

France to spend \$33 billion on upgrading nukes to meet NATO commitments



Paris, Feb 10 (RHC)-- France is planning to spend \$33 billion (27 billion Euros) to upgrade its arsenal of nuclear weapons as part of a massive \$370 billion (300 billion Euros) military spending over the next few years to meet the NATO military alliance's requirements, the French defense chief has announced.

Speaking to the media in Paris, French Defense Minister Florence Parly said his country wanted to increase its military budget so that it can "hold its own" as a key power in Europe. "The government's goal is twofold: reach the target of spending two percent of GDP on defense by 2025, while also ensuring we manage our public finances," Parly said.

France spends 34 billion Euros or 1.8 percent of its GDP for military purposes, slightly less than the two-percent threshold set by NATO. Under the new plan, President Emmanuel Macron's government increases overall spending by nearly \$2 billion Euros a year starting from 2019 until 2022, when it will reach 44 billion. Then the budget would be bumped up by 3 billion Euros a year between 2023 and 2025.

By then, Paris is supposed to have completed the expensive revamp of its nuclear arsenal, with work on a third-generation nuclear submarine program and a new generation of airborne nuclear missiles already

underway today.

"We are going to make up for past shortfalls and build a modern, sustainable, protective army" that would allow France "to hold its own," said Parly. French military forces are currently deployed to West Africa on a declared mission to fight militant groups.

With thousands of French troops overseas, the new program allows the defense department to perform a host of upgrades on equipment, from bullet-proof vests to combat uniforms.

There will also be a 34-percent increase in spending on "modernizing weaponry," which includes buying new Scorpion armored vehicles, four Barracuda attack submarines and three multi-mission frigates, as well as a new fleet of Griffon multi-role armored vehicles.

There are also plans to develop new spy satellites, light surveillance aircraft, new Rafale fighter jets and armed drones. Air tankers are also on the long list of upgrades.

The development is a major reversal in France's military strategy over the past years and is expected to make U.S. President Donald Trump very happy. Trump has put NATO allies under pressure to increase their military budgets.

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