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www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

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By Alex Lantier

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European Union threatens Iran with naval mission to Persian Gulf

As the British Ministry of Defense announced on Sunday that a second UK destroyer, the HMS Duncan, had arrived in the Persian Gulf, calls were escalating across the European ruling elite to deploy a European naval flotilla or “eurofleet” in the Persian Gulf to threaten Iran.

The pretext for this European escalation is the military crisis provoked by Washington in the oil-rich Persian Gulf. After Washington unilaterally tore up the 2015 Iranian nuclear treaty and reimposed sanctions on Iran last year, and Trump said this year that he had been 10 minutes away from bombing Iran, British troops illegally seized an Iranian tanker off Gibraltar on US orders, and Iranian boats seized a UK-flagged tanker, the Stena Impero. The European Union (EU) powers are reacting, however, not by opposing Washington, but threatening Iran.

After the July 19 capture of the Stena Impero, officials in Britain and other EU countries launched a campaign calling for an EU naval intervention targeting Iran. Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian called for “better securing the Persian Gulf maritime zone” at the French National Assembly on July 23, adding: “This is why we are now launching a European mission with the British, the Germans, so there will be a mission to observe and ensure maritime security in the Persian Gulf.”

Amid the US war drive against Iran, this mission is a reckless attempt by the European imperialist powers to grab a share of oil resources in the strategic Persian Gulf region.

In 2013, as Berlin remilitarized its foreign policy for the first time since the fall of the Nazis in 1945, a group of German firms formed the Raw Materials Alliance. In a piece titled “Will we see resource wars?”, one of its officials, Dierk Paskert told *Handelsblatt*: “History shows that many conflicts have their origin in the fight for resources... The supply of raw materials is the basis for added value and the well-being of a country, and so has geopolitical significance.” The paper added that industry wants “more state—and military—involvement in securing raw materials.”

Yesterday, Dieter Kempf, the head of the German Industrial Association (BDI), came out in favor of German military participation in an EU intervention in the Persian Gulf. Echoing *Handelsblatt*'s earlier call for resource wars, Kempf said: “For Germany, an exporting nation and industrial power, freedom of navigation is of critical importance. ... At least one fifth of world oil demand is transported through these shipping lanes.”

Cynically calling the EU expedition to the Persian Gulf a “defensive intervention,” Kempf added, “It is a question of solidarity between us Europeans; Germany should participate in such a mission.”

Kempf's positions are shared by capitalist politicians across Europe. Norbert Röttgen, a top official of Germany's ruling Christian-Democratic Union (CDU), called for “a genuine contribution to a European mission” from the German military. German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (AKK), Chancellor Angela Merkel's ostensible successor, did not rule out participating in the EU mission, declaring: “We can talk about it, once we know exactly what is being planned.”

Last week, it was reported that French, Italian and Danish officials supported the British plan for an EU naval mission, while Spanish and Dutch officials were still studying it.

Yesterday, Iranian officials condemned the planned EU naval missions. “The presence of foreign forces will not only not help the security of the region, but will be the main factor for tension,” said Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, while government spokesman Ali Rabiei said: “We heard that they intend to send a European fleet to the Persian Gulf, which naturally carries a hostile message, is provocative and will increase tensions.”

It is an open secret in European ruling circles that these plans are coordinated with the Pentagon, which has **called** for EU powers to send their warships to the Persian Gulf as part of its war plans against Iran. A senior EU diplomat cynically told Reuters: “Britain's request, rather than Washington's, makes it easier for Europeans to rally round this.

Freedom of navigation is essential; this is separate from the US campaign of maximum pressure on Iran.”

Similarly, officials in South Korea are reportedly discussing sending a warship to participate in “freedom of navigation” operations in the Persian Gulf, targeting Iran.

The campaign for an EU naval mission targeting Iran underscores the hysterical shift to the right in ruling circles across Europe and internationally. Amid a new march towards an ever-greater Middle East war, Washington is reprising the methods of provocation that led to the illegal, US-led 2003 invasion of Iraq, based on lies that Iraq had “weapons of mass destruction.” Yet the EU powers led by Berlin and Paris, who criticized US provocations against Iraq at the United Nations in 2002, today make no public attempt to oppose the war drive against Iran.

Despite the unpopularity of Middle East wars and of Trump in the US, European and international working class, the European bourgeoisies are preparing military operations that, for now at least, largely dovetail with the war plans of American imperialism.

Nonetheless, deep contradictions and conflicts persist between the imperialist powers who are all sending forces to the Persian Gulf. While the Trump administration tries to include EU warships in its war plans, it is also threatening EU corporations with hundreds of billions of dollars in trade-war tariffs and demanding that the EU powers abandon plans for an independent EU army. At the same time, the EU is being shaken by the looming Brexit crisis. These conflicts have led to visible tensions among the EU powers as they try to work out an anti-Iran policy.

After Boris Johnson became British prime minister last week, calling for a no-deal Brexit from the EU, UK officials abandoned the fiction that the “eurofleet” was unrelated to US war plans. “I think we do want to see a European-led approach, but that doesn’t seem to me to be viable without American support as well,” incoming Foreign Minister Dominique Raab told the *Times* of London. The *Daily Telegraph* said that Raab’s remarks were “likely to unsettle Germany and France, both of which have stated that any European effort must be independent from the US.”

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas responded by declaring, “We have made clear that we do not subscribe to the United States’ policy of maximum pressure. Our efforts in the region must be recognizably European.”

French Defense Minister Florence Parly told *L’Est Républicain*, “We are working to organize ourselves only between Europeans, but one thing is clear: our policy must have

only one objective, to calm the current tensions and defend our interests. ... We do not want to contribute to a force that could be perceived as aggravating the tensions.”

The attempts of Berlin and Paris to distance themselves from US war plans against Iran are shot through with hypocrisy. While proclaiming that they do not want maximum pressure or aggravating tensions with Iran, they are stirring up the crisis, threatening to send warships to one of the world’s most volatile military and commercial flashpoints—a move playing into the hands of US war policy.

The EU’s militarist policy underscores that the only way to oppose the war drive against Iran is to mobilize the vast opposition and disaffection with war among workers internationally in a struggle against all the capitalist governments including the EU imperialist powers threatening Iran.

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