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Press release

The United Kingdom needs the EU, not NATO, to ensure its security

LONDON, 7 June 2016: As Boris Johnson and the Vote Leave campaign turn their attention to the alleged security dangers of EU membership, Open Briefing has released an assessment of the security and defence advantages the United Kingdom gains from being part of the European Union. Intelligence analysts from the non-partisan think tank and consultancy also examined whether Britain's security would be better met by its membership of NATO rather than the European Union as some Eurosceptics have claimed.

Open Briefing concludes that the United Kingdom's membership of the EU gives it diplomatic leverage and law enforcement mechanisms that it would not have on its own as well as military cooperation beyond that possible within NATO. While NATO remains somewhat of a 'solution looking for a problem', Open Briefing finds that the EU takes a broad political, economic and military approach to security that is in keeping with Britain's own approach and is well-suited to the interconnected security threats of the 21st century.

In relation to the law enforcement benefits of EU membership, Open Briefing identifies Europol, the European Counter Terrorism Centre, European Arrest Warrants, the Visa Information System, the Schengen Information System, the EURODAC database and the Prüm Convention as key law enforcement mechanisms that greatly aid the British police and security services in tackling terrorism, organised crime and other security threats. Open Briefing points to the fact that it takes up to 143 days to gain access to DNA profiles via Interpol, whereas the Prüm Convention grants access within 15 minutes. It also points to the fact that the European Arrest Warrant scheme can result in the extradition of a suspect in a matter of weeks rather than the average 10 months it takes from non-EU countries.

In addition, Open Briefing identifies two key ways in which EU membership is a clear benefit in military terms. Firstly, it ensures a strong European defence technology and industrial base (DTIB), which the United Kingdom can take advantage of to invest in and supply our armed forces. Secondly, by pooling resources the European Defence Agency allows governments to create programmes that member states, including the United Kingdom, could not implement working in isolation. For example, the GovSatcom project is designed to build satellite communication infrastructure for EU governments in partnership with the European Space Agency. Open Briefing also identifies numerous EU military cooperation mechanisms that help ensure our security, including the European Defence Agency, the European Union Military Staff, European Union Forces, the EU battlegroups, the European Air Group, the Movement Coordination Centre Europe and the European Amphibious Initiative.



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In relation to the claim that Britain gains more from its membership of NATO than it does from the EU, Open Briefing finds that as a nuclear-weapon state and major military power in its own right, the United Kingdom does not benefit from NATO membership in the same way that some of the smaller alliance members do. Furthermore, far from keeping the peace in Europe since the Second World War as some in the pro-Brexit camp have claimed, it could be argued that NATO brought us to the brink of nuclear war on several occasions. Indeed, Open Briefing points out that it is our membership of the Cold War remnant that today places us on a potential collision course with Russia, by far the most serious state threat Europe faces.

The lead author of the assessment, Open Briefing's executive director, Chris Abbott, concluded:

"While there may still be a valid debate to be had around some aspects of Britain's membership of the European Union, such as the perceived democratic deficit and issues of immigration, the argument over the security benefits is clear cut, and firmly in favour of the United Kingdom remaining a member of the EU."

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Notes to editors

1. *The United Kingdom needs the EU, not NATO, to ensure its security* by Chris Abbott and Matthew Clarke is published by Open Briefing on 7 June 2016. It is available to download from <http://www.openbriefing.org/thinktank/publications/the-united-kingdom-needs-the-eu-not-nato-to-ensure-its-security>.
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