

## German Military Officers' Leaked Audio

# Discussion of Taurus Cruise Missile Options To Destroy the Crimean Bridge

March 9—*Margarita Simonyan, editor-in-chief of RT and Rossiya Segodnya, parent media group of Sputnik, published on March 1 an audio file and partial transcriptions and translations, including in English, of a leaked phone conversation that took place Feb. 19 among four high-ranking Bundeswehr officers discussing an attack on the Crimean Bridge, as well as other targets, using German-built Taurus cruise missiles, and otherwise how to operate clandestinely in Ukraine. That bridge connects the Crimean Peninsula with the Russian mainland over the Kerch Strait.*

*The speakers are Brig. Gen. Frank Gräfe, Department Director for Operations and Exercises at the Air Force Command in Berlin, and recently military attache*

*ché in the German Embassy in Washington; Lt. Gen. Ingo Gerhartz, Chief of the Luftwaffe; and two officials at the Air Operations Center of the Bundeswehr Space Command, Lt. Col. Sebastian Florstedt and Lt. Col. Udo Fenske.*

*We present here a translation of the proofed [transcript](#) of the conference call published March 4 by the German weekly paper, Junge Freiheit. Subheads have been added. Translation is by Daniel Platt, EIR.*

**Lieutenant General Ingo Gerhartz:** Very good, very good. Yes, I wanted us to briefly talk to each other beforehand ... uhhhhm ... yes, not in the sense of who says what, but that we briefly coordinate like this, and the two comrades Florstedt and Fenske in particular



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*The Crimean Bridge connects the Crimean Peninsula, now part of Russia, with the Russian mainland over the Kerch Strait. A recorded conversation among high-ranking German Bundeswehr officers, plotting German military involvement to destroy it, risks triggering a Russian response directly against NATO member Germany.*

know how the whole thing works. Because when you hear that the Defense Minister [Boris Pistorius] wants to, really, really wants to get deep into this thing with the Taurus, and the appointment with him is for a half hour, from what I saw, so ... we won't be able to get the thing to fly, put it this way.

I don't see any momentum for releasing the missiles at the moment. So it's not like the Chancellor [Olaf Scholz] told him "Hey, look into this again and then let's decide tomorrow." Um, in any case I didn't realize that, but he spoke to Pistorius again, and this whole discussion comes up over and over, and nobody really knows why the Chancellor is blocking things.

Of course, adventurous rumors arise. I want to name one. Yesterday I received a call from a journalist who is extremely close to the Chancellor. Yes, she had heard in Munich that the Taurus wouldn't work at all. I thought, okay, who says that kind of shit? I thought she'd somehow picked this up from political circles, but someone in uniform told her that. Of course she didn't name her source. That goes without saying. But she wanted to run with it, and publish something under the headline, "Now we finally have the reason why the Chancellor is not delivering the Taurus, because the thing doesn't work at all."

Naturally we tried to dissuade her, it's total nonsense. In fact, we do test-runs all the time. The last one wasn't that long ago. But you can see what kind of chatter there is in the room these days, and what sort of nonsense is being said. So, I just wanted to take a moment ... to coordinate with you so that this doesn't go in the wrong direction.

So first of all, my question would be to Florstedt and Fenske. Has anyone ever spoken to you directly or did General Freuding [Major General Christian Freuding, head of the Bundeswehr's Situation Center Ukraine] get in touch with you somehow?

**Lieutenant Colonel Sebastian Florstedt:** Um, negative from my side, no, I only heard from Frank



*Lt. Gen. Ingo Gerhartz, Chief of the German Air Force.*

[Gräfe].

**Lieutenant Colonel Udo Fenske:** Negative for me too. I only communicated with General Gräfe.

**Gerhartz:** Ah yes, all clear.

**Fenske:** I gave him both numbers on Sunday.

**Gerhartz:** Yes, okay, then maybe that will happen. No, that hasn't happened yet, um, so what I've seen is that its half an hour ... and it could well be the case, um, that I might not be there at all. But I may have to go to the budget committee because we still have such a small issue with a price increase for

the F-35 [fighter jet] infrastructure in Büchel [Air Base], which is super annoying because it's not really a price increase, but it was simply estimated too low, and now the companies have just submitted their offers and they are way above what was estimated.

And now, of course, there is great anger. And I told them now that they should have known that would happen. As for whether I should go with you or whether I should go to the budget committee, that's up to the



U.S.A.F./Alexandra M. Longfellow

*Boris Pistorius, German Defense Minister.*

Minister, because the two meetings are almost simultaneous. So it could well be that you are on your own then. And I would recommend, well, I'm not going to make a big thing of it. I'm just going to say, here, these are our two experts. One in the association, the other in the ZLO and then ... there you have it. And I would recommend, I already sent this to you through Frank, that you have a few slides with you, right? ... Templates, as they call them, so that you can visualize a little bit.

Well, you just have to put yourself in his position. Yes, we showed him at a demo show, there was a Taurus there, it was also armed ... on the carrier next to the Tornado [aircraft], but for example what it looks like when installed on a Tornado, or what a mission planning facility looks like, for example, he has very little idea.

Okay. Udo, do you have ... you have a bunch of slides, right?

**Fenske:** Yes. Yes, I have it available.

### **Presentation: 'What Can the Taurus Do?'**

**Gerhartz:** But on the other hand, don't bombard him with a slide show with 30 slides. Just keep in mind that the appointment is half an hour. Um, I'd say go for a quick impact, hopefully Freuding will get in touch again. Of course it's also a bit about how it works: What can the Taurus do? How is it deployed? But of course there is still something in the back of his mind: If we were to make a political decision to support Ukraine with this, how would the whole thing work out in the end?

And I would be really grateful to you if we can present it in such a way that we don't just pose a problem, but we also offer the solution. So when it comes to doing mission planning, for example. I know how the English do it [how they deliver missiles]. They do it completely in Ridgback armored vehicles. They also have a few people on site. They do that, the French don't. So they also quality check the Ukrainians when loading the SCALP missiles. Because they say Storm Shadow and SCALP are relatively similar from a purely technical perspective. They already told me, yes, my god, they would also look over the Ukrainians' shoulders as they loaded the Taurus.

But the question would be, how do we solve this? Let them do the mission planning and give them the MBDA [Taurus missile manufacturer, *MBDA Deutsch-*

*land GmbH*] missiles on Ridgbacks, and then bring one of our people to do the MBDA? I would now like to ask again, maybe Frank again, how did we always position ourselves, how would we do it, and then Fenske, Florstedt, if you'll both show how you see it from your perspective.

**Fenske:** Maybe I'll start with this: What is the most sensitive or the most critical thing that can happen now? There are all kinds of discussions going on about this. And I go to two points that are sensitive. One is the timing; if the Chancellor says we'll give them the missiles, they'll be transferred from the *Bundeswehr*. Fine, but they will only be ready for use in eight months. And the second thing is, of course, we can't shorten the time frame either, because it may later be used incorrectly and the thing lands on a kindergarten, and there are civilian casualties. So we have to find a balance between these two things.

### **Missile Delivery?**

If you break it down like this, one path is the delivery of the missiles. We actually have nothing to do with that, and the important point would then be in the conversation.... I have to point it out again ... without the company we can't do anything, and it would then be like it was with the IRIS-T missiles. That means that the first missiles are equipped, converted, and delivered relatively quickly. But then rudimentary things have to be done, like a small overhaul, taking down the German national emblem and so on. But that doesn't have to wait until you have 20 of them, because you could theoretically deliver five at a time. So, that would be the first step.

How long will it take to ship them? That is actually completely in the hands of the industry and the question still arises as to who pays for it, because it involves costs.

The second question is then the question of mounting the missile: How do you connect it to which weapon system? And that's another thing that some amateur technician in Ukraine would actually have to do that with the company, because ... Mr. Fenske? ... We don't have any contacts there who could hook it up to the Sukhoi planes, for example, right?

**Fenske:** I don't think so, although TSG, the manufacturer, says that they can do that with a timeframe of about six months, so either Sukhoi or F-16.



Utah National Guard/Jordan Hack

*Brig. Gen. Frank Gräfe, recently the German Defense Attaché to the U.S., currently Director for Operations and Exercises at the Air Force Command.*

**Brig. Gen. Frank Gräfe:** Exactly, we don't have any assets there for that, but when the message comes across, "Great, the Chancellor has decided," and then the other message is, "But it takes six months for the mounts alone," well, then the positive news quickly turns into negative news.

And the third part is the one that could theoretically affect us, namely, training. That means, as we once said, that we work in collaboration with the industry in a similar way to the way we did the IRIS-T. The industry trains them how to use the system, and we employ people who provide tactical support for the whole thing. And then we talked about the best-case scenario of three or four months. And that would be the part we do in Germany. And then of course you would have to think about whether you should rely on the British for both the mounts and the training, in order to quickly come to a quick solution with the first missiles, if they have the know-how.

Look, how did they manage to mount the Storm Shadow—it can't be that big of a difference—and maybe they'll take part in the operation at the beginning, while the crews are trained by us in the meantime. So that it doesn't take so long. And then there are a few things: Can we deliver a database? Can we provide satellite images? Can we supply a planning station? In addition to just the missiles that we have,

everything would have to go through the industry or through the IABG [*Industrieanlagen—Betriebsgesellschaft mbH*].

**Gerhartz:** Well, we always, always have to remember—they have aircraft that they use for things like the Taurus—the Storm Shadow. Well, that means the British were there and wired up the planes, so it's not *that* different from installing the Taurus on those planes ... no? Let's not talk about the F-16 right now. They have it on the MiG-23, and that's what it was all about.... I can only say the experience with the Patriot—I still remember the timelines our own experts drew up at the beginning. And then they mastered the thing in just a few weeks and are now using it to such an extent that our people say: "Oh, wow, we didn't expect that at all!" Well, some of them are currently engaged in warfare, more high-tech than our good old *Luftwaffe*. I always keep all of this in mind when it comes to all the timelines that we come up with, so that you shouldn't make such a mistake. But now, of course, comrade Fenske, Florstedt, I just want to see and hear how it looks to you, with a view to a possible delivery to Ukraine.

**Fenske:** I would add the point about training again.



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*A Royal Air Force Tornado GR4 carrying two Storm Shadow cruise missiles under its fuselage.*

We've already looked there. If the appropriate personnel come and can be trained in parallel, then we will have around three weeks of industrial training and a training phase, which we, the Air Force, can then do in around four weeks. That means we're well below the twelve weeks—assuming we have appropriately qualified staff, we can do it without interpreters and the like, so there's some other data there.

We had already spoken to Ms. Friedberger. When it

comes to deployment afterwards, the recommendation would actually be that at least the first mission support would be provided by us, since the planning is very complex. We need about a year to train our staff. So, to sort of push it to, let me say, ten weeks, with the expectation that they will be able to drive in a Formula 1 racing car off-road and also on Formula 1 tracks. So a possible variant would be to provide planning support. Theoretically, you could even do this from Büchel with a secure line to Ukraine, transfer the data file over, and then it would be available, and you could plan it together.

So, that would be the worst-case scenario, the minimum being the industry supporting the whole thing with a user help-desk that can provide support with software questions, just like we basically have in Germany.

### **Handle the Data File, Don't Look Implicated**

**Gerhartz:** Hang on a second, Herr Fenske. If you were politically worried now, that this connection from Büchel Air Base directly to Ukraine is too direct an involvement, we could claim that the data file is created at MBDA Missile Systems, and then we send one or two of our experts to Schrobenhausen. That's a complete ploy, but look at it this way: it could protect us politically. If the data file comes from private industry, then we aren't implicated.

**Fenske:** Yes, the question will be, where does the data come from. Now I'm going to take a step back when it comes to the target data, which ideally come with satellite images, because this gives the highest precision, so that we have an accuracy of less than three meters. We have to process that in the first step in Büchel. This would require a data transfer between Büchel and Schrobenhausen, or what is, of course, also possible is that the data can be sent to Poland and you have the handover somewhere in Poland, with someone driving there by car. I think you have to look into it in detail, and there will also be possible solutions.

So, the moment we have the support, worst case scenario, I might have to commute back and forth by car, which only reduces the reaction time. So you may not be able to respond within hours; if you want to react very quickly, we could say that we are confident that we can dispatch aircraft within six hours. Whereas

if we do that, then we also have precision, but unfortunately it's greater than three meters, which can certainly be sufficient if the target is appropriate. And if I want the higher precision, I have to work with satellite images and model the target, And then the reaction time can be up to 12 hours. It all depends on the target. I haven't studied this issue in detail, but I believe such an option is possible. We just need to figure out how to organize information transmission.

**Gerhartz:** And do you think ... Yes, we can only guess at what the Ukrainians are doing now. We also know that there are a lot of people with American accents walking around in civilian clothes. Hopefully they are able to do this relatively quickly because they all have satellite images. We can assume that, too.

**Fenske:** Now let's talk about it very briefly. The question will then be: In order to be able to break through skillfully, I have to break through the air defense, which is there in large numbers.... We can do that very well, let's assume, because we can, of course, work at low altitude and have data from the IABG and the NDK for this. You definitely have to make this available to them so that I can fly under [radar] with a [B-]21 [Raider bomber], so that I can get the most out of planning here and not plan using waypoints like with Storm Shadow, but actually by flying around or under the respective systems.

If I provide that, then there will probably be quicker learning effects and I'll just get back into the area where I can later get to the number of missiles. So, very quickly, if I'm talking about 50, then 50 missiles will be fired very quickly.

**Gerhartz:** Yes, of course. Of course, it must be clear that this will not change the war. We don't have anything for that.... We wouldn't give them all away, we don't want to give them away, and not all of us are the same. I don't have to tell you that. So, you could say 50 in the first tranche, and then if they come after us for the next 50, and that would be the end of it. Well, that's completely clear. Well, that would be big politics again, when you get right down to it.... I suspect there could be some momentum behind it, because I know—from my British and French colleagues—that they are as good as Winchester rifles with their Storm Shadow and SCALPs. And then of course they will say, that before

we deliver the next ones here—and we have already done that once—Germany should now make an effort. It wouldn't be the first time, you can imagine.

### **Targets: Crimean Bridge, Russian Ammo Depots**

**Florstedt:** I concentrated on a pragmatic approach today. I thought to myself, what is the unique selling point of the Taurus compared to the Storm Shadows? Like air defense, robustness, and altitude, etc. And then I realized that there are two interesting targets. One is the bridge in the East and the other is the ammunition depots, where we come in. So, the bridge in the East is difficult to reach, and the pillars are relatively small. It's a relatively small target, but the Taurus can do it, and it can also strike the ammunition depots. Considering all this and comparing it with how many Storm Shadows and HIMARS have been shot down, you have a really cool unique selling point.

I have a question: "Is our target the bridge or the military depots?" And then I basically come to the decision—yes, it's good, it's doable. The limiting factor is the Su-24 aircraft, how many of them they [the Ukrainians] have left. That would then be in the single digits. And I picked out a few lead points and said, pay attention, basically it's doable, and how do you teach the Ukrainians the TTPs [the tactics, techniques, and procedures] to shoot this thing? I would say the pilots—under a week....

**Fenske:** I would like to quickly add this again about the bridge, because we have looked at it intensively and the bridge is unfortunately like an airfield due to its size. That means we may need 10 or 20 missiles for this.

**Florstedt:** I made my estimate where it opens up, if you hit the pillars.

**Fenske:** Yes, the pillar, we might just make a hole in it. And then here we are.... In order to have workable data, we would really have to....

**Florstedt:** I didn't want to define the bridge for you, I just want to say, that was the pragmatic approach: what do they actually want and how quickly can I train them

### **The Crimean Peninsula**



CC/mwmbwls

*A Russian map, issued Aug. 28, 2014, shows Crimea as part of Russia.*

for it? In the end, it becomes clear: What remains is that we have to give them the image-centralized mission planning data. We basically have to give them the satellite image if we have it ourselves. And we have the daily data, but we would have to make it available to them somehow. Because when it comes to such small targets, you have to plan them out a little more precisely than just on a satellite picture. When it comes to hardened targets, it's much easier and relatively quick to plan if we exploit the fact that it can fly at a double-digit height.

**Gerhartz:** You sum it up quite well. We all know that they want to take out the bridge. We also know what that means in the end. It has not only military-strategic importance, but it means a lot politically. It's not quite so fatal now that they have their land supply route in place. There are certain concerns if we have direct communication with the Ukrainian Armed Forces. So the question arises: Can we use such a ruse and assign our people to MBDA? Thus, direct communication with Ukraine will only be through MBDA, which is much better than if such communication exists with our Air Force. And then the question would always be: Can we get away with it?

### **'Imagine If This Gets Leaked to the Press'**

**Gräfe:** I don't think it makes any difference, Ingo [Gerhartz]. We have to make sure that from the very

beginning there is no language that makes us a party to the conflict. I'm exaggerating a bit, of course, but if we tell the Minister now that we are going to plan meetings and travel by car from Poland so that no one notices, that's already participation, and we won't do that. So first of all, if it comes from the company, MBDA would first have to agree to do it. And it makes no difference whether we let our people plan it in Büchel or in Schrobenhausen—involved is involved. And I don't think we'll get over this hurdle.

From the very beginning, we defined this as a key element of the "red line," so we'll participate in the training. Let's say we'll prepare a "roadmap." The training process needs to be divided into parts. The long track will take four months, where we'll thoroughly train them, including practicing scenarios with the bridge. The short track will be two weeks so that they can use the missiles as soon as possible. If they are already trained, then we'll ask the British if they are ready to take over at this stage. I believe these actions will serve as an interim solution. Just imagine if this gets leaked to the press! We have our people in Schrobenhausen or we drive through Poland by car—I don't think either of these are acceptable solutions.

**Gerhartz:** Of course you can turn it around so that you say, if the political will is there now, then we first have to say: "Well, someone from Ukraine should come here." And then we have to know the political requirement—no more direct involvement in mission planning? Then it must be clear: The training takes a little longer. And the complexity and ultimately the success of the operation naturally decrease, but it is not impossible either. Because it's not like we haven't already gained a certain amount of experience in this, and we can see for ourselves what high-tech stuff we're currently using.

And then you would have to see: If that is the requirement—there is no direct participation, we cannot do the mission planning in Büchel and send them over, I can almost imagine that that is a red line for Germany.... Yes, that has to be crystal clear—you have to train them a little longer, then it'll be fine for a few months, and you can't do everything with them. But it's not the case that you say you can't do anything with it. You can then perhaps even assume that they will get it under control relatively quickly.

Then we just have to make sure that we can process the entire database, the mission data, so that they can process it themselves, right? So I mean....

**Gräfe:** Then I would do it the way Seb [Sebastian Florstedt] just said: doing a quick track and a long track. The point is to achieve a quick effect. And if it's just about the ammunition depots with an initial effect and not the complexity of the bridge, then you could say that you get rid of this junk for a certain price so that you can achieve a quick effect. And I don't see these IABG data as critical, because they are not related to a specific position, they have to explore that themselves. But that would be the generic performance of the system. That would be a point that we have already discussed in the group, and I could certainly imagine handing it over. At the moment it's just German Eyes Only.

**Gerhartz:** That will remain the pivotal point, because if it is basically an ammunition depot, the folks in Bavaria have no easy plan, due to the massive number of air defenses. That means you'll have to go intensively into it.... With our people, I believe that we will find a way, and it would also be good at the moment to say "Let's try it" in order to be able to give better political advice. As I said, all we need is the "go" and we're ready to start. What could ruin it for us would be if the KSA [knowledge, skills, and abilities] does not have a clear picture of where all the air defense systems are located.

**Gräfe:** But the Ukrainians have that, so you can assume that they....

**Gerhartz:** Exactly. Hopefully they will have that. Because I see that with us—we normally only show the radar device. But in order for us to have proper planning, we really have to look at where the radar devices are and where the air defense systems are. The more we skimp on this, the less precise our plan becomes and the more.... So we have a super tool, which means that when we have the data, we can say relatively precisely whether we can break through their defenses. Anything that I eliminate anywhere for reasons of complexity, or because I don't have enough training yet, always means a reduction in my ability to break through.

**Gräfe:** Yes, of course. But there is no reason now to

say: “This is the show-stopper,” meaning “You can’t do that.” There are different gradations, depending on where the political red line is.... Oh, by the way, I really like this short track/long track idea, too. There are different timelines and different possibilities for complex use, which will become more manageable for Ukraine over time.

**Gerhartz:** Definitely, because they can do it every day—practice. So I think that even if I’m not in the meeting, the Minister is a really cool guy to be around anyway. So, ... you are the experts. It was just important to me that we just appear sober and don’t somehow throw in show-stoppers that aren’t credible when other nations deliver Storm Shadows and SCALP. So, I don’t shout “Hurrah” either. I mean, we’ve managed to deliver only three radars out of twelve. There were some long faces because of this. But at the moment they are shooting down planes and missiles that can’t hit us as a result.

**Gräfe:** You have to say very clearly: the longer you wait to make a decision, the longer it will take to implement it. Either the progression: first something simple, later something bigger. Or we ask the British: “Can you support us at the beginning and take over this planning?” This could expedite the things for which we are responsible. As I said, the mounting is not our responsibility at all, the Ukrainians would have to do that themselves with the company.

**Gerhartz:** Okay, any additions from you two?

**Fenske:** None, no additions.

**Florstedt:** Only for me, the Komo, Sammy is currently writing, “Please tell the inspector that the interview with SZ went smoothly today, no complications. I’ll brief him on the situation tomorrow.”

**Gerhartz:** Wonderful, very good, very good. Well, because the background is of course this: We don’t want the committee to cause problems now. Because if he didn’t cover up this—I’ll call it “price increase” in quotation marks—then we would have the problem that construction work would be delayed. That would perhaps make it impossible to start the main construction this year. And every day counts in the program. That’s why it’s good that the interview is

going well.

And in the end, I think if we get the decision on Wednesday [Feb. 21] that we will continue to work with the two consortia and the general contractors. As I said, it could really be that until the Minister decides to send me to the committee. The experts are there anyway. Well, we’ll have to see. That’s why it was even more important that we agreed beforehand.

Make something for visualization—not too much, always remember: They come from a completely different world, from a completely different world of thought than we who are currently talking. So, ...yeah, that’s fine then.

Yay, all clear. Then I would like to thank you for the group and wish everyone happy work and then I hope to see you both in Berlin. And then you, Frank, when you get back from Singapore. And if I can’t be there, then one of you can just join in.... Contact me, because then of course I’ll be interested in how things went with good Boris [Pistorius].



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