

Pentagon threatens Europe over EU army plans

By Alex Lantier
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On May 1, the US Department of Defense sent a letter to the European Union warning that plans for an independent EU army could lead to a collapse in the NATO alliance between the United States and the EU powers. The letter, sent by the US undersecretaries for defense Ellen Lord and Andrea Thompson to EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini, was leaked to the Spanish daily *El Pais*.

El Pais reported on it on May 13, as US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo arrived uninvited at a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels to demand EU support for US war moves against Iran.

“The United States is deeply concerned by the approval of rules for the European Defense Fund and the general conditions of PESCO,” the letter states, referring to the EU army’s technical name, the Permanent Structured Cooperation. The EU army, the letter added, is leading to “a dramatic step back in three decades of growing integration of the trans-Atlantic defense industry.” It warned of the danger of “unnecessary competition between NATO and the EU.”

The “very harsh” letter, *El Pais* reported, “is full of more or less veiled threats of possible political or commercial retaliation if Brussels maintains its intentions to develop European weapons projects without consulting with outside countries, like the United States.”

The Pentagon letter objects to provisions in the European Defense Fund mandating that European firms control the technology employed in European weapons systems, and threatens to take similar measures to exclude European firms from Pentagon weapons contracts. It states, “It is clear that similar reciprocally imposed US restrictions would not be welcomed by our European partners and allies, and we would not relish having to consider them in the future.”

Referring to the conflicts that erupted when European powers led by Berlin and Paris opposed the illegal 2003

US-led invasion of Iraq, the letter states that the current EU plans “could not only hurt the constructive relationship between NATO and the EU, but could also potentially revive the tense discussions that dominated our contacts 15 years ago on European defense initiatives.”

The seriousness with which threats of a breakdown of the US-European alliance are taken in ruling circles in Europe was reflected in the publication this week of a study by the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) think tank in London. The report, titled “Defending Europe: scenario-based capability requirements for NATO’s European members,” estimated the costs to Europe to rebuild NATO’s military capacity if the United States abandoned the alliance. The document called for a massive \$110 billion naval build-up and \$357 billion to prepare for war with Russia.

The publication of these documents point to the advanced state of collapse of alliances and arrangements that have governed the international relations of world capitalism for decades. It puts paid to the European imperialist powers’ attempts to present their plans for a major escalation of their military spending and operations as a supplement intended to aid NATO. The Pentagon views these plans as a threat to develop the EU as a rival to the US-led NATO alliance, founded in 1949 after two world wars between the United States and Germany.

The strategic aims underlying the deployment of US warships and troops for war with Iran, which Washington is justifying with unsubstantiated and non-credible allegations of an Iranian military threat to the United States, go well beyond that oil-rich region. Washington is engaged in a ferocious military campaign not only to defend its fading military hegemony in the Middle East and Eurasia. One of its main aims is to stamp out the danger of a potential challenge from its great power rivals, including its nominal European allies.

The massive military build-up underway in Europe, as the EU powers pour billions of euros into their militaries and wage bloody wars of plunder such as the Franco-German occupation of Mali, underscore the class nature of these conflicts. They are bitter struggles between rival imperialist powers over the spoils to be obtained from the world economy, amid growing working class opposition to war and the austerity measures used to finance the military build-ups.

Washington viewed the temporary alliance between Berlin, Paris and Moscow at the UN in opposition to the illegal 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, justified by lies about non-existent Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (WMD), as a serious threat. Now that Brexit has deprived London of its ability to veto plans for an EU army on Washington's behalf, these conflicts have vastly escalated. Under cover of an agreement of all the NATO powers to boost military spending to 2 percent of gross domestic product, strategic and commercial rivalries continue to rise between Washington and the EU powers.

On May 13, US Senators Ted Cruz and Jeanne Shaheen introduced bipartisan legislation to sanction European and Russian firms working on the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline linking Russia and Germany. Using against Europe methods Washington previously used to target Iran and Russia, the bill would ban travel and financial transactions involving employees and physical assets of firms building the pipeline, which Trump denounced last year. Firms targeted could include Germany's BASF, British-Dutch Royal Dutch Shell, and France's ENGIE.

Tensions are growing as well over EU relations with China, after Italy formally signed in March a memorandum of understanding endorsing Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a vast Eurasian infrastructure plan, over US objections. Since then, Washington has threatened Germany and Britain with a suspension of intelligence cooperation for allowing the Chinese firm Huawei to participate in building their telecommunications network.

Bitter conflict has above all been provoked by the US campaign against Iran since the Trump administration withdrew from the 2015 Iran nuclear treaty and reimposed US sanctions, which cut across multi-billion-dollar deals signed in Iran by European oil and industrial firms.

Last week, after visiting Britain to demand London's support for Washington against Iran, Pompeo abruptly cancelled a visit to Berlin, citing "pressing issues," and flying to Baghdad instead. There, he promoted US oil

deals and demanded that the Iraqi puppet state set up after the 2003 war protect US interests from alleged Iranian threats. Germany's *Süddeutsche Zeitung* wrote on Pompeo's snub to Berlin that "much of that which for a long time was lauded as the German-American friendship now lies in pieces."

Similarly, French President Emmanuel Macron complained of the US torpedoing of the Iranian nuclear deal. At an EU summit last week in Romania, Macron said, "Firstly, Iran did not withdraw from this deal. Secondly, if Iran withdraws from this deal, it will be the responsibility of the United States."

And yesterday, Spain withdrew its frigate Méndez Núñez from the US-led naval battle group anchored by the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln, which is sailing to the Persian Gulf to threaten Iran. Spanish Defense Minister Margarita Robles blandly stated: "If the North American government intends for the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln to go to a certain zone for a certain mission that it never agreed with Spain, we are provisionally leaving the battle group."

Despite taking a move indicating real fears that the naval battle group will launch military action against Iran, Madrid sought to downplay the decision and mask its significance to the public. Spanish Foreign Minister Josep Borrell said there had been "no formal complaint" from Madrid to Washington over this event, adding, "It is not something to get too worked up about."

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