

NATO's war offensive against Russia

Germany to station 4,000 combat troops permanently in Lithuania

Johannes Stern
28 June 2023

Just a few days after the failed coup in Russia and a week before the NATO summit in Vilnius, Germany is increasing its deployment of combat troops in Eastern Europe.

At a meeting with his Lithuanian counterpart Arvydas Anušauskas in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius on Monday, German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius (Social Democratic Party, SPD) announced that Germany was ready to “permanently station a robust brigade in Lithuania.” The prerequisite for this was “that the corresponding infrastructure is available, barracks, training facilities and the aforementioned depots. For a brigade, we are talking about 4,000 soldiers, plus material, and in the case of a permanent stationing, also family.”

The far-reaching plans were announced by Pistorius without any public discussion—let alone a parliamentary vote. They stem from an agreement reached between German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda about a year ago after the last NATO summit in Madrid. That they are now being implemented is part of the escalation of the war against Russia in Ukraine by the imperialist powers, which is also the focus of the upcoming NATO summit in Vilnius.

The original agreement between Scholz and Nausėda shows that the German combat troops on the Russian border will serve to intensify the aggression against Moscow. Both politicians expressed “the will to further strengthen the eastern part of NATO in order to continue to ensure the Alliance’s credible deterrence and defence,” as the text says. It was “agreed that in addition to the already existing and upgraded enhanced forward presence Battlegroup, Germany is ready to lead a robust and combat-ready brigade in Lithuania, to deter and defend against Russian aggression.”

This is the usual propaganda that turns reality on its head. In fact, it is the imperialist powers, not Moscow, who are the main aggressors in Ukraine and Eastern Europe. With its systematic military encirclement of Russia, NATO deliberately provoked the reactionary intervention of the Putin regime. Since then, it has continued to fuel the conflict and is now also using the failed coup attempt for a further escalation of the war.

In Lithuania, Pistorius visited the “Griffin Storm” exercise at the Pabradė military training area together with Anušauskas, Nausėda and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. According to the Bundeswehr (German Armed Forces), armoured infantry brigade 41 “Vorpommern” is “training” there “for deployment on NATO’s eastern flank” and has deployed “around 1,000 soldiers to Lithuania” for this purpose.

Standing in front of a martial backdrop of German battle tanks with their Iron Crosses, they competed in their threats against Russia. Stoltenberg thanked Pistorius for Germany’s contributions. “Griffin Storm” demonstrated “the ability to rapidly increase the German-led NATO battlegroup to brigade size,” he said. The exercise “sends a clear message: NATO is ready to defend every inch of the alliance’s territory.” There were now “more than 40,000 troops under NATO command, especially in the eastern part of the Alliance, supported by a strong air and naval force.” And “further strengthening” would be “high on the agenda at the Vilnius summit.”

Nausėda affirmed that he would do his “part of the job as well and as quickly as possible” to “accommodate the brigade-sized presence of German troops in my country.” He said that there was a “firm political determination to raise the necessary financial resources to finance the infrastructure needs.” And of course, “the modernisation of our armed forces is also a high priority.”

In his own statement, Pistorius boasted of Germany's leading role in the war build-up against Russia in Eastern Europe. "Three decades ago, Germany was the eastern flank of NATO territory until the end of the Warsaw Pact. Today, the Baltic countries, Poland and Slovakia are the eastern flank and quite exposed because of their geographical location." Now, he said, Germany was ready to take "responsibility" and "make our contribution to protecting the eastern flank."

Pistorius preferred not to delve into what Germany's role on the "eastern flank" or "eastern front" had been eight decades ago under the Nazis. But the aggressive posturing of German imperialism in Eastern Europe and the deployment of German combat units for war against Russia reveal the sinister tradition in which the entire NATO war offensive stands.

82 years ago, Hitler's Wehrmacht (Armed Forces) invaded the Soviet Union and plunged the whole of Eastern Europe into a war of extermination in which at least 27 million people lost their lives—six million of them Jews, in the Holocaust. Despite these terrible crimes, the imperialist powers are once again pursuing the goal of subjugating the geostrategically important Russia and plundering its huge reserves of raw materials.

The aims of German imperialism extend far beyond Russia now, as they did then. The German ruling class is deliberately using the conflict to re-establish itself as the leading military power in Europe after losing two world wars, in order to pursue its great power ambitions.

Significantly, ahead of the European Council on June 29-30, Scholz focused his recent government statement on some key statements of Germany's new National Security Strategy. The *World Socialist Web Site* has commented on the document, calling it "a blueprint for war abroad and the establishment of a military state at home."

Scholz's remarks confirmed this assessment. "We are taking a much more active role in protecting our alliance territory and our friends in NATO. We are laying the foundations for a geopolitically capable Europe," he declared. What this means is the militarisation of the continent under German leadership.

Strengthening Europe's role in NATO means "above all, that we bundle our defence efforts in Europe, give the defence industry in Europe a long-term perspective and accelerate its production." Partner nations were being offered "the opportunity to join our procurement initiatives." The Chancellor praised "major projects" such as "the European Sky Shield Initiative," a European missile shield initiated by Berlin.

The National Security Strategy also set "concrete goals" for "national and alliance defence", i.e., the ability to wage a major war. "First, to strengthen the Bundeswehr so that it becomes a guarantor of conventional defence in Europe; second, to promote military capabilities for the future; and third, to expand the security and defence technological base in Europe."

The cost of this war madness is to be borne by the working class in every respect. Scholz announced his government's goal of increasing military spending to two percent of GDP, even despite the "special fund" of €100 billion for the Bundeswehr introduced by his coalition government with the Green and Liberal Democrats (FDP). He said that care would be taken "to ensure that the Bundeswehr finally receives the equipment it needs—through effective procurement from the special fund, but also by spending 2 percent of our GDP on defence for the first time in decades, starting next year."

The social attacks on the working class to come are gigantic. In concrete terms, implementing the two percent target means increasing the regular military budget by almost €30 billion. The annual war budget would then amount to about €80 billion. By comparison, the current education budget is €21.46 billion. Last year, the health budget was already cut from €64 to €22 billion. And for the current budget, Federal Finance Minister Christian Lindner (FDP) is planning an austerity package of at least €20 billion.

All the capitalist parties in Germany are working closely together to push through the pro-war course and the associated massive social attacks against opposition among working people. According to the parliamentary record, at the beginning of his government statement, when Scholz announced his administration would support Ukraine "in its defence struggle with all its strength and above all for as long as necessary," not only the deputies of the governing parties SPD, FDP and Greens applauded, but also representatives of the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Left Party.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact