

Germany's new military doctrine of "national self-assertion"

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Two months after taking office, the new Defence Minister Thomas de Maizière (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) introduced his plans to "reform" the armed forces. He has also published new guidelines that now form the basis of Germany's defence policy.

Rarely have the imperialist interests of post-war Germany been expressed as clearly in an official document as in this paper. "As an expression of national will and the self-assertion of state sovereignty to protect its national security, Germany is ready to deploy the entire spectrum of national instruments of action. This includes the use of the Bundeswehr [armed forces]", it states.

In the past, the official line was that the Bundeswehr was a purely defensive force. This is how it is described in the constitution. The concept of "defence" has been stretched considerably to accommodate Germany's participation in the wars in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan. However, until recently, there has not been talk in any official document of "national self-assertion". This language can be used to justify virtually any kind of war, including wars of conquest.

To achieve "national self-assertion", de Maizière wants to transform the Bundeswehr into a flexible intervention force, ready for use at a moment's notice anywhere in the world.

The number of soldiers is to be reduced from the current 220,000 to 175,000-185,000. But the new army will be much more powerful than the old one, since it will consist almost entirely of professional soldiers, rather than involve conscripts. Conscription was called to a halt by de Maizière's predecessor, Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg (CSU).

The Defence Ministry will also become much smaller. The workforce will be reduced from 3,500 to 2,000. Control and decision-making powers are to be shifted from the politicians and civil service to the military.

In future, the Inspector General, the highest-ranking soldier, "will be the superior officer of all soldiers" and "inspectors will lead their military divisions in the future outside the Ministry". This means that the commanders of the five branches of the military will stand outside the political mechanisms, and the military can act without democratic control.

De Maizière is not going so far as to re-establish a general

staff, but his plans go in that direction. The disastrous role played by the General Staff of the Reichswehr (armed forces) in the Weimar Republic and in Hitler's seizure of power is the reason why there is no German general staff today. The constitution enshrines the strict primacy of politics over the military. The planned reform will now soften this crucial institutional principle.

Now, there is hardly any mention of the savings measures previously used to justify the reduction in troop levels. The previous goal of saving €8.3 billion is only being maintained through mathematical sleight of hand. De Maizière has already indicated to journalists that he will probably simply move the personnel costs from the defence budget into another area. In this way he can achieve the target without really cutting a cent.

The cuts in civilian personnel—where a quarter of posts are supposed to go, some 76,000—should be seen in the same light. Here, much of the work that is currently performed by civilians in the Defence Ministry can be awarded to private companies that are paid from other budgets.

However, there will be no savings in armaments spending. After he had complained vigorously in the previous week about the current defence policy ("catastrophic"), de Maizière noted that the €5.1 billion spent annually in upgrading the military capacity of the armed forces would continue.

Here, too, de Maizière wants to enhance effectiveness and fighting power. All current military operations are to be put under the spotlight, with the aim of commissioning only "what is necessary and affordable". In addition, "the short-term response to immediate needs must be guaranteed".

The 20-page "Defence Policy Guidelines" describe in previously unprecedented clarity for what purposes the armed forces may in future be used.

First, the document presents a wide range of threats, which sees nearly every possible political world event as a potential external danger. In addition to "international terrorism", there is also "terrorist and dictatorial regimes, radical changes upon their downfall" and "migration trends".

The Defence Ministry also appears to regard as a threat the uncontrollable and independent dissemination of information through new technologies, which have played a key role in the popular uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East.

In that connection, the guidelines say “...irreversible changes in the field of telecommunications and information technology [lead] to the dissemination of often unevaluated information worldwide within the shortest possible time. This also opens up many opportunities for [spreading] misinformation by extremists and permits radicalization and destabilization”.

Another threat arises “from the shortage or lack of supply of natural resources and raw materials” —a concern that later in the document appears increasingly evident. Access to energy and raw materials should be secured using military force.

In the paragraph on “risks and threats” it states, “Free trade routes and secure raw material supplies are vital for the future of Germany and Europe. The exploitation, protection of and access to natural resources, distribution channels and markets are being reordered on a world scale. Shortages of energy and other raw materials needed for high technology are not without consequences for the world’s states. Restrictions on access may provoke conflicts. Disruption of transportation and the flows of raw materials and commodities through piracy and sabotage of air transport are a threat to security and prosperity. Therefore, transport and energy security and related issues will continue to play a growing role for our security”.

The field of operations is regarded as the entire world. The further away the army conducts war, the better it is for the security of Germany, according to the warped logic of the guidelines: “To ensure security for our country today means especially to keep the impact of crises and conflicts at a distance, and to actively participate in their prevention and containment”.

The Bundeswehr should also contribute to strengthening Germany against its imperialist rivals: “The ability to deploy the whole spectrum of force enables Germany to make a political and military contribution that is in keeping with its size, and thus to secure especially its voice in making plans and decisions. Only those with the capacity for undertaking joint missions can help shape the Alliance”.

Although Defence Minister de Maizière (CDU) had responded with reserve to the calls of Interior Minister Hans-Peter Friedrich (CSU) to agree to the deployment of the army at home, the defence policy guidelines foresee this. Significantly, they use the term “homeland security”. Following the September 11, 2001, attacks, under the name of Homeland Security, the US established a powerful security apparatus reminiscent of totalitarian states.

“Homeland Security is a pan-governmental task”, according to the guidelines. “The contribution of the Bundeswehr to Homeland Security includes all the capabilities of the armed forces to protect Germany and its citizens on German territory”. This applies explicitly also to the “protection of critical infrastructure and during internal emergencies”.

In face of the escalation of the war in Afghanistan and the increasingly frequent confrontations with the civilian population, the final sentence of the document is remarkable. It

states, “The soldiers of the Bundeswehr will better adopt and fulfill their professional self-image in action for our security and the protection of our citizens the more receptive and understanding German society recognizes and appreciates the specific features of the soldier’s service and the contribution of the armed forces as a whole for Germany”.

Conversely, this means that public criticism and a lack of moral support from the “home front” undermines the mission in Afghanistan or—as the Nazis put it—corrodes the armed forces. It is an undisguised signal to make anti-militarism punishable again.

De Maizière’s plans are supported not only by the ruling parties CDU/CSU and Free Democratic Party (FDP) but also by the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens. The SPD and Greens favour the proposed Bundeswehr reform in principle, are making their own suggestions, and at most are only critical on questions of detail.

In particular, they criticise the volunteer model that will replace conscription. Plans to increase the attractiveness of the soldier’s occupation were “discouraging and uninspired”, complained the defence spokesman of the SPD Rainer Arnold.

Green Party spokesman Omid Nouripour merely criticised the presentation of the reforms. One does not reach all parts of society “by only promoting it in the Springer press,” he said in an interview with the *taz*. Fundamentally, however, he is in full agreement with the Minister of Defence: the reforms have to be successful because “neither efficiency nor transparency currently prevails in the [government] offices”.

The criticism of the Left Party is especially hypocritical. What the media sometimes called “fundamental criticism” (*tagesschau.de*) is really only a fig leaf for a reform-minded opposition.

Just recently, the Left Party ex-chairman and Euro-MP Lothar Bisky called for a no-fly zone over Libya, which was followed by the bombing of the country. Now, in the person of its defence expert Wolfgang Gehrcke, the Left Party is demanding that the Bundeswehr must be limited to “national defence”. Of course, the concept of “national defence” has been used for 10 years by all German governments to legitimise the war in Afghanistan. The new defence policy guidelines define “national defence as a defence alliance within the framework of the North Atlantic Alliance”.

Similarly hypocritical is Gehrcke’s proposal that the money invested would be “better used for development or education policy”. The biggest education cuts in Germany are not being carried out by a CDU/CSU federal government but by the SPD-Left Party coalition that controls the Berlin city government.



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