

# Media demands France prepare for world war

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Several major French newspapers are demanding that European governments increase their military spending, in preparation for major wars in the future. These demands, and the dire scenarios the media are laying out, are a serious warning to the working class.

As part of spending cuts in response to the sovereign debt crisis, governments across Europe are announcing temporary cuts or freezes in defence spending. France plans to save some €5 billion over three years, which includes a reduction of 54,000 jobs in the armed forces. The 2011 defence budget will amount to €30.1 billion, the same as in 2010.

These sums are considered completely inadequate by leading bourgeois publications.

In its July 3 editorial titled “To arms, European citizens!”, France’s daily of record *Le Monde* wrote, “In a world that is arming itself, Europe is disarming. Under the impact of the crisis and the need to clean up public finances, European countries are cutting their defence budgets—massively. This is dangerous”.

On June 24, the right-wing daily *Le Figaro* published an article titled “Europe, a military power?” by Thérèse Delpech, a senior research fellow at the Centre d’études et de recherches internationales (CERI) in Paris. She wrote, “[T]he future of European military power at a time of sombre cuts in defence budgets is not a cause for celebrating European peace or ‘soft power’. Rather, it is potentially disquieting”.

Such comments testify to the naked class outlook that dominates the press. Massive cuts to pensions or labour rights are applauded, but any cut threatening France’s ability to wage war is unacceptable to the entire spectrum of the bourgeois press.

In fact, France devotes gigantic resources to the military. In 2008, France introduced a White Paper on Defence, defining the French military’s strategic orientation. The White Paper provided stability of the 2009-2011 defence budget, then a one percent increase for 2012. It granted €377 billion in defence spending over six years. The planned

savings in defence spending would not affect France’s major weapon programs: the Rafale fighter jet, the upgrading of nuclear submarines, or the Airbus A400M military transport plane.

As the character of these plans make clear, the French bourgeoisie’s purpose is to prepare imperialist interventions abroad alongside, or to rival, the US.

*Le Monde* writes, “Defence, for a continent like Europe, is the capacity to justify its strategic ambitions (does it still have any?); it’s the ability to project power into faraway theatres where part of its economic future is at stake; it’s the possibility of intervening into other continents.... In short, to hold its rank amid the powers of our time”.

The privilege of being a major imperialist power comes at a cost, *Le Monde* continued. Noting that “most European countries devote less than 1.5 percent of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to defence”, it wrote, “The US intends to remain one of the great military powers of our time—with more than 4 percent of GDP devoted to defence; the Russians the same, with an effort of 5 percent; the Chinese even more”.

Delpech’s article lays out chilling scenarios, including a world war waged by the US and Europe against China—in which France would intervene to help blockade China’s energy supplies in the Middle East.

She writes, “Asia is still perceived largely as an economic partner [in Europe], even as the United States rightly regards it as a potential strategic headache. Much closer, the Middle East is often understood only in terms of the Arab-Israeli conflict, when even beyond the Iranian nuclear puzzle there are a number of other questions that deserve consideration—Turkey’s new regional policy, or the fates of Egypt and Saudi Arabia after their current rulers are gone”.

Delpech added, “The potential conflicts of the 21st century are too obvious for Europe to be solely an observer. Even Asia is not as remote as many would want to believe. China is present in Central Asia, in the Middle East, in Africa and

in Latin America—which is to say, everywhere”.

Delpech treats the rise of China as a major potential threat for its global interests. If there is a conflict between China and America, she wrote, Europeans “may have to do some work—in the Middle East, for example, helping block maritime routes. Is Europe prepared to consider this, let alone actually do it?”

European military spending is not only directed at powers outside Europe, but increasingly at strategic relations inside Europe itself.

The outbreak of the southern European debt crisis, beginning with the Greek sovereign debt crisis, also created tension inside the EU—in particular, between France and Germany. In May, when Germany was reluctant to agree to the Euro bailout to pay off banks holding Greek debt, French President Nicolas Sarkozy reportedly threatened to break from the euro. European Central Bank director Jean-Claude Trichet said the international situation was the most difficult since the beginning of World War II.

The austerity measures to be implemented threaten the working class and the industrial base throughout Europe. Under the nation-state system, however, this inevitably poses the question of who will conserve a strong enough industrial base, capable of supporting a large military. That is, economic competition under conditions of world depression takes on the character of military competition as well.

Writing in *Le Post*, Jean-Pierre Chauvin notes that European countries “fear being militarily outclassed and industrially phased out—which would have long-term consequences on unemployment rates, the economy, the sovereignty, and even the power of the country”.

Evoking the military defeat of France in 1940, at the beginning of World War II, he added, “French history...and notably the period before World War II during which Paris did nothing against German rearmament, should nonetheless serve as a lesson”.

At the same time, the French ruling class is deepening its economic and political relationship with Russia, whose major European bilateral trading partner is Germany. In 2009, France and Russia exchange €14 billion in goods, whereas German-Russian volume was €44 billion.

In June, French President Nicolas Sarkozy travelled to Russia to participate in the Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum. Accompanied by business groups, Sarkozy oversaw the signing of around 25 major contracts—for food, energy, transport and aerospace deals between French and Russian firms. They were worth an estimated €5 billion. French energy companies GDF-Suez and EDF (*Electricité de France*) respectively bought 9 and

10 percent stakes in Russia’s North Stream and South Stream gas pipelines.

This is connected to a developing military relationship. In March, France announced that negotiations to sell four *Mistral*-class amphibious assault ships to Russia had begun.

In his keynote speech, Sarkozy said, “I have the conviction that Europe and Russia must work together in a strategic way, very closely, in a relationship of confidence”. He added, “[T]he Cold War is over. The Wall is finished. Russia is a great power, we are neighbours, we are destined to be friends, we must come closer to each other”.

France’s deals with Russia, aiming to compete with Germany, are a sign of the growing strategic tensions inside Europe. Increasingly, these include competition with powers besides the US and the main NATO powers.

The French ruling elite is worried at growing Chinese penetration into the European market. Since Greece announced privatization of state-run railway company OSE—one of the key actions Greece must take under a €110 billion bailout deal signed with European Union and International Monetary Fund—France’s national railway operator SNCF has been interested in it.

According to various reports, Chinese firms are also interested in buying stakes in Greece’s railways. In June, China signed commercial deals worth billions of euros with Greece, which were regarded as the single biggest investment by China in Europe. Chinese firms signed 14 agreements in the shipbuilding, tourism, construction and telecommunications sectors.

On July 1, French Transport Minister Dominique Bussereau visited Greece and signed a “strategic partnership in the domain of rail transport” with his Greek counterpart, Dimitris Reppas. Bussereau added, “I am looking reality coldly in the face: if France does not act, others and not only Europeans will do so instead”.



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