

Leaked documents implicate French government in war crimes in Yemen

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Disclose, an independent investigative media, published on April 15 a devastating report exposing France's role in the Saudi-led coalition's war crimes in Yemen. The coalition has massacred thousands of civilians in operations using weapons supplied by France, Britain, the United States and other countries. Yet top French officials continued to deny this in public, issuing bald-faced lies contradicted by their own intelligence briefings.

On Wednesday, Disclose and its partners, including Radio France, Mediapart, Arte Info and Konbini revealed that the state is moving to prosecute those who helped expose these crimes. Police summoned two Disclose journalists and one Radio France journalist for questioning over the revelations.

Disclose's report cites a classified 15-page French military intelligence (DRM) report dated September 25, 2018. The report provides overwhelming evidence that French-made artillery, tanks and laser-guided missile systems were used against civilians in a war that has turned Yemen into the world's worst humanitarian disaster zone.

The DRM report, titled "Yemen: security situation" was given to President Emmanuel Macron for a defence council meeting at the Élysée presidential palace on October 3, 2018. The report covers French weapons sold to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), both involved in the war in Yemen, even mapping out the positioning of French-made weapons on the Saudi-Yemeni border. Macron's foreign and defence ministers, Jean-Yves Le Drian and Florence Parly, were both present at the Élysée briefing.

The DRM report states that CAESAR howitzers, one of the most powerful weapons made by French state-owned company Nexter Systems, were deployed along the Saudi-Yemeni border. This howitzer can fire six shells per minute up to 42 kilometres. The DRM report includes a map titled "Population under threat of bombs" which,

Disclose writes, "shows where 48 CAESAR guns are positioned close to the Saudi-Yemeni border, their turrets facing three different zones in Yemen, in which are located towns, villages, farms and farmers' hamlets."

The DRM report states CAESARs were likely used to "back up loyalist troops and Saudi armed forces in their progression into Yemeni territory." That is, French-made guns were used to bombard Yemeni territory to prepare a Saudi invasion.

CAESAR heavy artillery is shelling zones in Yemen inhabited by hundreds of thousands of people, according to the DRM. It states, "The population concerned by potential artillery fire: 436,370 people." Based on data from the NGO Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), Disclose writes: "Between March 2016 and December 2018, a total of 35 civilians were killed in 52 bombardments localised within the range of the CAESARs. On June 14th 2018, Saudi 'artillery fire' in the north of the country left two children dead and several adults wounded."

Fully aware of the mounting death toll from the Saudi-led coalition's indiscriminate attacks, Paris kept selling CAESARs to Riyadh. The report states, "No less than 129 CAESARs are due to be delivered to Saudi Arabia between now and 2023." Using satellite images and open-source information, Disclose traced the itinerary of one of these deliveries from the French port of Le Havre to Saudi port of Jeddah in September 2018.

Disclose said satellite images, video and civilian photographs showed French Leclerc tanks were used in coalition offensives, including the November 2018 battle for the rebel-held port of Hodeidah. According to ACLED, they were responsible for 55 civilian deaths. French-made Mirage 2000-9 fighter planes, Cougar transport helicopters, the A330 MRTT refuelling plane and two French-built warships were also involved in the offensive.

The DRM report also indicates that a new Paris-Riyadh arms deal, codenamed ARTIS, was agreed at the end of last year. This exposes as lies official denials that any such deal was in discussion.

On October 30, 2018, Parly told news channel BFM-TV: “We have no ongoing negotiations with Saudi Arabia.”

The contents of the DRM report expose this as a lie, Disclose notes: “But at that very same date, the French government was involved in negotiations over the final details of the contract with Saudi Arabia, which covered a period lasting up to 2023.” Under the ARTIS contract, France will deliver equipment, including Titus armoured infantry carriers, one of Nexter’s newest products, and the 105LG towed howitzer, from 2019 to 2024.

The signing of the ARTIS contract requires approval from the Macron administration. Disclose writes, “Before signing a contract such as ARTIS, Nexter was required to first obtain an export licence from France’s general directorate of armament, the DGA, which is part of the defence ministry. Subsequently, such contracts must be approved by the CIEEMG, a special commission that sits under the authority of the French prime minister’s office.”

In its decision, the CIEEMG supposedly considers “the internal situation of the country that is the final destination [of the weapons], and also of its practices regarding the respect of human rights.”

The French bourgeoisie’s human rights propaganda is a lying political cover for a policy of war and the enrichment of French defence contractors via mass killings and terror. Since the Saudi-led coalition intervened in Yemen’s civil war in 2015 to fight Shiite Houthi rebels it accuses of ties to Iran, Saudi Arabia has imposed sanctions and blockaded Yemen, provoking the world’s gravest humanitarian crisis. Nearly 14 million people are on the brink of starvation as the Red Sea blockade blocks supplies of food, fuel and medicine destined for more than 20 million Yemenis.

Since launching the war, the coalition has carried out an unrelenting onslaught of airstrikes in Yemen. According to the DRM, the coalition has carried out 24,000 air strikes since 2015, including 6,000 in 2018. These attacks caused at least 8,000 civilian deaths.

France has denied playing any role in these strikes. On February 13, speaking before the foreign affairs commission of France’s National Assembly, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian insisted, “We supply nothing to the Saudi air force.”

The DRM report exposes his comment as a lie, reporting that Saudi fighter-bomber aircraft are equipped with the Damocles laser-guided system made by the French defence firm Thales.

Parly publicly claimed that the French government wants to end the Red Sea blockade. On October 30, 2018, she told BFM-TV: “It is a priority for France that humanitarian aid can get through.”

This was another lie, as Parly had received evidence that French-made warships participate in the naval blockade starving millions of Yemenis, and in the shelling of the Yemeni coast.

In addition to serving its geostrategic interests, French imperialism’s weapons sales are aimed above all at the working class. Even as it covertly armed the Saudi royals, Paris was openly providing billions of euros in arms to Egypt’s bloody military dictatorship, which seized power in 2013 via a coup targeting revolutionary struggles of the working class, gunning down thousands in the streets. Macron himself personally visited Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi last month.

This implicates the Macron regime in repression of the Egyptian workers via killings and torture of tens of thousands of political prisoners. In a recent report, Amnesty International stated that “armoured vehicles were used by Egyptian security forces to disperse peaceful sit-ins across the country violently,” adding: “French vehicles were not merely assisting the security forces, but were themselves tools of repression, playing a very active role in the crushing of dissent.”

As it carries out unprecedented mass arrests of ‘yellow vest’ protesters in France itself, the Macron administration is desperate to hide its political criminality from the public. It is continuing to lie to the public about its knowledge of its own participation in war crimes in Yemen.

“To my knowledge, French weapons are not being used in an offensive capacity in the war in Yemen,” Parly told Radio Classique last week in response to the revelations of Disclose. “I do not have any evidence that would lead me to believe that French arms are behind civilian victims in Yemen,” she boldly lied.



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