

Germany's 2023 armed forces report: A call for war and the militarization of society

Johannes Stern
14 March 2024

The armed forces commissioner of Germany's parliament (Bundestag), Eva Högl (Social Democrats, SPD), presented the latest edition of the armed forces report Tuesday. As in previous years, the report aims to advance German rearmament and the buildup for war.

Presenting the report in the federal press conference room, Högl stated that she had to “unfortunately determine” that the armed forces (Bundeswehr) “still had too little of everything.” She continued, “There is a lack of ammunition, spare parts, radios. There is a lack of tanks, ships and aircraft.”

The warmongering media eagerly took up Högl's statements and drew a picture of an “army in the red zone,” as the daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung* put it, which must finally be upgraded and made fit for war. The *Tagesspiegel* wrote: “Shrinking troop numbers, disastrous barracks: That's the harshness of the military report on the new epoch,” declared by Chancellor Olaf Scholz following Russia's US-provoked invasion of Ukraine. And the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* complained: “The armed forces are therefore not yet fully ready for action.”

With this propaganda, the ruling class pursues a series of interconnected goals. On the one hand, military spending is to be further increased. The chairman of the German Armed Forces Association, Colonel André Wüstner, appealed on public broadcaster ARD's *Morgenmagazin* for a massive increase in the defence budget: “We have major problems in all the armed forces, measured by their tasks and the situation. Investing now is essential.” The €100 billion Bundeswehr special fund had “unfortunately” not improved anything, he claimed.

Eva Högl already called in 2023 for a special fund of €300 billion. The new armed forces report states that it is already clear “that after the exhaustion of the special fund” by the end of 2027 “a significant increase in the defence budget in the order of billions of euros will be

necessary.”

The rearmament, which is accompanied by violent attacks on social and democratic rights, is already gigantic. Officially, the government plans to spend around €72 billion on defence this year. The regular defence budget accounts for €51.95 billion and around €20 billion come from the special fund. Taking into account other military expenditures hidden in other budget items and funds, the actual war budget is even higher, at €85.5 billion.

The immediate concern of the ruling class is to vastly expand military support for the Ukrainian army, which is suffering terrible losses and has its back to the wall. “Despite the escalating and worrying situation in the Middle East, the war in Ukraine must not be allowed to fade into the background,” the armed forces report says. “In supporting Ukraine,” the Bundeswehr “makes a considerable contribution” and must continue to do so.

The report provided an indication of the extent to which the Bundeswehr is already a party to the war in Ukraine. Supplies of equipment and weapons from its own stockpiles, as well as government-funded supplies from industry, would provide “material military support services, such as armored combat vehicles, air defense assets, artillery and logistics, pioneering and endurance capabilities, and protective and special equipment for the Ukrainian Armed Forces.” In addition, the Bundeswehr has “so far successfully provided mission-oriented training to about 10,000 Ukrainian soldiers, especially on Western weapons systems, in local and urban combat, in the medical service, as pioneers and infantrymen.”

The German government is currently preparing—despite all claims to the contrary by Scholz—the delivery of “long-range weapons systems” to enable Ukraine to “target strategically relevant targets far in the rear of the Russian aggressor,” according to a Bundestag resolution of the coalition government of February 22.

After Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (Greens) spoke out again on Sunday for the delivery of Taurus cruise missiles to Kiev, *Die Welt* reported Tuesday that Defense Minister Boris Pistorius (SPD) had given the order to make “all Taurus missiles operational.” According to the newspaper, the Bundestag Defense Committee was informed of the plans in the secret part of its special session on Tuesday evening.

Although the certification of the weapon systems by the manufacturer MBDA is not yet an “indication of a change of heart by the Federal Chancellor... the decision now to make all of the Bundeswehr’s Taurus missiles ready for use opens up further options for the Federal Government,” *Die Welt* commented. “It could give more of the cruise missiles to Ukraine in the future without exposing its own national defense.” And a so-called swap agreement, as recently offered by the British government, is “more likely to be possible.”

The direction of travel is clear: the ruling class is responding to the leaked conversation between air force commanders about the possible delivery of Taurus missiles to Ukraine and their use against Russian targets by pushing these plans ahead. Högl also indicated at the press conference that she supports supplying Taurus missiles. When asked “whether this sensitive device should be made available to Ukraine,” she replied that Ukraine needed to be “supported with everything it needs.” The soldiers also see this as their mission, she added.

Germany’s support for the war in Ukraine and the genocide in Gaza are aimed at strengthening German militarism so that it can play a leading role in the struggle for the imperialist redivision of the world. This is also made clear in the military report. “What both wars have in common is that they change the global order. The world is becoming more multipolar, and there are more and more crises, conflicts and wars,” it said. “Our solidarity with Israel and with Ukraine must therefore lead to our being able to become stronger ourselves.”

The report stated that important steps have already been taken along this path last year. Under the title “Combative. RESILIENT. Sustainable,” the government “presented a national security strategy for the first time in June of the reporting year.” In November 2023, Pistorius and Inspector General Carsten Breuer (the highest-ranking military officer) presented the “new defence policy guidelines for the new epoch” at the Federal Armed Forces Conference in Berlin. Both documents are aimed at refocusing all areas of society on war.

“Our combativeness requires a warlike Bundeswehr,” the guidelines stated. This means “that their personnel and equipment are geared to the performance of their demanding tasks.” Soldiers need “the readiness to fight at any time with the expectation to succeed in high-intensity combat.” “We don’t just want to win, but we must” in a confrontation with “at least a peer competitor.”

Another goal is “war prowess as a maxim of action.” Germany needs “soldiers who have the will to bravely defend the right and freedom of the German people while consciously accepting the danger to life and limb.”

This is exactly what is at stake now: German soldiers and civilians are to be mobilized en masse again in order to put their bodies in the line of fire for the predatory interests of German imperialism. “As a next step, the requirements of the defence policy guidelines must be converted into a new Bundeswehr capability profile and into a military strategy,” the armed forces report demands.

Central to this is “that a broad societal majority is prepared to bear a strengthened Bundeswehr” and “to anchor the Bundeswehr deep in the heart of society.” The military commissioner therefore welcomes “the debate on the introduction of a year of service,” i.e., a form of conscription.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) and its youth and student organisation IYSSE strongly condemn these plans, which threaten the lives of hundreds of thousands of young people—and, in the event of a nuclear escalation, the entire human race. After the German crimes in the First and especially in the Second World War, there is a deeply rooted opposition to militarism and war among the population, which is coinciding with a growing wave of protests and strikes. The SGP is participating in the European elections to develop this resistance and arm it with a socialist perspective.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact