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Brexit and the return of European militarism

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The European Union has responded to the UK referendum vote to withdraw from the EU, and the resulting intensification of the political, economic and social crisis of Europe, by calling for the militarization of the continent and buildup of its internal security forces. Since the announcement of the result 11 days ago, a number of high-level foreign policy papers have been published that advocate the transformation of the EU into a military alliance with expanded powers of internal repression.

At the first EU summit without British participation, held last Wednesday in Brussels, the 27 remaining EU government heads agreed on a paper authored by the EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini, titled “Global Strategy for European Foreign and Security Policy.” At the heart of the paper is the argument that the EU must become an aggressive world power capable of intervening militarily and, if necessary, waging war independently of NATO and the United States.

The new global strategy document acknowledges the role of NATO in protecting the EU states from enemy attacks. Nevertheless, it states that Europe “must be better equipped, trained and organised to contribute decisively to such collective efforts, as well as to act autonomously if and when necessary.”

The document provides some insight into the measures being prepared behind the backs of the European population. Military capabilities are to be improved in a “concerted and cooperative effort.” That this will require a further diversion of resources from social needs is alluded to: “Developing and maintaining defence capabilities requires both investments and optimising the use of national resources through deeper cooperation.”

The paper makes clear that there is no geographical limit to the potential reach of an EU military force. The EU reserves the right to intervene not only in nearby regions such as North Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe, but anywhere in the world.

The declared interests of the EU include “ensuring open and protected ocean and sea routes critical for trade and access to natural resources.” To this end “the EU will contribute to global maritime security, building on its experience in the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, and exploring possibilities in the Gulf of Guinea, the South China Sea and the Straits of Malacca.”

The drive toward European militarism is pushed above all by Berlin. In an official statement released in recent days, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier expressly thanked Mogherini “for her commitment and vision in the joint development of the ‘Global Strategy.’” He was pleased to find “key elements of German peace policy in it.”

The thrust of Steinmeier’s “peace policy”—more accurately, war policy—is well established. Together with German President Joachim Gauck, he has been at the forefront of the campaign for German rearmament. At the Munich Security Conference in 2014, he declared that Germany was “too big merely to comment on world affairs from the sidelines,” adding that “Germany must be ready for earlier, more decisive and more substantive engagement in the foreign and security policy sphere.”

Then, on June 13 of this year, he published an article in *Foreign Affairs* magazine titled “Germany’s New Global Role,” in which he not only declared that Germany was “a major European power,” but also questioned the dominant role of the United States.

Now, the Foreign Ministry in Berlin is using the UK referendum result to advance Germany’s great power aims. In a paper entitled “A strong Europe in a world of uncertainties,” published last weekend by Steinmeier and his French counterpart, Jean-Marc Ayrault, the British withdrawal from the EU is hailed as an opportunity to focus “our joint efforts on those challenges that can only be addressed by common European answers.”

The Brexit vote and the latest German initiatives have alarmed leading representatives of US imperialism. Last Friday, Robert D. Kaplan, an influential member of the US foreign policy establishment and architect of the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, warned in a column in the *Wall Street Journal*, “The returning geopolitical chaos is akin, in some respects, to the 1930s.”

In the article headlined “How to Crash Putin’s Brexit Party,” he asserts, “... Brexit has undermined a key goal of British geopolitics going back hundreds of years: preventing any one power from dominating the Continent. Yet now Germany is empowered to do just that.”

Kaplan sees the post-World War II alliance between the US, Britain and Germany in jeopardy. “Germany and Britain lately have been allies,” he writes, and “a long line of German chancellors, dating from Konrad Adenauer, have reflected Atlanticism and an understanding of Germany’s unique responsibilities to European peace and stability. Future chancellors may not.”

Germany, he warns, “could strike a separate bargain with Russia or turn inward toward populist nationalism...”.

Kaplan’s immediate concern is that Brexit could undermine US preparations for war with Russia. “The more that Europe fractures,” he frets, “the less resolve there will be to invoke NATO’s Article 5, which states that an attack on one member is an attack on all.” His proposed counter-strategy: “Great Britain should reinvigorate its alliance with America. Acting together, the two nations can still project power on the European mainland up to the gates of Russia.”

No one should underestimate the historical and political significance of such statements. One hundred years after the bloodbath on the Somme and 75 years after the launching of the German war of annihilation against the Soviet Union, the contradictions of capitalism are erupting once again, threatening to unleash a new world war between the great powers that would eclipse the horrors of the First and Second World Wars.

The working class must adopt its own strategy to counter the efforts of the imperialist powers to save the capitalist order through war. As the International Committee of the Fourth International emphasized in its statement “Socialism and the struggle against war”: the anti-war strategy of the working class must be developed “as the negation of imperialist nation-state geopolitics,” basing its strategy on the unification and mobilization of its forces internationally to resolve the “global crisis through social revolution.”