

In France, Xi rejects Macron's call for China to pressure Russia in Ukraine war

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On May 6-7, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited France for a two-day summit with President Emmanuel Macron. While the summit marked the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between France and the People's Republic of China, it was centered on the NATO powers' demands on China to cut ties with Russia and Iran, amid the war in Ukraine and the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

The summit unfolded under the shadow of French and British threats to deploy ground troops in Ukraine and launch long-range missile strikes on Russia. As Russian officials threaten to retaliate with potentially nuclear strikes, Macron demanded Xi cut off Chinese aid to Russia in the Ukraine war. However, they agreed only cosmetic gestures—like calling a world truce during the 2024 Paris Olympic games, and China's decision to postpone sanctions on French exports of cognac liquor.

Xi rejected Macron's demands on Ukraine, however, as well as European threats of far-reaching trade sanctions targeting Chinese exports of electric vehicles and other critical goods.

At a press conference after the first day of talks in Paris, Macron warned of “a historic turn where threats are at unprecedented levels, and the risk of fragmentation of the world is considerable.” He said the Xi-Macron summit aimed to “avoid precisely any formation of blocs and instead to build convergences.” However, Macron thereupon promptly demanded that Xi bow to the NATO bloc's demands that China cut off ties with Russia and Iran, its key suppliers of energy and raw materials.

He called on China to prevent Russia from threatening Europe over Ukraine. “Firstly, we obviously discussed Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine,” he said, demanding “Chinese authorities to abstain from selling any weapon, any assistance to Moscow” and report to European authorities any Chinese firm violating this rule. He also denounced “Iran, whose uncontrolled nuclear development poses many risks” and called on China to “fully coordinate with us on this issue.”

Macron's demands were presented, if anything, even more stridently by European Union (EU) Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who had traveled to France for the summit. She demanded Beijing “use all its influence on Russia to end its war of aggression against Ukraine” and help Europe

with “de-escalating Russia's irresponsible nuclear threats.”

She also called on China to slash its exports to Russia of “dual use” products that can have both civilian and military uses, like microchips or construction and digging machines. Von der Leyen said: “More effort is needed to curtail delivery of dual-use goods to Russia that find their way to the battlefield. ... And given the existential nature of the threats stemming from this war for both Ukraine and Europe, this does affect EU-China relations.”

Denouncing Chinese exports of electric vehicles and other high-technology products as “China's surplus production,” von der Leyen threatened extensive tariffs on Chinese goods: “Europe will not waver from making tough decisions needed to protect its economy and security.”

Xi responded, however, by rejecting the demands of Macron and von der Leyen virtually all down the line. On Ukraine, he defended Chinese ties with Russia, saying: “China did not start the Ukraine crisis, nor is it a party to or a participant in it. Instead of being an onlooker, we have been playing an important role for peace. The special representative of the Chinese government on Eurasian affairs is on his third round of shuttle diplomacy. At the same time, China opposes attempts to use the Ukraine crisis to scapegoat or smear a third country or to stoke a new cold war.”

Xi did not address Iran in his public statements, but instead criticized the genocide in Gaza carried out by Israel, which is armed by the NATO powers and recently bombed Iran. Xi said: “This prolonged tragedy is a test for human conscience. The international community must act. We call on all parties to work for an immediate, comprehensive and sustainable ceasefire in Gaza.”

Xi also dismissed von der Leyen's claim that China has a surplus production capacity that is a threat to Europe's economy. “The so-called ‘problem of China's overcapacity’ does not exist,” he said.

The insoluble conflict between the EU imperialist powers and China points to the deep-rooted, and intractable, crisis of the world capitalist system. The major powers are incapable of working out a deal to avert a catastrophic war that could erupt across Europe and spread around the world. This flows particularly clearly, in this case, from the incompatibility of

world economy and production with the nation-state system: the issue of how world markets for cars, semiconductors or other manufactured goods will be divided provokes bitter conflicts.

The imperialist powers stand exposed for backing the genocide in Gaza, and threatening a catastrophic escalation of the Ukraine war they have provoked with Russia.

As for China, it has undoubtedly overseen a massive and historic economic expansion over the last three decades by tapping into the resources of the world economy. However, its Stalinist regime has no viable or progressive response to the imperialist powers' relentless war escalation against Russia, Iran and Gaza, or China itself in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea. Having abandoned its anti-imperialist pretensions in the 1980s during its restoration of capitalism, it can make no appeal to mass antiwar sentiment in the international working class.

Xi's open letter in *Le Figaro* published Monday exemplifies its bankrupt, national perspective. Hailing the "strategic vision" of General Charles de Gaulle, who restored relations with the PRC in 1964, Xi proposed a "global strategic Sino-French partnership" for "cooperation in the world," adding: "Since the foundation of the New China 70 years ago [in the 1949 revolution], China has never started a war."

This does not provide a viable basis for world peace, however. Not only Washington but also EU imperialist powers like France are pressing for war with Russia—Macron most obviously, with his call to send ground troops to fight in Ukraine. Moreover, the calculations that led de Gaulle to tighten relations with the Soviet government in 1960 and then recognize the PRC in 1964 are now utterly rejected in the French ruling class and political establishment.

It is worth recalling the speeches de Gaulle gave, in a period when French imperialism, after the searing experience of World War II and Nazi occupation, felt the need to make concessions to mass support in the working class to the Russian and Chinese revolutions.

In 1960, calling for closer relations with the Soviet Union, he warned of the danger of global nuclear war: "Two camps face each other, and one decision in Moscow or in Washington could lead to a large part of humanity being crushed in a few hours. In this situation, France considers that there is no territorial or doctrinal struggle that is greater than the need to prevent this horrific peril."

De Gaulle called to limit NATO-Soviet tensions, "to rule out provocative acts and remarks" and thus the risk that "one day, suddenly, for whatever reason, the world could be again at war." He also called for "categorical measures of disarmament applied preferably to devices capable of transporting bombs at strategic distances," that is, long-range nuclear missiles.

Not only Macron but the entire French political establishment has repudiated such sentiments. Its criticisms of Macron notwithstanding, there is overwhelming support in ruling

circles for arming Ukraine in the pursuit of territorial goals, building up France's nuclear arsenal, and provocatively denouncing Putin. All of this has brought Europe to the brink of total war.

In 1964, to justify recognizing the PRC, de Gaulle appealed to sympathy in the French population, only two decades after the Nazi occupation of France, for China's war against Japanese occupation during World War II. Pointing to this conflict, which cost 20 million Chinese lives, as well as to previous US and European wars on China, de Gaulle said:

"This country's entry into contact with modern nations was very harsh and costly. The many European, American and Japanese demands, interventions, expeditions, and invasions were for it so many humiliations and dismemberments. Thus, so many national shocks and also the determination of elites to transform at all costs their nation, so that it could reach the status of the countries that had oppressed it, led China to revolution."

De Gaulle was a bourgeois politician who, from 1958 to 1962, oversaw a bloody French colonial war in Algeria. He did not have revolutionary or anti-colonial sympathies. However, in the interests of pursuing French imperialist foreign policy, he could make carefully calibrated statements about the importance of avoiding a catastrophic nuclear war, or the heroism of the 1949 Chinese revolution.

Macron and the French capitalist class today, overseeing a completely degraded regime, are plunging ahead towards a nuclear war, while promoting the unsubstantiated and false claim that China is committing a genocide of the Uighurs—even as the NATO powers back a real genocide in Gaza.

This underscores one fundamental political reality: There is no way forward in the struggle against genocide and war on a national perspective, appealing to capitalist national governments. The way forward is the unification of the working class in an international, revolutionary movement against imperialist war and genocide, and for socialism.



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