

Germany's defence minister threatens Russia with war

Johannes Stern
26 January 2024

The NATO war against Russia over Ukraine is increasingly taking on the character of a massive and coordinated military mobilisation by the imperialist powers. In several interviews following last week's announcement of operation Steadfast Defender—the largest NATO manoeuvres since the end of the Cold War—Defence Minister Boris Pistorius declared that Germany had to prepare for a direct war with Russia, a nuclear power.

Last Monday, he told the TV news programme *heute-journal* that “we have to put ourselves in a position to fight a war that is forced upon us, not one that we start, that goes without saying.” He then said, “But if we are attacked, we have to be able to wage war and that is crucial, and we have to prepare for that.”

The entire interview made clear how concretely the ruling class is discussing war scenarios that would result in the deaths of millions and the destruction of the entire continent. If Moscow were to organise an uprising by the Russian minority in the Baltic states or attack one of those states, according to one such scenario, Germany would have to respond militarily and be in a position to wage all-out war.

“That's exactly the point,” Pistorius said, which is why a German combat brigade with 5,000 soldiers was currently being set up in Lithuania, “to be present on the ground right away.” The brigade, he explained, would be “ready for deployment in 2027.”

Pistorius added that according to military experts, Russian aggression could occur within five years. But, he cautioned, this was “an estimate” and “nobody knows for sure.” In any case, he stressed, the next three to five years had to be used to “intensively arm ourselves.”

In an interview with the *Tagesspiegel*, Pistorius stated that an “attack by Russia” was possible in “a period of five to eight years.” He therefore considered “understandable” the Swedish homeland security minister's call to “arm ourselves for war—now.” But Germans also had to “learn to live with the danger again and prepare ourselves—militarily, socially and in terms of civil defence.”

This is tantamount to a declaration of war on Russia. The defence minister, who has declared that his goal is to make Germany “fit for war” again, is talking publicly about a

possible direct war with Russia. The propaganda line about a “war of defence” turns reality on its head, echoing the old lies of German imperialism. German aggression in the First and Second World Wars—including the war of annihilation against the Soviet Union, which cost the lives of 30 million Soviet citizens—was also described by the German elites in the Kaiser's Empire and under the Nazis as “self-defence,” or “imposed self-defence.”

Today, German imperialism, in alliance with the other leading NATO powers, is once again the aggressor. With the systematic military encirclement of Russia and the 2014 anti-Russian coup in Kiev, NATO provoked the reactionary intervention of the Putin regime. Now it is continually escalating the conflict in order to force resource-rich Russia into an even bigger war so as to subjugate it militarily.

Regardless of the exact timetable that Pistorius and the other NATO warmongers have in mind, the mere announcement that Germany and NATO are preparing for war will fuel the escalation. In view of the threats, the Russian government and military leadership will deem themselves forced to prepare for a possible NATO attack and all-out war.

The large-scale exercise Steadfast Defender, which is currently underway, involves the biggest NATO manoeuvres since the end of the Cold War. According to NATO, 90,000 soldiers will be mobilised by the end of May, including some 40,000 from the US, 20,000 from the UK and 12,500 from the Bundeswehr (German Armed Forces). More than 50 warships, 80 fighter planes, helicopters, and drones and over 1,000 armoured vehicles, including 133 battle tanks and 533 infantry fighting vehicles, will take part in the war exercise.

Geographically, the manoeuvres extend across Scandinavia and the Baltic states to Poland, Romania and Germany. The Bundeswehr boasts that Germany is assuming “leadership responsibility” for the exercise, and serving “as a huge hub for the necessary troop deployments of national and international forces.”

Berlin is also forging ahead with further arms deliveries to Ukraine. This year, Germany will massively expand its support for Kiev, Pistorius said at a meeting of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group, the so-called Ramstein Format, on Tuesday. Among other things, it is planning to deliver six SEA KING

Mk41 multipurpose helicopters from Bundeswehr stocks. The delivery includes a full package of accessories and spare parts, as well as flight and technical training support.

According to Pistorius, the Sea King helicopters will “help the Ukrainians in many areas: from reconnaissance over the Black Sea to the transport of soldiers.” In the war against Russia, he added, “air defence remains the number one priority.” He was therefore pleased that Germany, together with France, would “assume responsibility in the air defence capability coalition and jointly coordinate with more than 20 partners.” The goal of training 10,000 Ukrainian soldiers in Germany in 2024 was also being pursued.

The German government’s official list of military support services for Ukraine is getting longer and longer, and shows the extent to which Berlin is already waging war against the Russian army in Ukraine. The following items are listed in the “in preparation/implementation” section:

- 105 LEOPARD 1 A5 main battle tanks
- 30 MARDER infantry fighting vehicles
- 42 Armoured Personnel Carriers (APC)
- 15 GEPARD anti-aircraft tanks
- 9 IRIS-T SLM air defence systems

In addition, there are armoured recovery vehicles, armoured bridge-laying vehicles, and armoured mine-clearing vehicles, as well as various types of ammunition, including 250,000 rounds of 155 mm artillery ammunition and 259,680 rounds of Gepard ammunition.

In an interview with *Tagesspiegel*, Pistorius boasted that Germany was “the second largest supporter” of Kiev in terms of military aid, after the US, “and thus the largest in Europe.” According to official figures from the German government, the funds for the “defence budget” amounted to about €5.4 billion in 2023 (after €2 billion in 2022). And the commitment authorisations for 2024 and the following years already amounted to some €10.5 billion. These gigantic sums are only a fraction of the total amount of money being channeled into the arms race.

What are the factors driving the ruling class towards total war? In a recent perspective on the NATO war escalation, the WSWS wrote:

As in the two world wars of the 20th century, the imperialist ruling elites feel that they have little time, and that only rapid escalation can counteract powerful political forces—in the military situation and the international class struggle—that are working against them.

This applies in particular to German imperialism. The ruling class is reacting to the debacle of the Ukrainian offensive, which, despite tens of thousands of dead soldiers, has not

brought any significant successes. It is also responding to the possibility of Trump’s return to the White House by beating the drum ever more aggressively in favour of war and a more independent German-European great power policy.

Pistorius demanded in *Tagesspiegel*:

“We need more European capacity to act—regardless of the outcome of the US elections. We need to make the defence industry in particular more efficient.”

What the elites fear most is that the working class will thwart their war plans. For months, millions worldwide have been protesting against Israel’s genocide in the Gaza Strip, which is cynically supported by the ruling class in Germany under the banner of “Never again.” In Germany, following massive farmers’ protests, train drivers are currently on strike, and millions have demonstrated against the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the sharp shift to the right by the ruling class as a whole.

In order to conduct the fight against fascism and war, opposition must be developed into an international movement of the working class against capitalism, armed with a clear socialist leadership and perspective. This is precisely what the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) is fighting for, together with its sister parties across Europe and internationally, in the upcoming European elections in June. The SGP’s election statement declares:

The only legitimate conclusion that can be drawn from Nazi Germany’s war of extermination and the Holocaust, the worst crimes in human history, is this: The working class must never again permit war and fascism, and must eliminate once and for all the root of this horror, capitalism. ... We demand:

Stop the NATO war in Ukraine! No sanctions or arms deliveries!

Two world wars are enough! Stop the warmongers!

€100 billion for daycare centers, schools and hospitals, instead of for armaments and war!



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact