

Paris recalls ambassadors to US, Australia over anti-Chinese AUKUS alliance

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Last night, Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian recalled France's ambassadors to the United States and Australia after the announcement Wednesday of the AUKUS (Australia-UK-US) alliance. Australia had repudiated a massive €56 billion arms deal with France for attack submarines, to instead obtain them from Washington and London.

Le Drian's communiqué stated: "At the request of the President of the Republic, I have decided upon the immediate recall to Paris for consultations of our ambassadors to the United States and Australia. This exceptional decision is justified by the exceptionally serious announcements made on September 15 by Australia and the United States."

This decision is without precedent in history. The recall of an ambassador is traditionally the last diplomatic measure taken before the outbreak of war. France, an ally of the United States in every war involving both countries since the 1775–1783 Revolutionary War for independence from Britain, has never before recalled its ambassador to the United States.

While the AUKUS alliance targets China, it has revealed explosive conflicts among the imperialist powers. Washington, London and Canberra prepared AUKUS over several months in total secrecy from what are ostensibly their closest allies among the European Union (EU) powers. This points to deep distrust among the United States, Britain and the EU countries, beset by insoluble military and economic rivalries in Asia.

On Thursday, Le Drian had given a TV interview to *France Info* to emphasize that the Australian and US decisions were fundamentally unacceptable to France. He said, "I am outraged; allies do not do this to each other. ... To speak plainly, this is a stab in the back."

"We had established relations of trust with Australia; this trust has been betrayed," Le Drian said, stressing his "great bitterness" and pledging to sue for damages.

France's Naval Group corporation in Cherbourg was working with Australian manufacturers to deliver the first subs by 2023, he said, "with teams of Australian engineers working in Cherbourg and Naval Group staff working in Adelaide [in Australia]. Then, suddenly, poof!"

Le Drian then denounced "America's behavior," blaming President Joe Biden for not resolving but compounding the crisis of US-European relations under his predecessor, Donald Trump.

He said, "This unilateral, brutal, unpredictable decision is very much like what Mr. Trump used to do. We learned brutally, by a declaration from President Biden, that the contract between the Australians and the French is broken, and that the United States will propose to the Australians a nuclear deal whose content is unknown. ... This is not how one treats allies or other powers who want to develop a coherent, structured Indo-Pacific strategy."

Arguments that Australia's violation of the deal was a technical move—to get longer range, nuclear-propelled submarines from Washington and London, as opposed to diesel-electric boats sold by France—do not hold water. The submarines sold by France were in fact a nuclear design, the Barracuda, with its reactor replaced by a diesel-electric engine to respect Australia's nuclear non-proliferation obligations. Yet Australian officials did not contact their French counterparts to change the design, instead scrapping the contract overnight and replacing it with US nuclear submarines.

To defuse tensions, an anonymous US official told AFP: "Senior administration officials have been in touch with their French counterparts to discuss AUKUS, including before the announcement."

However, the French embassy in Washington immediately responded with a formal denial. Embassy spokesman Pascal Confavreux said, "We were not informed of this project before the publication of the first

reports in the US and Australian press, which came only a few hours before Joe Biden's official announcement."

This eruption of bitter conflicts between supposed NATO "allies" is a historic warning to the working class. The Soviet bureaucracy's dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 did not resolve the deeply rooted, ultimately fatal contradictions of world capitalism. Depriving NATO of a common enemy, it exacerbated interimperialist conflicts that twice in the first half of the 20th century erupted into world war. Now, Asia's economic rise and the US war drive against China are inflaming bitter US-European competition over profits and strategic influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

In Paris, *Le Monde* called AUKUS "a slashing blow in the web laboriously woven by French diplomacy in recent years in the Indo-Pacific. Precisely to avoid the trap of Sino-American rivalries, Paris made a military-industrial turn to Canberra a leading focus of its new strategy in the region."

French attempts to pursue an independent policy in the Indo-Pacific region proved unacceptable to Washington, however. *Le Monde* compared the resulting breakdown in US-French relations to that of 2002, when Paris, Berlin and Moscow opposed US plans to invade Iraq: "Is the Iraq war (2003), launched by the Bush administration, the last crisis of such magnitude? After the chaotic, unilateral US withdrawal from Afghanistan, it is a new warning for Europeans to build their strategic sovereignty, especially in the Indo-Pacific..."

In an editorial titled "A Smart Submarine Deal with the Aussies" hailing the AUKUS alliance, the *Wall Street Journal* asserted that AUKUS was US retaliation for Europe's failure to fully support US policies against China, Russia and Iran. It wrote, "French President Emmanuel Macron has made a point of emphasizing 'strategic autonomy' from the US, including on China, Russia and Iran. ... Europe can't play China's game of divide-and-conquer on economic and strategic issues without consequences for its US relationship."

Biden manifestly intended the announcement of AUKUS as a rebuke to the EU. He timed it the day before EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Foreign Policy Representative Josep Borrell unveiled a long expected Indo-Pacific policy statement, in the runup to France holding the rotating EU presidency in the first half of 2022. In America, *Politico* wrote that the AUKUS alliance aimed to show the EU that it is "not in the geostrategic big league" and mock Europe's "woolly Indo-Pacific strategy."

In this interimperialist conflict, there is no progressive faction; the fundamental question is uniting workers internationally in a socialist, antiwar movement. After the bloody failure of decades of neo-colonial wars in the Middle East since the 1991 Gulf War in Iraq, and the millions of deaths and economic dislocations caused by their handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, the NATO powers face catastrophic conflicts for which they have no peaceful solutions.

Last week, it emerged that during Trump's January 6 coup attempt in Washington, US military officers worked desperately to prevent Trump from launching nuclear bombs at China.

European imperialism is not, however, fundamentally kinder or gentler than its American cousin. EU attempts to develop an independent Indo-Pacific policy are predicated on massive increases in military spending. This means new attacks on workers' living standards and a continuing refusal to fund necessary social distancing policies to end the COVID-19 pandemic, after 1.2 million people are already confirmed dead of the disease in Europe.

Indeed, speaking Wednesday on the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy, von der Leyen called for greater new military programs, "from fighter jets to drones and cyber." She concluded her remarks by stating, "This is why, under the French Presidency [of the EU], President Macron and I will convene a Summit on European defense. It is time for Europe to step up to the next level."

These announcements must be taken as a warning of the mounting danger of aggression against China, of explosive tensions inside NATO and of the necessity of mobilizing workers around the world against the war danger.



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