

Macron invites Trump for Bastille Day parade in Paris

By Alex Lantier
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Donald Trump arrived yesterday in Paris at French President Emmanuel Macron's invitation for a meeting and a joint press conference, before attending the Bastille Day parade today on the Champs Élysées avenue in Paris. Macron sent an unambiguous signal: despite his differences with Trump, he still places his relations with US imperialism at the center of his diplomatic strategy.

Macron launched the joint press conference by praising the “symbolic and important” trip of Trump, who is hated among workers in France, and hailing the centenary of the US entry into World War I against Germany. Trump's visit, he declared, would “celebrate not only our national holiday but also the centennial of the intervention of American troops alongside France... The presence of Donald Trump was not only natural, but a good thing for the history of our two countries.”

Macron then listed subjects where he shares Trump's positions: limiting free trade by reinforcing protectionist antidumping measures, censoring the Internet by editing out supposedly “terrorist” statements on social media, and waging imperialist wars in Africa and the Middle East.

After US, French and allied forces bombed the Iraqi city of Mosul during a siege that claimed 10,000 lives and displaced 700,000 people, Macron hailed the US role in Iraq. Fourteen years ago, Washington launched an illegal invasion and military occupation of that country, which cost over a million lives and was opposed by France's right-wing president at the time, Jacques Chirac. Macron, on the other hand, insisted that he “thanks” Trump for what US troops have done in Iraq “in recent years.”

Trump's statement also underscored the reactionary character of Macron's presidency. He applauded Macron's authoritarian policy of rewriting the Labor

Code by decree to slash workers' wages and conditions, calling it a struggle against “bureaucracy,” and also applauded the strength of French troops now occupying Mali.

The invitation of Trump marks a shift in Macron's foreign policy that points to the profound instability of relations between the main imperialist powers of the NATO alliance. After a quarter century of imperialist wars and deepening economic crisis following the 1991 dissolution of the USSR by the Stalinist bureaucracy, NATO—founded on a common hostility to the USSR—is being torn apart by deep rivalries that threaten to erupt at all points into open conflict, or even war.

During his presidential campaign this spring, Macron reacted to Brexit and Trump's election by moving closer to Germany. For his first trip outside France as president, the week of his election, he traveled to Berlin to meet Chancellor Angela Merkel and to try to revive the traditional Franco-German axis as the “motor” of the European Union (EU). This seemed to align him with Merkel in her conflict with Trump, who has denounced Germany and even threatened it with trade war, by blocking its exports to the United States.

However, only a few days after the July 7-8 G20 summit in Hamburg, Trump is back in Europe this week, to celebrate with Macron the centenary of a war against Germany. Yesterday, Trump and Macron both kept an extraordinary silence on Germany. This silence was all the more deafening, in that Macron was just coming from a joint meeting of the French and German council of ministers that very morning in Paris, after which Merkel and Macron held another joint press conference to announce several major initiatives.

As Germany abandons the policy of military restraint it adopted after the defeat of the Nazis in 1945, and tries to emerge as the hegemon of a remilitarized

Europe, Paris and Berlin are signing several military agreements. Perhaps most importantly, they are agreeing to collaborate in developing and manufacturing a fighter jet. Merkel also announced, however, that she might consider creating a budget for the euro zone and the position of a European minister of finance.

This noncommittal statement was a reaction to pressure from Paris. Speaking to *Ouest France* and dailies of Germany's Funke press corporation, Macron had just sharply attacked Berlin's diktat imposing deep austerity across the euro zone since the Greek debt crisis erupted nearly a decade ago, in 2009.

The euro zone, he said, "does not function well because it has nourished divergences. Those who were indebted ended up more indebted. Those who were competitive ended up more competitive." He added, "Germany is also benefiting from the dysfunction of the euro zone. This is not a healthy situation, because it cannot last."

Macron called for a government of the euro zone that would transfer tax funds between euro zone countries, a policy long opposed by Berlin: "In France, if the Paris area did not subsidize the rural districts, national unity would not last very long. For that, we need a budget, a government which decides upon how to spend this budget, and democratic forms of control which do not exist at present."

These deep tensions inside Europe underlie Macron's invitation to Trump. European capitalism is incapable of overcoming its internal contradictions, which twice in the 20th century erupted into world wars. After 40 years of austerity, deindustrialization, and growing indebtedness, France no longer has the economic weight to function as a full partner of Germany in a Franco-German axis that would try to direct the EU. Macron reacts by trying to blackmail Berlin, signaling that Paris could align itself with Washington and a more frankly anti-German policy.

The French press pointed to the growing military divergences between Paris and Berlin, particularly on Russia and Eastern Europe. "For Paris," wrote *Le Monde*, "relations with Moscow must remain pragmatic, guided by national interests. For Berlin, they are inscribed in territorial defense strategy and the very architecture of European security... Thus, for Germany, sending troops to Lithuania in the name of a

NATO policy of reassuring the country since [Russia's] annexation of Crimea is a priority. But that is not the case for France."

At their joint press conference, Trump and Macron worked to smooth over their previous conflicts. Both suggested that Trump might, in the coming years, moderate his opposition to the Paris climate accords and asserted that their dinner on the Eiffel Tower after the press conference would be a meeting between "friends."

Macron also confirmed the abandonment of Paris' former Syrian policy of war for regime change against President Bashar al-Assad. Calling cooperation with Moscow in the Middle East a "necessity," he added: "We have indeed changed French doctrine on Syria... We have a principal objective: the eradication of all terrorist groups, whatever their political sensibility... We do not make Assad's departure the precondition for French engagement in Syria."

Whereas Chinese President Xi Jinping had just met Merkel in Berlin before the G20 summit in Hamburg, Macron added that Xi was not his "friend," even if he had had a "fruitful" discussion with Xi.

Macron's rapprochement with Trump underscores the deeply reactionary character of his presidency. When questioned by a journalist, Macron refused to criticize Trump's Muslim ban or his plan to build a wall to keep people from immigrating across the US-Mexican border.

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