

France backs renewed US war in Iraq

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France is supporting US airstrikes in northern Iraq against forces of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). On Saturday, after speaking with British Prime Minister David Cameron and French President François Hollande, US President Barack Obama announced that “both leaders express strong support for actions and agreed to join us in providing humanitarian assistance.”

On Friday, the Elysée presidential palace had released a statement supporting Obama’s new intervention in Iraq. Subsequently Hollande confirmed France’s involvement in the Iraq offensive. “France will proceed in the coming hours with the first deliveries of first aid equipment in Iraq,” he said.

The statement made clear that France is preparing to participate militarily in the new war. It said, “France will examine with the United States and all its partners the actions that could be carried out in order to jointly bring all the support necessary to end the suffering of civilian populations ... [France] is ready to play its full role.”

On Thursday, Hollande confirmed “France’s readiness to support forces engaged in this combat,” without providing any details.

Over the weekend, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius traveled to Iraq to insist that the US-backed Iraqi regime in Baghdad form a “unity government” to fight ISIS.

Claims by the United States and France that they are fighting ISIS for humanitarian reasons are reactionary lies that reek of hypocrisy. ISIS emerged from the US occupation of Iraq and above all the imperialist proxy war in Syria during which Washington, Paris, and their allies aggressively armed Sunni Islamist militias such as ISIS against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Now, they are using the results of this bloody war, which cost over 100,000 lives and turned millions into refugees, as a pretext to launch a new “humanitarian” war in Iraq.

Their intervention against ISIS in Iraq has not prevented the imperialist powers from escalating their campaign for regime change in Syria. As ISIS forces captured large areas of northern and western Iraq—including its second largest city, Mosul, in June—Hollande held an emergency meeting to discuss possible military options for Iraq and Syria.

French imperialism sees the Iraqi crisis as an opportunity to renew interventions into their former colonies, including Syria and Lebanon. The war drive against Iraq has the support of all the major parties of French imperialism: Hollande’s Socialist Party (PS), the right-wing Union for a Popular Movement, and the neo-fascist National Front (FN).

On his blog, former UMP Foreign Minister Alain Juppé called for strong initiative of France and Europe in Iraq: “We must be associated to the struggle against the insanity of jihadist fanaticism that will ultimately reach us, if we simply contemplate without reaction to the genocide of Christians of the East.” He demanded that France “must make its voice heard more loudly” in the Middle East crisis.

FN leader Marine Le Pen said the fight against terrorism “cannot and must not limit itself to speeches and declarations of intent ... France must be at the side of governments combating the militaro-Islamist forces and bringing them, as the National Front demands, logistical and intelligence support.”

French military officials are pushing to arm the Lebanese government’s military forces, backed by Saudi Arabia. French General Dominique Trinquand said, “The greatest support France can give to block the jihadist offensive is to support the Lebanese army, particularly by supplying it with weapons.”

In January, during his visit to Saudi Arabia, Hollande signed an arms deal with Saudi Arabia, which pledged to give a \$3 billion grant to buy French weapons for the Lebanese Army. On top of this \$3 billion grant, Saudi

Arabia decided to give the Lebanese military \$1 billion in military aid last week. This represents three times more than the Lebanese defense budget of \$1.2 billion annually.

French imperialism's role in another bloody intervention in Iraq marks a significant shift since the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, which was based on lies that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein had ties with Al Qaeda and possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD). At the time, the administration of French President Jacques Chirac (UMP) publicly opposed the US invasion at the United Nations.

The French capitalists were not pursuing a peace policy, but opposing a US policy of preemptive war that undermined international law and threatened to cut French imperialism out of the Middle East. French oil companies such as Total and Elf-Aquitaine had won rights to exploit the massive Bin Umar project and the Majnun oil field in southern Iraq. However, they had been unable to exploit these fields due to the US-dictated trade embargo against Iraq that followed the 1990-1991 Gulf War.

The shift to the right in bourgeois politics in Europe over the past decade found particularly sharp expression in the foreign policy of French imperialism. In 2006, Chirac announced a "first-use" policy of France's nuclear arsenal against states France accused of terrorist activity. Soon after his election in 2007, right-wing President Nicolas Sarkozy offered explicit support to the US occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan and re-integrated France into NATO's military command structure.

French imperialism was recompensed with a share of the profits plundered from US-occupied Iraq. In 2007, French oil giant Total signed an accord with US oil firm Chevron to jointly work on the Majnun oil field in Iraq.

Since then, the French ruling class has aligned itself ever more closely with Washington, launching wars in Libya, Syria and sub-Saharan Africa, aimed at plundering and re-colonizing Africa and the Middle East. This reactionary and utterly reckless policy has led to a debacle. While backing Sunni Islamist militias such as ISIS in Syria, France and the US are in conflict with the same forces in Iraq, where they threaten French and US strategic and corporate interests.

Last October, French oil firm Total announced the

discovery of oil and gas fields in the semi-autonomous Kurdish region of Iraq, where the US has conducted airstrikes against ISIS. The discovery well on the Harir Block, located 60 miles from Erbil, in the north, contains a depth of over 4,000 meters of "significant oil and natural gas columns," Total said.

"The discovery is very encouraging and demonstrates that our strategy to grow in this very prospective region is on the right track," Arnaud Breuillac, Senior Vice President, Middle East, Total Exploration & Production commented at the time.



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