

Spain's PSOE-Podemos government announces record military budget

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The Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government has announced the largest increase in military spending in history, including that under the military-fascist dictatorship of General Francisco Franco which ruled Spain from 1939 to 1975. It follows the decision of the German government to allocate €150 billion to the Germany army, the most since the fall of the Nazi dictatorship. This made Germany Europe's strongest military power overnight.

Last week, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez announced Spain's military spending would rise to 2 percent of GDP, more than double the current expenditure. This implies bringing the budget of the Ministry of Defense to €24 billion, more than double its current €10 billion budget.

Speaking to Spain's RTVE public television, Sánchez said Russia's invasion of Ukraine required a massive increase in military spending. He said, "We have woken up from a kind of mirage" since we thought that "at the gates of Europe a war was not going to happen, but we are living it, this is not a movie, it's real." Therefore, he assured, "common foreign and security policy and the complementarity between NATO and the EU must be strengthened."

He blamed Putin exclusively and his "expansionist desire," though Moscow's reactionary invasion of Ukraine was provoked by NATO's decades-long eastward expansion against Russia. Sánchez did not rule out that conflict could trigger a Third World War, which he says "must be avoided."

The truth is that the PSOE-Podemos government's promotion of militarism was already reflected in the Ministry of Defence's 2022 budget, which rose 7.92 percent over a year ago. The government's priorities are clear: it cut this year's health budget 17.3 percent amid the COVID-19 pandemic, which has seen 162,000

excess deaths in Spain according to *The Lancet*.

While it claimed there was no money for an elimination strategy for COVID-19, including lockdowns, contact tracing and subsidies to workers and small businessmen, and that the "economy could not stand any more lockdowns", it showered the military with billions.

In fact, total military spending is actually more than double the Ministry of Defence's budget, once military spending carried out by the Industry and Interior Ministries is counted. The latter runs the Civil Guard, an 80,000-strong force that carries out police activities, but which participates in foreign "peacekeeping missions", including operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Angola, Congo, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Haiti, East Timor and El Salvador. It also joined in the US-led neo-colonial wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

According to a report by the Center for Peace Studies, total Spanish military spending in fact reaches €22 billion, a 5.7 percent rise over the previous year. Investment in arms amounts to €4.5 billion. With the increase to 2 percent of GDP in the budget of the Ministry of Defence that Pedro Sánchez has pointed out, total military spending would rise to an astonishing €36 billion.

While officials claim the military spending increase is caused by the war in Ukraine, a rise in military spending has been planned for years. As in Germany, officials waited years for an opportunity to carry it out. The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party (Germany) have documented and condemned this conspiracy of the ruling class to resurrect German militarism.

Similarly, the PSOE and Podemos are seizing on the war to implement long-designed plans to promote militarism and raise military spending. The Spanish

Institute for Strategic Studies, a Spanish Ministry of Defence think tank, published in 2019 a document titled “The Defence Financing Law: an urgent need.” It called to spend 2 percent of GDP on the military. The main obstacle, however, is historically rooted opposition to Spanish militarism in the working class. It stated:

“The reduced spending on this item [Defence] in our country is nothing more than a reflection of the scant political and social importance given to Defence, the result of both a non-existent national strategic culture, scarcely promoted by the Executive, and the scant relevance given by political actors. Also contributing to this is not only the lack of interest from government agencies in promoting the culture of Defence, but also the lack of educational and informative work by the government that allows, both at the level of citizens and the rest of the political parties, to move forward, explain and maintain sustained growth in defence spending.”

Along the same lines, the Elcano Institute, a think tank in Spain whose honorary president is the King of Spain, published an article in 2017 entitled “Defence spending in Spain.” It said, “The increase of 2 percent of GDP should be assumed as an urgent need for National Security” and that to overcome resistance to this increase, a “strategic communication exercise” was needed.

This policy is massively unpopular among workers. According to a report by the Funcas foundation, only 21 percent of Spaniards consider the military budget to be low, and “public opinion is unfavourable to allocating state resources to the military.” On the other hand, 60 to 80 percent of the population thinks that insufficient resources are dedicated to health, pensions, care, scientific research and protecting the environment.

Working class memory of the past crimes of the Spanish ruling class have proven to be obstacles to remilitarisation since Franco’s death in 1975. The army was associated with vicious colonial wars in Northern Africa and South America, and extreme violence against the working class at home. In 1936, generals led by Franco who had led the suppression of anti-colonial Moroccan resistance launched a coup, in alliance with German and Italian fascism. This led to the deaths of 500,000 Spaniards in a civil war and a 40-year military dictatorship.

Nevertheless, efforts to revive Spanish militarism did not stop after Franco. Under PSOE governments in the 1980s and 1990s, Spain joined the main structures of post-war European capitalism: the European Union and NATO. It ended conscription, banned the military from making public political statements, and allowed women to serve, while modernising the army for the neo-colonial wars of the 21st century.

Key to consolidating the “culture of defence” has been the branding of wars as “humanitarian”—in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Libya—by social democrats, Stalinists and pseudo-left groups. The Stalinist United Left worked for decades to lull workers to sleep, promoting these as “humanitarian wars.” Podemos for its part recruited former Chief of the Defence Staff Julio Rodríguez, who led the Spanish army’s participation in the US-led neo-colonial wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.

The PSOE and Podemos intend for the working class to pay for Spanish militarism. Facing an unprecedented debt of 120 percent of GDP, they will impose further cuts in education, health care, pensions and social services. The PSOE and Podemos plan to crush social opposition and are already deploying 23,000 police to try to crush a nationwide truckers strike.

Podemos does not represent an alternative to this. While it claimed to oppose the budget, it was involved in the anti-Russia drive from the beginning, supporting NATO’s crippling sanctions against Russia and arming Ukraine. These weapons are now being used by the far-right Azov battalion, which has recently published videos of its members armed with weapons supplied by the Spanish government.



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