

German army expands its tank battalions targeting Russia

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Another major project of the Bundeswehr (German army) reached the latest stage of its development last week. On Wednesday, Projekt System & Management (PSM)—a joint venture of German armaments industry giant Kraus-Maffei Wegmann (KMW) and Rheinmetall Land Systems (RLS)—officially delivered to the army the first Puma operational level 1 infantry fighting vehicle (IFV).

Observed by about 150 guests from industry, politics and the military in the Unterlüß (EZU) test centre near Munster, Lieutenant General Rainer Korff, commander of the German sector of NATO's Multinational Corps and Basic Military Organisation, symbolically accepted receipt of the first “ignition key” of the new Bundeswehr tanks.

In a brazenly militaristic address, Korff exhorted his audience to resolutely continue the advance of “Project Puma”: “Today is the day of the adoption of the Puma into the German army. All of us—manufacturers, designers and also we, the army, the users—are called upon now and in the future to strive together to provide the Puma with the ‘prowling, sprinting and leaping capabilities’ that we’ll need from it in combat under conditions of ‘enemy barrage and rapid movement’.”

The Puma IFV will replace the army's current Marder infantry transport tank. To date, at least 350 vehicles are envisaged. The IFVs are thought to be the most expensive armoured personnel carrier in the world at €8.85 million each, amounting to at least €3.1 billion for the German army's current acquisition.

The delivery of the Puma is only the most recent result of the Bundeswehr's major upgrading campaign. Following the federal government's March announcement of its intention to increase the defence budget by €4 billion, armaments projects have been launched one after another.

In early March, the government concluded an €8.7 billion helicopter contract with Airbus. A few weeks later, the German navy took into service a new submarine costing almost €500 million. At the end of May, the ministry of defence announced the development of its own combat drone in a joint venture with France and Italy. This was followed in early June by a new missile system and battleship, each of which will also devour some €4 billion by 2025. Now the focus is on tanks.

As early as last November, Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) commissioned an increase in Boxer transport tanks. The army was to receive an additional 131 tanks at a cost of €620 million. Instead of the previously planned 272 Boxer tanks, the Bundeswehr will now have a total of 403 by 2020.

The upgrading of armoured carriers is not limited to infantry carriers and transport vehicles. It also involves battle tanks. The Federal Ministry of Defence intends to begin development this year of a new model of the Leopard combat tank.

A letter in May from German Defence State Secretary Markus Gröbel to the federal parliament's defence committee confirms that the preparations have already begun. The letter reveals that “Capability requirements for a follow-up system were formulated and agreed in the course of Franco-German cooperation.” In a further step, “technologies and concepts (will be) examined in joint studies with regard to German industry” by 2018.

The extent of the armaments project is gigantic. With respect to the Bundeswehr's main battle tank, the Leopard 2, whose period of utilisation expires in 2030, approximately 3,300 will be produced. A Leopard tank currently costs about €10 million, depending on peculiarities of construction and the number ordered.

The federal government leaves no doubt about the direction in which the new tanks will be travelling; the decisions already taken clearly indicate that a massive upgrading of the Bundeswehr in confrontation with Russia is only just beginning.

In a recent interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* newspaper, Lieutenant General Bruno Kasdorf, inspector of the German army, explained that “in view of the changed security situation in the East and consequent changes in the demands on the army”, Germany’s military forces are currently under-equipped. “In the medium to long term, about 450 Puma infantry carrier vehicles [will be needed] to completely replace the old Marder model,” Kasdorf said. Given the changed security situation, he said he was “worried” and saw an “urgent need for action. ... We can’t wait any longer.”

Leading government officials openly declare that the upgrading of armoured tanks is directly related to NATO’s military build-up in Eastern Europe, which is being increasingly revealed as preparation for war against Russia. In February, von der Leyen had already declared in an interview with the Bundeswehr’s official media outlet in Berlin: “Spearhead (NATO’s rapid reaction Spearhead Force), for example, involves our commitment to creating a force capable of deployment within two to five days. That’s something completely different to the 180 days we’ve had in the past.” Therefore, she said, “more materials, like tanks, that are immediately available” would be needed.

An open discussion has already broken out in political and media circles regarding how the German army can effectively conduct another tank war against Russia. The thrust of the “debate” and its accompanying propaganda evoke memories of the darkest period of German history.

Almost exactly 74 years ago, on June 22, 1941, German ambassador Friedrich-Werner Graf von Schulenberg presented Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov with a “Memorandum”, whose allegations eerily parallel the propaganda being directed by the West against Russia since the beginning of the crisis in Ukraine.

The German memorandum was delivered to the Russian foreign office on the day Operation Barbarossa was launched. Hitler’s Germany claimed: “The Soviet Union’s stationing of the Red Army on its border, the

Comintern’s conspiratorial activities in Germany and the country’s annexation of eastern Poland and the Baltic states have broken the nonaggression pact and thereby delivered a ‘stab in the back’ to Germany in time of war.” (All quotes are translated from the German sources by the WSWS.)

While German fighter planes were already on the attack, German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop sent the Soviet ambassador another note, justifying the aggression by charging that, “despite all its acknowledged obligations and in stark contrast to its solemn declarations,” the Soviet Union had “turned against Germany” and “deployed its entire forces on the German border, ready to pounce”.

Almost simultaneously, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels read out on German radio the infamous “Proclamation of the Leader of the German People”. The main message was: “At 3 o’clock in the morning of June 22, the German army was launched into the middle of the massive deployment of enemy forces, in order to avert the imminent danger from the East.”

Seven decades ago Germany’s war of annihilation resulted in 27 million war dead suffered by the Soviet Union. Waged with nuclear weapons, a future war against Russia would have far more catastrophic consequences.



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