

Le Monde promotes French government war propaganda on Iraq

Kumaran Ira
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Le Monde is serving as a mouthpiece of the French state's war propaganda, trying to browbeat the public into accepting a massive, long-term escalation of war in the Middle East and Africa with mendacious claims that Paris and its imperialist allies are waging a "war on terror."

On September 25, *Le Monde* published an editorial titled "It is jihadism that provokes war." It hailed Paris's decision to bomb Iraq alongside the United States, bluntly declaring: "It's a good thing. And it would be good if things continued this way in a lasting fashion."

To justify its militarist position, the paper seizes upon the shock and horror caused by the murder of Hervé Gourdel, a French mountaineer decapitated near the eastern Algerian town of Tizi Ouzou by the Jund Al-Khalifah—a group linked to the Islamic State (IS) militia targeted by French air strikes in Iraq. In this, it echoed statements by unpopular French President François Hollande posing as a "war president" and vowing to step up military intervention in the Middle East after Gourdel's killing.

Citing Gourdel's murder and IS threats of retaliation for France's bombing of Iraq, *Le Monde* writes, "The truth must be told: the IS did not wait for the bombing campaign against it to practice terrorism under all its forms. It is rich, rather powerful, and very well armed. It spreads a totalitarian ideology, practices ethnic and religious cleansing, and large-scale massacres. For months, it has been proclaiming its intention to indiscriminately attack 'Westerners.'" *Le Monde* adds, "It is indeed jihadism that provokes war, not the reverse."

What miserable lies and evasions! *Le Monde* begins with a bizarre factual error by claiming that the IS anti-French terrorism began before France bombed Iraq; in

fact, French jets bombed Iraq on September 19, Gourdel was abducted on the 22nd, and he was murdered on the 24th. Above all, however, the editorial begs the question: if IS is rich, powerful, and well-armed, where did its money and weaponry come from?

IS's money, its weapons, and indeed the group itself emerged from the proxy war launched by France and other imperialist powers to topple Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Starting in 2011, the US, France and their allies, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar, armed, financed and trained Islamic militias to fight the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad. These powers backed Al Qaeda-linked jihadist forces, including both the Al Nusra Front and IS.

This followed the US-NATO intervention in Libya in 2011, when France and NATO worked closely with Al Qaeda-linked forces to destroy Libyan Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's regime.

The murder of Gourdel underscores the barbaric character of the jihadist groups. However, the main political responsibility for his death lies not with various IS-linked gangs, but with pro-war officials in Paris, Washington, and other NATO capitals who stoked up the jihadists, and their supporters in the bourgeois media, such as *Le Monde*.

Le Monde closes its editorial by noting that bloodshed is spreading across the Middle East and Africa, covering a large percentage of the earth's surface: "It would be illusory and irresponsible to imagine that Middle East chaos will remain limited to that region. It will spread, like the informal network of jihadist groups, to Nigeria and Cameroon, passing by the Maghreb and the Sahel."

Thus, while admitting that hundreds of millions of people risk being plunged into war, *Le Monde* throws its weight behind Hollande's escalation in Iraq and

across French imperialism's former colonial empire. It can safely be predicted that if Hollande declared that France must spread its wars in Libya, Mali and the Central African Republic towards the African countries listed by *Le Monde*, the paper would support it as opening a new front in the war on terror.

The French bourgeois media, with establishment organs like *Le Monde* at its head, is functioning as a propaganda instrument to dull mass opposition to the wars that the imperialist powers are preparing behind the backs of the people. It is employing methods that, during the world wars of the last century, drove workers to contemptuously call its coverage "skull stuffing."

Last year, as the NATO powers pushed for an unpopular war with Syria, *Le Monde* repeatedly published articles, based on government or intelligence sources, accusing the Assad regime of using chemical weapons against the Syrian people. Such reports aimed to give the Obama administration ammunition to claim that a "red line" had been crossed on chemical weapons, and that Washington should therefore bomb Syria.

When a year ago, Washington and Paris threatened to bomb Syria based on claims—later proved to be lies—that Assad had gassed civilians in Ghouta, many readers wrote in to *Le Monde* to protest its pro-war coverage. The paper felt compelled to respond to its readers' letters in a September 16, 2013, column by *Le Monde*'s "mediator," titled "Newspaper of struggle."

Le Monde cited its readers' criticisms of its "nationalist hysteria" and their questions, such as, "Do you intend to lose all objectivity?" Another reader contrasted *Le Monde*'s support for war today to right-wing President Jacques Chirac's decision not to support the US invasion of Iraq a decade ago: "Where is the France that in 2003 refused to participate in the 'world' coalition against Saddam Hussein in a gesture of Gaullist independence?"

Le Monde replied by trying to wrap its pro-war views in the tattered flag of human rights. It wrote, "Did our paper go all in by calling for a response to one crime too far? Some think, say, write it. So let us not be afraid of words. A newspaper like ours is, yes, a newspaper of struggle for universal and humanist values. Created in December 1944, need we recall it, to prepare the return to peace, democracy, human rights. It is because we are

a newspaper of struggle that is horrified by war that we speak truth to power and combat its inertia. This is the role of the press in a democracy, the celebrated 'fourth estate.'"

This phrasemongering about speaking truth to power is pretentious nonsense. *Le Monde* is campaigning to promote wars that have broad support in the government and the ruling class, but not in the population. As for *Le Monde*'s pompous invocation of the 1944 liberation from the Vichy regime and Nazi occupation at the end of World War II, this is dangerous territory for France's leading bourgeois "left" paper.

If there is something that needs to be recalled, it is that *Le Monde* was founded in 1944 because its predecessor *Le Temps*, whose offices and typeface it inherited, was closed for collaborating with the Nazis. Its first postwar editor, Hubert Beuve-Méry, worked at the Vichy regime's youth training school at Uriage and wrote essays supporting the National Revolution movement of fascist dictator Marshal Philippe Pétain.

He later switched sides to the Resistance and was picked to head *Le Monde* by General Charles de Gaulle, abandoning fascist and nationalist themes for "universal and humanist" ones as part of the bourgeoisie's broader campaign to deny and cover up the crimes of the French collaboration.

It is this history, and not *Le Monde*'s superficial and misleading invocation of 1944, that gives the best indication of the paper's function today: using humanitarian rhetoric to cover up the most ruthless policies of imperialism.



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