

"Where do we stand? We are not members of the European Defence Community, nor do we intend to be merged in a federal European system. We feel we have a special relationship to both...we are with them, but not of them".

Prime Minister Winston Churchill, 11 May 1953.

The defence implications of Brexit are enormous. It is now three months since the Brexit referendum which saw the British people vote 52% to 48% to quit the EU. Since then, and in the absence of firm leadership in London, a phoney war is being 'fought' into which all sorts of nonsense is being injected. However, the defence aspect of Brexit has been by and large AWOL, both in Britain and elsewhere in Europe. Speaking in Riga, Latvia last week the need for Europe's strongest military democracy to remain fully committed to the defence of Europe is as clear to me as ever. That commitment is in danger and here is why, explains Dr Julian Lindley-French.

♦♦

Nasty Brexit: Last week Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico warned that the, "V4 (Visegrad) countries will be uncompromising. Unless we feel a guarantee that these people [V4 citizens in the UK] are equal, we will veto any deal between the EU and Britain". Whatever emollient British politicians and diplomats might say if the V4 states (or others) did indeed veto a Brexit deal the commitment of British public opinion to the defence of other European states would be dangerously undermined. Mr Fico cannot expect to threaten Britain and still expect British soldiers to possibly lay down their lives in defence of Slovakia and others. A nasty Brexit would thus not only damage the EU, but also NATO, an outcome that must be avoided at all costs. Remember, I called Brexit right!

Disarming Corbyn: The re-election on Saturday of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader threatens to critically undermine Britain's military power. The leader of the main political opposition party is not only committed to unilateral nuclear disarmament, he is also a committed pacifist. This weekend Corbyn said as prime minister he would want to re-direct Britain's armed forces towards 'emergency support'. In other words, if Corbyn ever gained power in London he would turn the British armed forces into little more than a poorly-armed first aid force. An anti-NATO, anti-American Prime Minister Corbyn would thus put the entire Western defence architecture at risk at what is a dangerous time. There must be no complacency about the threat Corbyn poses to European defence.

Rearming Barrons: Last week the leaked 'haul down' report of recently-retired General Sir Richard Barrons warned that Britain's armed forces have become a 'shop window' force due to repeated 'skimming' of the defence budget by Government. They look good but there is little of substance beyond the image. He argued (and rightly) for the need to reinforce the front-line with all the necessary support elements needed to ensure and enhance the ability of the force to project power projection, strike, and command coalitions and thus fulfil the roles and tasks assigned to it. Europe's future defence will be dependent to a significant extent on just such a British military capability.

Anglosphere: If the Corbyn disaster can be averted post-Brexit Britain will inevitably form part of the American-centric defence Anglosphere (Yanksphere?), itself at the hub of the coalescing World-Wide West. For Britain the move towards Anglosphere is obvious. With the commissioning of the two new super-carriers, HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Prince of Wales, the British will find themselves integrated ever more deeply into the global power projection order of strategy of an over-stretched US.

Eurosphere: The rest of Europe will have to move towards some form of defence Eurosphere via tighter European defence integration. Indeed, as efforts to save the Euro intensify the only way for the Eurozone states to make the single currency work AND afford credible security and defence will be to radically re-order their defence effort and integrate more tightly. Such integration would not, at least in the first instance, lead to the creation of a European Army, but rather a very tight intergovernmental structure favoured by EU foreign and

security policy supreme Federica Mogherini in the EU's recent Global Strategy.</p>

<p>Implications for post-Brexit NATO: The Alliance would continue to be organised around an American-led pillar and a European pillar. However, the US and Canada would be joined by the post-Brexit British, and by extension non-NATO strategic partners such as Australia, and possibly even India and Japan. The Eurosphere would in time begin to take on the appearance of an EU-centric European pillar of the Alliance. This is what perhaps Jean-Clause Juncker was implying in his State of the European Union speech this month when he called for

NATO-friendly defence integration.</p> <p>Implications for the Defence of Europe: Brexit will thus lead to a new organising principle for the defence of Europe with profound implications for several European states. France will be finally forced to demonstrate just how much 'Europe' she is really willing to accept in defence. The Nordic states will have to balance their traditional closeness to Britain with their commitment to EU defence, as will the Netherlands. And Germany will be forced to assume the mantle of European defence leadership that for understandable reasons is still politically sensitive if not toxic in many quarters of the Federal Republic. Italy?</p>

<p>Respectful Brexit: Britain's REAL commitment to the defence of Europe, the use of Britain's armed forces as an agent of influence not simply a function of defence, the cohesion of an Alliance organised along new lines, and the commitment of the British people to the defence of eastern and southern Europe, are all dependent to a significant extent on a respectful Brexit.</p>

<p>Therefore, if there is a respectful and reasonable fulfilment of the democratic desire of the British people to leave the EU, allied to a clear British commitment to remain close friends and partners of the EU and its member-states, then security and defence Brexit could even help reinvigorate the security and defence of Europe. If not, then the deep divisions that ensue will in turn ensure that no-one in democratic European 'wins' and everyone is less secure.</p>

<p>Brexit will mark the final and irrevocable end of Britain's dalliance with European defence integration, just as it will inevitably mark the start of a new era of European defence integration. It is time to plan accordingly to ensure the Western Alliance is organised for optimal effect in the Europe of tomorrow, not the Europe of yesterday.</p>

<p>Britain must be with 'Europe', even if it is no longer of it.</p> <p>Professor Dr Julian Lindley-French is Vice President of the Atlantic Treaty Association</p> <p>◆◆</p>