

US drone attacks controlled from military bases in Germany

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3 June 2013

US military sites in Germany are playing a key role in the use of American combat drones to target the killing of people in Africa. According to reports from the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* newspaper and the ARD television programme “Panorama”, the Stuttgart-based supreme command of the United States Africa Command (US Africom) and the Air Operations Center (AOC) at the US air force base in Ramstein, in the state of Rhineland Palatinate, are directly involved in the drone attacks.

Media reports claim that fighter pilots in the US are operating through a relay station on the Ramstein air base to maintain contact with combat drones employed in Africa. Quoting from an internal policy brief of the US air force, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and “Panorama” revealed that “the drone attacks in Africa could not be carried out” without the support of this satellite station.

Up to 650 employees at the US flight control centre in Ramstein use 1,500 computers to monitor European and African airspace. They analyse drone and satellite images and plan new operations.

The US Air Force focuses on countries such as Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and lately Somalia in particular. It is alleged that the US military has carried out at least 10 deadly drone attacks in this East African country, killing up to 29 people. Most of them were said to be members of the Somali Shabaab militias, who want to establish an Islamic state in the Horn of Africa.

Under the headline “Execution by Radio Signals”, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* wrote of “death at the press of a joystick button”, which is occurring more and more. “No matter where around the world the US military or the CIA target people for execution, the attacks are carried out by drone pilots, usually sitting in the United States”. The US Air Force is said to have stationed its

experts at the Creech air force base near Las Vegas; and the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operates from the basement of its headquarters in Langley, or from Camp Chapman in Afghanistan.

“The pilot uses a joystick; he steers the drone and, when deemed appropriate, fires the missiles”, the newspaper reports. This kind of manhunt involves executions without arrests, without trials, without hearings and without verdicts.

Professor Thilo Marauhn, an expert in international law, said on the “Panorama” broadcast that the killing of a terrorist suspect was “in case of doubt, manslaughter or murder”. He suggested consideration be given to “whether criminal proceedings should be undertaken in these cases”.

Responding to an enquiry from the broadcaster, the German government announced that the launching of “military attacks contravening international law” from German soil was forbidden. That was the law. Probed further, it added that “the federal government (had) no evidence” such attacks were taking place.

The claim that the German government was not informed about the involvement of US military bases in Germany in the targeted killings is completely implausible.

The air force base at Ramstein has been continually upgraded for more than six decades and is now the largest outside the United States. More than 50,000 US citizens and military officials are employed there. Most of America’s European troop and cargo transports start and land at Ramstein. Nowhere outside the United States does the US Air Force have a larger airport. Nowhere outside the US is there a larger hospital than the nearby Landstuhl Regional Medical Center. Wounded US soldiers from all over the world receive treatment there, according to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

When Africom was stationed in Stuttgart five years ago, the German foreign office advised the US government not to draw attention to US military bases in Germany. Otherwise, it would lead to “headlines” and “unnecessary public debates”.

The mendacity and duplicity of the German government has a long tradition. In earlier times, the chancellery and Ministry of Defence were informed about America’s waging of war from German soil, but kept the facts secret and feigned incomprehension when questioned on the matter. In 2003, the Social Democratic Party-Green Party government under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer spoke against the Iraq war. At the same time, however, they guaranteed Washington the unrestricted use of US bases in Germany, which was of utmost importance for America’s conduct of the war.

The recent reports expose the extent to which the German government is involved in the US government’s criminal acts of war. It is flouting German law just as much as it ignores the widespread anti-war sentiment in the population. In 1949, the German constitution abolished the death penalty and outlawed the planning and waging of wars of aggression.

But the reality is that the German government is exploiting Washington’s illegal actions to pursue the same objectives. A day before the reports were broadcast, political scientist Peter Strutynski published an article on the AG-Peace Research web site under the headline, “Federal government approves procurement of 16 combat drones—and acts as if nothing was decided”. Only after persistent questioning at a press conference was a government spokesman prepared to admit that the acquisition of combat drones had already been discussed at a cabinet meeting.



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