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Dan Sabbagh, Kate Connolly

UK urges Germany to give long-range missiles to Kyiv despite Luftwaffe leak

Великобританія закликає Німеччину передати Києву ракети великої дальності, незважаючи на витік інформації з Люфтваффе

Як пише редактор газети «The Guardian» з питань оборони та безпеки Деніел Саббах, Велика Британія закликала Берлін надати Києву ракети дальнього радіусу дії «Таурус», незважаючи на прикрий витік у російські ЗМІ секретної телефонної розмови офіцерів ВПС Німеччини, які заявили, що британські війська перебувають на території України.

Велика Британія посилила лобювання передачі Києву ракет «Таурус», які мають дальність дії понад 500 кілометрів, що вдвічі перевищує дальність англо-французького комплексу Storm Shadow/Scalp, який вже передано Києву. Міністерка закордонних справ Анналена Бербок, яка є представницею правлячої коаліції «зелених», підтвердила свою принципову підтримку надання Україні ракет «Таурус».

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/mar/04/uk-urges-germany-to-give-long-range-missiles-to-kyiv-despite-luftwaffe-leak>*Share*

Chancellor Olaf Scholz says he will not give missiles that could strike at strategic Crimea bridge, as Russia seeks to exploit leak

How significant is Russia's apparent interception of military talks on Ukraine?

Britain has urged a reluctant Berlin to supply long-range Taurus missiles to Kyiv despite an embarrassing leak to Russian television of a top-secret call involving German air force officers who said UK troops were "on the ground" in Ukraine.

The Kremlin sought to exploit what it saw as a propaganda coup and pressure the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, who in turn insisted on Monday he would not donate missiles that could strike at the strategic Kerch bridge linking Russia and occupied Crimea.

Released on Friday by the editor of the Kremlin-controlled news channel RT, Margarita Simonyan, the audio recording – confirmed as authentic by Germany – captures Luftwaffe officers discussing what they said was Britain's military presence in Ukraine, helping the country select Russian targets.

Rather than publicly criticise Germany over the leak, Britain said it was for Berlin to investigate. Instead the UK toughened up its own lobbying on the Taurus missiles, which have a 300-mile range, twice that of Anglo-French Storm Shadow/Scalp weapons system already given to Kyiv.

"The UK was the first country to provide long-range precision strike missiles to Ukraine, and we would encourage our allies to do the same," a Downing Street spokesperson said. "The presence of a small number of British troops in Ukraine" had been acknowledged by No 10 a week earlier, they added.

Former Ministry of Defence insiders added they believed the leak was irritating but not significant, partly because the conversation was not very specific – and that, on the plus side, it also emphasised how effective Taurus could be.

The Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov, however, said the leaked conversations “once again highlight the direct involvement of the collective west in the conflict in Ukraine”, a day after former Russian president Dmitri Medvedev said: “Germany is preparing for war with Russia.”

Scholz insisted on Monday he would not change his mind about Taurus, as he met a group of voters at a vocational school in Baden-Württemberg and cited concerns Ukraine could, in theory, use the weapons to strike at the heart of Russia. “I am the chancellor and my word counts,” he said.

Control over the Taurus missiles, theoretically able to hit targets in Moscow, would only be guaranteed if German soldiers were directly involved in firing them, and “that is completely out of the question”, Scholz added.

The leaked conversation, 38 minutes long, was led by Lt Gen Ingo Gerhartz, the head of the Luftwaffe, who wanted to prepare for a half-hour meeting with the German defence minister, Boris Pistorius, on Taurus a fortnight ago. The conversation was held on the relatively insecure Webex service, and one of the participants dialled in from Singapore.

During the call, Gerhartz and his subordinates discussed the chancellor’s refusal to donate the weapons, how it might be possible to get around it and what issues were at stake. In doing so, the Germans discussed how Britain worked closely with Ukraine in deploying Storm Shadow missiles.

“When it comes to mission planning,” the German commander said, “I know how the English do it, they do it completely in reachback. They also have a few people on the ground, they do that, the French don’t.”

Reachback is a military term to describe how intelligence, equipment and support from the rear is brought forward to units deployed on the front, but Gerhartz suggested the British approach was deeper, involving direct support on site.

Downing Street had confirmed the presence of a “small number of personnel” in Ukraine on Tuesday last week, although it did not spell out all tasks they were undertaking due to concerns that any potential combat involvement could be considered as escalatory by Moscow.

A makeshift memorial to the victims of a Russian drone strike that heavily damaged an apartment building, in Odesa, Ukraine.

On the recording, the German officers came to the conclusion that use of the missiles in the immediate future would only be possible if German soldiers were involved. Taurus training for Ukrainian soldiers to avoid putting German soldiers on Ukraine soil was a possibility, but would take months of preparation.

The officers also discussed potential target types for the Taurus including a “bridge in the east” that was said to be difficult to reach with pillars that were “relatively small” – a description that matches the strategic Kerch bridge.

The bridge is a key supply route to Russian-occupied Crimea, which, despite various attempts to bomb it, the Ukrainians have so far been unable to destroy. They concluded it would be technically feasible to blow up the bridge, but it might take “10 to 20 missiles” – and that Germany could donate a maximum of 100.

On Monday, there were signs of German divisions after the leak. Annalena Baerbock, the foreign minister, from the governing coalition's junior partner, the Greens, reiterated her support in principle for giving Taurus missiles to Ukraine.

"We will do everything so that Ukraine can ... defend and protect itself," she said during a visit to Montenegro. "We therefore need to precisely control all means we have ... on the grounds of international law."

Roderich Kiesewetter, the opposition Christian Democrats' defence expert, said Russia had leaked the meeting at this moment in time to specifically "undermine a German Taurus delivery". He suggested the leak was carried out "in order to divert public conversation away" from other issues, including the death of Alexei Navalny.

Carlo Masala of the Bundeswehr University in Munich, a military expert, told German media that the "hysterical, public reaction" to the possibility of direct German participation in the war against Russia in Ukraine, following news of the leak, would now prevent the delivery of Taurus.

"Now it's certain that Olaf Scholz will not want to deliver Taurus to Ukraine, which is exactly what the Russians wanted once and for all to prevent," he said.