

In China, Macron criticizes US policy on Taiwan, demands European “war economy”

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This weekend, French President Emmanuel Macron finished a four-day state visit to China for talks with President Xi Jinping. Even as working class opposition explodes in strikes and protests across France after he imposed deep pension cuts in the face of overwhelming popular opposition, Macron called for new, massive increases in military spending in order to build a European “war economy.”

Macron’s visit to China unfolded under the shadow of the NATO war with Russia in Ukraine and escalating US military threats against China over Taiwan. In the first day of talks, he asked for Xi’s help to “bring Russia back to a reasonable policy” in Ukraine. Xi responded, the Chinese *People’s Daily* reported, by pledging to “work with France to call on the international community to maintain rationality and restraint to avoid actions that will make the Ukraine crisis deteriorate further.”

Macron’s visit turned to discussions to deepen French economic ties with China and to strengthen French and European military forces amid growing tensions with Washington. Macron was accompanied on his visit by a massive delegation of CEOs from energy monopoly *Electricité de France*, aerospace firms Airbus and Safran, train-maker Alstom, luxury conglomerates LVMH and L’Oréal and tourist firms. Electronic music composer Jean-Michel Jarre and his wife, Chinese movie star Gong Li, also were part of the French delegation.

Macron criticized the US policy of building closer relations with Taiwan, creating conditions for Washington to possibly end the “One China” policy and provoke a Beijing-Taiwan war. According to a Chinese communiqué, Macron called Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen’s visit to the United States “regrettable,” and formally stated his support for the “One China” policy. Macron returned to this in a detailed interview with the financial daily *Les Echos* yesterday on his flight back to Paris.

Macron said, “The question posed to us Europeans is: do we have an interest in things speeding up over Taiwan? No. The worst thing would be to think that we Europeans must

blindly follow on this issue, adapting to US rhythm and Chinese overreactions. Why would we need to follow a rhythm others have chosen for us? At a certain point, we must pose the question of our own interests. ... It would be paradoxical, as we set up elements of a true European strategic autonomy, if we suddenly began to follow US policy in a sort of panic response.”

Macron argued for France and the major EU imperialist powers to respond to growing tensions with Washington with a vast military build-up, financed by attacks on the working class. He said, “For too long, Europe did not build this strategic autonomy I am fighting for. Today, the ideological battle has been won, the structure is set. It comes at a cost, inevitably. ... We carried out cuts, they are harsh, we are starting to see results but at the same time, we are paying for what we did not do in the last 20 years.”

“As history is accelerating, we must in parallel accelerate the European war economy. We do not produce [arms] fast enough,” he said, adding: “The key to depending less on the Americans is to strengthen our defense industry and agree on common standards” on arms manufacturing in Europe.

Macron worried that if Washington provokes all-out war with China too soon, before the EU military build-up is complete, EU states could be left as “vassals.” He said, “If there is an acceleration of the explosion of the [US-China] duopoly, we will not have the time or the means to finance our strategic autonomy and will become vassals, though we could be the third pole if we had a few years to build it up.”

Macron also indicated his lack of confidence in the US dollar, which faces mounting question marks after the bailout of Silicon Valley Bank and the US Treasury’s use of the dollar to impose sanctions targeting Iran and European firms operating there. As Russia, Brazil and other countries move to carry out their trade with China in other currencies, Macron said, “I want to take the opportunity to insist on one point: we should not depend on the extraterritoriality of the US dollar.”

Chinese commentators signaled the Beijing regime’s support for the latest turn in French policy, publishing

articles in the French press hailing Macron's "independence." China's state-run *Global Times* issued an editorial, titled "Macron's China visit embodies the value of strategic autonomy," praising Macron for potentially opening a path to a China-Europe alliance counterbalancing Washington.

It wrote, "The Chinese people have always appreciated the strategic autonomy and independent diplomatic spirit demonstrated by France in the changing international landscape. Back then, former French President Charles de Gaulle adhered to pursuing an independent foreign policy to safeguard France's national sovereignty and interests. ... It is clear to everyone that being a strategic vassal of Washington is a dead end. Making the China-France relationship a bridge for China-Europe cooperation is beneficial to both sides and to the world."

While Washington plays the leading role in stoking wars with Russia and China in a bid to preserve its global hegemony, the proposals emanating from Paris and Beijing for a "multi-polar" capitalist order to better defend their national interests are also unflaggingly reactionary. It is not only the policy of the leading imperialist power, but the entire capitalist nation-state system that, as in the lead-up to the world wars of the 20th century, is utterly bankrupt.

This emerges most clearly from Macron's policy in France. He rules against the people, imposing deep cuts to pensions without a parliamentary vote despite overwhelming popular opposition, in order to finance a vast military build-up. Indeed, while in China, Macron publicly mocked the majority of the French people who oppose his cuts, insisting that his regime is "democratic" and then jeering: "If people wanted the retirement age at 60, they should not have voted for me."

The "national autonomy" praised by Paris and Beijing is not the liberty and social and democratic rights of working people, but, instead, the liberty of the capitalist classes to wage war in the pursuit of their profit interests.

This is particularly clear in the case of France. De Gaulle withdrew from NATO in 1965 amid rising conflicts between Washington and Paris over the US dollar, and French suspicions that the CIA had helped rival factions of the French right who tried to murder de Gaulle during France's war against Algerian independence. It was as these conflicts mounted that France became the first NATO country to recognize the People's Republic of China in 1964.

US-French tensions have become sharper since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 deprived the NATO powers of a common enemy. The material source of these tensions remained the struggle over the division of profits from the world economy. Apart from a period of US-French tensions as Washington launched its illegal invasion

of oil-rich Iraq in 2003, French imperialism has joined in all the major US-led wars of the post-Soviet era—sending troops to Iraq, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, and beyond.

It is French imperialist rivalry with Washington that underlies Macron's reactionary calls for a "war economy," financed on the backs of the workers, to build Europe as a "third pole" rivaling both Beijing and Washington.

Macron's trip, amid an explosive crisis at home, had a domestic as well as a global dimension. He hopes to use the services of the union bureaucracies and pseudo-left groups to exhaust the strike and press workers to accept that the cuts will ultimately pass. Macron no doubt hopes that rhetoric about French national autonomy, appealing to chauvinists among the union bureaucrats who look up to de Gaulle and his alliance with the Stalinist French Communist Party, would shore up his support in the bureaucracies.

Significantly, Macron's China trip came after Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the leader of the pseudo-left Unsubmissive France party, repeatedly criticized US Taiwan policy last autumn and supported the "One China" policy.

It would be politically suicidal for workers to entrust the struggle against war to Macron and to the Chinese Stalinist regime in Beijing. Macron leads an ever-more dictatorial regime in France that must be brought down by a general strike by the working class. His trip to Beijing underscores that prosecuting such a struggle also requires building an international anti-war movement of the working class, uniting workers in America, Europe, China and beyond in opposition to imperialist war and capitalism.



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