

Kamikaze Drones and Artificial Intelligence: Germany Shifts Gears and Deploys New Systems to Lithuania

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During the *Freedom Shield* military exercises, the Bundeswehr field-tested loitering munitions and AI-based targeting software for the first time, marking a strategic turning point for Berlin's defense posture on NATO's eastern flank.

The German Army has begun its **first tactical tests with kamikaze drones in Lithuania,** where a 5,000-strong armored brigade is to be permanently deployed by the end of 2027. The trials took place as part of *Freedom Shield*, the largest military exercise Germany has ever conducted in the Baltic country.

Field testing and the role of AI

At the Rudninkai training range, located a short distance from the Belarusian border, the head of the German Army, Lieutenant General Christian Freuding, observed the attack simulations. The unmanned aircraft — produced by German companies **Helsing** and **Stark** and fitted with

inert warheads for the occasion — dived onto several main battle tanks.
In the preceding days, German troops had already tested **Clarity** for the first time, **a targeting software also developed by Helsing. Based on artificial intelligence,** the system can **analyze vast amounts of data from satellites, drones and other sensors far more quickly than a human operator**, generating real-time operational recommendations.

A turning point after years of debate

The use of so-called “loitering munitions” (*loitering munitions*) — single-use aircraft capable of flying over an area while waiting for a target before crashing into it and exploding on impact, widely used by both Russia and Ukraine — marks a significant shift for Berlin. Germany only decided to acquire these weapons in 2025, overcoming years of hesitation and domestic controversy over their procurement.
General Freuding, who previously coordinated German military supplies to Kyiv and will assume the post of Chief of Defence in February, **described both explosive drones and AI-based analysis systems as now “indispensable for modern warfare.”**

Strengthening NATO’s eastern flank

The exercise is part of the broader reorganization of the German armed forces launched after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, backed by investments worth hundreds of billions of euros intended to address decades of underfunding.
In 2023, Defense Minister Boris Pistorius pledged the permanent deployment of a combat brigade in Lithuania, an unprecedented move in Germany’s recent history:

- **The structure:** The new *Panzerbrigade 45*, with bases in Rudninkai and Rukla, will eventually comprise around 5,000 soldiers and 2,000 vehicles, including dozens of tanks.
- **Timeline:** Approximately 1,800 military personnel are already operational in Lithuania, while full operational capability is expected by the end of 2027.

The move responds to repeated warnings from NATO leadership about a growing threat from Moscow, which, according to Alliance assessments, could be capable of launching a large-scale attack against Allied territory as early as 2029 — an accusation the Kremlin rejects, instead blaming NATO for heightened tensions along its borders.