



Photo Source: Britain's World

Gulf Research Center
Knowledge for All

Rebuilding EU-UK Security Cooperation: A Case of Pragmatism Over Integration

Houda Barroug
June 2025



@Gulf_Research Gulfresearchcenter gulfresearchcenter gulfresearchcenter

25
Gulf Research Center
Knowledge for All



Rebuilding EU-UK Security Cooperation: A Case of Pragmatism Over Integration

In recent months, the shifting landscape of European security has undergone substantial recalibrations. The relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union has entered a new era, amidst continuous conflict in Gaza and Ukraine, newly implemented US tariffs, rising pressure from Russia, increased hybrid warfare threats, and persistent challenges in cyber and economic security. While the formalities of Brexit had previously pushed security cooperation to the background, recent developments have highlighted the ongoing interdependence between the two sides.

The [UK-EU Security and Defence Partnership](#), announced in May 2025, is a deliberate step towards formal engagement as a structured dialogue that reflects a shared realization of mutual dependence in a complex security environment. This renewed engagement, however, is not without challenges or constraints. As both sides navigate a world of constantly evolving threats, instability, and shifting alliances, the characteristics of their partnership highlight both the importance of collaboration and the ongoing impediments to broader strategic integration. The end goal is a framework that strikes a balance between pragmatism and ambition, striving to bolster collective security while cautiously protecting the autonomy that each party values.

The [Partnership](#) is an important milestone in the post-Brexit relationship to improve information sharing, align goals, and allow for coordinated responses to common challenges. Its scope is broad, including both conventional and emergent security domains. The [EU's Common Security and Defence Policy \(CSDP\)](#) emphasizes collaboration in peacebuilding, civilian and military crisis management, and resilience to hybrid attacks, cyber vulnerabilities, and infrastructure concerns. The past also covers counterterrorism, the climate-security nexus, irregular migration, and economic security, demonstrating a holistic strategy that reflects the multidimensional character of contemporary threats.

The Partnership promotes collaboration and allows UK involvement in specific EU defense projects. However, it excludes access to significant EU financing mechanisms such as the [Security Action for Europe initiative \(SAFE.\)](#) Its flexible, non-binding nature is consistent with the [EU's overall approach](#) to collaborating with external partners. In essence, the agreement recognizes the long-term importance of UK-EU security cooperation while also responding pragmatically to the necessity for structured conversation in a rapidly changing geopolitical context.

The Partnership is a pragmatic attempt to meet Europe's complexities, but its practical impact is met with cautious hope and cynicism. The [agreement prioritizes](#) regular high-level engagement and strategic consultations to achieve alignment on critical problems like cyber threats, hybrid warfare, and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. [Structured processes](#) such as biannual foreign and security policy discussions and UK participation in the Schuman Security and Defence Forum facilitate information exchange and coordinated planning, avoiding the possibility of misalignment or duplication of effort.

However, while it broadens cooperation to include maritime and space security, counterterrorism, critical infrastructure resilience, and the climate-security nexus, the [partnership framework](#) remains non-binding and incremental. The agreement allows the UK to participate in EU defense



initiatives and invest in the defense industry. However, not providing access to major EU funding streams like the SAFE initiative prevents boosting collaborative projects and industrial innovation, which are more tangible and substantive prospects for integration and co-investment.

From a strategic standpoint, the Partnership is best viewed as a consolidation of existing forms of collaboration rather than a transformative leap ahead. However, while the agreement demonstrates a shared commitment to collective security and strengthens the UK's role as a key regional partner, it falls short of providing the structural integration or resource commitment required to fundamentally and substantially reshape the continent's security architecture.

The strategic implications of this new Security and Defence Partnership look to strengthen European security. For the EU, the pact expands its network of trustworthy partners and enhances the continent's collective security architecture. It [enables the EU](#) to benefit from the UK's significant defense expertise and capabilities while maintaining autonomy over its own decision-making processes. The alliance [allows the UK](#) to influence European security policy and ensure that its interests are represented at the highest levels of EU decision-making. It also [promotes collaborative investment](#) in the defense industrial base, which might assist in stimulating economic growth and minimizing fragmentation in Europe's defense sector

Despite this new momentum, there remain significant limitations and missed opportunities in the current collaboration. The pact is [primarily symbolic](#), codifying existing forms of cooperation rather than establishing a new transformative and more relevant framework. The cooperation does [not grant the UK access](#) to important EU financing instruments, such as the SAFE program, which would be required to facilitate deeper industrial and operational integration. This limitation will eventually become a serious impediment to the possibilities for collaborative defense programs and procurement.

Furthermore, the [agreement is non-binding](#) and tailored to the EU's overall objective of establishing flexible partnerships with third countries. While this approach allows for gradual improvement, it also implies that [the partnership lacks the vision and institutional depth](#) needed to handle the full spectrum of the current security challenges. This makes the collaboration perhaps more of a calculated political move rather than an effective, genuine investment toward a new security architecture.

Looking ahead, the collaboration lays the groundwork for greater cooperation and could serve as a springboard for deeper integration if both parties are ready to go beyond the narratives and take more substantive collaborative action. The agreement's long-term effectiveness will be determined by the ability of the UK and EU to overcome political impediments and invest in the practical procedures required to translate shared objectives into successful cooperation. While the existing alliance is a great step, it is evident that continued growth will require both ambition and political will.

** Houda Barroug is a Researcher at the Gulf Research Center (GRC)*

Gulf Research Center
Knowledge for All



مركز الخليج للأبحاث
المعرفة للجميع



**Gulf Research Center
Jeddah
(Main office)**

19 Rayat Alitihad Street
P.O. Box 2134
Jeddah 21451
Saudi Arabia
Tel: +966 12 6511999
Fax: +966 12 6531375
Email: info@grc.net



**Gulf Research Center
Riyadh**

Unit FN11A
King Faisal Foundation
North Tower
King Fahd Branch Rd
Al Olaya Riyadh 12212
Saudi Arabia
Tel: +966 112112567
Email: info@grc.net



**Gulf Research Center
Foundation Geneva**

Avenue de France 23
1202 Geneva
Switzerland
Tel: +41227162730
Email: info@grc.net



**Gulf Research Centre
Cambridge**

University of Cambridge
Sidgwick Avenue,
Cambridge CB3 9DA
United Kingdom
Tel: +44-1223-760758
Fax: +44-1223-335110



**Gulf Research Center
Foundation Brussels**

Avenue de
Cortenbergh 89
4th floor, 1000
Brussels
Belgium

