong maritime interest including in Arctic security matters.

Turkey's important role in international and regional security also should not be understated. Turkey's influence encompasses both military and political aspects.

Turkey's military contribution to NATO, EU and UN led operations sets it apart from

⁴ Sec. Hillary Clinton, Q/A session to her speech in Paris: 'Remarks on the Future of European Security' 29 January 2010.

many of the nations of Western Europe. Politically, Turkey is a bridge to the Islamic world. It shows that prosperity, democracy and security are possible in a constructive partnership with the developed world. Turkey's geo-strategic location also makes it important to Europe's energy security. Because we share many of the same security concerns as Turkey it makes sense that we aim to improve our relations with it. Some of our allies in Europe need to see Turkey for what it really is: a valued NATO partner, a secular state bridging Europe and the Islamic world, a developing economy and a major player in the energy market. They may want to consider the implications of having a resentful and uncooperative Turkey on the European doorstep as an alternative.

Alongside key strategic bilateral partners, Britain has strong tactical partners in Europe.

The Danish and Estonians are fighting in Helmand Province alongside—and in some cases under the command of—British Forces. The Danes currently have 750 troops in Afghanistan most of them infantry and most of them in Helmand Province. In addition Danish doctors routinely serve in the field hospital at Camp Bastion where British forces and Afghan civilians receive life-saving care. During the busiest three-month period in the hospital's history, Danish medical troops were in command. Estonia's contribution is equally inspiring. Estonian troops patrol in Helmand Province with a company of infantry soldiers under British command. Seven Estonian soldiers have been killed since 2002 and over 40 have been wounded. It has been reported that Estonia's casualties—as a proportion of its population—are nearly twice those of the US.

But Britain's most important bilateral relationship in Europe is with France. There are many shared interests between France and Britain relating to defence. We are the only two countries in Europe with real, large-scale expeditionary capability:

- we are the two biggest defence spenders in Europe. Combined we account for 44 per cent of defence expenditure and 62 per cent of Research and Technology expenditure in the EU.
- we both have a good history of close cooperation on big ticket procurement items.
- we are both permanent members in the UN Security Council.

Most importantly, France and Britain are Europe's only two nuclear powers and we contribute greatly to NATO's security because of this. A future Conservative Government will continue and strengthen this relationship. It is because of these shared interests that the United Kingdom and France should be the driving force when it comes to reforming NATO and to prepare it for the 21st century. Since President Sarkozy came into office we have seen, with renewed vigour, an attempt to bring Europe and America closer together in partnership and cooperation, and an honest attempt to bring France deeper into NATO—where many of us believe she truly belongs. So far the outcomes of this have been considerable.

France has fully rejoined NATO's Integrated Command Structure and is taking a leading role inside the alliance through its official command of the Allied Command Transformation—responsible for NATO transformation, and Joint Command Lisbon—responsible for, among other things, NATO's relations in the Mediterranean. France currently has 3,750 troops in Afghanistan in places where the fighting is at times intense and is the fourth largest troop contributor. Six French Mirage jets based in Kandahar are providing close air support coalition forces in Southern Afghanistan—including British forces in Helmand.

France has also shown how seriously it takes security and defence matters. The French White Paper on Defence and National Security is a useful template which other governments across the Continent would benefit from studying. As Shadow Defence Secretary I have visited Paris to meet some of the authors of the White Paper so that we can learn from their process.

Here the MoD, under the current Government, has fostered closer links with the French Ministry of Defence. Such cooperation should go further with dialogue on cyber-security, space security, joint training, nuclear proliferation and NATO reform.

Today, France and Britain already collaborate closely in a number of procurement areas. Where there is a common interest, as we have seen recently, with the joint industrial strategy for complex weapons, we want to advance co-operation.

However, a future Conservative Government would like to see a renewed and energised Anglo-French synergy to modernise and reform NATO—in order to keep the alliance relevant for Europe's defence in the 21st century. The forthcoming publication of NATO's Strategic Concept should give us an opportunity to do just that. To demonstrate our commitment to strengthening the Anglo-French relationship we would like to take the existing High Level Working Group one step further and propose an upgrading to a quarterly, or at least bi-annually, ministerial meeting. In addition, if we were to form the next Government the Ministry of Defence will also invite France to make a formal submission to our SDSR stating what they expect from their relationship with the United Kingdom.

There is one particular area where we need to bring British and French political influence to bear in NATO—and that is in relation to the issue of NATO's nuclear posture.

The multi-polarity of the post-Cold War world means that events are often unpredictable and quickly changing. No one can accurately predict the threats the alliance will face in the next 50 years just as no one 20 years ago could have anticipated the collapse of the Soviet Union, or the nature of the conflicts which currently confront us in Afghanistan or Iraq. The threat associated with proliferation of nuclear weapons makes the world even more dangerous. This is why it is so important that NATO maintains a 'nuclear culture' and that this is reflected as explicitly as possible in the upcoming Strategic Concept. NATO's previous Strategic

Concept in 1999 stated that:

‘The supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies is provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the alliance, particularly those of the United States; the independent nuclear forces of the United Kingdom and France, which have a deterrent role of their own, contribute to the overall deterrence and security of the Allies.’ (paragraph 62)

This is one aspect of the previous Concept that I hope will remain in the proposed new Concept. Since 1999 the world has experienced more, not less, nuclear proliferation—especially with North Korea and Iran.

In addition to the nuclear capabilities of France and the United Kingdom, the Americans have between 180-240 nuclear weapons based in Europe in at least five different countries for use by non-nuclear NATO members in the event of a nuclear war. There has been some talk in a few of the countries where these weapons are based about the possibility of removing them because they are viewed as a throwback to the days of the Cold War and irrelevant to today’s security challenges. But as stated in the 1999 Strategic Concept, nuclear weapons are ‘the supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies.’ This was the case in 1999 and I believe that this, even more so, is the case today.

Ultimately it is up to each individual member state to choose whether to have American nuclear weapons on their soil or not. When these decisions are made, the best interests of the alliance as a whole in a very unpredictable world should be borne in mind. The onus is not on those of us who wish to maintain a ‘nuclear culture’ inside the alliance, but on those who want to scrap it, to tell us why they believe that they can predict the risks that we will face in the future. This is why a future Conservative Government will maintain Britain’s round the clock, independent, submarine-based, and strategic nuclear deterrent based on the Trident missile system.

Currently, France is the only member of the alliance that doesn’t participate in NATO’s Nuclear Planning Group—the body inside NATO that takes decisions on the alliance’s nuclear policy. I would like to see this change in the future. As one of the three nuclear powers in the alliance, France has a natural place in the NPG and its participation would make the alliance stronger. I hope we will see that soon.

Conclusion

It was Henry Kissinger who said ‘We cannot always assure the future of our friends but we have a better chance of assuring our future if we remember who our friends are.’ The United States will remain our number one global strategic partner and NATO will remain our preferred security alliance. Where there are other alliances and groupings, which augment without attempting to duplicate these key elements of our security, then a future Conservative Government, will want Britain to play a full part. Ultimately it is national security not political convenience which has to be the trump card.

