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European Languages

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07.02.2023

Macron hosts Netanyahu in Paris to plan Israeli arms deliveries to Ukraine

Last Thursday evening, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris. This was Netanyahu's first official foreign visit since he once again became Prime Minister on December 29 last year.

While no official remarks or transcript were published after Macron and Netanyahu's meeting, the details of the conversation given to the major newspapers by government officials make clear that the purpose of the meeting was to plan the escalation of NATO's war in Ukraine and Israel's provocations against Iran.



French president Emmanuel Macron, right, welcomes Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu prior to their meeting at the Elysee Palace, in Paris, France, Thursday, February 2, 2023. [AP Photo/Michel Euler]

The meeting took place amid the efforts of imperialist powers to drastically escalate the war in Ukraine. In the first week of January, Macron became the first NATO leader to

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announce the delivery of tanks to Ukraine, which has now led to the delivery of 120 advanced battle tanks and even more advanced missile systems to the front lines by EU powers and the United States. It is now widely expected that, in a further escalation, NATO countries will soon deliver fighter jets to Ukraine.

In this context, Netanyahu used the meeting to play his “Ukraine card,” agreeing to send Israeli armaments to Ukrainian forces at his meeting with Macron. In exchange, he sought assurances from France and her European allies that the 2015 Iranian Nuclear treaty will not be revived, and that European powers will continue to turn a blind eye to Israeli bombing raids against Iran, the far-right character of Netanyahu’s government, and its repressive measures at home.

According to a source quoted in *Le Monde* who had knowledge of the meeting, Netanyahu promised the French president that Israel would deliver “military things” to Ukraine. Israeli foreign minister Eli Cohen is due to travel to Kyiv next week to finalize the delivery of Israeli arms to the Ukrainian army.

In return, “Macron expressed his readiness to weigh sanctions on the IRGC (Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.)” In Friday’s press conference after Thursday’s meeting, Netanyahu stated that, “France and Israel are drawing much closer in the way they see the Iran threat.”

The two leaders both lead crisis-riddled regimes that are reviled by broad sections of their populations. As their meeting took place, millions of French and Israeli workers and youth were protesting their respective governments. Indeed, it is more or less apparent that Netanyahu hoped his first official state visit would provide favorable publicity as new Prime Minister and allow him to gloss over massive internal opposition to his regime.

In Israel, demonstrations against Netanyahu’s far-right coalition government and its proposed judicial reform have continued into their fifth week. On Saturday, tens of thousands marched in 20 cities across the country, protesting Netanyahu’s attempted reform to emasculate the judiciary and block prosecution of Netanyahu himself, and against his government, which is made up of far-right nationalists, racists, and homophobes.

In France, Macron oversees an equally fragile regime. The president is facing mass protests of workers and youth against his overwhelmingly unpopular pension reform and rapidly declining standards of living. On January 31, 2.5 million people marched against the reform, according to the French unions, and even the government’s own figure of 1.27

million protesters was a record. This followed a one-day strike on January 18 that was also supported by millions.

The closed-door meeting took place as Netanyahu's government is waging a series of violent assaults on the Palestinian people, with 32 people killed by Israeli forces or settlers in January alone. This included the Israeli security forces' raid on the Jenin refugee camp on January 26, which killed 10. Netanyahu's new offensive is part of his government's use of state violence to massively expand settlements in the West Bank and suppress any domestic opposition to annexation of Palestinian territories.

Even behind closed doors, Macron did not condemn the murderous policies of the Israeli state. Instead, he cautioned Netanyahu: "If you continue what you are doing in Palestine, it will be difficult for Saudi Arabia to accept an agreement with you."

In other words, Macron only objects to an escalation of violence against Palestinians insofar as it threatens the NATO-backed axis of Israel and Saudi Arabia against Iran in the Middle East. Indeed, in 2022 Macron's government denounced charities and organizations which label the Israeli state's persecution of its Palestinian population and the privileged legal status of Jewish citizens as apartheid.

Macron is clearly concerned by the instability of Netanyahu's regime. According to the leaked remarks, the French president told Netanyahu that the judicial reform "opens a crisis unprecedented since the birth of the state in 1948," and warned that if it goes through, "Paris should conclude that Israel has moved away from a common conception of democracy."



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Macron's criticisms, though they make clear that the imperialist bourgeoisies are well aware of the anti-democratic character of the present Israeli regime, are shot through with hypocrisy. In alliance with Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally, the "president of the rich" has overseen his own battery of anti-democratic laws, including the discriminatory anti-Muslim law and the Global Security Law, which outlaws taking photos or video of police.

Macron's refusal to publicly condemn Netanyahu's judicial reform or Israel's murderous suppression of Palestinians, despite his misgivings about their geopolitical consequences, flows from the bloody policies of the NATO powers themselves. Above all, they now seek to secure extensive Israeli support for imperialist war against Russia in Ukraine. Macron's own pension cut aims to free up the state budget to fund French imperialism's rapid rearmament and delivery of weapons to Ukraine without cutting into the wealth of the super-rich.

Macron and Netanyahu are widely aware of mass opposition to their regimes and the NATO-Russia war. That is why these two "democratic" leaders met behind closed doors in order to plan the next stage of escalation of the war in Ukraine and how to continue efforts to provoke the bourgeois-nationalist Iranian regime into an action that can be seized upon to justify all-out war against Iran.

The fact that two such widely reviled politicians can come together and plot military attacks on major powers like Russia and Iran must be taken as a warning by masses of workers internationally. The danger that the Ukrainian war could spread across the entire Middle East, and turn into a direct conflict between major, nuclear-armed powers, is very real.

Moreover, neither Macron nor Netanyahu see the eruption of political opposition and social protest in the working class and youth in any way as a reason to change their policies. Instead, they are trying to create conditions to double down on their reactionary policies by accelerating their military escalation and demanding that the population rally to them and to the armed forces in order to prosecute the wars which they themselves are playing a decisive role in launching.

The way forward is the construction of a mass, international anti-war movement in the working class, independent of the entire political establishment. Only such a force can

smash the reactionary influence of figures such as Macron and Netanyahu and halt the military escalation they are recklessly setting into motion before it erupts into a global conflagration.

World Socialist 06.02.2023