Peace, security and defence cooperation in Post-Brexit Europe: risks and opportunities, edited by Cornelia-Adriana Baciu and John Doyle

Book review

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*Published in:*  
Defence Studies

*DOI:* 
10.1080/14702436.2019.1674146

*Publication date:* 
2019

*Document version:*  
Accepted manuscript

*Citation for published version (APA):*  

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Download date: 15. Sep. 2023

The impending exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union (EU) – commonly known as ‘Brexit’ – has citizens, politicians and analysts alike wondering what political, economic, cultural and other consequences this divorce will entail for the future UK-EU relationship. In *Peace, Security and Defence Cooperation in Post-Brexit Europe: Risks and Opportunities* Cornelia-Adriana Baciu and John Doyle offer a first assessment of the significance of Brexit for security and defence policy in Europe. The editors bring together ten chapters by different contributors, including their own conclusion on “The Future of Europe” in chapter 10, structured into four themes: the collaborative potential between the EU and UK, Europe’s future, sources of legitimacy and power for the EU, and post-Brexit strategies. Through the four sections, the book highlights the challenges for future European security and defence policy and explains why reaching an agreement on security and defence has proven difficult. It covers a wide array of topics related to the impact of Brexit on European security and defence and the individual chapters are well written and well researched, addressing many relevant questions for the future of European defence post-Brexit. Yet, the many topics also leave the individual contributions rather disconnected, providing snapshots of the consequences of Brexit more than a comprehensive assessment.

Part I addresses the collaborative potential of future EU-UK relations regarding security and defence. In chapter 1, Lee David Turpin analyzes the mixed track-record of UK-EU military cooperation and argues that it has proven more difficult than expected to reach a deal because the political preferences of the EU27 and UK regarding future EU-UK cooperation diverge significantly. Monika Sus and Benjamin Martill, in chapter 2, take a closer look at the reasons for why security and defence has been seen as an area of mutual interest and easy agreement between the UK and EU, unmasking them as misperceptions and showing how developments since the Brexit vote have made reaching an agreement increasingly difficult.

Part II of the book considers the future of Europe by looking at the effect of Brexit on three specific issue areas: Delphine Deschaux-Dutard argues in chapter 3 that the diverging strategic priorities of Germany and France for CSDP can explain “why CSDP has not managed to go much beyond a small steps approach” (p. 54), despite French-German cooperative initiatives and the removal of UK veto power through Brexit. Chapter 4, by John Doyle and Eileen Connolly, looks at how Brexit undermines the Northern Ireland peace process, as the basis for the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement was the EU-membership of both countries and the open-ended nature of the peace process. And in chapter 5 Jonas J. Driedger writes that the ties between the UK and Estonia strengthened due to Estonia’s increased utility for the UK as a supporter of British views on EU matters with the ability to influence EU policy from within.

Part III then looks at three sources of legitimacy and power: emerging technologies (chapter 6 by Raluca Csernatoni), naval procurement (chapter 7 by Michael Friederich Kluth), and nuclear deterrence (chapter 8 by Adérito Vicente). Although there are differences between the three sectors investigated and much takes place within NATO or bilaterally – thus less affected by Brexit –, all three chapters highlight the detrimental impact of Brexit by removing the strongest...
European military power from the ongoing collaboration efforts; while the UK also stands to lose substantial EU funding, industrial revenue, potential cooperation possibilities, and potentially faces a decreasing defence budget.

Finally, part IV takes on the broader perspective by looking at post-Brexit strategies for European security and defence, with Effie Charalampaki arguing in chapter 9 for an EU security agenda based on complexity and nonlinearity, taking micro and macro actors into account, to allow for a “holistic” (e.g. p. 196) policy “that transform[s] threats to opportunities by fostering resilience and enhancing interdependence and interconnectedness in all government structures” (p. 198) through common denominators. In chapter 10, the editors, aside from summarizing the individual contributions and the issues raised, argue for a greater need for autonomous EU competencies and the importance of bi- and multilateral structures for the UK in case of a no-deal Brexit.

It is an ambitious project to shed light on the consequences of an ongoing phenomenon, and the editors have managed to compile contributions that are very interesting on their own, and together succeed in elucidating the challenges and future for European security and defence. Nevertheless, it is difficult to assess an ongoing phenomenon and to reach any lasting conclusions, when the outcomes are still undefined and undecided. Clearly, since the contributions to the book were written, a non-deal Brexit has become more likely than the authors assumed. Additionally, the book would have benefitted from an introduction laying out a common theoretical and methodological frame of reference, setting the scene, and - most importantly – clarifying the underlying ideas for the four-part structure and inclusion of some topics and issue areas but not others. Without such an introduction, the reasons for the inclusion of some topics but not others remain hidden and the individual contributions remain somewhat disconnected. There is also a want for a common list of abbreviations, to avoid confusion for the reader. Despite these limitations, the book succeeds in teasing out underlying dynamics and tensions, such as differing visions of future UK contributions to the CSDP.

It remains to be seen which form Brexit will take, if and when it happens, and what consequences it will have on European security and defence. Until then, Baciu and Doyle’s edited volume is an informative starting point for those interested in some of the underlying dynamics of the tumultuous relationship between the UK and EU that will certainly impact the future of European security and defence.

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