

A Potemkin gathering of world leaders in Paris

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14 January 2015

A photograph posted on social media has revealed that the “world leaders” who had supposedly led the march in Paris on January 11, in the aftermath of the attack on the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*, were in reality assembled for a massive staged photo-op.

While in the media, photos and video of the leaders were almost invariably angled to give the appearance of massive crowds in their wake, one shot taken from above shows them standing bunched tightly together in barely a dozen rows in an empty street, cordoned off from the marchers by a heavy ring of security.

Nothing could more accurately symbolize the reactionary character of this assemblage of state officials and the fraud of their attempt to posture as defenders of human liberties.

At the center of those participating in the photo was French President François Hollande, whose approval ratings in recent months have plumbed new depths—around 15 percent at the end of last year. The president no doubt hopes that the events surrounding the attack on *Charlie Hebdo* will buttress his government as it pursues unpopular policies at home and abroad.

Aside from Hollande and his fellow European imperialist heads of state, their hands dripping with blood from the Middle East, to Africa to Ukraine, the marchers included Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, whose government has imprisoned more journalists than any on the planet, and Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, whose regime has massacred thousands and imprisoned tens of thousands of political opponents.

Also posing for the cameras (and in one shot waving to what was apparently a non-existent crowd) was Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose regime has butchered thousands of Palestinians, while

ruthlessly repressing Palestinian media.

Among the other champions of democratic rights on hand was the King of Jordan, who recently sent a writer to prison for 15 years for the crime of criticizing his monarchy. Also present was the Saudi Arabian Ambassador to France Mohammed Ismail Al-Sheikh, who represents a dictatorial monarchy that imposed a sentence of 1,000 lashes—50 of which were meted out Friday—and 10 years in prison on Raif Badawi, a blogger accused of insulting the state-sponsored Wahhabi school of Islam.

In both their political aims and the social interests they defend, all of the officials assembled for the staged photograph on Sunday stand in direct opposition to the masses of working people in France and all over the world. This is why they had to be huddled together under intense police protection in the photo-op staged at safe distance from the Paris marchers.

While among the millions who marched throughout France over the weekend, there were no doubt many moved by feelings of horror and sorrow over the killing of the 12 people in the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*, the assembled heads of state and high officials were there for very different reasons. They were brought together by a common desire to exploit the shock and confusion over the attack to further the “war on terror,” a state conspiracy to promote unending war abroad and police state suppression of democratic rights at home.

Notably absent in the photograph was President Barack Obama or any high-ranking head of state from the US, a fact that has become the focus of a political controversy within the American state apparatus. Attorney General Eric Holder, who was in Paris at the time, also did not attend, with the United States represented instead by US Ambassador to France Jane Hartley, appointed recently for her service as a

campaign contribution bundler for Obama.

The White House explanation for the failure to send anyone to Paris last Sunday was that it would have involved such a massive deployment of US security as to make the march itself virtually unworkable. Given the real circumstances of the “rally,” one wonders if the Secret Service would have insisted on strip searching the assembled heads of government and their security personnel.

Whatever the reasons for Obama’s absence, his attendance would have only been the capstone to the cynical charade. The presence of Obama or any other senior representative of a US administration that constitutes the number one practitioner of state terror on the planet would have only added to the grotesque hypocrisy of the “selfie” staged by the so-called world leaders on a heavily guarded street in Paris.



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