

UK and EU Advance Defence Partnership Talks with Focus on Security and Industry Access

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The United Kingdom and the European Union are continuing formal discussions on a wide-ranging security and defence partnership, with negotiations centring on industrial access and joint strategic priorities. The talks follow a framework agreement reached earlier this year, but key points, such as participation in EU defence funding, remain unresolved.

At the heart of the discussions is the Security and Defence Partnership, agreed in principle at the EU–UK summit in May. The arrangement outlines ambitions for regular dialogue on emerging threats, deeper collaboration on cyber and maritime security, and a coordinated stance on international sanctions. While the partnership avoids binding legal commitments, it signals a return to more structured cooperation between the UK and its European neighbours following years of post-Brexit disengagement.

One of the most pressing issues is the UK's exclusion from the Security Action for Europe (SAFE), the European Union's flagship €150 billion defence funding programme. Under current conditions, non-EU countries can only participate if they meet strict regulatory requirements and enter formal agreements. UK defence firms, many of which play a vital role in aerospace, cyber, and advanced manufacturing, risk being sidelined from lucrative contracts that support high-skilled jobs and domestic innovation. Industry leaders have called for urgent clarity, warning that continued uncertainty may put British firms at a disadvantage in the European market.

Despite broad agreement on security cooperation, progress is being hampered by unrelated EU demands. Sources indicate that Brussels, influenced by French interests, is tying defence talks to concessions on fishing rights and youth mobility arrangements. This approach has raised concerns among defence analysts and UK stakeholders, who argue that strategic security should not be used as a bargaining chip in broader political negotiations.

The current Labour government has expressed support for deeper defence cooperation, though critics question whether it will push back

firmly enough against political conditionality that may compromise UK interests. Some within the defence sector are urging ministers to prioritise industrial access and strategic autonomy over diplomatic optics.

A final agreement is expected to be pursued ahead of the next EU summit. If successful, the UK could re-establish a meaningful role in joint European military initiatives, including procurement, intelligence-sharing, and capability development. With rising global threats and the evolving nature of warfare, securing a balanced and practical agreement may prove critical to Britain's long-term security and defence industry competitiveness.