

German defence minister calls for faster increase in military spending

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The initial budget of the Social Democratic Finance Minister Olaf Scholz planned to increase military spending over the next legislative period by at least €5.5 billion. Since the figures were announced last week, there has been an aggressive campaign by politicians and the media aimed at increasing military spending much faster and more comprehensively.

On May 2, in a statement on “the parameters of the 2019 federal budget and the financial plan up to 2022,” Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) stated, “The benchmark for the 2019 financial year is the initial basis for completing the government bill on trend reversals in [military] personnel and materiel.” For the following years, “further significant increases in defence spending are necessary.”

Where von der Leyen had initially brought the sum of €12 billion into play, she is now going even further. The current budget proposal “does not even cover a quarter of the existing needs,” she wrote in a letter to the defence and budgetary politicians of the grand coalition, according to *Bild* newspaper. There were “further significant increases necessary in defence spending.” Otherwise, “trend reversals in personnel and materiel” could not be continued.

In the coalition agreement, the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats pledged to raise defence spending to 2 percent of gross domestic product by 2024. Now, influential military brass are openly saying what sums of money this concerns. Retired General Egon Ramms told broadcaster Deutschlandfunk at the weekend, “with a view to the next ten years...let’s assume that we have a need somewhere in the order of 30 to 35 billion euros.”

In the spring of 2014, shortly after the government announced the return of German militarism at the

Munich Security Conference, Ramms had said, “We need compulsory military service. Otherwise, Germany cannot guarantee its national defence in cases of the [NATO] mutual defence clause. Certainly not on a voluntary basis. But we also need the necessary military equipment for such a case. It cannot be done with the materiel we have now.”

Four years later, this programme is being implemented. The Defence Ministry is currently working on a new “conception of the Bundeswehr [Armed Forces],” which should again focus the German army more on “national and alliance defence.” Even if for Germany, the “assumptions current at the time of the Cold War have changed significantly in today’s security policy environment,” national defence still posed “a core task of the armed forces.” Next to foreign missions, the Bundeswehr must again approach these “equally,” the draft document states, as reported by the *Bundeswehr Journal*.

Ensuring “national defence” is synonymous with the planned re-armament of the Bundeswehr and the preparation for massive wars. “National defence in Germany against conventional, symmetrical attacks is always an alliance matter for NATO and an assistance case for the EU,” the draft states. And in another place: “The Bundeswehr—following invocation of the alliance [mutual defence] or assistance obligation in NATO or EU—contributes fully to the (collective) alliance defence. Alliance defence can affect both one’s own territory and the territory of another, fully sovereign member state. Alliance defence in Germany, or on the territory of an ally, is a national and multinational task.”

The scenario extends to a nuclear war with Russia. “Potential symmetric opponents” with “larger conventional forces and significantly enhanced

technological capabilities,” posed a “threat potential to the Alliance territory.” The latter could “quickly become the target of hostile actions in the entire spectrum of state and social action,” and “the still doctrinally established and de facto possibility of using nuclear weapons complements this.”

According to *Bundeswehr Journal*, the concept to be published in June refines “the new strategic direction of the Bundeswehr, which is already described in the 2016 ‘Security Policy White Paper’.” The white paper had also employed the term “national and alliance defence,” in order to justify the return of Germany to a military foreign and great power policy and the associated substantial re-armament of the Bundeswehr. The next “conceptual step” would then concern the future “capability profile of the Bundeswehr.” This “should concretely outline the necessary resources for the quality and quantity of the armed forces. And probably the associated costs,” writes the *Journal*.

Commentators in the bourgeois media, who have been beating the drum for rearmament and war for four years are now calling for further cuts in social spending in order to extract the necessary billions for armaments and war. Writing under the headline, “Berlin must rearm,” the lead commentator of the German daily *Die Welt*, Torsten Krauel, states this should be done, “If necessary, to enforce peace robustly; Germans must get that into their heads. Instead, they purchase domestic and foreign policy peace and are therefore prone to [demands for] protection money in world politics.”

Anyone who wants to buy “stability at home with money” will “do that abroad when things get serious,” Krauel continues. “A Germany that neglects its armed forces in favour of the social budget will also try to appease Russia and China through business, instead of clearly saying no in emergency situations.”

Then he attacks the grand coalition from the right: “If spending on child benefits is now to rise more than that for the Bundeswehr, the Christian Democrats are nourishing the impression that the next election is more important to them than Europe’s security. This puts Germany’s influence in the world at risk—and that costs far more than the spare parts for the Eurofighter.”

The US and Russia also have problems with military technology, Kraule notes, but both “tackle the issues resolutely, and both are watching closely to see if others do the same.” If the Ukraine crisis is not to give

President Vladimir Putin the impression that there was “an opening on the eastern flank, a chance against a weak NATO, Berlin must arm itself, and that contrary to their own instincts.”

While the vast majority of the population rejects war and militarism, after two catastrophic world wars, the ruling class can no longer hide their instincts. On Monday, a spokesman for the Ministry of Defence confirmed to the Deutsche Presse Agentur that Nazi general Erwin Rommel was considered “tradition-setting” following the Bundeswehr’s latest Traditionserlass, an edict outlining what traditions underlie service in the military. “Despite his capacity as a functionary of the Nazi regime,” he had “repeatedly violated criminal orders.” Because of this, “as well as his proximity to the military resistance against Hitler,” he fulfilled the requirements for using his name on properties of the Bundeswehr.

The claim that Rommel was part of the resistance or had “disrespected criminal orders” is as absurd as the current government propaganda that the planned rearmament serves peace. Before Rommel clashed with Hitler over military matters at the end of the war and was driven to suicide, he was considered Hitler’s favourite general. In October 1942, after a conversation with the Nazi leader, Goebbels wrote in his diary: “Rommel has made a very deep impression on him [Hitler]. ... He has a firm world-view, is not only close to us national socialists [Nazis] but is a national socialist.”



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