

Spain's PSOE-Sumar calls for European Union-led naval mission against Houthi forces in Yemen

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Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE)-Sumar government has called for the European Union (EU) to launch its own naval operation in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden targeting the Houthi rebels in Yemen and Iran, independent from the United States.

On December 23, Spain's Ministry of Defence called for "a new and specific mission, with its own scope, means and objectives, agreed upon by the corresponding EU bodies" to "guarantee maritime security" in the Red Sea.

American warships are already engaged against Houthi forces. Over the weekend, the US Central Command said the USS Laboon "shot down four unmanned aerial drones originating from Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen that were inbound to" the frigate. Washington claimed that two ballistic missiles were fired at the shipping lanes, but no vessels were impacted.

The Houthi movement is the de-facto government of Yemen and an ally of Iran, controlling 80 percent of the territory. It came to power after a popular revolt against the Saudi-backed President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi in 2014. Hadi was overthrown and fled the country.

Washington and the UK then backed a Saudi-led coalition intervention for seven years that has left over 377,000 Yemeni people dead, largely due to starvation from a deadly blockade. Another 15,000 civilians have died as result of indiscriminate attacks on civilian homes, markets, hospitals and schools, most from weaponry provided by European imperialist powers, including fighter jets, missiles, rockets and bombs, as well tanking planes.

Spanish military equipment was essential, with arms exports to Saudi Arabia and UAE in the period 2015 to 2021 reaching over €1.6 billion under right-wing Popular Party (PP) and PSOE-Podemos governments, the predecessor of today's PSOE-Sumar government.

After the genocide launched by Israel in Gaza, the Houthi declared their support for Palestinians. Yemen has seen some of the largest pro-Palestinian demonstrations across the

Middle East, with weekly protests of tens of thousands spanning provinces including Saada, Raymah, al-Bayda, Taiz, Marib, Ibb, and al-Jawf.

The Houthi then declared a blockade on ships to Israel through the geo-strategic Gulf of Aden until Tel Aviv stops its onslaught in Gaza. Through the Bab-el-Mandeb passage.

In November the Houthi seized some ships, while attacking others with drone strikes and ballistic missiles. Since then, the activity at Israel's Eilat port in the Red Sea has dropped by 85 percent. Many of the world's largest shipping companies have shifted to the longer more expensive route around Southern Africa, which costs an additional cost of \$2 billion per month on goods heading to Europe.

Spain's announcement underscores the hypocrisy of the PSOE-Sumar government. Over the past month, the government has postured as opposing Israel's genocide.

On Saturday, Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez stated that Gaza "has shocked our lives and our consciences," and that Israel is "causing unbearable, unacceptable suffering among the civilian population that the international community must stop immediately".

On Thursday, in statements to the *Cadena SER* radio station, Spain's deputy prime minister and leader of Sumar, Yolanda Díaz said it was "enormously hypocritical to act quickly to defend commercial interests [in the Red Sea] and not do so in the face of the murder of girls and boys in Gaza."

The fact is, by calling for an EU-led mission in the Red Sea the PSOE-Sumar government aims to allow Israel to continue its mass murder campaign in Gaza, suppress the Houthi's in the geostrategic Gulf of Aden, while laying the basis for war against Iran.

The new government will only expand the policies of its predecessor, the PSOE-Podemos government, of imperialist war abroad and draconian attacks against the working class at home. For four years, the PSOE-Podemos government

implemented ruthless austerity including a pension cuts consolidating the retirement age to 67, below-inflation wage increases, and a labour law reform slashing workers' legal protections. To break strikes, it used draconian minimum services laws on healthcare and airline workers and deployed tens of thousands of police to break metalworkers and truck drivers strikes.

This was accompanied by a huge military hike. According to Delás Center for Peace Studies, Spain doubled what it spent two decades ago on the armed forces. Since 2019, the PSOE-Podemos government has committed over €82 billion in military spending. Since January, it has committed over €22 billion.

The PSOE-Podemos was particularly concerned with strengthening Madrid's naval capabilities that may now be deployed in the Red Sea. In August, it launched F-111 Bonifaz, the first of the five new generation Bonifaz class frigates of the Spanish Navy specialised in anti-submarine warfare. Last month, Spain launched the S-81 Isaac Peral submarine, the first in a series of advanced new generation submarines. As conservative daily *El Confidencial* recently said, "The Navy is growing its fangs again, incorporating units and systems designed for high-intensity conventional warfare".

Madrid's announcement came days after US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin launched Operation Prosperity Guardian, an armada of nearly 20 warships to the Middle East, led by two aircraft carrier battle groups. The new naval operation includes major major imperialist powers, including the UK and Canada. Germany is considering participating.

Other imperialist powers are intervening independently from the US-led operation. France, which has a destroyer in the area, said its ships would stay under French command. Italy's Defense Ministry said it would send naval frigate *Virginio Fasan* to the Red Sea in response to requests by Italian ship owners.

Spain's call for the EU to act independently from the US comes after tensions between Madrid and Washington over US-led Operation Prosperity Guardian. Madrid was displeased when US Secretary of Defense Austin included Spain in the operation, allegedly without prior notice. Spain had to deny its involvement and stated it would not participate "unilaterally" in the coalition, although the Spanish Ministry of Defense made it clear that it could do so "within the framework of NATO or the European Union."

When the EU agreed take part in monitoring the Red Sea through Operation Atalanta, Spain first agreed, and then vetoed the decision the following day. Launched in 2008 as an anti-piracy operation, Operation Atalanta's real aim is to control the maritime route through which the majority of the Asia-Europe trade runs. The mission's headquarters is in

Spain's southern city of Rota and it is led by Spanish commander Vice Admiral Ignacio Villanueva. Madrid's frigate *Victoria* is currently off the coasts of Somalia, the only ship that the European operation has after the withdrawal of the Italian frigate.

This U-turn provoked US President Joe Biden to speak to Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez on Friday, in what was their first call since Sánchez was elected in November. Although the government did not reference the Houthi in its statement, the White House reported that both leaders discussed the importance of "ensuring the conflict does not expand in the region, to include condemning ongoing Houthi attacks against commercial vessels in the Red Sea."

On Saturday, Spain's Ministry of Defence called for an EU-led mission to the Red Sea.

The tensions between Madrid and Washington is a stark expression of the deepening rivalries between the imperialist powers amid war in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, a growing economic crisis and the growth of the international class struggle.

It must be stated clearly, these interventions, whether under the aegis of the US or imperialist powers are illegal wars of aggression which violates international law. They are led by imperialist powers that have been waging war across the Middle East for thirty years interventions, including proxy wars and regime change operations, from Ukraine, to Yugoslavia, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Somalia and Yemen, that have left millions dead and tens of millions displaced.

To successfully oppose the genocide in Gaza and a broader war across the Middle East, a powerful anti-war movement in the working class must be built. Fighting to build such a movement requires building a Marxist, internationalist, that is Trotskyist, party in the working class to oppose reactionary capitalist governments like the PSOE-Sumar coalition in Spain.



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