

France to send aircraft carrier to South China Sea to threaten China

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Shortly after US President Donald Trump announced he would repudiate the Intermediate Range Nuclear Force (INF) treaty signed with the Soviet Union in 1997, targeting Russia and China, Paris announced that it would send its aircraft carrier, the Charles de Gaulle, to Asian waters. The carrier's air wing includes Rafale aircraft bearing missiles with nuclear warheads.

In the daily *La Provence*, French Defence Minister Florence Parly said the carrier, which has been under repair since last year, would be sent to the Indian Ocean and South China Sea: "The fact that the Charles de Gaulle will soon be back at sea at full operational capacity will give back its power projection capacity to our naval air force and reinforce its political dimension. It is also scheduled to travel to the Indian Ocean in 2019."

Parly justified the dispatching of the carrier citing the need to defend freedom of navigation, the pretext Washington and its allies have used for provocative naval operations in the South China Sea: "We have always been on the front line of defending the inalienable right of freedom of navigation in international waters. And each time this fundamental principle of international law is threatened, as is currently the case in the South China Sea, we will make known our freedom to navigate in these waters."

She was thus echoing Washington's accusations—ever since then-US President Barack Obama announced in 2011 a "pivot to Asia" aiming to politically and militarily isolate China—that Beijing is threatening "freedom of navigation" in the South China Sea.

It points to the growing involvement of the European imperialist powers in the war drive in Asia, led above all by Washington, which seeks to defend its fast-crumbling world hegemony against China. At the beginning of this year, France negotiated an agreement

with India, a leading rival of China in Asia, allowing it to station military forces in India. At the beginning of May, French President Emmanuel Macron travelled to the French possession of New Caledonia in the Pacific Ocean to call for a new Indo-Pacific "axis" to threaten China.

The Charles de Gaulle is to set sail for Asian waters in a context of extreme political tensions. Its deployment can have the most serious consequences for working people in France and worldwide.

Trump threatened to repudiate the INF treaty only a few weeks after US officials made the first direct threats to launch war against Russia since the end of the Cold War. US Ambassador to NATO Kay Bailey Hutchison accused Russia of violating the INF treaty through its development of new cruise missiles and threatened to bomb Russia to destroy these missiles. One of the Trump administration's main goals in repudiating the treaty was to allow the United States to reinforce its nuclear arsenal in the Pacific, aimed at China.

Three days before, a Chinese warship had steamed at a US destroyer carrying out "freedom of navigation" exercises in the South China Sea, forcing the US ship to manoeuvre to avoid a collision. This could have provoked the most serious diplomatic crisis—and, potentially, military escalation—in the Pacific Ocean in decades.

These events confirm the warnings made by the Socialist Equality Party and the WSWS to workers internationally. Amid the same commercial and military rivalries between the major capitalist powers that twice in the 20th century plunged humanity into world war, the risk of nuclear war between the major powers is real, imminent and growing. The rising danger of war poses to workers who are entering into

struggle around the world the task of building an anti-war movement on a socialist and internationalist programme.

In 2015, as Washington threatened to arm Ukrainian militias against Russia in eastern Ukraine after having backed a fascist-led coup in Kiev, and as Russia threatened to retaliate militarily, then-French President François Hollande declared: “We have gone in the space of a few months from conflict to war. ... We are in a state of war, and a war that could be total.”

Since then, the rising economic weight of Asia, where half of the world’s trade in manufactured goods passes through the Indian Ocean, has only stoked the appetites of the imperialist powers in both America and Europe and inflamed the danger of war.

In 2016, then-French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian called on the European navies to build “a presence that is as regular and as predictable as possible in the maritime expanses of Asia.” And at the end of May, the *Dixmude*, a French power projection ship, carried out a military mission in the region alongside three Rafale fighter jets, an A400M military transport plane, an A310 and a refuelling plane.

A deafening silence predominates on the network news, the press and the political establishment in France as to the danger of war posed by imperialist war threats against Russia and China.

Above all, an entire layer of middle-class parties that claim to be the “far left,” but who support the neo-colonial wars of the imperialist powers, is criminally silent on the war danger. After having called for “humanitarian” military interventions in Libya and Syria by imperialism, forces like the Pabloite New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) are tacitly endorsing the war preparations the ruling class is carrying out behind the backs of the workers. At the same time, they maintain a hostile silence on the statements and the warnings made by the WSWS.

This reflects their anti-worker material interests. As a reactionary social layer of the affluent middle class composed of academics, union executives and media personalities, their revenues—their research grants, business subsidies for their unions, and access to the media—depend on their support for French imperialism’s aggressive foreign policy.

After Ambassador Hutchison’s threats against Moscow, the French ex-Maoist daily *Libération*

insisted in its “Check News” section that the WSWS is exaggerating the extent of preparations for “total war,” affirming that the WSWS “mixes up correct reports to arrive at misleading headlines.”

A few days after the WSWS published a response refuting *Libération*’s complacent article, Trump refuted *Libération* in his own way by repudiating the INF treaty in order to prepare an escalation of the US nuclear posture around the world. By sending the Charles de Gaulle into Asian waters, now it is Macron who is ratcheting up the danger of a nuclear war between the major powers.

The author also recommends:

A reply to French daily *Libération*: Is the WSWS exaggerating the threat of war?

[17 October 2018]

French president calls for new Indo-Pacific “axis” against China

[4 May 2018]



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