

German military deploys lethal drones in Afghanistan

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The *Bundeswehr* (German armed forces) have killed several “insurgents” in Afghanistan with the use of a US drone. The drone was deployed on November 11, 2010 in the Chahar Dara district. At that time, “four suspected anti-government troops were killed” as part of air support for ground troops, the news weekly *Der Spiegel* has reported in its latest edition.

The case has been kept secret by the German defence ministry for almost two and a half years. The ministry only felt compelled to admit the incident because of a parliamentary question asked by Social Democratic Party (SPD) deputy Hans-Peter Bartels, and then only in a confidential statement.

For the first time, it has been acknowledged by the government that drones have been deployed to kill Afghans at Germany’s behest. Until now, the public has only been aware that the *Bundeswehr* procured an armed drone for the first time in 2009, used at the time to destroy a weapons cache, but not deployed against people.

The report regarding the drone killings casts a harsh light on the increasingly aggressive character of German militarism. It comes only weeks after an editorial in the finance daily *Handelsblatt* indicated that Germany was intensively preparing for “resource wars”.

Given the explosion of imperialism after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the growing competition between the imperialist powers for spheres of influence and resources, the German ruling elite is increasingly losing all its inhibitions. After Berlin kept out of the NATO war in Libya in 2011, an action that was sharply criticised by wide sections of the German bourgeoisie, the government has used every opportunity to go on the military offensive.

The Merkel government is participating in the

warmongering against Syria and Iran, and has stationed Patriot rockets and some 300 soldiers on the Syria-Turkey border. In Mali, the German authorities are supporting French imperialism’s aggression, with the transportation of troops, weapons and ammunition, as well as a training mission. Last year, military operations were extended in Kosovo and Afghanistan, where thousands of German soldiers have been stationed for more than a decade to secure the interests of German imperialism.

Nevertheless, in comparison to the US armed forces, the German military is capable of mounting only relatively small-scale operations. According to the *Bundeswehr*, there are about 6,800 of its soldiers deployed around the world at present. By contrast, in December last year the US military had nearly 173,000 soldiers stationed abroad.

The American military budget is also incomparably greater. In 2011, \$739.3 billion flowed into the biggest military machine in the world. The total German federal budget that year was €305.8 billion euros, only about half as much; of which, only €31.5 billion went directly into defence.

The German bourgeoisie now sees a chance to gradually catch up with the US in drone technology and associated modern warfare, and enforce its interests more effectively.

Drones are suitable for a particular type of warfare. Political opponents can be neutralised over long distances and without the mobilization of thousands of soldiers or the invasion of an entire country. Drones play an increasingly important role for the great powers in their efforts to topple governments considered to be obstacles or keep allied puppet regimes afloat.

For years, the US Army has been conducting a semi-shadow war in many countries, such as Afghanistan,

Iraq, Yemen, Somalia and Pakistan. Drones are openly used to seek out alleged terror suspects and conduct targeted killings. President Barack Obama personally selects some of the victims. Without any legal charges being laid, without a trial or conviction, opponents and civilians are killed on mere suspicion. In Pakistan alone, more than 2,200 people have been killed by drones, at least 474 of whom were civilians.

The German ruling class now also wants to tread this path. For years, at least officially, Berlin has only deployed drones for reconnaissance. To conduct kill missions, as the drone murders of Chahar Dara show, requires the procurement of US combat drones. Now Germany wants its own drone programme, like the one already created by the US. In recent weeks, the German media and political establishment have conducted a propaganda campaign in favour of armed drones.

At the beginning of the year, several German newspapers reported government plans to acquire attack drones. In January, *Bild.de* quoted from a confidential document of the European aerospace and defence company EADS, which was addressed to Germany's defence ministry. According to this, "substantial research funding has been expended by the defence ministry for unmanned aerial vehicle systems". The company itself has "already spent more than €200 million" on this development.

According to *Bild.de*, the document states that the drone model described, "Talarion", is armed with rockets. As well as being equipped with up to four rockets, the drone also has radar and high-resolution cameras "which can follow and film a target from a great height, transmitting the high-resolution images to a control centre". The model should be ready by 2016; test flights over Canada have already been completed.

In parliament on January 31, Defence Minister Thomas de Maizière defended the plans of the German government to procure armed drones. The *Bundeswehr* needed armed drones to protect German soldiers in combat and because Germany cannot close itself off from this technological progress, he said. "We cannot say that we will stay with the stagecoach while everyone else is developing the railway", he said.

A few days later, Lieutenant Colonel Detlef Buch (General Staff), a military sociologist for the pro-government think tank, the Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), preached the advantages of

drones in a broadcast on *Deutschlandradio Kultur*: "They can provide intelligence and engage a previously defined target from the air. And they can fire more accurately than manned war planes today with their precision weapons. The main advantages of drones are less collateral damage, a lower risk for one's own soldiers and lower costs than for manned aircraft".

Buch added: "They are the logical consequence of the many conceptual guidelines and documents that have been written in and around the *Bundeswehr* over the last 20 years. The *Bundeswehr* should be a modern army of intervention that can fight in the Hindu Kush and around the world. That is the reality in 2013!"

De Maizière cynically described drones as "ethically neutral". The use of lethal drones by the *Bundeswehr* underscores the fact that the German elite now matches its ally in the US in criminality and violence. This must serve as a serious warning. For Washington, even American citizens are now legitimate targets in the drone war. In the course of his recent nomination process, prospective CIA director John Brennan did not exclude drone killings taking place in the US.



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