

# Der Spiegel calls for military build-up in Germany

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While the German government is sending its first troops to Iraq and preparing to deliver arms, *Der Spiegel* is lamenting what it calls the decrepit condition of the Bundeswehr (armed forces) and calling for an increase in the defence budget.

Under the headline “Appearance and Reality,” the latest issue of Germany’s largest circulation news magazine criticizes the policies of Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen. The tenor of the article is clear: If Germany wants to be more involved militarily in the world, it needs a suitably equipped army.

*Der Spiegel* sees a major problem and claims that the state of the Bundeswehr’s equipment is “disastrous.” This is despite the fact that the defence minister has, more than any other member of the government, distanced herself from the policy of “military restraint” advocated previously by all post-World War II German governments, including, in recent years, that led by current Chancellor Angela Merkel and former Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle.

At the Munich Security Conference in January, von der Leyen made it clear that indifference was “not an option for a country like Germany.” Faced with possible genocide, she declared, Germany was “almost doomed to take on more responsibility.”

“But how will that work with the Bundeswehr?” asks *Der Spiegel*.

German troops are not ready for the new situation, either in terms of personnel or equipment, the magazine writes. It cites a number of major problems, including the military’s “dilapidated equipment.”

Remarkably, *Der Spiegel* begins its critical survey with the Luftwaffe (Air Force), which is of particular importance for a powerful imperialist intervention force. The magazine quotes a “confidential report” by the Luftwaffe to the Defence Ministry indicating that “almost the entire German Euro Fighter fleet is lame.” The report

concludes that the Luftwaffe needs “a major repair operation.”

In large diagrams, the reader is confronted with the “dramatic situation” in relation to combat aircraft and transport planes. Of 109 Euro Fighter jets in the inventory of the Bundeswehr, only eight are fully operational, *Der Spiegel* writes, a particularly “awkward” problem for the government because it has promised to send up to six of these planes to the Baltic States beginning next week. There, the planes are to monitor the airspace in the Russian border region.

In the logistics sector too, the situation is disastrous, the magazine writes. Of 67 CH-53 transport helicopters, only seven are currently airworthy, while just five of 33 NH90 machines are operational. There is a severe shortage of spare parts and qualified mechanics.

The army is also under enormous pressure, according to *Der Spiegel*. The prescribed interval of 20 months between foreign missions is often not maintained, leaving many soldiers exhausted.

This is mainly due to a lack of new recruits. Despite an annual budget of 30 million euros for advertising, the Bundeswehr is unattractive, especially for qualified specialists. “Too few young men and women feel the urge to take up poorly paid positions in the army,” says the magazine.

In particular, at the level of noncommissioned officer and in the Navy there are no junior staff entering the ranks. *Der Spiegel* cites the ending of conscription in 2011 as the reason. Since then, the Bundeswehr has sought 60,000 new recruits every year and spent millions on advertising. Without saying it openly, the *Spiegel* authors suggest that the simplest solution would be to reintroduce conscription.

In any event, the defence budget must be urgently increased. Otherwise, the announcement of a more active German role in international crisis zones remains empty

talk, the magazine writes.

It complains that developments are currently going in the opposite direction. This year, the defence budget decreased by 400 million euros to 32.8 billion, and is slated to shrink further to 32.1 billion in 2016. By international standards, Germany's military spending as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) is relatively low. Even little Denmark spends proportionately more, the magazine writes scornfully.

The NATO summit in Cardiff, which starts next weekend, will set a minimum baseline for military expenditure at two percent of GDP. Germany's current defence budget stands at 1.29 percent. Implementing the new standard will mean increasing spending on the Bundeswehr every year by about 18 billion euros.

*Der Spiegel* is using the NATO summit to put the defence minister under pressure from the right, claiming that von der Leyen is shirking the debate over defence spending because Merkel's highest fiscal priority is a balanced budget. *Der Spiegel's* demand for increased military spending means imposing further austerity measures and cuts in social spending to finance the army.

Since the open turn to great power politics and militarism earlier this year, the government has made it clear it is willing to assert its foreign policy interests with military force. In Ukraine in February, it orchestrated a coup together with the US that brought to power in Kiev an anti-Russian regime resting on fascists and anti-Semites. Now it is using the ISIS offensive in Iraq to intervene in the Middle East.

This offensive is accompanied by a media propaganda barrage that aims to intimidate and silence opponents of war. *Der Spiegel* is playing a leading role in this war propaganda. A few weeks ago, it appeared with the headline: "Stop Putin now!" This was widely understood as a call for war against Russia.

Despite this media campaign, and despite the fact that all of the parliamentary parties support the war course, the government has not succeeded in breaking through the widespread antiwar sentiment in the population. An increase in military spending—especially under conditions of the debt ceiling—will now be associated directly with harsh social cuts. In sections of the ruling class, fears are growing that the current government may not be able to impose such cuts against the resistance of the working class.

The lead article in the same edition of *Der Spiegel* hints at this concern. It notes that Germany is maintaining the number at work at a record high, the social welfare and

tax coffers are full, and the country is not piling up new debts. "We are super-optimists," it declares.

But, it worries, today's prosperity stems from the Agenda 2010 "reforms," and one must wonder what new reforms are needed to sustain this situation for another ten years.

"What is necessary is a political stock-taking," writes *Der Spiegel*. The election campaign, which mainly revolved around avoiding further burdens, is now almost a year past. "It is time that the government broaden its horizons and that of the country beyond the current well-being."

*Der Spiegel* calls for a new round of drastic austerity measures, which must be imposed even in the face of resistance from the working class.

Here it becomes clear that the call for increased military spending and better equipment for the army is directed against the German population. The recent events in the working-class town of Ferguson in the US have shown how quickly social protest can develop. When workers and young people responded in Ferguson with demonstrations to the murder of Michael Brown by the police, the ruling class placed the city under virtual martial law and imposed a state of emergency.

The German government is preparing similarly scenarios. For several years, special Bundeswehr units have been established that are designed exclusively for use domestically. The so-called "Regional Security and Support Forces" (RSUKr) consist of reservists who are responsible for "homeland security" in direct cooperation with active Bundeswehr units.

Their "ability spectrum" includes "security tasks" and the intervention in "disasters" and "severe accidents." The Bundeswehr web site states: "Here, the soldiers of the RSUKr benefit greatly from their local knowledge, since the units have been widely established throughout Germany."

In July 2012, the German Supreme Court ruled in favour of the deployment of the Bundeswehr at home. Since November last year, the RSUKr units have achieved a nominal strength of about 3,200 men and are fully established and active.



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