

Grand coalition government submits White Paper

New role for German Army

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Six decades after the end of the Second World War and 15 years after the reunification of Germany, the German Army is once again emerging as a force on the world stage. This is the central claim of the “White Paper 2006 on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr [German Military]” published by the Grand Coalition government (Christian Democratic Union, Christian Social Union, Social Democratic Party) at the end of October.

In the course of its 150 pages, the White Paper lays down the goals of German security policy and draws conclusions for the tasks and structure of the German Army. There have been a series of such White Papers since 1970, with the last appearing in 1994 under the government of Helmut Kohl (Christian Democratic Union—CDU). In the meantime, as the new White Paper states in its introduction, there have been “radical changes in the security environment.” On this basis, the new document draws sweeping conclusions.

There is no longer talk of national defence in the traditional sense—the defence of one’s own territory from external attack. The White Paper continues to appeal to the “values set forth in the Basic Law” (the post-war German constitution), which expressly forbids wars of aggression. But German security policy is defined in such a way as to include the possibility of preventive military strikes, interference in the internal affairs of other countries, and the defence of economic interests by means of military force.

“A viable security policy requires preventive, effective and coherent cooperation at both the national and international level, including an effective fight against the root causes” of conflict, the White Paper states. “It is imperative that we take preventive action against any risks and threats to our security, and that we address them in a timely manner and at their sources,” the document adds.

According to the White Paper, the defence of “national interests” requires preventing “regional crises and conflicts,” meeting “global challenges, above all, the threat posed by international terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction,” and promoting “free and open world trade as the basis for our prosperity.”

The preventive and global character of the new security policy is dealt with in more detail later in the document. “German security policy,” according to the White Paper, “is forward-looking. The new risks and threats to Germany and Europe have their origin in regional and global developments, often far beyond the European area of stability. They are multifarious and dynamic, and will spread if not addressed promptly. Preventive security can hence be guaranteed most effectively through early warning and pre-emptive action, and must incorporate the entire range of security policy instruments.”

In this “entire range of security policy instruments” the White Paper includes “diplomatic, economic and development policy” as well as “police and military measures,” and “where called for, military

interventions.”

Thus the German government is assuming the right to intervene militarily all over the world should it consider such action to be in its interests. Principles such as national sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, which were long regarded as fundamental precepts of international relations, are brusquely swept aside. The paper’s endorsement of preventive military strikes amounts to an implicit justification of wars of aggression—the central war crime dealt with at the Nuremberg Trials.

In this respect there is no difference between the stance taken by the White Paper and the so-called “Bush Doctrine,” laid down in the US National Security Strategy pronouncement of 2002, which legitimised “preventive military strikes” and served as justification for the illegal war in Iraq one year later.

Unlike the White House, the German government emphasises the importance of international alliances. The entire second chapter of the White Paper is dedicated to this topic and deals with the role of such international bodies as NATO, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the United Nations. However, the consent of such international organizations does not change the nature of preventive wars. Such wars serve imperialist interests, even if they have the benediction of the United Nations, the European Union or NATO.

The German government stresses the importance of international support because it lacks the economic and military strength to single-handedly pursue its military policy. Having lost two world wars in the last century, Germany fears nothing more than international isolation.

The White Paper makes little effort to cloak the imperialist nature of its new military doctrine. There are the ritual references to helping “uphold human rights and strengthen the international order on the basis of international law,” and “closing the gap between the poor and wealthy regions of the world.” But Germany’s claim to the role of a great power is clearly stated: “An important role in the future shaping of Europe, and beyond, falls to united Germany because of its size, population, economic power and geographical location at the heart of the continent.”

Economic interests, which lie at the heart of the new security policy, are openly formulated as follows: “Germany, whose economic prosperity depends on access to raw materials, goods and ideas, has an elementary interest in peaceful competition over thoughts and views, an open world trade system and unrestricted transportation routes.”

In order to undertake missions all over the world, the German army is being completely restructured and reoriented toward international deployments, with the necessary logistical support. This process is already well under way. “Over 200,000 soldiers have already taken part in international missions,” the White Paper boasts.

The armed forces are divided into three categories: combat, stabilization and support forces.

The total planned for combat forces is 35,000 soldiers. These are Special Forces, which are able to react and intervene in “crisis response operations.” The stabilization forces will include 70,000 men, and are intended “for multinational, joint military operations of low and medium intensity lasting an extended period of time and spanning the broad spectrum of peace stabilisation missions.”

The remaining 147,500 soldiers will constitute the support forces. Their task consists of “providing comprehensive and effective support for response and stabilisation forces during the preparation and conduct of operations, both in Germany and in mission areas abroad.”

In total, the German Army aims to make available “up to 14,000 troops which can be employed more or less concurrently and distributed over as many as five different operational areas.”

This restructuring comes at a price and calls for extensive investment in expensive high-tech weapon systems. In 2006, the government budget made available 27.87 billion euros for defence—the second biggest item in the budget. For the coming year, the defence budget will rise by an additional 480 million euros—the first increase in the German defence budget in 14 years.

This figure only partially reflects the real cost of military and associated outlays. The cost of the current German deployment in Lebanon (estimated at 147 million euros) is not included in the defence budget. In addition, a large proportion of the investment in new weapons systems will be obtained through a reorganisation of the defence budget. Thus, expenditure on personnel is to be substantially lowered by axing 42,000 civilian jobs attached to the military (out of a current total of 117,000).

The entire structure of command and leadership is also to be reworked. So-called “networked security structures” are planned which “interlink” in an “all-embracing” fashion “all relevant personnel, units, facilities, intelligence and reconnaissance and weapon systems.”

The White Paper states, “In future, it will no longer be the classic one-on-one situation on the battlefield that will be important. Rather, the goal will be to achieve information and command and control superiority” by means of digital information transfers and the Army’s own satellites. Alongside “success on the battlefield,” the aim is “to influence the enemy’s development of objectives.”

The “all-embracing approach” expressly includes the Federal Intelligence Service (BND), which is not part of the military. “In future,” the document states, “the Federal Intelligence Service will, as part of its statutory responsibilities, take over the task of central situation analysis . . . for the Federal Ministry of Defence and the Bundeswehr, contingent on their requirements.”

Cooperation has already increased in recent years between Germany’s foreign secret service agency BND and its military defence service (MAD). The BND has the authority to tap telephones within Germany if there is suspicion of involvement in “international terrorism.” In the recent period the organisation has illegally spied on German journalists. Further collaboration between the BND and MAD will inevitably mean an expansion of the role of the military in German domestic affairs.

According to the White Paper, “internal and external security is becoming increasingly interwoven.” The document explicitly argues for the use of military force inside Germany. Such interventions are presently forbidden by the German constitution. The White Paper therefore declares that “the Federal Government considers it necessary

to expand the constitutional framework for the deployment of the armed forces.”

All of the crucial changes in Germany’s post-war Army were already prepared under the Social Democratic Party (SPD)-Green Party government led by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD) and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer (Green Party). The “Outline for the Bundeswehr Concept” issued by Defence Secretary Peter Struck (SPD) in August 2004 anticipates the current White Paper.

Having won the election in 1998, but prior to actually taking power, the SPD and the Greens were called upon to take sides in the US-led war against Yugoslavia. The parliamentary delegations of the SPD and the Greens supported the NATO threat to bomb Serbia. Four months later, having assumed power, the SPD-Green government agreed the first foreign deployment of German troops for a war of aggression since 1945.

Three years later, on November 16, 2001, the SPD-Green government agreed to make German troops available for the “war against terrorism” in Afghanistan. A year later, Defence Minister Struck justified the deployment of German soldiers in Afghanistan with his famous remark that the “security of Germany is defended in the Hindukush.”

According to a news agency report, there are currently 10,111 German soldiers actively deployed in international missions, a large number of whom were dispatched as a result of decisions by the SPD-Green coalition. This includes 2,800 in Kosovo, 2,800 in Afghanistan, 2,400 patrolling the Lebanese coast, 950 in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 780 in the Congo, 270 in the Horn of Africa, 60 in the Mediterranean, and 51 acting as military observers in Sudan, Georgia and Ethiopia/Eritrea.

Between 1992 and October 2006, a total of 64 German soldiers lost their lives in the course of international deployments. Fifty six soldiers have died over the past eight years. Most of the deaths have occurred in Afghanistan.

The coalition of Social Democrats and former Green pacifists will go down in history as the government that initiated the process of breaking up Germany’s post-war consensus and reviving the deadly heritage of German militarism.



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