

France sells Mistral warships designed for Russia to Egyptian dictatorship

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After charging Russia with violating Ukraine's sovereignty and canceling the sale of two Mistral-class warships to Moscow, France has reached an agreement with Egypt for the sale of the two vessels. The deal marks a new stage in the French government's collaboration with one of the world's bloodiest dictatorships. Since it came to power in July 2013, the Egyptian junta has killed thousands of Egyptians protesting the coup that installed General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in power in Cairo.

French President François Hollande was happy to announce the sale of the warships: "France will guarantee delivery of the warships, losing no money and protecting Egypt in the process."

The sale price on the ships is €950 million, which almost equals the down payment Russia paid on the ships, originally slated for sale at €1.2 billion. Besides Egypt, Canada, India, and Singapore reportedly expressed "serious" interest in buying the ships, with Saudi Arabia being "ready to do anything" to seal the purchase, according to *Le Monde*. According to French governmental sources, Saudi Arabia will also help finance Egypt's purchase of the warships.

The Mistral vessels will be delivered in March, after Russian weapon systems integrated to the two ships in the St Nazaire port are removed. According to *Le Monde*, "one of the ships could be stationed in the Red Sea and the other in the Mediterranean, where the situation is still worrisome in Libya and is a concern for border regions of Egypt."

France's sale to the Sisi junta exposes the empty humanitarian pretensions of the Hollande administration. In November 2014, under pressure from the United States and the European Union over the issue of Russia, it blocked the sale of the two ships to Russia. Now, France is selling them to a military

regime that ferociously attacks democratic rights without even a pretense of making the sale conditional on any "democratic" demands.

The United States and the European imperialist powers organized a coup last year against the pro-Russian regime in Ukraine and denounced Russia in the ensuing crisis for its annexation of Crimea and the deployment of Russian soldiers to eastern Ukraine to fight nationalist militias loyal to the pro-European regime in Kiev.

Washington and the EU feared that the two Mistral warships, upon delivery to Russia, could be used in a war against their proxy regime in Ukraine or against NATO's own military forces if there were to be a direct confrontation with Russia.

Jean-Christophe Cambadélis, the leader of the ruling Socialist Party (PS), hypocritically addressed Russian President Vladimir Putin on Europe1, saying: "That's not how it works, Mr Putin. France is an independent country, which will decide whether or not to deliver the Mistrals. If there is progress towards democracy and if there is peace in Ukraine, we can see."

The warship sale to Egypt is designed to reinforce the Sisi junta, which took power in a 2013 coup backed by the United States and the EU. The coup toppled Egypt's Islamist president, Mohamed Mursi, after the antidemocratic maneuvers and austerity policies enacted by his administration left him discredited among the masses.

Once in power, the military junta carried out ferocious repression against all opposition in Egypt. Opponents of the junta who escape death face arrest and torture. According to Amnesty International, some 41,000 people were imprisoned over the last two years in Egypt. Demonstrations and strikes are banned by law, independent media are censored or suppressed,

and parties and organizations critical of the regime are forced underground.

The junta has declared mass death sentences against several thousand people in mass show trials. On April 28, 2014, 683 people were condemned to death in less than 15 minutes. Mursi, who was democratically elected in 2012, was among those condemned to death.

The Egyptian junta acts as Washington's policeman and deputy in the region. Egypt is bombing Islamic State forces in Libya and seeking to control the flow of migrants across the Mediterranean, blocking immigrants who try to come to Egypt without papers. In Yemen, Egypt has joined a coalition with Saudi Arabia for a ground intervention to attack pro-Iranian Houthi forces.

To these ends, the Egyptian regime receives over a billion dollars and heavy weaponry from Washington and Paris. Sisi is a lackey of the imperialist powers, which support the mass killings carried out by the junta as long as that regime suppresses opposition in the working class and defends the interests of global finance capital.

With each Mistral warship, Egypt can unload 13 to 40 main battle tanks, 450 to 900 troops, and 16 to 35 attack helicopters. By deploying these warships to the Red Sea, Egypt can put military pressure on Iran if it is requested to do so by Washington.

The atrocities and human rights violations of the Egypt junta posed no obstacle to the Hollande government, which was desperate to sell the Mistral ships and to reinforce its strategic and military ties with the most reactionary regimes in the Middle East.



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