

France sets aside €300 billion for military in 2019-2025 budget plans

Kumaran Ira
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While slashing wage levels and preparing deep cuts in basic social programs, French President Emmanuel Macron is forking over billions of euros to the super-rich and the military. On July 13, he promulgated the Military Planning Law (LPM) for 2019-2025, which will increase French military spending to 2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2025.

The military budget will increase €1.7 billion per year until 2022 and €3 billion per year starting in 2023. Total military expenditure over the period will be €300 billion. For 2018, it is €34.2 billion (1.82 percent of GDP), compared to €32.7 billion (1.77 percent of GDP) in 2017.

The increase in military spending underscores the fact that France is preparing for large-scale conflict amid growing tensions among the major world powers. Macron is also preparing to impose the draft for all young men and women, supposedly to bring the army closer to the people.

The military spending will go for:

- * Increasing regularly planned funding of overseas wars, which will go from €650 million to €1.1 billion starting in 2020. It was €450 million in 2017.

- * The acquisition of heavy weaponry for the army, including 100 modernised Leclerc tanks, 733 VBL light armoured vehicles, and 34 NH-90 helicopters.

- * Buying 28 new Rafale fighter jets, 11 A330 MRTT tanker aircraft, and 11 A400M heavy transport planes.

- * Building up France's nuclear arsenal, with spending going from €3.9 billion in 2017 to €6 billion per year in 2025. This is a 65 percent increase compared to the previous LPM budget.

- * Investing €4.6 billion in intelligence and €1.6 billion in military innovation, with the creation of 1,500 and 1,000 new jobs, respectively.

The rearming of French imperialism goes hand in

hand with drastic cuts in social spending and draconian police state measures targeting growing social opposition among workers. Increased military spending will be financed by vast cuts in basic medical care, housing, education and other social services.

As he increases military spending, Macron is promising to cut public spending as a proportion of GDP from 56.5 percent in 2017 to 52 percent. This represents a roughly €100 billion cut.

At the same time, he is slashing the Tax on the Wealthy (ISF), which will allow holders of large fortunes to increase them by billions of euro each year. The 13 richest people in France have increased their wealth by €23.67 billion since the beginning of 2018 alone.

To justify increasing the military budget, the French army points to the neo-colonial wars being waged across France's former colonial empire. In its 10 talking points on the budget, it claims that "our armies face a very high operational tempo, especially in the demanding theatres of the Sahel and the Levant." It continues: "In this context, we must satisfy the immediate needs of our armies in order to ensure the long term sustainability of our engagements."

Having already gone to war in Libya in 2011 and Mali in 2013, French imperialism is stepping up its military intervention in Africa and the Middle East, particularly in Iraq and Syria. Amid ever sharper international tensions, Paris is preparing new wars in its former colonial sphere to defend its imperialist interests, most notably the vast uranium mines in the Sahel that supply French nuclear energy plants.

There is a broad discussion in official circles concerning France's expanding wars in its former empire. David Lees, a lecturer on French studies at the University of Warwick, told RT that Macron "will now

be putting more emphasis on ‘la Francophonie,’ or the French-speaking world,” aiming “to dominate the French-speaking world.” He added, “There is potential, of course, that Macron will look to Syria and look to the issues in Syria as a way to potentially ensure that the French army deploys more in Syria in the future.”

Since 2011, France has waged war in Syria alongside the United States, backing Islamist and Kurdish militias in an attempt to topple Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. In 2017 and 2018, Washington, London and Paris have carried out multiple unprovoked strikes in Syria based on lying claims that the Syrian regime had used chemical weapons.

France’s reactionary rearmament campaign comes amid a vast escalation of military spending in Europe and throughout the world. The United States, whose government is openly threatening Russia and China, has carried out a spectacular increase in yearly military spending to reach €614 billion.

At the July 11-12 NATO summit in Brussels, Washington demanded that its allies pledge to boost military spending to 2 percent of GDP by the mid-2020s. Amid growing NATO threats against Russia that could provoke a global conflict among the nuclear powers, conflicts are also erupting within NATO itself, particularly between Washington and Berlin.

In this explosive and dangerous context, certain strategists of French imperialism are calling for a policy that is more independent of the United States, echoing the policy debate in Berlin. The increase in military spending is a key issue in this debate.

Speaking to *France Info*, Yves Boyer, an associate fellow of the Strategic Research Foundation (FRS) think tank, stressed that the European Union must “review its perception of the United States.” He added that “Europe, together with France, must re-think its security so that Europe can ensure it alone and in its interests.”

European rearmament is a warning to the international working class of the bankruptcy of the capitalist order. Caught in a financial and economic downward spiral for which they have no solution and impelled by the escalating crisis of their catastrophic wars in the Middle East and Africa, the European capitalist classes are furiously rearming, as in the lead-up to World War I and World War II. To fight against

austerity, workers will be required to carry out a political struggle against militarism and war.



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