

On 80th anniversary of Stauffenberg's assassination attempt on Hitler

German government intensifies campaign for militarism and war

Johannes Stern
24 July 2024

Against the backdrop of the deep political crisis in the United States and the possibility of former president Donald Trump winning the presidential election, Germany's ruling class is accelerating its return to militarism.

In an extensive interview with the *Tagesspiegel* newspaper on Monday, the top military brass, Inspector General of the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces), Carsten Breuer, reiterated Defense Minister Boris Pistorius' (Social Democrat, SPD) call for Germany to become more independent of Washington in terms of foreign policy and to make "society as a whole" again "fit for war."

The occasion for the interview was the 80th anniversary of the failed assassination attempt on Hitler by Wehrmacht officer Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg on July 20, 1944.

"During his presidency, Trump has brutally held up a mirror to us Europeans and made it clear that we must strengthen the European pillar of the alliance and take on a role that is more independent of the US—something that other US presidents before him have also called for," explained the Bundeswehr's most senior soldier. And "at the latest with the Russian war of aggression," "everyone understood that."

In fact, Breuer's own statements make it clear that the NATO powers are the main aggressors in the Ukraine war. With their decades-long encirclement of Russia, they have downright provoked the Kremlin's reactionary invasion. Now they are escalating the conflict further and further in order to bring Russia to its knees militarily and realise long-cherished rearmament and war plans.

In the interview, Breuer called for, among other things:

- Additional funds for this year's war budget in order to establish the "full operational readiness" of the Bundeswehr and to make the necessary "new acquisitions." "The goal is effective structures that make us fit for war."

- The swift reintroduction of compulsory military service: "We urgently need military service because it trains the future reservists that we will have to be able to call on in the event of defence." Anyone who performs "basic military service for six months" could "be part of Germany's operational plan in the event of defence."

In other words, it is about recruiting cannon fodder for a direct war against Russia. This is what the secret, 1000-page "Operation Plan Germany" is all about—a detailed concept for the total mobilisation for war in all areas of society. He wanted to "appeal to the young people in our country to ask themselves one question: Am I prepared to defend Germany?"

- Increased military aid for Ukraine: Breuer emphasised in the interview that Kiev remained "dependent on Western solidarity and support in order to be able to defend itself." Everything was being done "to ensure that Ukraine continues to receive the support it urgently needs."

Breuer also praised the permanent deployment of a German combat brigade to Lithuania and defended the planned stationing of long-range US precision weapons in Germany. This was "not an aggressive act on our part, but a reaction" to the Russian arms build-up. This is the familiar propaganda. "In reality, the stationing serves direct military strikes against Moscow," as the WSWs emphasises in its statement "No stationing of US missiles in Germany! Stop the danger of nuclear escalation!"

The failed assassination attempt on Hitler on July 20, 1944, the 80th anniversary of which served as a hook for the interview, embodied "our moral obligation from German history that these crimes must never be repeated," Breuer cynically claimed. Only to then propagate a rearmament and war programme that stands in direct continuity with the Nazis and the Third Reich.

On Saturday, Breuer, Pistorius and Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) had already used the ceremonial pledge of allegiance on the 80th anniversary of the assassination attempt in the Defence Ministry's Bendlerblock in Berlin, which also houses the German Resistance Memorial Center, to swear in the recruits to the new war offensive against Russia.

The "new era" in foreign policy declared by Scholz after the Russian "attack on the whole of Ukraine" meant "that we must make more of an effort to secure our peace and defend our freedom," the chancellor said. That was why "we stand unwaveringly by the side of the invaded Ukraine. That is why we are taking on greater responsibility within NATO, especially on the eastern border of our alliance. And that is why we are strengthening our Bundeswehr."

The “resistance fighters of July 20” had “not been lucky enough” to “live to see this other, better Germany,” Scholz continued. “And yet they laid one of the foundations for our democratic country, for our country that is committed to human dignity, the freedom of the individual, a united Europe and the pursuit of peace in the world.”

That is a lie in two respects. The military men around Stauffenberg were no more committed to “democracy,” “freedom” and “peace” than the ruling class is today. In terms of foreign policy, Berlin is once again beating the war drum against Russia, supporting Israel’s genocide against the Palestinians and working to organise the whole of Europe under its leadership in order to pursue the interests of German imperialism globally. Domestically, this programme goes hand in hand with massive social attacks and the establishment of a police state.

It is only logical that the ruling class should rely on the assassins of July 20. Even though they were supported by leading representatives of the banned SPD and the trade unions, Stauffenberg and his comrades-in-arms were reactionary henchmen of German militarism who, by killing Hitler, wanted above all to avert Germany’s complete military defeat in the Second World War.

Contrary to the heroic propaganda spread by the German government and all the establishment parties and the media, the July 20 conspirators were not champions of freedom and democracy. The majority of them were right-wing anti-democrats, antisemites and nationalists who had long supported the Hitler regime and were themselves deeply involved in the Nazi crimes.

Some of the most important figures in the plot, already characterised by the WSWs in its article on the 75th anniversary of the assassination, include:

General Eduard Wagner, who provided the plane that took Stauffenberg to the Führer’s headquarters at the Wolf’s Lair and back to Berlin after the assassination, played a central role in the planning and execution of the war of annihilation against the Soviet Union.

“Prisoners of war in the prison camps who are not working must starve to death,” he stated in November 1941. With regard to the blockade of Leningrad, he wrote to his wife on September 9, 1941: “First of all, Petersburg has to be left to stew, what are we supposed to do with a city of 3 1/2 million that is only putting food on our wallets. There’s no sentimentality about it.”

Wolf-Heinrich von Helldorf, with whom Stauffenberg had met personally several times in 1944 and whom Himmler named first among the conspirators in his speech to the Gauleiters on August 3, 1944, had been a member of the NSDAP (Nazi Party), Sturm Abteilung (SA, Storm Troop) and SS long before the transfer of power to Hitler. Together with the then Gauleiter of Berlin, Joseph Goebbels, he organised the first antisemitic pogrom in Berlin on September 12, 1931, the day of the Jewish New Year, with the so-called “Kurfürstendamm riot.”

He later played a central role in the deportation of Jews from the capital. “Helldorff hands me a list of the measures taken against the Jews in Berlin. They are now really rigorous and comprehensive. This is how we will drive the Jews out of Berlin in the foreseeable future,” Goebbels noted in his diary on July 2,

1938.

SS Gruppenführer Arthur Nebe, whose units were supposed to arrest leading representatives of the Nazi regime after the assassination attempt, headed the notorious Einsatzgruppe B (mobile killing unit) in the first months of the war against the Soviet Union. Under his command, the death squad murdered more than 45,000 civilians, the majority of whom were Jews. He tested mass killings with poison gas, procured the poison gas for the murder of the disabled, e.g. in Action T4, and led the investigation into the communist resistance fighter Georg Elser, who had only just failed in his attempt to assassinate Hitler and almost the entire Nazi leadership on 8 November 1939 in the Bürgerbräukeller in Munich.

In December 1941, Stauffenberg himself welcomed the unification of the command of the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and the Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht in Hitler’s hands. He had seen the beginning of the Second World War as “redemption” and wrote in a letter to his wife in the course of the invasion of Poland: “The population is an incredible rabble, a great many Jews and a great many mixed people. A people who only feel at ease under the heel. The thousands of prisoners will do our agriculture a lot of good. In Germany they are certainly good to use, hard-working, willing and frugal.”

Before the assassination attempt, Stauffenberg professed his commitment “in spirit and in deed to the great traditions” of the German people and “to the Germanic essence.” He declared that he despised the “lie of equality” and that the “new order” he was striving for had to be based on the “recognition of natural ranks.”

By honouring these extreme right-wing and nationalist figures, the German government is itself making clear the dark traditions to which it is returning in terms of foreign and domestic policy. Significantly, the pledge was also attended by representatives of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), which is being systematically built up and courted by the ruling class in order to push through the war policy against growing resistance from the population. On X (formerly Twitter), AfD member of the Bundestag (parliament) and former Bundeswehr soldier Jan Nolte, among others, boasted about his participation and published a picture of the military parade in the Bendlerblock.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact