

Europe dispatches naval flotilla to threaten Iran, Syria

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22 January 2020

Yesterday the aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle left the French port of Toulon after President Emmanuel Macron announced in a January 16 speech to the armed forces that it would participate in Operation Chamamal, the US-led bombing of Islamic State (IS) targets, for three months. This comes less than three weeks after Washington assassinated the Iranian regime's second-highest official, General Qassem Suleimani, in Iraq. Thus, France and the European powers are intensifying their military intervention in the Middle East and the Mediterranean.

Paris also announced a European naval surveillance mission in the strategic straits of Hormuz, off the Iranian coast, also involving German, Belgian, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese and Greek ships. The French Foreign Ministry published a communiqué declaring that Paris is deploying the carrier and its Rafale jets, armed with thermonuclear bombs, amid an explosive risk of war in the region.

It declared: "Recent events in the Middle East are a matter of real concern, as they stoke tensions and increase the risk of a potential large-scale war. Fully respecting international law, especially the UN Convention on the Laws of the Sea, the mission will concretely furnish knowledge and surveillance of the naval situation by deploying supplementary naval surveillance assets in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea."

On Europe1, French Defence Minister Florence Parly denied that such missions put "pressure on Iran. ... France has made clear it wants to contribute to de-escalation in a region hit by very sharp tensions." She claimed, "We have arrived at a point where there is no more escalation or, in any case, where escalation seems to have stopped." Parly claimed that France's deployment of a carrier constitutes a "counterweight to

the US strategy of putting maximum pressure on Iran."

Whatever Parly claims, this patrol testifies to Europe's growing involvement, following in Washington's wake, in the spiral of military escalation and war in the Middle East. The NATO imperialist powers are each bidding to increase their share of the profits from plundering the region. Washington in particular sees Iran as an obstacle to its military domination of the region, notably because Tehran is developing ties with Russia and China after 30 years of imperialist war launched by NATO's war on Iraq in 1991.

The Charles de Gaulle is steaming towards the Middle East amid explosive tensions following Suleimani's assassination by a US drone strike on January 3 in Baghdad. This can have serious consequences for workers not only in France but around the entire world. The world is a few wrong decisions away from a military incident or spark that could plunge humanity into an all-out regional or even global war.

A major factor in the recklessness of US-European war planning is the plan of the ruling classes to use military tensions to strangle an international resurgence of class struggle. 2019 saw strikes and protests by US autoworkers and teachers, by workers in a number of European countries, and by mass protests in Iraq, Lebanon and across the Middle East. For over a year, Macron has faced mass "yellow vest" protests launched outside the control of the union bureaucracies.

Macron's widely hated pension cuts have driven broader layers of the working class into struggle against the government, in France's longest strike since the May 1968 French general strike.

Before France's carrier reaches the Middle East, Prime Minister Edouard Philippe is taking the

unprecedented decision of going aboard to observe the launching of Rafale and Hawkeye planes. Philippe and Parly will then travel tomorrow afternoon to Lyon, to visit airbase 942 Lyon-Mont Verdun, a key node of France's national air defence command. They will watch air supremacy exercises from within the national centre for aerial operations at the base.

Macron is wrapping Philippe, who is constitutionally charged with domestic social rather than military policy, in the flag and dispatching him to Middle East interventions. Moreover, Iran is not the only country targeted by the European coalition whose vessels are escorting the Charles de Gaulle. Another key target is Turkey and its talks with the Government of National Accord (GNA) forces in Libya. Paris is seeking to instead develop ties with Cyprus, Greece and Egypt.

French military news website OpEx360 writes, "Nicosia, Athens and Cairo are vigorously complaining the maritime boundaries agreement drawn up between Ankara and the GNA. This deal allows Turkey to extend its continental shelf and disrupt the EastMed gas pipeline. French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian denounced Turkey's 'illegal' drilling in Cypriot waters before parliament in October, warning: 'We have decided to draw up a regime of sanctions, just in case Turkey were to continue these operations. We are planning a military presence in this zone.'"

As the WSWS underscored after Suleimani's murder, "No one should make the mistake of underestimating the consequences of war with Iran. The development of the conflict will rapidly acquire global dimensions. It will be only a matter of time before the logic of the conflict—which affects the vital interests of countless states on the vast Eurasian land mass—draws numerous countries into the vortex of war."

Three decades after the Stalinist regime dissolved the Soviet Union, the relentless escalation of imperialist wars poses immense dangers. Great power conflicts that underlay the Pentagon's attempts to dominate Eurasia after the Soviet collapse, with wars in Iraq, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Syria and Ukraine and now in Iran are erupting openly today. As in 1914 or 1939, Washington, Moscow and other major capitals are all preparing for world war.

During the US "pivot to Asia" to defend US world hegemony by politically and militarily isolating China, France also threatened to send the Charles de Gaulle to

the South China Sea, echoing US claims that such operations aim to defend "freedom of navigation." Paris also cut deals with India, a key rival of China in Asia, including for basing French troops in India.

As he announced that the Charles de Gaulle would deploy to the Middle East, Macron also said it would go later this year to the North Atlantic and the North Sea, for exercises threatening Russia. A study for the French Defence Ministry's General Directorate of International Relations and Strategy reported by OpEx360 asserts: "The security issues at hand ... correspond to French strategic interests. This is why France deployed Operation Lynx under NATO control to the Baltic states."

Amid mounting geopolitical and social crises for which the capitalist class has no progressive solutions, Macron and the European powers are heading towards war. They are trying not only to demoralize workers with nationalism and militarism but to legitimize the construction of a military-police state capable of violent repression of the workers at home. These dangers, as well as that of a regional or world war provoked by the imperialist powers, underscore the necessity for workers in struggle to orient towards building an international anti-war movement in the working class.



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