

Paris demands aggressive EU policy after AUKUS treaty signed against China

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After Australia's sudden repudiation of a €56 billion submarine contract with France as it made its AUKUS alliance with the UK and the United States against China, French President Emmanuel Macron is intensifying calls for an independent European Union (EU) military policy.

Arriving at an October 5 EU summit at Brdo castle outside Ljubljana, Slovenia, Macron pointed to the signing of the AUKUS treaty and the humiliating US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August. While calling for "clarification and re-engagement" from Washington in the NATO alliance, he added: "But we must be clear with ourselves on what we want for ourselves, our borders, our security, and our energy, industrial, technological and military independence."

Macron made clear the signing of the AUKUS treaty had caused lasting damage to EU relations with America. "We must be realistic about the decisions that have been taken by our allies. There were choices that were made which I cannot say were signs of respect [for] France or Europe," Macron said. He said the EU's goal at the Ljubljana summit was to "continue to work in good faith with its historic partners and allies, but also to increase its independence and sovereignty."

This means that, even as the EU countries insist they do not have money needed for critical public health policies to eradicate the coronavirus and halt the COVID-19 pandemic, leading EU powers are pledging to massively increase military spending to further their geopolitical ambitions. Both Berlin and Paris, which will hold the EU's rotating presidency for six months at the beginning of 2022, have aggressively pushed for an EU military build-up.

The Ljubljana summit underscored that US threats against China are intensifying US-EU tensions and the European imperialist powers' aggressive moves in the

Balkans and the Mediterranean.

The same day, just before arriving at the summit, Macron had received in Paris US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, for talks on improving US-French relations.

Prior to Blinken's arrival, Macron made clear that Blinken's visit would not by itself resolve the crisis over AUKUS. He said, "We are obliged to observe that, for somewhat over 10 years, the United States first have concentrated more on themselves and on refocusing their strategic interests on China and the Pacific. That is their right, it is their own sovereignty. And I respect popular sovereignty, but there too, we would be naive, or rather we would commit a terrible error, if we did not draw our own conclusions from this."

"This is a crisis which is set to last, from which we can get out only by concrete actions," an anonymous French official told *Le Monde*.

Blinken also met his French counterpart, Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, but no joint press conference was held. Explaining this unusual decision, a French official curtly said: "The two ministers will speak once they have something to say."

Macron is scheduled to have a telephone call with Biden in the middle of the month, before meeting him in person at the October 30-31 G-20 summit in Rome.

The debacle of decades of escalating US-led wars of aggression in Iraq, Afghanistan and across the Middle East and Central Asia has not resolved but has intensified international conflicts and the danger of war. Thirty years after the 1991 Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union deprived the NATO powers of a common enemy, US-EU tensions are deep and growing. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan, leaving a power vacuum in Central Asia, is intensifying great-power rivalries

across Eurasia and the danger of a new, US-led war.

After Washington and the EU clashed over US attempts to arm far-right Ukrainian militias for war with Russia in 2014-2015, however, there is growing opposition in EU ruling circles at US war threats against China. In a briefing titled “France’s Indo-Pacific ‘Third Way,’” the Carnegie Foundation for International Peace think tank points to differences between Washington and the EU powers revealed by the AUKUS treaty.

“Despite statements about rallying like-minded democratic countries, the Biden administration failed to anticipate France’s reaction. This will have long-term negative consequences on the United States’ image and on transatlantic relations, already damaged by Donald Trump’s presidency,” it wrote, adding, “there is a growing sentiment—including in France’s neighbor Germany—that Washington’s new focus on the Pacific is not in line with EU interests.”

The French Institute for International Relations (IFRI) think tank criticized the escalating danger of war, including nuclear war, provoked by the AUKUS treaty targeting China.

The IFRI warned that the signing of “AUKUS may trigger an (nuclear) arms race and that the move dangerously exacerbates tensions in East Asia.” It listed Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, as well as Thailand, Laos and Cambodia, as regional powers angered by the AUKUS deal. It cited the Indonesian government’s statements that it was “deeply concerned over the continuing arms race and power projection in the region” and calling on Australia to “maintain its commitment towards regional peace, stability and security.”

Pointing to France’s position in the Indo-Pacific region via its island possessions such as Réunion or New Caledonia, the IFRI concluded, “France is not the only country in the Indo-Pacific which doesn’t want to follow the US blindly and unconditionally on its risky path against China.”

The drive to war and great-power conflict is, however, not only the product of aggressive US foreign policies but, more fundamentally, of the capitalist nation-state system itself. The geopolitical methods of the EU imperialist powers are not fundamentally different from the more openly aggressive policy of Washington.

With the more limited but still substantial military forces at their disposal, they laid out a policy of consolidating their strategic influence in Europe’s southern and eastern periphery. This includes moves to absorb former Yugoslav states bombed by Washington and the EU powers in the 1999 NATO war in Yugoslavia, to arm Greece against Turkey, and to escalate France’s neocolonial war in the African country of Mali.

The Ljubljana summit called to prepare to “enlarge” the EU into the former Yugoslavia. The summit communiqué declared, “The EU reaffirms its unequivocal support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans.”

After the summit, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic suggested that Serbia would likely not be able to join the EU without first recognizing the breakaway republic of Kosovo, which unilaterally declared independence with NATO backing in 2008. Vucic said, “Without resolving issues with Pristina [the capital of Kosovo], Serbia would not be able to join the EU.”

Nonetheless, the EU powers stepped up calls for an aggressive intervention. Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz said enlarging the EU to include former Yugoslav republics was geopolitically critical. “If the European Union does not offer this region a real perspective, we have to be aware that other superpowers—China, Russia or Turkey—will play a bigger role there. The region belongs to Europe geographically, and it needs a European perspective,” Kurz said.

France also has announced a €3 billion deal to sell three naval frigates to Greece as part of its continuing conflict with Turkey in the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean Seas. This sale, criticized by Turkey as a threat to “regional peace and stability,” was ratified yesterday by the Greek parliament. The deal also reportedly commits the Greek armed forces to sending forces to the French war in Mali and across the Sahel region.



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