

# French presidential candidates back NATO war drive against Russia

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As Russia's offensive in Ukraine and NATO's military threats threaten to provoke a generalised military conflagration in Europe, a political gulf is visibly emerging between the mass of workers and the main presidential candidates in France.

Workers are opposed to a war towards which all the capitalist governments are moving ever more rapidly. According to a 24 February poll for CNews, 70 percent of French people oppose a direct French military intervention in Ukraine. In 2015, polls found that 77 percent of Germans, 65 percent of Italians, 66 percent of Spaniards and 59 percent of French people opposed a policy of arming the Ukrainian regime against Russia.

The presidential candidates in France, on the other hand, are backing NATO's escalation of military and financial threats against Russia, including the arming of the Ukrainian regime against Moscow. They are lining up against the workers, who constitute the vast majority of the electorate, and behind NATO's imperialist moves that threaten to unleash a Third World War.

Emmanuel Macron, as yet undeclared incumbent, called on Putin to "immediately halt his military operations", claiming: "France stands in solidarity with Ukraine. It stands by the Ukrainians and acts with its partners and allies to stop the war." His foreign minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, was more threatening, reminding Russia that NATO "is also a nuclear alliance," before promising that Western sanctions would strike "at the heart" of Russia.

Right-wing LR (Les Républicains) candidate Valérie Pécresse "condemned in the strongest terms the war started by Russia in Ukraine." In a tweet she said that "the response of France and Europe must be vigorous, coordinated and harsh."

The extreme position of the traditional ruling parties allows the far right to present themselves as advocating

a less aggressive policy. Marine Le Pen of the National Rally (RN) is often criticised for her alleged ties to Putin, but she too has condemned the invasion of Ukraine. She called for "France to take the initiative for a diplomatic meeting, under the aegis of the United Nations."

The pro-Vichy journalist Eric Zemmour denounced the invasion and called on Macron to go to Moscow and Kiev as soon as possible to negotiate a ceasefire. He called for a strengthening of French military power, supposedly to oppose both the United States and Russia.

The most virulent criticisms came from the parties that the media falsely treat as being "left wing." The Socialist Party (PS) candidate and mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, "condemned with the greatest energy the brutal attack ordered by Vladimir Putin" and called for "a firm reaction to this unjustified and criminal act."

Christiane Taubira, former Minister of Justice and Radical Party presidential candidate, reacted on Twitter: "This is war, and that is the level on which France, the European Union, the Council of Europe, the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) and the UN must react."

None of these presidential candidates cared to explain the political and historical chain of events that led to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, or the impact of NATO's threats to send missiles and other weapons of war into Ukraine, including now to fight the Russian army.

It is undoubtedly the case, however, that US imperialism saw the Stalinist dissolution of the USSR in 1991 as an opportunity to impose its global hegemony. It set into motion the dismantling of Yugoslavia, wars across the Middle East and Africa, color revolutions in Eastern Europe and the 2014 coup

in Ukraine with the help of far-right forces to overthrow a pro-Russian regime. The debacles suffered by the US and its allies in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have led to a wider confrontation between the imperialist powers, against Russia and China.

Putin justified his reactionary invasion on a nationalist and anti-communist basis, in line with the interests of the capitalist ruling elites that emerged from the Stalinist restoration of capitalism in the USSR in 1991. But the healthy opposition of the workers to this counterrevolutionary policy must, in order to halt the rapidly-escalating danger of war, be directed also and above all against the bloody policy of the NATO imperialist powers.

Indeed, as it threatened Russia with the possibility of arming Ukraine, NATO effectively used the latter as bait to lure Russia into a war.

Against the threats of a catastrophic war provoked by the major capitalist powers, the struggles of the working class must be united in an international anti-war movement. This requires a fundamental, uncompromising break with the established political parties and corrupt national trade union bureaucracies.

Thus Jean-Luc Mélenchon, on the subject of Ukraine, called in a statement for “an immediate meeting of the OSCE” to achieve an immediate ceasefire and withdrawal of all foreign troops from Ukraine. He gave the following assessment of the war, based on speculations as to the psychology of the Russian president and his aides: “Russia is attacking Ukraine. An initiative of pure violence manifesting a will to limitless power. An unbearable escalation is being provoked.”

By calling for a meeting of the OSCE, Mélenchon is proposing that workers abstain from class struggle and instead take a back seat to the diplomacy of the capitalist states. Unable to call for a mobilisation of workers in Russia, Ukraine and the imperialist centres against the war, Mélenchon sows the illusion that diplomacy based on the nation-state system will be able to stop the race to war. In fact, an escalation of military and economic threats between NATO and Russia is ongoing.

This is the opposite of an attempt to mobilize workers internationally in a movement of demonstrations and strikes against the danger of war. One must recall that Mélenchon got 20 percent of the vote, or 7 million

votes, in the last presidential elections in 2017. However, he does not call for mobilizing his voters against the war, in strikes or protests, but for proposing to the state and its imperialist strategists various tactical initiatives to defend their own interests.

The invasion of Ukraine and the reaction unmasks the class nature of Mélenchon and his party, LFI. They have applauded the wars waged by French imperialism, especially in Africa and with the wars in Libya and then Mali. During Macron’s five-year term as president, Mélenchon supported compulsory military service and demanded an increase in the army’s budget, while downplaying the danger of a war with Russia.

His remarks calling for a faster increase in the military budget made clear his militarist class perspective. “Why we criticise this Military Planning Law,” he said, “is that it tries to please everyone... And I recall that General de Villiers [the former head of the army] resigned in July, explaining that he needed an immediate increase in these resources, and therefore one that rises immediately and stabilizes towards the end.”

LFI was built to serve as a trap for millions of people who voted or participated in LFI via Internet to support Mélenchon in 2017. They applauded some of LFI’s tactical criticism of the PS, of endless austerity in Europe and of imperialist crimes like Trump’s bombing of Syria in April 2017. But LFI’s criticisms were tactical and fraudulent. Despite these criticisms, however, the LFI leadership functions as petty-bourgeois supporters of war and the military.

Stopping the race to a truly devastating war requires the independent mobilisation of workers across Europe and the world in an anti-war movement, independent from and in conscious opposition to the impotent and cynical policies of Mélenchon and LFI.



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