

# Former British Prime Minister Blair joins call for a European army

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Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair recently called in a *Newsweek* magazine column for the establishment of a European army organised independently of the NATO alliance.

As part of a broader plea for unity among the major European Union (EU) powers under the title “European unity has never been more important,” Blair wrote that the European powers had to be capable of projecting their interests on the global stage. “I would argue that in the medium term, there will be a growing requirement for Europe to build defence capability. That force would not supplant NATO, but would have the independent ability to take military action at times when Europe’s security interests are threatened when the US may decide not to be involved.”

Justifying the creation of a European military force, Blair cited the rise in global geopolitical rivalries. “The world is changing,” he said. “New and vast powers will have the capacity to dominate. Smaller nations—and this means anyone with fewer than 100 million people—have to leverage their geographic relationships to maintain weight.”

These “vast powers” were explicitly identified as Russia and China, who were taking advantage of a shift east in global power.

During a decade in government in Britain beginning in 1997, Blair was Washington’s staunchest ally in Europe and fully supported the United States’ military predominance through the NATO alliance. In 1999, the Blair government rejected a call by then EU Commission President Romano Prodi for an independent European army and defended the NATO defence framework. British aircraft participated in the NATO-led bombardment of Yugoslavia, in which the US played the decisive role. Then in 2003, Britain was the only major European power to join the Bush administration in the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq.

His shift to support a European army, though by no means signalling a break from the US, reflects mounting imperialist tensions around the globe.

The US is waging war in the Middle East to secure its hegemony over the world’s most important oil-producing region, leading the encirclement of Russia in Eastern Europe and the Baltic, and pursuing an aggressive course in the Asia-Pacific against China, but its imperialist rivals are also intent on reasserting their own geopolitical interests.

Germany has been conducting a sustained drive to implement a more militarist foreign policy by sending troops to North Africa and Syria, while academics and media outlets carry out an ideological push to revive the plans for German domination of Europe and the world which had such disastrous consequences in the first half of the 20th century. France seized on the November 13 terrorist attacks in Paris to intervene in Syria, and is also conducting major operations in North Africa.

Blair’s call for European unity is an attempt to reassert his long-held position of the UK playing a pivotal role as a bridge between the US and Europe.

A referendum is due on Britain’s membership within the EU by the end of 2017. Washington has strongly indicated its opposition to Britain leaving the bloc, and military experts have warned that a “Brexit” would lead to a deterioration in the “special relationship” with the US, resulting in Washington aligning itself more firmly with Paris or Berlin.

However, the euroskeptic wing of Britain’s ruling elite is concerned that if a united European army is the price London has to pay for renegotiating its relationship with Brussels, then this will instead undermine British imperialism’s strategic position, above all its alliance with Washington, as France and Germany emerge as more assertive military powers.

In September, the *Daily Telegraph* revealed that

Chancellor Angela Merkel suggested a deal may be possible with Prime Minister David Cameron in his attempt to renegotiate British relations with the EU, but only if Cameron was prepared to back the integration of military forces on the continent.

The *Telegraph* cited an unpublished position paper drawn up by Europe and Defence policy committees of Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU), setting out "a detailed 10-point plan for military co-operation in Europe."

If a European army is created, Germany, as the continent's largest economic power, would demand to play the dominant role within it, and it is Germany that is playing the central role in moves towards its creation.

Under provisions in the Lisbon Treaty adopted in 2009, EU member states agreed on potential cooperation with the establishment of a common security and defence policy. The treaty contained a mutual defence clause for the first time, which obligated member states to assist a state if it faced a major attack. This was the clause invoked by France in the wake of the 13 November Paris terrorist attacks to secure EU military assistance.

EU Commission President Jean Claude Juncker told *Welt am Sonntag* last March, "[A] common army among the Europeans would convey to Russia that we are serious about defending the values of the European Union." He stressed, "Europe's image has suffered dramatically and also in terms of foreign policy, we don't seem to be taken entirely seriously."

Juncker's statement was backed by Norbert Rottgen, chairman of the German Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, German Green MEP Jan Philipp Albrecht and, most significantly, German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen, who told *Deutschlandfunk* radio station that a "European army is the future."

The conservative group in the European parliament, the European People's Party (EPP), backed the move in a position paper released in October. EPP President Joseph Daul commented, "We are going to move towards an EU army much faster than people believe."

The EPP went much further than Juncker's proposal, calling for a force capable of taking on missions of "higher intensity" including replacing national guards at EU borders—a policy now in part implemented regarding the EU's Frontex border force.

The EPP's paper that an EU army must be "able to conduct territorial defence... Russian aggression against members of the EU and NATO must be deterred." A key policy adviser noted that since 2007 the EU has had two

rotating emergency battlegroups of 1,500 men, which have never seen combat—which he described as a "failure" that "must be addressed."

The EPP stressed, "The EU should not be caught up in enlargement fatigue, but should rather keep a pro-EU spirit in the region of the Western Balkans alive and support the aspirations of these countries to join the EU."

Turkey was described as a pivotal state in securing Europe's military security.

On December 27, German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble told *Bild am Sonntag* that "we will have to spend a lot more funds for joint European defence initiatives... [as] ultimately our aim must be a joint European army." He cited the Middle East and Africa as key locations for military operations.

At the NATO summit in Wales in 2014, the 28 member states pledged to increase defence spending to 2 percent of GDP. But an objection was raised to this proposal, principally from Germany and Canada, that public opinion would not tolerate such a drastic hike in spending on the armed forces. The promotion of a "European" army, coupled with rhetorical pledges to be creating a united force to secure peace and stability, is seen as a necessary propaganda cover for a vast expansion of military budgets.

Moves towards a European army confirm that the period in which the unity of a capitalist Europe was hailed as the guarantor of peace, freedom and democracy is at an end. Instead, the major powers are reasserting their imperialist interests with military interventions in Africa and the Middle East, supporting a political coup in Ukraine, threatening Russia with military retaliation, and utilising the refugee crisis as a pretext to stir up militarism and xenophobia and to deploy military personnel across the continent.



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