

France sells 24 Rafale fighter jets to Sisi dictatorship in Egypt

Antoine Lerougetel
16 February 2015

On February 12, returning from talks in Minsk over the civil war in east Ukraine, French President François Hollande announced the sale of 24 Rafale fighter jets to the bloody regime of Egyptian dictator General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. Along with other prospective sales, it will make the Egyptian dictatorship France's biggest arms client in 2015.

The purchase agreement is to be signed in Cairo on Monday, financed by loans coming from a pool of French banks and guaranteed by the French state. The deal, first broached during French Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian's visit to Cairo in September, includes the sale of a navy frigate and missiles.

Hollande said, "Egypt wanted a quality aircraft, taking into account the threats existing around the country." According to an expert quoted by *Le Monde*, one of the selling points for French as opposed to American weapons is that France does not impose restrictions on whom they are used against. Egypt has recently launched military operations both against Islamist forces in Libya and insurgents in Egypt's own Sinai peninsula.

The announcement of the deal, the first time the French government has succeeded in selling the Rafale overseas, was greeted with euphoria by the French media and political establishment. *Le Monde* enthused, "Let's not deny our delight."

The arms deal constitutes a public endorsement by Hollande of the Sisi regime's military operations and its bloody suppression of political opposition after the revolutionary working class uprising that toppled Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak in 2011.

Since Sisi's coup in July 2013, his regime has massacred at least 3,000 people, including at least 1,000 members of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) of deposed President Mohamed Mursi, who was toppled

by the coup. It has imposed sweeping bans against public demonstrations and arrested tens of thousands of people who are now detained in secret prisons and torture centers. Sisi is also slashing subsidies on basic goods such as fuel and bread, further impoverishing the working class.

The Sisi regime's support for imperialist interventions in the Middle East and its violent hostility to the working class have won it broad support in the French ruling class. At Hollande's invitation, Sisi's representatives joined the officially-sponsored "I am Charlie" demonstrations in Paris after the shooting of journalists of the *Charlie Hebdo* weekly by Islamist gunmen.

The deal with Al-Sisi is part of developing alliances with African governments including Algeria by French and Western imperialism against the Islamic State (IS) group to maintain and enlarge their control of the geo-strategic mineral resources of North Africa and the Sahel. Last August, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) participated in air strikes against Islamist militias in oil-rich Libya which threaten the Western-backed government and the entire region.

The US government supplies half the warplanes used by the UAE air force, with France providing the balance.

Al-Sisi also participates in Israel's strangling of Gaza, destroying and blocking tunnels from Egypt into the Palestinian enclave that enables it to access vital supplies.

The deal is predicated on the understanding that the Sisi regime will continue to suppress the working class and align itself on the foreign policy of Hollande's Socialist Party (PS) government. A Reuters news dispatch noted, "Diplomats say the deal suits both Cairo and Paris geopolitically, with both particularly

invested in the fight against jihadist groups in North Africa. Sisi has been looking to upgrade Egypt's military hardware over fears Islamist militias in neighboring Libya could take control and directly threaten Egypt."

"Egypt needs planes quickly," said Patricia Adam, president of the French parliament's defense committee. "You just need to take a look at what's happening at its border. They are especially worried by what's happening in Libya." Islamist militias based in Libya provide forces for the destabilization of Mali, where thousands of French troops are deployed to ensure France's control of its former colonial sphere in the uranium-rich Sahel.

As it markets the Rafale, France's defense industry is also trying to profit from the fighter's increasing long combat record, as France fights wars across Africa and the Middle East. The Rafale, which first went into service in the French air force in 2004, has been deployed in Afghanistan (2007-2012), Libya (2011), in Mali (since 2013) and in Iraq against IS (since last September).

Negotiations on potential Rafale sales are underway with several governments, including India, Qatar and Malaysia. Before the Egyptian deal, however, the French army had been the Rafale's only customer, having been beaten to contracts by the US, the UK and Sweden.

After failing to clinch sales deals with several potential foreign buyers and facing military budget cuts in France, Paris faced a possible collapse of production of the Rafale, currently the French armed forces' main fighter-bomber.

The French armed forces' planned purchase of 320 Rafales shrank to 225 in 2013 and the minimum of 11 planes a year required to maintain the production line was threatened. The Egyptian sale was no doubt pushed aggressively by aerospace firm Dassault, but also defense electronics firm Thales and aircraft motor manufacturer Safran. The Rafale's 40-year development program has cost the state €49.5 billion.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact