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French President Macron signs basing deals in India

French President Emmanuel Macron's four-day visit to India last week highlighted the growing military build-up and drive towards war taking place internationally. Even as French officials and media called for war in Syria and backed Britain's calls for suspending diplomatic relations with Russia after the unclarified poisoning of British spy Sergei Skripal, Macron was drawing France and Europe into the maelstrom in Asia.

For India's Hindu-supremacist prime minister, Narendra Modi, Macron's visit was part of a broader strategy of reinforcing its military power in the strategically and commercially vital Indian Ocean area and pursuing an escalating rivalry with China stoked by Washington.

During the visit, Modi and Macron signed 14 agreements worth \$16 billion (€13 billion), focusing on military and nuclear energy deals. France is to sell conventional Scorpène-class submarines and nuclear-weapon-capable Rafale fighter jets to India.

Above all, the two agreed on a "Joint Strategic Vision of India-France Cooperation in the Indian Ocean region" that includes a so-called Reciprocal Logistics Support Agreement. Under such agreements, France and India will open their army or naval bases to each other's militaries. Not only will Indian warships be allowed to dock in ports located in France's numerous overseas territories in the Indian Ocean, but France will also have the option of stationing warships and troops in Indian military bases.

Workers and youth in France threatened by Macron's calls to bring back the draft should be warned: these deals point to the vast financial and military interests underlying

Macron's calls for a major military build-up and a return to universal military service in France. The attempts to trivialize Macron's plans notwithstanding, this plan does not aim to encourage youth to do community service. Rather, France is preparing to recruit the necessary forces to participate in large-scale conflict across the world between major, nuclear armed powers.

In Delhi, Macron made clear that France saw its escalating military involvement in the region as aimed to influence growing tensions and rivalries between the major powers. He declared, "A strong part of our security and the world's stability is at stake in the Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean, like the Pacific Ocean, cannot become a place of hegemony."

India and France pledged to intensify the pre-existing naval cooperation between the two countries under which they already hold yearly "Varuna" joint naval exercises. The "Strategic Vision" document pledged to "increase exchange of information on the maritime situation in the Indian Ocean" and to work on "co-developing a maritime surveillance satellite system focused on the Indian Ocean." This would allow continual monitoring and updating on ship movements, in particular those of Chinese warships in the region.

The unmistakable implication of this is to escalate French and European involvement in the growing great-power conflicts in Asia, as Washington tries to develop India as a counterweight to China. In recent months, India and China—both major nuclear-armed states—have threatened each other with military force in the dispute over the Doklam plateau on the China-India border in the Himalayas, and also over the crisis in the Maldives. French troops located in India could soon be parties to a conflict over these areas, should it break out.

While it plays a minor role in the Indian Ocean compared with the US military and major regional powers like China or India, the basing agreement French imperialism is offering gives Modi access to substantial facilities.

France has bases at Djibouti on the Horn of Africa, at Réunion island near Madagascar, in the United Arab Emirates, and in Mayotte off Mozambique in the Western Indian ocean. It also has bases in French Polynesia and New Caledonia in the South Pacific. France and India are preparing to build a military base in the Seychelles. France has deployed more than 7,000 permanent ground troops in the region.

Macron's visit underscores that it is not only US imperialism, but all the imperialist and regional powers that are participating in an escalating drive of world capitalism towards war. Macron is attempting to build a European military alliance with Germany and has

pledged to spend €300 billion on the army by 2024. His moves at home to slash jobs and social programs and dismantle the Labor Code are aimed at forcing the working class to bear the costs of European military escalation abroad.

At last month's Munich security conference, where German and French officials laid out these plans, they stressed that ties to the so-called "Asian Quad" (America, India, Japan, and Australia) could advance their interests amid the rising economic weight of Asia in the world. Macron's visit to India is part of a broad military escalation by France, involving it more closely in preparations of the "Asian Quad" countries for military confrontation—and potentially war—with China.

According to Defense Minister Florence Parly, since 2017 France has been negotiating with Japan agreements on stepped-up technical and operational military cooperation, as well as joint military exercises. The main target is China. Last January, Parly pledged France would "continue to deploy naval vessels in the Indo-Pacific region for freedom of navigation operations," that is, for US-led military incursions into the South China Sea to monitor and harass Chinese forces there.

Similarly, in India such reactionary agreements will do nothing except raise the danger of war and intensify the exploitation of India's large and impoverished working class. The celebration of the signing of multi-billion-dollar contracts between Modi and Macron was obscene, under conditions where hundreds of millions of Indians live in grinding poverty. India's ruling elites are spending more than €8 billion Euros to buy 36 French Rafale fighter jets, while more than 70 percent of the Indian population lives in poverty and a large proportion of them on \$2 per day or less. These deals will only compound the difficulties facing millions of Indian workers trying to earn a livelihood, while bringing the world closer to another catastrophic conflict.

Modi's Hindu-supremacist Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) has divided the country along ethnic, religious and caste lines to carry out this reactionary program.

It also carried out pogroms against minority Muslims and is notorious for demolishing mosques. In December 1992, the BJP and other Hindu supremacists demolished the nearly 500-year-old Babur Mosque. And in 2002, thousands of Muslims died in riots in Gujarat, which forced 140,000 to 200,000 Muslims to flee to other states as refugees, while Modi was premier of the BJP state government in Gujarat. Modi is tainted by this crime, and indeed before he came to power he was banned from traveling to America due to his role in the riots.

In an indication of his own utterly reactionary politics, Macron went out of his way to whitewash the role of Modi and the BJP.

During his visit, Macron met with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath (BJP) at Benares. The place is known as the focal place of Hindu supremacism and a political base for Hindu monk Yogi Adityanath, a founder of the Hindu Yuva Vahibi, a youth militia which carries out violence against India's Muslim minority. Adityanath has been accused of attempted murder, intimidation and instigating riots. He was arrested In January 2007 on charges of criminal activities and rioting. He spent 10 days behind bars, and a murder case is still pending against him.