

Is defence technology now becoming respectable again?

Since the end of February, our hitherto wholesome world order has been turned upside down. The Bundeswehr, equipment and defence budget have come out of their decades-long dubious reputation. Everyone is now more than aware of the need to restore defence capability as quickly as possible. The process will probably take five to ten years, and in order to succeed, encrusted procurement channels must be reformed or streamlined as quickly as possible.



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The special budget of 100 billion euros proclaimed by Chancellor Olaf Scholz gives the soldiers hope for better times, when they will no longer have to procure the simplest functional clothing from their pocket money and look enviously at better-equipped outdoor campers. The focus of the army is once again on its original task, and I hope that discussions about grammatical gender ranks, perhaps too tough (but necessary) training content, a far too expensive "Gorch Fock" and rifles shooting around corners will quickly fade into the background.

Plastics can be found along the entire supply chain - from simple functional socks to tents to high-tech equipment. Lightweight construction and special applications such as exoskeletons can only be realised with plastics. Not only industry, but also research can contribute to meeting the highest requirements, if desired. As far as I know, plastics research in the field of defence technology has almost come to a standstill in German-speaking countries. There are also synergies with medical technology, for example, which is clearly illustrated by the example of exoskeletons: These can support soldiers in carrying the heaviest loads as well as paraplegics in regaining personal mobility and quality of life.

Mobile halls and shelters such as the development of "tent houses", which can be used in the event of natural disasters, should be adapted for the Bundeswehr as quickly as possible in a practical and robust manner. Container shelters and flexible, modular hospitals are needed in many areas of operations. All of these were sufficiently available to the Bundeswehr in the distant past but are lacking in the inventory today. And revolutionary lightweight halls are also needed by the industry.

Companies are now faced with several challenges, and the fundamental decision to include the development, production, and quality assurance of defence technology in strategic planning must be made consciously. The understandable moral objections to comprehensible business interests and necessities of this sector must be weighed by each individual entrepreneur.

Understanding the special standards and approval procedures of the military is just as much a next step as building up a specific sales organisation and production that meets the high security requirements. If access to the Bundeswehr Procurement Office (BAAINBw) in Koblenz is successful, in the past it was necessary to exercise years of patience in order to get the go-ahead. The current situation now seems to open new possibilities.

The catch-up demand of the Bundeswehr, but also of other armed forces, is enormous in light of the threat that has become apparent. Existing systems have to be (re)produced in larger numbers and new ones have to be developed with accelerated release procedures.

Hopefully, the pragmatism shown in the approval of Corona vaccines will also spread to this industry, without the development having to be completed in the field, as was the case with the Starfighter in the 1960s and 1970s. This is an opportunity for our industry that none of us would have wished for, but which must be seized. ■

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