The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

What We Know About Leaked German Army Audio Recording

By Femke Colborne for AFP

March 04, 2024



Taurus KEPD 350 missile on Saab's Gripen E fighter aircraft. **Taurus System GmbH**

A leaked audio recording of senior German army officers discussing the war in Ukraine has caused a diplomatic firestorm and raised serious questions about the security of German military communications.

Russia declared the recording proves direct involvement of Western countries in the conflict in Ukraine.

Here is what we know about the intercept.

What was leaked?

On March 1, the head of Russia's state-backed RT channel, Margarita Simonyan, posted a 38-minute audio recording on Telegram of what she said was German army officers discussing

potential strikes on Crimea.

The conversation between air force chief Ingo Gerhartz and three high-ranking Bundeswehr officers took place on Feb. 19, according to Simonyan.

In the recording, discussions can be heard about the possible use by Ukrainian forces of German-made Taurus missiles and their potential impact.

Kyiv has long been calling on Germany to provide it with Taurus missiles, which can reach targets up to 500 kilometers away.

But Chancellor Olaf Scholz has so far refused to send the missiles, worried that it would lead to an escalation of the conflict.

What was discussed?

In the recording, the Bundeswehr officers can be heard discussing various details about the possible use of Taurus missiles, including specific quantities.

At one point, they speculate as to whether the missiles could be used to hit a key bridge over the Kerch Strait linking the Russian mainland to Crimea, which was annexed by Russia in 2014.

The conversation also turns to long-range missiles supplied to Ukraine by France and Britain, with one of the officers referring to British soldiers on the ground.

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The British Prime Minister's Office has said "a small number of personnel" are on the ground in Ukraine to provide security for diplomats and support Ukrainian troops, including medics, but declined to comment on operational matters.

According to the British Defense Ministry, "Ukraine's use of Storm Shadow (missile) and its targeting processes are the business of the Armed Forces of Ukraine."

A Ukrainian diplomatic source has also said that "all the European secret services are present in Ukraine — but they are not combat units."

The source added that when allies supply Kyiv with armaments, "experts are on the ground" to help with training and usage.

How was it leaked?

The meeting was held on WebEx, a popular public platform for audio and video meetings.

According to Defense Minister Boris Pistorius, the platform is legitimately used by the Bundeswehr for certain meetings, with extra security measures.

The participants may have used the wrong security settings or the wrong platform for such a

conversation in general, Pistorius said.

Roderich Kiesewetter, from Germany's opposition conservatives, has suggested a Russian participant may have had direct access to the conference, though it is not clear how.

"A number of other conversations will certainly have been intercepted and may be leaked at a later date for Russia's benefit," Kiesewetter told German broadcaster ZDF.

What does it mean for Scholz?

The scandal exposes a breach in security that Scholz himself described as "very serious" and risks sowing disunity with Britain and France.

Thorsten Frei, who heads the opposition conservatives' parliamentary group, told Welt TV that the intercept raises questions about Germany's reliability.

The conversation also casts doubt on the reasons Scholz has publicly given for refusing to send Taurus missiles to Ukraine.

Scholz has argued that Germany could not justify matching British and French moves in sending long-range missiles to Ukraine and supporting their deployment.

But according to the leaked recording, there is no reason why Taurus missiles could not be operated without any direct help from German soldiers.

How has Russia responded?

The Kremlin said on Monday that the content of the recording proved Western countries were participating in the conflict in Ukraine.

"The recording itself suggests that the Bundeswehr is discussing substantively and specifically plans to strike Russian territory," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, now deputy head of the Security Council, wrote in a Telegram post that "Germany is preparing for war with Russia."

What has Germany said?

According to German experts, almost everything discussed in the recording would already have been known to Russia.

Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, chair of the defense committee in Germany's parliament, said Moscow had deliberately leaked the recording in an attempt to stop Germany from supplying Ukraine with Taurus missiles.

Pistorius has warned that the leak is "part of an information war that Putin is carrying out."

A government spokesman on Monday dismissed claims Germany was preparing for war with Russia as "absurd... Russian propaganda."

Pistorius said there may be internal disciplinary proceedings as a result of the breach, but no one would be fired.

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