

Xi Jinping tours Europe amid growing divisions between America and EU

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On Tuesday, Chinese President Xi Jinping wrapped up a six-day tour of Europe that took him to Rome, Sicily, Monaco and Paris. This trip and the signing of multiple business and strategic agreements between China and the European powers have exposed the deep conflicts that exist between the United States and its nominal European allies.

Before Xi's trip, the press had leaked news that Italy planned to endorse China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) for transport, energy and industrial infrastructure across Eurasia.

This provoked bitter opposition from Washington. After launching a "pivot to Asia" to militarily isolate China in 2011, the US has now repudiated the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty to allow it to deploy large numbers of nuclear missiles targeting China and Russia. On Twitter, the US National Security Council warned Italy it was legitimizing China's "predatory approach to investment and will bring no benefits to the Italian people."

The European Union (EU) powers thrust aside US objections, however. After the EU powers all signed on in 2015 to the BRI's funding arm, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, this weekend Rome signed a Memorandum of Understanding endorsing the BRI.

Paris bitterly complained that Rome had sidelined its EU partners in its talks with China. However, when Xi arrived, it proceeded to sign its own multi-billion-euro deals with him. The biggest, a €30 billion deal for Franco-German firm Airbus to sell jetliners to China, included a large new order as China abandons the Boeing 737 MAX for Airbus A320s after two horrific crashes. French President Emmanuel Macron then met Xi together with German Chancellor Angela Merkel,

who said she saw "nothing to criticize" in Italy's deal with Xi endorsing the BRI.

These meetings unfolded amid explosive tensions with the United States over policy towards China and Russia. This month, after Merkel rejected US calls to boycott Chinese tech firm Huawei's products, US Ambassador to Germany Richard Grenell threatened to suspend US intelligence cooperation with Germany. At the same time, Washington is threatening Berlin with sanctions if it does not abandon its Nordstream 2 pipeline bringing Russian gas to Germany.

Despite their remarkable clashes with Washington, the policy of the European imperialist powers is not fundamentally different, or less predatory and reactionary. They plan to plunge hundreds of billions of euros into their military machines, financed by austerity targeting the working class, to give them the military might to better confront Washington.

London's *Financial Times* laid out the militarist implications of attempts to pursue an independent European policy in its editorial yesterday. "The EU fears being squeezed between the US and China as the Trump administration takes an ever-harder line towards Beijing. European leaders do not want to be forced into a choice between the two," it wrote, adding that EU member states either "take China's direct investment or put a premium on exporting to China."

In Europe, the FT continued, "Some argue for building an autonomous foreign and defence capacity. But for years to come, Europe will be unable to stand alone." It euphemistically called on the major EU powers to "think more strategically" and "take the lead." In plain English, this means Europe should hurry to rearm.

The European heads of state themselves do not know whether the weapons they are building would serve to

join a US onslaught against China, a Chinese war against America, or some other conflict. However, two years since US President Donald Trump speculated about an end of the NATO alliance and threatened trade war against German car exports, longstanding international arrangements underpinning the affairs of world capitalism are rapidly disintegrating.

The contradictions of capitalism that the great Marxists of the 20th century identified as leading to the outbreak of world war and the October 1917 Revolution in Russia—between world economy and the nation-state system, and social production and private appropriation of profit—are reasserting themselves.

The BRI is a multi-trillion-dollar plan, laid out in 2013, placing China at the hub of a vast web of rail and road networks, ports, energy pipelines and industrial facilities ranging from China across the Eurasian landmass to Europe, going as far as East Africa and Indonesia. Hundreds of billions have already been spent on initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, regular Chinese freight train service to Iran and Germany via Russia, and Indian Ocean ports. Chinese state-owned enterprises are coordinating enormous international operations as much of Eurasia industrializes.

This brings Beijing into headlong conflict with Washington. It also creates the conditions for a potential conflict with the European powers if they align themselves with the BRI. On Xi's Europe tour, the *Washington Post* quoted analyst Jacob Shapiro, who warned that pan-Eurasian plans lay "the groundwork for precisely the type of power the US has been obsessed with thwarting for over two centuries. As overly ambitious as China's larger strategic goal may be, it is precisely that strategic aim that so irks the United States. While it doesn't particularly care if China builds a port in Italy or high-speed rail in Poland, it does care about the potential emergence of a dominant power in Eurasia."

Washington's main strategy, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 threw open Central Asia to imperialist intervention, was to dominate this region as the key to controlling the Eurasian land mass. It launched a series of wars in the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and beyond. Despite growing commercial rivalries with the United States, the European imperialist powers largely joined these wars. They cost

millions of lives, shattered entire societies and discredited the ruling classes of the imperialist countries among workers internationally.

But the debacle of these neo-colonial interventions has only led Washington to up the ante, preparing new, even bloodier wars and provocations targeting Russia and China directly.

The European imperialist powers' attempts to formulate an independent imperialist policy do not offer a peaceful alternative to Washington's wars. Their rearmament, financed by austerity, goes hand in hand with a relentless march to the far right and towards police state rule. While right-wing extremist professors legitimize Hitler's crimes to justify German remilitarization, French President Emmanuel Macron has hailed fascist dictator Philippe Pétain and given authorization to shoot down "yellow vest" protesters opposed to social inequality and war.

Ultimately, the deepening global antagonisms rending the global geopolitical order carry with them the immense danger of a new world war, this time fought with nuclear weapons. The working class is the only social force capable of opposing the imperialist war drive.

The most urgent political task is the building of an international anti-war movement in the working class amid an upsurge of the class struggle. The eruption of mass protests for the downfall of Algeria's military regime, the "yellow vest" movement and strikes against EU wage freezes across Europe, reports of growing social protest in China, and strikes by US teachers and Mexican autoworkers against both the unions and the companies point to an enormous radicalization of workers. The critical issue is to orient them to the great tasks posed by the objective situation.

The only way to rationally organize the international productive forces created by modern society and prevent a new relapse into horrific wars is the expropriation of the capitalist classes by the working class, fighting on a program of world socialist revolution.



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