

UK prime minister invokes militarism and war to argue for EU membership

Julie Hyland
10 May 2016

In a speech pledging to ensure “peace”, Prime Minister David Cameron’s argument for Britain remaining in the European Union (EU) was all about preparing for war.

Speaking at the British Museum Monday, the Conservative Party leader set out what he described as a “big, bold patriotic case” for voters supporting continued UK membership of the EU in the June 23 referendum. While claiming to “respect” their views, he made a bellicose attack on supporters of a Brexit (British exit)—especially those within his own party—for endangering not only Britain’s “national interest” but the future of NATO and the security of the West.

Cameron made clear that he was speaking not only on behalf of the UK, but for all the major imperialist powers. Referencing President Barack Obama’s public intervention in favour of a Remain vote during his visit to London on April 22, Cameron said the US leader had made “plain” the standpoint of “our principal and indispensable ally, the guarantor of our security...as only the oldest and best friends can.”

Support for a Remain vote was the “clear view” of all the UK’s “allies”, he warned, from Australia, New Zealand and Japan to Britain’s “major new trading and strategic relationships—China and India. ...”

The secretary-general of NATO had said that a weakened and divided Europe would be “bad for security and bad for NATO,” he continued. Over the weekend, former UK intelligence chiefs Sir John Sawers, (MI6) and Lord Jonathan Evans (MI5) had added their voices to the calls by Britain’s former military chiefs for a Remain vote. UK membership of the EU was “not just about the day-to-day cooperation, it’s about the wider stability of our continent,” Sawers said.

These military considerations dominated the prime minister’s remarks. The economic arguments made by his opponents in favour of a Leave vote were dealt with more briefly, with Cameron accusing them of taking a “leap in

the dark” by failing to answer what would replace UK trade relations with the EU.

Despite arguing against the risk of turning the clock “back to an age of competing nationalisms in Europe” by a British exit (Brexit), Cameron’s presentation of UK-European relations centred entirely on glorifying past national conflicts.

The UK had shaped European history for 2,000 years, entirely—according to his account—through war. “From Caesar’s legions to the wars of the Spanish Succession, from the Napoleonic Wars to the fall of the Berlin Wall,” Britain had helped write the history of Europe, he said, before listing military battles against France and Germany from 1704 through to the Second World War.

Evoking Churchill, Cameron spoke of the “character of the British people”, this “island nation”, “our island story”, as being “special, different, unique” especially for not having “been invaded for almost a thousand years.”

“[M]y heart swells with pride”, he continued, “whenever I hear the tell-tale roar of a Spitfire engine” that had done battle with the German Luftwaffe during the Second World War.

Cameron’s extolling of British patriotism and militarism was not purely for domestic consumption. It was intended to reassure Washington that the British bourgeoisie remains its most valuable asset in ensuring that the EU continues to toe the US line—especially regarding militarism and war.

The years before the UK joined the then-European Economic Community in 1973 had seen British governments preside over “a steady retrenchment of our world role, borne of our economic weakness,” he said. In 1956, the Suez crisis—an attempted British/French intervention into Egypt—saw Britain forced to beat a humiliating retreat under US instruction while it also abandoned “our aircraft carriers”.

“[Starting] with the transformation of our economy by

Margaret Thatcher" in 1979, "we have turned around our fortunes", he said. As a result, the UK had waged wars in Iraq, the Malvinas, Afghanistan, and Syria, was "building permanent military bases in the Gulf", "flying policing missions over the Baltic states", renewing its independent nuclear deterrent, and building two new aircraft carriers—"the biggest warships the Royal Navy has ever put to sea."

It was UK membership of the EU, alongside NATO, the Commonwealth and the Five Power Defence Agreement with Australia and New Zealand that enabled the "amplification" of British power, Cameron said.

This was the preamble to his warning of a fresh existential threat to the European continent. He asked rhetorically, is "peace and stability on our continent" assured "beyond any shadow of doubt?"

Although he cited the terror threat posed by Islamic State to justify a further European-wide assault on democratic rights, he made clear that the main danger was what he described as a "newly belligerent Russia."

It was barely 20 years since war in the Balkans, he said, and, more recently, "we have seen tanks rolling into Georgia and Ukraine." Such threats require a "shared approach by the European democracies," he continued, evoking the Cold War and NATO's formation, under US auspices, against the Soviet Union in 1949.

British exit from the EU would mean abandoning "the Poles, the Czechs, the Baltic States and the other countries of central and eastern Europe which languished for so long behind the Iron Curtain." These nations "view the prospect of Britain leaving the EU with utter dismay. They watch what is happening in Moscow with alarm and trepidation.

"Now is a time for strength in numbers. Now is the worst possible time for Britain to put that at risk. Only our adversaries will benefit."

Cameron's presentation turns reality on its head. The liquidation of the Soviet Union in 1991 by the Stalinist bureaucracy was the signal for a scramble by the major powers—led by the US—to regain access to territory, raw materials, labour and markets that had been lost to them due to the October 1917 revolution.

The break-up of Yugoslavia and the Balkan wars of the 1990s were precipitated by the NATO powers—foremost the US and Germany. Under the banner of "humanitarian intervention" and "national self-determination", they encouraged intercommunal conflict and carried out the bombing of Serbia—aimed at transforming the Balkans into a de facto NATO protectorate.

Likewise, in Ukraine, it was the US and the EU that instigated the 2014 right-wing putsch in Kiev to install a virulently anti-Russian regime.

This drive to encircle, weaken and ultimately dismember Russia is resulting in the greatest remilitarisation of Europe since the Second World War. Only last week, Washington used the change of command at its European Command HQ in Germany to step up its provocations against Moscow—including plans to deploy a third US armoured brigade combat team near the Russian border and more funds for "war fighting equipment."

Describing a "resurgent Russia" as a greater threat to American interests than terrorism, newly installed Gen. Curtis Scaparotti said the 60,000 or so US troops deployed in Europe must be prepared "to fight tonight if the deterrence fails."

Cameron has solidarised fully with these threats against Russia. In doing so, he warned that without Britain's membership of the EU, there was no guarantee that Washington and NATO would be able to count on future European backing for its provocations. There had been a "real risk of a feeble European response, and of a split between the United States and Europe" in response to the Ukraine crisis, he said. But Britain had injected "steel into Europe's action," ensuring effective sanctions against Russia through the EU and thus ensuring "crucial unity between Europe and the US in the face of Russian aggression."

The UK had played the same role in pushing "hardest" for the implementation of an EU oil embargo against Iran.

Although he did not state so explicitly, Cameron's claims were directed against France and Germany.

Without UK membership there would be no one to prevent Europe from "becoming a protectionist bloc" or "pushing for political union," Cameron said.

If the Leave vote went through, the UK would be left "outside the room" while the leaders of Germany, France, Italy, "the Maltese, the Slovak, the Czech, the Polish, the Slovene" took the decisions that would "have a direct bearing on Britain"—the implication being that none of them could be trusted.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact