

While slashing pensions, Macron demands 40 percent hike in French military budget

Alex Lantier**23 January 2023**

As he pledges to cut €13 billion per year from pensions, French President Emmanuel Macron aims to raise military spending €118 billion over the next six years. On Friday, speaking at an airbase in Mont-de-Marsan, he announced a nearly 40 percent rise in military spending, to €413 billion in the period of 2024-2030.

As Macron and all the NATO powers spend billions of euros on waging war on Russia in Ukraine, this plan exposes the ruling elite's undisguised contempt for public opinion and the social needs of the working class. Macron's pension cuts are opposed by 80 percent of the French people. Yet he wants to transfer hundreds of billions of euros from retirees to the banks and the military, arguing that further, major escalations of the war are unavoidable.

Such announcements show that stopping the decimation of workers' living standards by austerity and inflation requires building a movement against NATO imperialist wars.

With NATO teetering on the brink of launching an all-out global war on Russia, Macron demanded that France prepare for further, explosive military escalation and high intensity wars. "We must never be one war late. We must be ahead by one war," Macron said, insisting that France must be ready for "more brutal and more numerous wars."

He announced a comprehensive modernisation of the warheads, missile launch systems of France's nuclear missiles, and an increase in the size of its ballistic-missile submarine fleet. Praising France's nuclear deterrent program, Macron said: "Deterrence is one issue that makes France a different country in Europe. We are seeing again in Ukraine its vital importance. It deserves the considerable efforts that we devote to it."

The budget expends enormous resources on the latest methods of spying and drone warfare. Macron announced a 60 percent rise in military intelligence and cyber warfare

budgets, increasing France's fleet of reconnaissance and killer drones, and building new air defense systems to scan for enemy drones, many of which can evade radar. The budget also allows for building a new aircraft carrier, replacing all Mirage jets with newer Rafale fighters and buying large quantities of the new Scorpion armored vehicle.

Macron called for a major increase in the French military-industrial complex's ability to put out large quantities of heavy weapons for use in overseas wars. Demanding to "build up our stocks of munitions, logistics capacity and support," he said: "We must be more alert, reinforce national emergency preparedness and have the necessary means for military intervention on little warning, even far from metropolitan France."

Macron called for France to be able to promptly deploy 20,000 soldiers capable of heavy combined arms operations.

He concluded by boasting that his presidency would entrench the vastly expanded power of the military high command in French public life, regardless of public opinion. Citing the 2019-2023 and 2024-2030 military budgets, Macron said: "Overall, the last two military budget laws will have led to a doubling of our military spending. ... These are considerable resources that are amplifying defense spending whose growth is without precedent since five decades."

This doubling of French military spending—to levels unseen since the era of the bloody 1954-1962 colonial war in Algeria—is, he said, "a profound change that will now be irreversible."

Macron did not spell this out, but the anti-democratic implications of this statement are self-evident: If workers' social and political demands interfere with Macron's "irreversible" decision to shower the high command with hundreds of billions of euros, they must be crushed.

His attempts to present his military build-up as a

defensive measure to deter attacks on French soil is thoroughly dishonest. It is belied, first of all, by the fact that he is calling to escalate spending on offensive weapons that are to be deployed overseas, far from France's borders. Moreover, with the France, like the United States, having declared that it may be the first to use nuclear weapons in a war, Macron's call for a nuclear build-up does not so much deter as threaten other countries.

It is increasingly clear, moreover, that the conception that a country can reliably deter attacks on its forces and soil by developing nuclear weapons is false. Russia has one of the world's largest nuclear arsenals, capable of destroying the entire world many times over. Yet NATO is arming Ukraine, on Russia's borders, and helping Ukraine launch attacks on Russian-speaking regions such as Crimea, on which Russia maintains armed forces and that Moscow claims as part of Russia.

The NATO war on Russia in Ukraine is the culmination of three decades of NATO wars since the 1991 Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union. NATO countries were the aggressors in these conflicts, attacking countries like Iraq, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and Mali in wars that altogether claimed millions of lives. The Russian capitalist regime's invasion of Ukraine last year was no doubt reactionary. However, it came after a 2014 NATO-backed coup in Kiev installed a far-right regime in Ukraine that attacked Russian-speaking areas of Ukraine on Russia's borders.

In 2019, Macron publicly criticized US policy towards Russia in *The Economist*, calling NATO "brain-dead" for risking direct war with Russia and stating: "When the United States is very harsh with Russia, it is a form of governmental, political, and historical hysteria."

After three years of rising class conflict and economic crisis since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, Macron has turned 180 degrees and embraced war with Russia, recently pledging to send Kiev French tanks to attack Russia.

Macron's pension cuts illustrate how French imperialism's policy of plunder overseas is inseparable from its drive to plunder the working class at home. The slashing of hundreds of billions of euros from pensions is intended not only to free up resources for French military operations overseas, but also to generate massive profits and tax cuts for major French corporations.

Social media reports have confirmed that provisions in Macron's pension-cutting law explicitly state that the purpose of cutting pensions is to allow the state to slash

corporate tax rates. The passage in question declares: "This curbing of spending will allow, without threatening the objective of controlling the budget deficit, to continue the strategy of cutting mandatory taxes launched in the previous term ... It will be pursued notably with the suppression over two years of corporate taxes paid on value added, as specified by the 2023 finances law."

Workers and youth cannot fight austerity and war by leaving the political initiative in the hands of labor bureaucracies and their pseudo-left political allies, like France's middle class Pabloite New Anticapitalist Party (NPA). Indeed, the NPA, like the General Confederation of Labor (CGT) bureaucracy, has explicitly endorsed NATO war in Ukraine.

In their lone article on Macron's military budget, the NPA-linked web site *Révolution permanente* argued for workers and youth supporting the union bureaucracies while protesting pension cuts. It wrote: "Right after a particularly massive protest against pension cuts, Macron's new announcement is a provocation against all those who protested. We should avenge this insult by mobilizing in the streets, workplaces and schools, making Macron take back his cuts, and refusing the reactionary military escalation he wants to impose upon us."

Macron's military budget shows that stopping the social assault on the working class also requires stopping the escalating campaign of imperialist war that the pension cuts are being used to fund. It does not suffice to "refuse" this escalation. An international mass movement of youth and workers must be built, independent of the pro-war middle class parties and union bureaucracies, against imperialism and war and in a struggle for socialism.



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