

# French National Assembly to examine €413 billion defense spending bill

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President Emmanuel Macron's government has begun examining the Military Programming Law (LPM) for 2024–2030 in the National Assembly. The bill would raise military spending to €413 billion over these years, or 40 percent more than the last LPM for 2019–2025. Debates on the LPM are to finish with a formal vote on the bill tomorrow.

The LPM is an illegitimate law, imposed by the political establishment against the will of the people, as the LPM is financed by the pension cut Macron has imposed on the French people without a vote and against overwhelming popular opposition. The LPM exposes the argument that the pension cuts, which eliminate €13 billion in yearly pension spending, are necessary to “save” the financing of pensions. In fact, there is plenty of money for pensions. The ruling just wants to spend it on war, not on retirees.

Macron is impoverishing the French people and trampling democracy underfoot in order to slash social spending and direct funds towards building the “European war economy” he has called for amid the NATO war with Russia. Indeed, the €17.7 billion increase in yearly defense spending is largely financed by the €13 billion per year now being cut from pensions.

French militarism depends on the tacit but very real support of the union bureaucracies and their pseudo-left political allies, who since the last mass protests against Macron's cuts on May Day have postponed action for a month, until tomorrow. The choice of this date also helped Macron avoid a debate on the budgetary priorities and the policy of military escalation that he is imposing on the French people.

Indeed, no nationwide protest against Macron was held until the Assembly had debated the bill and moved to vote on it.

The LPM vindicates the call of the Parti de l'égalité socialiste (PES) to bring down Macron via a general strike. According to polls, two-thirds of the French people want to block the economy via a strike in order to stop Macron's cuts—and, thus, the financing of the LPM. The struggle to bring down Macron is thus also a struggle against the military escalation that has already produced a NATO-Russia war in Ukraine and threatens to explode across all of Europe.

The LPM sets in place a highly aggressive rearmament policy for the French military. It includes massive spending on cyberwarfare, updating military equipment and modernizing France's nuclear arsenal.

As parliamentary debate on the LPM began, Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu said the law “is a sign of the return to harder competition between the great powers, against a backdrop of nuclear proliferation.”

General Jérôme Pellistrand, the editor of the *Revue Défense Nationale*, commented on the bill: “It is a significant budgetary effort. It will be useful. It comes amid a double context. There is an extremely fragile geopolitical situation, France's need to pursue and in fact restart an effort on defense, but also a domestic political situation where the French are being asked to make major efforts to finance their own defense. There is a feeling that these 413 billion euros must be very well spent.”

The military budget, which was already at €43.9 billion in 2023, will rapidly rise to reach 2 percent of France's GDP. Military spending will rise €3 billion per year until 2027, then €4 billion per year starting in 2028. It would reach €69 billion in 2030, compared to only €32 billion in 2017.

The LPM would give the navy a new generation of nuclear-armed ballistic missile submarines, whose construction is to begin in 2035, and a new aircraft

carrier to replace the Charles de Gaulle. Its construction will begin in Saint Nazaire and demand €5 billion. The air force will obtain a new generation of fighter jets, either the Franco-German Future Combat Air System (FCAS) or the Rafale 4.

The law also sets aside €5 billion for drones, €13 billion for overseas interventions, €10 billion for space and cyber warfare and €5 billion for intelligence operations. It also mandates €49 billion for equipment stocks and €16 billion to increase France's supply of ammunition.

The single largest item of defense spending, with 13 percent of the total budget, is the strengthening of France's nuclear arsenal. It foresees both the modernization of France's nuclear missile submarines with M51 missiles and also the modernization of nuclear missiles fired from French Rafale jets.

For over a half century, the French bourgeoisie has claimed that it was defending France via a policy of deterring attacks by holding nuclear weapons. It argued that no one would dare attack France, which has a nuclear arsenal large enough to destroy most of even the largest countries. Launched by President Charles de Gaulle in the 1960s, this deterrence strategy was aimed to guarantee France's national independence.

All these calculations are collapsing as Washington and NATO wage war on Russia in Ukraine, as a Third World War has in practice already begun. Indeed, this war shows that the simple possession of nuclear arms does not suffice to prevent direct attacks on a country's territory, or on what its government considers to be its fundamental national security interests.

NATO supported a coup in Ukraine in 2014 to install a pro-NATO, anti-Russian regime in Kiev, provoking a civil war and the secession of several Russian-speaking regions of the country. NATO then began arming its puppet regime in Kiev, which built up vast armed forces, heavily armed by NATO, near its borders with Russia. NATO implemented this policy even though Moscow, which has a massive nuclear arsenal, stressed that it saw this policy as an intolerable threat to Russia.

Finally, when Russian forces invaded Ukraine, Washington and its European allies not only armed Ukraine but applauded invasions of Russian territory by their neo-Nazi Ukrainian proxies. Thus the possession of nuclear arms by Russia has in no way deterred NATO from aggressively waging war on it.

To claim that today one can guarantee French workers' security by holding nuclear weapons is to deceive oneself or to try to deceive others. The greatest danger, indeed, is that the mounting NATO-Russia war in Ukraine threatens to lead the warring governments to utilise the vast stocks of nuclear weapons that they hold.

The urgent need in this situation is to build an international, anti-war movement in the working class to stop the war escalation and prevent the use of nuclear weapons. Defending the security and the living standards of the workers requires an international political mobilization of the working class. Indeed, no faction of the political establishment is opposing Macron's policies of austerity and militarism.

The union bureaucracies and their political allies like Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France party all remained silent on the LPM or refused to campaign against it. These forces have no perspective to offer to the struggle against Macron's pension cuts. Indeed, they do not oppose the militaristic policy that Macron needs the pension cuts in order to pursue.

To defend pensions and stop the war escalation, workers will have to organize independently of the bureaucracies negotiating with Macron. This requires the building of rank-and-file committees of action by workers and youth and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, together with an international anti-war movement to stop war policies like the LPM in France.



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