

Germany: Bundeswehr to become an army for foreign intervention

Ulrich Rippert
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Last month, former Federal President Richard von Weizsäcker presented the official report of his commission looking into Germany's military structures (*Wehrstrukturkommission*). The report has intensified persistent arguments over the function and future of the German army.

Only one year after the war in Kosovo, when for the first time since the Second World War German troops took part in a war of aggression, official German politics are once again discussing strategic interests, potential threats and war preparations. The debates suggest that the next recourse to weapons is already being planned. The proverb quoted by the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* — "If you want peace, prepare for war" — appears apt.

The commission, established during the Kosovo War by Secretary of Defence Rudolf Scharping (Social Democratic Party—SPD), originally planned to present the results of its consultations in September of this year. Chairman von Weizsäcker stressed that his commission needed sufficient time to carefully weigh the different points of view, since alongside military experts and party representatives it also contained trade unionists, church people and former peace activists.

The deputy chairman of the commission is Theo Sommer, one of the publishers of the influential weekly *Die Zeit* and a close associate of former SPD Chancellor Helmut Schmidt. Alongside DaimlerChrysler board member Dr. Eckhard Cordes, sat Lothar de Maiziere, the last prime minister of the German Democratic Republic in the east, and also, until his death in August of last year, the leader of Germany's Jewish community, Ignaz Bubis. The commission was seeking broad social consent.

Secretary of Defence Scharping did not want to wait until autumn for the report and pushed the commissioners to hurry. He tirelessly repeated the refrain that over the long term it was impossible to play in the "big leagues" economically if one was relegated to the "minors" in security and political matters.

Scharping complained that for years under the Kohl government, the German army (*Bundeswehr*) had been restructured "unmethodically and without aim" and could now only fulfil its NATO functions with difficulty. No more time could be lost, since, "due to its geo-strategic position in the centre of Europe, its size and economic power", Germany played "a key role for the organisation of a secure European sphere".

The Weizsäcker report draws the conclusions and implications of a development that has been purposefully advanced since German reunification: the transformation of the German armed forces from a territorial defence force, which within a short time can mobilise a mass army of 1.3 million men for national defence, into an internationally deployable army of intervention, whose major function is the "participation in crisis prevention and crisis management".

A new military doctrine was laid down in 1992, which declared that alongside national defence, intervention in areas of crisis would assume increasing importance. "Apart from their responsibility to defend their country, in a closely intertwined world our soldiers must in future also be

ready to share joint responsibility for the threatened liberty and well-being of other peoples and states.... German policy must be guided by vital security interests: the maintenance of free world trade and the unhindered access to markets and raw materials world-wide within the context of a fair international economic system" (Defence Policy Guidelines).

On this basis, foreign assignments for the *Bundeswehr* were systematically forced through, including those outside the NATO area. In 1991, Germany supported the Gulf War against Iraq, supplying weapons, ammunition, logistics and finance. A few months later there followed the "sanitary intervention" in Cambodia (1991-93).

During the Bosnian war in 1992, German AWACS pilots monitored the embargo against Yugoslavia and thereby played a clearly military role. In 1993, German soldiers intervened in Somalia ... and so on, up to the war in Kosovo last year.

The Weizsäcker Commission now suggests considerably increasing the capacity and scope of the *Bundeswehr* to intervene abroad, bringing the country's weapons systems and command structure into line with this task. The "size of the new *Bundeswehr*" should be determined by "the ability to participate simultaneously and without time limit in up to two crisis interventions".

Therefore the focal point of the proposals is an increase in the Crisis Reaction Force from 60,000 to 140,000, with a simultaneous reduction in the basic military organisation to 100,000 men. Instead of the present 323,000-man force, in the future only 240,000 will bear arms. However, of these, well over half are to be available for international combat missions, instead of less than a fifth, as is presently the case. The number of civilian employees is to be cut from 130,000 to 80,000, and the present 660 *Bundeswehr* bases decreased by 40 percent.

Parallel to slimming down the total number of troops while concentrating on concrete military functions, defence expenditure is to be greatly increased. According to the report, "expensive modernisation measures" are required: equipment must be brought up to modern standards, and investment in the military permanently increased. An additional two to three billion marks a year, over and above current planned allocations, are necessary. By the year 2010 some 120 billion marks will have to be disbursed.

The requirement to catch up is particularly acute in the area of transport capacity: "in view of the new spectrum of tasks, strategic air transport capacity (including capacity for mid-air refuelling) and efficient transportation by sea must be developed in close coordination with [our] European partners." The focus of future defence systems must be "precision armaments able to operate under all weather conditions".

The proposals of the Weizsäcker commission depart radically from the traditions of the post-war period, in which compulsory military service formed the basis of the *Bundeswehr*. Following the disastrous historical experiences with German militarism, the accepted doctrine after 1945 was that the "citizen in uniform", and not the career soldier, should form the backbone of the new army.

But according to the Weizsäcker commission, a reformed *Bundeswehr* should predominantly consist of career soldiers, accelerating an already existing trend. At present, barely half—134,000 of 323,000 soldiers—are conscripts completing their military service. The commission believes this number should be further lowered to 30,000, and proposes the replacement of compulsory military service with a so-called "selective military service".

Why such a low level of military service should be maintained at all is justified as follows: "in view of lasting foreign uncertainties, the structure of the armed forces should be flexible and have the potential to bring forward new people and a capacity for regeneration." This means that in a crisis situation, military service could rapidly be extended and the armed forces expanded to a "defence requirement of 300,000 soldiers" and "a personnel reserve of 100,000 soldiers".

In an interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Weizsäcker added a further reason: "We live in a time in which no one can say ... whether national defence will once again become necessary. For this reason, the retention of military service is important. Otherwise, reintroducing it would be a highly explosive step of internationally escalating importance, for which we could not take responsibility. Only the retention of military service preserves the necessary flexibility."

The commission's proposals break with tradition on yet another point: the command structure. After the fateful role that the general staff played during the Weimar Republic and Hitler's Third Reich, civilian control of the *Bundeswehr* was to be guaranteed by the absence of a general staff. The highest-ranking German officer, the general inspector, served only as an advisor to the Secretary of Defence and had no command authority.

The Weizsäcker commission is suggesting strong centralisation of the command structure. Under the chairmanship of the general inspector, an "intervention council" would be assigned the military command of future combat missions. "By assuming the chairmanship of the intervention council," the report states, "the general inspector would become the responsible chief-of-staff to the Minister for intervention matters." *Die Welt* commented that a general as chief-of-staff would not automatically become a "general chief-of-staff", but "the door is opened for the formation of a type of mini-general staff".

The secret services are also to be centralised, not least with a view to greater independence from the US. In order to improve the "national capability for the evaluation, analysis and assessment of intelligence", the *Bundesnachrichtendienst* (Foreign Intelligence), Armed Forces Office for Intelligence and the intelligence divisions of the individual services are to be united and moved to Berlin. It is urgently necessary, according to the commission, "to be able to promptly detect crisis developments and avoid one-sided dependency on the intelligence gathering of third parties."

While agreement prevails in all political camps about the development of the Crisis Reaction Force, the suggested restriction of military service has unleashed violent arguments. Hardly anyone, however, mentions the obvious danger that would follow from the formation of a professional army: the emergence of a military caste, which strives inevitably for social recognition and political influence. A first taste of what will come was provided by the public mass declaration of the *Bundeswehr* oath of allegiance and the associated persecution of army opponents.

Of all the parties, the Greens, who previously portrayed themselves as opponents of militarism, are particularly blind in this regard. They not only enthusiastically welcomed the Weizsäcker report, but are the only party arguing for a purely professional army.

Criticism of the proposal to reduce the number of those liable for military service to 30,000 essentially comes from two sides. Secretary of Defence Scharping, who, according to his own statements, agrees "80 percent" with the report (and even "100 percent ... regarding the balance sheet it draws, the analysis of potential threats and the capabilities of the armed forces"), regards conscripts as an indispensable recruiting ground

for a future professional army, and therefore wants to retain a substantially higher number of those liable for military service.

In his opinion, renouncing military service would result in the best and most intelligent of each year's potential recruits going immediately into business or an academic career. The army could no longer reach them, or would be forced to offer highly lucrative inducements. In the absence of military service, only right-wingers or those incapable of meeting the requirements for a career in business or research would be left to the army. "Then we will get only the stupid and the skin heads," was how some newspapers reported the Secretary of Defence's point of view.

Scharping's interest in maintaining military service is heightened by the fact that modern weapons technology requires highly trained specialists, making all the more critical access to new generations of high school and university graduates. The military would, according to Scharping, have the opportunity during the months of military service to convince some of the most talented young people to become career soldiers. Scharping supported his argument with examples from neighbouring European countries, where the transition to a professional army has already been carried out or is planned for the immediate future.

More far-reaching than Scharping's objections to restricting military service and reducing overall troop strength are those from the army itself, from the Christian Democrats and the conservative press.

On the one hand, they do not share the commission's estimation that the potential threat is such that there is no need for a perpetually ready defence army. In view of the unstable and entirely uncertain conditions in Russia, *Die Welt* writes, a large-scale military conflict in Europe cannot be completely excluded.

Moreover, conservative circles fear that the *Bundeswehr* could lose "its social acceptance", that through the "creeping abolition" of military service the connection could be lost between society and the army, which in every war forms the basis for the mobilisation of the population.

Above all, in the debate regarding military service and troop strength old conflicts are breaking out concerning Germany's foreign policy orientation. The suggestions of the Weizsäcker commission concerning a modern, internationally operational army of intervention correspond with plans for the development of a common European security and defence strategy, which have been accelerated since the Kosovo War. They are directed at the closer cooperation and integration of Europe's armed forces, aimed ultimately at overcoming American dominance of NATO.

This is precisely what the conservative opponents of the commission's proposals fear, and the retreat of the American armed forces from Europe connected with it. Thus *Die Welt* draws attention to the fact that a substantial part of the US military force of approximately 100,000 men, including NATO air defence, still in Europe are stationed on German soil. That was always regarded as an important contribution to Germany's security strategy.

The newspaper fears that reducing the territorial armed forces as suggested by the Weizsäcker commission would too severely limit the bases, airports and depots needed by the US:

"If Germany gambles away its ability to provide the major bases for American forces, which includes infrastructure and tactical anti-missile defence, then one must reckon with the removal of over 50,000 soldiers with 800 battle tanks, 440 artillery pieces, and US Air Force combat forces and air transport squadrons. In order to make the order of magnitude clear: that is the total strength of the British and French armed forces in Europe."

To what extent the resignation of General Inspector Hans-Peter von Kirchbach the day after the Weizsäcker report was presented has to do with such disputes is unknown. The general only said he had promised the secretary of defence to remain silent concerning his reasons for retirement.

In view of the complex questions and diversity of opinions concerning foreign policy orientation, Scharping would like to reduce discussion over

the restructuring of the *Bundeswehr* to a minimum. His ministry will immediately submit its own plans, and three weeks later parliament will finally decide. Under no circumstances does he wish the normally news-scarce time of the parliamentary summer break to be filled with a debate on these questions.



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