

German press demands more effective tanks for war against Russia

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“History doesn’t repeat itself, but it does rhyme,” the great American writer Mark Twain once wrote. One might add: “And often, unfortunately, in an alarming way.” Just days before the 70th anniversary of the capitulation of Nazi Germany in World War II, debate in the German media is raging about how the German army can again wage an effective armoured tank war against Russia.

In an article headlined “Why politicians rejected uranium projectiles for the Leo”, the *Die Welt* national daily newspaper calls for equipping German Leopard 2 battle tanks with uranium munitions to effectively combat Russian tanks.

The article begins by announcing, with obvious satisfaction, that the defence ministry has recently “recalled into operation 100 mothballed Leopard 2 tanks at a cost of €22 million, thereby increasing the country’s arsenal of combat tanks from 225 to 325”. The primary purpose of this “unusual measure” is allegedly to signal to eastern European countries that “the trend towards further reduction of Germany’s conventional military capabilities (has been) reversed”.

However, the author then gives full vent to his frustration over the country’s military inadequacy. The Leopard 2 tanks are, he writes, indeed “still excellent weapons ... but unfortunately [they are] no longer capable of effectively combatting the modern types of Russian tanks—particularly the T90 series”. The reason is “exclusively the inadequate type of ammunition used for the [tank’s] first-class 120 mm smoothbore cannon”, which is manufactured by the German Rheinmetall arms company.

The Bundeswehr’s (German army’s) DM63 ammunition, currently used in heavy armoured combat, is not powerful enough “to penetrate the newer versions of T80 and T90 tanks. This will probably be even more the case for Russia’s incoming Armata tank, which will be operational from 2020.”

The article concludes: “This makes it imperative that the Bundeswehr is upgraded as fast as possible with projectile munitions compounded from depleted uranium. If such a

policy remains impossible to implement for political reasons, further reactivation of decommissioned military tanks will be pointless—and at best serve to pacify friend and foe by administering a placebo.”

The demand by a leading German daily newspaper to effectively combat Russian tanks through the use of depleted uranium not only underlines the extent of current preparations for war against Russia. The proposal also resonates with particularly macabre historical overtones. Russian tanks played a central role in the Soviet Union’s victory over Nazi Germany. The famous T34, which from 1942 was produced in the tens of thousands, was far superior to the German tanks of the time.

Seventy years after the end of World War II, there is a growing mood in the German elite that the real catastrophe of World War II was not the Holocaust and the war of annihilation in the east, but rather the victory of the Red Army. At a time when notorious Nazi apologist Ernst Nolte is being rehabilitated at Humboldt University in Berlin, *Spiegel Online* published a few days ago an interview with the “legendary journalist” Wolf Schneider under the provocative title “Better Hitler than the Red Army”.

The author of the *Die Welt* column on combat tanks is not just anybody. He is Hans Rühle, a ministry official and national security politician who enjoys the widest and most influential connections.

Rühle headed the federal defence minister’s policy planning staff in the 1980s, was general manager of NATO’s Multirole Combat Aircraft Development and Production Management Agency from 1990 to 1995, and also coordinated the establishment of the Federal Academy for Security Policy. In addition to his essay in *Die Welt*, he has also published articles in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Der Spiegel* and foreign policy journals like *Internationale Politik*.

The provocations against Russia are not limited to the rewriting of history at the universities or rhetorical threats from politicians and the media. These provide merely the ideological background to the massive rearmament of

NATO in eastern Europe, which increasingly takes the direct form of open war preparations against nuclear-armed Russia. Germany is playing a leading role in this development.

The current issue of *Bundeswehr aktuell* (the weekly newspaper of the German military forces) reports on how German tank brigades engaged in the NATO manoeuvre “Dynamic Response” together with Czech and Austrian units. Under the bellicose headline “Feuer Frei!” (“Fire at will!”), the paper describes a war scenario that obviously simulates a tank battle against the Russian army.

“It is 9:30 a.m. Sergeant Kelzenberg has identified enemy forces coming from the east. His reconnaissance patrol opens fire. The multinational combat force now begins to fight a delaying action—defending more than 21 kilometres. Czech armoured tanks put the enemy under fire to enable their own forces to reposition on the first line of defense.”

The counterattack is then described. Tanks advance “on a broad front against the enemy. Gradually but constantly delivering cannon fire, they work their way up the opposite slope until they have reached their planned attacking position at the edge of a forest. The complex battle formation culminates in a coordinated onslaught. End of exercise.”

An interview with Lieutenant General Volker Halbauer in the same issue underscores that the operation was practice for a real emergency.

Halbauer leads the 1st German-Netherlands Corps and has thus been commanding general of the NATO Response Force (NRF) since the beginning of the year. The NRF is NATO’s rapid reaction force, whose troop strength was doubled this year to 30,000 soldiers and which plays a key role in the massive NATO deployment in eastern Europe. According to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the “Dynamic Response” exercise was just “one of at least 200 NATO manoeuvres scheduled for this year”.

Halbauer’s interim conclusion stated: “The goal is achieved. We have a headquarters that is capable of conducting successful military operations consequent of all possible decisions reached by NATO and our respective member nations.” Such NATO policies include the NRF’s 5,000-man-strong so-called “spearhead” unit, which was constituted at the last NATO summit in Wales and is designed to be ready for deployment within 48 hours.

Halbauer reported that “under the leadership of NATO’s supreme allied commander in Europe”, the “trial run” has begun. Germany was participating “very extensively in this process with forces allocated to the NRF”. The lieutenant general proudly stated: “In an initial alert exercise in April, we tested such a unit’s response to alarm, drawing on the existing NRF forces and procedures.” He added that “a deployment exercise in Poland (will) follow” in June.

Denying that the imperialist powers are preparing for a war against Russia, or are at least willing to engage in one, would be closing one’s eyes to reality. General Philip Breedlove, the supreme allied commander of NATO for Europe, accused Russia of being “revanchist” (seeking revenge) at a hearing in the US Senate last Thursday. According to Breedlove, it was not just about Ukraine, but the “entire region”. He claimed NATO had “considered (Russia) as a partner in the previous 20 years” and accordingly “reduced (NATO forces) by 75 percent since the end of the Cold War”.

The military, as well as political and media elites, consider opposition from the population to be the major obstacle in the drive towards war.

On May 1, a column in the *Wirtschaftswoche* weekly business magazine, calling for the reintroduction of conscription into military service and an end of “daydreaming”, irritably asked: “Is it possible simply to restore the former status quo? That is, more tanks, back to military service for all, a reopening of old [military] sites? That may be impossible. Because the general attitude to (military) defence seems to have changed. Large sections of the population have a low opinion of the Bundeswehr, oppose the arms industry and reject defence-related research.”

The ruling class is outraged. After two world wars and the terrible disasters in the Middle East and North Africa in recent years, the majority of the population is unwilling to take up arms in support of the geostrategic and economic interests of German imperialism.

But the widespread anti-war sentiment is not enough to avert a new arms race and the danger of a third world war. That can only be achieved by a conscious political offensive and the building of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International. This was the purpose of the May Day meeting held yesterday by the ICFI.

In its appeal for the rally, the ICFI wrote: “The turn must now be to the unification of the working class, across all national, ethnic and regional lines. In every country, the same basic question is posed: The independent political mobilization of the working class on the basis of a revolutionary, socialist and internationalist program. To lead this movement, a political leadership must be built.”



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