

# Britain signs up to Macron military pact

THE Ministry of Defense has signed up to a new European military force.



UK's Ministry of Defense has signed up for EU military force - GETTY

The European Intervention Initiative was formally launched yesterday at a ceremony in Luxembourg after being proposed last September by France's President Emmanuel Macron, who argued for a European force that could act independently of NATO and the US.

He said Europe needed to be able to provide a rapid military response to possible conflicts on its borders. Defense minister Earl Howe joined counterparts from France, Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, the Netherlands, Spain and Portugal in signing a "letter of intent", supporting the multinational alliance.

Supporters claim the initiative will operate outside of the EU's military structures, allowing the UK to take part after Brexit next year.

However, Eurosceptic campaigners raised concern last night.

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Veterans for Britain, a campaign group backed by former military chiefs, feared the move could be a cover for the UK to be dragged into a future EU defense force.

Lee Rotherham, executive director of the group, said: "We're told that the EII is not an EU initiative, but that is not correct.

"Mr Macron said it is 'one of the six keys of European sovereignty' which allows the 'full integration of EU armed forces'.

"Once again, MPs are being side-lined by civil servants.

"MPs need to understand that the other nations in this project have signed up to a centralized EU framework. This already binds in the European Commission's authority."

A Government spokesman said: "While our relationship with the EU is changing, we have been clear that we are unconditionally committed to European security.

"We are strongest together and already work with our European allies as part of Nato, the cornerstone of our defense."

Despite its departure, Britain seeks a security treaty with the EU by 2019, eager to keep access to its databases, arms deals and share intelligence.

Many EU countries support the idea.

A separate EU defense alliance - the Permanent Structured Cooperation - is also being set up, but will exclude UK.

Separately, Spain was yesterday confirmed to take over Britain's command of an EU maritime mission that combats Somali pirates off the Horn of Africa.

It will assume the role on March 30, 2019 - the very day after Britain's EU exit.

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