EU advisors advocate use of military against strikes and protests

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Experts at a European Union (EU) think-tank are demanding that the EU prepare to put down strikes and protests with military force. Due to the deepening social inequality in a globalised economy and growing military conflicts within the EU's borders, such outbursts will inevitably increase.

In the study by the European Union Institute for Security Studies, the authors bluntly state that in the face of these developments, the army will have to be used increasingly for policing duties to protect the rich from the anger of the poor.

The book appeared a year after the near-collapse of the global financial system in 2008, entitled "Perspectives for European Defence 2020." It makes clear that academics and politicians are very aware of the revolutionary implications of the crisis. They are working through scenarios that would allow the opposition of the vast majority of the population to social attacks to be suppressed.

"Within the framework of the joint foreign and security policy, the responsibilities of the police and armed forces are increasingly being merged, and the capacities to tackle social protest built up," radio station Deutschlandfunk reported on the study last month. Officially this was concerned with interventions in countries outside the EU.

"But under article 222 of the Lisbon treaty, a legal basis has been created for the deployment of military and paramilitary units within EU states in crisis."

The book was authored by a team of academics and experts in the area of European security, defence and foreign policy. The foreword was written by EU foreign policy representative Catherine Ashton. In it she set out the long-term parameters of the EU's security policy. Her introduction, and the fact that the institute is an EU institution, give the study an official stamp of approval.

The longest contribution in the book, entitled "The EU and the globalised security environment," summarises the direction of the EU's plans. In it, Professor Tomas Ries, a former director of the Swedish Institute of International Affairs, suggests that the EU should increasingly combat social problems with military means.

During the Cold War, Ries was already an experienced agenda-setter for militaries of northern Europe. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, he turned his attention to studying global security policy.

Ries sees the central threat to "security" in a violent "conflict between unequal socioeconomic classes in global society," which were "in vertical asymmetric tensions in the global village." Put simply, the main "security issue" is class struggle in the globalised world economy.

To illustrate these "vertically asymmetric tensions," Ries presented a diagram of social inequality. At the top are the transnational corporations, the "global fortune 1,000," or the 1,000 companies with the largest revenue. He calculated that as a percentage of the global population they amount to 0.1 percent, almost 7 million people. He sees a much larger contingent among the hundreds of millions of the global population starving. They are right at the bottom of his diagram.

For the inevitable social, economic and political conflicts which would emerge from this inequality, he recommended that the EU enter a "symbiosis" with the global corporations. The power of these companies "in the areas of technology and economy is constantly growing, while they are also winning influence in other areas. But they need the state and the state needs them."

With the financial crisis, the state had already

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fulfilled its part in the “symbiosis.” The population had been burdened with the banks’ debts, and the living conditions of the working class had been attacked and undermined.

As a consequence of these fundamental attacks on the social rights of the working class, according to Ries, social conflict will inevitably develop which would constrain important areas of infrastructure.

Ries provided examples of the sorts of workers’ struggles he meant: a strike of rubbish collectors in Naples, Italy, a strike by firefighters in Liverpool, England, and air traffic controllers in the US.

In all of these situations, the military had been utilised to maintain infrastructure. Even though this was not actually the army’s job, Ries warned that over the coming years the army would need to be deployed domestically with increasing frequency. “Police work” by the military will be called for more strongly due to these tensions, he wrote.

Since these lines were written, soldiers have already been deployed against striking workers in Spain and Greece, or martial law was declared to force them back to work. For Ries, this is inevitable.

The rich had to be protected from the poor, the professor explained. Since “the percentage of the population who were poor and frustrated would continue to be very high, the tensions between this world and the world of the rich would continue to increase, with corresponding consequences. Since we will hardly be able to overcome the origin of this problem by 2020, i.e., the functional defects of society, we will have to protect ourselves more strongly.”

By “functional defects,” Ries means the social consequences of the global profit system, just as much as the wars which are led to secure its maintenance. But these are both fundamental components of the capitalist system, forcing ever greater numbers of people into poverty or to become refugees. The shielding of the rich from the poor is described by Ries as a “loser’s strategy,” i.e. a strategy against the losers of the system. Although it was “highly morally questionable,” there would be “no way around it if we are not capable of overcoming the origins of this problem.”

Ries sums up the social outlook of the ruling class with his remarks. It is prepared to do anything to defend its privileges and riches against the opposition of the population.

Ries does not only call for a European military regime to suppress strikes, but also a massive strengthening of EU states. By 2020 at the latest, the EU will have to expand its military capabilities significantly in order to possess the full spectrum of capabilities required for high-intensity combat, Ries commented.

According to Ries, the peace between the major powers “is entirely and completely dependent upon the functioning of the world economy.” “If it breaks apart, the peaceful political order would also probably be destroyed.” This was what the EU had to prepare for.

Ries described Russia as especially dangerous for the EU. “Hard power politics” were called for against the country. Since these lines were written, the EU has already established its “power politics.” After orchestrating a fascist coup in Ukraine to push back Russian influence, a course of confrontation has been adopted towards the Kremlin. Ries describes how this will develop further: with war abroad and at home.

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