German government planning major military build-up

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The German government is using the mounting conflict between NATO and Russia to massively rearm the military. This is underscored by an article in the latest edition of the weekly news magazine *Der Spiegel*.

The title page of the article sums it up. Defence minister Ursula Von der Leyen stands before a tank smiling, surrounded by German army soldiers armed to the teeth. This is the gruesome smile of German militarism, which is attempting to return to the world stage after two world wars and horrific crimes.

Under the cynical title "Leopards live longer," a reference to the German tanks of that name, the article provides an insight into the West's military plans. NATO is to be transformed into an anti-Russian alliance and significantly expand its influence in Eastern Europe. Germany is playing a central role in this. Leading German politicians and military strategists are calling for a massive programme to rearm the army. "The debate cannot be stopped, and the arms industry senses an opportunity for good business," according to *Der Spiegel*.

The article first investigates the fundamental policy decisions by the imperialist powers that are once again turning to open confrontation with Russia. Then it describes the consequences for Germany that will arise from this.

"The cooperation firmly established with Russia over the years was officially abandoned last week," *Der Spiegel* states. "As a result, Moscow is no longer a partner, but an opponent. This determines the next step, even if it leads back to the past: how does military deterrence, a concept which has not been heard in Western Europe for so long, work in 2014?"

The authors consider tanks and military equipment, and determine that the "deterrence potential" of the German army has been sharply reduced in recent years through its transformation from a "defensive" into an "intervention force."

"Prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, deterrence was based on the potential destruction by nuclear weapons of differing ranges, and hundreds of thousands of soldiers with heavy equipment, mainly tanks," the article notes. At that time, the German army alone "even during peacetime had around 495,000 men in uniform," in addition to 4,100 Leopard tanks and almost 600 planes.

But since then, the military budget was "cut from 3 percent to 1.2 percent of gross domestic product. The German army has just 185,000 men, is to be cut further and is equipped more for rapid foreign interventions than for territorial defence." Instead of "tank divisions and field guns at the Fulda Gap," there are "paratroopers and helicopters for Kosovo, Afghanistan or a crisis country in Africa."

The message, which is appearing with increasing frequency in the German media, is unmistakable: After years of reducing troop numbers and heavy military equipment, it is now time to rearm!

Der Spiegel cited the head of the Kiel-based Institute for Security Policy, Joachim Krause, who stated, "Defence policy has focused on peace missions under relatively favourable conditions. The current crisis has made it painfully clear that this was perhaps too one-sided and naïve. Therefore the defence ministry has to fundamentally reconsider its purchasing plans."

Social Democrat (SPD) defence policy spokesman Rainer Arnold struck a similar tone, saying, "We have to consider whether the uncontrolled reduction of our tank fleet within NATO was correct. In Europe, we need to jointly develop drones as quickly as possible. The decision about the 'Euro-hawk' drone should also

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be reconsidered." This was in reference to a German government-sponsored project to develop drones, which was abandoned last year.

According to *Der Spiegel*, the defence ministry is already working on the build-up of NATO in Eastern Europe. Defence minister Von der Leyen ordered "top generals to review what further support can be provided through the alliance for the eastern member states." It appears as though they "will propose joint military exercises with the Polish and Baltic armies," the countries that are the strongest advocates of an aggressive role for NATO in Eastern Europe. Just last Tuesday, Polish foreign minister Radoslav Sikorski called for the stationing of two NATO brigades (around 10,000 soldiers) in Poland.

Der Spiegel reported on NATO plans that would effectively be a declaration of war against Russia. "Important military sources in NATO are appealing internally for an increased readiness of western land and air combat forces. Currently it would take 180 days for the vast majority to mobilise and be ready to intervene. This timescale is to be reduced. This will have an impact on at least 10,000 German army soldiers. In addition, according to the military sources, tank divisions were to be strengthened and munitions dumps replenished. It would be the comeback of the German 'leopard' tank."

At the same time, *Der Spiegel* sought to portray German politicians as being forced to act by events rather than driving them. German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier understood Germany's policy on Ukraine as "pure diplomacy" and advocated a "course of de-escalation." The defence minister was opposed to sending heavy military equipment and permanent troops to Eastern Europe. The German government viewed the NATO strategy with "extreme scepticism and would prefer to ignore the issue."

This is utter nonsense. In reality, the plans of NATO to rearm express the new direction in German foreign policy, which is supported by all parliamentary parties. At the beginning of February, defence minister Von der Leyen, Steinmeier and President Joachim Gauck announced the end of military restraint at the Munich security conference. The German bourgeoisie now views the crisis in Ukraine, which it provoked, and the NATO offensive against Russia as an opportunity to turn to German imperialism's traditional sphere in the east and rearm.

However, the drive to war within the ruling class is meeting broad opposition. The latest poll by public broadcaster ARD illustrated that a policy of increased security in Eastern Europe was opposed by the majority of the German population. Only four in ten spoke out in favour of strengthened air surveillance in Eastern Europe, while 53 percent opposed it. "German army involvement in related measures would be very unpopular here," according to the poll. "Only one in three (35 percent) believed German engagement was correct, while 61 percent rejected this."

The pollsters did not dare to ask about the sending of NATO troops to Eastern Europe, the reintroduction of conscription or the massive rearming of the German military. All of these plans are currently being discussed by the ruling elite, but are even more decisively opposed by the population.

Plans to deploy the army domestically in the future must be seen in this context. On Monday it was announced that the interior ministry would soon be seeking to change article 35 of the constitution, in order to make it easier to shoot down "terror planes." In conditions of immediate danger, the defence minister is to give the order alone for the intervention of the air force, *Spiegel Online* reported.

The timing of this attempt makes clear that the German government is not concerned with a struggle against terrorism, but the use of the army domestically, which is strictly limited by the constitution. Should these limits be overcome in one instance, the military could once again be used to suppress social opposition.

In recent months and weeks the government has not once given a concrete warning of a terror attack. But they have initiated an aggressive course in foreign policy that is opposed by the vast majority of the population. The massive military build-up must be seen as doubly threatening. In order to return to an imperialist foreign policy on a global scale, Germany's bourgeoisie is prepared to brutally suppress all domestic political and social opposition.

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