

French President Macron calls for military buildup in foreign policy address

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Speaking Tuesday to a conference of French ambassadors for his inaugural foreign policy speech, President Emmanuel Macron laid out plans for a military build-up and an aggressive global policy. He made clear that the counterpart to the assertion of French imperialist interests overseas would be an escalation of police-state measures, such as the state of emergency, at home.

The Macron administration is facing the collapse of American imperialist hegemony that has shaped world politics since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the Stalinist bureaucracy's dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The quarter-century of Middle East wars and ebbing US influence have undermined the geo-strategic order on which French capitalism worked out its world policy. Macron himself all but acknowledged that, after Trump's election to the White House, the political foundations of Europe are collapsing.

He said, "We are passing through a period of most intense questioning of the diplomatic certainties and of confusion about developments in 25 or 50 years. Today, the post-1989 order, one based on a form of globalisation that became totally unfettered and the hyper-power of one state, is shattered."

Without naming the United States or the Trump administration, Macron presented Europe as a democratic counterweight to a collapse of the world capitalist order, declaring: "Europe is one of the last refuges where the Enlightenment ideals of electoral and representative democracy, the respect for human personality, religious tolerance and freedom of expression and the belief in progress are still largely shared."

Only a few paragraphs later, however, he acknowledged that Europe is threatened with war, as well. Pointing to potential conflict between Russia and Ukraine in the aftermath of the 2014 NATO-backed coup in Kiev, he said, "We have forgotten that the last 70 years of peace on the European continent were an aberration of our collective history. That is however what the building of European institutions allowed us to create. But the threat is on our

doorstep, and war is on our continent."

The inescapable conclusion from Macron's remark that the last 70 years since World War II were an "aberration" is that world war is again a possibility, including in Europe. The "End of History" triumphalism of bourgeois commentators, who declared that the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union spelled the definitive triumph of capitalism, has collapsed. The same objective contradictions of capitalism that drove the Russian working class to socialist revolution a century ago are erupting today.

Under Macron, moreover, the French bourgeoisie is embarking on policies of militarism, politicised racism, and attacks on social and democratic rights that twice in the last century led Europe to war. Macron called for a major military build-up, including an increase in defence spending to 2 percent of Gross Domestic Product, and called for making "the struggle against Islamist terrorism the main priority of our foreign policy." He called for making the French army "one of the very best in the world, the best in Europe, to protect France and also our continent."

This will inevitably involve deep social attacks on the working class and a major confrontation with opposition in the working class, where Macron's popularity is plummeting. As his administration prepares to permanently write the main provisions of France's draconian state of emergency into common law, Macron said: "The choice between liberty and security of course poses a difficult problem at the national level. However, we have made our choices."

The claim that a war against Islamist terrorism is the centre of French foreign policy is a political lie. France and its NATO allies have for more than six years used Islamist militias tied to Al Qaeda—which originated in the CIA's covert war against the Soviet-backed regime in Afghanistan in the 1980s—in wars for regime change in Libya and then Syria. The supposed war on Islamist terror was a pretext on which Paris justified military interventions across its former colonial empire and stoked a nationalist, anti-Muslim atmosphere at home that benefited the neo-fascist National

Front.

The rest of Macron's speech showed that France's foreign policy is driven not by opposition to terrorism, but by the bitter struggle for military and economic influence in all the major world markets that motivated the imperialist strategists of the twentieth century. Appealing to France's ambassadors to "improve France's image with opinion-makers" worldwide and work for "growth in the number of French firms that export," he then briefly surveyed the policy France would pursue to maximise its influence in the world's major conflict zones.

At the centre of Macron's policy is an attempt to re-assert French influence in its former colonial sphere in Syria, North Africa, and the Sahel. "Two great zones are the focus of our efforts in the struggle against terror: Syria and Iraq on the one hand, and Libya and the Sahel on the other," he said. He announced that he would "soon" travel to Ouagadougou, the capital of the former French colony of Burkina Faso, which has played a significant role in the French war in neighbouring Mali.

Apart from the policy of military intervention in the Middle East, however, what appeared the most clearly in his remarks were the explosive tensions between Washington on the one hand, and its nominal European allies—above all, Germany and France—on the other.

Macron stressed France's "attachment" to the Iranian nuclear treaty—implicitly criticising Trump's denunciations of the deal and Trump's vocal support for Saudi Arabia against Iran—and called for limiting Saudi threats against the oil sheikdom of Qatar, which shares a gas field with Iran. He said, "as soon as the crisis between Qatar and its neighbors erupted, I sought to place France in a role of supporting mediation. ... One of the hidden aspects of this crisis is the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and their respective allies."

As Trump threatens North Korea with war, Macron also demanded an "intransigent" policy against North Korea. However, he also called for building "solid" relations with China, so long as it contributes "to the stability of international relations."

Macron called for careful engagement with China and its New Silk Road infrastructure project, which Washington strongly opposes, and which he saw as a challenge for French and European diplomacy: "I say with great gravity, if we are not able to use multilateral strategies, other great powers will seize these tools. ... The New Silk Road is a classic example of a major geopolitical project carried out by China, which we must take into account from the standpoint of our European interests."

In contrast to Macron's obvious if unstated geo-strategic conflicts with Trump, he stressed the importance of France's

alliance with Germany: "I sought to give it strength as soon as I took office by traveling to Berlin and by making this alliance, this foundation, between France and Germany not an answer to all our problems, but the condition to possibly start solving them."

The insane project of making Europe the basis for a bid to replace America as the world's imperialist hegemon confronts not only opposition from US imperialism, but also from the rising opposition to militarism and war in the European and international working class. The attempts to deal with rising social discontent and opposition to the institutions of the European Union (EU) took up a large part of Macron's speech.

With the EU discredited by a decade of deep austerity policies against workers across the continent, Macron called for a "refoundation" of the EU. He stressed that the EU was obliged to "honour the initial promises that repaired our continent after World War II: peace, prosperity, and liberty. ... This is why we will launch in the coming months, in France and in other volunteer countries, democratic conventions to more profoundly associate our fellow citizens with debate on Europe's future."

Macron's proposals are bankrupt and cynical. While calling for "peace, prosperity, and liberty," he is preparing war, police-state rule, and unilateral decrees to rewrite French labour laws, which are already overwhelmingly unpopular, in favour of the employers.

Macron's agenda shows that the promises the European bourgeoisies made as they launched the European institutions after World War II—that it would never again fall into war, economic depression, and dictatorship—were false. Unless they are stopped by a conscious political movement of the international working class against war, the imperialist powers are again heading towards military catastrophes on a scale as great, or even greater, than the wars of the previous century.



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