

WikiLeaks cables expose France's collaboration with US imperialism

Kumaran Ira

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Cables leaked to WikiLeaks expose how the French political establishment has moved to support the illegal US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. Under the guise of the “war on terrorism”, the French ruling class supports Washington to secure its own imperialist interests, acting with contempt for public opinion.

In particular, the US occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan are extremely unpopular. Over 65 percent of the French population opposes the war. Nonetheless, France's major parties have committed to aggressive war, lining up with the US to defend French imperialist interests abroad, while destroying the living standards of the working class through a series of austerity measures at home.

Cables published on WikiLeaks show that Sarkozy and his political team were in frequent contact with the US diplomats long before assuming the French presidency in 2007. This was part of a broader attempt by Paris to mend relations with Washington. Though Chirac kept French airspace open to US military flights to Iraq, Washington never forgave Chirac's opposition to the US invasion of Iraq at the United Nations in 2003.

Sarkozy's relations with the US were so close that he confirmed his candidacy for the 2007 presidential election to the US embassy some 16 months before he did so to the French public in 2006.

According to one cable, “Sarkozy lamented the troubled state of U.S.-France relations during recent years. He drew a sharp distinction between disagreeing with friends and undercutting them. He said, ‘we should always be able to disagree.’ Calling it something he ‘would never do’, he cited President Chirac's, and then-Foreign Minister de Villepin's, use of France's Security Council veto against the U.S. ... as an unjustifiable and excessive reaction to a difference of views.”

Shortly before Sarkozy announced his candidacy, the US embassy in Paris wrote, “He is a markedly different

presidential heavyweight, pro-American and committed to free-market principles. Sarkozy is the French political leader most supportive of the U.S. role in the world. Sarkozy has told the Ambassador on several occasions that France needs to help the U.S. ‘get out of Iraq.’ Sarkozy's pro-American orientation has earned him the sobriquet ‘Sarkozy the American,’ and his affinity for Americans and the U.S. is genuine and heartfelt.”

In fact, Sarkozy's “affinity” for the US is mainly the grovelling admiration of a little imperialist thug for a more powerful imperialist thug, while dealing more ruthlessly with the workers at home. This is quite clear from Sarkozy's policies. Once Sarkozy was in power, he carried out social cuts, praising US-style free-market economic policies, and reinforced the French contingent in the NATO occupation of Afghanistan.

In his desire to ingratiate himself with Washington, Sarkozy went so far as to tell US officials that he might send French troops to Iraq in support of the US occupation if elected. In 2006, Sarkozy met Bush's Attorney General Alberto Gonzales during the latter's visit to Paris. The US ambassador wrote, “Sarkozy stated that France and the international community would have to help the United States resolve the situation in Iraq, as the U.S. could not do so alone; perhaps with international forces eventually replacing the U.S.”

Ultimately, Sarkozy did not send troops to Iraq in the aftermath of his election in 2007, for fear of provoking mass opposition. However, Sarkozy has continued his collaboration with the criminal policies of US imperialism, such as the war in Afghanistan, in violation of public opinion. According to one US diplomatic cable, Sarkozy views this policy with pride.

In September 2006, Sarkozy for the first time met briefly with George W. Bush during a meeting with the latter's national security adviser, Stephen Hadley. The secret cable says, “Sarkozy said he felt ‘proud and honored to meet with

President Bush.’ ... Sarkozy went on to explain that he considers it an opportunity to ‘affirm my loyal friendship for the U.S., which, though it may be unpopular’ (in France), ‘I nevertheless openly avow.’”

Sarkozy was rewarded with his cut of the spoils. After his election, French oil firm Total won bids for oilfields in US-occupied Iraq, and France opened its first military base in the Persian Gulf. In 2008, France sent more French troops to Afghanistan to support the NATO-led occupation of Afghanistan. In 2009 Sarkozy announced that France would rejoin NATO’s command structure, in which France had not formally participated since 1966.

While occasionally making tactical criticisms of Sarkozy’s foreign policy, the main bourgeois “left” party, the Parti Socialiste (PS)—and its political satellites like the Parti Communiste Français (PCF)—support Sarkozy’s alignment with US imperialism. These parties have themselves played an important role in French imperialist policy, such as France’s participation in the Afghan war. In 2001 the PS-led “Plural Left” government (PS, PCF, and Greens) of then-Prime Minister Lionel Jospin sent troops to Afghanistan.

The PS’s commitment to US wars of aggression exposes the political bankruptcy of petty-bourgeois pseudo-“left” organisations like France’s Nouveau Parti Anti-capitaliste (NPA), who argue that the PS is part of the “left” and must be pushed to the left.

One such indication of the PS’s commitment to war and imperialism was the fact that several of its members defected to serve in the conservative Sarkozy administration.

The US embassy was delighted when Sarkozy nominated Bernard Kouchner as foreign minister. Kouchner was a former PS member, who openly supported the US invasion of Iraq on the basis of lies that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. According to the US embassy, “Kouchner’s nomination to lead the Quai d’Orsay [the French foreign ministry] represents the accomplishment of the dream of a lifetime.” Kouchner’s 2007 visit to Baghdad, applauded by the US, marked a sign of France’s official reconciliation with the US occupation of Iraq.

According to another cable, Kouchner also sought to convince US officials that France would be a US ally in Afghanistan over the long-term. He met US Secretary of Defence Robert Gates in Paris in February this year, pledging that France would stay in Afghanistan as long as there were US forces in the country.

However, leaked cables show that leading PS figures—such as former PS secretary François Hollande and 2007 PS presidential candidate Segolène Royal—had long discussions with US officials on foreign and domestic policies.

After Royal won the PS presidential nomination for the 2007 election, the US embassy wrote,

“Royal has made clear that she opposed the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, and what she saw as the high-handed U.S. dismissal of multilateral, UN-led efforts to defuse the crisis. However, in some of her more recent statements on Iraq, Royal has clearly broken with the conventional wisdom in France, particularly that of the French left.”

In its comment, the embassy said, “If elected, Royal appears to be someone who would approach world affairs pragmatically and would seek to maintain a close, if critical, relationship with the U.S.”

In 2006, Pierre Moscovici, the PS’s national secretary for international relations, met with the visiting ambassador to NATO, Victoria Nuland, to discuss the positions of a potential PS administration on transatlantic relations.

A cable says, “Moscovici asserted that the PS leadership was favorably disposed toward the U.S. and described the PS as ultimately less anti-American than Chirac. While it was likely to be tougher on questions of principle, he judged that the PS would be more flexible in practice. He described Chirac as a dogmatist who had pandered too much to domestic opinion, and accused Chirac of actively working against the U.S. in the run-up to the Iraq war and threatening a veto ‘too early,’ before the UN had had an opportunity to explore all possible avenues.”

Such cables expose the basic hypocrisy of the PS, which has issued tactical criticisms of US wars and occasionally opposed war-related measures in the National Assembly, when its position would not affect the outcome of the vote. When speaking privately to US officials, however, the PS makes clear that its “principles” will not prevent it from “flexibly” accommodating to all the wars of the US.



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