

Response to the Call for Evidence
On the British Government's Review of the
Balance of Competences between the United Kingdom and the European Union

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In evaluating the merits of UK membership in the European Union as it affects UK foreign and defense policies, the choice is sometimes posed as one between continuing an independent British external policy or subsuming that national effort into an apparently incoherent and ineffective EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). This is entirely the wrong approach. Instead of viewing this choice as an “either/or” — UK or EU policy — it is rather a question of whether a member of the Union can leverage EU external relations to supplement and support its own foreign policy. As the call for evidence points out, “The challenge for every nation is how to remain competitive, promote its national interests and make its voice count in this increasingly multipolar world.” Thus, in evaluating the impact of EU membership on UK foreign and defense policy, the right questions to ask are:

- Will EU membership force the UK to undertake an action or adopt a policy that it would otherwise not undertake?
- Will EU membership prevent the UK from undertaking action in foreign and defense policy that it would normally wish to undertake?
- Does EU membership give UK foreign policy greater reach and effectiveness, or even allow it to pursue policies it would not have the capacity to pursue on its own?

These questions should be considered not only in today's global environment, but also in light of likely global developments over the next twenty years. Foreign and defense policies cannot switch direction in the short term; this is especially true when building alliances or partnerships. In other words, the UK government must now work to create the partnerships it will need to have an effective foreign policy in twenty years; it cannot assume those partnerships will be available at the last minute.

Although prediction is always difficult, the US National Intelligence Council's *Global Trends 2030* report forecasts a world of diffuse power center and weak global governance. Moreover, a group of “middle tier” countries — including Turkey, South Korea, Columbia, South Africa, Mexico, and others — is expected to surpass the EU-27 in terms of global power by 2030. By 2020, emerging markets' share of global financial assets will almost double and they may

¹ The views expressed here are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Atlantic Council, its staff, or its supporters.

become the most important source of global finance. Thus, Europe as a whole must seek ways to boost its competitiveness — economically, politically, ideologically — if it is to continue to prosper in this more diffuse and ungovernable world. As for the UK, a general consensus exists that in 2030 or so, Britain will find its position in the global economy much reduced. Indeed, the Centre for Economics and Business Research forecasts that the UK will drop from the 6th biggest economy to the 8th in the next ten years, as it is passed by Brazil, India, and Russia.

By virtue of its leadership in international organizations (UN Security Council, G8, G20, etc), Britain will undoubtedly continue to “punch above its weight,” but there is no question that in the world of 2030, many more countries will have reached Britain’s level of economic and political power and will be rivals for international leadership. In some cases, of course, these emerging powers will be members of the British Commonwealth, with which the UK enjoys extensive economic, historical, and cultural ties (albeit sometimes ties that are ambiguous). Those ties should not be confused, however, with having shared foreign policy objectives. India, for example, is among the most protectionist countries, and has also been reluctant to address such issues as potential Iranian nuclear proliferation.

In this evolving context, the “value-added” of EU membership on UK foreign and defense policy can only be judged after identifying the main objectives of the UK. What are the challenges that Britain is likely to confront and where, and what resources will it need to respond? Britain must have a strategic vision of its place in the world — something that is too often missing in the current debate about whether to stay in the EU or leave. Foremost among these objectives must be the following:

- **Preservation and strengthening of the international economic system based on open markets and ability to move capital;** ie the system from which the UK has benefited as a free-trading nation. As Britain’s relative economic power declines, it must make alliances with like-minded nations in international fora such as the G8 and G20. Even more important, the UK market must be sufficiently large and important so that its standards and regulations become dominant internationally and so that others see participation in that market as key to their own economic success. Britain cannot do this alone; its domestic market is simply not large enough. The only real option is to build a strong and open Single Market with its European partners and to work for the creation of a transatlantic marketplace, as represented by the new Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. So Europe is essential in achieving this objective.
- **Maintaining security and stability in Europe.** This has been a core element of British diplomacy for centuries. Sometimes it was sought by preventing the emergence of any one dominant power on the continent, but with the advent of total war, this objective is now best achieved through diplomatic and political means. Indeed, the EU is the expression of this objective. Despite the challenges of the Eurozone crisis, the European Union was never in serious danger of disintegrating, and has emerged with even tighter bonds between the Eurogroup members, and with new instruments for averting or ameliorating future crises. In recognition of the EU’s central role in stabilizing Europe

after the end of the Cold War, the UK has been a consistent supporter of enlargement, bringing newly freed countries into both the EU and NATO as the institutions that can best bolster stability and security across Europe. The question for the UK today is whether its continuing interest in European security and stability are best represented by playing a central role in the discussion of the future of Europe or by holding itself aloof.

- **Consolidating security and stability in Europe's near neighborhoods,** including the East (and Russia) and the greater Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region. While Britain's view is often farther afield among the Commonwealth, the reality is that Europe's east and south have far more potential to be immediately disruptive of European (including British) security and stability. An unstable MENA region will contribute many refugees and migrants to Britain, both through Europe and directly. The region could also become a base for hostile terrorist action in Europe, as we have potentially seen with Mali. And the continuing stalemate in Israeli-Palestinian relations could also prove disruptive, especially as Britain's own Muslim population continues to grow. Yet Britain on its own does not have the resources to address the political and economic challenges of the MENA region, especially in the wake of the "Arab Spring." While it is far from certain that the EU will prove effective in its approach toward the southern Neighborhood, the resources, expertise, and connections are much more significant than Britain could provide alone. As for Russia, the British government is already well aware of how disruptive that country can be, given its attitude toward British law enforcement. On its own, Britain has little chance of building a relationship with Russia that may alter its behavior, especially if the economic situation in Russia declines. But Europe as a whole has enormous leverage over Russia through trade and investment, as well as the potential provision of visa facilitation for Russian citizens. EU policy toward Russia is not always unified, but increasingly there is a willingness to stand up to the Russians for each other on key issues, as well as on human rights issues. The launch of an EU competition case against Gazprom also demonstrates the potential power of the EU vis-à-vis Russia.
- **Stopping the threat of further WMD proliferation.** As one of the five declared nuclear weapons states, the UK is well aware of the dangers of WMD proliferation. From the beginning, it was part of the EU-3 effort vis-à-vis Iran, and it has continued to play a leading role in constructing the current sanctions regime. That regime is far more effective because of the combined weight of EU members, and it is precisely because of the integrative pressures of the EU that some members did agree to the sanctions, despite receiving significant portions of their energy supply from Iran. On its own, the UK would have had little chance of convincing Greece and Italy, for example, of the need to implement these sanctions.
- **Maintaining open shipping lanes.** As a trading nation, and one that will also have increasing need of energy imports as its own supplies decline, the UK has a significant interest in the preservation of open shipping lanes. Dangers to shipping come

increasingly from pirates (ie, non-state actors) rather than governments seeking to impose blockades. Although Britain has long been a naval power, it no longer has the assets (and has not for some time) to protect shipping lanes on a consistent basis. Instead, it must turn to its NATO allies and EU partners. NATO's Operation Active Endeavor has monitored shipping in the Mediterranean for terrorist activities since October 2001. One of the most effective operations to protect shipping is the EU's Operation Atalanta, operating off the Somalia coast since December 2008. Pirate attacks have declined from 174 (2010) and 176 (2011) to 36 (2012), and pirated vessels from 47 (2010) and 25 (2011) to 16 (2012). The EU has matched this military counter-piracy effort with missions to improve the capabilities of Somalia's security forces and also to improve the economic conditions in that country that often lead people to piracy.

- **Addressing global issues, including climate change, cybersecurity, transnational crime, and international poverty.** Such issues, by their very nature, must be addressed in a multilateral context. Few individual states, even leading powers such as the United States, can be effective in dealing with the consequences of such issues, or can change global behaviors on their own. The reality is that the UK can hope to accomplish little by itself, but must work with like-minded countries. Generally, the UK will find itself close to the position of the other EU member states. However, the EU's policies in some of these areas can hardly be considered effective. In climate change, for example, the EU has been a leading advocate of reform, but has found itself internationally isolated, and with a domestic cap-and-trade system that has done little to reduce carbon emissions. On the other hand, no other group of countries has provided an effective alternative approach for addressing global climate change. Thus, whether the EU is value added on these global challenges will depend very much on the particular issue and also on a consideration of what the alternatives to the EU will be. Again, the question for the UK is whether it could be more effective addressing these issues on its own or working to design an appropriate and effective EU response.

It should be noted that a close relationship with the United States is not — and should not be — the objective of UK foreign and defense policy. Instead, close partnership with the US is a potential means of achieving those objectives listed above, just as is a close partnership with the EU. In many cases, these two partnerships will not be in conflict; indeed, when seeking to protect a system of open global markets, partnership between the US and EU can only strengthen that effort.

With these objectives in mind, along with the evolving international context, we should return to the original three questions:

- **Will EU membership force the UK to undertake an action or adopt a policy that it would otherwise not undertake?** Under the terms of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), almost all decisions related to foreign and defense policy are taken on the basis of unanimity (Art 31). In the rare cases when qualified majority voting is permitted,

there is an explicit national security clause that any member state can use to prevent such a vote and require unanimity. The TEU does require member states to consult with other members about foreign and security policies of “general interest” and before “undertaking any action....which could affect the Union’s interests” (Art 32) but this is only consultation, and there is no definition of what it means to “affect the Union’s interests.” The TEU does now contain a “solidarity clause” (title VII, Art. 222) which requires member states to “act jointly in a spirit of solidarity” if another is “the object of a terrorist attack or the victim of a natural or man-made disaster.” However, the actual mandate for action is put on the Union itself, using resources made available by the member states. There is nothing to require member states to respond with resources to a particular situation. Furthermore, a member state that is the victim of such an event, will only receive assistance from the EU on the request of its government. Thus there is no chance that the UK could be forced to take unwanted action or adopt an undesirable policy because of its EU membership.

- **Will EU membership prevent the UK from undertaking action in foreign and defense policy that it would normally wish to undertake?** Under the TEU, states may explicitly undertake actions they deem necessary in the absence of a European Council decision (Art 28), although they shall inform the Council immediately of such measures. The French deployment to Mali certainly demonstrates the independence that each member state continues to enjoy when it determines that it must act. Of course, if the UK wished to abandon an established EU position (previously agreed by unanimity) it might find itself under enormous pressure not to do so. However, it is extremely difficult to imagine a UK government undertaking, for example, to abandon EU sanctions on Iran.
- **Does EU membership give UK foreign policy greater reach and effectiveness, or even allow it to pursue policies it would not have the capacity to pursue on its own?** As the discussion above about UK strategic priorities illustrates, in almost every case, the capacity for British action and influence is enhanced by reaching out to its EU partners. As is demonstrated by Britain’s current efforts to persuade its EU partners to adopt a more active policy toward Syria, there is already a significant recognition that in most cases, Britain acting on its own is far less influential and effective than the EU acting together. True, it can be difficult to reach agreement in the EU, and EU policy sometimes looks ineffective or disorganized (as does almost any national foreign policy at times!). And none of this prevents the British, when necessary, from acting alone. But if Britain is to maintain its competitiveness as an international foreign policy and defense leader, it must work to leverage partners, and that is most effectively done in the first instance, through the European Union.