

Bollwerk Bärlin: Germany's military practices domestic deployment and operates as far as New Zealand and into outer space

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This week, one of the most aggressive military manoeuvres of the postwar period took place in Berlin. Under the codename *Bollwerk Bärlin*, the government deployed 250 heavily armed soldiers of the Guard Battalion in underground railway tunnels and on an abandoned industrial site to train for urban warfare and operations against opponents in urban terrain.

Officially, the exercise was intended as “preparation for a state of defence.” In reality, it marks a qualitative escalation of domestic militarisation. It is part of the systematic preparations by the ruling class for war abroad and repression at home.

The manoeuvres are part of Germany’s broader militarist offensive. While the government is rearming on a scale not seen since Hitler, the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) already operate on global battlefields: Luftwaffe aircraft now patrol as far away as New Zealand, and with the newly unveiled space security strategy, German military planning extends into outer space. The exercise in Berlin is directly linked to this worldwide escalation of militarism.

At the same time, developments in Germany cannot be viewed separately from events in the United States. There, the fascist President Donald Trump is attempting to establish an openly dictatorial regime; mobilising military and paramilitary units in city centres to crush the growing opposition to his oligarchic rule. The same logic is unfolding in Europe, especially in Germany.

The ruling class is preparing for a global war and for violently suppressing the inevitable resistance of the working class. The militarisation of domestic politics is not a side effect but an integral component of the war preparations.

When the Bundeswehr claims that its menacing show of force in Berlin is preparation for a Russian attack, this is a double lie. First, Germany is not being threatened by Russia; rather, Germany and other imperialist powers provoked Putin’s reactionary invasion of Ukraine through decades of military expansion and the encirclement of Russia. Now they are using the conflict they themselves set into motion to militarise society and lay the groundwork for a direct war against the resource-rich and strategically central nuclear power.

Second, the exercise is directed against the German population itself. The choice of training locations is revealing: Public spaces and an industrial site are not classic theatres of war but places where workers protest, strike or resist social attacks. The Bundeswehr is training for operations against protests, uprisings

and strike movements—that is, against the millions of people who reject war, rearmament and social devastation.

The army is once again becoming an instrument of domestic repression, which in Germany has a long and bloody tradition. In the Kaiser’s imperial empire, the Weimar Republic and under the Nazis, the German military and paramilitary formations were used to crush social and political protests and revolutionary uprisings of the working class.

For years, the government has been working to legalise the deployment of the military domestically, something currently prohibited by the constitution. This week, the chairman of the Bundestag (parliamentary) Defence Committee, Marcus F. Röwekamp, declared on broadcaster Deutschlandfunk that the division between internal and external security was “no longer appropriate.” One must discuss amending the constitution to allow the Bundeswehr to be deployed domestically in “special threat situations,” he said. This included simplifying military assistance for the police and using Bundeswehr drones to counter “enemy systems.”

Militarisation is being deliberately normalised. As part of *Bollwerk Bärlin*, the Bundeswehr distributed flyers to residents, set up a hotline and erected an information booth so that “no one is surprised when masked soldiers get out of their vehicles and enter the underground station,” as a spokesman explained. This is the gradual acclimatisation of the population to soldiers carrying out police tasks in public spaces.

Berlin is not the only place hosting such “manoeuvres”: in Bremerhaven, the Bundeswehr practised urban combat in 2024 under the name “Fishtown Guard.” In Hamburg, the “Red Storm Bravo” exercise took place in September, in which soldiers drilled the redeployment of NATO troops eastwards, the suppression of anti-war demonstrators and defence against drone attacks.

Parallel to the domestic build-up, the government is pushing ahead with external war preparations at enormous speed. After approving €1 trillion in war credits—supported by all Bundestag parties, including the Left Party and the Greens—Berlin is implementing ever more megalomaniacal rearmament programmes.

On November 19, Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul (Christian Democrat, CDU) and Defence Minister Boris Pistorius (Social Democrat, SPD) presented Germany’s first space security

strategy. By 2030, €35 billion is to be invested in new rockets, satellites, telescopes, early-warning systems and ground stations. The strategy represents an openly offensive German claim in space.

Pistorius stated bluntly at the presentation: “We observe that Russia and China are also preparing to exercise influence over other satellites—those belonging to us or to the Americans. That means outer space is becoming militarised. ...

“We must be in a position to respond offensively, in the sense of a retaliatory strike.”

With this, the government is entering into the violent repartition of outer space, a gigantic escalation that further intensifies great-power tensions.

And the war offensive already extends far beyond Europe on Earth. For the first time in history, the German Luftwaffe is currently conducting exercises in the South Pacific over New Zealand. Squadron Commodore Colonel Markus Knoll explained that the South Pacific was an ideal area for training attacks in complex mountainous and low-altitude scenarios to prepare for future war scenarios against Russia and worldwide.

“If we manage to project tactical capabilities down here—from our point of view, at the other end of the world—then we can do it anywhere in the world, especially on NATO’s eastern flank,” he said.

A commentary by broadcaster ZDF on the manoeuvres captured the imperialist aims of Germany’s military offensive. It is not about defending freedom and democracy but about economic and geostrategic interests, above all, vis-à-vis Russia and China but increasingly also against the United States. “Germany no longer wants to be a geopolitical freeloader; it is seeking allies in the Indo-Pacific, a region vital for the German economy, where China is becoming increasingly aggressive and the USA is pursuing its own interests.”

The ZDF commentary continued: “The Indo-Pacific and its sea lanes contain the world’s most important trade routes. Twenty-five percent of global trade passes through the Strait of Malacca.” With its Indo-Pacific guidelines, the German government in 2020 “for the first time, defined its own geostrategic interests for the region. But in addition to diplomacy, military credibility is needed when one formulates geopolitical ambitions.”

What this ultimately means is explained by Germany’s most senior military brass, the new Inspector of the Army, Christian Freuding, in a recent interview with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. In the style and spirit of a general in Hitler’s Wehrmacht (Army), he demanded that the German army, German industry and the German population prepare once again for the possibility of total war.

“We must further increase the operational readiness of the army on the path towards war-fighting capability. Every day counts, and we have little time. The enemy will not wait for our readiness.” The second priority is “growth.” The army must “expand,” and the government is creating “preconditions” for this with the new conscription law. In addition, the “technological leaps we see in Russia’s war against Ukraine” must be made “usable” for the German army, and a new “leadership culture” must be established.

The Berlin manoeuvres are part of this comprehensive war and

militarisation offensive, which is reminiscent of the Nazis, and not only rhetorically. Achieving “war-fighting capability” abroad inevitably means the militarisation of society as a whole. As on the eve of the Second World War, the ruling class believes it can enforce its imperialist aims only by simultaneously establishing an authoritarian state order.

Germany’s war preparations stand in open conflict with the interests of the overwhelming majority of the population. Budget cuts, mass redundancies, austerity programmes, the dramatic rise in social inequality and the reintroduction of conscription are encountering growing opposition. Millions reject the policy of war and rearmament.

For this very reason, the ruling class sees itself compelled to strengthen the military at home. The deployment of the Bundeswehr against demonstrators, strikers and young people is being prepared because the government knows its policies can only be enforced through violence.

Just as in the United States, where Trump is moving towards dictatorship, the European bourgeoisie is responding to the deepest crisis of the capitalist system since the 1930s with war abroad and repression at home. The parallels to the Weimar Republic and Hitler’s rise to power are unmistakable: Today, too, the ruling class is turning to dictatorial methods to impose its imperialist redivision of the world and its attacks on the rights and gains of the working class.

The working class can and must stop this development—but only if it builds its own independent organisations and develops a clear political perspective: an international socialist strategy that unites the fight against war with the struggle against its root cause, the capitalist profit system.

The struggle against *Bollwerk Bärlin*, against the militarisation of domestic life, against the space strategy and the Bundeswehr’s drive for “world-war readiness” is ultimately the struggle against a system that produces war and oppression. It requires the building of a new socialist mass movement that unites workers in Germany, across Europe and worldwide, and confronts the danger of war at its roots.



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