

Chinese President Xi Jinping visits France

By Kumaran Ira
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On March 25-28, Chinese President Xi Jinping made his first state visit to France, in a European tour taking him also to Germany and Belgium.

At a March 26 ceremonial meeting at the Elysée presidential palace with French President François Hollande, Xi signed 50 trade deals and contracts worth €18 billion (\$25 billion).

A joint statement by Xi and Hollande claimed that China-France relations were entering a new era, consisting of a close and lasting comprehensive strategic partnership. Xi said the agreements “charted out the general direction, set down new goals and opened up good prospects for the future development of bilateral ties.”

During his meeting with Xi, Hollande said, “In our bilateral relations, we have excellent relations, even if we have the obligation, from our standpoint, to rebalance trade between our two countries.”

Despite the massive contracts and the rosy picture painted by Xi and Hollande, ties between China and France are dominated by escalating geo-strategic tensions and the crisis of world imperialism—one of whose major targets is China itself. The joint statement alluded to these tensions, claiming: “We want the 21st century not to be one of annexations and separatism. Everyone here must understand this.”

The signing of such a declaration by Hollande’s Socialist Party (PS) government is an act of political hypocrisy. The PS is supporting the US-German offensive in Ukraine, consisting of a fascist-led coup in Ukraine aimed at installing a pro-Western regime in Kiev hostile to Russia. Paris has repeatedly sought to encourage right-wing separatist tendencies in China itself, including by holding public meetings with the Tibetan Dalai Lama in 2008.

Since 2011, France has intensified its military intervention in Africa, with wars in Libya, Mali, Ivory Coast and Central African Republic aiming to undercut

Chinese influence and recolonize France’s former colonial empire.

In a Chinese concession to French and US interests, the joint statement included a remarkable attack on North Korea and Iran—two countries who rely on Chinese aid against threats from the Western imperialist powers. It declared, “France and China are two nuclear powers. But they are aware of their responsibility. They do not want countries that could endanger world peace to obtain nuclear weapons. This is true for North Korea, it is true for Iran.”

During Xi’s visit, France and China celebrated the 50th anniversary of the re-establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries. In 1964, under President Charles de Gaulle, France became the first major Western power to establish diplomatic ties with the People’s Republic of China led by Mao Zedong, fifteen years after China’s 1949 revolution. De Gaulle’s manoeuvre was bound up with his decision to withdraw France from NATO’s military command structure, two years later.

This anniversary underscores the reactionary character of the social transformations of the last half-century. The restoration of capitalism in China that culminated in the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre opened up China as a source of cheap labour for Western capital, and French imperialism has joined Washington in escalating neo-colonial wars worldwide, including the aggressive US “pivot to Asia” to isolate China. (See: “Hollande’s state visit to Washington: France embraces global neo-colonialist war”)

Hollande maintained the policies of his predecessor, Nicolas Sarkozy, who rejoined NATO’s military command in 2009 and aligned Paris on US foreign policy. Last year’s French military White Paper identified China as a potential military adversary of France and the Indian Ocean as a major arena of French intervention. It called on France to develop the

ability to intervene in the South China Sea.

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Xi's state visit came amid continuing efforts by Paris to clinch a \$20 billion deal to sell 126 Rafale fighter jets to India, which US imperialism aims to develop as a military counterweight to China.

These geo-strategic tensions underscore the fragility of the trade deals signed by Beijing and Paris, which is trying to stabilize its crisis-ridden economy by employing super-exploited Chinese labour and developing new markets among China's narrow but affluent elites.

Struggling French automaker PSA Peugeot-Citroën formalised the deal agreed last month with China's Dongfeng, which will buy a 14 percent stake in PSA as part of the French firm's recapitalisation plan. The joint venture allows PSA to penetrate Southeast Asian markets and boost the revenues it is obtaining through mass layoffs and plant closures in France. The PSA-Dongfeng deal came after PSA closed down its Aulnay plant near Paris and cut 8,000 jobs across France.

China also signed a new 10-year agreement allowing aircraft manufacturer Airbus to extend a deal to assemble A320 planes in Tianjin to 2025. It agreed to buy 70 new aircraft, including 27 Airbus A330 planes worth €7 billion, co-produce French EC-175 helicopters with Airbus, and co-operate on manufacturing turboprop engines with France's Safran.

France is seeking to rebalance its trade deficit with China, which was €26 billion last year. France's trade with China trails far behind that of Germany: it accounted for about 1.2 percent of Chinese imports, compared with Germany's 4.8 percent.

Opening a symposium on Sino-French relations, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said France is trying to make up for lost time in exploiting Chinese workers: "France did not take the full measure of China's initial industrialization. It's one of the causes of the disequilibrium we have spoken of." Fabius called for boosting Paris' economic weight inside China: "France wants to be a part of this new age of economy and Chinese society."

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