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| BREXIT - the departure of the United Kingdom, an opportunity to relaunch the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP)

BREXIT: NEITHER A DISASTER NOR A BLESSING FOR EU DEFENCE POLICY

by Nicole Gnesotto

Contrary to outward appearances, the revival of a real European defence policy does not depend solely on Brexit. It is, however, possible that Brexit could be catastrophic for London whilst Brussels could avoid the fallout. In terms of a future EU defence policy, the Franco-German partnership will be pivotal.

At first sight, the effects of Brexit on European defence policy seem positive: the departure of the British will liberate the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) from

a situation in which the UK fairly regularly wielded its veto power. Similarly, the election of Donald Trump may improve the situation further: the increased uncertainty regarding the willingness of the United States to protect Europe

may encourage Europeans to implement a more robust military strategy. In other words: without Britain, a reduced America, and an increased number of crises the end result may be an enhanced European defence.

But it is not that simple. Certainly, the positive effects of Brexit are unquestionably tangible. In terms of the Defence Agency's budget, the European headquarters and the enhanced cooperation procedure, progress has been made

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in this regard since spring 2017. Furthermore, the "Berlin-plus" agreements will now be reviewed. Either London retains their post as Deputy Supreme Allied

Commander for Europe (Dsaceur), and the "Berlin-plus" agreement becomes obsolete as the British can no longer claim command of the Union, or we decide to maintain "Berlin-plus" and the post of Dsaceur returns to a member state.

Some people have argued for a new defence treaty between France, Germany, and Great Britain. But this is a false premise. If one accepts that the Union can become a credible military and political force on a global scale, then this defence treaty, if it is proven to be necessary, must be concluded between members of the Union; notably between the four great European powers – France, Germany, Italy, and Spain. Great Britain would then be invited to join this European alliance, but only on the terms set by the founding members. If we prevent the reality of Brexit, we risk losing the true purpose of the Union.

As for the European army, it is a beautiful concept but a non-starter. There will come a day when we will have built a political Europe, one that is endowed with a national feeling and a shared sovereignty. But we remain far from this ideal. Freed from the risk of a British veto, one can aim at the formation of a European body for external intervention; creation of a European special forces or indeed European military doctors. A European army would be the icing on the political cake, but not the point of departure.

In other words, the European defence 'revival' only depends on Brexit in a marginal sense as Brexit poses a strategic problem

a thousand times more serious for London than it does for Brussels. After all, the British have only maintained a marginal presence in CSDP since 2003. The real problem for continental Europe will be that of their political will. Two options are on the table: wait or act. The wait-and-see attitude is fuelled by a propensity for denial, a refusal to accept the reality of Brexit, the Russian threat, the rise of extremism or the troubling developments within the United States. Europeans refuse to take charge, continuing to believe that everything will remain

- maintaining a reduced CSDP and relying on NATO. Paralysed by fear that the United States will abandon Europe or simply lose interest.

On the other hand, there is support for a rapid revival of a European foreign and defence policy amongst those who want one and can take action here, as inspired by Emmanuel Macron. It would be a policy founded upon a common vision of the political role of the Union and the right relationship with NATO. The Franco-German partnership is again the driving force behind a powerful and influential Europe. The CSDP is no longer an issue of resources or an end in itself. It is a question of effective influence on a global scale.

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