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afgazad@gmail.com

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Peter Schwarz

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German defence minister resigns as government prepares to triple special fund for the military

On Monday, Germany's Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht officially resigned. Chancellor Olaf Scholz (both SPD) reportedly will announce a successor today.



German Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht meets with her U.S. counterpart Lloyd Austin at NATO headquarters in Belgium [Photo by US Secretary of Defense / [CC BY 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/)]

The reason for Lambrecht's resignation is not the trifles she has been publicly accused of for weeks—a botched New Year's Eve video, taking her son on a government service flight, etc. The real reason is that despite her best intentions, the Social Democrat politician has been insufficiently assertive in advancing Germany's militarization quickly enough and ensuring the generals get everything they want.

In its Saturday edition, *Der Spiegel* published a long cover story that could be described as a “manifesto of the generals.” Partly anonymous, partly naming names, it lists one demand

after another that amount to a massive rearmament and enhancement of the military. Chancellor Scholz's "turn of the times" announced in the spring is modest in comparison. Below a cover picture showing a soldier with a wooden rifle sitting on a green toy car complete with a tank barrel, the article paints a picture of an ailing army that has lost "its core competence: fighting."

This is underscored with vulgar barrack room jokes, such as the claim that the Defence Ministry's procurement office prescribes air quality values for tank crews that "strictly rule out the threat of 'amniotic fluid damage among female Puma crew,'" and that passageways in frigates must be so wide that "two people using walkers can easily pass each other."

This crude propaganda serves to justify a massive rearmament campaign in the tradition of Hitler and the Nazis. The most important goals raised in *Der Spiegel* are:

- Tripling the special fund for modernizing the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) from €100 to €300 billion
- Increasing the annual arms budget from the targeted 2 to 3 percent of GDP, which would correspond to an increase from the current level of €50 to €120 billion
- Introducing a general staff and eliminating civilian control over the Bundeswehr
- Increasing troop strength and reactivating conscription
- Strengthening the arms industry, which is to supply weapons directly to the Bundeswehr without tendering, ministerial control and approval by the Bundestag.

The *Spiegel* article is part of a broad campaign. Over the weekend, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) published an interview with Eva Högl (Social Democrat, SPD), the parliamentary defence commissioner, who is being talked about as a possible successor to Lambrecht and is making similar demands to *Spiegel*.

Högl, too, is calling for a tripling of the special fund for rearming the Bundeswehr: "You would need €300 billion to make significant changes in the Bundeswehr." Adding, "That doesn't seem to me to be pulled out of thin air. At least €20 billion are needed to procure ammunition alone. New frigates, tanks or F-35 fighter jets also cost billions, and we haven't talked about personnel costs, energy-efficient building renovation, the necessary €50 billion of investment in infrastructure, or even inflation."

Referring to the former chairman of the Munich Security Conference, Wolfgang Ischinger, who calls for the introduction of a "war economy" in Germany, Högl makes the case for "fundamentally rethinking the legal provisions covering the Bundeswehr."

“We need even more far-reaching special rights for the Bundeswehr,” she demands. “We cannot respond adequately to war and the new challenges for German defence and security policy without changing the legal basis, at least temporarily.” Procurement law must be “streamlined” and the planning process “shortened” through special laws, she said.

The highest-ranking general in the Bundeswehr has also spoken out. *Der Spiegel* quotes from Inspector General Eberhard Zorn’s report on the operational readiness of the armed forces, which is classified but immediately circulated throughout the capital.

Except for deployments to Mali, Kosovo and, in some cases, Lithuania, the traffic light is set to yellow or red everywhere, *Spiegel* reports. This is followed by a long list of ammunition, weapons and spare parts that the Bundeswehr urgently needs. The report only refers to “the more than 20,000 men and women who are currently scheduled for missions and NATO, EU and UN obligations.” The situation was much worse for the 163,000 soldiers not currently scheduled for deployments, he said.

“For the core mission of the Bundeswehr ‘national and alliance defence,’ operational readiness must be restored for the entire armed forces,” the inspector general’s report states. Above all, “the shortage of necessary materiel (for example, modern large-scale equipment, command and control equipment, ammunition, spare and replacement parts) must be made up.” Only fully equipped and manned forces are “cold-start capable” and thus “key to credible deterrence by the Alliance because of their short-term response capability.”

The “full materiel equipment” of the force requires a huge amount of funding, *Spiegel* concludes. “The €100 billion from the special fund will not be enough for this. If the Bundeswehr’s ‘capability profile,’ which is still valid but already four years old, were fully implemented, about three times that amount would be needed.”

Der Spiegel considers the generals’ lack of influence in the Defence Ministry to be a central problem. “Germany may now be the only country in the world that has armed forces that are not led by a general staff or comparable military body,” the article says.

Thomas de Maizière (Christian Democrat, CDU), defence minister from 2011 to 2013, had disbanded the Armed Forces Command and Planning Staff, “ousted” the inspectors (the senior commanders of the branches of the armed forces) from the ministry, and created “three central monster authorities.” To the outside world, “the inspector general is still the face of the force,” but his domain now includes only three of the ministry’s ten departments, the news magazine says.

Lambrecht refused to change this, “She categorically rejects major reforms,” complained *Der Spiegel*. She preferred “to turn ‘small adjusting screws’ rather than the big wheel.” Even the goal agreed in 2018 of increasing troop strength from the current 183,000 to 203,000 by 2031 will not be achieved, it complains. “Because the Bundeswehr is not growing, it is stagnating.”

To replace the 20,000 men and women who leave military service each year and increase troop strength by 18,000, the Bundeswehr would have to recruit 22,000 new recruits each year, a “Mission Impossible,” according to *Der Spiegel*. In addition, “the Bundeswehr is finding no means to depress the stubbornly high dropout rate among regular soldiers and voluntary conscripts.”

Even though *Der Spiegel* does not explicitly mention it, preparations are obviously underway to reactivate compulsory military service, which was suspended in 2011, but not abolished.

These are apparently the real reasons why Lambrecht had to go. Under her, “the Ministry of Defence and the Bundeswehr leadership have fallen into a deep lethargy,” complained *Der Spiegel*. The money from the “turn of the times” was slowly arriving at the troops, but its spirit was not. Now “nothing less than a revolution is called for.”

The change at the top of the Defence Ministry prepares a new level of escalation of German militarism. This confirms the warning of the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) that the Ukrainian war serves as a pretext for the ruling class to revive its old militarist traditions and set in motion the most comprehensive military build-up since the Nazi dictatorship.

In order to once again become the leading military power in Europe, to subjugate Russia and to pursue the global interests of German imperialism, it is returning to its criminal militarist traditions and risking a nuclear world war.

All parties represented in the Bundestag stand behind this policy, which has little popular support. The SGP is the only party to oppose this danger. It is participating in the Berlin state elections and turning them into a referendum against the hated war policy. Together with its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International, it is building a worldwide movement that unites the working class on the basis of a socialist program in the struggle against war and capitalism.

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