

Germany

“Optimally positioned for war”

by German Foreign policy

German Defence Minister Pistorius pushes ahead with organisational shake-up. The Bundeswehr continues its trajectory, first begun in 2014, towards war with Russia. Military and civilian elements to be interlocked.

Germany’s armed forces are gearing their internal organisational structure to a future war against Russia. With the reorganisation announced by Defence Minister Boris Pistorius at the beginning of the month the military hopes to achieve “combat readiness, command capability and conscription preparedness”.

Pistorius says the aim of the reforms is to “rebuild the Bundeswehr” in a way that ensures it is “optimally positioned for war”. This includes getting ready for “large-scale” deployment against a major power and “high-intensity combat operations”. The reform package contains three key innovations: command and control capabilities for home and abroad will be consolidated into a single operational command centre; scarce capabilities such as NBC defence, medical services and logistics will be bundled into a single support command; and the cyber and information forces will be upgraded to form a fourth branch of the armed forces. The organisational shake-up will embrace “all sectors” of the Bundeswehr and, according to Pistorius, will be implemented “within the next six months”. The aim was, he said, to ensure “build-up capability, [...] innovation superiority, and combat supply reliability”. The overriding “maxim” of all these actions was to make the Bundeswehr “ready for war”.

Command for “NATO hub” Germany

Seeking to act “faster and more effectively” in the event of war, the Bundeswehr is initially centralising its command structures as part of the or-

ganisational shake-up recently announced. According to the German Defence Ministry, the aim is to bundle command responsibilities in order to “allow faster decision-making processes”.¹ Until now, there has been one command for the domestic space and one for operations abroad, i.e. the Territorial Command and the Operational Command. Both will now be merged into one Operational Command.² The new command will then act as a “central point of contact” for “allies and multinational organisations”, on the one hand, and national civilian and government agencies on the other.³ This move flows from Germany’s claim to perform the role of a logistical “hub” for transatlantic deployment towards Russia’s western border. Following the multinational forward routes to eastern combat positions, troops regularly cross borders and thus move from foreign to Germany territory and vice versa. Moreover, the Bundeswehr wants close cooperation of civilian actors to support its operations, not least facilitating multinational troop deployments passing through Germany.⁴

Merging the internal and the external

The Inspector General of the Bundeswehr, General *Carsten Breuer*, hopes that the new Operational Command will initially provide an overall perspective that “grows together” out of the internal and external situation. This involves a blurring of previous lines of organisational demarcation. For example, the homeland defence forces, which have so far been subordinate to the Territorial Command and are thus structurally restricted to domestic operations, will now be assigned directly to the army.⁵ The homeland defence forces consist mainly of reservists. The new centralised command is located precisely at the interfaces between internal and external affairs, on the one hand, and between civil society and the military, on the other.

Upgrading cyber warfare

The Bundeswehr’s new “Operational Plan for Germany” already accords a central position to the Cyber and Information space. It is in this context

* The news material of “information on German Foreign Policy” (german-foreign-policy.com) comes from publicly accessible sources, correspondents’ reports and expert opinions by associated scholars who examine individual aspects of the continuum of German foreign policy.

that the Bundeswehr says it is preparing to deal with “disinformation campaigns” and “cyber-attacks”. Among other things, the “adversary” could attempt to “influence government decisions, the opinions of the population and perhaps also the media”.⁶ Under the structural reform the Bundeswehr is upgrading cyber and information forces to form a fourth branch of the armed forces, alongside the army, navy, and air force. It set up its *CIR Command* (Cyber and Information Space) back in 2017. The tasks here range from digitalising war, “analysing hybrid threats” such as “disinformation campaigns” and the “securing command capability”, through to secure networked communication on the battlefield and electronic warfare.⁷ In an article on the structural reform package on its website, the Defence Ministry speaks of “hybrid attacks by Russia, some targeting Germany” that are already taking place – albeit without giving any further details or evidence.⁸ In his press conference on the structural reform package, Pistorius also mentioned the right-wing AfD party’s refusal to support the government line on Ukraine. He referred to AfD MPs as “Moscow’s fifth column”, adding that he wasn’t making an off-the-cuff remark but had chosen his words “judiciously”.⁹

Maximising capacity utilisation

The third element of the reform is the creation of a new Support Sector as a solution to the “special challenge of allocating key skills that are scarce”. Pistorius argues that there is “not enough available capacity” in resources such as military police and NBC defence to meet the needs of all branches of the armed forces. His new Operational Command will deal with this “skills shortfall” by bundling capacities into one Support Sector from which they can be centrally allocated to the various armed forces.¹⁰ The Support Command is also designed to provide “reliable relief of pressures on troops” by “replacing soldiers with civilian staff wherever possible”.¹¹ The aim is to create an administrative structure that frees up the troops from non-fighting duties.¹²

Preparing for pre-induction processes

The implementation of all the military upgrading projects agreed in the last few years is already pushing the Bundeswehr to its limits in terms of human resources. The army has announced that a “larger proportion” of its regular soldiers will

fight on NATO’s eastern flank in the event of war. This means they cannot be assigned to “securing the territory of Germany itself”.¹³ Although the current structural reform package does not provide for an increase in troop numbers, scalability is made a “guiding principle” to enable rapid build-up of numbers if needed.¹⁴ “We have designed the structures [...] in such a way” that “we can organise expandability – along whatever track – in the coming months and years,” Pistorius announced.¹⁵ The issue of boosting numbers could “ultimately not be resolved just by asking ‘Who will volunteer to join the Bundeswehr?’, but by considering the question of compulsory military service.”¹⁶ In pressing ahead with structural reforms, “the possibility of reinstating compulsory military service in whatever form” was to be “kept in mind and considered”.¹⁷ The German Ministry of Defence has confirmed that “military drafting and pre-induction examination processes” are being “structurally prepared” for the option of implementing compulsory call-up.¹⁸ Pistorius says that “various compulsory military service models” were being weighed up, which might involve the need for an “amendment to the Basic Law”. In the event of war, there would, he affirms, “in any case be immediate conscription”.¹⁹

Source: <https://www.german-foreign-policy.com/news/detail/9545>, 30 April 2024

¹ Bundeswehr der Zeitenwende: Kriegstüchtig sein, um abschrecken zu können. *bmv.g.de*, 4 April 2024.

² Bundeswehr der Zeitenwende: Minister Pistorius stellt Strukturentscheidung vor. *bmv.g.de*, 4 April 2024.

³ Bundeswehr der Zeitenwende: Kriegstüchtig sein, um abschrecken zu können. *bmv.g.de*, 4 April 2024.

⁴ See also: *Auf Krieg einstellen (I)*.

⁵ Press briefing on the Strukturreform of 4 April 2024, accessible via the Youtube channel of *ZDFheute* Nachrichten.

⁶ See also: *Getting ready for war (III)*.

⁷ Press briefing on the Strukturreform of 4 April 2024, accessible via the Youtube channel of *ZDFheute* Nachrichten.

⁸ Was bedeutet die neue Struktur für die Bundeswehr: Fragen und Antworten. *bmv.g.de*, 4 April 2024.

^{9,10} Press briefing on the Strukturreform of 4 April 2024, accessible via the Youtube channel of *ZDFheute* Nachrichten.

¹¹ Was bedeutet die neue Struktur für die Bundeswehr: Fragen und Antworten. *bmv.g.de*, 4 April 2024.

¹² Bundeswehr der Zeitenwende: Minister Pistorius stellt Strukturentscheidung vor. *bmv.g.de*, 4 April 2024.

¹³ See also: *Auf Krieg einstellen (IV)*.

¹⁴ Minister verkündet Entscheidung zur neuen Grobstruktur der Streitkräfte. *bmvg.de*, 2 April 2024.

¹⁵ Press briefing on the Strukturreform of 4 April 2024, accessible via the Youtube channel of *ZDFheute Nachrichten*.

¹⁶ Pistorius zur Zukunft der Bundeswehr. Was Nun? Youtube channel of *ZDFheute Nachrichten*, 8 April 2024.

¹⁷ Press briefing on the Strukturreform of 4 April 2024, accessible via the Youtube channel of *ZDFheute Nachrichten*.

¹⁸ Was bedeutet die neue Struktur für die Bundeswehr: Fragen und Antworten. *bmvg.de*, 4 April 2024.

¹⁹ Press briefing on the Strukturreform of 4 April 2024, accessible via the Youtube channel of *ZDFheute Nachrichten*.