

Visiting Mali, French President Macron appeals for army's support

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For his first official visit outside Europe, Emmanuel Macron traveled on May 19 to the military base at Gao in Mali, to which 1,700 French troops are deployed in the context of Operation Barkhane. There, the newly-elected French president paid a full-throated tribute to the French army. Macron was accompanied by the chief of the general staff of the army and by two ministers, former Defense Minister and now Foreign Affairs Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, and the new minister of the Armies, Sylvie Goulard.

“As I took office, among the living forces of the nation ... I wanted to give the first rank to the French army,” he declared in a 20-minute speech to the assembled troops. He then hailed “the continuity of our admirable military tradition” and the “faultless solidarity” of the army, which he called “an example for all the French people.”

Referring to France's colonial past in Africa, he said: “Here, you are the vanguard of the Republic, as so many generations of military men were here on this continent.”

To conclude, after having stressed his role as commander in chief of the army, he said: “My confidence in you is total. I know I can count on you in all circumstances, just like you can count on me.”

Macron repeated the tired and false cliché that the French military intervention in Mali is the “spearhead of the war on terror,” which the media dutifully trumpeted. But in fact, France, like its NATO allies, uses the same terrorist forces it is claiming to fight in the Sahel as allies in its war for regime change in Syria.

In fact, the political context of this “priority” visit suggests that other motives are at stake. Macron went to Mali amid the deepest crisis of the French political establishment since the Algerian war. Since the presidential elections, the two-party system that

governed France over the last 50 years has collapsed, with the electoral disintegration of the Socialist Party (PS), as the bourgeoisie plans to impose unprecedented social austerity and military spending increases on the workers.

The state of emergency has already been repeatedly extended and effectively made permanent, in order to repress working class opposition to austerity and war, which was clearly expressed before the first round of the presidential elections in the sudden rise of Jean-Luc Mélenchon's vote after the US missile strikes against Syria on April 7.

One indication of the explosiveness of the situation was the preparation of a coup d'état by the PS government, revealed by *L'Obs* last week, in the event that neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen won the presidential elections. The PS was planning to impose martial law and a massive mobilization of the security forces in order to crush anti-fascist protests. Le Pen would have been kept in power but the PS ministerial cabinet would have refused to step down. There have been no official denials or reactions to this report.

Even more than the former PS President François Hollande, Macron is relying on his relations with the security forces. Since his election, Macron has repeatedly signaled that he would place the army at the center of his policy, traveling down the Champs-Élysées on a military truck on his inauguration, and renaming the Defense Ministry the Ministry of the Armies.

Amid a massive extension of military operations by the NATO powers around the world, French imperialism is preparing a major escalation in Africa. Macron declared in Gao that he wanted to “accelerate” operations in the region. He has already signaled that he would respond favorably to requests from the generals

for more resources and materials.

But Macron's visit to an “army at war” is above all designed to consolidate his government's political ties with it.

His visit was aimed to check if the army would respond favorably if it was asked to intervene inside France, and that it could be reliably counted upon to defend his government if its situation collapsed. What Macron said about the army in Gao is quite revealing, well beyond operations in Africa: “You are more than ever our sentinel and our rampart.”

It is necessary here to alert workers and youth: French imperialism is perfectly conscious that its policy of social counter-revolution and war will provoke deep opposition in the working class, and that it will not be able to impose it without repression. It is consciously preparing for revolutionary struggles in France and across Europe.

The colonial army of an imperialist country is not simply an instrument of overseas conquest and of the subjugation of foreign populations. It plays an enormous and reactionary role in the political equilibrium of the country itself. Its objectives and methods overseas make it well suited for repression of the working class at home.

Macron has barely been in power one week and he is already unpopular. According to an Elabe poll for *Les Echos*, the new president's approval rating is only 45 percent. The new president is entering “the Elysée palace with less support than any of his predecessors,” *Les Echos* noted, and his prime minister has only 36 percent support. All Macron's political decisions and announcements since his election show that he is preparing a confrontation with the working class.

The greatest danger is that the workers and youth are not fully conscious of the depth of the political crisis and the danger posed by the Macron government and its international allies.

Responsibility for this state of affairs lies entirely with the political parties that obtained millions of votes from workers and youth who opposed Macron in the first round of the presidential election: Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France (UF) and the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA). Neither of them warned the population of the growing risks it faces.

UF press officials told the *World Socialist Web Site* that they had nothing to say about the coup that was

being plotted by the PS, and the movement's spokesmen, though they are in the middle of the legislative election campaign, have kept silent on the matter. As for the NPA, its press officials dismissed news of the coup plot as journalistic sensationalism that did not deserve to be taken seriously or even read. Even though NPA members have already been banned from protests and threatened with legal action under the state of emergency, the NPA still treats this news as if it had no importance.

These parties, which for decades claimed to be the “left” or even the “far left” in France, are totally indifferent to the attacks on basic democratic freedoms carried out by the PS, and new, even more drastic attacks being prepared by Macron. This testifies to the bankruptcy of the petty-bourgeois parties that for decades revolved around the PS and presented it as a working-class party and an alternative to Stalinism.



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