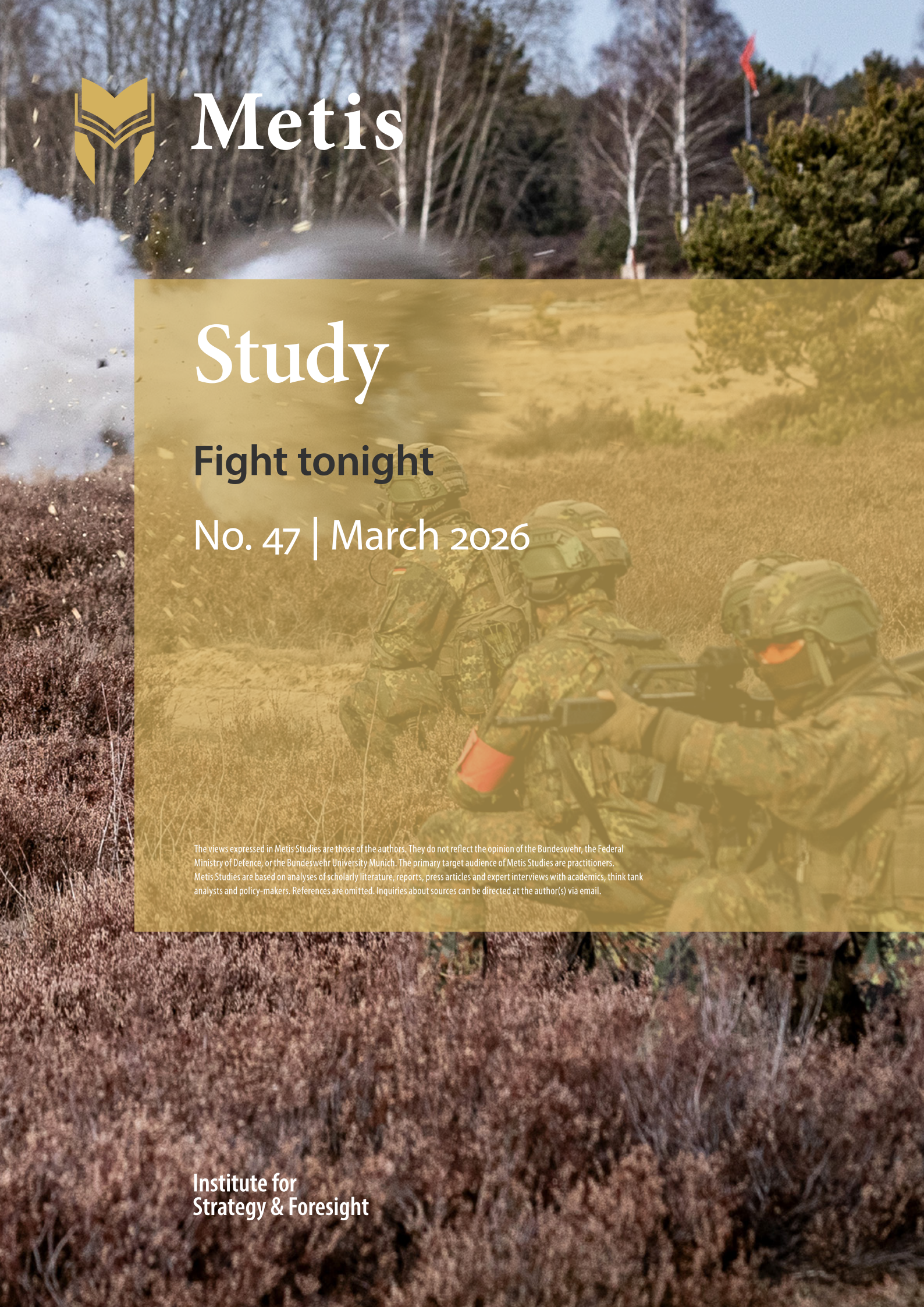

Metis

Study

Fight tonight

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Summary

In the event of an armed attack on the Federal Republic of Germany and its allies, it is the adversary who determines the location and timing of the hostilities, and against whom one must defend oneself using whatever resources are available at the time. This is the simple underlying principle of Fight Tonight. Against this backdrop, the present study focuses on the areas of personnel and material operational readiness as well as system resilience, and proposes a series of immediately implementable measures.

Fight Tonight

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Bundeswehr and the Federal Ministry of Defence have been preparing to build, by around 2029, a German military capable, in conjunction with other armed forces, of effectively deterring a potential Russian attack on European NATO territory and – should deterrence fail – to defend both itself and allied nations and to defeat a potential aggressor militarily. Examples of these efforts include the Special Fund, the exemption from the debt brake, the enormous increase in the number of procurement projects, the passing of a Military Service Act designed to ensure the expansion of the armed forces' personnel over the coming years, the 2023 Defence Policy Guidelines, the future capability profile of the Bundeswehr, and a military strategy drawn up for the first time.

Taking all these activities together, there is good reason to believe that, by around 2029, the Bundeswehr could be both (more) capable of deterrence and fit for war. However, the above list consists of financing instruments, laws, strategies and procurement programmes with long planning horizons. These will not be the ones fighting. It would be people who, in an extreme scenario, might have to take on the defence of Germany and Europe as early as tomorrow.

Against this backdrop, the question arises as to what the Bundeswehr would be lacking should an alliance case manifest well before 2029. Since taking office, the Inspector of the Army, Lieutenant General Dr. Christian Freuding, has been emphasising that the army – and the Bundeswehr as a whole – must prepare for the *Fight Tonight* scenario. This refers to the assumption that one might have to wage a defensive battle against an adversary long before one has the necessary equipment and sufficient personnel that one actually considers necessary to defend against and defeat an adversary of equal strength. *Fight Tonight* is therefore based on the simple, yet correct, realisation that it is the adversary who determines the place and time of the battle to which one must react defensively.

The *Fight Tonight* approach seeks solutions that are available at short notice and lie outside the normal planning and procurement cycle of armed forces in peacetime. *Fight Tonight* is therefore more than just a catchy phrase. Concrete objectives and tasks for the armed forces can be derived from this approach.

Of course, the idea that armed forces must be capable of fighting at any time using whatever resources are available is not new. But in the context of the tectonic shifts that have been observable in international politics for the past few years, the increasing willingness of revisionist actors to use military force as the primary means of advancing their agendas, and the concrete military threat to Europe posed by Russia, the issue has taken on extreme urgency.

Two dimensions

Conceptually, *Fight Tonight* can be considered along two dimensions, from which systematic proposals for improvement or action can then be derived.

1. Increasing personnel and material readiness

A high standard of training and equipment without a lengthy mobilisation and preparation phase; units not fully equipped, but with sufficient equipment and manned to 80–85 % capacity; soldiers mentally prepared for combat; maintenance and repair of weapons and systems as a top priority; establishment and safeguarding of functioning C4ISR systems [1] to conduct reconnaissance, share information rapidly and thereby ensure short response times and accelerate the kill chain.

2. Strengthening system resilience

From the perspective of potential military inferiority, which the *Fight Tonight* scenario certainly also implies, defence must be conceived more broadly and in ways that go beyond the military domain. [2]

Derivation of immediate measures

Personnel

Regarding personnel readiness, a comprehensive empirical survey should be carried out as a first step within the units that must be ready for deployment and deployable within 24 hours (Tier 1 and 2). The aim of such a survey would be to ascertain what percentage consider themselves immediately ready for deployment and what percentage do not.

In a second step, it would then be necessary to ascertain why soldiers describe themselves as not immediately operational. Is it due to mental disposition or to personal (private) circumstances? In the latter case, it would be necessary to examine to what extent the employer can help remedy the situation (e.g. by improving childcare or care for relatives). If it is mental disposition that prevents immediate operational readiness, then methods based either on the *US Army Battlemind* concept or the *Holistic Health and Fitness* (H2F) programme must be applied in both recruitment and regular training. Despite their differences, both programmes aim to make soldiers more resilient to stress and better able to cope with extreme situations.

It is also important to make the concept *train as you fight* more realistic. This includes the widespread use of training equipment readily available on the market, such as small quadcopter drones (FPV), FX ammunition, smoke and anti-drone ammunition in the NATO standard calibre of 5.56 mm – and not just within special and specialised forces, but across the entire spectrum of the army. Occupational safety considerations should take a back seat to the priority of *train as you fight*. Unmanned systems, in particular, have changed the nature of warfare, making it faster and deadlier. The army has not yet trained sufficiently for this new form of warfare and the necessity of 'drone defence for all troops'. Russia's learning curve over the last four years, by contrast, has been considerable; not across the breadth of the Russian armed forces, but certainly in the case of effective drone units such as Rubikon. The Bundeswehr must rapidly adapt. The aim of all measures would be to approach the required NATO quota of 90 % operational personnel.

1 C4ISR = Command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.

2 See "Thinking about Resilience", Metis Study No. 21 (November 2020).

Fig. 1 Soldiers from Mountain Infantry Battalion 231 practise as part of a multinational combat formation in a stabilisation operation during the MILEX 2024 exercise of the EU Battlegroup 2025 at the Bergen military training area on 1 December 2024. | Source: https://www.flickr.com/photos/bundeswehrfoto/; © Bundeswehr / Marco Dorow

Equipment

Regarding the question of operational readiness, the primary challenge is that, although the Federal Ministry of Defence has initiated and implemented extensive procurement programmes over the past two years, the platforms or weapon systems to be procured will not reach the troops for at least two to three years. It will not be until the early 2030s, at the earliest, that we will be able to say that the Bundeswehr has all the necessary equipment to successfully meet a major conventional challenge. Against this backdrop, a number of immediate measures are being considered.

Firstly, greater priority should be given to FME (*Foreign Material Exploitation*). Since the start of Russia's war of aggression, substantial quantities of Russian military equipment have come into the possession of the Federal Republic of Germany. Systematically analysing this material can improve the capabilities of our own armed forces and help to develop defensive measures, as well as providing a better understanding of the enemy's tactics. The Bundeswehr could possibly take a leaf out of the book of the Australian armed forces, which have a dedicated organisational unit for this technical analysis, the DST Group (*Defence Science and Technology Group*), whose findings are fed directly into operational command, training and weapons development. In addition, there is a coordination of FME within the *Five Eyes* intelligence alliance. In Germany, this analysis – insofar as it concerns ammunition and weapons – is carried out by the WTD 91, which, however, also has other tasks to fulfil. Giving greater priority to FME could rapidly enhance the combat effectiveness of existing equipment. Organisationally, a focus on FME analysis could be established within the Bundeswehr's newly created Innovation Centre near Erding.

Furthermore – and this is, of course, nothing new – the focus should be on procuring what is available on the (defence) market. New developments can be useful. And defence procurement is always also a matter of national industrial policy, where care is taken to ensure that domestic jobs are preserved. But as long as time is of the essence and domestic industry is only partially capable of scaling up its production to produce large quantities in a short time, there will be no avoiding the purchase of already available equipment from other sources.

When prioritising procurement, ammunition and spare parts should come first. The next step is to strengthen the electronic warfare capability. After that, the focus should be on short range and very short range air defence.

Fig. 2 Panzerhaubitze 2000 firing live rounds during the White Eagle exercise conducted by Artillery Training Battalion 325 at the Altengrabow military training area on 13 April 2021. | Source: https://www.flickr.com/photos/bundeswehrfoto/; © Bundeswehr / Marco Dorow

As significant numbers of new anti-aircraft gun tanks are not expected to be available until the early 2030s, there is a need for rapid, off-the-shelf solutions – these include, for example, stationary interceptor drone products, light vehicles (4 × 4 wheeled platforms) as mobile drone defence systems (with interceptor drones and machine guns), as well as the immediate equipping of as many army combat vehicles as possible with active protection systems that also offer protection against drones. The next area should be the strengthening of command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR) capabilities. Platforms with autonomous functions serve to protect our own forces, accelerate the kill chain and increase the probability of mission success (against this backdrop, the ongoing procurement and, hopefully, rapid introduction and training with loitering munitions is the right approach). The ability to engage targets at range using *deep precision strike* is the next essential step in holding high-value targets such as the enemy's command and control and production capabilities at risk. For it is not enough to shoot down their arrows; one must also be able to hit the archer and his ammunition. Otherwise, there is no prospect of enabling manoeuvre warfare on a battlefield dominated by long-range weapons and masses of unmanned systems – and thus partly 'transparent' – and thereby liberating territory. Last but not least, logistics must be prioritised, as the ability to rapidly deploy units, sustain them and keep them in combat over extended periods is currently limited.

System resilience

A *Fight Tonight* mindset would also require us to view defence and counter-attack as a matter of system resilience: adaptation, disruption, decentralisation and endurance are key factors in this regard. Cheap, rapidly iterating, precise (disposable) weapon systems ('precision mass') thus take precedence over sophisticated, expensive large-scale weapon systems.

Democracies must also learn to weather protracted conflicts through effective communication, thereby shielding their own populations from fatigue and information warfare.

An integral part of system resilience, understood more broadly in the sense of a defence strategy, is to create strategic dilemmas for the adversary, which consist of the adversary having to incur high costs to counter asymmetric measures taken (e.g. in the field of defending against cyber or drone attacks).

Fig. 3 **The helicopter brigade flies over various towns in Lithuania during the Griffin Lightning 2025 exercise on 6 May 2025.** |
Source: https://www.flickr.com/photos/bundeswehrfoto/; © Bundeswehr / Julia Dahlmann

The aim is to create ambiguities and fears that force the adversary to constantly rethink their own plans and to confront them with situations in which their response either creates new risks for them or forces them to reveal their own weaknesses. The latter is possible, amongst other things, by simultaneously threatening the adversary on multiple levels. System resilience therefore also means driving the costs of the adversary's actions in fields other than the purely military one to an unacceptable level. These costs may be of a political nature (isolation) or an economic nature (sanctions, blockades of key trade routes, disruption of financial flows). These measures are not merely accompanying measures, but an integral part of the defence strategy.

Concluding Remarks

Fight Tonight is not a sophisticated theoretical concept. It is a simple idea, born of an undesirable necessity. The primary aim is to close gaps in one's own armed forces and to minimise the greatest of those risks arising from the technological and tactical developments of Russia's war of aggression against the Ukraine over the past four years. The immediate measures identified here – concerning individual deployment, material equipment, but also the question of the underlying defence strategy – can contribute to this.

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Soldiers from the 26th Parachute Regiment fire a Panzerfaust 3 under the cover of their comrades during Exercise Cold Storm at the Oberlausitz training area, on January 24, 2025. | Source: https://www.flickr.com/photos/bundeswehrfoto/; © Bundeswehr / Mario Bähr

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