

Security: The UK should not relinquish power by voting for a Brexit

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With only a few days to go until the UK's referendum on EU membership, both sides of the campaign are making their final appeals to the electorate. [Gijs de Vries](#) writes that the UK has played a leading role at the EU level in efforts to tackle terrorism, ensure security, and deal with external threats such as the Iranian nuclear programme and Russia's annexation of Crimea. He argues that Brexit would leave British citizens less secure, Europe weaker, and the UK a smaller country on the global stage.



On 11 March 2004, terrorists attacking Madrid's Atocha train station claimed 191 victims. Two weeks later I started work as the European Union's first Counter-Terrorism Coordinator. On 7 July 2005, the London bombings claimed 52 lives. The European Union needed to respond. At that time the UK held the EU Council's Presidency, and the British government took the lead.

EU ministers adopted the European Union's Counter-Terrorism Strategy which Home Secretary Charles Clark and I had prepared and which applies to this day. Dozens of concrete measures followed, from European action to disrupt terrorist financing to European sharing of strategic intelligence. By providing leadership to the European Union the UK increased its own security and that of its partners.

That leadership continues. Europol, under its British director Bob Wainwright, plays a key role in the fight against terrorism and money laundering. Europol and Eurojust cracked down on the Kurdish terrorist organisation Rawti Shax, headed by Mullah Krekar. Thirteen suspected leaders were arrested in simultaneous operations in Finland, Germany, Italy, Norway, Switzerland and the UK.

Europol also helps Britain to fight illegal migration. Last year police from Belgium, the Czech Republic, and Germany helped the UK disrupt a network smuggling irregular migrants into Britain, while the National Crime Agency joined forces with police in Austria, Greece, and Sweden, and arrested a leading migrant smuggler in Liverpool.

Britain successfully uses the EU to fight crime. In April Scottish and Romanian police disrupted a network trafficking Romanian sex workers to Scotland. In February, Europol, with British support, broke up an international ring of money mules – illegal money traffickers. In December a British suspected drug trafficker was extradited to France after being arrested on a European Arrest Warrant in the Costa del Sol – the result of two years of investigation by the National Crime Agency and its European partners. That same month the Metropolitan Police Cyber Crime Unit helped break up a European cybercrime network.

EU databases help to keep Britain safe. If it leaves, the UK will lose access to Eurodac, the EU database of asylum seekers' and irregular migrant's fingerprints. It will also lose access to the EU's Prüm database of DNA, fingerprints and vehicle information. Britain will have to fall back on Interpol's much less efficient systems. When the West Yorkshire Police undertook an investigation through Interpol it took two and a half months for a match to be reported. In the meantime costs spiralled to £250,000. Under the EU's Prüm system, a fingerprint search takes 24 hours, a DNA search takes 15 minutes and vehicle data are delivered in 10 seconds.

The EU is playing a growing role in crisis management, often under British leadership. In Bosnia the EU took over NATO's peacekeeping role. Off the coast of Somalia the EU anti-piracy mission has reduced the number of hostages by 96 per cent and the number of vessels seized by 100 per cent. Operation Commander of the EU Naval Force Somalia is Major General Martin Smith; the operation is directed from Norwood, UK.

While bilateral, operational intelligence exchange between MI5, MI6, GCHQ and its European partners is unlikely to be much affected, leaving the EU would deprive British intelligence agencies from access to the EU Intelligence Analysis Centre (EU INTCEN). INTCEN's mission is to provide intelligence analyses and early warnings to the EU and its member states, including in the fight against terrorism. The UK would also lose access to the intelligence directorate of the EU military staff.

An Iranian nuclear bomb would be highly dangerous. The UK has been instrumental in getting the EU to speak with one voice on relations with Iran. It has done the same for relations with Russia. Again, working through the EU has enhanced British influence and prestige.



Of course ad hoc arrangements could be worked out with the EU that might preserve some role for the UK in the institutions it would have chosen to leave – from Europol to the European Satellite Centre or the European Defence Agency. But Britain could no longer expect to play a leading role.

On 18 March 2014, Russia militarily annexed the Ukrainian territory of Crimea. ISIS and similar groups pose a deadly threat. Shrinking defence budgets, spent in duplication, erode Europe's security. To protect its citizens in the years to come the EU needs more British engagement, not less.

By providing leadership to the EU the UK has served British interests well. The key to this success has been Britain's willingness to share some of its sovereignty with other EU countries. In today's world isolation is no longer splendid, if it ever was.

No country has ever relinquished power voluntarily. For the UK to leave the EU would leave British citizens less secure, Europe weaker, and the UK a smaller country.

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