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Lebanon

# Macron on an imperial visit

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### **Emmanuel Macron has paid another visit to Lebanon, and also to Iraq to seek to consolidate the role of the French imperialist power in the region.**

At the end of his latest visit to Beirut, the second in the space of a month after the double explosion of 4 August, Macron notably obtained the commitment of the bourgeois confessional parties of the country to quickly form a government, after the appointment of the new Prime Minister, Mustapha Adib.

## **A "mission government"**

This "mission government", in the formula employed by Macron, must implement the "reforms" demanded in particular by France and the IMF. These "reforms" are based on the terms of the Paris conference of April 2018 which reserves more than 11 billion dollars in loans and grants for Lebanon in exchange for the Lebanese government's commitment to develop public-private partnerships, reduce the level of debt and enact austerity measures.

All the dominant confessional political parties in Lebanon agree with these measures. The government of national unity made up of all these parties and led by former Prime Minister Saad Hariri, before his resignation following the outbreak of the popular protest movement in October 2019, had moreover provided for the merger or suppression of certain public institutions and the privatization of the electricity sector, as part of its 2020 budget plan. All these measures met the requirements of the World Bank, the IMF and the CEDRE agreement.

The French president announced that he would return to Lebanon in December to follow the progress made by the Lebanese government, and that he would invite Lebanese representatives to Paris in October to a meeting organized in conjunction with a new conference of international aid.

Macron is therefore continuing his efforts to assist the dominant confessional parties to maintain their power in the country by calling on them to unite to carry out these "reforms" in a government headed by a new prime minister who has the support of all these forces.

## **In Iraq against "foreign interference" (sic)**

Following his visit to Lebanon with great fanfare, the French president travelled to Baghdad to meet with the country's authorities. Since October 2019, there has been a major popular protest movement in Iraq that challenges, as in Lebanon, the confessional and neoliberal system. Officially, Macron's visit aimed to launch, in conjunction with the United Nations, "an initiative to support a process of sovereignty". The French president notably affirmed his support for Iraq in the face of "foreign interference" (sic).

The country has been the subject of sharp tensions between these two most important partners, the United States and Iran, since the coming to power of Donald Trump in the United States and his policy of "maximum pressure" against Iran, but especially since the double elimination in January 2020 by the White House of the former commander-in-chief of the elite al-Quds unit within the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, Kasseem Soleimani, and Abu Mahdi al -Muhandis, former de facto leader of the paramilitary coalition of Hashd el-Shaabi, affiliated with the Islamic

Republic of Iran. Even though there has not been too violent an escalation between Washington and Tehran following the assassinations, more than thirty rockets have targeted American soldiers and diplomats in Iraq since October 2019. Some 5,000 soldiers and US diplomats are still deployed in the country, while Iran has significant allies in Iraq, including paramilitary militias affiliated with Tehran. Washington and Tehran collaborated for years in Iraq following the invasion of the country in 2003 by the occupation forces of the United States and Britain. Moreover, the current Iraqi Prime Minister, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, is trying to balance between Washington and Tehran.

## France seeks to extend its influence

During his visit Macron also affirmed that the war against "Islamic State" is not over and that France will continue to support the Iraqi government as part of the international coalition to fight against jihadist forces. Since 2014, French forces have been engaged in Iraq as part of Operation Chammal. French officials have said they want to quickly resume training and arming Iraqi security forces, suspended during the pandemic period. France also allocated a loan of one billion euros to help rebuild Iraq in January 2019. France's interests in Iraq are not, however, comparable to those in Lebanon, where Paris still has significant political and economic influence

The French imperialist power is trying through the visits of its president to Lebanon and Iraq to maintain and extend its political, economic and military influence in the region. In addition, the French state is also seeking to show its usefulness to US imperialism by playing an intermediary role for Washington with the Islamic Republic of Iran in these countries and on other issues such as Iranian nuclear power.

*9 September 2020*

*PS:*

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