

German defence minister restructuring army for worldwide operations

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Last Saturday the German Defence Minister Thomas de Maiziere (Christian Democratic Union-CDU) told German radio that in principle the German army could carry out military operations anywhere in the world.

The criteria for such interventions, he continued, must be based on how high the price would be in terms of "money and blood", and what other factors should be considered. "We cannot simply say it's none of our business," the minister said. "Those days are long gone following 1990."

It is now "also part of our role in the world as a leading power in Europe to fulfill international responsibility, even if we are not obliged to," he said. There needed to be a public debate about such issues in order to "electrify" the population on the need for an aggressive foreign policy.

On this basis de Maiziere welcomed the recent speech by the German President Joachim Gauck to the Bundeswehr staff college, in which Gauck called on the population to give their utmost for Germany, even "life, one's own life."

The latest statements by both de Maizière and Gauck are aimed at polishing up the reputation of the military and rehabilitating war in Germany. They are seeking to overcome widespread opposition to militarism and establish a degree of support amongst certain social layers for a re-militarization of society and the restructuring of the Bundeswehr into a powerful intervention force. This process is already quite advanced, with the support of all the leading political parties and in the absence of any public debate.

Substantial changes in the structure and equipment of the armed forces are to be completed by the year 2013.

The explicit aim of the reform is "intervention orientation, increasing efficiency and streamlining" the army. This is to ensure that Germany can in the future

pursue a much more aggressive foreign policy. Its role model is the US, where armed forces can be sent to any part of the world on short notice.

The Defence Ministry emphasizes that what is being undertaken is not just an organizational reform. "What is novel is not just the new structures and procedures. Rather, it is also a new self-understanding," the Ministry website declares.

With its missions in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan, the German army had long departed from its post-World War II role as a purely defensive army, but nevertheless it remained reluctant to publicly describe these actions as wars.

After the undermining of this longstanding political taboo, the stage is now being prepared for military interventions on an unlimited basis, in the face of massive popular opposition.

In 2012 the army has already made significant progress in this respect. Conscription has been done away with and the Bundeswehr is now a volunteer army. This is aimed at encouraging professionalization and the specialization of the army. At the same time the number of active soldiers will fall to around 185,000. Thirty-two army locations are to be closed nationwide.

The changes also extend to the officers level. Last year it was revealed that the highest-ranking soldier in the army, the Inspector General, was to be equipped with new powers.

The changes are dealt with in the so-called Dresden Decree of March 2012, which states that for "the first time the armed forces, including the inspectors of the various army units, will be subordinate (to the Inspector General) in every respect."

In the future he will be the supreme commander of all troops, a power not held by any German military officer since 1945. He will at the same time receive more powers and assume control over all foreign missions. The operational and tactical leadership, up to now shared by the Defence Ministry and the Joint Operations Command in Potsdam, is to be fully integrated into the uniformed military.

Inspectors of the armed forces will be separated from the ministry and therefore freed from any political control. Their current dual role in the ministry and army is increasingly "a mutual disability," de Maiziere said. In future they should be "more soldier than departmental head."

In the first decades after World War II such a leadership structure was unthinkable. The memories of the army as a "state within a state" and the totally anti-democratic traditions of the German officer corps made it impossible to install a strong military leadership against the resistance of the population. Instead, the official line was to stress the primacy of civilian control.

This conception is now to be finally buried with the Bundeswehr reform. The creation of "a new military culture" for the army meant that "the worries of the past were no longer relevant," the minister declared. "We no longer need to compete against ghost-like arguments. We no longer have to make decisions with an eye to the danger of organizational abuses, but rather what we need and find correct today and for the future."

These comments are aimed at sweeping aside any restrictions on German militarism and establishing an army capable of intervening all over the world to secure the interests of German imperialism.

The reform does not involve the explicit creation of an independent General Staff. Such a step evokes too many memories of the German past. But the freeing of inspectors of the armed services from civilian oversight and the elevation of the Inspector General are major steps towards a more powerful military command able to operate independently of democratic institutions.

In addition to establishing autonomous and centralized management structures, the restructuring promotes changes in armament. One such project, "Future Soldier", is to be completed and delivered next year. It includes the latest in combat, reconnaissance and guidance equipment.

The army has also purchased 560 new G-28 weapons

and nearly 200 armored transport vehicles. These are weapons of war designed for so-called "asymmetric threats".

The Defence Ministry has remained silent about the cost of the reform. Originally, cost reductions were given as one of the main arguments for restructuring the armed forces, but, according to *Der Spiegel*, costs have now risen to 1.3 billion euros.

In order to implement the restructuring of the armed forces, the Defense Department is also undertaking an ideological offensive led by de Maiziere and Gauck, combined with a massive advertising campaigns directed at young people.

At the last "Girls Day" (a day when girls nationwide are invited to test out "men's jobs"), the army was one of the main employers on offer. Offers in the civilian sector, such as military administration, were directed clearly at youth as young as ten.

All this is taking place with the support of opposition parties. They have criticized some details of the reform, such as the closure of certain army bases, yet-to-be-clarified retirement issues for soldiers and other such questions. There was, however, no fundamental criticism of the army reform.

On the contrary, Social Democratic Party spokesman Rainer Arnold criticized what he described as the lack of powers of the Inspector General, arguing that he should be freed even more from any political accountability.

The Left Party has raised a number of objections to the reform, but has refrained from taking any concrete actions and has actually contributed to the decisions taken. The Left Party has its own member, Christine Buchholz, on the Defense Committee of Bundestag, and maintains the committee's vow of silence on all of the secret deals aimed at beefing up and transforming the German army.



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