



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

France sends warships to Suez and Hormuz – Europe's response to a new maritime crisis



France has decided to increase its **naval presence** significantly in the eastern Mediterranean and Red Sea as the war in the Middle East begins to affect key global trade routes.

President **Emmanuel Macron** announced during his visit to Cyprus on 9 March that the French Navy will deploy a substantial group of warships in the region, tasked with protecting commercial traffic and ensuring freedom of navigation in areas now under immediate threat.

This decision comes as maritime routes connecting the Persian Gulf, Suez Canal, and European markets have become some of the most sensitive elements of the global economy.

The conflict involving the United States, Israel and Iran, which escalated at the end of February, has already caused serious disruptions in the transport of energy and goods.

The **price of oil** before the attack was just over \$73 per barrel; within ten days, Brent crude exceeded \$100, at one point reaching \$119 – a rise of more than 50 per cent.

The daily cost of transporting oil by supertankers has reached an all-time high of \$423,736, almost double the pre-attack rate, while shipping giants such as **Hapag-Lloyd** have imposed a wartime surcharge of \$1,500 per container on all shipments to and from the Persian Gulf.

The **Strait of Hormuz**, through which about a fifth of the world's oil exports and a significant share of global LNG traffic pass, is under constant threat of closure or restrictions on navigation.

Meanwhile, the situation in the **Red Sea** further complicates transport towards Suez, the most important sea passage between Europe and Asia.

France deploys a major naval

force

In Paphos, where he met with Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, Macron stressed that Paris views this development as a direct security and economic challenge for Europe.

France will deploy eight frigates, two amphibious helicopter carriers and the Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier to the region, forming one of the largest European naval groupings there in recent years.

The aim, according to the French president, is to ensure the protection of commercial shipping and support allies exposed to the consequences of the conflict.

Macron emphasised that the mission was exclusively defensive. French forces will not participate in offensive operations against Iran or in direct combat in the context of the conflict between Tehran, Israel and the United States. Their task is to secure maritime routes and reduce risk for commercial ships passing through the region.

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In practice, this means the navy will be present at several key points. The French strike group centred around the aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle is already in the eastern Mediterranean, near Crete.

The carrier, which carries twenty Rafale M fighter jets and a helicopter unit, is the centrepiece of the operation. It is accompanied by several frigates with anti-aircraft and anti-missile capabilities, as well as logistics support ships.

At the same time, Paris announced that two additional frigates will be sent to the Red Sea as part of the European operation Aspides, the

European Union's naval mission aimed at protecting merchant ships from drone and missile attacks.

The operation was launched after a series of attacks on commercial shipping in the region and is the EU's first attempt to establish a permanent naval presence on the route.

Strait of Hormuz as a point of global importance

Macron specifically highlighted the Strait of Hormuz as a point of global importance. This passage between Iran and Oman is the most important sea channel for transporting oil from the Persian Gulf.

France is therefore considering, in cooperation with its partners, organising a multinational maritime escort for commercial ships passing through the strait.

Such a convoy system has already been used in previous crises in the region and is considered one of the safest ways to ensure the continuous transportation of oil and gas.

This plan, however, has not yet been activated. Macron explicitly stated that such an operation would be launched only when the intensity of the conflict has decreased enough for the naval escort to operate without the risk of direct military confrontation with Iran.

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The security context of the French decision was further sharpened by the incident at the beginning of March, when an Iranian Shahed drone hit a hangar at the British military base RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus.

The attack prompted a swift response from Paris, which sent the frigate Languedoc off Cyprus and deployed ground-based air defence systems on the island to protect critical points in this key European logistics hub in the eastern Mediterranean.

A day before his visit to Cyprus, on 8 March, Macron spoke by phone with **Egyptian President** Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. Both agreed on the urgent need to secure maritime routes through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, which are of vital importance to the global economy.

The Suez Canal is one of the most important arteries of world trade, through which about twelve per cent of total global maritime traffic passes, including a significant part of energy and containerised goods transport.

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France takes the lead

The French initiative also carries broader political significance. Paris is seeking to take the lead in the **European response** to the regional crisis at a time when the European Union lacks a unified strategy towards the conflict involving Israel, Iran, and the United States.

So far, European countries have responded individually or through limited missions such as **Operation Aspides**. Foreign Affairs Minister Jean-Noël Barrot emphasised that France aims to develop a cooperation model that enables European navies to jointly protect maritime routes from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf.



France aims to develop a cooperation model that enables European navies to jointly protect maritime routes from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf - Jean-Noël Barrot

This approach depends on cooperation with countries that already maintain a naval presence in the region. The **Greek frigates** Kimon and Psara are already patrolling off Cyprus. Ships from Italy, the Netherlands and Spain are expected in the coming days, and the British destroyer HMS Dragon will arrive next week.

Maritime security experts warn that securing these routes will be a complex task. Iran possesses drones, anti-ship missiles and naval mines, with which it can threaten navigation in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz.

In addition, Iranian proxy groups in the region have the capability to attack commercial shipping in the Red Sea and Eastern Mediterranean.

In such an environment, even a strong naval group has only limited control over the situation. However, the presence of large European navies significantly reduces the risk to commercial vessels and increases the political cost of potential attacks on international shipping.

Europe is highly dependent on sea routes passing through Suez and Hormuz. Energy supplies from the Persian Gulf, industrial raw materials from Asia and a large share of global trade reach European ports via this route.

Maintaining the security of these routes is therefore not only a matter of military policy but also essential for the stability of the

European economy.

If the conflict in the Middle East continues, the maritime corridor from Suez to Hormuz could become one of the key points of global security for years to come.

This is precisely why the French deployment of ships in the region is much more than a regional operation. It signals that the European powers are beginning to prepare more seriously for a scenario in which the stability of world trade can no longer be taken for granted.