

Germany's ex-defence minister warns of a “cold military putsch”

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According to a recent report by *Spiegel* online, a key element of a proposed structural reform of the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) will be the strengthening of the position of the general inspector, the most senior figure in the German military. The command structure of the army is to be centralised, and the general inspector would have the power to name his own general staff.

In turn, the inspectors of the various branches of the armed forces (Army, Air Force, Navy, Medical Service) will lose influence and their leading role in the defence ministry.

The Bundeswehr management structures are no longer efficient, and the processes and procedures no longer meet the current requirements, according to the “guidelines to the planning of the new Bundeswehr”, published on 30 June by the defence ministry.

According to *Spiegel*, the body set up by Defence Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg (Christian Social Union, CSU) in April is using the reform of the military to overcome existing limitations and create a tight and efficient command structure.

Commenting on these plans, former secretary of defence Willy Wimmer (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) has warned of a “cold military p utsch”. In an interview with the weekly *Freitag*, Wimmer said “Certain military circles” wanted to “turn back history” and return to solutions that had been “used by the “Wehrmacht”; going back to “Prussian traditions, putting the military leadership at the centre of the state again.”

According to Wimmer, there are those in the leadership of the Bundeswehr who are presently considering “whether it could return to the grand old scale of things”. This tendency clearly questions “the primacy of politics” over the military. He warned that the “next thing to go after compulsory military service, would be the Parlamentsbeteiligungsgesetz [parliament participation law, laying down the authority of parliament over foreign military missions by the Bundeswehr]”.

After the experiences of the empire under Kaiser Wilhelm, the Weimar Republic and the Nazi period, the position of the

general chief of staff was strongly circumscribed in Germany, and parliamentary control over the military introduced. In the past, the position of the general staff meant the military took on the role of a state within the state to a certain extent. This contributed significantly to the preparation and execution of two world wars and the establishment of the Nazi dictatorship.

When the German Armed Forces were formally re-established on 5 May 1955, this historical experience meant the term “general staff” was no longer used, and the general inspector was the highest-ranking Bundeswehr officer, whose authority to issue orders only extended to the inspectors of the various branches of the armed services. This did not include the power to directly order military operations; as a battlefield commander would give orders to his troops, and for a long time the position was described as that of a “general without troops to command”.

Under conditions in which the crisis of capitalism poses new challenges and risks” to German imperialism at home and abroad, these restrictions are finally to be lifted. The call now is for a “general who can command troops”.

Against a background of substantial claims to power by the military, voices are being raised within the Free Democratic Party (FDP) urging caution. FDP defence policy spokeswoman Elke Hoff reportedly said that she did not know yet whether the party was prepared to accept the plans for reform.

The Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Green Party see things somewhat differently. Both expressed their support for Guttenberg’s plans to equip the highest-ranking Bundeswehr officer with greater powers. Rainer Arnold, the defence policy spokesman of the SPD parliamentary faction told *Spiegel* online that he considered it necessary that “the general inspector become the superior of the inspectors of the armed services in an operational sense”.

Likewise, Omid Nouripour, the security policy spokesman of the Greens, considers extending the powers of the general inspector to be correct: “In principle, I have nothing against enhancing the position of the general inspector—as long as

there are corresponding checks and balances.”

It is no surprise that the Greens and the SPD support Guttenberg’s plans. In 2002, the SPD-Green Party had already substantially strengthened the position of the general inspector, placing the Armed Forces Operational Command in Potsdam under his authority. Guttenberg’s plans for reform were already anticipated in part by the previous defence minister, Peter Struck (SPD), in 2004, when he issued an “outline conception of the Bundeswehr”. They are also in sync with the “White Paper on Germany’s security policy and for the future of the Bundeswehr” from 2006.

In the White Paper, “Germany’s security policy” was defined to include preventive military strikes, interference in the internal affairs of other countries and the military defence of imperialist interests.

These “tasks” still exist in the new guidelines, but are now subject to “asymmetrical dynamics”.

The strategy document describes the next decade as one of “rising threats” as well as “traditional and asymmetrical risks”, in which new national participants will take to the stage, whose “increasing political and economic weight will also challenge our values, standards and interests.” The effects of the financial and economic crisis are also regarded with concern, since they will limit “the possibilities of the Western world to determine the political order.”

Against this background, the guidelines define the tasks of the Bundeswehr on three levels. On the one hand, operations conducted in the context of “conflict prevention” and “crisis management”, including the fight against “international terrorism” remain the “most probable form of intervention”.

Beside this, however, national defence plays a role, which also includes “supporting allies in case of a longer lasting, intensifying crisis”. In addition, there are “supplementary measures” to “ensure security” in Germany itself, “including the ability to cooperate with other institutions of national security in the context of what is constitutionally possible”.

In future, the Bundeswehr will not only be used more in the course of wars of aggression, as in Afghanistan, and for the defence of the interests of German imperialism. It should also be able to suppress and defeat struggles by working people against the attempts to shift the burden of the crisis onto their shoulders—at home and abroad.

According to the guidelines, these “tasks” can only be mastered by a Bundeswehr that has been converted completely into an army of intervention. Therefore, all processes, actions and planning within the Bundeswehr will have to be considered from the “standpoint of intervention”. “Intervention orientation concerns the Bundeswehr as a whole. Intervention is the central process. Intervention orientation in this holistic sense requires the constant

alignment of the substantial processes of the Bundeswehr along these lines”.

To this end, the troop strength is to be reduced to between 150,000-205,000 soldiers. The abolition of compulsory military service and the establishment of a purely professional army are also being considered by the structural commission.

Parliamentary control of the military is no longer compatible with such an army of intervention. In a recent keynote address to the Bundeswehr leadership academy in Hamburg, Guttenberg characterised the constitutional requirement to obtain the agreement of the Bundestag (parliament) for armed interventions as an “occasionally arduous process”.

Over 70 percent of the German population oppose the war in Afghanistan and are deeply angry about the crimes of the Bundeswehr, such as the massacre at Kunduz in September 2009, in which about 150 people were killed in an operation ordered by German Colonel Georg Klein.

The ruling elite are using the Afghanistan war to gradually eliminate all the barriers that were imposed upon the military after 1945. The Bundeswehr reform is a considerable step in this direction. While the vast majority of the population abhors war and militarism, the ruling elite are working to re-establish the dominance of the military over society.

In his keynote address, Guttenberg made clear what he is demanding from the population: “Interventions and fighting” will in future move ever more strongly into the centre. The armed forces and “in particular also society” will have to display “readiness for interventions” and also “readiness to make sacrifices”. “A society that is no longer ready generally and also outside of the armed forces and the military to make a sacrifice, means its decline will be inevitable.”

These are the words of the German ruling class in the deepest crisis of capitalism since the 1930s. Lacking democratic traditions, the German bourgeoisie has always reacted to economic crises with the arming of the military, the establishment of dictatorial structures and wars. This “tradition” is now to be revived. Guttenberg can mean nothing else, when he says in his speech to the military leadership that “upholding tradition” has often been made “difficult” due to the Nazi period, “in particular a self-evident separation of all links to older German military history before 1933.”



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