

German defence report sparks hysterical campaign for increased military spending

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The German government's latest defence report has sparked hysterical calls for increased military spending in the country's political circles and the media. The report, presented on Tuesday, paints the picture of a still ailing and broken army. "Too little staff on the one hand, missing materiel on the other," it says in the first section. Often there are "gaps on top of gaps," and "the troops [are] far away" from being "fully equipped."

The parliamentary Defence Commissioner Hans-Peter Bartels (Social Democratic Party, SPD), lists his complaints over more than 120 pages. "There is a lack of materiel in all areas." There are "barely any operational Leopard 2 [battle tanks]," "no tankers in the Navy" and "a large part of the submarine" fleet was "broken." In addition, "less than half of the Eurofighters and Tornados are airworthy" and ammunition stocks have been "reduced to a minimum."

Also, "the spare parts situation" had "not improved," and there were "far too little basics like personal gear (vests, boots, clothing, modern helmets, night vision devices) to provide for every soldier." Supposedly, the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) succeeded "only with great effort" to "equip the 8,000 German soldiers with winter clothing and protective vests, who took part in the NATO exercise Trident Juncture in Norway this autumn."

The establishment media and parties have reacted to the report with anger and indignation. The *Frankfurter Rundschau* lamented the "disastrous shortages in the Bundeswehr," the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* claimed that soldiers would have to mend their overalls themselves, and finance daily *Handelsblatt* asked provocatively: "Is our Bundeswehr even operational?" In a commentary on the "embarrassing condition" of the troops, the tabloid *Bild* newspaper raved and demanded "compulsory military service be restored."

"The Defence Commissioner's reports are honest and have shown the government the dramatic situation of the

armed forces for years," said the spokesman of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) Rüdiger Lucassen. "All the worse," Lucassen declared, was "the policy of the Minister of Defence." One could, he noted, "only come to the conclusion that Ursula von der Leyen ignores the Defence Reports and continues her fatal course of German demilitarization."

The Left Party also attacked the grand coalition of the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and SPD from the right. "What the Defence Commissioner notes here is pretty steep," said group leader Dietmar Bartsch in an official press statement on Tuesday. The report was "a disastrous result for the Minister of Defence. Millions were spent on consultancy contracts [...] but there is no adequate equipment for the soldiers." Parliament had "the damn responsibility and duty to equip the soldiers whom it sends into action [...] and also appropriately."

With the propaganda offensive, the ruling class and its parties in government and opposition are pursuing a transparent target: the implementation of their massive rearmament plans and the preparation of Germany for new, more comprehensive war missions.

The Defence Commissioner's report was "always a great incentive for us," said von der Leyen in an official statement of the Ministry of Defence. Her ministry had undertaken "many modernization steps in materiel, in personnel," and "the finances are rising." It was "a fight on many, many fronts, and there, you have to have a long breath and powerfully continue the way forward." She also wished that "things went much faster, but 25 years of shrinking and cuts in the Bundeswehr cannot be reversed in a few years." All the more important now was that "the first effects are positively measurable." "Every week on average, a new tank is commissioned, on average every month a new plane or a new helicopter, and on average every year a new ship."

The Defence Report provides an insight into the

massive scale of rearmament and war plans of the German ruling class. Even with an increase in the defence budget to 1.5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP)—in the coalition agreement, the CDU/CSU and SPD have actually committed themselves to raising defence spending to two percent of GDP by 2024, and thus more than €75 billion a year—“the German defence contribution would lie, in absolute terms, higher than the contributions of Britain [...] and France,” the report boasts.

In addition, the Ministry of Defence had “in the year under review, with the conception of the Bundeswehr and the new capability profile, set the Bundeswehr’s strategy for the future. Accordingly, full equipment should be completed by the year 2031.” With the so-called “trend reversals in the areas of finance, personnel, materials and infrastructure,” the Bundeswehr “should meet the increased demands of national and Alliance defence.”

Terms such as “fully equipped” and “national and alliance defence” are euphemisms for a new German war policy. The “Conception of the Bundeswehr” issued last August by the Minister of Defence leaves no doubt that the German military is preparing for massive operations and a possible Third World War, despite catastrophic outcomes of the previous two world wars.

“For a very large operation, skills in rapid response and follow-up forces are to be planned,” it says. These would have to be able to “work in a hybrid conflict that occurs in all dimensions in the entire spectrum of escalation and activity. At the beginning of a very large, high-intensity operation, the massive deployment of high availability resources is required. There is a personal and materiel provision for regeneration.”

The Defence Report points out that the Bundeswehr plays a central role in NATO preparations for war against Russia. Increasingly, “the Bundeswehr is assuming obligations of Alliance defence in Europe” and, as part of NATO’s “Enhanced Forward Presence” since January 24, 2017, is setting up the Multinational Battle Group as a framework nation for Lithuania.

With more than 500 soldiers the fighting force is “the third largest mission of the Bundeswehr abroad.” For the NATO Rapid Reaction Force, Germany had “brought in 10,000 soldiers in 2018” and “made the necessary preparations” to become the so-called flagship of NATO in 2019.

Since the Bundeswehr took over the leadership of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) on 1 January, the German government is stepping up its threats against nuclear armed Russia and pushing ahead with its

campaign for an independent German-European foreign and defence policy. At the World Economic Forum in Davos last month, von der Leyen called for greater “European military capacity” and demanded that the continent “be ready to deal comprehensively with problems in our immediate neighbourhood.” This included Russia, which respects “no weakness.”

On January 22, in a foreign policy keynote address titled, “The Future of European Security and Defence,” von der Leyen railed against “the expansive behaviour of Russia” and “an increasingly demanding China.” It was necessary to “strengthen Europe’s military capabilities” in order to be “able to act” and to be able to “act independently.” The implementation of this strategy, which builds on German ambitions in the first half of the 20th century, goes hand in hand with the strengthening of extreme nationalist and right-wing extremist forces.

Von der Leyen delivered her speech as part of the 2019 Security Policy Review in Vienna, organized by Austrian Defence Minister Mario Kusanek. Kusanek is a member of the extreme right-wing Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ,) which currently has five ministers in the Austrian Peoples Party-led (ÖVP) government of Chancellor Sebastian Kurz.

In Germany too, the ruling class is working very closely with the AfD. In the foreword to the Defence Report, Bartels expressly thanks the “Defence Committee and the political leadership of the Ministry of Defence for an open, constructive exchange to the benefit of our soldiers.” In addition to representatives of CDU/CSU (12), SPD (8), FDP (4), Left Party (4) and Greens (3), the Defence Committee also includes five representatives of the neo-fascist AfD.



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