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As Trump lands in UK, US threatens break in NATO alliance over EU army

As US President Donald Trump arrived in Britain yesterday for a state visit and to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Normandy landings in World War II, reports emerged in the Spanish press of new US threats against plans to build a European Union (EU) army.

Bitter conflicts between Washington and its European imperialist allies over EU army plans already surfaced last month. The Spanish daily *El Pais* reported on May 13 that the Pentagon had written to EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini, warning that these plans were damaging US-EU relations. The London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies think tank published estimates that Europe might spend \$110 billion on naval forces and \$357 billion on land forces in a massive military build-up if Washington withdraws from the NATO alliance.

On Sunday night, *El Pais* published another article citing leaked transcripts of an “explosive” May 22 meeting between unnamed EU security officials and US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Michael Murphy. According to the paper, Murphy delivered “an ultimatum to Europe to rectify its defense plans.”

Murphy apparently threatened that if the EU did not change its military plans to allow US defense contractors to bid on EU contracts, Washington might not defend the EU against a hypothetical Russian attack. This breaches Article 5 of the Atlantic treaty, which states

that the NATO alliance must respond collectively to military aggression on any NATO member state.

In his May 22 remarks in Washington, Murphy took aim at the European Defense Fund (FDE) and PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation, the EU army's bureaucratic name). "If the language in legislation on the FDE and the guidelines of PESCO do not change," Murphy reportedly said, "then the EU will have to choose. Either it will give up on using the best technologies that exist, or it will have to develop its own."

Murphy bluntly accused the EU powers of misleading Washington regarding the nature of the PESCO plan: "The EU and many of its governments presented European defense initiatives as part of a European security policy, and we believed you." However, Murphy added, "At least some of you are developing an industrial policy under cover of a security policy."

In a sidebar, the Spanish paper noted the bitter struggle between US and European defense contractors over control of world arms markets. In 2016, US arms exports totaled €135 billion, dwarfing EU arms exports at €16 billion. It wrote, "The United States seems to fear a repeat of the phenomenon of Airbus," the Franco-German aerospace giant founded in 1969 to compete with US firm Boeing and that now "has grabbed 50 percent of the market from Boeing."

Murphy thrust aside EU officials' arguments that the EU army would be compatible with NATO, again accusing the EU of lying to Washington: "Some of the responses we have received are based on incorrect information. I want to be clear with you. The United States cannot support either the Fund or PESCO if they develop in the manner it seems they will, according to what the current legislative and regulatory texts clearly indicate."

According to *El Pais*, Murphy argued that "the West again faces, after the end of the Cold War, hostile nations." One of them, which Murphy apparently did not name but that *El Pais* identified as Russia, "has a physical border with the EU and constitutes a direct physical threat to its member states," Murphy declared.

El Pais cited Murphy as saying, "Any important crisis in Europe will inevitably require a common response with the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Norway." If the EU develops a separate defense industry, Murphy added, "our armies could become less inter-operational and could not fight together."

This was a barely veiled threat that continuing to build an EU army could lead to an all-out break in relations with Washington. Through Murphy's comments, *El Pais* wrote, "The

United States made very clear that if the project continues on its current basis, the EU will have to defend itself with its own weapons, which would leave Europe in a position of obvious inferiority.” It added: “His words constitute the greatest threat Washington has made since Brussels started to elaborate a common defense policy.”

These threats cast a sharp light on Donald Trump’s state visit to Britain. He has not only endorsed British politicians like Boris Johnson advocating a hard Brexit and a break with the EU, but also taken the peculiar decision not to officially commemorate the Normandy landings on June 6, the date on which US and UK troops landed in 1944 in France. Instead, the official international commemoration is to take place on June 5 in Portsmouth, Britain, from where US and British ships set sail to land troops on the Normandy beaches in France.

These decisions are bound up with deep, historically rooted geopolitical conflicts between the United States and the continental European powers, as Berlin and Paris lead attempts to build an independent EU army. The 2016 Brexit vote, by removing Britain from the EU, ended London’s ability to veto projects for an independent EU army on Washington’s behalf. Now, US threats to dispense with the Atlantic treaty reflect commercial and military rivalries between the imperialist powers that twice in the 20th century erupted into world war.

The fact that the conflicts are erupting over the EU army—to be built with hundreds of billions of euros extracted from the working class via social austerity, and to undertake bloody operations like the Franco-German war and occupation in Mali—underscores the class nature of these conflicts. They are bitter struggles between rival imperialist powers over the spoils to be plundered from the world economy, trampling growing anti-war sentiment in the working class.

As the Trump administration threatens to go to war with Iran and imposes tariffs on China in an escalating trade war, Washington is increasingly colliding with the commercial and military ambitions of the EU powers, led by Germany. They have criticized US nuclear weapons deployments to Europe after Washington scrapped the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) with Russia and are integrating Chinese firm Huawei into EU telecommunications networks over US objections.

The EU powers continue to support the 2015 Iran nuclear treaty, long after Trump scrapped it, as EU oil, automotive and engineering firms sought to scoop up markets at their US rival’s expense.

Last month's revelations from *El Pais* emerged as US officials sought to browbeat EU officials into supporting Trump's war drive against Iran. This month, its report came as Trump's overseas tour eerily recalls the strategic alignments of 75 years ago—as the US president stands in Britain and glowers across the English Channel at the European continent.

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