

Spain's PSOE-Sumar government establishes NATO naval base on Menorca island

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Amid growing threats of NATO states led by France to send troops to Ukraine to fight Russia, Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE)-Sumar coalition government admitted that the Port of Maó (in Spanish, Mahon) on Menorca has now become a naval base to offer logistical support to NATO fleets. The government is also escalating its war propaganda against Russia and increasing military spending to record levels, as NATO countries back Israeli genocide in Gaza and NATO bombing of Yemen.

The port has a critical geostrategic location in the Mediterranean. It is at the centre of the western Mediterranean, 400 kilometres from the other key ports, including Marseille in France, Algiers in Algeria and Alghero on the Italian island of Sardinia. Located in a large natural harbour, Maó has large fuel and water tanks, as well as unused underground tunnels, facilitating the resupply of NATO ships anchoring or docking in the area.

With contempt for mass working class opposition to war, the PSOE-Sumar government announced this via the pro-PSOE daily *El País*, a spearhead of anti-Russian war propaganda in Spain. But in fact, according to *El País*, the previous PSOE-Podemos government had already covertly decided a year ago to designate a major Spanish port as a base for NATO operations in the Middle East, West Africa, the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. This took place behind the backs of the Spanish people.

Posted on Good Friday as the country went on holidays and the main media was busy covering the weather, the traffic situation and religious processions, *El País* reported that government sources "confirmed" the decision to the newspaper. Even the Balearic regional government was surprised. Regional premier Marga Prohens told *Diario de Mallorca*, "We have found out in the press."

El País reported, "In April last year, the Spanish government offered Maó to the Atlantic Alliance as a 'port with permanent diplomatic authorisation' so that

the allied ships that participated in NATO can dock and anchor," it said. Since then, it has been functioning as such.

The port has already been providing support to Operation Sea Guardian, led by NATO's Allied Maritime Command (MARCOM) based in Northwood, UK. Launched in 2016, the operation is the heir to Active Endeavor, initiated by NATO after the September 11, 2001 Al Qaeda attacks. Its objectives include monitoring the movement of Russian ships in the Mediterranean and controlling the Red Sea and West Africa, using the pretext of acts of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea and the Horn of Africa.

MARCOM is now heavily involved in the Red Sea attacks against the Houthi militia in Yemen, which aims to disrupt supplies to the Israeli military in solidarity with the Palestinians. The US, Britain and their allies are bombing the Houthis whilst amassing an armada in the Middle East to back Israel's war on Gaza and to prepare for a wider war against Iran and Iranian-linked forces.

The Spanish ruling class also hopes to leverage Maó for its own imperialist ambitions in West and North Africa. After Spain and Italy successfully lobbied NATO to focus on its "southern flank" at last year's Madrid NATO Summit, it is expected that NATO will adopt its first-ever Southern Flank strategy at the Washington summit in July. According to the pro-NATO Atlantic Council, the Southern Flank strategy will focus on preventing migration to Europe and defending Europe's economic interests:

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Europe has decreased oil and gas imports from Russia and increased imports from the MENA region. As of the last quarter of 2023, the European Union (EU) imported 21 percent of its

oil from three MENA countries: Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq. The EU also imported 17.8 percent of its gaseous-state natural gas from Algeria and 24.1 percent of its liquefied natural gas from Libya and Qatar. Instability on NATO's Southern Flank is also a potential threat to the maritime commerce that flows through the Mediterranean Sea, which accounts for 15 percent of the world's shipping by port calls and 10 percent of the world's shipping by vessel weight.

The Southern Flank strategy, the *Atlantic Council* states, could involve increasing military training and aid to former colonial countries across Northern Africa and the Sahel, to "prepare for future military operations in the region" and enhance "resources for Operation Sea Guardian, allowing for more maritime situational awareness, more maritime counterterrorism, and, especially, more maritime security capacity building with regional partners."

That is, the Southern Flank strategy means preparing to violently suppress mounting opposition to NATO across Africa. France, the United States, Germany, Spain and other NATO powers have all cited Islamist forces like Al Qaeda, the Islamic State and Boko Haram as a pretext for wars aiming to maintain control of Africa's rich natural resources. These wars have provoked mass opposition and led to the launching of coups in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger against pro-NATO regimes there.

These coups and wars are inextricably linked to NATO's war on Russia in Ukraine, since the newly formed military juntas in the Sahel countries sought military aid from Russia.

On Saturday, the Ministry of Defense posted a cynical statement to minimise the impact of the *El País* report. It stated "there is no provision" for Maó to serve as a NATO base, "beyond its current role as a specific port of call for permanent fleets of the Alliance." That is to say, it issued an empty "denial" that in reality confirmed that Maó will be used as a military base against Russia.

The press ludicrously portrayed the Ministry statement as a response to what the media promotes as the "left" in Spain. Leaders of Podemos—its general secretary, Ione Belarra, and its political secretary and candidate for the European elections, Irene Montero—have cynically postured as critics of the decision. Montero said "the Parliament voted for a prime minister for Spain, not a secretary general of NATO. Not to the war. Not in our

name."

Meanwhile, in her X account, Belarra wrote that NATO bases in Spain "not only represent an unacceptable transfer of sovereignty, they are also playing a key role in US support for the genocide that Israel is committing against the Palestinian people."

The fact is that Podemos is deeply implicated in the decision to use Maó as a NATO base, as well as in Spain's arming of the Israeli regime against Gaza: These decisions were taken when Podemos was in office! It was part of a broader operation to support NATO's maritime strategy, including the US-Spain agreement signed in 2022 under Podemos. The agreement allows two additional US destroyers in the naval base of Rota in Cádiz, and provides for the garrisoning of up to 1,800 troops. The port has been used to aid US operations to support Israel's genocide in Gaza and against the Houthis in Yemen.

Under Podemos, Spain also decided to provide 1,700 troops and jet fighters in Eastern Europe to strengthen NATO's eastern flank to prepare for war against Russia. This entailed deploying troops and equipment to Latvia, Romania, Bulgaria and other countries, while funneling tanks, ammunition and rocket launchers to NATO's proxy forces in Ukraine.

Stopping the war requires mobilizing working class opposition through an uncompromising struggle against the PSOE-Sumar government. This includes the pseudo-left Podemos party that, having laid the groundwork for imperialist war policies in power, is now working outside the government to tie workers to the bankrupt perspective of launching moral appeals to the ruling parties. The key issue is to build an international, anti-war movement in the working class, in irreconcilable opposition to pseudo-left parties like Podemos and Sumar, and in the struggle for socialism.



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