

French President Hollande visits India to boost military ties, investment

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The three-day visit to India by French President François Hollande on January 24 to sell Rafale fighter jets to India, coming after New Delhi opened talks with Washington on possibly hosting US troops on Indian military bases, pointed to the military escalation seizing South Asia.

Hollande's delegation, including the ministers of defence, foreign affairs, economy and culture and dozens of top corporate executives, aimed to boost the French military-industrial complex and France's exploitation of Indian cheap labour. The French delegation announced it would invest US\$1 billion a year in India in the coming period. This is on top of France's existing investment of \$19 billion in India, compared to Indian investment of only \$700 million in France.

Hollande flew directly to Chandigarh, the capital of Haryana state, whose free-market policies made it attractive to the French delegation. Offering a \$2.25 billion line of credit, France has already promised to help transform Chandigarh, Nagpur, and Puducherry into "smart cities" with clean water supplies, efficient sewage disposal and public transportation. Both Hollande and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended an India-France Business Summit in Chandigarh, attended by around 30 CEOs of Indian and French companies.

Addressing the summit, Modi declared, "We want to work closely with France. ... The world has accepted India as a good investment destination. India's talent and the manufacturing (skills) of France can achieve a lot." Keen to guarantee that French investments are in safe hands, he added, "This government is known for a stable and predictable tax regime."

The two sides failed to finalise the main deal, India's purchase of 36 Rafale fighter jets. Dassault, who

manufactures the Rafale, declared last week that it supports finalising an agreement in the next four weeks. After meeting Hollande, Modi only said, "We have completed an intergovernmental agreement for the purchase of 36 Rafales, with the exception of the financial aspects."

Though India is anxious to boost the strength of its fighter squadrons and emerge as a major world power, New Delhi's initial plans to purchase 126 jets were later reduced to 36 to cut costs.

Agreements were signed on space cooperation, green economy, smart cities and infrastructure, science and technology, and the renovation of railway stations in India. The two sides also agreed to finalise the building of six nuclear reactors for India by a French company within a year. There was also an unspecified aerospace agreement between Airbus and Mahindras Company of India.

The two sides also discussed increased cooperation on security and intelligence. Hollande said, "France and India are two great democracies ... therefore we are prime targets for terrorists who cannot abide liberty, democracy or culture."

Hollande's description of France and India as "two great democracies" waging a "war on terror" is sheer hypocrisy. In fact, Modi and Hollande personify the reactionary and anti-democratic character of the ruling elites in both India and France.

Modi, as the then Chief Minister of Indian state Gujarat, presided over the anti-Muslim pogroms in 2002 which killed more than 1,200 Muslim civilians and drove tens of thousands from their homes. Since Modi became prime minister in May 2014, communal tensions and attacks against minorities have surged.

As for France, since the terrorist attack last November 13 by ISIS in Paris, it is under a state of emergency.

Public protests are banned, there is no guarantee of freedom of the press or freedom of assembly, and no judicial oversight of searches and seizures carried out by police. Hollande has pledged to make the state of affairs permanent and is stirring up anti-Islamic hatred. This has created a political atmosphere in which the neo-fascist National Front can flourish.

Hollande's trip coincided with India's celebration of its independence from Britain on Republic Day, January 26. In keeping with the Modi government's tradition of inviting prominent leaders of Western countries for Republic Day, Hollande was the chief guest following US President Barack Obama last year and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe the year before.

A French military contingent marched in the Republic Day parade, the first time since independence that foreign forces had joined the parade, underscoring the subservience of the BJP government to the imperialist powers.

Sections of the Indian media hailed the measure as proof of India's growing military ties to the Western powers. C. Raja Mohan praised Modi in the *Indian Express* for trying to exorcise the "ghosts of Indian isolationism." He added, "The marching of the French contingent down Rajpath suggests the effort has begun to pay off."

Trying to somehow pretend that New Delhi's relations with Hollande have an anti-imperialist character, the Indian media highlighted the fact that in the late 18th century, French troops joined with Indian feudal lord Tipu Sultan against the British, which ruled most of the country.

The comparison of French troops fighting the British monarchy during the war for American independence, the French revolution, and the Napoleonic wars is a reactionary fraud. These wars emerged from a revolutionary upsurge of the masses of Europe and America against absolute monarchies. Today, France is waging bloody wars to defend the imperialist order across Africa and the Middle East, while imposing police-state measures at home.

For the first time, the involvement of the CIA in a French president's visit to India was reported. The CIA asked the police of Haryana state on January 23 to submit a crime status report and data on all criminal activities reported on Gurgaon and surrounding

districts. Modi and Hollande visited Gurgaon on January 25, and this was said to be part of efforts to ensure proper security.

CIA inquiries also touched upon illegal mining and other activities in the Aravalli Mountain range, as well as on Mewat district, where several alleged terrorists were arrested over the past three years, including an Al Qaeda suspect.

Though the CIA's role was presented as reflecting France's friendly relations with the United States, French and US foreign policy in Asia do not coincide. In fact, while they collaborate with Washington on military policy, both India and France have significant reservations regarding US foreign policy in Asia.

Significantly, Modi and Hollande were silent on the US "pivot to Asia," aimed at isolating China during the visit. Only three months ago, Hollande visited China in order to deepen financial ties with that country. Both New Delhi and Paris joined China's \$50 billion Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, despite Washington's calls to boycott it.

Heavy security measures were imposed in Gurgaon and Faridabad. Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) commandos took up positions in a radius of two kilometres around where Hollande and Modi were located, and Section 144 was imposed. This allows authorities to ban an assembly of more than 10 people and impose fines and three years' imprisonment on those violating police orders. Section 144 was applicable at prominent malls, shopping centres, strategic locations and crowded places between January 24 and 26.

Blanket security measures were imposed on Republic Day. "Central Delhi was turned into a virtual fortress," NDTV noted. 50,000 members of the Delhi police and security forces were mobilised, it noted: "Commandos with light machine guns were deployed at 10 strategic locations and anti-aircraft guns remained positioned at two vantage points in the capital." A multi-layer security ring was enforced around Hollande and Modi.



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