

France to spend billions on military rearmament program

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After a defense meeting at Presidential Elysée palace on Wednesday, French President François Hollande announced a major boost in defense spending. He announced an extra €3.8 billion in defense spending over the next four years to cover both overseas military operations and permanent deployment of troops throughout France.

“Several decisions have been taken,” Hollande said, stressing that he spoke as the head of armed forces. The current €31.4 billion defense budget will be increased, with an extra €600 million in spending next year, reaching as much as €1.5 billion in 2019. Paris is preparing to review the 2014-2019 Military Spending Law on May 20 to “release €3.8 billion of additional appropriations on the four years,” according to Hollande.

Extra military spending will come from further plundering of the working class through the austerity measures and social cuts advocated by Hollande’s Socialist Party (PS). Hollande called the military spending increase “a large effort, even a major effort.”

On Thursday, Finance Minister Michel Sapin announced cuts in health care and housing. “It’s legitimate that priority goes to security,” he told Europe1 radio.

Bloomberg cited Finance Ministry sources saying that “the housing budget, which includes subsidies for families and students as well as incentives for home builders, will be reduced and the ministry in charge will be asked to better allocate its resources.” Health care, which already faces big spending cuts this year, will be at the center of efforts to cut spending in 2016.

Hollande sought to justify his reactionary program of austerity and war, which has made him the most unpopular French president of the post-World War II period, by claiming the bill would protect the French

population from terrorism. He was alluding to the deployment of 10,000 troops inside France itself in the aftermath of the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings this January.

Hollande is also expanding the military’s manpower resources. Of the 10,000 troops deployed across France after the *Charlie Hebdo* attack, 7,000 soldiers are to be permanently deployed, according to Hollande. Up to 18,500 jobs in the military that were set to be eliminated will be kept, in order to bolster troop deployments at home and abroad.

Under conditions where the ruling class has nothing to offer to millions of unemployed youth, Paris is preparing to use them as cannon fodder in its imperialist wars. Hollande is promoting “voluntary military service” for young people aged between 18 and 25 without qualifications. The government recently announced the establishment of seven “voluntary military service” centers that will receive around 2,000 young people next year.

Hollande justified these policies, claiming they would protect the French people from terrorism and allow for stepped-up military interventions abroad.

Hollande said, “I am making this choice because it is that of France, of its protection, its security, and I know that the French people, if they want to be confident in the future, must feel they are safe and protected everywhere. It is one reason that justifies the decision, giving confidence to the French people. ... They have it in the army, in the political authorities that take decisions, but they must know that the necessary spending will be placed at the service of these objectives.”

He added, “I have also argued that our exterior deployments must also be placed at an elevated level.”

Hollande’s claim that he is building up the military to boost the French population’s confidence in his

government is a political fraud. The French ruling elite is terrified of rising social discontent and anger in the working class with the Hollande administration. It is dramatically expanding police state measures designed to intimidate and repress social discontent, while escalating its imperialist wars of pillage in its former colonial empire.

Participating in the US-led wars in the Middle East, including in Syria, Libya and Iraq, France is also waging wars in former French colonies in sub-Saharan Africa, such as Mali and the Central African Republic. Around 10,300 troops are deployed in France's overseas operations.

The PS's rearmament program is also part of a broader turn to militarism and war by the imperialist powers around the world that poses the sharpest possible dangers to the working class internationally. It can only be met by a unified international struggle of the working class against war, based on a revolutionary and socialist perspective.

Tensions between the major capitalist powers threaten to plunge the population of Europe and the world into a catastrophic war. Europe is embroiled in a conflict with Russia over the civil war that broke out in Ukraine after the NATO-backed fascist-led coup in Kiev last February, a conflict that Hollande said could lead to "total war." Under its "pivot to Asia", Washington is fomenting a war drive aimed at China, and French media have called for preparations to blockade Chinese oil imports from the Middle East in the Indian Ocean.

Tensions between the major European imperialist powers historically rooted in two world wars of the 20th century, notably between Germany and France, are also exploding. As the anti-European Union neo-fascists of the National Front rise in France, Berlin has launched a broad re-militarization program that is being watched nervously by the French ruling elite.

Germany plans to boost its defense budget by 6.2 percent over the next five years, increase defense spending to more than €35 billion by 2019, and comprehensively modernize its army. From 2010 to 2014, Berlin has raised defense spending by 7 percent to €32.4 billion, while French defense spending fell 2.5 percent over the same period, to €31.4 billion.

Initial comments have begun to appear in the French media expressing concerns over German rearmament,

however, particularly after Berlin responded positively to proposals for the creation of an EU army in which it would play a dominant role. *Le Monde* attacked this policy as an attempt to disguise plans for German military domination of Europe. It described Berlin's calculations as follows: "We cannot scare our neighbors as we rearm. It is better to give a European gloss to our re-militarization." It added that French policymakers, however, "are not in a hurry to see Germans in uniform."

As Hollande's policy makes clear, French imperialism's response is to launch an arms race in Europe that threatens humanity with disaster.



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