

German defense chat overheard by Russian eavesdroppers on Cisco's WebEx

Connor Jones : 4-5 minutes : 3/4/2024

The German Ministry of Defense (Bundeswehr) has confirmed that a recording of a call between high-ranking officials discussing war efforts in Ukraine, leaked by Russian media, is legitimate.

Senior government officials have also confirmed Russian reports that the call was hosted on and tapped via Cisco's WebEx video conferencing platform rather than any kind of secure, military-grade comms.

Roderich Kiesewetter, deputy chairman of the German parliament's oversight committee, [said](#) the Bundeswehr leak was possibly caused by a Russian agent inside the [WebEx](#) call or the Bundeswehr's implementation of it, but the country is still working on discovering how the intrusion took place.

Likewise, the ministry released a statement to wider media saying: "According to our assessment, a conversation in the air force division was intercepted. We are currently unable to say for certain whether changes were made to the recorded or transcribed version that is circulating on social media."

Cisco has distanced itself from the situation. A spokesperson told *The Register*: "Cisco does not publicly discuss customer information and we refer your request to the organization in question."

The 38-minute recording was first published by Margarita Simonyan, editor-in-chief at the Russian state-controlled RT news outlet, and has since been shared widely online. It was supposedly handed to her by "sources" in Russian intelligence.

RT said it identified two of the four German military officials on the call, including the head of Air Force Operations Brigadier General Frank Graefe, and Air Force Chief Lieutenant General Ingo Gerhartz.

RT has since made a number of claims after publishing the call, including that the conversation provides proof that Germany was planning to help Ukraine to destroy the Kerch Bridge that connects Russia to the illegally annexed Crimea.

Discussions also involved a potential delivery of Taurus long-range missiles to Ukraine for use in the attacks and how Germany could supply these without appearing to be directly involved in the conflict.

Taurus missiles have a range of around 310 miles, far greater than the Storm Shadow cruise missiles supplied to Ukraine by the UK, which have a range of around 155 miles.

Ukraine has long asked Germany to deliver Taurus missiles, but Chancellor Olaf Scholz has repeatedly declined to do so out of fears that the [ongoing conflict](#) could escalate.

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Kiesewetter told broadcaster ZDF that more recordings are likely to have been intercepted and could well be released at a later date, all to Russia's benefit.

It's likely the recent release was designed to pressure Germany to drop talks over Taurus missile deliveries.

On Friday, Dmitry Medvedev, deputy head of Russia's Security Council, said via Telegram: "After all, our

eternal opponents – the Germans – have again turned into sworn enemies."

"Germany is preparing for war with Russia," he said in a second message on Sunday, both of which were lengthy and included several Nazi-themed slurs against the German military.

Maria Zakharova, spokesperson for Russia's Foreign Ministry, said Germany must "promptly" explain the nature of the audio, adding that a failure to respond will be seen as an admission of guilt.

Scholz said on Saturday that the leak was "a very serious matter" and is now being investigated thoroughly and quickly.

Asked about developments in the investigation, the Bundeswehr told *The Register* it had nothing further to add, but pointed to defense minister Boris Pistorius's comments on Sunday, calling the leak an act of "information war."

"It is a hybrid disinformation attack. It is about division. It is about undermining our unity," he said. ®