

Biden, Macron pledge to meet amid mounting US-EU conflicts over China

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Less than a week after Paris recalled its ambassador to the United States over Australia's canceling of a €56 billion contract with France to build submarines, amid the sudden signing of the Australia-UK-US (AUKUS) alliance against China, Paris and Washington announced moves to repair ties.

US President Joe Biden and French President Emmanuel Macron will meet next month in Europe to discuss the crisis. The two spoke in a 30-minute phone call yesterday, according to White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki. The Élysée presidential palace posted a brief communiqué on the Biden-Macron telephone call in English and in French on its website, which announced that Washington and Paris will “open a process of in-depth consultations” to try to reestablish trust.

Biden apparently accepted responsibility for not consulting Paris about AUKUS, according to the communiqué, which states: “The two leaders agreed that the situation would have benefitted from open consultations among allies on matters of strategic interest to France and our European partners. President Biden conveyed his ongoing commitment in that regard.”

Biden and Macron are to meet next month in Europe for discussions, and a French ambassador will return to Washington, it added. It reaffirms “the strategic importance of French and European engagement in the Indo-Pacific region, including in the framework of the European Union’s recently published strategy for the Indo-Pacific.” The statement commits Washington to supporting “a stronger and more capable European defense,” which it called “complementary to NATO.” It also endorses France’s ongoing neo-colonial war in Mali and the Sahel.

This brief statement does little more than paper over deep contradictions emerging between Washington and its European Union (EU) “allies,” however. The press has widely described these events as the deepest crisis in US-

French relations since 2002-2003, when Paris joined Berlin and Moscow in opposing the US-led invasion of Iraq. The question of how to manage relations with China’s rising economy is provoking deep and bitter conflicts inside the NATO alliance.

While Biden endorses the EU’s strategy on the Indo-Pacific and European defense as “complementary” to Europe’s NATO alliance with Washington, the way the Australian-French contract was broken and the AUKUS alliance was announced gives the lie to these claims. Washington, London and Canberra did not discuss AUKUS or the breaking of the French contract with any of the EU powers before announcing these decisions September 15.

In 2015, all the major EU powers rejected US pressure and signed up for the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the investment arm of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI has led, however, to hundreds of billions of dollars in Chinese investment across the Middle East, Central Asia and beyond, and the signing of strategic alliances between China and countries like Iran, which US imperialism routinely threatens with war.

The *Wall Street Journal*, for its part, hailed Washington’s breaking of the French-Australian submarine contract as “smart” in a recent editorial, stressing that it was in retaliation for French policy: “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.”

While Biden formally endorsed the EU’s Indo-Pacific strategy, this strategy paper is incompatible with a US policy of arming Australia with nuclear submarines to threaten China. In it, the EU pledges to “pursue its multifaceted engagement with China, engaging bilaterally

to promote solutions to common challenges, cooperating on issues of common interest and encouraging China to play its part in a peaceful and thriving Indo-Pacific region.”

The conflict between US and European imperialist policy on China underlay French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian’s criticism of the AUKUS alliance as a step towards war. Le Drian said, “We see the rise of an Indo-Pacific strategy launched by the United States that is militarily confrontational. That is not our position. ... We don’t believe in the logic of systematic military confrontation, even if sometimes we must use military means.”

Indeed, conflicts continued between the AUKUS countries and the EU yesterday, as British Prime Minister Boris Johnson ridiculed French concerns: “It’s time for some of our dearest friends around the world to ‘prenez un grip’ about all this and ‘donnez-moi un break.’” Johnson’s mock-French call to “get a grip” and “give me a break” was his response to angry comments from the EU officials, criticizing the AUKUS alliance as a breach of faith, targeting not just France but the EU as a whole.

Such statements must be taken as a warning to workers around the world that, whatever the official attempts to downplay the crisis, tensions between the United States and Europe that twice in the last century exploded into world war are again reaching explosive levels.

EU Council leader Charles Michel denounced the United States for bad faith, adding, “The elementary principles among allies are transparency and confidence, these go together. But now, what do we see? An obvious lack of transparency and good faith.”

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell of Spain said a meeting of EU foreign ministers amid the ongoing UN General Assembly meeting in New York had come out in support of France. The ministers “clearly expressed their solidarity with France,” Borrell said, adding that the AUKUS alliance is “not a bilateral issue” between Washington and Paris but “affects” the whole EU.

Foreign ministers of the EU imperialist powers made similar statements. “I can understand the anger of our French friends,” said German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas. “What was decided—and the manner in which it was decided—is irritating and disappointing, and not only for France.”

Belgian Foreign Minister Sophie Wilmès called the signing of the AUKUS alliance at France’s expense “a thunderbolt in contemporary life in France, in Europe certainly and geostrategically at the level of the entire

world.” She called on Europe to be “more vocal” and “present on the international scene,” particularly on the issue of relations with China.

In Italy, former Foreign Minister Marta Dassù told *La Repubblica* that AUKUS “contains a risk: the division of the West between an Anglo-Saxon sphere aiming to contain China on the one hand, and a traditional Euro-Atlantic sphere with NATO concentrated against Russia. The question that is posed is how long these two Western alliances can remain united.”

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte responded to the AUKUS crisis by proposing to delay EU trade talks with the United States. “We support not having the meeting on economic safety at this point with the US,” Rutte told reporters on Tuesday.

Russian officials also said they see both the US-Australia-Japan-India “Asian Quad” alliance and the AUKUS alliance as targeting Russia. Speaking of the Quad, Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev said, “Washington will also try to involve other countries in this organization, especially to pursue anti-Chinese and anti-Russian policies. ... Just now, another military bloc was formed in the region, AUKUS, which pursues the same objectives.”

Yet neither the EU imperialist powers nor the post-Soviet capitalist kleptocracy have a progressive policy to oppose the US war drive against China. They either seek to adapt themselves to the framework of US policy, or furiously arm themselves in an attempt to compete with Washington militarily—a policy that entails massive military spending and attacks on the living standards and social rights of the working class. The way forward against US war threats targeting China is the independent and international mobilization of the working class in a socialist, antiwar movement.



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