

## France to open first Persian Gulf base in May

By [Global Research](#)

Global Research, March 15, 2009

[Press TV](#) 14 March 2009

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Militarization and WMD](#)

French President Nicolas Sarkozy is set to formally open his country's first permanent military base in the Persian Gulf, reports say.

French diplomatic sources on Saturday revealed the scheduled date for the opening of the base, adding that Sarkozy would attend the inauguration ceremony, AFP reported.

Under a pact penned in 2008, United Arab Emirates agreed to host the French military base in Abu Dhabi, the wealthiest and largest of the seven emirates that form the Sheikdom.

"It will be the first such French base in the gulf and it will face the Strait of Hormuz," a French presidential source said at the time.

The strategic Strait of Hormuz, an important channel dividing Iran and Oman, serves as a vital artery for the oil industry. An estimated 40 percent of the world's sea-transited oil supplies pass through its waters.

French officials said last year that the base will eventually host 400-500 security personnel from all three elements of the French military: army, navy and air force.

Abu Dhabi and Paris are linked by a 1995 defense pact and carry out regular joint maneuvers in the UAE.

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