

Hollande's State Visit to Washington: France Embraces Global Neo-Colonialist War

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Yesterday marked the end of a three-day state visit by French President François Hollande in Washington, DC. It was billed as the definitive burying of the diplomatic conflicts that erupted between the United States and France over a decade ago, when right-wing President Jacques Chirac opposed the Bush administration's 2003 invasion of Iraq.

In a joint editorial in the *Washington Post* and *Le Monde* on Monday, as the visit began, Obama and Hollande spelled out a new Franco-American alliance.

They wrote: "A decade ago, few would have imagined our two countries working so closely together in so many ways. But in recent years our alliance has transformed. Since France's return to NATO's military command four years ago and consistent with our continuing commitment to strengthen the NATO-European Union partnership, we have expanded our cooperation across the board. We are sovereign and independent nations that make our decisions based on our respective national interests. Yet we have been able to take our alliance to a new level because our interests and values are so closely aligned."

With this declaration, Hollande's Socialist Party (PS) is signing on as a junior partner to the US agenda of world domination launched under Bush and continued after Obama took over from Bush in January of 2009. In defiance of both public opinion and the traditions of its own imperialist diplomacy in the post-World War II era, Paris is abandoning any pretense of pursuing an independent foreign policy from Washington.

The 2002 US National Security Strategy, which sought to justify US aggression against Iraq, called for a policy "based on a distinctly American internationalism that reflects the union of our values and our national interests."

Today, Obama and Hollande cite shared "interests and values" to embark not on the conquest of a country, but on a neo-colonial re-division of the entire globe by imperialism. Washington is aiding Paris in its wars in Mali and the Central African Republic, while Paris is pledging to step up support for Obama's "pivot to Asia" aimed at China. Both are backing a German-led campaign to isolate and carve up Russia, starting with the current far-right street protests pushing for regime-change in Ukraine.

France emerged last September as the only European power pushing to fight a US-led war against Syria, which could have escalated into a war with Syria's backers, Iran and Russia. Hollande pressed for war even after the British Parliament voted against it, and despite overwhelming popular opposition in France. This earned Hollande comparisons to former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who was mocked as Bush's "poodle" for slavishly supporting the Iraq war.

In their joint press conference Tuesday in Washington, Obama praised Hollande, saying: “From Mali and the Central African Republic to Syria and Iran, you have shown courage and resolve. And I want to thank you for your leadership and for being such a strong partner to the United States.” He also announced stepped-up aid to the Al Qaeda-linked Islamist opposition in Syria.

Obama also praised Hollande, who just announced a €50 billion corporate tax break involving deep cuts to social spending, for launching new free trade talks. He said they had “agreed to continue pursuing an ambitious and comprehensive Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership.” He added, “I want to thank President Hollande for his commitment to these negotiations.”

Hollande solidarised himself with the agenda of war and austerity outlined by Obama, whose election he hailed as “proof that America was moving forward once more.” He added, “America was able to make something possible, to make progress possible.”

Hollande’s claim that this joint agenda of austerity and war represents “progress” is an absurd lie. Paris is reacting to the crisis of its world position—its loss of competitiveness to Germany, its ebbing economic influence in its former African colonies, and a collapsing economy undermined by harsh social cuts—by turning the clock back, embarking on a global policy of plunder. The crisis of the imperialist world order has irrevocably undermined the class equilibrium that existed in France in the post-World War II period.

The Hollande-Obama commentary underscores the broad significance of the 2009 decision by Hollande’s predecessor, right-wing President Nicolas Sarkozy, to re-integrate France into NATO after 43 years outside NATO’s central command. This decision to integrate French and US foreign policy—maintained by Hollande and silently supported by his allies, the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) and the pseudo-left New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA)—has far-reaching political implications.

The traditional distance between US and French foreign policy, as formulated by General Charles de Gaulle, emerged from the revolutionary crisis of post-war France. Both de Gaulle and the PCF sought to suppress anti-capitalist sentiment in the working class that exploded after the collapse of France’s Nazi-collaborationist regime. De Gaulle, leading most of the right-wing forces in the Resistance and France’s remaining colonial armies, relied on PCF support to found a new capitalist regime and keep control of France’s colonies.

Both this strategy and de Gaulle personally faced opposition from powerful forces in Washington, however. US imperialism opposed the PCF and had its own designs on France’s colonies. De Gaulle feared that if Washington sidelined him and kept a Vichy official as head of state, popular anger might prove impossible to contain.

The external counterpart to his balancing between right-wing elements and the PCF was the pursuit, from within NATO, of an independent foreign policy, including limited overtures to Moscow and attempts to keep conflicts between Washington and Moscow from escalating too far. In 1945, De Gaulle called for “a French policy of balancing between the two very great powers, a policy I consider absolutely necessary for the interests of our country and even for those of peace.”

De Gaulle was a ruthless imperialist, whose views in part prefigured the global re-eruption of imperialism today. Reflecting on his government’s defeat in the Algerian war and his

decision to allow a 1962 referendum that would lead to the independence of Algeria, he wrote in his *Memoirs*: “Everything commands us to re-appear in Cairo, Damascus, in Amman, in Baghdad, in Khartoum, as we have remained in Beirut.”

The concessions he made to the working class and the conflicts between French and US interests required him, however, to pursue an independent policy from Washington, particularly amid the escalating US-French tensions of the 1960s. Leading French officials and publications charged the CIA with encouraging the failed 1961 anti-Algerian independence putsch against de Gaulle, led by former NATO official General Maurice Challe, to keep Algeria French and thus keep it from falling under Soviet influence.

This, along with US opposition to France’s nuclear program, led de Gaulle to withdraw France from the integrated NATO command in 1966 and to limit US intelligence operations in France.

These policies have irrevocably collapsed, however, following the breakup of the Soviet Union and amid the escalating crisis of European capitalism. The social concessions to the working class that formed the basis of the PCF’s collaboration with de Gaulle and the military restraints on European imperialism imposed by the existence of the USSR have disappeared. A new revolutionary conflict is emerging between the working class and a ruling class determined to preserve its wealth through social retrogression at home and wars of plunder abroad.

The violent shift to the right of the bourgeois “left” parties towards a reckless and aggressive war policy is an unmistakable indication of the revolutionary crisis that is emerging, and the gulf opening up between the working class and all of the representatives of the capitalist class.

The PCF and the NPA have used their support for the Syrian opposition, cynically justified on “human rights” grounds, to line up behind the Socialist Party’s reckless policy of risking war with Syria, Iran, and even Russia and China. They have ignored the exposure of mass spying operations by both US and French intelligence, revealed by NSA whistle-blower Edward Snowden. They are complicit in all the crimes being prepared by Washington, Paris and the United States’ other imperialist allies.

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