

# German defence minister demands additional €130 billion for military

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In recent weeks, leading figures in the German government, including Chancellor Angela Merkel and Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble (both of the Christian Democratic Union, CDU) have held out the prospect of a major increase to the country's defence budget. Now the minister of defence, Ursula von der Leyen (also CDU) has provided additional details of these plans. Germany will commit at least €130 billion in additional military spending by the year 2030.

In a post entitled "Investing Billions in the Coming Years" on the official website of the ministry of defence, Von der Leyen pledges to raise "spending on the equipment of the armed forces by around 130 billion euros over the next 15 years to ensure a flexible functionality." The plan is no longer "as it was in previous years, oriented towards a lowering of defence spending, but rather to increasing it."

On Wednesday morning, Von der Leyen made public the plans of the German government on ARD television's morning news show. She announced the defence budget would now "gradually" and "steadily" go up. This was not a matter of "taking a big gulp from the bottle just for this year," but of increasing the defence budget and then maintaining it at that level over a longer period.

The days of "tightening our belt" are over, according to Von der Leyen. For too long the German military had lived on the "bare necessities," she said. In the last 25 years, the gap between the funds available and the tasks to be performed had only increased. This "large backlog" would now have to be made up for. From now on, the ministry would no longer operate by the concept that the army would have to make due with just 70 percent of the equipment needed. A "fully equipped" military would again have to become a priority.

Von der Leyen explained exactly what this means at a defence committee meeting in Parliament on Wednesday afternoon. Media reports on the document submitted to

the committee by Von der Leyen show that the military's heavy machinery, in particular, will be upgraded by 2030. There is talk of additional armoured scout vehicles, howitzer tanks, marine helicopters, transport helicopters and ships.

The numbers go far beyond those previously made public. The number of Fennek scout vehicles, for example, has been raised from 217 to 248 and howitzer tanks have been increased from 89 to 101. The Fennek, named after the desert fox, is produced by German weapons manufacturer Krauss-Maffei Wegmann (KMW) and has been used in Afghanistan. Beginning in May, it will also be used in the German military's next combat mission in Mali.

Furthermore, 36 new Sea Lion marine helicopters will be purchased, six more than previously planned. The document also lists for the first time the quantities of a new heavy lift helicopter to be purchased. The defence ministry will acquire at least 59 of them.

Other plans detailed in the paper had already been announced by the defence minister. Among other things, the number of Leopard 2 combat tanks will increase from 225 to 320. In addition to this, the ministry will determine whether 196 older "Marder" infantry fighting vehicles are still in stock. Three hundred forty-two "Puma" tanks, the successor to the "Marder," will also be purchased. The Leopard 2, as well as the "Puma", are built by KMW and Rheinmetall, the second German arms manufacturing giant.

The planned upgrade to the fleet of tanks is breathtaking. Von der Leyen aims to acquire a total of 1,300 Boxer (KMW and Rheinmetall) and Fox (Rheinmetall) heavy armoured transport vehicles, a number which could still go up, according to the paper. Included in this are close to 900 older Fox transport vehicles and approximately 400 newer Boxer armoured transports.

The figures announced are not simply the proposals of a megalomaniacal defence minister. They represent the policy of the entire government. On Wednesday, Spiegel Online reported that the minister of finance had already “declared his readiness to increase the budget of the defence ministry”. With regard to Von der Leyen’s plans, finance minister Schäuble was “open to investing a total of 130 billion euros in armaments by 2030.”

To help demonstrate the scale of these sums: €130 billion is almost double the combined amount set aside in one year for education and research (€16.4 billion); families, seniors, women and youth (€9.1 billion); health (€14.5 billion); nutrition and agriculture (€5.6 billion); economy and energy (€7.6 billion); and traffic and digital infrastructure (€24.5 billion).

The official propaganda justifies this massive military buildup with the supposedly deficient combat readiness of the German military due to inadequate and dilapidated equipment. Significantly, just one day before Von der Leyen’s appearance before the military commission in parliament, Hans-Peter Bartels (Social Democratic Party) presented his annual report.

“The troops are suffering,” lamented Bartels, “too much is lacking”. The “economy of scarcity” jeopardises the training, exercises and missions of the soldiers. “The military is at a turning point. Still more reductions won’t work.” Like Von der Leyen, Bartels spoke in favour of a massive buildup of the military and called for a change in defence policy.

The real reason for the buildup, however, is not the allegedly desperate condition of the army, but rather the “turn” in German foreign policy proclaimed by President Joachim Gauck, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) and Von der Leyen herself more than two years ago at the 2014 Munich Security Conference. Germany was “too big just to comment on foreign policy from the sidelines” and would have to “be prepared to intervene earlier, more decisively and more substantially in foreign and security policy,” they declared at the time.

Von der Leyen explicitly based her plans for military buildup on these demands. On the ARD morning show, she explained that Germany was a country that “has great political and economic significance and must bear that responsibility”. She then added, “If we don’t pay attention to Syria and Iraq, if we don’t pay attention to Afghanistan and Africa ... if we don’t do our part there, then the problems will come to us and it will be even worse and that’s exactly what we don’t want. We want to take on our share of the responsibility and, for that, the

troops must be well equipped.”

In other words: in order to take on “responsibility” worldwide, i.e. to enforce militarily the economic and geopolitical interests of German imperialism all over the world, the German elite, just as they did in the past, needs a large, highly equipped army. According to reports in the media, in March an increase in military personnel is also to be decided on. To prepare a large-scale recruiting campaign, politicians and journalists will repeat the refrain that since 1990 the military has “shrunk” from almost 600,000 soldiers to 177,000.

The massive rearmament plan, and the propaganda campaign that accompanies it, evokes historical parallels. Before the German Reich began the enormous buildup of the military under the Nazis, defence minister Werner von Blomberg prepared a memorandum describing the condition of the German army as “hopeless.” Similar to the current defence report, the critique declared that the military was lacking in every area—personnel, combat equipment and munitions. The Navy did not even have available the material guaranteed by the Versailles Treaty. Armoured ships were not delivered and the air force was virtually non-existent.

The terrible events which followed are well-known. In the 1930s, practically the entire German economy was placed in the service of German militarism and vast military machinery was built from the ground up to fulfil Hitler’s war plans. In 1939, the German military, armed to the teeth, began the Second World War and reduced large parts of Europe to rubble and ash.

If the German elite now believe that after the terrible crimes of two world wars they can once more set a course for war, they are deceiving themselves. Workers and youth, who will have to bear the costs of militarism—in the form of social cuts to finance the buildup, as cannon fodder in war and in the suppression of their democratic rights—will not permit a third such catastrophe.



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