

NATO urges major military build-up

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Germany and other European NATO members are using the crisis they provoked in Ukraine to justify an intensive campaign of rearmament. NATO representatives, defence politicians and journalists are closely interacting in this campaign.

The leading role is being played by outgoing NATO General Secretary Anders Fogh Rasmussen, who in a number of interviews over recent weeks has been promoting the deployment of NATO combat forces to Eastern Europe and a massive increase in national defence budgets.

In the course of visits to Poland and Estonia, Rasmussen confirmed that NATO's commitment to collective defence was "steadfast, now and in the future." On Romanian television he promised that NATO was ready "to defend every inch of your territory." He also described neighbouring Moldova and Ukraine as "partners of NATO."

Then on Monday, the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* published an article that described Rasmussen's statements as "empty words" and "a cry in the wilderness." The NATO alliance had "little to offer," it stated. It was unable to adequately defend itself. "In the event of attack, it would be more likely to break apart than fight."

The article was based on internal NATO documents, some of which had "the highest level of secrecy" and on a "draft for a comprehensive, secret inventory of NATO" as well as several papers "from responsible military and political sections of NATO." In other words, the article was based on documents that most likely had crossed Rasmussen's desk. Its main author was Nikolaus Blome, who unexpectedly moved to *Der Spiegel* last October after 16 years working for the right-wing Springer publishing house.

The papers cited by *Der Spiegel* warn of a Russian attack on NATO members in Eastern Europe and conclude: "The alliance is not currently in a position to

defend the Baltic with conventional weapons, that is with tanks, planes and ground forces."

From the end of the Cold War, the conclusion had been drawn that "these capabilities, which were required to fight in conventional, wide-ranging, high-intensity conflicts in Europe, could be reduced," the news magazine states, quoting from a NATO paper. Now NATO was forced to rethink.

NATO military forces expressed themselves even more explicitly internally, according to *Der Spiegel*: "There are weaknesses among tank units and infantry. The combatting of mines and submarines has also been neglected, as well as air defence with anti-aircraft guns and patriot missiles. Pilots are poorly trained for air combat; exercises with large units: no chance. To summarise: NATO has lost a dangerous amount of its power for a ground war in Europe with large units of troops."

Rasmussen responded immediately to *Der Spiegel*'s report and demanded the reequipping of NATO. "What we have seen in Ukraine is incredible," he said in Brussels. Russia had assumed the right "to intervene in other countries." "So we have to update our defence planning, make new defence plans, have more exercises and consider appropriate deployments."

He called for a massive increase in defence spending. "In the last five years, Russia has increased its defence spending by 10 percent annually," he claimed. "At the same time, we have seen drastic cuts above all from European allies, in some cases by 40 percent. In the face of the new security situation, we cannot go on like that."

Rasmussen was supported by several newspaper commentators. On *Spiegel Online*, Nikolaus Blome called for a public debate about "how much money and effort NATO's promise is really worth to us if Russia continues to act aggressively."

Daniel Brössler in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*

complained of Russia's supposed readiness "to alter borders in Europe by violent means." If NATO were not in a position to defend an ally like Latvia from a Russian attack, the alliance would be worthless. This was virtually forcing the alliance "to discuss credible deterrence."

NATO defence ministers will meet in Brussels 10 days after the European elections on June 3 and 4 to discuss the new orientation of the military alliance. Then in September, a NATO summit in Wales is to decide about it. Until then, the military build-up against Russia is to be intensified and public opposition overcome.

The efforts by NATO to rearm, and its aggressive actions towards Russia, are highly unpopular. A poll in Germany, conducted by the Koerber foundation on behalf of the foreign office, concluded that 60 percent of those questioned opposed a greater involvement in foreign policy by Germany, which the president and government have been promoting for months. Military interventions and even weapons exports to allies were supported by just 13 percent!

The foreign office, under its new head Frank-Walter Steinmeier, is engaged in an intensive campaign to change public opinion. On Tuesday, it organised a conference in Berlin on German foreign policy, where around 40 experts from across the globe called for Germany to adopt a more aggressive foreign policy. The proceedings were broadcast by Deutsche Welle as a live stream. During the summer, public meetings are to take place throughout Germany on the same theme.

For this purpose, the foreign office has created the web site "Review 2014: Re-thinking foreign policy". On it there are contributions such as "German foreign policy: Economically strong and politically weak," "Germany can and must find its global role," and "Germany's destiny: Leading Europe in order to lead the world."

Steinmeier's role in Ukraine must be seen in this context. In close collaboration with Washington, the German government supported the coup in Kiev. It brought a right-wing pro-Western regime to power with the assistance of fascist militias, which has met with resistance mainly in the east of the country.

Now Steinmeier is playing the part of a mediator who is attempting to prevent a civil war with round table discussions, while he continues to support the violent

measures of the Kiev regime against the opposition. The pose of a mediator is directed above all at the German public. It is to give the false impression that responsibility for the escalation of violence does not lie with the German government and its allies. This attempt at deceiving the public is supported by virtually the entire German media, which is either providing one-sided reports from Ukraine or shamelessly lying.

One of the few who has steered clear of this chorus is former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt. In an interview with the *Bild* newspaper, the 95-year-old accused the EU commission of "megalomania" because it was trying "to integrate Ukraine" and "to draw Georgia closer."

"We have nothing to look for there," he said.

Schmidt spared his party colleague Steinmeier and made "officials and bureaucrats in Brussels" who "understand very little about it" responsible for the escalation of the crisis. But long-term EU commissioner Günter Verheugen, also a Social Democrat, promptly contradicted Schmidt. He noted in an open letter that all important decisions had been taken by national governments, including those by Steinmeier.

Schmidt also left no doubt that he took the danger of war provoked by the EU seriously. Responding to the question, "Do you see Europe in the abyss as in 1914 before the world war?" he answered, "The situation seems to me to be increasingly comparable. Europe, the Americans and the Russians are behaving, as Christopher Clark described in his book about the start of the First World War, like sleepwalkers."

He ended with the sentence, "The danger that the situation deteriorates as in August 1914 is growing daily."



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