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Germany, France propose EU military alliance before post-Brexit summit

By Alex Lantier

13 September 2016

In the run-up to Friday's European Union (EU) summit in Bratislava, Berlin and Paris are pushing to transform the EU into a military alliance capable of large-scale operations abroad or at home.

A six-page proposal, drafted by defense ministers Ursula von der Leyen of Germany and Jean-Yves Le Drian of France, was shown to the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* and *Le Figaro*. Its aims are to use the exit from the EU of Britain, which, like the United States, has traditionally opposed European military alliances separate from the NATO alliance, to integrate remaining EU countries' armed forces. The remaining EU countries kicked Britain out of the Bratislava meeting, which is therefore technically an "informal" EU summit.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President François Hollande launched talks on this proposal in early July, just after the Brexit vote. "It is high time to reinforce our solidarity and European defense capabilities in order to more effectively protect our borders and EU citizens," the document declares, according to *Le Figaro*. "Given that the United Kingdom has decided to leave the EU, we will now have to act with [the remaining] 27 member states."

"For many years, [EU military] cooperation failed in the face of opposition from the USA, who feared it would compete with the NATO alliance," wrote Stefan Kornelius in the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*. "The Brexit has now changed this situation in one blow. There will be no more

opposition from Britain, though it formally still belongs to the EU. Two states suddenly have seen their chance: Germany and France are letting their ambitions emerge and playing the role of the avant-garde.”

The aims of Berlin and Paris are utterly reactionary. Staggered by Brexit and the deep unpopularity in the working class of the EU’s social austerity agenda, the European ruling class is trying to hold the EU together by arming it to the teeth against enemies abroad and the working class at home.

The von der Leyen-Le Drian document assigns responsibility for planning EU military operations to the Eurocorps, a joint unit with German, Belgian, French, Italian, Luxembourg, and Polish troops, that is headquartered in Strasbourg. It also calls for joint EU military medical command, logistics facilities and officer training programs, and the creation of a unified EU military headquarters.

It proposes to unify EU defense industries around developing key technologies. “The objective is to keep European partners from buying systems ‘off the shelf,’ mainly from the United States, thus undermining the EU’s strategic autonomy,” *Le Figaro* writes. “Efforts should focus on four key technologies: in-flight refueling, satellite communications, cyber-security, and drones.”

This makes a mockery of von der Leyen’s and Le Drian’s claim that their proposal is about border defense. Such technologies grant military capabilities—like strategic bombing, long-distance reconnaissance, cyber warfare, and drone murder—that are unnecessary for routine border security operations. They are critical, however, to waging aggressive wars of colonial conquest like the illegal US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, or wars with other major world powers.

Workers in Europe and beyond have nothing to gain from such policies, as two decades in which Washington and its allies expended trillions of dollars on neo-colonial wars from Afghanistan to Iraq and Africa, costing millions of lives, have shown. Spending trillions of euros to rival US imperialism militarily would ruin a continent devastated by nearly a decade of deep austerity. As tensions escalate between NATO and Russia in Syria, Ukraine, and across Eastern Europe, it would set the stage for a war threatening the very survival of humanity.

The danger of a new world war between nuclear powers is openly discussed in ruling circles. In April, Britain’s *Telegraph* carried an article titled “Here’s how World War III could start tomorrow.”

“As in the past, it is perfectly possible that a third world war could start with a small event, or even by accident,” it wrote. “Indeed, the skies over Syria are starting to get dangerously crowded, with Russian jets flying near US planes on bombing runs, and sparring with NATO air defenses in neighboring Turkey. Perhaps it could happen at sea, when a Japanese or American ship scrapes paint with its Chinese Navy counterpart amid the reefs in the Pacific that are being militarized as part of Asia’s current arms race.”

The proposals of von der Leyen and Le Drian show the remaining EU states are also preparing for such a war—and, as well, to violently suppress opposition in the working class at home.

European workers are key targets of the tiny cabals devising EU policy, which fear mass social anger. In its “Perspectives for European Defense 2020,” the EU Institute for Security Studies bluntly declared that a key task of EU military action was the “protection of the rich of this world from the tensions and problems of the impoverished.”

“As the proportion of the world population that is impoverished and frustrated continues to increase, the tensions between this world and the world of the rich will increase,” it declared, adding: “Technology contracts the world into a small town that is on the verge of a revolution. While we have to deal with an increasingly integrated upper stratum, we are at the same time confronted with the growth of explosive tensions in the poorest lower stratum.”

This has already found practical expression in France. Tens of thousands of troops and riot police are on the streets under the state of emergency declared after the 13 November 2015 terror attacks in Paris. The PS has used the state of emergency as a pretext to violently attack mass protests against its deeply unpopular labor law, which imposes draconian social cuts on workers.

As the major NATO powers seek to arm themselves to the teeth, they raise tensions among themselves to explosive heights. The last time that the EU pushed aggressively for an independent military capability from the United States—calling in the 1990s and early 2000s for a “multipolar” world after the Stalinist dissolution of the USSR—bitter conflicts erupted with Washington.

When French and German officials opposed the US invasion of Iraq, it plunged relations with Washington into a historic crisis. Then-US National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice proposed to “punish France, ignore Germany, forgive Russia.”

Significantly, the current push for an independent EU military policy comes amid deep tensions between Washington and Europe. Two weeks ago, top officials in Germany and France called for an indefinite suspension of trade talks with the United States. Yesterday, French President François Hollande took the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the September 11 terror attacks to deliver an unusual attack on US war policy.

On his Facebook page, he wrote: “The response of the American administration to these attacks, planned from inside the country and methodically executed, far from eliminating the terror menace, spread it over a larger area, especially in Iraq.” France “legitimately refused to join the intervention, and even condemned it,” Hollande continued, but “it nonetheless suffered from the consequences of the chaos it produced.”

While EU-US tensions are erupting, the proposed EU military alliance is itself shot through with explosive contradictions. Three times in the last 150 years, Germany and France have fought each other in major wars, and Berlin’s emergence as the “taskmaster” of Europe, leading the formulation of EU austerity policies across the continent, has raised tensions between the EU powers to unprecedented heights.

The *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* ruled out the possibility that the EU could jointly decide on military action, writing: “On military intervention, and on questions of life and death, national sovereignty is holy for all EU states, including for Germany and its parliament.”

Retired Italian General Vincenzo Camporini told *Defense News* that he doubted France would fully submit its military—and particularly its nuclear forces, the sole legally declared nuclear arsenal in the post-Brexit EU—to EU approval. British opposition to an EU army allowed other European states to also drag their feet, he said, “Now the excuse is no longer there; who is ready to go forward? I believe the Germans are willing, although I have doubts about France because of its nuclear deterrent. Will that be shared? It is a very delicate political issue.”