**SPEECH BY THE BISHOP OF PORTSMOUTH, the Rt Rev Christopher Foster**

**House of Lords, 15th May 2019**

**DEBATE ON COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY (CSDP) MISSIONS AND OPERATIONS (Report stage)**

My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Dannatt, has just reminded us that none of us participating in this debate can forget that we will shortly mark the 75th anniversary of what must surely be the most defining day in Europe in living memory: D-Day.

That has special significance for the city of Portsmouth, and indeed the whole ​diocese I serve. As a result, we will have the pleasure—I think—of welcoming the President of the United States into our midst as part of the commemorations.

Memories of D-Day are long in Portsmouth, and these are memories of which we can all be justly proud. Perhaps the most powerful memory is of those young men who crossed the channel in a storm to face another storm. It was a mighty army; a staggering 156,000 men were landed on D-Day itself. That represents a force just under double the size of the British Army today.

It is instructive to dig into that number, because the army that crossed the channel to France consisted of men from no fewer than 12 nations. The logistics of such an endeavour rather boggle the mind, but those people made it work. It is a powerful reminder of what can be done when, despite difference, we work in concert with partners and allies for the common good—the good not just of the United Kingdom but for a more united world.

More than that, it reminds us of a moment when Britain incontrovertibly acted as a force for good and accumulated colossal moral authority for decades thereafter. With considerable regret I worry that we risk squandering such moral authority as we currently enjoy.

I turn to the CSDP and the committee’s excellent report. Of course, it does not consider interventions on the scale of the Normandy landings, but it shows the good that can be achieved by deploying British expertise and know-how in, as paragraph 90 says “lower-intensity crisis management, such as capacity building, reform and training”.

The committee rightly draws attention, as others have, to the important success of Operation Atalanta, a signal success in suppressing piracy using Type 23 frigates well known to Portsmouth. This has seen a reduction in reported pirate attacks from 176 in 2011 to just nine in the past three years, according to the Government’s response to the committee.

The tragedy—and it is a tragedy—is that we might be willing and able to participate in future operations, but our leverage in planning them will be more limited. We risk looking from the outside in. That is something on which the committee rightly focused, not least in noting that the Government’s aspirations for their co-operation with the EU on the CSDP is some distance beyond the current third-country model.

The Government’s response acknowledged that the model allows operational but not strategic involvement, and goes on to note that the overall initiative to strengthen strategic partnerships with third countries is “ongoing”. I would be interested to hear the noble Earl’s analysis of how it has gone on and how such aspirations will become reality.

That we even have to ask such questions is a source of sadness. It would be a tragedy for the influence we have to be lost. We have perhaps punched above our weight; we now risk punching below it. Our soft power risks being that much softer. But “soft power” is perhaps a misnomer.

The CSDP is not about projecting power: it is about doing good and doing the right thing. Limiting our capacity—indeed self-limiting it—above all risks those whom we seek to serve: those ​at risk from instability, those subject to violence or those who live in fear of violence. It risks ordinary people who just want to get on with their lives.

Recently, someone told me that they were “Brexited out”. It is a new verb, in increasingly common usage, and I am wholly in sympathy with those who suffer from the debilitating effects of the syndrome. But Brexit, or being “Brexited out”, does not provide a reason to turn away. We must engage and serve the wider world. We must not let Brexit dilute our moral purpose.

Lest we forget, our moral purpose is lived out in the nitty-gritty of how we participate in endeavours such as the CSDP. Lest we forget, deploying British expertise and know-how within a multinational enterprise can be a tremendous force for good. Lest we forget, we have a duty as a developed, affluent nation to be a force for good.