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## ***Macron's sending of tanks to Ukraine marks escalation of France's role in war on Russia***

On Wednesday, French President Emmanuel Macron announced plans for France to deliver AMX-10 RC light tanks to the Ukrainian military. This is the first time that Western-designed tanks will be sent to the Ukrainian armed forces. It marks a significant escalation of French involvement in the war.



France said Wednesday January 4, 2023 it will send French-made AMX-10 RC light tanks to Ukraine, the first tanks from a Western European country, following an afternoon phone call between French President Emmanuel Macron and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. [AP Photo/Jeremy Bessat/Armee de Terre]

In a tweet announcing the deal, Macron stated, “Until victory, until peace returns to Europe, our support for Ukraine will not weaken. I confirmed it to President Zelensky: France will provide light combat tanks.” The exact number of AMX-10 RCs to be

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delivered is unknown, but they will be transferred from the French military, which currently has 248. The vehicles sent to Ukraine will be replaced by EBRC Jaguar vehicles at a cost of €5 million apiece.

In discussions with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Macron also pledged to deepen France's air defence support to Ukraine. France has already supplied Crotale air defense batteries and pledged more Caesar artillery pieces, on top of the 18 delivered in 2022. According to *Le Monde*, Macron is also currently in talks with Italy to send SAMP/T Mamba missile batteries to Ukraine, a more modern surface-to-air missile system with similar capabilities to the American-built Patriot missiles already used by the Ukrainian military.

The delivery of light tanks confirms that French imperialism has joined the NATO war on Russia, even though it risks a nuclear conflagration.

In 2019, Macron declared NATO "brain-dead" in an interview with the *Economist*. He said US policy towards Russia was unhinged, adding, "When the United States is very harsh with Russia it is a form of governmental, political, and historical hysteria."

When the NATO-Russia war began last year, Macron was somewhat reluctant to openly endorse NATO's policy of provocation against Russia and unlimited expansion of the war in Ukraine. He claimed he aimed to negotiate a ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine. On March 28, the *New York Times* wrote: "Nobody can accuse President Emmanuel Macron of stinting on efforts to avert, defuse or stop Russia's war in Ukraine." In February and March, he spoke to Zelensky and Putin and claimed his aim was "securing a cease-fire and then the total withdrawal of troops."

In March, when then-British Prime Minister Boris Johnson supported Zelensky's call for NATO tanks to be delivered to Ukraine, Macron refused. He said this was a "red line" which, if crossed, would make the NATO powers "co-belligerents." Now, at the beginning of 2023, Macron is attempting to position French imperialism as a European leader in arming Ukraine.

As recently as December, Macron said that he had two "red lines" on arms deliveries: that it did not affect France's ability to defend itself and did not make Paris a co-belligerent in the war.

By coordinating delivery of weaponry and ammunition with other NATO powers, France was in reality a co-belligerent state, according to international law. With the delivery of tanks that are designed to perform offensive operations, Macron has only shattered what

few illusions could have remained that Paris was not at war with a major nuclear-armed state.

This shift developed over the course of 2022 and intensified, in particular, after the bombing of the Nord Stream pipeline. This effectively ended any chance of renewed French natural gas imports from Russia and aligned French imperialist foreign policy with that of its NATO allies.

The French announcement that it would supply tanks was soon followed by German and US pledges of their own military vehicles. Behind the front of united support for Ukraine, however, are increasing inter-imperialist tensions. Macron's decision to pioneer tank deliveries is seen by military and political analysts as an attempt to remove France from the military and geopolitical shadow of its rivals, in particular Germany.

Marc Chassillan, engineer and specialist in military land equipment, told *Le Monde*, "From a political point of view, this announcement is a marker. France will be the first to deliver what the military calls a melee vehicle, i.e., an armored vehicle for close combat." Significantly, this has intensified tensions between Paris and Berlin. Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, chairwoman of the Bundestag's defence committee and a member of the Free Democratic Party, one of Germany's ruling parties, told AFP: "Once again, France is taking on the role that was expected of Germany and is taking the lead itself. The ball is now in Berlin's court."

It is no accident that the delivery of French tanks to Ukraine was announced a few days after Macron declared that 2023 would be the year of pension reform. As with all the NATO powers, the cost of sending billions of euros in arms to the Ukrainian military while expanding the military is to be borne by the working class.

France's military budget for 2023 is €49.3 billion, the highest ever and the largest year-on-year increase in 15 years. This includes an extra €3 billion added in an amendment in October last year as the French ruling class took the decision to more firmly align itself with NATO's policy. The military budget is the government's second-largest budgetary expense, topped only by education.

In Macron's New Year's Eve speech, he announced that 2023 would be the year of pension reform, which has been a central goal of his government in both his first and second terms. His last attempt to force through the reform led to mass public-sector strikes in December 2019. By raising the retirement age and freezing pension increases, so that

their real value is eaten away by inflation, Macron hopes to find the funds for military expansion.

In 2023, French government spending overall will decrease by 1.5 percent, and 6 percent inflation means expenditure in real terms will be cut even further. Most of these savings come from drastic cuts to the health sector, already suffering from wave after wave of COVID-19 and staffing shortages, including the dismantling of COVID-19 testing infrastructure.

NATO's embargo of Russian energy exports has primarily impacted the poorest households. Energy prices have increased by 15 percent in France as US natural gas exporters ramped up prices for the European market amid the embargo on Russia. The French population still faces the prospect of winter blackouts due to shortages. So far, however, due to unseasonably mild weather, demand has not exceeded France's limited energy supply.

Macron's delivery of tanks to the Ukrainian military sets the tone for his policy in 2023, that is, for a massive intensification of war with Russia, irrespective of the threat of escalation to nuclear war, and brutal austerity meted out to workers.

The deepening involvement of France and her imperial allies in the NATO-US war in Ukraine shows that only an international anti-war movement of workers can avert nuclear catastrophe and the ruling class drive to World War III. At its December 10, 2022 webinar, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality launched an initiative to build this movement. Faced with the endless escalation of the conflict, workers and youth opposed to war and austerity in France and internationally must take the decision to join this movement.

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