

# State Department downplays European army: 'We support NATO'

European nations should bolster their military capabilities within the NATO alliance, the State Department said Tuesday in response to French and German calls for a continental army.

"Whatever should be done should not take away from NATO's efforts," State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert told reporters Tuesday. "We would not want the weakening of NATO."

President Trump has charged European leaders with free-riding on the United States by failing to spend a large enough proportion of their budgets on NATO. But French President Emmanuel Macron and outgoing German Chancellor Angela Merkel replied, most recently, by casting doubt on U.S. commitment to their security and calling for a new "European army" to give the continent more independence in foreign policy.

"What is really important, if we look at the developments of the past year, is that we have to work on a vision of one day creating a real, true European army," Merkel said Tuesday, according to the Daily Mail. "Only a stronger Europe is going to defend Europe."

Her comments echoed Macron's sentiment last week. "I want to build a real security dialogue with Russia, which is a country I respect, a European country, but we must have a Europe that can defend itself on its own without relying only on the United States," the French president said, according to the BBC.

Macron added that Europe must fortify its cybersecurity capabilities "to protect ourselves with respect to China, Russia and even the United States of America."

Germany is the leading European economy, but has been a relatively weak military power since the end of the Second World War. France and the United Kingdom — which recently left the European Union — have flanked the United States as the major powers of the NATO alliance.

“We support the European efforts to increase defense spending at NATO and also their military capabilities as a means to achieve a more equitable burden-sharing in the transatlantic security relationship,” Nauert said. “We support NATO. We support NATO and think that NATO should only be strengthened.”

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