

# France offers the United Arab Emirates nuclear protection

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On May 26, France opened its own military base in Abu Dhabi. (See “France opens first permanent military base in the Persian Gulf”) Now the French daily paper *Le Figaro* has reported that Paris has provided guarantees to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to defend them “with all available military measures,” i.e., including the use of nuclear weapons.

On June 15, the conservative *Le Figaro* wrote, “According to the secret clauses of the contract negotiated between Paris and Abu Dhabi, France has committed itself to use all available military measures for the defense of the United Arab Emirates in the event of attack. All military measures means the use of nuclear weapons if necessary.”

The report in *Le Figaro* is based on anonymous statements by high-ranking officials and diplomats familiar with the wording of the contract. The term “nuclear” does not appear in the contract, according to the newspaper, because “This would contradict the deterrence philosophy, which is based on saying as little as possible about the deployment doctrine.” However, the contract is “more stringently” formulated than Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which obligates NATO members to mutual military support in the event of attack.

No nuclear weapons are to be stationed directly in Abu Dhabi, but France has its own submarines equipped with nuclear weapons that are permanently on patrol, as well as the aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle*, which carries fighter planes armed with nuclear bombs. Both the submarines and the aircraft carrier can be moved into the Gulf region at any time.

France had already sealed a defense contract with the UAE in 1995, whose text remained secret. According to *Le Figaro*, in the old contract the obligation to

intervene militarily remained “ambiguous and uncertain.” The new contract and the establishment of a French military base have changed the situation dramatically. They have considerably increased the possibility of an “automatic activation of the bilateral contract, because an attack by Iran could now be interpreted as a violation of vital French interests.” For this reason, according to *Le Figaro*, Paris has placed itself “in the forefront” in the event of a conflict with Iran.

Since taking office two years ago President Nicolas Sarkozy has undertaken a systematic revision of French defense policy.

One year ago he presented a White Paper on Defense, which redefines the country’s strategic orientation. The geographical remit given in the White Paper consists of “an axis from the Atlantic across the Mediterranean up to the Arab-Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean.” This axis covers “the areas in which the strategic interests of France and Europe could most be affected,” the White Paper declares. The United Arab Emirates occupies a central position on this axis situated on the Strait of Hormuz, through which 40 percent of worldwide oil is transported, and in the immediate vicinity of Iran.

At the beginning of this year France returned to the NATO Supreme Command, which the country quit in 1966 under President de Gaulle. What on the surface appeared to be a shift closer to the US has in reality turned out to be just the opposite.

A thorough study by the German Foundation Science and Politics (SWP), under the title “France’s New NATO Course,” concludes that “there can be no talk of a comprehensive change in the transatlantic policy of France.” With his return to NATO Sarkozy was rather pursuing the aim of providing “France more standing in the Atlantic alliance and increasing the international

scope of action for his country.” Second, he expected a gradual but clear increase in the military autonomy of the European Security and Defense Policy, because he recognized that the autonomy of the ESDP could not be furthered in the face of US opposition.

The SWP study notes in summary: “Thus the return of the country into the military integration of the Atlantic alliance is based on the rational calculation of maintaining France’s international prestige and claim to determine policy, while at the same time pushing forward with the development of the ESDP.”

The agreement struck between France and the United Arab Emirates confirms this analysis. It is striking that the deal was made at a bilateral level and spiked with secret clauses. In a region dominated by the US for the past 50 years and where America is conducting two major wars—in Iraq and Afghanistan—France is offering nuclear protection to a country without coordinating its actions with NATO and the US. Sarkozy could not have made clearer France’s intention to play an independent role in future conflicts in the region.

For its part, the UAE see their alliance with France as an opportunity to weaken their current dependency on the US. *Le Figaro* comments, “By asking Nicolas Sarkozy to establish a French basis in Abu Dhabi, they are attempting to diversify their alliances and insure that they are no longer exclusively dependent on their American allies.”

This kind of bilateral alliance containing secret assistance clauses strongly recalls the conflicts evolving between the great powers at the beginning of the last century, when the struggle for the re-division of the world eventually led to the First World War. The emergence of France as a nuclear power in the Gulf will only exacerbate tensions in this explosive region and considerably increase the danger that conflicts go out of control and lead to nuclear war.

The article in *Le Figaro* has been largely ignored in France. This is because all political parties—including the Socialist and Communist parties—unreservedly support the imperialist aims of French foreign policy. This is especially true for France’s nuclear weapon capacity (*La force de frappe*) which was inaugurated in the 1960s by President de Gaulle in order to restore France’s great power status and reduce its dependence on the US.

Even the various radical groupings, such as the New

Anti-capitalist Party and Lutte Ouvrière, maintain a discreet silence when it comes to the *force de frappe*. They do not want to spoil their relationship with potential allies in other parties over issues of foreign policy.



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