

Anniversary of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union: Pistorius prepares war against Russia in Lithuania

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On Monday, Defence Minister Boris Pistorius visited Lithuania to take part in the first major exercise of the Bundeswehr's Armoured Brigade 45 stationed there. That the visit took place precisely on the 85th anniversary of the German invasion of the Soviet Union is more than a provocation. It demonstrates the character of NATO's war offensive against Russia in Ukraine, which is increasingly being led by the European powers and, in particular, by Berlin.

In the "Freedom Shield" exercise, around 2,900 soldiers from eight NATO states—a large proportion of them from Germany—are training at the Pabradė training area, only about 20 kilometres (12.4 miles) from the border with Belarus. Around 800 vehicles, tanks, artillery and more than 300 drones are involved. The exercise trains high-tech warfare on NATO's eastern flank: combat with and against drones, the interaction of unmanned systems with tanks and artillery, reconnaissance, rapid deployment and command-and-control operations in the immediate vicinity of Belarus and the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad.

The German brigade is to be fully operational by the end of 2027, with 4,800 soldiers and 200 civilian employees. Around 1,800 Bundeswehr personnel are already permanently stationed in Lithuania. It is the first permanent stationing of a German combat formation abroad since the end of the Second World War. In Rūdninkai, near the border with Belarus, a German military town is being built: barracks, ammunition depots, logistics areas, maintenance halls for tanks and other combat vehicles, as well as firing ranges and training facilities.

During his visit, Pistorius made clear that these war plans are to be realized through forced recruitment. Although the federal government claims that it wants to build up the brigade mainly with volunteers, the defence minister admitted that there would "probably" be soldiers who would have to be compelled. The Inspector of the Army, Lieutenant General Christian Freuding, was more explicit: An army does not function only through voluntary service. He said it would be ensured that the soldiers "receive their mission at the right time and in the right place." He then added: "And we will be operational by the end of 2027. Period."

This language is unmistakable. The federal government is not preparing for an abstract "deterrence" but for war against Russia. The Bundeswehr is being stationed on the Eastern front, society is being militarized, conscription is being reintroduced and soldiers are to be forced, if necessary, to deploy to the Russian border.

The timing of Pistorius' visit is of enormous historical significance. On June 22, 1941, Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union. This marked the beginning of the greatest war of annihilation in history.

Three million German soldiers, 600,000 motor vehicles, 3,350 tanks, 7,000 artillery pieces and 3,900 aircraft crossed the border. The invading army carried not only weapons but detailed murder plans. It was accompanied by *Einsatzgruppen*, whose task was to systematically murder communists, partisans, Jews and Sinti.

The war in the East was planned from the outset as a war of annihilation. It was aimed not only at military conquest but at the extermination of "Jewish Bolshevism," the enslavement and decimation of the Slavic population and the creation of German *Lebensraum* in the East. Entire villages were wiped out, civilians shot en masse, Jews driven into pits and murdered and Soviet prisoners of war systematically killed through starvation.

The Commissar Order ordered the immediate execution of political commissars. The Decree on Military Jurisdiction placed the civilian population practically outside any legal protection. The so-called *Generalplan Ost* envisaged the expulsion, enslavement and murder of millions of people.

The balance sheet was monstrous. At least 27 million Soviet citizens lost their lives, the overwhelming majority of them civilians. Three million Soviet prisoners of war were murdered or killed by hunger, cold and forced labour. The blockade of Leningrad alone cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of civilians. At Babi Yar near Kiev, German murder squads shot 33,771 Jews—men, women and children—within two days. In the following months, tens of thousands more were murdered there.

Lithuania was one of the countries where the Nazis and their local collaborators committed particularly gruesome crimes. Before the war, Vilnius was a major center of Jewish life. After the German invasion, Lithuania's Jews were deprived of their rights, ghettoized and murdered with breathtaking speed. In Ponary near Vilnius, German units and Lithuanian auxiliaries shot tens of thousands of Jews, communists, Soviet prisoners of war and Polish intellectuals. The extermination of Lithuania's Jews is among the most horrific chapters of the Holocaust.

That German tanks are once again rolling up to the Russian border precisely in this country shows that German imperialism is again expanding eastward 85 years after the beginning of the war of annihilation. What was invoked after 1945 as "Never again" has long since been turned into its opposite. The crimes of German imperialism are being downplayed, relativized or suppressed, while Germany once again seeks to become Europe's leading military power.

The new military strategy presented in April by Pistorius and Inspector General Carsten Breuer formulates this objective openly.

Russia is defined as the main adversary. The Bundeswehr is to be built up into the “strongest conventional army in Europe.” The state, economy and society are to be aligned with war within the framework of “total defence.” Operation Plan Germany transforms the Federal Republic into a logistical hub for NATO operations on the eastern front. Roads, railways, ports, airports, hospitals, companies, administrations and labor are being incorporated into war planning.

The brigade in Lithuania is a central element of this strategy. Germany does not only want to move troops, weapons and supplies in the rear but to be present at the front itself. The sentence by Friedrich Merz, which now even appears on the wall of Vilnius’s historic town hall, sums up the program: “Lithuania’s security is also our security. The protection of Vilnius is the protection of Berlin.” The German ruling class once again defines Eastern Europe as the strategic forefield of German power politics.

This policy is inseparably bound up with the escalation of NATO’s war in Ukraine. During Zelensky’s visit to Berlin in April, Germany and Ukraine signed a “strategic partnership” that drives forward the fusion of the German arms industry with the Ukrainian war apparatus. Germany supports the production of drones, air defence systems, ammunition and long-range weapons systems.

During his visit to Kiev in May, Pistorius announced that Germany and Ukraine intended jointly to develop and produce drones and other unmanned weapons systems with ranges of up to 1,500 kilometres (932 miles). This enables attacks on Moscow and St. Petersburg, as well as industrial centers, ports, airfields and command centers deep inside Russia—which is already happening with increasing frequency.

The claim that this is about defending Ukraine or Europe against a Russian aggressor is a political lie. NATO provoked the war through its decades-long eastward expansion, the 2014 coup in Kiev backed by Washington and Berlin and the systematic transformation of Ukraine into a military outpost against Russia. Since the Russian invasion in February 2022, the NATO powers have escalated the war ever further. They supply weapons, train Ukrainian soldiers, provide reconnaissance and targeting data, coordinate logistics and enable attacks deep inside Russia.

In doing so, Berlin is working with a regime in Kiev that openly relies on fascist forces and rehabilitates the Ukrainian Nazi collaborators of the Second World War. The veneration of Stepan Bandera, Andriy Melnyk and the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) is not a marginal phenomenon but part of official state ideology. These forces collaborated with the Nazis during that war and were involved in antisemitic pogroms, ethnic cleansing and mass murder. Today they are honored as “national heroes,” while the imperialist powers claim to be defending “democracy” and “freedom.”

This propaganda itself has an eerie historical continuity. Hitler, too, did not openly justify the invasion of the Soviet Union with conquest, plunder and extermination. In his proclamation of June 22, 1941, he claimed that Germany had always wanted peace but had been forced to act by the alleged threat from Moscow. The subjugation of half of Europe was presented as a protective measure, military aggression as defence and the war of aggression as a pre-emptive strike. An announcement by the High Command of the Wehrmacht stated: “To ward off the imminent danger from the East, the German Wehrmacht struck on June 22, at 3 a.m., into the midst of the enormous deployment of enemy forces.”

In Lithuania, too, it is currently evident how closely German war policy is bound up with the rewriting of history. At the Bundeswehr

site in R?dninkai, the expansion of the military training area threatens to displace a memorial site to Jewish partisans. The federal government officially claimed that it would work to preserve the former partisan camp. But reality tells another story: On the historic grounds of Jewish and left-wing resistance to the Nazis, a military infrastructure is being built for German tanks and the next war against Russia.

According to a report by the news magazine *Der Spiegel*, the responsible Lithuanian Ministry of Culture does not consider the former partisan camp worthy of protection. As a propaganda structure, the historical site falls under Lithuania’s ban on the “promotion of totalitarian and authoritarian regimes and their ideology.” Accordingly, “it could potentially be removed as a public object.” The far-right and anti-communist Lithuanian authorities are thus condemning the Jewish partisans because they fought alongside Soviet forces against Nazi Germany. “Their activities are assessed as hostile toward the local population and Lithuanian statehood,” *Der Spiegel* quotes a spokesperson as saying.

This speaks volumes. While Ukrainian Nazi collaborators are honored and far-right forces are integrated into the NATO war apparatus, the memory of Jewish and communist resistance against fascism is being displaced and banned. At the same time, those who today fight against war, fascism and militarism are persecuted and criminalized—from left-wing opponents of war, such as the Trotskyist Bogdan Syrotiuk in Ukraine, to opponents of rearmament in Germany.

The Merz-Klingbeil government is not identical with the Nazi regime. But the objective driving forces that are once again pushing the ruling class toward war and dictatorship are the same as in the 1930s: the imperialist appetites of German capitalism, the struggle for raw materials, markets, spheres of influence and geopolitical power. As in the First and Second World Wars, control over Eastern Europe and Ukraine plays a central role. German imperialism is again attempting to organize Europe under its leadership and to push Russia back militarily in order to gain access to the Eurasian landmass.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei is the only party in Germany that has called this development by its name from the beginning, warned of its consequences and at the same time formulated a viable perspective against it. The development toward a devastating Third World War can be stopped only through the independent mobilization of the international working class. Workers and young people in Germany, Russia, Ukraine, Europe and the United States have no interest in being slaughtered for the profits and great-power interests of their ruling classes. The answer to war, rearmament and fascism is the building of an international socialist movement against their cause: the capitalist system.



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