

With NATO chief Rutte present: Merz government adopts war laws

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In the presence of NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, the Merz-Klingbeil government on Wednesday set in motion a comprehensive package of war laws at the Defence Ministry. Under the seemingly harmless phrase “Germany is becoming crisis-proof,” the Bundeswehr, the state apparatus, the economy and the whole of society are to be rapidly prepared for a direct war against Russia.

Significantly, the cabinet meeting did not take place in the Chancellery but in the Bendlerblock, the seat of the Defence Ministry. It was already the second time in this legislative period that the entire cabinet had met there. This time, Rutte, the secretary general of NATO, sat directly at the table. At the subsequent press conference, Chancellor Friedrich Merz and Defence Minister Boris Pistorius declared that Germany would “pick up the pace in security policy,” make NATO “more European overall” and increase its defence spending to 3.5 percent of gross domestic product by 2029.

The decisions are part of the preparations for the impending NATO summit in Ankara on July 7-8. Merz had already announced in advance new financing commitments by the European NATO states for Ukraine. Rutte explicitly praised Germany for spending 3.5 percent of GDP on defence by 2029 and declared that the summit would be about translating this money into “deployable, combat-ready capabilities” and “significantly expanding” the arms industry.

The cabinet adopted three central measures: the draft of a Reserve Strengthening Act, the draft of a Bundeswehr Infrastructure Acceleration Act and key points for amending the security and precautionary laws. The Defence Ministry declared that the decisions were connected with “national and alliance defence,” the personnel expansion of the Bundeswehr, accelerated military infrastructure and “whole-of-state security provision.”

In this way, the new German Military Strategy and Operations Plan Germany are being concretely implemented. As the WSWs already analysed in April, the new Military Strategy defines Russia as the central threat and orients all military planning towards a comprehensive war against the nuclear power. It envisages a massive increase in Bundeswehr personnel, the establishment of deployable large formations, the permanent stationing of German troops on Russia’s border, the expansion of arms production, preparations for conscription, military logistics for rapid troop deployments and the integration of the military, state, economy and society within the framework of “comprehensive defence.”

Precisely these elements are at the centre of the new laws. They create the legal prerequisites for forcibly conscripting personnel, building military infrastructure in fast-track procedures and subordinating civilian life to the needs of warfare.

This applies in particular to the Reserve Strengthening Act. It ends so-called “double voluntariness.” Until now, in practice, both reservists and their employers had to consent to a call-up. In future, former soldiers are to be subject to compulsory reserve service even in peacetime. Pistorius said: “We want to abolish double voluntariness.”

The aim is the massive expansion of the Bundeswehr. In addition to at least 260,000 active soldiers, the reserve is to grow to at least 200,000. The government is thus speaking of a total force of at least 460,000 deployable soldiers. The Defence Ministry declares that the reserve is to be integrated “deeply” into the structures of the armed forces, trained, equipped and exercised so that it “can be deployed together with the active force in a crisis.”

The coercion is comprehensive. The maximum duration of compulsory reserve service is to range from three to twelve weeks per year, depending on previous service. Over the entire period of service monitoring, compulsory service can total six to twelve months. For former temporary and professional soldiers, call-up applies up to the age of 65, and in individual cases up to 68.

Particularly far-reaching is the fact that coercion is not limited to a state of tension or defence. The ministry explicitly writes that in future unlimited reserve service is to be possible even outside a state of tension or defence, for example in the event of a “hybrid threat situation” or another crisis situation. This massively lowers the threshold for military coercion. Under the vague slogan of a “hybrid threat,” the government can mobilise reservists before a state of war has even been officially declared.

War deployments abroad are also being prepared. Anyone who has performed more than one year of military service can in future be obligated to serve abroad in EU or NATO states as well as aboard ships and aircraft. This provision makes clear what is at stake: the reserve is not being built up for abstract “security,” but for Germany’s integration into NATO war planning on the eastern flank.

At the same time, the Bundeswehr is beginning to register the so-called R1 inventory. This refers to former professional soldiers, soldiers serving on a temporary basis with at least two years of service, and other reservists subject to service obligations. Since July 1, the Bundeswehr has been sending out questionnaires with

QR codes and personalised access data. These request information on professional qualifications, changes in health status, contact details and activities in so-called blue-light organisations. Anyone who fails to report changes subject to notification can be punished with fines and enforcement measures.

This is the concrete content of the much-invoked “military service monitoring.” The state registers, records, assigns and mobilises. What is now being legally enforced for reservists also serves to prepare for the coming compulsory military service. Pistorius and Merz are still trying to sell the new military service as voluntary. But the reserve shows the logic of the entire project: as soon as the required numbers are not reached, compulsory recruitment will come. Not volunteering, but coercion for war is the core of this policy.

The second law, the Bundeswehr Infrastructure Acceleration Act, is intended to create the material basis for these war plans. The Defence Ministry speaks of a “comprehensive infrastructural renewal on a scale unprecedented since the founding of the Bundeswehr.” Barracks, training facilities, ammunition depots, command and logistics centres, and facilities to support allied armed forces are to be newly built, expanded or modernised.

To this end, military construction projects are to be explicitly placed in the “overriding public interest.” A total of ten laws are being amended, including the Federal Emission Control Act, the Environmental Impact Assessment Act, the Land Procurement Act, the Water Resources Act, the Federal Forest Act and the Federal Nature Conservation Act. The federal government itself admits that exceptions are planned in environmental and nature conservation law.

In other words, while hospitals, schools, housing and civilian infrastructure decay, all obstacles are to be swept aside for barracks, ammunition depots and military logistics. Environmental requirements, planning procedures and legal challenges are being restricted so that Germany can more rapidly be built up into NATO’s military hub.

This is precisely what lies at the centre of Operations Plan Germany. The Bundeswehr describes it as the “essential military component of Germany’s comprehensive defence.” It combines the military components of national and alliance defence with the necessary civilian support services. Its core is Germany’s role as NATO’s hub. In an emergency, up to 800,000 allied soldiers and 200,000 vehicles are to be moved through Germany and supplied within six months. The plan is secret, comprises around 1,400 pages according to Bundeswehr sources, and is continuously updated. Its aim is to increase “cold-start capability,” “war-fighting capability” and “staying power.”

The new laws are the legislative implementation of this plan. The Reserve Strengthening Act provides the personnel. The Infrastructure Acceleration Act creates the barracks, depots, ammunition stores, transport routes and command centres. The amendment of the security and precautionary laws is intended to subordinate civilian supply, administration and the economy in crises and wars to military planning. Under the slogan of “comprehensive defence,” civilian authorities, municipalities, companies, transport infrastructure, healthcare and labour are integrated into military planning.

Against the background of the international development of war, the federal government apparently cannot move fast enough. The war in Ukraine has entered an extraordinarily dangerous new phase. On the eve of the NATO summit in Ankara, the European imperialist powers are escalating the conflict with Russia. They are transforming Ukraine into a kind of launching pad for attacks deep inside Russia and are preparing the political, military and industrial foundations for a direct war between NATO and Russia. Such a war would not remain confined to Ukraine, but could set the whole of Europe ablaze and rapidly escalate into a nuclear war.

Germany plays a central role in this escalation. The ruling class is exploiting the crisis of American imperialism and the associated conflicts within NATO to once again rise as Europe’s leading military power. Merz’s demand to make NATO “more European” does not mean distancing itself from Washington’s war course, but assuming a more aggressive European leadership role in the war against Russia.

The working class and youth must take this development as a warning. The war laws are directed not only outward, against Russia. They are also directed inward. The costs of rearmament are being imposed on the population through social cuts, wage reductions, longer working hours and attacks on democratic rights. At the same time, the state apparatus is being restructured so that resistance to war and social austerity can be suppressed.

The struggle against this war policy requires the independent mobilisation of the working class against the Merz-Klingbeil government, against all parties in the Bundestag that support rearmament and war, and against the trade union bureaucracies that organise the militarisation of the economy and the attacks on workers. The alternative to militarism, compulsory service and world war is the building of an international socialist movement against capitalism and war.



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