

European defence

The UK is firmly committed to NATO which remains the main way that Europe's defence is organised. NATO ensures the participation of the USA. It preserves individual country control over when and whether their forces will be committed to NATO missions, whilst also including the important NATO guarantee for members to assist if any NATO country is threatened.

The EU is now pushing towards more defence integration with an EU role. The aim is to bring together the defence industries of the member states, to enter common procurement programmes, and to move from there to defining more EU defence operations. The USA is in two minds about this development. On the one hand the USA would like the European countries in NATO to make a bigger contribution to their own mutual defence. On the other hand the USA does not wish to see the NATO system undermined in any way.

There are doubts about whether the EU has in mind spending more and buying more equipment. It is more likely they wish to exercise more control over the budgets that member states already have. The UK out of the EU should examine each of the main procurement projects and see if it makes sense to join as a co purchaser and contributor to the project, where the EU would like the UK's purchases and or expertise. The UK can also offer to join EU missions and assist with troops and equipment where that is in our mutual interest and compatible with NATO's views and role. What we need to avoid is being sucked into a system of defence procurement and mission definition that impedes our role in NATO or leaves us without central capabilities we need as an independent country.