

European Union seeks drone and spy satellite network

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After feigning outrage over the US spying on European citizens, the European Union has proposed the creation of what amounts to a pan-European equivalent to the National Security Agency (NSA), armed with a European drone programme and a spy satellite network.

The extent of collusion between the European powers and the NSA in the mass surveillance of EU citizens has already been made apparent by the exposures from whistle-blower Edward Snowden.

The PRISM program was developed in collusion with the United Kingdom. Together with the UK's own Tempora system, PRISM gives full access to the emails, phone calls, social network records and browser histories of millions of people, obtained by tapping into the fibre optic network of the Internet. Germany's collaboration with the NSA is also extensive, making it a prime European hub for operations in Afghanistan as well as for gathering data on European citizens. France's independent system of data collection has been exposed, and it must be assumed that every other state has similar operations in place.

This is no longer considered sufficient. The European powers are intent on acquiring the full panoply of mechanisms of surveillance and repression possessed by the US. They are citing Snowden's revelations as justification for overcoming the advantages in this area presently enjoyed by Washington.

"The Edward Snowden scandal shows us that Europe needs its own autonomous security capabilities. This proposal is one step further towards European defence integration," a senior EU official recently told the *Daily Telegraph*. "Looking at the current gaps, possibilities could be from surveillance Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS, or drones) to airlift and command and communication facilities."

The European Commission (EC) intends to put proposals to a European Council meeting in December.

Michel Barnier, the EU's internal market commissioner, said that Europe should build its own drones "rather than importing them," a call supported by Eric Trapper, CEO of France's Dassault Aviation, in response to a French government decision to purchase 12 US drones for use in military operations in Mali. Dassault, the aerospace group EADS, and Finmeccanica issued a joint statement prior to last month's Paris Air Show offering to cooperate on producing drones. Drone operations will, in turn, be linked to a £3.5 billion system of "hyper-spectral, high resolution satellites in geo-stationary orbit," collectively known as Copernicus, that will "support Common Security and Defence Policy missions and operations" and be run by the European Space Agency.

Drone use and satellite surveillance are explicitly not confined to overseas military operations. EU officials stated that they are intended for both "defence purposes"—meaning imperialist military operations across the globe—and "internal security."

Internal use is, once again, cast as part of the "war on terror". But no one should accept the argument that the vast intelligence-gathering network being proposed, backed up with drones that can easily be adapted to act as lethal weaponry, is aimed at policing a terror threat. Vast sums are being poured into ever more sophisticated and intrusive systems to reinforce existing nationally-based spying networks. Information is routinely trawled out of the emails, telephone calls and social network accounts of every man, woman and child in Europe, because the European powers know that their austerity measures are arousing mass opposition, which must be dealt with.

Since 2008, Europe's governments have pumped

countless billions of euros into the coffers of the banks and financial speculators. The ruling class is intent on utilising the present crisis to destroy all of the past social gains made by working people and refashion society so that all impediments to their personal enrichment are removed once and for all. This is being paid for by Europe's workers through the destruction of vital social provision, wage cuts and the throwing of millions into unemployment and poverty.

The EC strategy proposals also point to the global military ambitions of the European powers. The European bourgeoisie has for years bridled at its subordinate position to the US, leading to a loss of influence in key geo-strategic areas such as the Middle East and Africa. "Europe must be able to assume its responsibilities for its own security and for international peace and stability in general," the European Commission proposal insists. "This necessitates a certain degree of strategic autonomy: to be a credible and reliable partner, Europe must be able to decide and to act without always depending on the capabilities of third parties."

France and Germany issued a complimentary policy document signed by Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Francois Hollande that spoke of "further strengthening the European Union and its Common Security and Defence Policy." A separate paper urges the creation of EU battle-groups, multinational military units, a European military command structure and various joint efforts to safeguard the EU's maritime strategic interests.



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