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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

12 February 2019

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13.02.2019

German army initiates military cooperation with Deutsche Bahn railway company

An agreement came into effect at the beginning of 2019 between the German army and Deutsche Bahn (DB, German Rail) that has largely been ignored by the media. The so-called freight framework agreement is part of a massive military build-up aimed at transporting military equipment to the Russian border and preparing for war with Russia. The agreement will initially run for two years, until December 31, 2020, but can be extended by a year indefinitely.

Germany assumed the leadership this year of NATO's spearhead, the "very high readiness joint task force" (VJTF). The spearhead includes approximately 5,000 soldiers who should be capable of deploying to wherever they are required within 48 to 72 hours. The VJTF is part of the NATO Response Force (NRF). The NRF is an operational force made up of land, air, sea and special forces components with a total of 40,000 soldiers.

More than 1,000 transports of military equipment and soldiers to the Russian border will take place annually. Each transport refers to an entire train and not just individual carriages. With the coming into force of the agreement between German Rail and the army, military transportations take priority over passenger travel.

The contract is worth €100 million. This total is comprised of €79 million of fixed costs (personnel, materiel and rail lines), a €6 million surcharge for express transport, and €21 million in costs tied to utilisation. In addition to the 1,000 transportations per year, plans will be drawn up to dispatch a further 300 trains to transport additional equipment by rail if necessary.

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For 2019, there are plans to transport 9,700 soldiers, 150 military vehicles, 3,300 bikes, 1,500 trailers and 1,370 containers to the east. In 2020, the military supplies are to be transported to the Baltic states within five days. The trains will be loaded in Bergen in Lower Saxony and Deuten in North Rhine-Westphalia, with one train departing daily for the Lithuanian location of Sestokai on the Polish border. The route will cross the German border at Frankfurt-Oder and also pass through Kunovice in the Czech Republic.

In the German army's new doctrine, published by the Defence Ministry in April 2018, Germany is described due to its geographic position as "a strategic hub at the heart of Europe, as well as a key element in European collective defence." The "capacity of the NATO alliance and the EU to act" depends on "Germany fulfilling its tasks as a host nation, as a transit country for the dispatching of forces to the borders of alliance territory and the interior operational area."

"Host nation support" comprises all civilian and military efforts to support an ally or partner's armed forces in the country. These "challenges" are being dealt with by the NATO Joint Support Enabling Command (JSEC) established in Ulm last June, which effectively amounts to the creation of blitzkrieg-like structures in Europe.

In case of war, the JSEC is responsible for coordinating the deployment of troops and materials throughout Europe, and the centralisation of planning ahead of and during the deployment to the area of operation. The command centre employs up to 100 people in peacetime and can employ 500 during times of war. Full readiness at the command centre will be reached in 2021.

Another major topic in the military sector within the European Union is "military mobility." Six and a half billion euros have been made available in EU budgets in the coming years for this. This is not only to improve transport infrastructure, such as by expanding roads and bridges and purchasing new rail carriages, but also to overcome and adapt the bureaucratic structures within the EU states. The framework agreement imposed no territorial restrictions on rail transport. Additionally, other armed forces (such as NATO, the EU, or the United Nations) could use the infrastructure.

The German army's intervention in the Baltic states, which served as the pretext for the freight framework agreement, is increasingly assuming the form of a preparation for war with Russia, a nuclear-armed power. The NATO exercise Trident Juncture, held last autumn in Norway, was the largest of its kind since the end of the Cold War. The German army participated with 10,000 soldiers and 4,000 vehicles.

The German army doctrine makes clear that Germany is preparing for major military conflicts. It states, among other things, “Rapid strike and follow-up capabilities for a very large operation have to be planned. They must be effectual in a hybrid conflict as it develops and escalates across the full spectrum of its effects, in all its dimensions, in a joint, multinational armed force, and in all types of operations. At the beginning of a very large, high-intensity operation, a huge deployment of readily available forces and equipment is necessary. Provisions to regenerate the personnel and materiel will be undertaken.”

The framework freight agreement, which recalls a dark period from the past, must be seen in this context. “The wheels have to turn for victory!” was one of the German Reichsbahn’s propaganda slogans during the offensive against the Soviet Union in 1942. Without the Reichsbahn, its rail network and “special train programme,” the war of annihilation against the Soviet Union and the millions of industrial killings carried out after the victims were transported to concentration camps could never have taken place. At that time, the Reichsbahn was directly under the Transport Ministry’s control. Today, the federal state retains 100 percent control of German Rail, which is increasingly being subordinated to the needs of German militarism and imperialism.