

Germany's ill-equipped army—the campaign for higher military spending

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On virtually an hourly basis the German media features new “revelations” about alleged “technical glitches” and the “ailing” state of the German army (Bundeswehr). The reports all have one clear objective: a massive increase in defense spending.

Already last weekend Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen (CDU) claimed in an interview with *Bild am Sonntag* that in the event of NATO calling upon assistance the German army would be unable to provide the required aircraft and helicopters. “At the moment our flying capacities are less than the targets set a year ago which, in the event of an emergency situation, we would seek to make available to NATO within 180 days,” she said. “This is due to the spare parts bottleneck for aircraft and the incapacity of naval helicopters.”

The beginning of this week then witnessed a flood of reports regarding the limited capabilities of the German armed forces. On Tuesday the official website of the Bundeswehr reported that a “new deficiency had been discovered” in the Euro Fighter. The German army currently possesses 109 planes. The manufacturer had informed the Bundeswehr that “manufacturing defects on a large number of bore holes” were discovered on the rear fuselage of the aircraft. As an “emergency measure” the life of the plane was halved from 3,000 to 1,500 flight hours.

Also on Tuesday a statement by the Parliamentary State Secretary in the Ministry of Defence, Ralf Brauksiepe, was published by the dpa news agency. According to *Spiegel Online*, the statement reported that Bundeswehr soldiers in Turkey manning Patriot missile defense systems were at “the limits of their endurance.” The soldiers’ prescribed breaks could not be met and the Patriot systems were “barely operable” due to the lack of spare parts.

On Wednesday, news outlets floated the news that 150 German soldiers were “stuck for a week in Afghanistan” (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*) because their plane out of the country—an Airbus A310—was not fully operational. In sensationalized reports the media cited a note from the Bundeswehr blog “Eyes front” in which, citing the Operational Command of the German Army, the soldiers could now possibly be flown out by one of the chancellor’s own official planes.

The ten-day-long campaign has long since assumed a farcical character. It is aimed at giving the impression that the Bundeswehr is a chronically underfunded scrap heap. This is patent nonsense. According to official data no less than 3,544 German soldiers are deployed in twelve international military missions abroad. The German defense budget is the seventh largest in the world. Since German reunification in 1990 every government has strived to rebuild the German armed forces into a powerful force for international military operations.

However, the “end of military restraint” announced by the grand coalition in Berlin at the beginning of the year and a return to a policy of military-based power politics requires a force of much greater dimensions and capabilities than the current Bundeswehr. This costs money and involves increasing defense spending by tens of billions of euros annually.

Such a massive upgrading of the military would be bound up with further social cuts and would undoubtedly be rejected by the vast majority of the population. The current campaign on military “glitches” is aimed at shifting the public in favor of such rampant militarism.

The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* admits this openly. Under the heading “Condemned to revamp” the organ of the Frankfurt Stock Exchange cheered: “This

material crisis could not have come at a more convenient time for the Bundeswehr.”

The FAZ continues: “Following the violence in the Middle East and in Ukraine feelings of insecurity in Germany have reached their highest point since September 11, 2001, the will to cooperate in defense projects and NATO military operations is at its strongest since the end of the Cold War, and the defense minister has not been in office long enough that she must take responsibility for the equipment defects, but can rather work on a solution. As a result a Bundeswehr could arise from the current crisis within a decade which is better equipped and more reliable than today.”

The comments by the media are an indicator of the plans being drawn up by the ruling elites.

Josef Joffe, co-editor of *Die Zeit* and a man close to American neocon circles, welcomes the US-led bombing campaign in Iraq and in Syria and demands that the Bundeswehr be finally restructured into a powerful war machine.

In contrast to the revived strength of the “world’s policeman, the US”...“the army of the fourth largest economy on earth” is thus far “a joke,” Joffe complains, and asks angrily: “Why are only eight of 101 Euro fighters fully operational and just 36 of 104 Tornados? How could these pitiful remnants fly off to war when the air force only has four airborne fuel tankers?” It is time, he says, “for a parliamentary inquiry committee, which explores the causes of the decay.” The agenda for such an investigation should also include Germany’s “highly renowned arms industry.”

Another comment on *Zeit Online* carries the martial title “Battle-proven, flexible and decisive.” It compares the Bundeswehr with the French army. While the German army was fighting to overcome its deficits “the French Air Force attacks jihadist positions in northern Iraq.”

In response to the question of how these deficits arose, the author of the article, George Blome, demands the abolition of parliamentary approval. This specifies that German soldiers can only be sent on foreign missions with the agreement of the Bundestag.

“In the first place the military in France plays a very different role in society,” Blome writes. “This begins with the chain of command: In Germany, the Bundestag must approve a Bundeswehr deployment

after lengthy parliamentary debates. It is different in France. If President François Hollande wants it, then the army goes into action, with lightning speed and without any outside help.”

A further “benefit” is “the number of troops.” Although France abolished conscription in 2001, it still has 222,000 soldiers under arms, “not counting almost 100,000 uniformed gendarmerie, which can take over military tasks” For its part, “the significantly more populous Germany” has “only 181,000 soldiers.”

An additional factor is “operational flexibility” and the attitude of the soldiers. Blome cites a French military expert who explains: “We have a rustic army which manages without refrigerators” and soldiers who “sleep on the bare earth.” Blome allots special praise to the French Foreign Legion, which is infamous for the brutality of its mercenaries. Finally, Blome concludes, France expends much more of its budget in relation to its gross domestic product on the military than does Germany.

The message behind this media firestorm is unmistakable. In order to achieve its desired change in foreign policy the ruling elite needs an army that is materially and psychologically able to make war on a large scale. Above all, what is required is a much higher defense budget, more soldiers, a tight chain of command and the “right attitude” towards war.



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