



HOUSE OF LORDS

Select Committee on the European Union

External Affairs Sub-Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Brexit: Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions

Thursday 8 March 2018

10 am

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Members present: Baroness Verma (The Chairman); Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top; Baroness Brown of Cambridge; Lord Dubs; Lord Horam; The Earl of Oxford and Asquith; Lord Risby; Lord Stirrup; Baroness Suttie; Lord Triesman.

Evidence Session No. 6

Heard in Public

Questions 72 - 87

Witness

[I](#): Lord Ricketts, former British Ambassador to France.

Examination of witness

Lord Ricketts.

Q72 The Chairman: Lord Ricketts, welcome to our evidence session. We are extremely grateful to you for finding time to be with us this morning. This evidence session is part of our Committee's "Brexit: Common Security and Defence Policy missions" inquiry. The evidence session will be broadcast and transcribed, and a transcript will be sent to you. If there are any errors or corrections to be made, perhaps you could send them back to us. Maybe you would like to start with a few opening remarks and then we will go into the questions, of which you have had sight. As I always say to our witnesses, I cannot promise that the Committee will always stick to the questions on the paper, but that is what it is.

Lord Ricketts: That is quite understood. There is a link between those two things, because the shorter any opening statement, the more likely the Committee will have time to get to all the questions it is interested in. I will not say more than a few words.

My own background is a 40-year diplomatic career. I am not as expert in the latest position on the individual missions as, for example, the excellent witnesses before you two or three weeks ago. I listened online to their interesting evidence on Kosovo and Somalia.

I was in at the creation of what is now the CSDP, because it would not have happened at all if it had not been for the British and French reconciling our different philosophies of European security at St Malo, in the bilateral agreement that launched the whole process that led to the institutions, doctrines and operations that have followed from it. I followed it in different capacities over the years, but I am a bit out of date on the present position. I am, however, delighted to respond to all the questions of the Committee as best I can.

Q73 The Chairman: That very neatly takes us to the first question about the importance of the CSDP missions to the UK's pursuit of its foreign policy priorities. Would you give us an idea of your views on the advantages and disadvantages of its participation in those missions?

Lord Ricketts: If you look back to those early days, our ambitions were very high. As Lord Stirrup and others will remember, we foresaw at that time possible EU operational capabilities of up to 60,000 men deployed at a time—the famous Helsinki headline goal—modelled on what NATO had done in Bosnia and then Kosovo at that time. Of course, the ambitions were not fulfilled for a whole range of reasons. What we have is a series of missions that are much more in niche areas, as the Committee has explored.

When I look at a snapshot of the range of current CSDP missions, civilian and military, while it is not fashionable to talk about the EU as "Starship Enterprise", we have boldly gone to very many of the world's conflict areas and set up missions of high political salience in a crisis. The snapshot now is a legacy of 15 years when things drifted out of crisis

mode and political priority, but missions are still going on all round the world doing extremely difficult work in very tough countries and regions, some of which have no concept of the rule of law or indeed any administrative structures. They have proved to be very long and grinding, and slow to produce results.

However, I still think that where the EU can engage in such areas, particularly with mixed civilian and military missions, it is valuable. Having listened to the evidence that you had on Kosovo and Somalia, I asked myself the question: if the EU had not been putting in that effort in the Balkans over the last 20 years, would things have been exactly the same? No. I think they would have been worse, so there is a case for maintaining that range of functions.

By and large, I think they have been in British interests, even if sometimes Britain has not been fully involved, and if the EU is to continue to do these sorts of missions, it is in the interests of the UK to continue to stay with them, engage in them and influence how they are done. I would not overclaim on what CSDP has added to British foreign policy. In many ways, the more classic foreign policy instruments of the EU, such as sanctions policy, have probably had more influence on events and the management of crises, but the CSDP missions have quite bravely tackled some very difficult issues and are worth pursuing.

Q74 Lord Stirrup: Some previous witnesses characterised the UK's participation in CSDP missions as 'manager' rather than 'player'; in other words, we have contributed strategic thinking, we have perhaps deployed one or two people in key positions on the ground and maybe the odd strategic capability, but we have not really provided the muscle for the missions. Do you think that characterisation is fair? If so, does it matter? Should one draw a distinction between civilian and military missions in that regard?

Lord Ricketts: It is fair strategically, and that is what the record shows. There are a number of reasons. Some are to do with the fact that Britain's conflict resolution and stabilisation efforts have been directed elsewhere, where the EU has not been so involved, in major crisis areas such as Afghanistan, Iraq or Libya, so we have had less to offer. In part, it is because Governments, perhaps particularly the Conservative Government after 2010, have been less willing to commit serious resources to CSDP for more political reasons.

Over the years, we have normally chosen to go for strategic staff positions—staff in Brussels, staff in missions, deputy head of mission, planning, logistics, reinforcing the staff and direction for missions—rather than supplying battalions of troops on the ground. That is probably right given where the capacity of the British Armed Forces lies, which is not in that sort of role.

I do not know whether that is true in a standard way across the civilian and military missions. In a way, it probably is in the military missions. The British Armed Forces are better at having, choosing and finding the

key individuals who can be put into a mission at short notice, who have language skills or regional skills and can do a staff job to buttress a mission; whereas I think the civilian side of Whitehall, the Stabilisation Unit, finds it difficult to find people with the right skills quickly and sustain them in a mission.

We have probably been weaker in the civilian missions than in the military ones. That is just an impressionistic judgment, but overall I think that characterisation is fair.

- Q75 **Lord Stirrup:** In helping us in our efforts to see ourselves as others see us, particularly given your experience in France, do you think that perception influences the way other EU nations, particularly the larger ones, think about us? Does it make them rather dismissive of us in CSDP terms? Do they think that this is where Britain contributes best, so that is appropriate, or do they think we are slackers?

Lord Ricketts: I think they think we are slackers. The French enormously respect what the British Armed Forces can do. The British Armed Forces have assets that they do not have, as we saw recently with the offer of Chinooks for Mali. The French do not really have heavy-lift helicopters. At the start of their Mali mission, we offered them C17 airlift, for which they were grateful, but they noticed that the British were not really contributing in any major way to the Mali mission on the ground or in the Central African Republic, and so on. I do not think people count on Britain any more to produce serious numbers of people to staff CSDP missions, civilian or military, and they rather regret that. They think we talk a big game in Brussels and try to influence things, but on the ground we are not really contributing.

- Q76 **Lord Dubs:** Could we turn to what the position may be like after Brexit? Previous witnesses said that the framework for third-country participation for CSDP missions is not a very attractive option for this country. What do you think about that? Are there any comments you would like to make about how other third-country participations have happened?

Lord Ricketts: Yes. I really was part of the policy design of the current arrangements, in that essentially I drafted the text that was adopted in 2002, with the grand title of the Nice implementation text, I think. It sets out the rights of non-EU NATO allies to participate in EU missions. At the time, it was driven by the need to find an accommodation with Turkey, which wanted, first, the capacity to participate in EU military missions and, secondly, guarantees that EU military capability would never be used against Turkey. It was a rather paranoid but very clear view. The document was needed in order to allow the Berlin Plus mechanism in NATO to be approved, which is the capacity of the EU to borrow NATO command and planning capabilities for a mission. In fact, it was only ever used in the Bosnia mission,¹ which is a Berlin Plus mission.

As far as I know, that 2002 text still governs the participation of non-EU NATO allies. I never realised when I sat down to draft it that the UK

¹ EUFOR Althea

would one day need to rest on it. It sets out arrangements for what the EU calls permanent and continuing consultations, which is not a bad point of departure, and the right of non-EU allies to participate in a Berlin Plus operation, with the option for them to be invited to participate in an EU autonomous operation, and, if they do, to take part in Committees of Contributors and so on.

Is that adequate for the UK? Obviously, the UK is a very different sort of military power from the one we imagined might use those mechanisms. The answer is that this is not what we have sought. However, personally I do not think that the EU will go much beyond it in the negotiation over future arrangements with the UK. It will always draw a line at EU autonomy in decision-making. If we are not in the EU, we will not be part of the decision-making, but I think it will be prepared to stretch permanent and continuing consultations, and set up mechanisms for us to have influence and be part of the consultative process before decisions, and obviously to participate in a Committee of Contributors if we take part.

The key thing is that the British should show commitment to contributing and being part of missions. If we do that, there will be all sorts of *ad hoc* possibilities for continuing regular consultations in Brussels. If we just assert it as a right because we are a major military power, I do not think the EU will wear that; it will say, 'The red line remains. You are not at the table and not part of the decision'. That is a long answer, but I do not think we will get much beyond that text in formal terms.

Baroness Brown of Cambridge: Does that imply that the EU will then tell us in what way it would like us to contribute? It might say that it would like people rather than advice and strategy. Would we still be able to contribute in the way we have been contributing up to now, with leadership and strategy rather than boots on the ground?

Lord Ricketts: The answer is implied in your question. We will be outside the room for decisions and we will not be part of the core of the concept of missions. The EU would want to see that Britain was seriously interested in contributing something more than the odd staff officer if we were to get significant consultative access before a decision was taken. There is a distinct link between those two things.

Baroness Brown of Cambridge: Would it be a more expensive way for us to participate?

Lord Ricketts: We would probably have to put more resources on the table to have real influence in the way missions were designed and operated, because we will not be a Member State, so we will not have the influence that comes from being at the table all the way through.

Lord Dubs: Does it mean that in practice we will be sitting there waiting for the EU to say, 'Hey, Britain, we want your help'? Will it be like that? Will we be so much on the margins that we simply have to wait for the EU to approach us, or will we be a bit nearer to what is going on?

Lord Ricketts: It partly depends on us. It goes a bit to the heart of how Britain sees its role in the world after Brexit. I very much hope that we will translate 'Global Britain' as meaning globally engaged in international peace and security, and not just in trade. If so, we ought to be in the thick of things in Brussels, not a member of the EU but very much involved, and therefore involved in early thinking when a crisis breaks out and the idea of an EU contribution begins to be thought about.

Britain should be part of permanent and continuing consultations, and therefore more than just sitting outside the room waiting to be asked, but of course in a different position from Member States. Because of the assets we have—the highly experienced Armed Forces, the logistics and the civilian capabilities—if we are ready to offer to be part of an EU mission, there will be no reluctance on the EU side to take that offer.

Lord Stirrup: To press you a little further, Britain has for a long time been a very small player in CSDP missions, despite being a member of the EU. The Government have indicated an interest in continuing to contribute to CSDP missions after Brexit, but if Britain has been such a minor player while a member of the EU, why would it suddenly become a much larger player in CSDP missions once it left the EU? There seems to be a slight contradiction. I am talking about situations separate from specific *ad hoc* arrangements to address specific crises, and about CSDP in particular.

Lord Ricketts: There are two things. What would we need to do to gain significant influence over future EU decisions on CSDP missions? I think what I have said is right. If we are to have significant influence, we will have to be willing to make a significant contribution. If we say we will produce two staff officers, the EU will say, 'Thank you very much. We'll ring you up in two months' time and tell you which jobs you are going to fill'. There is a link between the two.

We have not been deeply engaged in CSDP for many reasons. One of them was overstretch in other crisis management operations, as we were saying, which we do not have at the moment. Britain now has the choice to think about whether we will do more through UN peacekeeping. Of course, we are doing more in NATO. Do we want at least to maintain, or perhaps step up a bit, our contribution in CSDP missions, not because they are CSDP missions but because they are doing work that we think is in British interests?

I am thinking of the Balkans; you heard in detail about EULEX and the problems there. Of course, we have Althea, which is the military mission in Bosnia, and Britain is hosting a Balkans summit this year. Clearly, we want to put political effort into maintaining slow forward movement in the Balkans, so why would we not want to continue to contribute to the EU missions that are trying to do good work there? That is how I would put it.

Q77 **Lord Triesman:** The Government have stated that they seek an unprecedented—a big word, which suggests that nothing quite like it has

ever been achieved before—'deep level of co-operation' with the EU to enable the United Kingdom to 'work with the EU during mandate development and detailed operational planning' of CSDP missions. You have commented on this to some extent, but could you say how it might be achieved in practice? What kinds of arrangements might achieve it? Is the ambition realistic in present circumstances, or in circumstances we can foresee? If it is realistic, why do you think so?

Lord Ricketts: It is realistic to expect to be able to have some influence on the way EU thinking develops in a crisis, if we are prepared to put in the work, the input, to deserve that, by which I mean we will have to rely on old-fashioned diplomacy and military diplomacy. We will need very good people in Brussels who are in regular contact with the PSC ambassadors on the civilian side and the EU Military Committee and Military Staff in the way that countries outside the EU, such as Norway, are very active and have influence in Brussels. If Britain offers input in the form of intelligence, diplomatic information, political will and, potentially, military contributions, I think we will be listened to because we are respected. From that point of view, it is unprecedented.

It is unprecedented that the largest military power in Europe, with the largest military budget in Europe, has been a member of the EU and is leaving it. That is unprecedented. There is real respect for what we can bring both in military assets and in diplomatic inside information, intelligence, planning, expertise and so on. We will be able to have influence in the process, through good staff work in Brussels, if we bring something to the party.

Q78 **Lord Triesman:** I was fascinated by your paper for RUSI and would like to link it to this discussion. Maybe this will not surprise you, but I entirely get the possibilities of deep and detailed diplomatic work in order to find how we can co-operate and locations where we can co-operate. I assume we will do that.

One of the characteristics of that kind of work is that it is essentially pretty private; it is not on display most of the time, yet we are in a period when transparency seems a very much more significant feature. Taking military action seems routinely to require the decision of Parliament, or at least the opinion of Parliament. It is no longer done by prerogative, and I do not see that being likely to change again.

We would be doing things in a fairly confidential way, because of the nature of the things we would need to do, but in an environment where the demand is to be very much more transparent. If we are unable to take part in formal strategic discussions in the ways we have in the past, I wonder whether the want of transparency might mean that people say, 'Are you seriously thinking of committing British lives to an activity that we can't even discuss in a transparent way, or through a mechanism that is capable of transparent report?'

Lord Ricketts: I am intrigued by the premise of your question, which is that things are discreet in Brussels. In my experience, they are not.

Everything happens in a very open way in Brussels, and in a crisis it would all be happening at the same time. There would be a political debate going on in Parliament, the press and the media here and in all other countries; there would be calls for action; there would be debate about what sort of action it should be; and, hopefully, there would then be some planning in Brussels into which Britain could have an input. No crisis preparation in this world can be done privately. That is absolutely right.

I do not think that any Chief of the Defence Staff would advise the Prime Minister to commit British forces to an operation where Britain had not had significant influence on the planning, and the CDS of the day was not content that the plan was a good one and a proper basis for a British contribution. I do not think it can be done discreetly, but, as part of the chaotic and very public response to any crisis these days, Britain could make sure that we had access to decision-shaping in Brussels, just as there would probably be parallel discussions going on in NATO, and a debate, as classically happens, as to which institution was better placed to lead a crisis response. I do not think that the discreet versus transparency issue would be a problem.

Q79 Lord Risby: You have set out very well the limitations of our role, talking about management rather than feet on the ground, so to speak. I am interested in your thoughts on our bilateral relationship with France, with which you are very familiar. Our defence capability is unique in Europe. In the context of our negotiations, you have made very clear what you think would be most useful or helpful to the United Kingdom in future participation in EU roles, and what we would need to do. As a diplomat who was part of the St Malo process, I am interested to understand at what point we should go beyond just talking about deep co-operation. At which point in the next few months would be the most efficacious time to talk in those terms? In other words, can we put some additional meat on the bones, which could be to our advantage? I would be interested in your thoughts.

Lord Ricketts: The time to be putting meat on the bones of what the Prime Minister said in her Munich speech, for example, about how we follow up the general idea of deep and structured co-operation is now. We ought to be doing that now. We will not be able to offer anything on specific capabilities in the abstract. That could be done only in the case of a particular mission that was taking shape, or perhaps we could make some commitments to maintain what we are doing in the current range of CSDP missions, but the sooner meat is put on those bones, the better.

This may be anticipating a question. We should not have a gap between the current arrangements and whatever will be put in place for our future; we should not have a transitional period when there is yet another structure for British consultation and co-operation with the EU. We should jump straight from the full member rights we have now to the new situation, which I hope will be extensive access and capacity for input, but short of anything that touches on the decision-making autonomy of the EU. I think it should be sooner rather than later.

I hope the issue has not been a major one in the negotiations so far because both sides assume that the answer is pretty straightforward: it will not be full membership but something very close, up to the point of protecting EU autonomy in decision-making. I hope that is the case, because it is important that those arrangements should be in place so that there is seamless transition. If a further crisis blew up, and there was an issue about the role the EU should play, I think Britain would want to be part of whatever consultations were going on.

Q80 Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top: It looks as though we are going to move into a transitional period with the EU. Most of the discussion about it has been to sort out details on trade and on organisations of which we will or will not be a member. I have heard no discussion about the role of CSDP transition. Do you have any information, insight or view about what sort of participation you would expect the UK to have during a transition period? In particular, we are interested in how you think we would be able to participate in any discussion about a new mission during the transition.

Lord Ricketts: There is a passage in the Prime Minister's speech in Munich, with which I agree, where essentially she says that there is no reason why we should not move straight to the future relationship in one jump from the present position, rather than passing through a transitional period for defence and security. I agree. I think that is right. As she says, as from the time we leave, the key aspects of our future partnership in this area would already be effective from 2019. That is fair and it should be our target. I cannot believe that the EU will want anything different.

If in that two-year period a new crisis developed and there was a proposal for a new operation, we would already be in whatever the future partnership is going to be, which will, I think, be based on very close consultation short of decision-making rights. As I said before, if the EU is serious about Britain making a contribution, Britain would have to have some influence on the plan; otherwise, British Chiefs of Staff would not recommend that Britain take part. The French, who understand that very well and would always want to see Britain part of an EU mission, if we were willing to produce serious resources, would want to make sure that we were consulted, as long as they could be the ones who drove the decision.

Q81 Lord Horam: You mentioned in an earlier response to one of my colleagues that you thought, post Brexit, the Balkans was an interesting area from our point of view. I agree that we have already made a contribution of a rather slender kind to the Kosovo situation. Why do you think Balkans issues are of importance to the UK? As you are aware, we have been active in Operation Atalanta and Operation Sophia, for example. Are there other areas that you think are important to the UK where we should be involved post Brexit?

Lord Ricketts: As many people around this table know, and as you have heard from witnesses, we have been deeply involved in the Balkans for

20 years or more. We have been deeply involved because it is an area of strategic importance for the EU.

Lord Horam: But not involved in terms of muscle.

Lord Ricketts: We deployed IFOR to Bosnia in 1995 with a significant British contribution, and in 1999 we deployed KFOR to Kosovo with a significant British contribution. Of course, that scaled down, but we have been involved in Operation Althea and in EU missions; we have been involved bilaterally. We are holding a bilateral summit to try to encourage progress in the Balkans. Writ large, Britain has been significantly involved in the Balkans over that period.

You will remember that, when Foreign Secretary, William Hague made the Balkans a particular priority in his foreign policy, and in some ways that continues. It is not reflected in numbers in EU military missions, but in overall British foreign policy investment we have made a continuing contribution for 20 years. That is because it is important in many ways to the UK, not least as regards organised crime, the risk of smuggling of Kalashnikovs and so on. It is relevant to British security as well as to the EU's overall prosperity. Britain having made that commitment and having amassed considerable experience in the Balkans, I hope we continue to play a role in that area.

The Horn of Africa is very important. Having chosen to put effort into a region, we should sustain it. One of the problems of CSDP, and stabilisation work more generally, is that Western countries have enthusiasm for getting in and trying to reduce a crisis when it is of high political salience. Once it goes off the political agenda, interest drifts away to the next crisis. Structures are left in place, but they lose the political voltage going through them. Prime Minister David Cameron made Somalia a priority in the 2010-12 period. It is an area where Britain has historically—

Lord Horam: Do you think that should continue?

Lord Ricketts: I do. Your witnesses two weeks ago spoke about the fact that we are able to have EU missions in Somaliland and Puntland trying to make a contribution. That was unthinkable seven or eight years ago. You would have needed high levels of close protection to go anywhere in Somalia seven years ago. Given our Commonwealth interest in Kenya and Uganda, issues of regional stability and piracy in the Indian Ocean, we have interests and, having made a commitment, we should sustain it.

We also have interests in the Sahel. The French are leading, but the Sahel is a very significant area of Islamist terrorist risk, so, without putting in major resources, we should keep an engagement there as well.

Q82 **Lord Horam:** Does that mean you are in favour post Brexit of more involvement in what I might call CSDP missions and Europe generally? You said in an earlier response that one of the reasons Britain had not been involved was engagement in Afghanistan, Iraq and so forth. That is

now less of a factor, so in practice, despite coming out of the European Union, are we going to spend more time on European issues than we did in the past?

Lord Ricketts: I am not sure about “on European issues”, but obviously we will have the right to choose where we concentrate our effort. As I say, I hope that we will interpret ‘Global Britain’ to mean globally active and engaged in foreign policy and international peace and security, earning our role as a permanent member of the Security Council, and that we can choose in a sovereign way to put our effort into areas that are of importance to the UK. Some of the areas where the EU is engaged have been struggling and continue to struggle, and are ones that would merit Britain continuing to contribute.

In a way, leaving the EU makes it more important that Britain throws its weight into international peace and security efforts, not all through the EU. I would like to see us doing more in the UN. I am glad that we are doing more on forward deployment in NATO, for example, against the Russian threat there, but now that we do not have brigades deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq, we ought to have the capacity to do a bit more in those sorts of areas. I am avoiding looking at the former CDS, because I know CDSs do not like penny packets of forces distributed around the world, but we have the capacity to do a bit more than we have been doing, given that we were very heavily engaged in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Q83 **Baroness Suttie:** Moving on from Lord Horam’s question, in your RUSI report you say that post-Brexit Britain will have to work harder through bilateral contacts to influence EU decision-making. Following on from that, what impact, if any, do you think that leaving the CSDP will have on the Government as regards staff and financial resources? Do you think they would have to put more resources into Brussels and our bilateral diplomatic missions throughout the EU?

Lord Ricketts: The Brussels mission will change in shape because, instead of having dozens of experts sitting on EU committees shaping EU legislation, which we will not be doing, we will need to revert to more classic diplomacy, where people try to shape and influence from the outside, as many other countries do. Most other countries in the world have embassies or delegations in Brussels that are trying to shape and influence EU policy-making. We would have to do the same. We would have to work harder.

As we will not be at the table participating in decisions, some of which will none the less affect our interest, I agree that we will have to work harder in capitals to make sure that Paris, Berlin, Rome and all the others know what British views are, why and what the arguments are. It will not involve vast numbers of people, but we should be upping the staffing of the political side of embassies around the EU in compensation for not being a member of the EU. It is not significant numbers of people, but it will be an important incremental investment. Indeed, I think the FCO is already moving in that direction, to staff up the embassies a bit, because

we will have to operate as a third country in lobbying to have our view heard.

- Q84 **Lord Stirrup:** I was going to save this question until the end, but this is an appropriate moment. We have been talking about security and defence. You spoke earlier about the need to have specific arrangements for the UK to participate in debate if it is to be part of a CSDP mission, even though it does not sit at the table and vote at the end of it all. Of course, these missions occur in a wider foreign policy context, and those foreign policy debates are going on all the time, not just while there is a crisis. It seems to me that, if we want to do that in security and defence, we need the right level of engagement with the EU in wider foreign policy. Are you equally optimistic about the prospect of the UK being able to construct some kind of permanent co-operative arrangement with the EU at that higher level?

Lord Ricketts: I am certainly optimistic that we can do that. Having had 40 years' experience in the EU, knowing how the game works and being a major foreign policy player, we can certainly make sure that we have a continuing dialogue. We will not have a seat on the Political and Security Committee in Brussels, but we will know all the people, and we can work it from the outside. If we have something to offer by way of information, initiatives and political energy, we will be welcome as a third country with very much the same views, interests and values as EU Member States.

Quite a lot of it is up to us. The classic tools of EU foreign policy are perhaps its most powerful diplomatic card. I mentioned sanctions, and there is also the attractiveness of the EU to potential Member States. In most foreign policy areas, Britain and the EU will still have the same interests to pursue and it will make sense for Britain to work very closely with the EU, as well as working with the US, Commonwealth countries and others.

I am confident that we can have the access. It is then up to us to mobilise the political will, ideas and initiatives to be a serious player. My worry at the moment is that we are not doing that. There is so much political energy going into Brexit that we are not being an actively engaged enough political player. The Balkans summit is a very welcome demonstration of a wish to do that, and I would like to see more.

- Q85 **Lord Triesman:** How much does that depend on the personality of the Foreign Secretary?

Lord Ricketts: It depends on more than the personality of the Foreign Secretary. Every Foreign Secretary has their own agenda and priorities, and issues in which they take a personal interest. I am evading your temptation to comment on Boris Johnson in great detail. It depends on the whole attitude of the Prime Minister and the National Security Council and our appetite for putting in effort across the board on foreign and security policy.

The Foreign Secretary is one player in that but by no means the only one, which, as a former Minister of State in the Foreign Office, you know very

well. That is what we need. It is part of redefining what Britain is in the world after Brexit, which we are only in the foothills of doing.

- Q86 **Baroness Brown of Cambridge:** We will move on to UK-French co-operation. In your RUSI paper, you mention the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force with the French as a potential way to maintain our involvement in EU missions, and you say that the CJEF needs to do something to maintain momentum. It would be interesting to have your thoughts on how the CJEF and the EU might work in practice, and what would be the pros and cons of the UK being part of an EU mission through the French, so to speak.

Lord Ricketts: The Combined Joint Expeditionary Force proposal that has taken shape since the Lancaster House agreement with the French in 2010 is a very interesting and potentially useful piece of military capability. As members of the Committee know, it is not a standing force; it is a pool of forces from each of the armed services who train and exercise together and have developed a communications doctrine and got used to working with each other to a level of capability ready for serious high-intensity combat, if necessary. That is now close to being usable in a serious way.

My feeling is that, if it is not used and it sits on the shelf for 10 years, it will wither away, like so many other initiatives. I am thinking of EU battle groups that have never been used, or the famous Franco-German brigade that was never used. Without inventing reasons to use it, which would obviously be stupid, when a suitable opportunity comes along to draw some elements of it together into whatever shape of operation is needed, we should do that; we should be actively looking for that. It could be in NATO; it could be to make operational our commitments on forward deployment, for example. It is not quite what the CJEF was intended for, but it could be.

It could be through the UN, or it could be through the EU if there was some sort of stabilisation response that needed forces that could get into a country quickly, perhaps in conditions of some danger and risk. Not all EU countries are by any means ready to do that, but the British and French are; they are trained and exercised to do it. It would in effect be a joint contribution from one EU Member State and one non-EU Member State, but of a serious piece of military capability that does not really exist anywhere else in Europe, as far as I know. I hope we will be prepared to look at doing that. It could be very good for the UK-French defence co-operation relationship and for our relations with the EU.

Baroness Brown of Cambridge: But it would be relevant only to specific types of EU mission.

Lord Ricketts: Yes.

Baroness Brown of Cambridge: It is not a more general way for the UK to be involved.

Lord Ricketts: It is certainly not intended as a contribution to a standing force that is there for 10 years, and we take a six-monthly rotation. I see it more in the context of perhaps a new crisis of some kind. It need not be vast; for example, it could even be evacuation of citizens, and upwards from that on the intensity scale, but you never know. This world is full of surprises. If it was ever suitable for the EU to do that, the CJEF might be a vehicle for it.

Q87 **The Earl of Oxford and Asquith:** I would be interested to know whether you thought Brexit might lead to stimulation of UK-French bilateral security and defence relationships and co-operation. I was very interested in what you wrote recently about the possibility of a joint British-French review of deterrence policy, nuclear deterrence policy in particular.

We might argue that nuclear deterrence policy goes well beyond the scope of our CSDP operations review in this Committee, but there may be a case for saying that bilateral British-French relations, possibly even British-Spanish or British-German relations, automatically could, or perhaps should, play into a wider discussion of our contribution to a European common security and defence policy.

Lord Ricketts: I agree with that premise. Brexit does not alter the logic of UK-French defence co-operation, or indeed UK-German, UK-Italian or UK-Netherlands defence co-operation. The way Brexit happens could make it more or less difficult to build on that co-operation. If there is a very acrimonious and divisive Brexit, it can only have negative influence on the willingness of other countries to work with us. So far, that does not seem to be happening.

From the evidence of President Macron's summit at Sandhurst recently, he was very warm towards UK-French defence co-operation, quite rightly, because, seen from the professional side, which I know very well, the French armed forces are full of respect for the British Armed Forces and thoroughly enjoy working with us. They know that when the chips are down we are the two armed forces in Europe with the capacity to do the necessary work.

That is not true of most other EU Member States, if I can diplomatically put it like that. There is willingness to do that co-operation. I absolutely agree that, as part of our post-Brexit demonstration that we still intend to be a serious defence and security country, we should be working to develop UK-French defence co-operation, which has important areas of work.

The defence industrial area perhaps lies outside your immediate inquiry, although it is very important that new initiatives in the area of the European Defence Fund, and efforts by the Commission and others to make it more coherent, do not become protectionist and exclusive of UK contributions in the European defence industrial area. I am thinking of the work on the UK-French large drone programme, the operations we have talked about, such as the CJEF, and the nuclear area.

It is a fact that Britain and France are the two nuclear weapons powers in Europe. We are at a similar scale, albeit a very different scale from the Americans or Russians. We are affected by American and Russian announcements recently about their nuclear posture, but it is no secret that Britain and France have had a continuing dialogue for many years on nuclear deterrence issues. It would be a positive part of the modern UK-French defence relationship to talk together about the implications for us as medium-sized nuclear powers of the various developments, the threatening noises coming from Russia and so on. That would not be revolutionary; it would be a continuation of what has happened, but it would send an important signal in an area where Britain and France really are very closely allied, and still will be after Brexit.

The Chairman: Lord Ricketts, thank you very much. You have frictionlessly navigated the questions posed this morning. You started off by saying that when we began those missions the UK's ambition was high. What colleagues have gathered, and I have certainly taken away from this, is that you hope it continues to remain high even though we sit outside the EU post Brexit. Perhaps those who read this transcript will be minded to see how the tone of pure diplomacy can work in building the relationships that we will definitely need once we exit.

Thank you very much for coming in this morning. It has been an extremely helpful and insightful session for us. As I said earlier, we will send you the transcript and wait for its return.

Lord Ricketts: Thank you for the chance to contribute to a very important inquiry.