

France bombs ISIS targets in Iraq

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French Rafale fighter jets bombed forces of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) organization in Iraq yesterday. This was the first overt French military operation in Iraq since the 1990-1991 Gulf War and the first attack by a European power in support of the new war being waged in Iraq by Washington, which has carried out 176 air strikes against ISIS since August 8.

The Elysée palace announced the operation in a presidential communiqué, stressing that this was just the beginning of France's bombing campaign in Iraq: "This morning at 9:40, our Rafale jets carried out a first strike against a logistics depot of the terrorists of the ISIS organization in northeastern Iraq. The target was hit and entirely destroyed. Other operations will follow in the coming days."

According to Qassim al-Moussawi, a spokesman for the US puppet regime in Iraq, the ISIS depot was located near the town of Zumar and was hit by four air strikes, killing dozens of ISIS fighters. The strike was launched by jets from France's air base at Al Dhafra, near Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

With its air strike in Iraq, Hollande's Socialist Party (PS) government has definitively repudiated Paris' decision to oppose the illegal US invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003. Hollande is instead bidding to have France supplant Britain as the most loyal supporter of US-led wars in the Middle East.

Hollande, whose popularity has collapsed amid deep popular disillusionment with his right-wing agenda, announced the air strikes in a national press conference Thursday night. He began by wrapping himself in the flag and posing as the disinterested defender of the Iraqi and French peoples.

"A first duty is to assure the security of France," Hollande declared. "I have decided to respond to the Iraqi authorities' request for air support. Our goal is to contribute to peace and security in Iraq by weakening the terrorists."

US President Barack Obama applauded Hollande's speech, thanking the French government for supporting

Washington in Iraq. "As one of our oldest and closest allies, France is a strong partner in our efforts against terrorism, and we are pleased that French and American service members will once again work together on behalf of our shared security and our shared values," Obama said.

The case for war advanced by Paris and Washington—that they must protect the people of Syria and Iraq from the danger of far-right Islamists linked to Al Qaeda—is a cynical lie. In fact, ISIS is a creation of the intervention in Syria by Washington and its European and Arab allies who pumped billions of dollars and massive amounts of weaponry into Islamist militias in Syria in a proxy war to topple Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime. This war has claimed over 190,000 lives and forced ten million Syrians, nearly half the country's population, to flee their homes.

While they continue to back Islamist opposition militias in their war against Assad in Syria, Washington and Paris are now exploiting the offensive of ISIS to justify further escalating their military operations in Iraq. The entire Middle East is threatened with a descent into ethno-sectarian conflict driven primarily by the reckless intervention of the imperialist powers. The risk that this could escalate into a major international or even world war, if the imperialist powers turned their sights on Iran or its nuclear-armed allies, such as Russia or China, is ever present.

The fact that this unpopular policy is being implemented by the bourgeois "left" Hollande government and, in the US, by an administration that came to power in 2008 on a wave of anti-war sentiment, testifies to the breakdown of democratic processes on both sides of the Atlantic.

It also points to the deep-going integration of the pseudo-left forces into the policy of imperialism. A decade ago, facing mass opposition to the Bush administration's illegal aggression against Iraq, various pseudo-left groups participated in international mass protests in the run-up to the 2003 US invasion of Iraq. Now that the wars are being launched by Obama and Hollande instead of a Texas

conservative, however, groups like France's New Anti-capitalist Party are enthusiastically supporting it, despite deep opposition to a new war in the working class.

The internal crisis of the Hollande administration is a major factor in its decision to bomb Iraq. Last year, as Paris went to war in Mali, PS officials said they were modeling their policy on British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's Falkland Islands war with Argentina in 1982—hoping war would give them a quick boost at the polls to help them push through unpopular social cuts.

This politically criminal policy failed amid escalating anger at Hollande's austerity agenda. Now, with Hollande at 13 percent in the polls and facing widespread popular contempt, he is again turning to war in an even more desperate attempt to shore up his position.

Significantly, while Paris is integrating its military operations closely with Washington's, tensions between French imperialism and US imperialism are increasing.

“Air strikes were the entry ticket necessary to be a serious partner in military planning, which is led by the Americans,” *Le Monde* wrote. However, the paper added, “Paris wants to conserve its autonomy, to choose its targets, and acquire its own ability to carry out intelligence operations on the ground.”

In his press conference Thursday, Hollande criticized last year's eleventh-hour decision not to go to war against the Assad regime—a decision taken by the Obama administration after the British parliament voted against war with Syria. Throughout the Syrian crisis, French imperialism has acted in concert with the Saudi monarchy to press for aggressive support for the Sunni Islamist militias in Syria.

He also pointedly insisted that France would only bomb ISIS in Iraq, not in Syria—where the imperialist powers continue to seek the ouster of Assad by Islamist forces sympathetic to ISIS.



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