

Macron threatens Syria, pledges to make no concessions to French workers

Alex Lantier
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In an hour-long interview on TF1 television on Thursday, French President Emmanuel Macron threatened imminent war with Syria and pledged to make no concessions to the growing strike movement against his austerity policies at home.

The interview demonstrated the political bankruptcy of the Macron administration and its NATO allies. Macron baldly announced that his support for unprovoked military attacks, which threaten not only Syria but also Russian forces in Syria, and that he would formulate his policies without regard for public opinion, which he dismissed as “polls.” He called for an atmosphere of national unity despite his wildly unpopular agenda based on resort to the military, including restoring the draft.

The interview underscored that the only way for the working class to stop the drive to austerity and war is to bring down Macron’s government in the course of a struggle for political power.

Macron said he was working closely with US President Donald Trump, who has threatened to bomb Syrian and Russian forces inside Syria over unsubstantiated allegations that the Syrian regime used chemical weapons against Islamist militias at Douma. “I have called him many times,” he said, adding: “Yes, every day since the beginning of the week our teams have worked closely together. We will have decisions to take in good time, when we think it is most effective.”

To justify his threats, Macron echoed the Trump administration: “The ongoing wars in Syria, particularly by the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad, cannot just do anything they want. There is a framework, of international law. We have proof that last week, chemical weapons were used, at least chlorine. They were used by Bashar al-Assad’s regime.”

The cynicism of Macron’s invocation of international law to justify plans for an unprovoked and illegal act of aggression against Syria is breathtaking. Washington and

its allies have provided no evidence for their claims that the Assad regime used chemical weapons in Douma, which are based solely on the say-so of Islamist “rebel” forces. Since 2011, in defiance of international law, NATO governments have armed the Islamist networks in a proxy war for regime change in Syria—even as these very same networks carried out terror attacks across Europe, and particularly in France.

Yet 15 years after the collapse of US lies that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, the pretext for the illegal 2003 US invasion of Iraq, Macron insisted that the French people should just accept the word of the Islamists and the NATO governments and acquiesce to their plans for war.

Macron all but acknowledged that his case for war against Russia in Syria has no factual basis. He pledged to “remove the regime’s chemical warfare capabilities” and “prepare the Syria of tomorrow,” that is, to bomb Syria, “once we have decided upon and verified all the evidence.”

An unprovoked NATO strike on Syria, where Moscow has stationed substantial forces, threatens escalation into all-out war across the Middle East and with Russia, a major nuclear-armed power. Macron breezily dismissed this danger, claiming he could stop any spiral of military escalation thanks to his relations with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

He said, “Since I received President Putin for an official visit we have seen each other repeatedly, we speak regularly, the world is chaotic, there are unacceptable situations, and that is why we are doing today what we will have to do in Syria, to stay on our priorities and ensure as much stability as possible in the region. France will not, under any circumstances, allow an escalation to begin or do anything that could damage the stability of the region.”

Macron’s guarantees that France can bomb Syria but without provoking a major war are worthless and

dangerous. In the course of a quarter century of escalating wars since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union, the NATO powers have devastated the Middle East—from Iraq to Afghanistan, Libya and now Syria. Amid explosive political warfare between Trump and his Democratic opponents, who are spearheading the anti-Russian campaign against the White House, Washington is threatening not only Syria but Iran and Russia with war.

Macron's comments aim to lull the French people to sleep as to the danger that NATO aggression in the Middle East could escalate into a war and a nuclear conflagration between the major powers.

This is a warning to workers and youth, in France and across Europe, entering into struggle against the European Union (EU) agenda of austerity and militarism. Amid strikes by workers and students against Macron's social cuts and university reforms, there is growing discussion in France of the May-June 1968 general strike 50 years ago—when the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) blocked the seizure of power by the workers, selling out the strike in favor of wage concessions and new elections. There will be no "reformist" outcome of the class struggle today, however.

After a quarter century of war and a decade of deep economic crisis, the French ruling class as a whole is determined to drastically restructure class relations at home and assert its interests in the global imperialist drive to war. The French government has announced plans to spend €300 billion on the military by 2024. The money for this and for Macron's multi-billion-euro tax handouts to the rich is to be obtained by plundering the workers with deep social austerity.

Macron insisted that he would make no concessions to growing support for strikes by railway and airline workers and protests by university students. Citing EU rules, he pledged to continue with plans to abolish the rail workers and public workers statute, which would allow him to replace these workers with new hires whose wages and social rights would be reduced to those of temp workers.

Asked by TF1's Jean-Pierre Pernaut if he would continue with his unpopular policies "even if this means losing the support of public opinion," Macron said he would. "Public opinion is not an end in itself," Macron declared. "Pardon me for being blunt, but what is public opinion? Does this mean that each day I have to look at the polls about this or that question, and do this or that?"

This is the language of dictatorship, and Macron promised to build up a social base for his policies by appeals to nationalism and the military, including by

restoring universal military service. He said, "our country must be aware that it is a nation, and that means public education, secularism, universal national service, a true politics of the Nation." As Macron wages war from Syria to Mali, and the entire ruling elite uses "secularism" as political code for appeals to anti-Muslim racism, it is ever clearer what Macron is speaking about.

Plans for universal military service means inciting nationalist hysteria to recruit masses of youth as cannon fodder for imperialist wars overseas, and police-state operations against social opposition at home. Significantly, these plans enjoy the support of the entire political establishment, including the union bureaucracy and petty bourgeois pseudo-left forces like Jean Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France (LFI) party. They are complicit in Macron's plans for repression.

Only a few days after his government violently attacked ecological protesters at Notre-Dame-des-Landes with paramilitary police and armored vehicles, and cleared students from parts of Nanterre University, Macron again threatened student protesters in his interview. He claimed that the forces leading the student protests are not in fact students, but only "professional inciters of disorder."

These remarks underscore that workers and students cannot fight Macron based on symbolic protests organized inside France by the unions and their political allies, who are at the same time negotiating the reforms with Macron. The way forward is the mobilisation of the working class around the world based on an internationalist and socialist perspective in a struggle against imperialism and war.



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