

French president travels to Saudi Arabia amid danger of war with Iran

By Francis Dubois
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Amid the eruption of an open confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iran, French President Emmanuel Macron suddenly decided on November 9, amid an official visit to Abu Dhabi, to visit Saudi Arabia for talks. In Abu Dhabi, Macron had, among other official activities, visited a military base from which French warplanes bomb targets in Iraq and Syria, in order to announce further military operations.

The reason for Macron's trip to Riyadh was the danger of a sudden outbreak of open military conflict between Saudi Arabia, backed by the United States, and Iran, allied to Russia and Syria. The two regional rivals are already fighting each other in proxy wars in Syria and Yemen. The Saudi regime has blamed Iran for alleged missile launches targeting Riyadh by Houthi rebels in Yemen and declared itself "in a state of war" with Lebanon, pressing Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri to step down and violently criticize Iran.

Speaking on these topics as well as Trump's opposition to the 2015 Iranian nuclear deal, Macron declared: "I want to make the Saudi neighbor more sensitive to all these questions." He added, "The very hardline positions expressed by Saudi Arabia on Iran ... are not in conformity with my thinking."

Paris clearly fears a breakup of Lebanon, a former French colony, which it hoped to stabilize based on a new constitution. "We really want unity and the territorial integrity of Lebanon to be preserved," declared French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian. Macron and the Saudi leadership discussed the Lebanon crisis, and Macron reiterated the importance that France places on "the stability, security, sovereignty and integrity of Lebanon."

In Riyadh, Macron specifically raised the issue of the danger of US cancellation of the Iranian nuclear deal, which he instead proposed to complete with an accord

to oversee Iranian ballistic missiles. He warned against decisions that could even further destabilize the region, trip it into war or trigger a crisis like the current nuclear-armed standoff in North Korea.

The actions of both Riyadh and Washington threaten to trigger an all-out general war in the Middle East that could rapidly turn into a confrontation between Washington and Moscow. *Le Monde* cited Nahla Chahal, the chief editor of *Safir Al-Arabi*, an online magazine covering the Arab world, as saying: "We are on the edge of the precipice. The slightest thing could suddenly plunge the entire region into flames."

This war danger flows from the humiliating defeat that the NATO imperialist powers and their Gulf state allies are currently suffering in their bloody proxy war in Syria. Saudi Arabia's plans for the overthrow of Saudi President Bashar al-Assad are now in ruins, faced with the intervention of Russia and of Iran via the Hezbollah militia and the Saudi regime is now trying to take its revenge in Lebanon. Its leaders have made multiple belligerent statements about these countries in recent days and called its citizens to leave these countries.

A few days before Macron's surprise visit, Saudi Arabia had apparently forcibly kept Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri in Riyadh. In a speech given on Saudi radio on November 4 to announce his resignation, Hariri attacked Iran for its alleged "interference" in the affairs of Lebanon, Syria and Yemen. Hariri accused Hezbollah—a Lebanese Shiite militia with close ties to Iran that supports Hariri's own government and is fighting in Syria alongside Assad's forces—of forming a "state within the state."

Most Lebanese politicians are demanding Hariri be returned to Beirut. Lebanese President Michel Aoun said he was awaiting Hariri's return to "discuss with

him the circumstances of his resignation to try to draw the lessons of it.” Walid Jumblatt, the head of the Progressive Socialist Party, declared: “Now is not the time for Saad Hariri to resign; that would have serious repercussions on Lebanon’s economy and on Lebanon.”

A source close to Hariri’s March 8 Coalition, which also includes Hezbollah, told the media: “It is shameful that [Hariri] tendered his resignation in Riyadh, not Beirut. We are patient and reasonable, but there are limits. They accuse us of being linked to Iran, but Iran has never tried to dictate to Lebanon how it should behave.”

A chief of the Lebanese Forces, an ex-Christian militia that fought in the Lebanese Civil War, said: “Coexistence with Hezbollah is now impossible.” For former minister and influential Maronite deputy Boutros Harb, Hariri’s resignation “will create political tensions due to the breaking of the accord that allowed for the formation of the government at the end of 2016.” He added, “Now we can only work together to minimize the dangerous impact [the resignation] will have on Lebanon.”

“This situation is completely surrealist; it’s as if one were living in a political thriller,” said a Lebanese businessman linked to the Hariri family.

The Saudi monarchy is doubtless encouraged by the continual support of Washington, particularly since Donald Trump’s trip to visit the Middle East in May of this year and the formation of a new alliance with the United States and Israel—set up to counterbalance the axis between Russia, Iran and Turkey, backed by China, which took shape during the Syrian war.

Paris, like Berlin, is hostile to the Trump administration’s preparations for nuclear war against North Korea and its threats against Iran, which Trump has labeled a terrorist state. The European bourgeoisie is strongly opposed to repudiating the 2015 Iranian nuclear accord, which would signify reimposing harsh economic sanctions that would directly affect their investment, production sites, exports and profits in the country.

The intervention of Paris in the Saudi-Iranian conflict underscores the rising tensions between US and European imperialism. By traveling to Riyadh, Macron is trying not only to prevent Trump from carrying out a policy Berlin and Paris consider to be disastrous for

their interests, but to prevent a situation in which Paris would be reduced to the role of a spectator in a major regional war that could spread across the entire world.

The ever more dangerous conflicts that Macron is trying to control are themselves the disastrous outcome of the policy of aggressive neocolonial war carried out by previous French governments in alliance with Washington, and in which Macron participated. Former French President François Hollande armed anti-Assad Islamist forces in Syria and, based on lying claims about chemical weapons attacks, led the charge for a direct war against Syria in 2013. However, that war was called off at the last minute by Washington and London, after war was voted down in the House of Commons.

The impact of the Syrian intervention was not only the destruction of Syria, the decimation of its population and the transformation of tens of millions of Syrians into impoverished refugees (to whom France refuses asylum), but to sow the seeds of a war that could destroy the entire region.

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