

German general calls for new tanks against Russia

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Germany needs new tanks! This was the demand of Jörg Vollmer, inspector of the German Army, on June 9 in Berlin. Referring to the supposed “changed threat situation” in the east, the lieutenant general concluded that the German military needs 31 “Iguana” bridge-laying armoured vehicles next year as well as additional materials costing several billion euros. All troops would also have to be equipped with new radios.

The army must be capable of building stable bridges and laying anti-tank mines, Vollmer said. “A brigade that is fully equipped with combat tanks and armoured personnel carriers but has no Iguanas to carry them over water is clearly handicapped.” According to the general, the army must “again provide everything we once sized down for good reasons.”

Seventy-five years after Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union, the German military is again arming itself against Russia. Vollmer confirmed that the military will participate in the permanent deployment of NATO combat troops in Eastern Europe. At the NATO summit to be held in Warsaw at the beginning of July, Germany will propose taking leadership of one of the four planned “robust, multi-national NATO battalions” in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Poland. To this end, the military wants to send an additional 600 soldiers to Lithuania.

The German military is already playing a leading role in NATO deployments in Eastern Europe, which are an increasingly direct preparation for a war against Russia. It is currently involved in Operation Anaconda, the largest NATO manoeuvre since the end of the Cold War. On June 8, German combat engineers worked with British, Dutch and American soldiers to build a more than 300-meter-long amphibious bridge across the Vistula at Chelmno, over which heavy tanks can drive in the direction of Russia. At the same time, the

German military is taking part in sea manoeuvres in the Baltic Sea and exercises in the Baltic states.

The return of German militarism to Eastern Europe is part of the foreign policy “turn” that President Joachim Gauck, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen announced at the beginning of 2014. At that time, Steinmeier declared that Germany would now have to intervene “earlier, more decisively and more substantially” in world politics.

A new interview with von der Leyen in *Welt am Sonntag* underscores the consequences of this foreign policy turn. According to the minister, the previously approved 10 billion euros for upgrades to the military will not last through 2020. “In addition to the increase of 10.2 billion euros by 2020, we need a further gradual increase over the next 15 years in order to fill the gaps. The entire investment volume through 2013 came to 130 billion euros.”

In the same breath, von der Leyen announced that German soldiers would also be used domestically. She was asked, “Should the military be used within the country in the case of a terrorist threat?” Von der Leyen explained that the constitution already allows “the military to operate within the country, not only with regards to natural disasters or refugee aid, but also in the event of a catastrophic terrorist attack.”

Such a scenario could occur quite suddenly, she added. That was shown in the attacks in Brussels and Paris. It was therefore necessary to prepare for the use of troops within the country now. “Soldiers under the command of the police could then provide support with military means. For example, to protect important buildings or to secure the entrances to subway stations. That would be a new kind of collaboration for everyone involved. So that everyone knows what to do, the

police and military must train for such a collaboration. The paths of communication and the division of responsibilities should be tested and made clear.”

The government had already “dealt with these questions in detail in its forthcoming White Paper,” the minister added.

This is a turning point in the rearmament of Germany. The separation of the police and army and the ban on troop deployments within the country are closely bound up with the experiences of war and dictatorship in Germany, above all with the period of National Socialism.

These traumatic experiences with the Nazi dictatorship and the Second World War are precisely the reason why the return of German militarism is met with such widespread opposition within the population. The rearmament of the German armed forces is accompanied by a large-scale propaganda offensive by the Ministry of Defence. For months the German military has carried out a costly 11 million euro nationwide campaign with posters and films. Under the slogan “Do something that really matters,” the military is attempting to present itself as an attractive place to get an education.

Last Saturday the second so-called German Armed Forces Day took place. The German army opened its doors in 16 locations to acquaint residents and young people with uniforms, military technology and heavy equipment. At the cathedral square in Erfurt, there were protests at a children’s festival which the military targeted with the provocative motto, “Tanks not Ferris Wheels.”

Opponents of war unfurled several banners in front of the tanks on which children climbed which read, “Lay down your weapons!”, “What are 1,000 dead compared to an Iron Cross?” and “Death is a master from Germany.”



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