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Making NATO Defunct: EU Military Force intended to Reduce US Influence in Europe?

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An EU military force is being justified as protection from Russia, but it may also be a way of reducing US influence as the EU and Germany come to loggerheads with the US and NATO over Ukraine.

While speaking to the German newspaper Welt am Sonntag, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker announced the time has come for the creation of a unified EU military force. Juncker used rhetoric about *"defending the values of the European Union"* and nuanced anti-Russian polemics to promote the creation of a European army, which would convey a message to Moscow.

The polemics and arguments for an EU army may be based around Russia, but the idea is really directed against the US. The underlying story here is the tensions that are developing between the US, on one side, and the EU and Germany, on the other side. This is why Germany reacted enthusiastically to the proposal, putting its support behind a joint EU armed force.

Previously, the EU military force was seriously mulled over during the buildup to the illegal Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003 when Germany, France, Belgium, and Luxembourg met to discuss it as an alternative to a US-dominated NATO. The idea has been resurrected again under similar circumstances. In 2003, the friction was over the US-led invasion of Iraq. In 2015, it is because of the mounting friction between Germany and the US over the crisis in Ukraine.

Re-think in Berlin and Paris?

To understand the latest buildup behind the call for a common EU military, we have to look at the events stretching from November 2014 until March 2015. They started when Germany and France began showing signs that they were having second thoughts about the warpath that the US and NATO were taking them down in Ukraine and Eastern Europe.

Franco-German differences with the US began to emerge after Tony Blinken, US President Barack Obama's former Deputy National Security Advisor and current Deputy Secretary of State and the number two diplomat at the US Department of State, announced that the Pentagon was going to send arms into Ukraine at a hearing of the US Congress about his nomination, that was held on November 19, 2014. As the Fiscal Times put it, *"Washington treated Russia and the Europeans to a one-two punch when it revealed its thinking about arming Ukraine."*

The Russian Foreign Ministry responded to Blinken by announcing that if the Pentagon

poured weapons into Ukraine, Washington would not only seriously escalate the conflict, but it would be a serious signal from the US that will change the dynamics of the conflict inside Ukraine.

Realizing that things could escalate out of control, the French and German response was to initiate a peace offence through diplomatic talks that would eventually lead to a new ceasefire agreement in Minsk, Belarus under the *"Normandy Format"* consisting of the representatives of France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine.

Pessimists may argue that France and Germany opted for diplomacy in February 2015, because the rebels in East Ukraine or Novorossiya, as they call it, were beating Kiev's forces. In other words, the primary motivation of diplomacy was to save the government in Kiev from collapsing without a fair settlement in the East. This may be true to an extent, but the Franco-German pair also does not want to see Europe turned into an inferno that reduces everyone in it to ashes.

Trans-Atlantic differences were visible at the Munich Security Conference in February. US Senator Robert Corker, the chair of the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, commented during a question-and-answer session with German Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel that it was believed in the US Congress that Berlin was preventing Washington from publicly ratcheting up US and NATO military aid to the authorities in Kiev.

Chancellor Merkel was explicit in her response when she told Senator Corker that the simmering crisis in Ukraine could not be resolved by military means and the US approach would go nowhere and make the situation in Ukraine much worse. When Merkel was pressed on militarizing the conflict in Ukraine by the British MP Malcolm Rifkind, the chair of the Intelligence and Security Committee of the British Parliament, she said that sending more arms to Kiev was useless and unrealistic. Merkel told the British MP *"to look reality in the eye."* The German Chancellor also pointed out that there cannot be security in Europe without Russia.

Germany's public position at the Munich Security Conference flew in the face of US demands to get its European allies to militarize the conflict in Ukraine. While US Secretary of State John Kerry went out of his way at the gathering to reassure the media and the public that there was no rift between Washington and the Franco-German side, it was widely reported that the warmonger Senator John McCain lost his cool while he was in Bavaria. Reportedly, he called the Franco-German peace initiative *"Moscow bullshit."* He would then criticize Angela Merkel in an interview with the German channel Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), which would prompt calls by German MP Peter Tauber, the secretary-general of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), for an apology from Senator McCain.

German resentment of US control of NATO

Back in February, Bloomberg wrote:

> "For all the alarmist rhetoric about Russian barbarians at the gate, NATO countries are reluctant to put their money where their mouth is. Only the countries closest to Russia's borders are increasing their military spending this year, while other, bigger ones are making cuts. Regardless of what their leaders say about Vladimir Putin, they don't seem to believe he's a real threat to the West."

Washington, however, did not give up. When the Franco-German peace offensive began in February, General Philip Breedlove — who is the supreme commander of NATO's military forces — said in Munich that *"I don't think that we should preclude out of hand the possibility of the military option"* in Ukraine. General Breedlove is a US Air Force flag officer who takes his orders from the US government, thus subordinating NATO's military structure to US command. While Berlin and Paris were trying to deescalate, Washington was upping the ante using Breedlove and NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg.

After speaking to the Armed Services Committee of the US House of Representatives, General Breedlove would claim that Russian aggression was increasing in Ukraine. Germany, however, would rebut Breedlove's statements calling them *"dangerous propaganda."*

"German leaders in Berlin were stunned. They didn't understand what Breedlove was talking about. And it wasn't the first time. Once again, the German government, supported by intelligence gathered by the Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND), Germany's foreign intelligence agency, did not share the view of NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR)," Der Spiegel reported on March 6.

While Berlin has tried to downplay the reports about a rift with NATO over General Breedlove's misleading comments, German Foreign Minister Steinmeier candidly admitted that it was true that the Germans disagreed with the US and NATO while he was in Latvia on March 7. What Steinmeier actually did was diplomatically rebuk and dismiss both the US and NATO statements about the *'Russian aggression'* in Ukraine.

In Latvia, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini added her voice to Steinmeier's. She told reporters in Riga that the EU will pursue a realistic approach with Moscow and will not be pushed or pulled by anyone into a confrontational relationship with Russia. This was a tacit message to Washington: the EU realizes that there can be no peace in Europe without Russia and does not want to be positioned as a US pawn against Moscow.

Destabilizing Eurasia

Germany itself is the ultimate prize for the US in the conflict in Ukraine, because Berlin has huge sway in the direction that the EU turns. The US will continue to stoke the flames in Ukraine to destabilize Europe and Eurasia. It will do what it can to prevent the EU and Russia from coming together and forming a *"Common Economic Space"* from Lisbon to Vladivostok, which is dismissed as some type of alternative universe in the Washington Beltway.

The Fiscal Times put it best about the different announcements by US officials to send arms to Ukraine. *"Given the choreographed rollout, Washington analysts say, in all likelihood this is a public-opinion exercise intended to assure support for a weapons program that is already well into the planning stages,"* the news outlet wrote on February 9.

After the Munich Security Conference it was actually revealed that clandestine arms shipments were already being made to Kiev. Russian President Vladimir Putin would let this be publicly known at a joint press conference with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban in Budapest when he said that weapons were already secretly being sent to the Kiev authorities.

In the same month a report, named Preserving Ukraine's Independence, Resisting Russian Aggression: What the United States and NATO Must Do, was released arguing for the need to send arms to Ukraine — ranging from spare parts and missiles to heavy personnel — as a means of ultimately fighting Russia. This report was authored by a triumvirate of leading US think-tanks, the Brookings Institute, the Atlantic Council, and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs — the two former being from the detached ivory tower *"think-tankistan"* that is the Washington Beltway. This is the same clique that has advocated for the invasions of Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Iran.

Watch out NATO! United EU military in the horizon?

It is in the context of divisions between the EU and Washington that the calls for an EU military force are being made by both the European Commission and Germany.

The EU and Germans realize there is not much they can do to hamper Washington as long as it has a say in EU and European security. Both Berlin and a cross-section of the EU have been resentful of how Washington is using NATO to advance its interests and to influence the events inside Europe. If not a form of pressure in behind the door negotiations with Washington, the calls for an EU military are designed to reduce Washington's influence in Europe and possibly make NATO defunct.

An EU army that would cancel out NATO would have a heavy strategic cost for the US. In this context, Washington would lose its western perch in Eurasia. It *"would automatically spell the end of America's participation in the game on the Eurasian chessboard,"* in the words of former US national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski.

The intelligentsias in the US are already alarmed at the risks that an EU military would pose to American influence. The American Jewish Committee's influential Commentary Magazine, which is affiliated to the neo-cons in the Washington Beltway, has asked, as the title of the article by Seth Mandel illustrates, *"Why Is Germany Undermining NATO?"* This is while the Washington Examiner has asked, as the title of the article by Hoskingson says, *"Whatever happened to US influence?"*

This is why Washington's vassals in the EU — specifically Britain, Poland, and the three Baltic states — have all been very vocal in their opposition to the idea of a common EU military force. While Paris has been reluctant to join the calls for an EU army, French opposition politician Marine Le Pen has announced that the time has come for France to come out of the shadow of the United States.

British Prime Minister David Cameron's government responded to Jean-Claude Juncker by slamming his idea as an outrageous fantasy, declaring that the military is a national responsibility and not an EU responsibility. Poland and Latvia also reacted skeptically towards the proposal. These statements all serve US interests in preserving NATO as a tool for its influence in Europe and Eurasia.

10 Downing Street has contradicted itself about the military being a national issue and not a collective issue. Just as recently as 2010, London signed treaties to essentially create joint naval units with France and to share aircraft carriers in what is an amalgamation of the military. Moreover, the British military and military-industrial sectors are all integrated to varying degrees with the US.

There are some very important questions here. Are the calls for an EU military, meant to pressure the US or is there a real attempt to curb Washington's influence inside Europe? And are moves being made by Berlin and its partners to evict Washington from Europe by deactivating NATO through a common EU military?

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