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French President Macron backs NATO war drive against Russia

On Wednesday night, in a prime time address to the nation coming shortly before he is due to announce his bid for re-election in next month's presidential elections, Emmanuel Macron spoke on the rapidly escalating war between Russia and the pro-NATO regime in Ukraine.



French President Emmanuel Macron, second left, watches screen during a video-conference with NATO members at the French Army headquarters, Friday, Feb. 25, 2022 in Paris. NATO leaders met to discuss how far they can go to challenge Russian President Vladimir Putin. (AP Photo/Michel Euler, Pool)

He spoke shortly after a poll emerged showing that 70 percent of the French public oppose joining the conflict. Defying public opinion, Macron is, however, sending French troops to neighboring Romania and warships and fighter planes to the region. His speech therefore sought to lull workers to sleep about the mounting danger of a Russia-NATO war, while demanding that the French people support NATO war policies and accept massive bloodshed and vast economic sacrifices.

Denouncing “the brutal attack launched by [Russian President Vladimir] Putin against Ukraine on February 24,” Macron warned: “The coming days will likely be increasingly difficult. ... The balance of our continent and many aspects of our daily lives are already transformed by this war and will undergo profound change in the coming months.”

Macron appealed for popular support for NATO’s policy on a fraudulent basis, blaming war entirely on the Russian regime. However, while the Kremlin is responsible for launching the invasion, the NATO powers have systematically worked to threaten Russia and cut off negotiations with it, goading Putin to take military action. As a result, Macron’s appeal to the French people to support NATO against Russia collapsed into a series of lies, distortions and half-truths.

“Neither France, nor Europe, nor Ukraine nor the NATO alliance wanted this war. On the contrary, we did everything we could to avoid it,” Macron said. Pointing to his own talks with Putin, he added: “The US president made clear his availability to negotiate after physically meeting President Putin in June 2021 in Geneva. It is thus indeed alone and deliberately violating one by one all his promises to the community of nations, that President Putin chose war.”

Leaving aside his own attempts to negotiate with Putin, which clearly have failed, Macron’s claim that US President Joe Biden was “available to negotiate” with Putin is a fraud. Biden said he did not respect Putin’s “red lines,” that is, that Washington would take whatever action it pleased, even if Putin warned that this crossed a “red line” that could lead to war. All the major NATO powers then insisted that Ukraine had to have the option of joining NATO, after which NATO weapons aimed at Russia could be placed on Ukrainian soil, directly on Russia’s borders.

Macron tried to refute the arguments Russian officials have given to justify the invasion, pointing to the aggressive role played by NATO. Currently, he said, “there are neither NATO troops nor bases in Ukraine. Those are lies. Nor is this war, as intolerable propaganda would have it, a struggle against ‘Nazism.’ That is a lie.”

While it is true that NATO troops are technically not permanently deployed to Ukraine, Macron’s statement is at best a cynical dodge. In February 2014, the NATO powers backed a putsch, led by neo-Nazis of the Right Sector group, that installed a pro-NATO government in Ukraine. Since then, CIA advisors and US mercenaries from the private firm Academi (formerly Blackwater) have helped Ukrainian forces carry out attacks on Russian-speaking areas of Ukraine.

Putin’s claim that he aims to “de-Nazify” Ukraine is a political lie, as his own regime is based on close alliances with far-right groups. However, Macron’s comments covered up the enormous role played by neo-Nazi forces, like Right Sector or the Azov Battalion, in NATO’s Ukrainian puppet regime. Indeed, it was reported last year that the FBI is investigating American neo-Nazis who went to Ukraine to fight for the pro-NATO Ukrainian regime on charges of murdering non-combatants and burying them in mass graves.

A crying contradiction underlay Macron’s speech: While presenting NATO policy as moderate and Russian action as totally unprovoked, he also stressed aggressive actions NATO is taking that cut across any attempt to negotiate an end to the war. “Several major Russian banks have been excluded from the international payments system, making many transactions impossible and triggering a collapse of the ruble. Russian propaganda outlets can no longer broadcast in Europe,” he said, boasting of NATO’s “delivery of civilian and military equipment” to Ukraine to fight Russia.

Urgent warnings are needed. NATO and the Macron government are heading for a direct military clash with Russia, a nuclear-armed power. It is critical to politically alert workers and youth to this danger and mobilize opposition to NATO’s policies that threaten humanity with nuclear war.

Examining Macron’s speech also reveals the explosive internal class conflicts the NATO powers are seeking to suppress with the war drive against Russia. Already before the war,

strikes and protests were mounting against rising inflation and the policies of mass infection with COVID-19 pursued by the NATO powers. Handouts of trillions of dollars and euros to the investing classes in bank bailouts massively fueled inflation, even as over 2 million people died of COVID-19 inside NATO.

Macron laid out a framework in which NATO can try to use the war to falsely blame Russia for the mounting social and economic suffering caused by the official handling of the pandemic. Having admitted that the NATO powers are working to cut Russia out of international trade, he proceeded to blame Russia for the acceleration of inflation and economic disruption the NATO trade embargo on Russia will produce.

Among the consequences of Russia's invasion, Macron listed: "Our agriculture, industry, many economic sectors will suffer, either because they depend on raw materials from Russia or Ukraine, or because they export to those countries. Our economic growth, currently high, will inevitably be affected. Rising prices for oil, gas, and raw materials will impact our purchasing power: Tomorrow, filling up your tank, heating your home, the cost of key products will likely rise even further."

In reality, it is apparent that the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered an enormous escalation of the global crisis of capitalism and the NATO powers' drive to war. The deadly political and military consequences of the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 are becoming apparent. The proxy wars NATO fought across Europe against allies of Russia, seeking to crush Serbia during the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s or with the 2014 putsch against a pro-Russian regime in Ukraine, now have escalated into a crisis that threatens to provoke a world war.

All the historically rooted contradictions of European and world capitalism are re-emerging in the current war. Berlin's recent decision to triple its military spending to €150 billion and thereafter spend at least 2 percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on defense, amounts to an official rehabilitation of German militarism—which was discredited for decades after 27 million Soviet citizens died fighting the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in World War II.

This also means that, for the first time since its conquest of France in that war, Germany could have a more powerful military than France. While the NATO imperialist powers are

all moving against Russia, Macron's speech gave some indication of the mounting tensions among the NATO powers themselves caused by these dangerous developments.

While Biden and other NATO heads of state insist that they will not meet Putin, Macron said he would and referred to French imperialism's traditional alliance with Russia against Germany. After pledging to "stay in contact as much as I can and as much as is necessary with President Putin," Macron hailed "the history of Russia and Ukraine, the memory of earlier generations who fought side by side with us against Nazism."

This reference is hypocritical and politically obscene coming from Macron. He made it while also threatening Russia in alliance with a far-right regime in Ukraine that rewarded surviving members of Ukrainian SS units involved in the Holocaust with state pensions. Nonetheless, as Macron also announced a pledge to massively escalate military spending, it is apparent that German rearmament amid a war drive against Russia is also intensifying interimperialist conflicts within NATO itself.

Concluding his speech, Macron referred briefly to the April 2022 presidential elections and made clear that none of the broad outlines of the policies he had discussed—which are shared by virtually every major candidate—would be up for discussion. He said, "This campaign will allow for democratic debate that is important for the nation, but it will not prevent us from being united on that which is essential."

Macron's remarks point to the accelerating collapse of French democracy under the impact of unsustainable levels of social inequality, the pandemic, and the imperialist drive to war. None of these issues can be resolved on a national level, or by any of the candidates running in the 2022 elections. The critical question is building an international movement in the working class against the imminent danger of global war, against the policies of mass infection with COVID-19, and for the overthrow of capitalism and its replacement with a socialist society.

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