

EU States Agree to Create Mega-Army



EU foreign and defense ministers attend a signature ceremony of a defense pact in Brussels, Belgium, November 13, 2017.

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) -- France and Germany have edged toward achieving a 70-year-old ambition to integrate European militaries, signing a pact with 21 other EU governments to fund, develop and deploy armed forces after Britain's decision to quit the bloc.

First proposed in the 1950s and long resisted by Britain, European military planning, operations and weapons development now stands its best chance in years as London steps aside and the U.S. pushes Europe to pay more for its security.

Foreign and defense ministers gathered at a signing ceremony in Brussels Monday to represent 23 EU governments joining the pact, paving the way for EU leaders to sign it in December. Their signatures are a sign of political

will but the program will only enter force once it's been legally endorsed, probably in December.

Those governments will for the first time legally bind themselves into joint projects as well as pledging to increase military spending and contribute to rapid deployments.

EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said countries have already submitted more than 50 joint projects in the fields of defense capabilities and military operations.

She added that the countries who didn't sign up can join later.

The pact includes all EU governments except Britain, which is leaving the bloc, Denmark, which has opted out of military matters, Ireland, Portugal and Malta. Traditionally neutral Austria was

a late addition to the pact. Paris originally wanted a vanguard of EU countries to bring money and assets to French-led military missions and projects, while Berlin has sought to be more inclusive, which could reduce effectiveness.

Its backers say that if successful, the formal club of 23 members will give the EU a more coherent role in tackling perceived threats, and end the kind of shortcomings seen in Libya in 2011, when European allies relied on the U.S. for air power and munitions. Unlike past attempts, the U.S.-led NATO alliance backs the project, aiming to benefit from stronger militaries.

The club will be backed by a 5 billion euro (\$5.8 billion) military fund for buying weapons, a special fund to finance operations and money from the EU's common budget for military research.

European governments say Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea in 2014 was a turning point, after years of military spending cuts that left Europe without vital capabilities.

"This is a commitment for countries to do better together," French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said. "It comes at a time of significant tension," he said, referring indirectly to Russia's rising military reach and Takfiri militants who have attacked European cities.

In 1998, Britain blocked formal collaboration on military matters, wary of the creation of an EU army. Britain's aerospace industry and its biggest defense firm BAE Systems fear losing out, diplomats said.

Poland Defends Rally That Called for 'Islamic Holocaust'



Nationalists burn flares as they march through Warsaw to mark Poland's National Independence Day on Nov. 11, 2017.

WARSAW (Dispatches) -- A 60,000-strong nationalist march in Warsaw which saw demonstrators tout white supremacist, anti-Semitic and Islamophobic messages calling for "Islamic Holocaust" was a "great celebration of Poles" and largely an expression of patriotic feeling, Poland's Foreign Ministry has said.

Marchers hung a banner which

said, "pray for Islamic holocaust" and carried signs with slogans like "white Europe of brotherly nations". Others chanted "pure Poland, white Poland" and "refugees get out!"

Although the country's government condemned racist and xenophobic ideas, it called the event "a great celebration of Poles, differing in their views, but united around the common values of freedom and loyalty to an independent homeland."

Jaroslav Kaczynski, the leader of the ruling Law and Justice party, said there were "unfortunate incidents" during the march, but he called them a "marginal problem."

Kaczynski added that he believed there could have been a "provocation".

Without specifying who might have tried to bait the marchers, he said: "Those who want to harm Poland know how to do it."

Poland has previously accused Russia of trying to create instability in the country.

A small group of rights activists subsequently protested what they said was the authorities' failure to respond properly to the behavior of the nationalists.

They protested in front of Warsaw city hall and a police station, chanting: "Warsaw free from fascism". One man held a banner saying, "Poland, wake up. Fascism is coming."

The Polish president "there is no place in Poland" for xenophobia, pathological nationalism and anti-Semitism even though he did not address Islamophobia.

He added that it made no difference if a person's father was "German, Jewish, Belarusian, Russian, or whatever."

Tajani: Most Brits Now Believe Brexit a Mistake

LONDON (Dispatches) -- Most British people now believe Brexit was a mistake, the president of the European Parliament has said.

Antonio Tajani said that disillusionment had set in "even in the British government" over the process of leaving the EU, though officials would not admit as much publicly.

In an interview with German newspaper Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, Tajani warned that if no deal was reached in Brexit talks Britain "especially" would have problems but that "the 27 remaining EU countries would also be affected."

"The problem is not us: the EU speaks with one voice. Rather, the government in London is struggling with a lot of difficulties. The British have to tell us what kind of relationship they want with the EU - whether they want the model of Norway or that of Switzerland," he told the newspaper.

"I believe that by now a majority of the population sees Brexit as a mistake. Even in the British government disillusionment has come, even if it will not officially admit that."

Polls of the British public show a gradual trend of an increasing number of people believing Brexit was a mistake.

A YouGov tracker last month had 47% of people believing leaving the bloc to be a mistake, with just 42% saying it was the right decision.

Almost one in five of the NHS's European doctors have made plans to quit Britain, according to research that has raised fresh fears of a Brexit-induced medical brain drain.

And almost half of the health service's 12,000 medics from the European Economic Area (EEA) are considering moving abroad, the British Medical Association survey of 1,720 of them found.

Surveys on the question of how people would vote in another referendum however show the overall picture broadly unchanged from the referendum date, with two highly polarized camps unmoved by recent events.

At a European Council summit last month Donald Tusk, the president of the European Council, said Brexit could still be stopped, and that possible outcomes included "a good deal, no deal or no Brexit."

The UK government must come up with "concrete and clear" proposals in the next two weeks to break the logjam in Brexit negotiations, European business leaders told Theresa May on Monday.

Amnesty's Reaction to Military Probe: Myanmar Seeks to 'Whitewash' Anti-Rohingya Atrocities



Rohingya Muslim refugees with a Bangladeshi border guard at a camp in the no man's land between Myanmar and Bangladesh

YANGON (Reuters) -- Human rights group Amnesty International poured scorn on a Myanmar military investigation into alleged atrocities against Rohingya Muslims, branding it a "whitewash" and calling for UN and independent investigators to be allowed into the country.

More than 600,000 Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh since late August, driven out by a counter-insurgency clearance operation in Rakhine State that a top UN official has called a classic case of "ethnic cleansing".

Accusations of organized mass rape and other crimes against humanity were leveled at the Myanmar military on Sunday by another senior UN official, who had toured camps in Bangladesh where Rohingya refugees have taken shelter.

Myanmar's military has consistently protested its innocence, and on Monday it posted the findings of an internal investigation on the Facebook page of its commander in chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. It said it had found no instances where its soldiers had shot and killed Rohingya villagers, raped women or tortured prisoners. It denied that security forces had torched Rohingya villages or used "excessive force".

The military's self-exoneration came as U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson pre-

pared to visit Myanmar on Wednesday for talks with leaders. Amnesty International dismissed the military's internal investigation and called for a UN fact finding mission and other independent investigators to be given full access to Rakhine.

"Once again, Burma's military is trying to sweep serious violations against the Rohingya under the carpet," James Gomez, Amnesty International's regional director for South East Asia and the Pacific, said in a statement released late Monday.

"There is overwhelming evidence that the military has murdered and raped Rohingya and burned their villages to the ground. "After recording countless stories of horror and using satellite analysis to track the growing devastation we can only reach one conclusion: these attacks amount to crimes against humanity."

Speaking in Dhaka, Pramila Patten, the UN special representative of the secretary-general on sexual violence in conflict, said she would raise accusations against the Myanmar military with the International Criminal Court in the Hague.

"Sexual violence is being commanded, orchestrated and perpetrated by the armed forces of Myanmar, otherwise known as the Tatmadaw," Patten said following a three-day tour of the Rohingya refugee camps in the Cox's Bazar region of Bangladesh.

South Korea: Not Easy to Destroy North's Nukes



South Korea's President Moon Jae-In delivers a statement during the 19th ASEAN-South Korea Summit on the sidelines of the 31st ASEAN Summit in Manila on November 13, 2017.

SEOUL (Dispatches) -- South Korean President Moon Jae-in said Tuesday it would not be easy for North Korea to destroy its nuclear arsenal quickly, even if wanted to, given its weapons programs were so developed.

North Korea is under heavy pressure to end its weapons programs but it has vowed never to give up its nuclear arsenal.

Speaking to reporters in the Philippines, Moon said that if North Korea agreed to hold talks, negotiations could be held with all options open. "If talks begin to resolve the North Korea nuclear issue, I feel it will be realistically difficult for North Korea to completely destroy its nuclear capabilities when their nuclear and missile arsenal are at a developed stage," Moon said in a briefing.

"If so, North Korea's nuclear program should be suspended, and negotiations could go on to pursue complete denuclearization."

Last week, the North said it did not oppose dialogue, but would "never put the issue related to the supreme interests of the DPRK and security of its people on the bargaining table." "We are not interested in such dialogue and negotiations in the least," the North's official news agency said, referring to the country by its official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The North defends the programs as a necessary defense against U.S. plans to invade. The United States, which has 28,500 troops in South Korea, a legacy of the 1950-53 Korean war, denies any such intention.

U.S. President Donald Trump threatened in

his maiden UN address to "totally destroy" North Korea and has said the time for talking, the policy of previous U.S. administrations, is over.

North Korea warned Monday that the unprecedented deployment of three U.S. aircraft carrier groups "taking up a strike posture" around the Korean peninsula is making it impossible to predict when nuclear war will erupt.

North Korea's UN Ambassador Ja Song Nam said in a letter to Secretary-General Antonio Guterres that the joint military exercises with South Korea are creating "the worst ever situation prevailing in and around the Korean peninsula."

Along with the three carrier groups, he said the U.S. has reactivated round-the-clock sorties with nuclear-capable B-52 strategic bombers "which existed during the Cold War times." He also said the U.S. is maintaining "a surprise strike posture with frequent flight of B-1B and B-2 formations to the airspace of South Korea." "The large-scale nuclear war exercises and blackmails, which the U.S. staged for a whole year without a break in collaboration with its followers to stifle our republic, make one conclude that the option we have taken was the right one and we should go along the way to the last," Ja said.

Ja accused the UN Security Council in Monday's letter of repeatedly "turning a blind eye to the nuclear war exercises of the United States, who is hell bent on bringing a catastrophic disaster to humanity." He said the exercises raise serious concern about "the double standard" of the UN's most powerful body.

News in Brief

MOSCOW (Dispatches) -- Russia's top domestic security agency says it has detained 69 suspected members of an outlawed Takfiri group during a raid near Moscow.

The Federal Security Service, or FSB, said the suspects belonged to Tablighi Jamaat, a global Takfiri missionary movement that has been banned in Russia as an extremist group. The FSB said it detained the suspected group members during Tuesday's raid and confiscated the group's literature. It said natives of formerly Soviet Central Asian nations led the Moscow cell of the group. The raid follows a series of arrests of suspects accused of involvement in radical and extremist Takfiri groups in Russia.

ATHENS (Reuters) -- A group of mainly Syrian women and children who have been stranded in Greece pitched tents opposite parliament in Athens on Tuesday in a protest against delays in reuniting with relatives in Germany.

Some of the refugees, who say they have been in Greece for over a year, said they had begun a hunger strike. "Our family ties our stronger than your illegal agreements," read a banner held up by one woman, referring to deals on refugees between European Union nations. Greek media have reported that Greece and Germany informally agreed in May to slow down refugee reunification, stranding families in Greece for months after they fled Syria's civil war. Greece denies this. Migration Minister Yannis Mousallos told reporters Greece had assurances from Germany that refugees whose applications have been accepted will eventually go to Germany even if there are delays. Applications for asylum, reunification and relocation to other European countries can take months to be processed.

WASHINGTON (AP) -- A second woman emerged Monday to accuse Roy Moore of sexually assaulting her as a teenager in the late 1970s, this time in a locked car, further roiling the Alabama Republican's candidacy for an open Senate seat. Moore strongly denied it, even as his own party's leaders intensified their efforts to push him out of the race. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell took a remarkably personal swipe at his party's candidate for a Senate seat the GOP cannot afford to lose. "I believe the women," he said, marking an intensified effort by leaders to ditch Moore before a Dec. 12 special election that has swung from an assured GOP victory to one that Democrats could conceivably swipe. Moore abruptly called a news conference in Gantt, Alabama, after a tearful Beverly Young Nelson's detailed the new allegations to reporters in New York. "I can tell you without hesitation this is absolutely false. I never did what she said I did. I don't even know the woman," Moore said.

ISLAMABAD (Reuters) -- An anti-corruption court in Pakistan Tuesday issued an arrest warrant for Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, media reported, after the veteran politician failed to turn up for several court hearings. Dar, who has been charged with amassing wealth beyond his known sources of income, has for three weeks missed court hearings conducted by the anti-graft agency the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), prompting a judge to issue a non-bailable arrest warrant, the English-language Dawn newspaper and other media reported.

Dar, who is receiving medical treatment in London and now faces arrest upon his return to Pakistan, has pleaded not guilty.

BOSTON, Mass (AP) -- International enrollments at U.S. colleges have fared better than expected this year, but many schools still fear the country's political climate, according to a national survey. The Institute of International Education reported Monday that the number of new students coming from abroad fell by an average of seven percent at nearly 500 colleges and universities surveyed this fall, but said the results from school to school are more mixed than many had feared. Many schools nevertheless have concerns about the U.S. political climate and fear that it could drive students away. While 45% of schools saw declines in international enrollment, nearly a third said their numbers have increased since last year, the survey found. The remaining 24% said they saw no change.

BRUSSELS (AFP) -- The EU removed Colombia's FARC from its list of terrorist organizations, an official told AFP, after the former guerrilla movement disarmed as part of a peace deal and relaunched itself as a political party.

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), which battled the government for half a century in a conflict that left some 260,000 people dead, reached a historic peace deal last year and its former leader now plans to run for president.

The decision to remove FARC from the list permanently comes after the EU suspended its terror listing in September 2016 in a bid to help the peace process in Colombia. "The Council adopted the legal acts providing for the de-listing of the FARC from the EU list of individuals and entities subject to restrictive measures to combat terrorism," an EU official told AFP, adding that the decision would be announced officially on Tuesday. After agreeing to the peace deal and disarming, the rebels transformed their movement into a political party, keeping the same initials but changing the official name to the Common Alternative Revolutionary Force.