

The Most Important Line in the China-France Joint Statement

Europe's prime players are embracing the multipolar paradigm; are they leaving the U.S. behind?

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On April 7, after three days and several hours of meetings, Chinese President Xi Jinping and French President Emmanuel Macron issued a [joint declaration](#) between France and China. The declaration contained much of interest on trade, nuclear war, the war in Ukraine, the food crisis, climate change, and more.

But the most important line may be a short nineteen-word sentence that appears early in the document. In a section on "promoting global security and stability," China and France declared that "They seek to strengthen the multilateral international system under the aegis of the United Nations, in a multipolar world."

Multipolarity is the world-vision and language that frequently appears in China-Russia joint declarations. Now France has signed a document that, together with China, offers a multipolar world as an alternative to the unipolar world sought by the U.S. It is one thing for China, Russia, or the other members of multipolar international organizations like BRICS or the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to call for balancing U.S. hegemony in a multipolar world. It is quite another for a key NATO ally to make the call.

This potentially seminal statement suggests a fundamental divide between France and the U.S. The U.S. seeks to maintain a unipolar world with America at its head, with no "potential future global competitors"—in the language of the 1992 Defense Planning Guidance—and Europe as its subordinate partner. The joint declaration suggests that France seeks to break from that project.

A world with several poles and all countries, large or small, having an equal voice has long been advocated by China and Russia. After his meeting with Macron, Xi [said](#) that Europe is an "independent pole in a multipolar world." It is not surprising that Xi walked away from

their meetings making such assertions. It is quite another thing for Macron to walk away from their meetings asserting the same world view. In an interview aboard his plane, departing from Beijing, Macron [said](#) that Europe must achieve “strategic autonomy” and become a “third superpower.” He [advocated](#) for a Europe that is not a junior partner in a U.S.-led unipolar world but for a Europe that “can be the third pole.”

“Quite a few” European leaders may “think like Emmanuel Macron,” [according](#) to European Council president Charles Michel. “There is indeed a great attachment that remains present—and Emmanuel Macron has said nothing else—for this alliance with the United States. But if this alliance with the United States would suppose that we blindly, systematically follow the position of the United States on all issues, no.”

Macron is neither breaking from the U.S. nor opposing it. He has [said](#) that France is “an ally of the Americans. We are not equidistant between China and the United States,” adding that they don’t always “have the same interests.” Macron maintains that “Strategic autonomy means assuming that we have similar views with the United States, but,” he says, “whether it’s on Ukraine, the relationship with China or sanctions, we have a European strategy.” Assertions of alliance aside, Macron is breaking from the American worldview and key foreign policy goal of a U.S.-led unipolar world.

That French, or perhaps even European, strategy has lately not had the same interests as U.S. strategy on a number of key issues, including Ukraine and sanctions on China.

Contrary to the American refusal to negotiate NATO expansion to Ukraine or Russia’s security concerns, Macron has [said](#) that the West “must address, as President Putin has always said...the fear that NATO comes right up to its doors, and the deployment of weapons that could threaten Russia.” German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has similarly [said](#) that “all questions of common security could be solved and discussed.”

Although the U.S. has pressured the European Union to re-examine its trade policies with China to align them with American interests, Macron was [accompanied](#) on his trip to Beijing by about fifty French business executives, including the chief executives of Airbus and the French electricity company EDF. While the U.S. has encouraged an economic break from China, Macron has [objected](#) that “any decoupling, or ‘de-linking,’ is not good for Europe, given the vast economic interests at stake.” The joint declaration with China spoke of the promise “to promote economic cooperation.”

German Chancellor Scholz has also recently traveled to Beijing [in the company of](#) the chief executives of Volkswagen, BMW, BASF, Bayer and Deutsche Bank. With Macron, Scholz [says](#) that “even in changed circumstances, China remains an important business and trading partner for Germany and Europe—we don’t want to decouple from it.”

But the divergence of interests and strategies that may most directly concern the U.S. and its pursuit of maintaining a unipolar world is Macron’s [insistence](#) that Europe “must not depend on the extraterritoriality of the dollar.” The U.S. has recently demonstrated in Cuba, Iran, and Russia, the speed and power associated with the ability to weaponize the dollar. Several countries and regions, including Russia, China, India, Iran, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, Latin America, BRICS, and the Eurasian Economic Union, have all expressed interest in and even made moves towards partially escaping the U.S. dollar.

Most international trade is conducted in dollars, and most foreign exchange reserves are

held in dollars. A move to other currencies would weaken American influence. Such a desire is not a surprise coming from China or Russia; it may be more of a surprise coming from France and Europe. It may also be more of a challenge to a U.S.-led unipolar world.

That short sentence near the top of the joint China-France declaration may be the most important policy statement to come out of Macron's trip to China. It may signal a foundational shift in the global movement toward a multipolar world.

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