

French officials warn AUKUS alliance undermines US-Europe relations

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19 September 2021

After taking the unprecedented step Friday of recalling its ambassadors to the United States and Australia, Paris continued this weekend to denounce the Australia-UK-US (AUKUS) alliance announced by Biden on Wednesday. While the alliance targets China, it was prepared behind the backs of the European Union (EU) and led Australia to cancel a €56 billion deal to buy French-made submarines. Tensions between Washington and the EU powers are now exploding.

After denouncing AUKUS on Thursday as a “stab in the back,” Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian appeared Saturday for a prime-time interview on France2 television. He said his recall of the ambassadors meant to “show our longstanding partners that there is a very strong anger, there is really a serious crisis between us.”

“There have been lies, there was duplicity, there was a major breach of trust, there was contempt. So, things are not going well between us, not at all; in short there is a crisis,” Le Drian continued. “We are recalling our ambassadors to try to understand ... and it is also a way to reevaluate our position and to defend our interests in Australia and the United States.”

He added that French authorities were still in the dark on the AUKUS plan “one hour” before it was formally announced on Wednesday. He said, “The planned agreement between the United States and Australia was launched by a very small inner circle. I am not even sure all the Australian and American ministers were aware of it.”

Le Drian made clear that anger in Paris at the AUKUS alliance is also bound up with broader international military developments, including the sudden, humiliating collapse of the NATO puppet regime in Afghanistan—a decision Washington did not discuss with its EU allies. He said, “The United States are shifting their fundamental interests. They are reneging on a certain number of promises they made at a global level, and there is a real

link between Afghanistan and what just happened with the Australia accord.”

Le Drian concluded with an unusually blunt statement questioning the viability of France’s alliance with the United States. “All this leads us to ask how strong the alliance with the United States is,” he said. “Real allies talk to each other and respect each other. This is not what happened.”

Le Drian added that the US-French conflict over AUKUS would impact the upcoming NATO summit next year. He said, “NATO has launched a discussion, at the request of the President of the Republic, of its fundamentals. The next NATO summit in Madrid will lead to the formulation of a new strategic concept. Clearly, what has taken place will have an impact on this new definition.”

The bitter conflicts erupting between the NATO imperialist powers constitute a warning to the working class. The Stalinist regime’s dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 did not resolve historically rooted contradictions of capitalism that twice in the 20th century erupted into world war. As Washington, reeling from its defeat in Afghanistan, intensifies its war drive against China, it is colliding with European imperialist powers who are seeking to assert their competing commercial and strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region.

Significantly, Biden timed the announcement of the AUKUS alliance the day before the long-announced publication of the EU’s Indo-Pacific strategy, which was completely upstaged. The document nonetheless is significant, insofar as it points to the economic foundations of the growing conflicts among Washington and the European powers over influence in Asia.

Noting that the EU is the “top investor” and a “natural partner” in the Indo-Pacific region, it wrote, “Together, the Indo-Pacific and Europe account for over 70 percent of global trade in goods and services, and over 60 percent

of foreign direct investment flows.” While calling for collaboration with “partners that already have Indo-Pacific approaches,” like Washington and London, it also called on the EU to “pursue its multifaceted engagement with China” and “protect its essential interests” there.

The AUKUS alliance is a signal that, after the debacle of its wars in the Middle East and Central Asia, Washington views London and Canberra as more reliable allies against China than the EU. In an editorial hailing the AUKUS deal, the *Wall Street Journal* denounced French calls for “strategic autonomy” from Washington and then warned the entire EU, “Europe can’t play China’s game of divide-and-conquer on economic and strategic issues without consequences for its US relationship.”

The *Atlantic* magazine similarly published an article, citing anonymous British officials, asserting that to pursue a hard line against China, Washington has to prioritize Britain over the EU.

After Britain’s exit from the EU and US-EU conflicts during Trump’s presidency, the *Atlantic* wrote: “a political consensus now exists in the U.S., Britain, and Australia that Chinese power must be contained. Taken together, the end of the war in Afghanistan, the pivot against China, and the prioritization of the old Anglo alliances over the EU are all grand strategic moves. ‘When you make grand strategic moves,’ the British official said, ‘you piss people off.’”

In the short term, Paris appears to be retaliating by trying to develop ties with other Asian powers Washington has tried to use as regional allies against China.

On Saturday, Le Drian called his Indian counterpart, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, proposing a Franco-Indian conference at this week’s UN General Assembly meeting. According to a French Foreign Ministry report, they “exchanged on the situation in Afghanistan, which is deteriorating,” and “agreed to meet in New York next week, on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly meeting, to work on a common program of concrete actions to defend a truly multilateral world order.”

Behind the French government’s rhetoric on multilateralism and sovereignty, however, there lies an accelerating rivalry between the imperialist powers over the division of profits realized in Asia, and in particular amid the growing arms race between the major world powers there. While the other EU powers have up until now remained silent on the French submarine contract, there can be little doubt that the explosive US-French

crisis is being closely followed in all the European capitals.

On Friday, reporters raised numerous questions at the German Foreign Ministry press briefing on the AUKUS alliance. Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Adebahr repeatedly refused to comment, repeating only that Berlin had “taken note” of the new alliance.

When reporters demanded to know whether the breaking of the Franco-Australian contract was a “violation of a rules-based international order,” and whether Berlin had discussed AUKUS with Paris, Adebahr again refused to answer. However, she held out the possibility that Berlin might consider that the new US deal selling nuclear submarines to Australia, which replaces the French deal, might violate Australia’s obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

About AUKUS, Adebahr claimed to have “no knowledge of the precise agreements that have been made. That is why I do not want to make a more precise characterization, juridical or otherwise, of this deal at the present stage. It is clear that the federal government attaches great importance to international rules for the handling of radioactive materials.”

German federal government spokesman Steffen Seibert, who was also attending the briefing, said: “Chancellor [Angela Merkel] yesterday had a very detailed and intensive working dinner with the French president yesterday. That dinner is confidential. That is why I am not speaking about it. Our French friends and partners have made their view on the decision that was revealed there about [submarine] sales known to the public.”



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