

# US-EU tensions erupt over Iran war as France holds back-channel talks with China

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US-European conflicts have exploded in the weeks leading up to the sudden US cease-fire with Iran announced by Donald Trump last Tuesday. Trump repeatedly lashed out at European regimes and in particular at French President Emmanuel Macron, accusing him of being “very unhelpful” in Iran.

Trump’s outbursts, delivered alongside genocidal threats to bomb Iran back to the Stone Age, aim to cloud, not to illuminate the situation. The French government, as its other European counterparts, remains deeply complicit in the US war. However, the ranting of America’s fascist president points to the irreconcilable conflicts between the major imperialist powers underlying US imperialism’s war of aggression against Iran.

On March 30, Trump denounced Macron on Truth Social as “very unhelpful” for refusing to let US planes overfly France to transport cargo to Israel. On March 31, he told the UK and French navies that if their countries lacked fuel, they should “build up some delayed courage, go to the Strait [of Hormuz], and just TAKE IT.” On April 1, he mocked Macron over the televised slap Macron received from his wife on a visit in Vietnam, claiming Macron is “still recovering from the right to the jaw.”

Trump was aiming at more than just Macron’s denial of US overflight rights or his refusal to allow French warships to leave the Mediterranean and face Iranian anti-ship missiles in the Persian Gulf. His outbursts reflected explosive inter-imperialist conflicts building up in the NATO alliance. As Trump spoke, Paris was preparing a definite, though limited outreach to Iran’s allies, in particular China, that cuts across basic objectives of US foreign policy.

On April 2, France joined Russia and China in blocking a UN Security Council resolution, sponsored

by the Persian Gulf oil sheikdoms, authorizing the use of force against Iran. This was the outcome of back-channel talks between French and Chinese officials since shortly after the war began. The Chinese and French foreign ministers, Wang Yi and Jean-Noël Barrot, had a call on March 2, and Wang continued talks with French officials, including a March 20 discussion with Macron advisor Emmanuel Bonne.

On April 3, after the French vote alongside Russia and China at the United Nations, the container ship *Kribi*, owned by French shipping corporation CMA CGM, became the first European vessel to transit the Hormuz Strait. The prospect emerged that, despite the US war on Iran, Europe might continue receiving critical Persian Gulf energy supplies.

Just before announcing last week’s cease-fire, as he threatened Iran with extermination, Trump denounced his European allies. Declaring himself “very disappointed” with NATO, he claimed Europe’s failure to assist in the Iran war is “a mark on NATO that will never disappear.” After the cease-fire began, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that top US officials are planning “punishment” for European NATO countries they deem unsupportive of the Iran war.

In Trump’s hysterical denunciations of France and its European allies, there is a large element of exaggeration and posturing. In reality, France, like other leading European powers, has played a key role in enabling US military aggression against Iran—above all, in France’s case, relying on its military presence in the Persian Gulf region.

France deployed its Rafale fighter jets on March 2, three days into the war, to protect US-backed Persian Gulf oil sheikdoms from Iranian military retaliation. It authorized US supply flights to Iran to use Istres airbase in southern France. Even more significantly, on

March 5, it granted the US access to French airbases in the region: Al Dhafra in the UAE, Prince Hassan/H5 in Jordan, and Base Aérienne 188 in Djibouti. These bases are used to refuel US bombers, who travel to attack Iran from very long range, and who therefore rely critically on refueling near Iran.

Trump's denunciations of France have an enormous element of political posturing. While Europe provides Trump with a scapegoat for the disastrous outcome of his initial attack on Iran, his remarks help the French ruling elite hide its complicity in a war of aggression and extermination that is overwhelmingly unpopular among French workers. This complicity is active and ongoing. Even in their talks with their Chinese counterparts, French officials intervene not to denounce US aggression, but to try to isolate and weaken Iran.

On April 2, as France voted alongside China and Russia in the UN Security Council, French Admiral Nicolas Vaujour unsuccessfully pressed China to threaten Iran to abandon its policy of blocking the Straits of Hormuz in response to the US war. "We have not seen China's navy step in to reopen the strait," Vaujour said, adding: "China will probably have to engage more directly in the debate and show its impatience with the fact that the strait remains closed."

But while Washington and Paris both pursue a neocolonial policy against Iran, Trump's criticisms of Europe above all reflect objectively-rooted conflicts over markets, profits and strategic position that twice in the 20th century exploded into world wars. Last year, Trump imposed unilateral tariffs on European exports to the United States, as US capitalism sought to claw back market share in key industries from its European competitors.

This March, during the Iran war, US officials threatened to cut off US liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports to Europe if the European Union (EU) tried to renegotiate the tariffs. With the EU having cut off its imports of Russian gas at US prompting after the outbreak of the Ukraine war, and Persian Gulf gas exports cut off by the US war of aggression against Iran, the meaning of this was clear. Washington is threatening an energy blockade of the EU that could shatter Europe's economy.

In previous epochs, imperialist states have responded to attempted blockades of essential raw materials with declarations of war. After the Trump administration

threatened to invade the Danish-held territory of Greenland earlier this year, the potential for a catastrophic breakdown of US-European relations, escalating into a direct military clash, is ever more evident.

European outreach towards China—a country targeted by US imperialism as its main economic competitor—no doubt causes enormous concern in US foreign policy circles, however arrogant and unsuccessful French negotiations with China may be. Indeed, after the recent breakdown of US-Iranian talks amid the ceasefire, Trump again threatened a blockade of the Persian Gulf. European officials are no doubt asking themselves whether such a blockade could lead to orders being given to US warships to seize European oil or gas.

Negotiations are breaking down between major world powers because these conflicts are too deep, and involve capitalist interests too fundamental, to be resolved diplomatically. The capitalist system is plunging ever deeper into a global war, driven by the contradiction between the global character of economic production and the nation-state system. This means that workers and youth cannot try to effect progressive change on a perspective of pressuring capitalist governments to change policies.

How war drives the collapse of democratic forms of rule was starkly demonstrated only three years ago in France, in the struggle against Macron's utterly unpopular pension cuts. Ruling against the people, Macron slashed pensions to free up tens of billions of euros for the military budget. Three-quarters of French people opposed the cuts, but he rammed them through the parliament without a vote. He then sent riot police to assault protesters and strikers and bystanders, preparing war abroad by waging class war at home.

Stopping further war escalation depends on unifying workers struggles in an international, socialist anti-war movement in the working class on both sides of the Atlantic and internationally.



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