In the name of “peace”, the European Union readies for war

Jean Shaoul
28 February 2014

A series of European Union (EU) discussion papers and meetings have made it clear that the European powers are pushing for a more assertive militarist policy. The unfolding of this aggressive imperialist foreign policy takes place amid concerns that these powers are, in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, losing influence in the scramble for vital energy resources and markets in Asia and Africa.

A recent European Council of Foreign Relations policy brief, *Why Europe needs a new global strategy*, sets out the European powers’ military ambitions, not just in their former colonial possessions but in areas further afield. These include the Eurasian land mass, where the EU is set on geopolitical competition with Russia in Eastern Europe, as highlighted by the struggle for control of Ukraine, as well as with Asia and China.

The policy brief bemoans Europe’s lack of influence in the Middle East. The EU responded to Washington’s calls for sanctions on Syria, only to find that Russia and Iran were able to circumvent them, while the rise of Saudi, Qatari and Turkey-backed Islamist forces in the region has cut across longstanding interests.

The authors note that Europe’s success at buying influence through “aid”, to facilitate trade and “security”, has been limited in part because of rivals with bigger pockets, such as the Gulf petro-states in the case of assistance to Egypt. Likewise, despite pouring money into the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) for more than 10 years, it lost out to China.

The policy brief urges the sharing of national defence plans in order to better coordinate resources, the common policing of European airspace, the use of drones, and the development of European capabilities to manage crises in the EU’s own “backyard” without the need to turn to Washington.

It notes that the European powers have worked through the United Nations, serving as the funder and regional subcontractor for United Nations missions. The EU contributes 37 percent to the UN’s peacekeeping budget that enables UN “peacekeeping” troop deployment and international military operations—currently 15 missions are under way—in comparison with the US contribution of 28 percent. But the UN is dominated by the US.

While both Britain and France have permanent seats on the UN Security Council, they each push national interests that frequently differ both from each other and those of the EU, with a consequent loss of European influence on the world arena. For example, France and Germany opposed the US and UK-led 2003 invasion of Iraq, while Germany opposed the US, French and British intervention in Libya.

The emergence of Brazil, Russia, China, India and other so-called emerging economies has further squeezed Europe.

With this “traditional multilateralism” no longer providing a reliable mechanism for advancing their commercial and political interests, the European powers have turned to other organizations, using various funding mechanisms. These include the African Peace Facility, ATHENA, and the Instrument for Stability (IfS) to fund “peacekeeping” missions by the African Union (AU) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

AU missions have included operations in Burundi, Darfur, Comoros and Somalia, as well as hybrid missions in Mali and the Central African Republic, while ECOWAS has sent troops to Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Cote d’Ivoire and Mali. But these operations are usually handed over to the UN at a later stage. In September 2011, the EU, led by Britain and France, put together an ad hoc coalition, the “Friends of Libya,” to carve up the oil-rich North African country.

A policy briefing from the EU’s Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), *Setting the stage for the defence summit*,

© World Socialist Web Site

argues that Europe needs “a strong security and defence policy underpinned by robust and readily available joint military capabilities” to enable it to engage “in all five environments (land, air, maritime, space and cyber).” It states that the only way to counter falling national defence budgets—from €251 billion in 2001 to €194 billion in 2013—is to take a joint approach, since no European government can afford to launch major new initiatives.

A critical concern is economic relations with Asia. The EU is China’s biggest trading partner, India and ASEAN’s second biggest, Japan’s third, and Indonesia’s fourth. While the EU is in discussions with a number of Asian countries over establishing free trade areas, it lags far behind 73 bilateral FTAs signed by others with the region since 2000.

A new European Council of Foreign Relations (ECFR) policy brief, *Divided Asia: the implications for Europe*, warns that unlike the US, the EU missed the boat by failing to take a region-wide approach. This refers to agreements such as the Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC) or the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations, which aim to cover 45 percent of the world’s population and one third of its GDP in FTAs. Washington launched its Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) proposal and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) as regional trade and investment initiatives. All of these initiatives exclude Europe.

Given the US “pivot” to Asia that is aimed at undermining and encircling China militarily, the think tank warns, “Europe cannot leave Asian security to the US” and allow the US to dominate the Asian-Pacific region. It added, “Basing European foreign and security policy in Asia on an alignment with US policy is misguided. US diplomacy is closely linked to US commercial goals in the region.”

It adds that, while US and EU interests often overlap, they are “in competition in many areas such as aerospace, transport equipment, public procurement, media and entertainment, and telecoms.”

Europe should be prepared when necessary to go it alone and pursue its own interests, including establishing a Tran-Eurasian Partnership on trade and investment, particularly in services, the brief states. It should end energy sanctions and boycotts in the Middle East and North Africa on which both Europe and Asia depend, a policy which another ECFR paper, *Shooting in the dark? EU sanctions policies*, attacked.

The policy paper calls for the promotion of arms sales to Asia, which “almost always involve training, after-sales services, or continued upgrades.”

“Europe cannot continue to focus only on a soft power approach,” it insists. It notes that while European arms sales to some Asian countries match US sales, arms transfers to China are negligible due to the lack of a unified policy on lifting the arms embargo put in place after China’s brutal suppression of the Tiananmen Square uprising in 1989.

European Foreign Affairs chief Catherine Ashton echoed these sentiments at a European summit meeting at the end of last year. She said, “If Europe is to remain a global player in the 21st century, Europeans will need to cooperate even more closely. The rationale for a stronger European defence policy is threefold: political, ensuring that the EU can live up to its global ambitions; operational, giving Europe the capacity to act on the ground; and economic, securing jobs and driving innovation in times of austerity.”

Ashton was backed up by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, who was invited to address the summit—a first. He called on Europe to beef up its military capabilities or face a security crisis on its borders and international marginalisation, pointing out that “our European allies lack critical capability.”

Operations in Libya and Mali exposed the EU’s limited military power, even for relatively small-scale operations not far from Europe. In the case of the 2011 NATO-led operation to overthrow the Gaddafi regime, largely undertaken by European forces, the lack of European capabilities meant that US air tankers had to refuel at least 80 percent of the European fighter jets.

Once again, however, the European powers were unable to come to any substantive agreement. British Prime Minister David Cameron was determined to block any attempt to give the EU—Germany in alliance with France—a bigger role in determining defence policy, and emphasising the primacy of NATO and member states.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site