

Russia is wiretapping the Bundeswehr

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On 1 March, Margarita Simonyan, the editor-in-chief of the Russian broadcaster RT, released a recording from a video conference involving four high-ranking German officers, including the Luftwaffe inspector General Ingo Gerhartz. The recording, which had reportedly been made on 19 February, was subsequently broadcast by the Russian media. The conversation concerned preparations for the federal government's briefing on the potential transfer of Taurus long-range cruise missiles to Ukraine. The discussed topics included the number of missiles, training for Ukrainian soldiers, the extent of support from the Bundeswehr as well as potential targets that could be destroyed.

The Military Counterintelligence Service (MAD) launched an investigation into this matter. Preliminary findings suggest that one participant in the conversation, who was in Singapore at the time, did not follow the required security procedures during the call, which created the opportunity for the Russians to intercept the recording. Defence Minister Boris Pistorius (SPD) played down the significance of the leaked information, arguing that it was known to the public anyway, and said that the leak was an informational attack.

Commentary

- The fact that the Bundeswehr were unable to prevent its officers being wiretapped fits in with a series of events and phenomena that discredit the German army and prove its weakness. The leaked content undermines the position of Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who is the main opponent of supplying Taurus to Kyiv. So far, he has justified his stance by arguing that the operation of the missiles would require the involvement of the Bundeswehr, and German assistance in targeting on Russian territory could make Germany a party to the conflict. The solutions discussed by the officers have revealed that Scholz's resistance is difficult to understand, because there are solutions where the German army does not have to be involved in this process. The leak will motivate the SPD's coalition partners from the Greens and the FDP, as well as the opposition CDU/CSU grouping, to increase pressure on the Chancellor's Office to change their mind about supplying Taurus missiles. Externally, the recording undermines the image of Germany as a reliable ally and partner in intelligence cooperation. French and British officials have reacted negatively to the leak, as it includes information about the long-range Storm Shadow/SCALP missiles provided by them and the presence of their soldiers in Ukraine, as suggested by the chancellor a few days earlier. British politicians in particular have harshly criticised Scholz for using classified information in the domestic political dispute over missile transfers.

- The leak of the conversation is another example of the high activity of Russian intelligence, which is penetrating the German civilian and military authorities and secret services both in Germany and outside its borders (see '[Germany is expelling Russian diplomats](#)'). Moscow is thus aiming at preventing the chancellor's potential approval for supplying Taurus missiles to Ukraine. Another goal is to intimidate German society. The attacks from Russian officials on the German government following the publication of the leak, suggesting that Germany has become a party to the war, are intended to stoke the fear among the German public that the conflict could be escalated and intensify their sense of the threat of a direct attack from Russia. As a result, support for sending military aid to Ukraine may fall (see '[An attempt to break the deadlock. Scholz visits Washington](#)') and public disapproval for the transfer of Taurus missiles to Ukraine may be maintained (according to a survey conducted by the Forsa Institute at the end of February, 56% of respondents disagreed with this move, while 35% supported it). The Kremlin's propaganda campaign may also stimulate support for pro-Russian political parties: Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance for Reason and Justice (BSW). However, it cannot be ruled out – although this is less likely – that the Russian moves may have the opposite effect than intended: a confrontation of expert opinions with Scholz's narrative may contribute to expanding the group of supporters of supplying Taurus missiles to Kyiv.