

German government discusses massive increase in military spending

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At the NATO summit in Wales, the United States and Great Britain pressured member states to fulfill the 2006 agreement to increase military spending across the alliance to at least two percent of gross domestic product (GDP). So far just five of the 28 NATO countries—the United States, France, Great Britain, Greece and Estonia—adhere to the target.

In Germany, which spends around 1.4 percent of GDP on its military budget, the summit has led to immediate demands for massive rearmament.

“If Europe wants to keep its freedom, it is not possible without additional efforts,” declared the Christian Democrat (CDU) foreign policy expert Karl-Georg Wellmann, in order to combat what he called the “threat from Moscow.”

CDU defense politician Henning Otte also supported a military upgrade. “We must adapt our defense preparedness to the new threat. That will not be possible without an increase in the defense budget,” he said. “The assumption that the *Bundeswehr* (German army) can do without armor or heavy equipment in future is wrong ... Both will cost money, but there is no security without expenditure,” the CDU deputy declared.

“The time of the peace dividend is over,” proclaimed the foreign and security policy spokesman for the Christian Social Union (CSU) in the Bundestag, Florian Hahn. Just a few weeks ago CSU leader Horst Seehofer had pleaded in the news magazine *Der Spiegel* for an increase in military spending. “We cannot discuss progressive tax changes and then say there is not enough money for the *Bundeswehr* to fulfill its responsibilities,” he said.

The budget increase required by NATO and now being discussed in the German government, would be the biggest increase in spending for the *Bundeswehr*

since the unification of Germany 25 years ago. It would mean that Germany, which currently stands at number seven of the countries with the highest military expenditure, would shift into fifth place ahead of France and Great Britain, and become the biggest military power in the EU.

In 2013, the military budget was already increased as part of the reform of the *Bundeswehr*. In the 2013 federal budget, overall spending was reduced by 3.1 percent to 302 billion euros, but the defense budget rose 4.4 percent to 33.3 billion. Only the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has a larger budget. This remains the case in 2014, when defense spending will total 32.4 billion euros. That is more than ten percent of all public expenditure.

In 2013, however, this total only represented about 1.4 percent of GDP. An increase to the required target of two percent would mean an additional expenditure of over 14 billion euros.

This sum corresponds almost exactly to the state spending in 2013 on Germany’s 4.4 million recipients of unemployment benefits (without counting administrative costs). Major cuts in social spending to pay for a beefed up military amount to a social declaration of war on the working class.

However, even the NATO requirement is not enough for the warmongers in Berlin and in the media. The long-time US correspondent for *Der Spiegel* Gregor Peter Schmitz recently demanded that Germany and Europe compensate for the failures of the ‘lame duck’ from Washington and take over the main responsibility in NATO.

If one takes Schmitz’ claims seriously then, based on the 3.8 percent of GDP spent by the United States on its military, Germany would have to spend an extra 57 billion euros. If Germany sought to spend as much

money as the United States for arms (in real terms) it would have to raise more than 400 billion euros—an unimaginable sum for the current federal budget.

There is no question that such armament hikes can only be financed by violent social attacks on the working class. Historically in Germany, such hikes in military spending have always been associated with sharp cuts in social spending and repression against the workers. This process found its most extreme expression in the Nazi regime.

The federal government is aware that such increases in the military budget will inevitably be met with massive popular resistance. Following two world wars, the rejection of militarism is deeply rooted in the German working class.

This is why some government representatives from the social democratic SPD and the CDU have been initially more cautious in raising demands.

Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU) reportedly said during a conference that there would be no cuts made in the defense budget “in the near future.” At the same time, any increase in military spending, he continued, was “not a wise policy.”

The Chairman of the Defence Committee, Hans-Peter Bartels (SPD), proposed using defense budget funds more effectively and distributing them “intelligently.”

Such statements cannot hide the fact that the massive military buildup is the logical consequence of the foreign policy of the government and was planned long ago. They are merely aimed at disguising the process from the population.

At the beginning of the year, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen, announced the end of German military restraint. Since then, Germany has pursued an aggressive policy of military confrontation towards Russia and in the Middle East.

Just on Thursday, the Defense Department announced it was transferring more troops to Poland. The German contingent in the Szczecin headquarters of the Multinational Corps Northeast is to be doubled.

At the NATO summit, US Secretary of State John Kerry announced the setting up of a “core” coalition for military intervention in Iraq, which is also to include Germany. On Friday morning, the first German military supplies to the Kurdish Peshmerga arrived in northern Iraq.



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