

French army launches large-scale recruitment drive

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Amid a rapid militarization across Europe and rising social tensions, the French armed services are launching a large-scale recruitment campaign.

General Frédéric Blachon, who supervises the army's recruitment campaign, declared that 2015 was "an exceptional year for recruitment. You would have to go back five years to find a time we recruited so many people."

In total, the army is recruiting 11,000 extra soldiers over two years, 5,000 in 2015 and 6,000 in 2016. The navy is expecting to recruit 3,000 youth, the air force 400, and the Special Forces 1,000 by 2019. By that date, the Defense Ministry is also aiming to train 4,300 civilian reservists to respond to large-scale cyberattacks.

The government is also planning to mobilize France's 56,000 reservists more intensively. The number of days they would be mobilized to carry out internal operations in France is scheduled to pass from five to 10.

Aiming to attract youth in the 17- to 29-year-old age bracket, the army has set up a PR machine including a Twitter account followed by several thousand people, video clips shown on TV and in movie theaters, a recruitment web site, posters, and a team working round-the-clock to answer potential recruits' questions on social media. The population is not being informed, however, of the political or geo-strategic calculations underlying the decision to recruit on this massive scale.

This campaign has been facilitated by a defense budget increase passed in the aftermath of the shooting attack on *Charlie Hebdo* in January. The legislature voted a €3.8 billion rise in military spending for the 2015-2019 period, bringing the total defense budget over this period to €162.4 billion.

The extraordinary surge in manpower levels is

motivated in part by the spread of wars across Africa and the Middle East, through which French imperialism is seeking to assert control over its former colonial empire. The White Book on defense prepared for France's Socialist Party (PS) government in 2012 stated: "The evolution of the strategic context could push our country to have to mount operations or to shoulder, more often than in the past, a substantial part of the responsibility for the conduct of military action."

The White Book also confirmed France's alignment with Washington in terms of preparations for war with Iran, as well as with nuclear-armed powers Russia and China. The French air force is bombing the Islamic State (ISIS) in Iraq and is preparing to do so in Syria, the French navy is operating in the Indian Ocean, and France has launched ground interventions in several African countries, including secret targeted killings.

The increase of the French military budget and staffing levels is also taking place in the context of a broad re-militarization across Europe.

Eleven European countries increased their military budgets between 2013 and 2014, including Poland (14.33 percent), Sweden (7.18 percent) and Holland (2.6 percent). Above all, French authorities are also concerned with the re-militarization of Germany, which is cited as a justification for increasing this year's defense budget.

The international concerns do not by themselves explain what is driving the militarization of France. The ruling class is also preparing for immense social conflicts due to dramatically rising social inequality, the outcome of the austerity policies of the European Union.

A recent study published by the European Union's Institute for Security Studies bluntly declared that faced with these developments, the army will have to be

relied upon more and more frequently to maintain order and defend the rich against the poor.

“In the context of a common foreign and security policy, the responsibilities of the police and the armed forces have increasingly merged, and their capacity for struggle against social protests have been reinforced. And in virtue of article 222 of the Lisbon treaty, a juridical foundation has been created for the deployment of the army and of paramilitary units inside EU member states in times of crisis,” it declared.

Tomas Ries, the director of the Swedish Institute of International Affairs, declared that the principal security threat is “the conflict between unequal socioeconomic classes in world society,” which he describes as “vertically asymmetric tensions in the global village.” To state this more clearly, the main “security question” is the class struggle in a globalized world economy.

Ries warns that in coming years, the army will have to be deployed more and more frequently in domestic circumstances. Due to these tensions, he writes, the army will be called upon more and more frequently for “police work.”

Ries’ statements point to the underlying intentions of the French government and military when the chief military recruiter, General Blachon, declares, “He [the soldier] must be capable of very rapidly going from a system where he is being asked to be able to control a zone to an operating environment in which he will be totally immersed in the population.”

After the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, a large-scale military deployment, initially of 10,000 troops, was set up across France.

These soldiers, “immersed” in the population, will be called upon to monitor activists and repress demonstrations or strikes, as during the anti-police violence protests last year in Ferguson in the United States, where police were equipped with military equipment.



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