

<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article323>



Europe

The threat of military Europe

- IV Online magazine - 1997 - IV290 - Europe special - June 1997 -

Publication date: Saturday 28 June 1997

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

The Euromilitarisation of the EU is an undeniable reality, even if it is being done discretely and taking forms that are still uneven and incomplete.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/eurofighter.jpg>]

The Eurofighter - cost will be 100 million euros

Most progress is being made in the areas of bilateral co-operation between armies and military industry. On the institutional level, there are still major obstacles to changes which will involve a real transfer of national sovereignty to the supranational level. But behind the scenes, a series of measures have been taken, whose goal is to give the EU a more coherent, operational capacity for intervention. The Amsterdam Intergovernmental Conference is supposed to give its seal of approval to this dangerous development.

European military unification is been haunted by the memory of a traumatic setback in 1954, when the attempt to create a European Defence Community (under NATO auspices) failed spectacularly. The goal was German rearmament, which the US government had favoured since the late 1940s, as part of its strategy of tension and military confrontation with the USSR. But Europe, above all France, was not ready to see Germany rearmed, because of still-painful war wounds, and a desire to hold back Germany's spectacular economic recovery.

The only institutional result of that period was the Western European Union (WEU), an empty shell dozing from one parliamentary gathering to the next, without either powers or resources. German rearmament happened anyway.

The same powerful contradictions have determined military co-operation ever since. The military question is part of each member country's foreign policy. And foreign policy is a powerful means for opening markets, securing access to raw materials, protecting foreign direct investments and, more broadly, defending and extending each country's political sphere of influence. Each of the EU's ruling classes would certainly like the EU to speak "with a single voice", but political rivalries and economic competition within the EU are always enough to brake any major surrender of national sovereignty.

This explains the cacophony of EU military policy during the Gulf War, the conflicts in ex-Yugoslavia, the Rwanda crisis, and elsewhere. Disunity, and the interests of national states has dominated, rather than some community spirit. These stronger national interests include the privileged ties between German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and former Soviet and Russian leader Mikhail Gorbachev, German ties with Croatia, French ties with Serbia, British ties with Bosnia (in tight alliance with the US), France's repeated solo operations: in the Middle East, nuclear testing in the Pacific; covert clashes in Africa between the US-British tandem and France-Belgium, and so on.

Nuclear weapons make all this even more complicated. Not only are they the quintessence of "global diplomacy", they are the supreme weapon, symbolising ultimate power over the planet, and requiring a single centre to take the extreme decision to drop the bomb.

Different histories

The EU's "big three" are differently situated in the world arena, largely because of their specific historical trajectories.

- France was a great neo-colonial power, but is now reduced to a second-rank capitalist country. It tries to make up for its weakness through a great measure of autonomy in foreign and military policy (with its own atom bomb, its overall military strength, and the quality and versatility of its army).
- Britain, no longer the world's greatest imperialist power, has linked its future to a "special relationship" with the US. While maintaining its own nuclear arms, it tries to keep its status as a power by following in the wake of the US, which it sees as the only force capable of guaranteeing global stability.
- Germany, defeated in World War Two, is now the EU's biggest economic power, and the third biggest economy in the world. But, for obvious historical reasons, Germany cannot express its economic strength on the political and military level. It still needs the US and EU to camouflage its diplomatic and military advances.

The new world situation is increasingly unstable. This, combined with the EU's progress, have given new life to discussions of "Europe's defence". This immediately poses the fundamental choice: either western Europe stays under the NATO umbrella, which assures US hegemony, or else the old continent acquires a substantial measure of operational, technological and financial autonomy through an independent structure, giving "muscles" to the WEU and making it the EU's armed wing.

The Eurocorps

Three developments on the purely military level have opened up new options. First is the voluntarist Franco-German effort, sealed by the creation of a joint military unit (the 50,000 man "Eurocorps") and of a "Common Defence Council" that brings the two countries' general staffs and experts together for regular, frequent meetings.

The lesson of the 1991 Gulf War has played a role: In that conflict the US imperial power reduced some countries (including France and Britain) to an auxiliary role, and relegated others (Germany and Japan) to the role of financial support. France accepted; Paris has since been retreating in the face of insidious attacks by its US competitor in its own African backyard (where an "Anglophone" north-south corridor now spans the continent).

Meanwhile, Germany has shaken off the restrictions on its army, imposed by the Allies and written into its constitution. The German army can now operate outside the country's borders. Hesitation and resistance from the German reformist left (Social Democrats and Greens) proved no match for humanitarian demagoguery, underpinned by the EU's impotence in ex-Yugoslavia, and political thrusts by US imperialism in Europe and the Mediterranean. However discrete, Germany's new military role is a highly significant turning point.

The military meets the market

Thirdly, globalisation has hit the military-industrial sector full-force, in Europe as well as the US. This has accelerated military-industrial co-operation and integration in the EU. This sector depends overwhelmingly on state intervention. No aspect, from research and development to marketing, escapes state command. Restructuring has been imposed due to drastic cutbacks in production (and employment) and budgetary restrictions (thanks to Maastricht).

The most advanced sectors, particularly those oriented towards aerospace, have come through relatively unscathed. But the classical arms industry is going through a major crisis. This explains the appeal, under cover of bi- or

multilateral intergovernmental co-operation, of bi- or multilateral joint ventures for the production of new weapons systems. In fact, programmes set in motion by the main European "cannon merchants" - Britain, France, Germany and Italy - are no longer to be counted on. We are seeing in this sector the silhouette of an emerging, authentic "European capital".

The real turning point was the Franco-German agreement signed in Nuremberg in November 1996. Prolonged, ad hoc co-operation gave way to the detailed definition of a genuine joint defence policy. This has consequences for both Franco-German relations and the EU. It is based on a double upheaval. France has accepted the end of a myth: the operational effectiveness of its independent nuclear arsenal. It has abandoned the equally illusory and ruinous perspective of an independent European defence founded on the French and British nuclear arsenals. Suddenly, France is re-joining the NATO military command.

France and Germany are joining Britain (which never had any doubts on this score) in placing their nuclear weapons, as a "complementary" force, under the US umbrella. Germany has broken the taboo and is giving itself the means to operate outside its borders, particularly in order to contribute to "stability in the Mediterranean basin". France and Germany "commit themselves to participating [together], in very varied forms, in crisis-management missions".

A European pillar in NATO

The perspective of transforming the WEU into the EU's independent armed wing has been given up for good, to be replaced with a "European pillar" within NATO. The reasons for this are strictly military, technological and financial. The complex organisational chart (the chain of command, division of geopolitical zones and material resources, operational leadership, etc.) that results from it will have to pass the practical test of reliability and effectiveness.

For the key EU countries, the way has thus been opened to move forwards together towards a growing complementarity in the fields of "means of command, intelligence, logistics, long-range transport, as well as education and training of personnel".

This military rapprochement is based on a mixture of supra-nationality and intergovernmentalism. The practical consequence will clearly be a military reinforcement of the EU, if ever the member states' political intentions should coincide. This substantial rapprochement on the military level requires a reinforcement of the "common foreign and security policy", which should be decided by "qualified majorities" rather than by unanimity, as presently. This is the counterpart of the "common police and judicial space", which goes together with military unification.

This advancing Euromilitarisation is a real danger. The danger is all the greater because fear of war and instability (in the EU's eastern and southern periphery), Europeanist ideology (against the US's new offensive spirit) and humanitarian hypocrisy towards the Third World have destroyed the peace movement of the 1980s, devastated the organisations and NGOs that were its backbone, and broken the opposition of the (political and intellectual) reformist left among the social democrats and Greens.

Demands

For all these reasons, we must begin a project of activist re-mobilisation and political rearmament, which must combine "old" slogans that have unfortunately lost none of their validity with new proposals:

The threat of military Europe

- Against NATO, particularly against its European pillar.
- Dissolve the Eurocorps, not in the name of national defence but in the name of anti-militarism.
- US 7th Fleet out of the Mediterranean.
- Reorientation of military research towards civilian, social goals.
- Drastic cuts in the military budget so as to meet social needs.
- Total, immediate and unconditional nuclear disarmament.
- Openness and public control over the whole weapons industry and more broadly over all military industry (orders, production, trade), so as to move towards peace conversion.
- Systematic demystification of military intervention under cover of humanitarian aid.
- Towards universal disarmament.