

A spokeswoman for the EU's foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, quoted in The Guardian on May 27, 2016, asserted: "There is absolutely no plan to set up an EU army with the global strategy.": A denial qualified by the words "with the global strategy."

In that same news article, "Is there a secret plan to create an EU army?", The Guardian also cited Nick Witney, writing the "former chief executive of the European Defence Agency, said no one took the idea of an EU army seriously."

Joe Fallon explores the idea further on the next page.

But then-President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, said in 2000: 'When I was talking about the European army, I was not joking. If you don't want to call it a European army, don't call it a European army. You can call it 'Margaret', you can call it 'Mary Ann', you can call it any name.'" In an interview with Welt am Sonntag with The Guardian on March 8, 2015, the then European Commission President, Jean-Claude Juncker, identified as "a longstanding advocate of an EU army," stated "Such an army would help us design a common foreign and security policy...Europe's image has suffered dramatically and also in terms of foreign policy, we don't seem to be taken entirely seriously."

On May 29, 2016, two days after The Guardian's "Is there a secret plan to create an EU army?",

was published, a spokesman for the Conservative government of Prime Minister David Cameron, which opposed Brexit, assured British voters "Britain would have a veto and would 'never' join a single EU military force." But the UK referendum meant that the UK ceased its opposition in anticipation of leaving the EU.

Prior to the June 23, 2016 referendum on Brexit, the EU had assured the government of the UK that "decisions over EU Defence Union were taken unanimously."

Three months later, however, on September 9, 2016, the EU reversed its implied 2014 position on "no EU army" and its 2016 assertion that EU defense decisions require a unanimous vote. The EU's foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini stated: "'The prospect of Brexit offered an opportunity not to be slowed by the country [the UK] that was always most determinedly opposed to the idea of pooling the instruments of defence. Political barriers preventing battlegroups being deployed will be removed â€“ making 18 national battalions, including British troops, available but never yet used for military missions.' The foreign affairs chief added: '...We could and should decide to make them into an instrument to be used where and when an immediate European intervention is needed.'"

The view of the UK as an impediment to EU defence integration was seconded by then German Defence Minister, now the President-elect of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen. "Britain has been persistently blocking for years all EU proposals on the military. The exit of Great Britain from the EU opens up new possibilities for intensifying military cooperation among the member States."

23 of the 28 member states of the EU (excluding Portugal, Ireland, Denmark, Malta and the UK) met in Brussels on November 13, 2017, and signed the permanent structured cooperation on defense agreement (PESCO).

According to the EU, "PESCO is a sophisticated legal instrument central to the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)...[which in turn] is an integral part of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), through which the EU speaks and acts as one in world affairs."

A year after the signing of PESCO, "The EU Parliament, in its November [2018] Defence Union

report, said that the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy 'should lead in due time to the establishment of the European Armed Forces'".

So what exactly is PESCO? According to an EU fact sheet dated May, 2019: "PESCO is both a permanent framework for closer cooperation and a structured process to gradually deepen defence cooperation within the Union framework." It further says that the primary aim of PESCO is "to jointly develop defence capabilities and make them available for EU military operations. This will thus enhance the EU's capacity as an international security actor, contribute to the protection of EU citizens and maximise the effectiveness of defence spending."

A second factsheet, with the date May 20, 2019, provides some specifics: "The difference between PESCO and other forms of cooperation is the legally binding nature of the commitments undertaken by the participating Member States... It will be a driver for integration in the field of defence...PESCO is designed to contribute to making European defence more efficient, strengthen operational cooperation among Member States, connect their forces through increased interoperability and enhance industrial competitiveness. PESCO will help reinforce the EU's strategic autonomy to act alone when necessary and with partners whenever possible."

If it looks like an army and is created to function as an army, it is an army regardless of its name. This is separate from the issues of how viable or effective such an army is.

"The EU treaties do allow for 'the progressive framing of a common defence policy that might lead to a common defence'. But this 'common defence' will only come about 'when the European Council, acting unanimously, so decides'. (Article 42 of the Lisbon Treaty of 2007).

However, Articles 44 and 16 of the Lisbon Treaty negate Article 42.

It was through Article 44 that France and Germany were able to have PESCO, a treaty on defense matters, signed November 13, 2017 not by all the member states of the EU, but 23 of the 28.

Article 44 states: "Within the framework of the decisions adopted in accordance with Article 43, the Council may entrust the implementation of a task to a group of Member States which are willing and have the necessary capability for such a task. Those Member States, in association with the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, shall agree among themselves on the management of the task." (Note: Article 44 does not specify what the minimum size of "a group" must be.)

In accordance with Article 16 the Council of the EU voted on December 11, 2017 to adopt PESCO not by a unanimous vote but by a "qualified majority".

According to the European Union Law website, the Lisbon Treaty of 2007 amended the EU's Article 16 to redefine "unanimity" to mean, in many cases, including PESCO, simply "a qualified majority".

"The latest amendment to the treaties, the Lisbon Treaty, which came into force in 2009, increased the number of areas where qualified majority voting in the Council applies."

A "qualified majority" exists "when 55% of members of the Council, comprising at least 65% of the population, support a proposal)".

However, economic and political realities may undermine the future of PESCO and "establishment of the European Armed Forces".

First is the problem of reaching the targeted level of defence spending. "The vast majority of EU members do not currently meet NATO's defence spending target of two per cent of GDP." Now under "legally binding" PESCO, EU members must somehow "regularly increase defence budgets in real times". For some, this will most likely mean reducing funding for domestic social programmes to meet EU defense requirements. This poses the question : How long before domestic pressure against such a reallocation compel some member states to withdraw from PESCO?

Second is the problem of the structure of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy. It is

essentially military Keynesianism for the benefit of France and Germany. "In the next budgetary cycle, post-2020, the capability window of the EDF, the European Defence Industrial Development Programme (EDIDP), should amount to â‚¬5 billion per year, from which up to 20% can be funded from the EU budget, for multinational projects that address a commonly identified shortfall. For projects in the framework of PESCO, an additional bonus of 10% is foreseen. France and Germany are proposing what those projects could be." Such circumstances are likely to foster friction among other members over a perception of favoritism in the EU's selection of projects.

Third are the penalties, diplomatic, financial, and technological, likely to be incurred by the EU for enacting protectionist policies for its defence industries. In a letter to the EU, dated May 1, 2019, the US objected to provisions in the seven-year, $14.6-billion European Defense Fund, "mandating that European firms control the technology employed in European weapons systems." Stating this was "a dramatic step back in three decades of growing integration of the trans-Atlantic defense industry", creating "unnecessary competition between NATO and the EU", the letter warned "that similar reciprocally imposed US restrictions would not be welcomed by our European partners and allies, and we would not relish having to consider them in the future." In such a trade dispute, it is not a question of whether the EU will suffer economically, militarily and technologically, but how severe those consequences will be.

Fourth is the nature of the mission of an EU army. From whom is such an army to defend Europe? There must be an existential threat to justify the financial cost of creating a duplicate, but inferior, military force to NATO. That threat is said to be Russia.

The year before the signing of PESCO, Berlin issued the 2016 White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr. The document asserted: "Russia is openly calling the European peace order into question with its willingness to use force to advance its own interests and to unilaterally redraw borders guaranteed under international law, as it has done in Crimea and eastern Ukraine."

This ignored the fact in 1991-1992, Germany and the EC (predecessor of the EU) had unilaterally redrawn the borders of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, which had been internationally guaranteed under the 1975 Helsinki Accords.

The 2016 White Paper continued: "Internationally, Russia is presenting itself as an independent power centre with global ambitions."

Russia was criticized for doing exactly what the EU did under the Lisbon Treaty of 2007 â€“ to be an independent power center that speaks "with a single voice in world affairs".

The 2016 White Paper continued: "This is reflected, for example, by an increase in Russia's military activities along its borders with the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO)."

The statement is disingenuous. One anti-war poster summed up such accusations: "Russia wants war. Look how close they put their country to our military bases."

Russian military activities along its borders were a natural result of past NATO, and by extension EU, policies. Declassified documents released December 2017 by the National Security Archives, George Washington University in Washington, D.C: reveal: All of the Western powers involvedâ€”the US, the UK, France, Germany itself made the same promise to Gorbachev on multiple occasions and in various emphatic ways" - NATO would not expand "one inch eastward".

Another broken promise was that former Warsaw Pact countries would not be admitted into NATO. Not only did NATO admit former Warsaw Pact countries, it also admitted the three former Soviet republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania -- "bringing St. Petersburg within a hundred miles of a NATO country."

But the accusation that Russia poses a military threat to Europe continued. In an interview with Spiegel, on March 20, 2017, eight months prior to the signing of PESCO, Germany's Intelligence Chief, Bruno Kahl stated: "The Russian threat has become greater, which is why we are taking it extremely seriously.... Russia has doubled its forces on its western border -- and we aren't just talking about Iskander missiles. There are also a lot of missiles in the Crimea region. And conventional armed forces. You can't interpret all that as being part of a defensive stance against the West. It also must be seen as a potential threat."

As such rhetoric intensified, the 2018 Munich Security Report, "To the Brink â€“ and Back?" warned: "The erosion of arms control agreements, deployment of additional weapons and

tensions over military exercises have increased the risk of an inadvertent armed clash between Europe and Russia".

That there is a serious possibility of war between the EU and Russia suggests the EU's quest to be taken seriously as an independent military power is folly. An EU army would be an anemic imitation of NATO lacking the overwhelming military power of the US. In the RAND Corporation report, "Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics", it concluded if war broke out Russian troops would defeat NATO forces within 60 hours.

If war erupted between Russia and an EU, without NATO firepower, it is not inconceivable Russian troops would be in Berlin within a fortnight.

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