Polish government announces massive rearmament programme

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Last week, Polish Defence Minister Mariusz Blaszczak, together with PiS party leader and Minister of National Security Jaroslaw Kaczynski, presented the "Plan for the Defence of the Fatherland." This provides for an increase in the target strength of the Polish army to 250,000 professional soldiers. Currently, the Polish armed forces number about 110,000 soldiers.

In addition, there are the planned 53,000 volunteers of the Wojska Obrony Terytorialnej, or WOT (Territorial Defence Forces), whose strength is currently around 30,000. This paramilitary militia is directly subordinate to the Ministry of Defence and, in the style of the US National Guard, serves both to support the regular army and to provide "internal security." The WOT also aims to "strengthen the patriotic and Christian foundations of the Polish system and armed forces," and is considered a stomping ground for right-wing extremists.

Kaczynski justified this "radical strengthening of the armed forces" with a worsened security situation as a result of Russia's "imperial ambitions" and the " hybrid attacks " by Belarus. The latter refers to the current situation on the Polish-Belarusian border, where hundreds of refugees are facing hunger, cold and death. The EU and the Polish government justify their brutal border regime by declaring themselves to be the victims. After Spain, Greece and Hungary, a border fence more than two meters high is now being erected on the Polish border.

In classic fashion, Kaczynski presented his orgy of rearmament as an act of defence and peacekeeping. He invoked the Latin proverb: "If you want peace, prepare for war."

Not coincidentally, information about the Polish military exercise "Winter 20" leaked to the public earlier this year. The exercise simulated a surprise attack by Russia on Poland. In keeping with the rearmament doctrine, Polish forces were devastated, and Warsaw surrounded after only four days. Comparisons were drawn to the "Blitzkrieg" of Hitler's Wehrmacht (army), with the conclusion: "Even worse than 1939."

In reality, the NATO powers are the aggressors. The military alliance has massively rearmed in recent years. This has been accompanied by a build-up of troops on NATO's eastern flank, the border with Russia. The largest manoeuvrers were "Trident Juncture," "Defender 2020," "Defender 2021" and "Sea Breeze."

Poland has a key role in NATO strategy as both a battlefield and a logistical hub. The PiS government is seeking to expand this role further and is seeking closer ties with US imperialism. Following the election of President Biden, however, relations have cooled considerably.

Nevertheless, at the inauguration of the 1st US Infantry Division's Forward Command Post in Poznan, Poland, in early October, Defence Minister Blaszczak stressed that expanding the US troop presence was one of his priorities in office. It is part of the 2,000-soldier increase in the US troop presence in Poland under President Trump. Poznan serves as the command centre for all US units operating on NATO's eastern flank as part of the "Atlantic Resolve" rotational deployment.

This rearmament initiative will also further exacerbate intra-European conflicts, both that between Germany or the EU and Poland, and the conflict between France and Britain. The latter has announced an alliance with the Visegrad Group (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary) and the Baltic states against France.

Defence reform has long been announced and was described by Kaczynski as the crowning achievement

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of his ministerial tenure. Although no draft law has been published yet, and thus no details are known, the scope of the planned measures seems enormous. The legislative package is to consist of 720 articles and replace 14 key laws, first and foremost the law on the general duty to defend, which has been in force since 1967.

One goal is to ensure the enormous increase in the defence budget from various sources and to make it largely independent of the official state budget. A "support fund" is being set up at the national development bank BGK specifically for this purpose. Revenues from government bonds, BGK bonds, the state budget and the profits of the National Bank of Poland are to flow into the rearmament programme.

The official military budget has also been increasing for years. It currently stands at around $12 billion, or about 2.2 percent of GDP. The Ministry of Defence has already announced additional arms spending of around $33 billion for the next 11 years. It has already signed defence contracts worth $17.4 billion in the last three years, including for two Patriot missile defence batteries, four Black Hawk helicopters, 32 F-35 fighter jets, 250 Abrams main battle tanks and three Miecznik class frigates.

Another goal is to attract more soldiers to the armed forces. While there is to be no reintroduction of conscription—at least for now—there will be, among other things, a one-year voluntary military service and more financial incentives. Blaszczak has announced plans to increase pay by about €130. Another financial incentive is a full scholarship for those who commit to five years of military service after graduation. There are also plans to increase the size of the reserve forces, for example by requiring an oath be taken after completing voluntary military service, which will also be remunerated.

In addition, the "Wojska Obrony Cyberprzestrzeni," or cyberspace forces, are to be established as a separate branch of the armed forces, and national crisis management is to be subordinated to the ultra-right WOT. As always when the ruling class speaks of "defending the fatherland," the rearmament is thus directed both outward and inward.

The Civic Platform PO, the largest opposition party, invariably criticizes the rearmament plans from the right. On broadcaster TVN, Tomasz Siemoniak, deputy party leader and until 2015 defence minister, mocked that this inflating of the armed forces in terms of numbers was totally useless. Instead, he stressed the need for a qualitative upgrade—especially in air and missile defence. At the same time, Siemoniak also called for a reserve of several hundred thousand. This would go far beyond the PiS plans known so far.

In general, it is clear from all the comments in the Polish media that there is only disagreement about how to upgrade the military. The differences revolve around whether equipment should be purchased or whether Poland should increasingly develop its own defence industry. It is also about fundamental questions of foreign policy orientation. While the opposition PO is calling for better cooperation with the EU, Kaczynski justified the massive increase by saying that in the event of war, it would be necessary to hold out until the NATO allies arrived.

The unanimity between PiS and PO in their demand for rearmament underscores the class nature of both parties. For weeks, doctors and medical staff have mounted the "Bia?e miasteczko" (White City) protests for improvements in the ailing health care system, only to hear from the Ministry of Health that their demands could not be financed. On the other hand, there are apparently endless resources for military rearmament.

In view of a rapidly spreading new coronavirus wave in Poland, the unscrupulousness of the Polish bourgeoisie becomes particularly clear. Due to the dismantling of all protective measures, infection figures have risen by over 50 percent within a week, and the 7-day incidence rate has skyrocketed to over 140 per 100,000. Poland has already suffered over 70,000 victims of the pandemic, one of the highest death rates in the EU. Whether in the pandemic or war, recent developments show how willingly the Polish bourgeoisie sacrifices hundreds of thousands of lives for its class interests.

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