

Spain boosts military spending

Alfie Cook, Alejandro López
17 November 2014

After six years of budget cuts that have destroyed tens of thousands of public sector jobs, impoverished the population, and crippled what remains of the welfare state, Spain's Popular Party (PP) government is preparing to boost military spending by billions of euros.

The latest draft 2015 budget includes a 1.1 percent increase for the Ministry of Defence (MoD), although the increase is closer to 2 percent when the government's "extraordinary credits" for military expenditure—including Special Programs of Armament (PEA) and foreign military deployments—are added in. The latest report by the peace foundation Centre Delàs states that military expenditure in 2015 will reach €17 billion.

The increased spending follows the September NATO summit in Wales, which was dominated by scheming against Russia, preparations for military action in Iraq and Syria, and demands that all NATO members boost defence spending to at least 2 percent of GDP. Only four—the United States, UK, Greece and Estonia—do so at present.

The new military programme includes the purchase of five Frigate F-110 anti-submarine warships designed for high intensity combat missions, up to 400 armoured 8x8 vehicles, three A330-MRTT tanker aircrafts and four drones, capable of carrying up to 3,000 pounds of armaments, and two ground control centres. Four S-80 Spanish-made submarines, which use the latest technology for silent cruising and travel at high speeds, will also be bought.

Citing the risk of Islamist terrorism, Defence Minister Pedro Morenés of the Popular Party declared that "there is no possibility in guaranteeing security in an integral way if we do not guarantee the necessary supplies."

However, former PP defence minister and current president of the Spanish Atlantic Association, Eduardo

Serra, pointed to deeper concerns in Spain's ruling elite, insisting that Spain must increase its defence budget "if it wants to have a voice in the world," even though it might be "unpopular" or even "not necessary."

The problem facing Spanish imperialism is that it long ago lost its global status. Over a century ago, in 1898, its remaining colonial territories including Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines were lost in a humiliating ten-week war with the US.

Apart from engagements in Morocco and the use of the fascist Blue Division to fight against the Soviet Union during World War Two, the Spanish army has been overwhelmingly used for internal repression against the population—most brutally, in the civil war sparked by the July 1936 coup under General Francisco Franco.

During the Cold War, the US entered into a trade and military alliance with Francoite Spain, because of its important geostrategic location spanning some of the world's major sea, land and air routes. Construction began of vital military facilities that are still operational today.

The experience of the Civil War and the dictatorship that followed, US support for Franco, socialistic sentiments and popular sympathy for the Soviet Union left a deep anti-imperialist, anti-military outlook within the Spanish working class. In the early 1980s, demonstrations against Spain's entry in NATO were so large that the promise to hold a referendum on withdrawal became a major feature of the Socialist Party (PSOE) election manifesto in 1982. The referendum was constantly delayed after the PSOE came to power in a landslide victory; when it was eventually held in 1986, the PSOE campaigned vigorously for continued membership. Even so, only 52.6 percent voted in support.

After Spain joined NATO, successive governments

participated in US-led wars in Iraq, Bosnia, Afghanistan and Libya, despite public opposition. A 2003 survey by the publicly-funded Centre for Sociological Investigations suggested that 91 percent of Spaniards oppose Spain's involvement in the military action launched against Iraq.

The following year, Prime Minister José Maria Aznar's PP government was voted out after Aznar tried to blame Al Qaeda's March 2004 terror bombings in Madrid on the Basque separatist group ETA. Voters were incensed that Aznar tried to conceal that the bombings were Islamist retaliation for Spain's unpopular role in the Iraq war. The PSOE was the undeserving beneficiary of this sentiment, however; once elected, it brought back Spanish troops from Iraq only to increase them in Afghanistan.

Today, 10 years later, the PSOE has lined up behind the PP's active support for Washington's renewed aggression in Iraq and Syria to assert US hegemony over the strategically vital and oil-rich Middle East.

Madrid will deploy 300 instructors to train the Iraqi Army at a base in Tallil, just south of Diwaniya, where Spanish soldiers were stationed during the occupation of Iraq in 2003. Spain has also allowed its allies to use its military bases, as well as airspace and territorial waters, is supplying weapons and equipment to the Iraqi Army and the Kurdish Peshmerga forces and deployed a squadron of Patriot surface-to-air (SAM) systems and 130 soldiers at the Turkish border.

Félix Arteaga, a defence analyst at the prestigious Real Instituto Elcano, wrote that Spain's military presence "is not there to put an end to a conflict which, in all certainty, has no solution, or at least a quick one" but "because other jihadist groups, now obedient to ISIS, are roaming throughout North Africa and the Sahel, endangering the stability of the countries of the area, a risk that directly affects Spain. And when those countries seek assistance as did Iraq, Spain knows that it will have to accept the call, and seek help of those who now are now in the Coalition. Today for you, tomorrow for me."

Beneath the pretext of terrorism lies Spain's attempt to regain influence in Africa, where it still retains two enclaves, at Ceuta and Melilla, in Morocco. Arteaga's "tomorrow for me" can be best understood in the words of the recent report, "Towards a Strategic Renewal of Spanish Foreign Policy," also published by the Real

Instituto Elcano, that insists that Spain "has to elaborate an integral strategy of action in the area of Sahel, from the Gulf of Guinea to the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa... Considering that the business ties between Sub-Saharan Africa and Spain are intensifying rapidly."

The area was a major source of discussion at the Crans Montana Forum's Homeland and Global Security Forum, held in mid-October in Switzerland, where Stephen O'Brien, UK Prime Minister David Cameron's Special Representative to the Sahel, explained that the region was part of a "global band of instability," that spanned from Afghanistan in the East to Mali in the West and that the international community must intervene to prevent the five countries in the Sahel from becoming another Afghanistan.

The global crisis of 2008 has accelerated the ambitions of all the rival imperialist powers for a new division and re-division of the world. Moreover, with the second highest level of inequality in the European Union, according to Oxfam, Spain's increasing militarism also expresses the attempt to project rising social tensions outward.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact