

Europe moves towards independent military role

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The decision to lay the basis for a European Rapid Reaction force operating independently from NATO is a significant expression of growing differences with the United States.

The plan, endorsed by the recent Cologne summit of European Union (EU) heads of government, is aimed at giving the 15 member states the "capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces". It has all the hallmarks of a compromise, made necessary by the conflicting views of the various European powers.

As late as November 17 last year, Europe's foreign and defence ministers ended a two-day conference in Rome that agreed on the necessity for strengthening Europe's military capabilities, but not on any organisational break with NATO. Alongside France, Britain has been at the forefront of calls for a military build-up. But as the most steadfast ally of the US, it is also the main defender of a continued NATO framework. Conversely Germany, while weak militarily, strongly supports the EU securing control of its own military future. More recently, newly appointed European Commission President Romano Prodi fielded the idea of a single European army. This was welcomed by France and Germany but opposed by Britain, epitomising the conflicting positions within the EU.

Bringing European military forces under direct EU control also creates problems for non-EU members like Turkey, and for the non-aligned nations (members of neither NATO nor the Western European Union)—Ireland, Finland, Sweden and Austria.

The final statement following the Cologne summit contains concessions to all these positions. It agrees to the liquidation of the Western European Union (WEU) by the end of next year and to transfer control of its European Rapid Reaction Force to the EU. In deference to the non-aligned states, however, it omits Article 5 of the WEU charter pledging mutual defence.

Javier Solana, NATO secretary-general, will fill the new post of EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy. He was chosen over the German and French nominees—Deputy Foreign Minister Günter Verheugen and Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine—because he is trusted by the US and Britain for the role he has played in the present Balkan crisis. His deputy will be the French ambassador to the EU, Pierre de Boisseau, and ironically a nephew of General Charles

de Gaulle who took France out of NATO in 1966.

Solana will preside over a reinforced policy-making apparatus that is to be established in Brussels. This will include a new 20-member planning unit and a permanent committee of foreign ministry and defence officials from the 15 EU member states. The new body will be charged with overseeing the development of the EU's capacity to mount its own peacekeeping or other limited military operations, either independently or by using NATO assets. The US does not oppose this, but has insisted behind the scenes and through Britain that the role of such a body be restricted.

Commenting on the proposals, when France and Germany first announced them last weekend, Robin Cook, the UK foreign secretary, said that any new body was "not a substitute for NATO". Spokesmen for the Blair government also cautioned against any conclusion that Europe might have acted alone in Kosovo if the new EU arrangements had already been in place. "This is not about dealing with conflicts on the scale of Kosovo, for which, frankly, we are not equipped, but for moving swiftly to pre-empt crises on a smaller scale," one told the *Financial Times*.

This language contrasts sharply with that employed by French President Jacques Chirac, who declared last weekend that the decisions would make "an essential contribution to a multi-polar world to which France is profoundly attached." He added that it was a contribution to the United Nations and the Security Council (as opposed to NATO) "as it assumes the prime responsibility for peace and international security".

No amount of re-jigging the security arrangements can, of itself, resolve the real military deficit between the US and Europe. That is why the foreign ministers called for increased military spending across Europe, to ensure that the necessary forces exist to meet the new security challenges such as Bosnia and Kosovo. France and Germany stress the need to develop an independent satellite technology, complaining that the US does not share its intelligence with any of its NATO allies apart from Britain, and this was also agreed in Cologne.

The Cologne summit declared the EU's determination "to foster the restructuring of the European defence industries," seeking "further progress in the harmonisation of military requirements" in order to become "competitive and dynamic"

against the US.

The proposals have met a mixed reaction in the European press, with some endorsing its historic character, despite the limitations, and others condemning it as futile or wrongheaded.

The *Financial Times* June 2 editorial stressed that any new arrangement was not an alternative to NATO, but said, “It is high time the Europeans were organised to fight fires in their own back yard. Now it is up to the member states to prove they are serious. Mr Solana must be given the means and political backing he needs. And Washington will have to get used to having someone at the end of a phone who may answer back.”

On June 4, Philip Stevens wrote, “Kosovo must be the catalyst that persuades western Europe to take responsibility for its own affairs—to rise belatedly to the challenge posed a decade ago by the fall of the Berlin Wall. The European Union must show it is ready to organise its own military forces—and that it has the political will to use them.”

The *Times* of London, in contrast, said, “Europeans should be concentrating on improving their armed forces, not playing their favourite war game, redesigning institutions.”

The *Guardian*, which has staunchly advocated European military independence, complained, “This will not be the common European army that Romano Prodi has envisaged. It will be an attempt to get more value for money from the £120 billion which European taxpayers fork out on defence. These lavish sums keep over 2 million troops under arms, 750,000 of them conscripts. This is far more than the 1.4 million US troops, but delivers only a pathetic fraction of the American military punch.”

In Germany, the financial daily *das Handelsblatt* also complained of “largely very vague conceptions”, given that Kosovo had shown “how helpless the Europeans are confronted with American dominance in foreign and defence policy.”

Prior to the summit, France's *Libération* wrote, “The true challenge is elsewhere and it will not be dealt with during the Cologne Summit: it is budgetary and industrial. A European defence capability that requires the integration of the European defence industries; the creation of a competent agency for programming; a policy of favouring the purchase of European hardware and especially that required a rise in military budgets, is very far away.”

In the US, the *International Herald Tribune* said, “The move could be the most ambitious of the many attempts since the 1950s to find a common European defence stance under the US nuclear umbrella,” but was sceptical about the future. “Europe is still almost totally reliant on the United States in several key fields, including electronic intelligence gathering, the ability to airlift large quantities of troops and equipment and in command and control capabilities. The Kosovo conflict, which began during the EU summit meeting in Berlin two months ago, underlined the inability of the EU countries to act independently against a challenge on their doorstep,” it wrote.

The *New York Times* wrote that the plans represented an

attempt to make the EU “a military power for the first time in its 42-year history,” but added that “these arrangements exist only on paper so far. In reality, when the NATO allies decided to use air power to try to force Yugoslavia to accept a settlement in Kosovo, only the United States had the hundreds of air-planes to throw into the battle and intelligence satellites and weaponry to mount a campaign with minimal risk to pilots.”

Nevertheless, however faltering and internally contradictory, the liquidation of the WEU, bringing its military force under direct EU control, confirms the ongoing break-up of the Cold War security arrangements that rested on the undisputed military domination of America over the Western powers.

The WEU has its origins in the post-war 1948 Brussels Treaty for mutual self defence, which did not include Germany and Italy. The defeated powers were brought into the WEU proper in 1954—a body set up as an appendage of the NATO alliance (created in 1949), thus confirming the leading role of the US in European security matters. Largely moribund, the WEU was reactivated in 1984 with a view to developing a common defence policy and strengthening Europe's role within NATO.

The collapse of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe and the former USSR in the late 1980s and early 90s created a situation in which the US held undisputed military hegemony—a unipolar world in military-speak—which it has exploited in order to assert its global interests ever since.

The 1990-91 Persian Gulf War against Iraq—through which the US strengthened its grip on the oil-rich Middle East region—produced numerous demands for Europe's military strength and independence to be developed. The Treaty of European Union, negotiated in 1991, committed Europe to the creation of common foreign, security and defence policies. With the initial break-up of Yugoslavia in 1991, then European Commissioner Jacques Poos declared it to be “the hour of Europe”, only to see US military might dominate events once more.

The latest war against Serbia has finally pushed the European powers to formulate definite plans to overcome their military reliance on the US. It points towards an escalation in militarism across the Continent and increased global tensions in the struggle to dominate the world's strategic resources. This will require massive cuts in social spending. It has been estimated that Europe would need to spend £100 billion a year more in order to be independent of the US militarily, equivalent to 1 percent of the EU's gross domestic product.



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