

French media hail Macron's moves away from US anti-Russian policies

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Yesterday, French media applauded newly elected President Emmanuel Macron's summit Monday in Versailles with Russian President Vladimir Putin. This enthusiasm was all the more significant as the newspapers made little effort to hide the fact that Macron was shifting towards Moscow despite Washington's open hostility to Russia.

"In the finery of the castle of Versailles," *Le Monde* wrote in its editorial yesterday, "France wanted on Monday, May 29, to start a new, better course in its relations with Russia. And that was a good thing." It rejoiced that "At NATO, with Donald Trump and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, like with Vladimir Putin in Versailles, Mr. Macron set the tone."

The editorial pointed to the close links between Macron's overtures to Russia and the growing tensions between the United States and the European Union (EU), and above all Germany. These took the most overt form in German Chancellor Angela Merkel's statement this weekend that, after Britain's exit from the EU and the election of Donald Trump as US president, continental Europe would have to fight for its future alone, without relying on Washington and London.

Le Monde hailed Macron's "will to seize a 'European moment.'" It added, "Between Brexit and the mercantilist isolationism of Donald Trump, highlighted this week by Angela Merkel, the EU must close ranks and reinforce its own identity on the great issues of the day: Ukraine, Syria, global warming."

This analysis was shared, with minor variations, by newspapers of all political colours. The right-wing *Le Figaro* explained that the two presidents aimed to "revive diplomatic relations between their two countries" and applauded Macron's timing: "Macron also capitalised on an international situation favourable to France. Faced with Putin, he was free to act: the UK is out of the picture since Brexit, the United States is unpredictable since Donald Trump's election, and Germany is busy preparing its upcoming elections."

Libération, however, recalled the close relations between Germany and Macron, who was Berlin's favoured presidential candidate, and applauded Macron's rapprochement with Putin. "The diplomatic collaboration [Macron] has developed with Angela Merkel shows undeniable skill," it wrote. "By inviting the Russian president to follow the footsteps of the brutal and visionary Czar Peter the Great, of whom Putin styles himself the descendant, Macron is offering Putin assurances."

The emergence of such a consensus in the French media reflects a profound shift taking place in the politics of the capitalist class in France and across Europe. The NATO military alliance between the United States, Canada, and the western European powers is in an advanced state of collapse.

At Versailles, Macron broached policies that would repudiate most of the initiatives that French and US imperialism developed together over the last decade. When right-wing President Nicolas Sarkozy was elected in 2007, he took France back into the NATO military command in order to repair the damage done to relations with Washington by German and French opposition to the illegal 2003 US invasion of Iraq.

Since then, France and other European imperialist powers worked with Washington to launch a war rampage across the Middle East and eastern Europe, often targeting pro-Russian regimes. Now, however, Macron is signaling that he is considering a vast reorientation of French foreign policy away from the United States and towards Russia.

In Syria—where France backed the NATO war to topple the Russian-backed regime since the war began in 2011, even recognising US-backed opposition militias as Syria's government—Macron floated the possibility of reopening France's embassy in Damascus. He also proposed developing closer counter-terrorism cooperation with Russia.

Macron stood by silently while Putin denounced economic sanctions Washington forced the EU to impose on Russia. To address the conflict that erupted inside Ukraine after Washington and Berlin backed a fascist-led putsch against a

pro-Russian government in Kiev in 2014, Macron also endorsed the “Normandy format” of four-way talks between Germany, Russia, France, and Ukraine. This negotiating format pointedly leaves out the United States.

Significantly, sections of the international media are beginning to discuss the vast implications of this policy shift, coming as Germany, Macron’s main ally, remilitarises its foreign policy.

In the United States, *Forbes* pointed to the link between the Macron-Putin conference and the bitter geo-strategic rivalries growing inside NATO. It mocked coverage in the US media which, it said, all “reads the same: Macron took it to Putin over fake news, Syria and gay rights. There is nothing else to see. Progressive nice guy Macron spanked evil backer of dictators, Putin.”

Coming after Trump’s foreign tour to the Middle East and Europe, during which Trump laid out an aggressive pro-Saudi and anti-Iranian line, the magazine pointed to bitter strategic and energy rivalries between Washington and its nominal European allies.

“Macron,” *Forbes* warned, “needs Putin more than he needs Donald Trump. These two are more likely to get along, at least behind closed doors, and here is why. First, many in France are souring on sanctions [against Russia]. ... Second, and more importantly, is this little deal here: Total SA’s agreement to develop giant South Paris gas field in Iran. French oil giant Total SA is one of the biggest European players in Iranian hydrocarbons. Russia is Iran’s best friend. ... France and Total cannot trust the Americans on Iran, but they can trust the Russians.”

While *Forbes* unmistakably saw a potential Franco-Russian alliance as threatening US interests, Germany’s *Die Zeit* was, by contrast, agreeably surprised.

“From a German standpoint, one always asks oneself, when the big neighbours France and Russia are meeting, whether they are hiding some sort of plan against Germany,” it wrote. “And Paris and Moscow are often happy to play on these concerns. So it is astonishing that French observers are almost unanimously interpreting Macron’s first international appearances in the context of a renewed German-French alliance.”

It is ever clearer that the sudden, rapid and unpredictable shifts in the foreign policy of the various imperialist powers are not passing events or coincidences, but symptoms of a far broader crisis of the capitalist system struck by more than a decade of deep economic crisis.

In 1991, the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union deprived the NATO alliance of a common enemy. Over a quarter century later, the process of NATO’s internal collapse is in a very advanced state. The wars in Iraq and Yugoslavia launched by the United States and its European

allies in the 1990s have escalated into wars across much of the Middle East and Africa, and vast US-led confrontations with Russia and China, with a major NATO military build-up in eastern Europe and the US-led “pivot to Asia” aimed at China.

Every indication is that the shift Macron is undertaking has been under preparation for some time, amid mounting opposition in European capitals to the impact of US wars on their strategic interests. Macron himself traveled to Russia last year as economy minister and met with his Russian counterpart, Alexei Ulyukayev, to announce that despite EU sanctions on Russia, Macron hoped French economic ties to Moscow would deepen. Under the impact of the sanctions, France’s trade volume with Russia has been halved, to only US\$11.6 billion per year.

Macron’s prime minister, Edouard Philippe, was the mayor of France’s busiest container shipping port, Le Havre, which repeatedly hosted the influential China-Europa business summit.

The deepening strategic and economic rivalries between the NATO powers constitute a warning to the working class. After a quarter-century of escalating war, the remilitarisation of German foreign policy and Macron’s call for a return to the draft in France, the European ruling elites are preparing an explosion of imperialist militarism fought in the interests of the banks, shareholders, and major corporations.

Workers cannot support any of these contending imperialist powers, on either side of the Atlantic; all are led by ruling classes bitterly hostile to working people and that are preparing horrific wars. What is emerging is not the bankruptcy of one or another imperialist power, but of world imperialism, and a plunge by international capitalism back to the type of conflicts that twice in the last century led to world war.

The reactionary character of Franco-German imperialist interests is perhaps most strikingly indicated by the nature of Macron’s government. Having extended France’s nearly two-year-long state of emergency, which suspends basic democratic rights, it is preparing to impose deep cuts to jobs and social benefits in authoritarian fashion, by decree. As it prepares to wage war overseas, it is pouring resources to boost police force levels and increase the number of prison cells, in anticipation of a confrontation with the working class.



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