

UK, France boost military, intelligence ties at Sandhurst summit

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On Thursday, UK Prime Minister Theresa May and French President Emmanuel Macron held a summit meeting at the UK military officers training academy, Sandhurst. The meeting was aimed at boosting UK-French military and intelligence ties, in line with the strategy developed in the 2010 Lancaster House Treaty, amid growing tensions with the Trump administration and inside NATO, and the crisis caused by Britain's exit from the European Union (EU).

They agreed on a series of reactionary measures, including stepped-up military spending, joint spying operations, and attacks on immigrants trying to reach Britain from the French port of Calais. They pledged to intensify cooperation on nuclear weapons programmes, aircraft carriers, and naval deployments to the Pacific and Indian oceans and the Caribbean Sea. Also agreed were provisions for draconian Internet censorship.

The *Financial Times* noted that Sandhurst was chosen as a venue since it “underlined a two-decade-old defence pact between Britain and France.” Highlighting the strategic character of the meeting, the heads of the UK's main domestic and international intelligence agencies—MI5, MI6 and Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ)—and of their French equivalents, the General Directorates of External Security and Internal Security (DGSE, DGSI), all attended.

Pointing to “an increasingly unstable and uncertain world,” the summit communiqué declared that the “Lancaster House Treaty is the bedrock of our relationship. Since 2010 we have improved our collective capabilities and seen unprecedented levels of integration between our armed forces, intelligence agencies and diplomatic and development authorities.”

It added, “There is no situation in which we could envisage a circumstance where the vital interests of either the United Kingdom or France could be threatened without the vital interests of the other being also

threatened.” As vital interests are those that states will go to war to protect, this essentially means that Britain and France are building a separate, smaller alliance inside NATO. France's *Le Point* magazine expressed satisfaction at this “simple principle outlined already in 1992,” after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the reunification of Germany.

The foreign policy compact document contained bullet points outlining the positions of British and French imperialism on key global flashpoints, in particular those where Washington is threatening to trigger major wars. It commits them to defending the 2015 Iranian nuclear peace deal, which the Trump administration is signalling it will scrap, amid growing US war threats against Iran. It called for “meaningful and unconditional dialogue” with North Korea, which Washington is threatening with nuclear annihilation.

In an apparent concession to the UK by Macron—who began his presidency by inviting Russian President Vladimir Putin to France and calling for improved relations with Moscow—the compact document sharply attacked Russia.

It declared that the UK and France “share a common assessment of Russia's more assertive foreign and defence policy, ... strategic intimidation, including the use of disinformation, malicious cyber activity, and political subversion.” It denounced Russia's annexation of Crimea and endorsed the Minsk peace deal in Ukraine negotiated by Berlin, Paris, Kiev and Moscow: “Until Russia complies with its Minsk obligations, economic sanctions [on Moscow] cannot be lifted.”

The two countries agreed to a pair of overseas interventions to illustrate their alliance. Britain is to send three helicopters and 50 to 60 support staff to assist thousands of French soldiers fighting a neo-colonial war in Africa's Sahel region. For its part, France will send more troops to NATO's “enhanced Forward Presence” in

2019, “as part of the UK-led battlegroup in Estonia, building on the successful joint deployment in 2017 .” The UK currently has 800 soldiers in Estonia.

In addition, May stated that a combined UK-French expeditionary force would be ready to deploy up to 10,000 troops “quickly and effectively to face any threat” by 2020.

Both countries agree on the necessity to clamp down on democratic rights as they build up their war machines, with Internet censorship at the top of their agenda. Under the guise of fighting “terrorism” and “criminals,” the summit was presented with a report containing proposals to “ensure the automation of detection and deletion of illegal content within 1-2 hours of upload,” and “prevent its dissemination...”

London and Paris also haggled over the financing of the repression of immigrants in Calais, where France accepted responsibility for policing Britain’s border along the Channel tunnel in the 2003 Le Touquet treaty. At Sandhurst, the two countries agreed to joint action to “increase the number of illegal migrants who are returned to their own country.”

Under pressure from Macron, May agreed to “support France in its provision of accommodation in facilities located outside the Calais and Dunkirk areas, such as Reception and Assessment Centres,” and to increase Britain’s payment to France for policing the border to €50 million.

Macron hypocritically declared at the summit’s press conference that the new treaty on migrants would ensure a “more humane approach.” In fact, what is being implemented is a speeding up of the deportation process, with the time to process migrants to be reduced from six months to one month for adults, and 25 days for children. The UK refused to specify how many migrants it would accept into the UK.

The summit pointed to both the escalating collapse of the international political framework that existed in the era of US imperialism’s world hegemony, and the turn to repression and anti-immigrant hate-mongering as the imperialist powers again prepare for war. Fundamental differences separate the major European powers from Washington over countries in the Middle East and Asia, where they have major economic and strategic interests, and where US policy could provoke a major regional or world war.

At the same time, the EU is rapidly disintegrating, particularly since the Brexit vote. It is significant that Paris organised a high-level military summit with London

amid rising concern over its relations with Germany, Europe’s leading power, after the crisis unleashed by the September 2017 German elections. The Grand Coalition (Christian Democratic Union-Social Democratic Party) government that favoured close ties with Macron suffered a humiliating loss of votes, and with Berlin still unable to form a government, Paris must fear that a more hostile government may emerge in Berlin.

Both the Leave and Remain factions of the British bourgeoisie supported closer ties with France. In a pre-summit editorial, the Remain-supporting *Financial Times* wrote effusively of the previous decade of military and intelligence cooperation but warned, “In the era of Brexit, however, these bonds will be re-examined.” Given the UK’s historically close ties with the US, it wrote, “There is deep scepticism in Britain about integrating the country’s armed forces with those of Europe.”

Macron made no move whatsoever to support Britain in its contentious Brexit talks with the EU, however, pointing out that the EU, and not France, is negotiating Brexit. Asked why he opposed including financial services in any EU-UK free trade agreement, he said, “I am here neither to punish nor to reward. I want to make sure that the single market is preserved because that is very much the heart of the EU.”

If Britain wanted full continuing access to the EU’s single market, Macron added, “The choice is up to Britain: it’s not my choice—but they can have no differentiated access to financial services. ... it means that you need to contribute to the budget and acknowledge European jurisdiction.”

Britain would not be able to pick and chose a Canada-style trade deal that would allow access to the single market, he insisted. “There should be no hypocrisy in this respect, or it would not work and we would destroy the single market.”



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