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www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

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By Will Morrow
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After US withdrawal from INF nuclear treaty with Russia

France conducts dry-run simulation of nuclear weapon strike



On Monday afternoon, three days after the Trump administration declared it would suspend compliance with the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty with Russia, the French military conducted a dress rehearsal for a nuclear weapons strike.

The dry-run was reported the following day in a brief, three-paragraph statement from the defense ministry. The operation lasted 11 hours and included “all phases” of what was referred to as a “nuclear dissuasion mission,” except for the detonation of an actual nuclear warhead.

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A Rafale warplane equipped with a nuclear-capable cruise missile took off from the Saint-Dizier Air Base 113, approximately 200 kilometers east of Paris. It conducted high-altitude flying, mid-air refueling, and a low-altitude high-speed portion, practicing evading anti-aircraft defense systems, before firing its missile at a target on a testing range in Biscarosse in southwestern France.

Downplaying the connection of the exercise to the collapse of the US-Russian nuclear treaty, the French government statement claims that such operations are “planned well in advance and conducted regularly.” Whether or not this is true, the decision to announce the exercise was a deliberate signal to make clear that the French state is preparing for nuclear war.

These war preparations are a conspiracy involving the highest echelons of the military and state apparatus, worked out entirely behind the backs of the working class.

The population is informed of nothing. It awoke on Tuesday to reports that the military had rehearsed a nuclear attack. But none of the most obvious questions are addressed: Whom is the French military preparing to use nuclear weapons against? Which cities or countries is it planning to destroy? How many millions or tens of millions does it anticipate would die in such a conflict? None of these questions are raised, because the ruling class knows there is overwhelming opposition to war in the population.

France possesses approximately 300 nuclear warheads, making it the third-largest nuclear power in the world, behind the United States and Russia, which possess each approximately 6,500 and 6,800 warheads. The French government has not tested a nuclear weapon since 1996, when a nuclear test in the Pacific under Jacques Chirac prompted a mass outcry in the population.

Amid growing military and geopolitical tensions between the world’s major powers, the European ruling classes, led by France and Germany, are rapidly arming for war. To this point, the European powers have aligned themselves under NATO with the aggressive US confrontation against both Russia and China. But there are growing demands in the ruling class that Europe be prepared to act independently of and in opposition to the United States to protect its own imperialist interests.

The day after the nuclear exercise, French Army Minister Florence Parly spoke before the Portuguese government and military brass in Lisbon and declared that Europe must arm itself for wars on a scale unlike anything seen since WWII.

“Our continent has been at peace for seventy years,” she said. “But, today more than ever, this peace should not be taken for granted. We are facing growing threats.”

After blaming Russia and repeating the completely unsubstantiated claims by the Trump administration that Moscow had violated the INF treaty, Parly added: “Let us not forget the seemingly more distant challenges of Asia” and “the rise of China,” which was “challenging the rules-based order.”

The “rules-based order” refers to the system of alliances, dominated by the United States, by which the European and US imperialist powers have maintained their dominance since the second world war, which is being disrupted by the economic growth of China in particular.

Parly stated that while “NATO is and will remain the cornerstone of the collective defence of the European continent ... nevertheless, we need to do more by ourselves.” Europe must be “able to ensure our own security, to be ready to act whenever our interests are at stake—because we have the capabilities, a shared assessment and a common willingness.” Such a “willingness” meant overcoming the deep anti-war sentiments among workers and young people. Governments must “explain to our citizens what we are doing,” she said, and “convince our citizens of the benefits of a ‘Europe that protects.’”

While Parly was careful to couch her call for Europe to do “more by ourselves” within the framework of being “better allies” with the United States, they are clearly directed at developing a more independent stance. They followed the statements by President Emmanuel Macron last November, in which he called for the building of a “real European army,” so Europeans can “protect themselves from China, Russia and even the United States.”

Macron has also announced an increase in nuclear military spending from €3.9 billion in 2017 to €6 billion per year in 2025 as part of a major modernization of its nuclear weapons arsenal.

France’s preparations to wage nuclear war demonstrate the fraud of all claims that the European imperialist powers represent some kind of more benevolent, less brutal and aggressive counterweight to the United States. Their own drive to war is proceeding hand in hand with brutal austerity overseen by the European Union against the working class, the build-up of police powers and elevation of extreme right-wing forces across the continent, and attacks on immigrants and refugees.

Germany is also remilitarizing and boosting its military spending. Last July, the *Welt am Sonntag*, a major German national newspaper, published a front-page picture of a nuclear bomb, painted in the colours of the German flag, with the headline: “Do we need the bomb?” (and answering in the affirmative).

These war preparations are accompanied by a systematic ideological campaign to rehabilitate the past crimes of the European imperialist powers.

In Germany, the neo-fascist Alternative for Germany now sets the line of official politics. It has been promoted by the state and security forces, and its anti-immigrant policies have been adopted by the political establishment. Its growth has been facilitated by extreme-right academics such as Humboldt University's Jorg Baberowski, who have worked to justify and relativize the crimes of the Nazis.

In France, Macron recently hailed Marshal Philippe Pétain, the head of the fascist Vichy regime that collaborated with the Nazi occupation, as a "great soldier."