



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on March 5, 2024

German Officials Discussed Taking Out Russia's Strategic Crimean Bridge

German military officials discussed how they could secretly help Ukraine destroy Russia's strategic Crimean Bridge, according to leaked audio. They also mentioned that foreign military personnel had already been deployed to the country.

The 40-minute-long recording posted online featured a conversation in German between four people who allegedly hold high-ranking positions within the Bundeswehr, Germany's armed forces. One of the people recorded in the audio file is supposedly Lieutenant General Ingo Gerhartz — the commander of the national air force.



Rosavtodor/Wikimedia Commons
Crimean Bridge

The recording included a discussion of the efficiency of the Franco-British air-launched stealth cruise missiles, known as Storm Shadow in the U.K. and SCALP in France. Such weapons were previously donated to Kyiv by its Western backers. The full text of what was claimed to be a discussion by senior German military officers on how to attack the Crimean Bridge in Russia was published by RT editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan on March 1. She reported that Russian security officials had leaked the recording hours earlier and has pledged to release the original audio shortly.

Simonyan identified the officers as General Ingo Gerhartz, the German Air Force commander, and senior leaders responsible for mission planning. The alleged conversation took place on February 19, based on the source of the leak.

Kyiv has urged Germany to provide some of its Taurus missiles, which are similar to the Storm Shadow. The officers in the leaked recording debate whether the weapon system was adequate for hitting the Crimean Bridge in Russia, which connects eastern Crimea to Krasnodar Region across the Kerch Strait.

As per the transcript, the officers discussed how a successful attack on the key piece of Russian infrastructure would require additional satellite data, possible deployment of missiles from French Dassault Rafale fighter jets, and at least a month of preparation.

One participant observed that due to the size of the bridge, which is the longest in Europe, even 20 missiles may not be enough to cause considerable damage. It is comparable to a runway in that regard, he noted.

"They want to destroy the bridge ... because it has not only military strategic importance, but also political significance," Gerhartz is quoted as saying, apparently referring to officials in Kyiv. "It would be concerning if we have direct connection with the Ukrainian armed forces."

The officers went on to discuss how close the German military should be working on the proposed operation without crossing the "red line" of being involved directly. Secretly training Ukrainians in the use of German weapons and helping them plan the operation were deemed acceptable. Worries about



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the press learning about such cooperation were also raised, the transcript disclosed.

In turn, a German Defense Ministry spokeswoman told state broadcaster ARD on March 2 that the leaked discussions were genuine.

“According to our assessment, a conversation in the Air Force was intercepted,” the ministry’s spokeswoman told ARD, adding that the German officials were unable to determine whether any changes were made to the transcript or the recording itself.

Earlier, the German media also reported that the audio clip seemed to be authentic. Germany’s DPA news agency said that the officers were talking using the WebEx online calling, messaging, and conference platform. *Der Spiegel* reported that “according to an initial assessment, AI-supported counterfeiting is largely ruled out.”

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz called the leak a “very serious matter” on March 2. “That is why it is now being investigated very intensively, very carefully and very swiftly,” he told journalists in Rome following an audience with the Pope, adding that such a probe was “necessary.” A German MP, Roderich Kiesewetter of the Christian Democratic Union party, himself a retired colonel and the head of the German reservists’ association, told the German media that other sensitive military conversations could have been intercepted and might be published by Russia in the future.

“It is in no way surprising that such a conversation was intercepted,” he told Germany’s n-tv news media outlet, adding that it was “equally unsurprising that the recording became public.” “We have to assume that the Russians have more material of this kind,” the retired colonel said.

The incident drew flak from other German politicians. “There must finally be an end to our naivety,” the head of the Bundestag’s Defense Committee, Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, told n-tv. She also called for more “counter-espionage” efforts while admitting that Germany was “obviously vulnerable in this area.”

The chairman of the Parliamentary Control Committee, Konstantin von Notz, demanded an “immediate clarification of all background information” in a conversation with the German media company RND.

The Times reported on March 3 that the revelations may help Russian intelligence track the delivery of Western SCALP and Storm Shadow missiles to Ukraine.

Notably, the article pointed out that the officers had used standard WebEx video conference software that was not encrypted to discuss “highly sensitive military secrets” which, among other things, revealed details about the deployment of Storm Shadow missiles and confirmed the presence of the British military in Ukraine.

“We know Germany is pretty penetrated by Russian intelligence so it just demonstrates they are neither secure nor reliable,” *The Times* cited former U.K. Defense Secretary Ben Wallace as saying.

For their part, Russian officials have said that the presence of Western military personnel in Ukraine is “no secret,” and that the Foreign Ministry was demanding an explanation from Berlin over the leaked recording.

Also, the German Defense Ministry protected a press statement on leaked military communications behind the password “1234.” German media has criticized the ministry for the “extremely embarrassing” security detail.

The statement, made by Defense Minister Boris Pistorius on March 3, was posted in audio format on the



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ministry’s website on Monday. Under a link to a cloud storage service hosting the file, the ministry informed visitors that they could access the recording by entering the password “1234.”

While the file is not classified and the password was likely chosen as a placeholder, its use was roundly slammed by German tabloid *Bild*. “After the wiretapping attack on the Bundeswehr [German military] by Russian spies, this is extremely embarrassing,” the paper wrote on March 4.



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