

German air force conducts massive exercise targeting Russia

Florian Hasek, Johannes Stern
12 June 2023

The escalation of the NATO war against Russia over Ukraine is taking on ever more dangerous forms. Last week, former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen stated that NATO “ground troops” could be deployed to Ukraine. At the same time, NATO is organizing massive military maneuvers with which the alliance “practices” for a direct intervention in the conflict.

The most comprehensive exercises will take place in Germany beginning Monday. From 12 to 23 June, hundreds of fighter jets will be flying over the country as part of Air Defender 2023 and training for a state of total war. It is the largest aerial exercise in NATO history. In total, more than 10,000 soldiers from 25 nations are involved with 250 aircraft. They will be practising offensive maneuvers, potentially right up to the Russian border.

Here are some more key figures about the exercise: The Bundeswehr (German army) has a contingent of 60 aircraft—including 30 Eurofighters and 16 Tornados—and four helicopters. The largest contingent of combat aircraft comes from the United States with 100. Around 90 percent of air traffic during the exercise will take place in German airspace or over the North and Baltic Sea coasts. Most missions start from locations in Schleswig-Holstein, Lower Saxony, Bavaria and Rhineland-Palatinate, as well as from one location each in the Netherlands and the Czech Republic. Civilian air traffic will be prohibited for at least two hours daily in several areas during the exercise.

Large parts of German airspace are being de facto transformed into a war zone. The official website of the Bundeswehr states on the maneuver: “Depending on the activated airspace, the jet-fight practice flights take place from 2500 or 3000 meters altitude. Low-level flights of jets and cargo aircraft are planned in a part of the eastern air exercise area, the so-called Fight 1. This exercise area extends over northern Brandenburg, parts of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and the Baltic Sea.” In addition, low-flying would take place at the military training sites Baumholder and Grafenwöhr.

Both the sheer scale of the exercise and its character make

it clear that “Air Defender 2023” is not simply a routine maneuver. It is a direct component of the NATO war offensive against Russia. Representatives of the German ruling class in particular, which has already tried to subjugate Russia militarily in the two world wars, openly state this.

“History has caught up with us,” said Agnes Strack-Zimmermann (Free Democrats), chairwoman of the Defence Committee of the Bundestag. “We have a hot war by Russia against Ukraine.” Military exercises such as “Air Defender” are always a signal to the other side: “You show what you can do.”

Based on the “script” of the maneuver, this includes a comprehensive war effort against the nuclear-armed power Russia. According to a *Wall Street Journal* report:

“The baseline scenario involves the enemy taking the German port of Rostock, an attack that would trigger NATO’s joint defense clause known as Article 5. The response includes recapturing the port and other infrastructure as well as defending cities and launching offensive measures.”

The other training elements also read like a blueprint for direct intervention in Ukraine. “The scenarios include the fight against drones and cruise missiles, the protection of cities, airports and seaports as well as the direct support of ground troops,” writes the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

In addition, nuclear-capable F-16, F-35 and Bundeswehr tornado fighter jets will take part in the exercise, which, according to the Bundeswehr, will fly “daily missions” to Estonia and Romania—i.e., directly to the Russian border and towards the Black Sea. In doing so, the pilots and crews would fly according to the “train as you fight” principle—which means that the Russian military leadership would have to assume potential acts of war are being launched.

In a recent commentary on the escalation of the war, the *World Socialist Web Site* warned:

“Given the statements of leading US and NATO officials that they are committed to the military defeat of Russia, the

Putin government will be compelled to interpret all these actions as possible preparations for NATO incursions into Russian territory.”

And in another article on the Ukrainian counter-offensive, we wrote:

“In the event of a military debacle for Ukraine, there exists the extreme danger that the NATO powers will respond with the declaration that they will implement a no-fly zone over Ukraine, involving NATO warplanes attacking Russian aircraft, and the deployment of ground troops from NATO member states into Ukraine.”

Regardless of whether “Air Defender 2023” becomes the immediate starting point for NATO’s direct intervention into the war—and this danger exists—the maneuver is part of the development towards a third world war.

From the point of view of the German government, the maneuver is not only part of the war mobilization against Russia. It is also aimed at re-establishing Germany as a military leader and war power. Germany as a host proves “that we are not only talking about international responsibility, but also taking it on as a logistical hub in Europe and a leading nation in such a large exercise,” boasted Defense Minister Boris Pistorius (Social Democrats).

And Air Force Inspector General Ingo Gerhartz told the *Wall Street Journal*: “Germany needs to take much more responsibility and sometimes take the lead among NATO nations here in Europe... And we prove with this exercise that we are capable of doing so.”

The fact that Gerhartz, of all people, declared yesterday, at the base of the Tactical Air Force Squadron 51 “Immelmann” in Jagel in Schleswig-Holstein, that the preparation of the maneuver was “completed” may have triggered particular unrest in Moscow. Last June, the air force chief openly threatened Russia with the use of nuclear weapons, stating: “For a credible deterrent, we need both the means and the political will to implement the nuclear deterrent if necessary.”

The name “Immelmann” underlines the tradition in which the Luftwaffe operates. It is a tribute to the fighter pilot Max Immelmann, who shot down enemy aircraft during the First World War before he himself died in a mission on 18 June 1916. In the Third Reich, Immelmann was celebrated as a war hero and a unit was also named after him. The Battle Squadron 2 Immelmann played a central role in the war of annihilation against the Soviet Union and was used in numerous operations against Russian cities and positions of the Red Army on the Eastern Front.

The war-mongering media is also beating the drums for war in a way that has not been experienced since Hitler and the Nazis. Thus, the editorial in the current issue of *Der*

Spiegel calls for a massive increase in the German war effort to defeat Russia in Ukraine. The Ukrainian army needs “even more urgent Western support now,” writes head of the foreign affairs desk Mathieu von Rohr. “The next few weeks and months will prove decisive. They will show whether Ukraine can repel the invading army. This war must not become frozen.”

Von Rohr praised Scholz’s militaristic outburst of anger last weekend and noted with satisfaction: “The good thing is that Germany and its Western partners have now understood: It is not enough to prevent Ukraine from losing. You have to help it win.” After the billion-dollar supply of “air defense,” “tanks” and “ammunition,” the German government must now, “as recently indicated by Defense Minister Boris Pistorius, also examine the support of Western fighter jet deliveries.” Von Rohr continues, “The more successful the counter-offensive, the more hope there is for an end to the war.”

This argument corresponds to the murderous war logic of German militarism in the past century. The German elites in the Empire and among the Nazis also justified their total warfare with the cynical argument of wanting to achieve a quick “victory peace” or “final victory.” In fact, they prolonged the duration of the war, sacrificing millions more lives and committing increasingly horrific crimes.

While the ruling class is once again preparing for total war, the opposition in the population is enormous. According to a survey by Infratest dimap published on June 1, 64 percent of Germans reject sending combat aircraft to Kiev. Only 28 percent support it. The thundering fighter jets over Germany in the next few days will further fuel resistance to militarism and war.

The urgent task is to arm this opposition with a clear perspective. The only way to stop the catastrophe is to build a socialist movement of the international working class against war and its root cause: the capitalist profit system. This is what the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) and its youth organization, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), are fighting for.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact