

Spain to double its military spending

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Defence spending will double by 2024, Defence Minister María Dolores de Cospedal has told Spain's parliamentary Defence Committee. The defence budget will increase from 0.8 percent of GDP (€8.7 billion) to 1.53 percent (€18.47 billion).

To limit popular opposition to war and anger against increased military expenditure, while austerity has decimated public services and made life more precarious for millions of workers and youth, Cospedal refused to publish the letter addressed to NATO outlining the increase, as she had initially promised. She claimed that part of the content was classified as secret.

Secrecy also surrounds the real level of current military spending. According to the pacifist organisation Centre Delàs d'Estudis per la Pau, there is a whole swathe of military related expenditure that is excluded from the defence budget. If social security, pensions and insurance for the military, missions abroad, state aid for military research and development at private companies, the budget of the militarised Civil Guards and NATO fees were included, then the true figure would stand at around €18.8 billion. By 2024, it will really be "the implausible figure of €28 billion a year," the Centre declared.

Spain's increase in military expenditure is in response to the agreement made at last May's NATO summit, under intense pressure from the Trump administration, for all NATO members to increase defence spending by 2024 to 2 percent of GDP.

Cospedal admitted that the increase to 1.53 percent fell short of NATO's objective, but insisted it would "facilitate the achievement of that horizon in future years" and was in line with targets set by other European countries.

An idea of the scale of the upgrade and renewal of the military can be gathered from the list of new equipment that will be purchased. Included are 348 new Piranha 5

armoured infantry vehicles, which are designed for close combat situations, five F-110 frigates, four S-80 submarines, three Multi Role Tanker Transport refuelling aircraft, 23 NH-90 helicopters, a Reaper unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) and a new training aircraft. In addition, the army will acquire a new Command and Control System and the renovation of its barracks, 17 Chinook helicopters will be modernized, and Spain will contribute funds towards the replacement for the F-18 fighter jet.

Cospedal confirmed that the military spending in Spain's participation in 17 military missions around the globe last year was €835 million, 8.2 percent more than the previous year. Spain will participate in the European Union's (EU) Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) on security and defence and will head the Command and Control System for EU Missions and Operations. PESCO was agreed last November by 23 of the EU's 28 member states "to jointly develop defence capabilities and make them available for EU military operations."

Spain's commitment to PESCO reflects the attempt by the ruling elite in Spain and in Europe to defend their economic and military positions vis-a-vis actual and potential competitors, in a situation threatened by Brexit and the Trump administration's "America First" policy.

The Spanish government is attempting to straddle the contradictions of supporting both the German-led PESCO and the US-led NATO, two militarist projects that are incompatible in the long term. This was reflected in a resolution proposed by the government to be debated in an upcoming parliamentary session, which calls for improvements to EU-US relations in the sphere of defence, while concluding that "Europeans must assume more than ever before the responsibility of our own security."

The growth of Spanish militarism, as elsewhere

globally, is the response of the ruling class to rising inequality, the deepening economic crisis and the growing conflicts between the major powers. Its aim, as recently expressed in the new US National Security Strategy, is the conquest of new spheres of influence, markets and raw materials—above all in conflict with Russia and China—and to deflect social tensions outwards.

The main obstacle for the Spanish ruling class is the population's traditional hostility towards the military. This was recently revealed in the attempt to open a debate to re-impose conscription, following the example of France under President Emmanuel Macron. All the main dailies published articles and opinion pieces bemoaning the population's hostility to such a measure.

The pro-militarist senior researcher for the Real Instituto Elcano, Félix Arteaga, complained to *El Mundo*, "Raising it [conscription] here would be political suicide, first because there is no military need to justify it, and second, because the concept of obligation is not liked by Spanish society. There is no mentality or culture of national identity and, of course, no one believes that you should lose your life for the defence of the country."

The ability of Spain's ruling elite to pursue its military ambitions is to a large extent due to the role of the pseudo-left Podemos, which has been virtually silent on these developments or has openly endorsed them. Last month Podemos covered up for increased Spanish intervention in Mali, where an EU "Training Mission" still continues five years after jihadist groups overran the north of the country in 2012, prompting a wave of refugees. Thousands attempted to cross the Mediterranean to Europe, and many drowned.

On January 24, Cospedal appeared before the Defence Commission to get belated authorisation for approving Spain's taking over control of the mission and sending in more troops on January 9. She warned the commission that increased involvement in the EU intervention was "fundamental" and that North Africa was "a strategic place" for Spain.

Juan Antonio Delgado, the Podemos spokesperson for military affairs, complained that Cospedal had "broken the law" by sending in the troops before parliamentary approval. He revealed, "I was in Mali three months ago and I learned that Spain would take

over the operation," before asking Cospedal, "In that time has there not been time to ask for authorization?"

The obvious question is why Delgado himself did not pursue the issue... and when it came to the vote [on authorisation] at the commission he merely abstained.

Even more explicit was Podemos General Secretary Pablo Iglesias, who attacked Cospedal from the right over the death of a pilot killed in a jet crash last October. He told her, "Patriotism is defending the rights of the professionals of our Armed Forces. It is shameful that in this country some who fill their mouths talking about our homeland do not respect the rights of workers who are here to protect us all and whose lives cannot be endangered."

Such statements prove Podemos is a pro-war party, offering itself as a reliable political platform for Spanish militarism. Since its foundation, Podemos has created branches in the army and made an explicit effort to articulate its main demands. Former Chief of the Defence Staff Julio Rodríguez Fernández has stood as a Podemos candidate in recent parliamentary elections and is the general secretary of Podemos in the municipality of Madrid, where he will be the party's main candidate in next year's elections.



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