

French President Macron proposes 35 percent increase in military spending

By Alex Lantier
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Yesterday, the French Council of Ministers viewed the Military Planning Law (LPM) for the 2019-2025 period, which imposes a vast increase in military spending. Total spending over this period is to be above €300 billion, and the yearly budget will increase by more than 35 percent to reach €44 billion. This is to fulfill Emmanuel Macron's pledge, during last year's presidential election campaign in France, to increase military spending to 2 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Defense Minister Florence Parly indicated that despite the spending increase, France would seek to strictly adhere to European Union (EU) limits on budget deficits. "I'm aware that the 2 percent for defense go together with Brussels' 3 percent [limit on state budget deficits]," she told *Le Monde*. That is, the increase in military spending will correspond automatically to a massive reduction in social spending and in popular living standards.

This exposes the policies pursued across Europe, under the aegis of Macron and the Grand Coalition government that the German bourgeoisie is trying to assemble in Berlin. The banks and the armed forces are waging an offensive against the workers to make them pay for the militarization of Europe. They want to smash social rights won in struggle after the Russian revolution of October 1917 and the foundation of the Soviet Union, and the collapse of fascist regimes in Europe after World War II, in order to prepare the continent for new wars.

In France, they are planning the effective invalidation of the Labor Code by Macron's labor decrees, the imposition of salaries below the minimum wage, mass job cuts in auto, the privatization of the railways and the elimination of the railway workers' guaranteed rights, and the end of lifetime employment in the public

service. Deep cuts to pensions and health care are announced for the end of Macron's term. At the same time, Macron has handed over billions to the rich by eliminating the wealth tax (ISF), and is handing the general staff hundreds of billions of euros.

The rate of defense spending hikes is to go from €1.7 billion per year in 2018-2022, to €3 billion per year in 2023-2025. This suggests that the deep cuts to pensions and health care planned for the end of Macron's terms is largely destined to finance France's military machine.

Across NATO, governments are pouring hundreds of billions of euros per year into the armed forces, after Washington recently declared that Russia and China, both nuclear powers, are priority targets outranking Al Qaeda. US Senate Democrats have just agreed to a \$180 billion increase in US military spending, while Spain plans to more than double its yearly military budget to €18.47 billion.

The basis of the accord to try to form a Grand Coalition government between conservatives and social democrats in Germany is austerity destined to finance a massive, €35 billion increase in yearly German military spending, that would make Germany the EU's main military power.

The French LPM is part of this international arms race that the imperialist powers in North America and Europe are launching. According to initial press reports, it foresees a 14 percent increase in spending on salaries for the armed forces, including for 6,000 new recruits.

Spending on military equipment and weapons systems is to increase 34 percent, with an accelerated timetable for the production of Scorpion armored vehicles, four Barracuda-class submarines, and three Multi-Mission Frigates (FREMM). Finally, so-called

“strategic” spending, aiming to maintain the long-term military power of the French state, is also projected to explode.

Increased spending on nuclear weapons alone is to amount to €17 billion over the time period covered by the law. There are also to be large increases in spending on cyber-warfare, the designing of new weapons (aircraft carriers, tanks, and fighter planes) and the planning of a European tanker aircraft—key to waging war independently of the United States. Currently, French and European armed forces still depend on US tanker aircraft for their imperialist interventions overseas.

Macron will likely demand even greater increases in military spending in the coming years, however, as he also repeated last month his call for a return to universal military service last month, in a speech at the Toulon naval base. The cost of the reintroduction of universal military service and its extension to women would reportedly be in the tens of billions of euros.

This militaristic policy, carried out in coordination with all the NATO imperialist powers, constitutes a warning for workers internationally. After a quarter century of imperialist wars following the Stalinist bureaucracy’s dissolution of the Soviet Union, which cost millions of lives across the Middle East and Africa, world capitalism is yet again on the verge of large-scale war. The conflict for which Macron and the NATO powers are preparing would be a devastating global conflict, aiming to maintain the hegemonic world position of the imperialist powers.

When it speaks more openly about its appetites, the imperialist press admits that this is what NATO is preparing. Thus, in January, the influential British weekly *The Economist* wrote, “powerful, long-term shifts in geopolitics and the proliferation of new technologies are eroding the extraordinary military dominance that America and its allies have enjoyed. Conflict on a scale and intensity not seen since the second world war is once again plausible. The world is not prepared.”

These lines constitute a warning that humanity is teetering on the brink of a new world war. They shed a cold light on what Berlin, Madrid, Paris and the Trump administration are preparing, that is, conflict “on a scale and intensity not seen since the second world war.” This is why, as well, Sweden has resumed yearly

publication of a book destined to the entire Swedish population on what to do in case of nuclear war, and the Kremlin issued instructions in November that Russian industry should be prepared for total war mobilization.

For European workers, among whom opposition is rising to the policy of wage cuts or freezes and social austerity imposed across Europe since the 2008 Wall Street crash and economic crisis, it is also a warning on the emerging struggles of the working class. In 2018, large-scale strike action has already been taken by German and Turkish metal workers and British rail workers. In France, retirement home workers struck and rail strikes are being prepared, faced with Macron’s privatization plans.

It will be impossible to defend the wages and social rights of the working class in Europe without a political struggle against militarism and war, in which the main allies of workers in France will be their class brothers and sisters in the other countries.

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