

Macron's US Visit Tells Europe's Alienation

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The state visit by French President Emmanuel Macron to the United States stands out as a signpost of the alignments taking place against the backdrop of the historic churning in the world order. The two leaders went to extraordinary lengths to display bonhomie but how far that impressed the two statesmen — Macron, an erudite mind and the most vocal European statesman on his continent's integration and strategic autonomy vis-a-vis the US, and Biden, a veteran of international diplomacy — time will show.

Macron already marked his profound difference with the US stance on Ukraine, a topic that dominated his visit, in a remark in Paris on Saturday after his return, during an interview for the French channel TF1. Macron said,

"We must think about the security architecture, in which we will live tomorrow. I am talking, in particular, about Russian President Vladimir Putin's words that NATO is approaching Russia's borders and deploys weapons that could threaten it. This issue will be a part of the peace discussions, and we must prepare for what will come after [the Ukrainian conflict], and think how we could protect our allies and, at the same time, provide Russia with guarantees of its own security, once the sides return to the negotiation table."

Macron made the above remark as the countdown begins for an expected large-scale Russian winter offensive in Ukraine.

While the [Joint Statement](#) issued after Macron's visit shows that the US and France are on the same page in their criticism of Moscow's conduct of the war in Ukraine, the nuances in the respective articulation by the two leaders during their [joint press conference](#) cannot be missed.

Biden, of course, tore into Putin, personally holding him responsible, but Macron held back. Interestingly, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz also may have marked his distance from Biden by initiating a call with Putin on Friday, his second in a row in successive months.

The [readout](#) from Moscow highlighted that while Scholz criticised Russia's conduct of the conflict, he went on to discuss other issues with Putin and they agreed to keep in touch.

Both France and Germany are greatly concerned about a possible escalation of the war in Ukraine whereas the US is focused on supporting Kiev "for as long as it takes."

Macron highlighted France's 3-pronged approach: "Help Ukraine resist"; "Prevent any risk of escalation in this conflict"; and, "make sure that, when the time comes, on basis of conditions to be set by Ukrainians themselves, help build peace." But Biden was categorical that "there is one way for this war to end the rational way: Putin to pull out of Ukraine."

Macron maintained that

"We need to work on what could lead to a peace agreement, but it is for him [Ukrainian president Zelensky] to tell us when the time comes and what the choices of the Ukrainians are."

Macron indirectly stressed the need for flexibility, saying,

"If we want a sustainable peace, we have to respect the Ukrainians to decide the moment and the conditions in which they will negotiate about their territory and their future."

Curiously, Biden never once mentioned Zelensky, whereas, Macon openly commended "the efforts of President Zelensky to try and find a way, a path to peace while leading the heroic resistance."

Macron stressed,

"I believe, very much need to continue to engage with him [Zelensky] because there is a genuine willingness, on behalf of Ukraine, to discuss these matters. And we acknowledge it, and we commend it."

Apart from Ukraine, as expected, Macron's main concern was the recent Inflation Reduction Act, a \$369 billion package of subsidies and tax breaks enacted by the Biden Administration to boost American green businesses, which, from a European perspective, constitutes a protectionist measure that encourages companies to shift investments from Europe and incentivises customers to "Buy American".

Only a month remains before the final provisions of the US law enter into force on January 1. Germany and France have hit back by joining forces to back a French push for a more subsidy-based EU industrial policy.

At the White House talks with Macron, Biden conceded that there were "glitches" in the roll-out of America's multi-billion-dollar package of green subsidies. To quote Biden,

"There's tweaks that we can make that can fundamentally make it easier for European countries to participate and, or be on their own, but that is something that is a matter to be worked out."

The remark, perhaps, allows Macron to claim a takeaway from his visit. But how far Biden's words get turned into practice remains to be seen, as chances of Congress amending the law is debatable, especially as Republicans are set to take narrow control of the House.

Clearly, the Biden-Macron meeting does not include a breakthrough on Europe's concerns. Biden's basic stance is that "United States makes no apology," since the IRA legislation aims to "make sure that the United States continues... not to have to rely on anybody else's supply chain. We're — we are our own supply chain."

Macron noted that he had "some very frank discussions." He stressed,

"France simply did not come to ask for an exemption or another for — for our economy but simply to discuss the consequences of this legislation... We will continue to move forward as Europeans. And we're not here simply, really, to ask for 'proof of love'."

The Americans are making a fortune from the Ukraine war — selling more gas to Europe at vastly higher prices and boosting arms exports to NATO countries who have supplied military hardware to Ukraine. The EU countries are suffering when the war in Ukraine is tipping them into recession, with inflation rocketing and a devastating squeeze on energy supplies threatening blackouts and rationing this winter.

The greening of America at the cost of European industry casts shadows on the Indo-Pacific strategy. The recent visits by Scholz and Charles Michel, president of the European Council, to Beijing in quick succession underscores that the tensions in the transatlantic alliance as a fallout of the Ukraine war have a spillover effect.

Macron's visit to Washington showed that France's main interest lies in "building resilience in the Pacific Islands." Apropos China, the Biden-Macron joint statement had nothing new to announce. It resorted to a balanced formulation that the US and France will "continue to coordinate on our concerns regarding China's challenge to the rules-based international order, including respect for human rights, and to work together with China on important global issues like climate change."

On Taiwan, the joint statement simply reaffirmed "the importance of maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait." Conceivably, the [crushing defeat](#) Tsai Ing-wen suffered in the recent Taiwanese local elections had a sobering effect.

At any rate, in their respective opening remarks at the press conference on the Indo-Pacific strategy, while Biden limited himself to an anodyne remark or two, Macron simply glossed over the subject.

Beijing must be quietly pleased that Michel picked Thursday for his visit. [President Xi Jinping appreciated](#) the EU's "goodwill of furthering relations with China." Xi noted that the more unstable the international situation becomes and the more acute challenges the world faces, the greater global significance China-EU relations take on.

The EU's foreign policy is at a juncture on whether to confront or cooperate with China. [Global Times wrote](#) that Michel's visit "sent a signal that represents rational voices, that is, refusing to follow the US and treat China primarily through a political and ideological perspective...What the US wants is hegemony, but Europe wants survival, and the EU cannot achieve that without China."

The bottom line is that as the conflict in Ukraine escalates, the neocons in the Biden Administration may feel elated, but the incipient tensions in the transatlantic relations can only aggravate.

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Featured image: French President Emmanuel Macron (R) and US President Joe Biden met in the White House, Washington, DC, Dec. 1, 2022 (Source: Indian Punchline)

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