

Macron criticizes Biden's call for regime change in Russia

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On Sunday, French President Emmanuel Macron spoke on the war in Ukraine and on his plans for cuts to pensions, university spending and unemployment insurance if he is re-elected next month.

Macron was speaking a day after US President Joe Biden denounced Russian President Vladimir Putin as a “butcher.” Insisting that Putin could not stay in power and that America had to prepare itself for “decades” of war, Biden made clear that NATO is waging war for regime change in Russia.

This clearly has made the French ruling class nervous, and France3 interviewer Francis Letellier asked Macron, “Are you concerned that these are remarks that could poison the situation?”

Macron distanced himself from Biden's remarks, stating, “I think we must first of all speak factually and then, indeed, do everything in our power for the situation not to get out of control. I would not use such language because I am continuing to discuss with President Putin. What do we want to accomplish collectively? We want to stop the war Russia has launched in Ukraine, without waging war and without escalation.”

Macron made clear that Biden's remarks cut across French policy. He defined France's goals as “a cease-fire and the total withdrawal of Russian troops. If we want that, we cannot have escalation, either in words or in deeds.”

Macron argued that the European powers have a greater stake in Russia than America does, and that they cannot accept US policy on Russia as their own. “The United States of America are our allies in the context of NATO, we work with them and that is a good thing,” Macron continued. “We share many common values. But those who live next to Russia are the Europeans. That is why for five years you have heard me say that we Europeans must have a defense policy and define this security architecture, not delegate it.”

Macron concluded by explaining that European powers must pursue a different policy towards Russia than Biden. “We, Europeans, we cannot give in to any form of escalation,” he said. “We must not, we, Europeans, forget our geography or our history. We are not at war with the Russian people.”

For a month since Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, the NATO powers have been recklessly escalating a confrontation with Russia that threatens to trigger war between nuclear powers. Before the Russian invasion, NATO had massively armed Ukraine against Russia. Now, all the major NATO powers, France included, are sending troops to the borders of Russia and Ukraine and are working to cut Russian banks' access to world markets. Biden's remarks have made clear the aggressive, militaristic character of NATO's policy towards Russia.

After nearly a month of war, however, conflicts between the NATO imperialist powers themselves are also coming to the surface. Indeed, under Biden's predecessor, Donald Trump—who dismissed NATO, warned of nuclear war in Europe, and slapped massive tariffs on European exports to America—Macron sharply criticized US policy against Russia.

“What we are experiencing is for me that NATO is brain-dead,” Macron told the British magazine the *Economist* in a 2019 interview, adding, “That the United States is very hard towards Russia is a form of administrative, political, and historical hysteria. ... If we want to build peace in Europe, rebuild European strategic autonomy, we need to reconsider our position towards Russia.”

Despite its attempts to advance itself in a somewhat less aggressive light, the policy of French imperialism is not fundamentally different from that of Washington. The only way to halt the accelerating drive to war is to mobilize the working class against war, independently of and in opposition to all capitalist governments, including

the Macron government.

Indeed, after Biden took office and goaded Russia into invading Ukraine, Macron turned 180 degrees. This policy is, indeed, continuing: on Sunday, even as he criticized Biden's remarks, Macron announced the accelerated deployment of 800 French troops to Romania.

This makes clear that calls by Paris, Berlin or other European Union (EU) powers for greater EU military autonomy are not a peace policy. Rather, these calls aim to arm and prepare the European powers for military policies that may be distinct from, or even conflict with those of Washington.

One openly-stated purpose of Macron's remarks was to reassure Putin that France and other NATO powers are not immediately seeking to topple the Russian government. After the EU summit on Friday, Macron also announced a potential Franco-Greco-Turkish humanitarian mission to the besieged Ukrainian city of Mariupol that appears connected to attempts to organize a cease-fire.

Russian officials, facing mounting threats from NATO, are making clear that they believe Russia faces an existential threat, and that they are refocusing their military policy in consequence.

Last week, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said, "Today a real hybrid war, a total war has been declared on us. This term [total war] which was used by Hitler's Germany, is now voiced by many European politicians when they talk about what they want to do with the Russian Federation. The goals are not hidden, they declared publicly—to destroy, break, exterminate, strangle the Russian economy and Russia as a whole."

On March 25, the Russian general staff gave its first public accounting of the invasion, emphasizing protection of the Donbass in eastern Ukraine and its connections, through Mariupol, to the Crimea.

Colonel General Sergei Rudskoy said, "Tasks are executed while seeking to minimize losses to our personnel and damage to the civilian population." He claimed Russian forces have destroyed 1,587 tanks, 636 artillery pieces, 112 fighters, 35 Turkish-made Bayraktar drones, 148 anti-air missile systems, and 117 other radar platforms in Ukrainian hands or provided by NATO. Rudskoy said 1,351 Russian troops had been killed and 3,825 wounded in the fighting.

"Our forces and our equipment are concentrated on the main point: the complete liberation of the Donbass," Rudskoy declared. The general claimed that the Russian army aims to tie down the Ukrainian army in Kiev and

Kharkov to prevent it from moving against the Donetsk and Luhansk areas of the Donbass, and to consolidate control of the Donbass by linking it to Russian-held Crimea. Mariupol is the main objective necessary to link these two areas that is still being fought over, as Russian troops besiege Ukrainian defenders in the city.

Also on March 25, Macron announced an EU policy of seeking a cease-fire and an end to the war, adding, "Together with Turkey and Greece, we will launch a humanitarian operation to evacuate all those who would like to leave Mariupol. We will organize things in the best possible conditions." He said his staff had discussed with municipal authorities in Mariupol, "a city of over 400,000 inhabitants that today has little more than 150,000," living "in terrible conditions."

Greek officials have confirmed that this vaguely defined mission to Mariupol is indeed being discussed.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, returning from last week's NATO summit, made clear that he is also planning extensive diplomatic maneuvers in the region as negotiations with Putin are to begin in Istanbul.

Erdoğan forecast wide-ranging shifts in international relations. "We had a chance to discuss what steps we can take for the resolution of the problems in the Turkey-Greece ties," he said, adding that "we can start a new process on the Turkey-Israel ties. Here, of course, there is mostly the issue of what we can do together about the eastern Mediterranean. As one of the most important steps we can take together in bilateral relations, I think that the natural gas issue can come to the fore here again."

Erdoğan added that he had discussed and obtained Macron's agreement to Turkey not cutting off purchases of Russian natural gas or nuclear power plants.

Such remarks further undermine the claim that what is at stake in NATO's decision to arm Ukraine for war against Russia is an altruistic, humanitarian defense of Ukrainian democracy. It is clearly bound up with wide-ranging geopolitical conflicts and control over strategic energy reserves. In this context, Macron's tentative attempts to organize missions in support of a cease-fire policy have one obvious weakness: they are opposed by Washington, the world's dominant military power, which is pursuing a policy of military escalation.



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