

German army to be equipped with drones

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On Wednesday, German defence minister Ursula Von der Leyen (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) announced to parliament that the army was to be equipped with drones capable of carrying weapons. The military build-up is directly connected with the revival of German militarism, which has been systematically promoted by the government since the beginning of the year.

Von der Leyen announced that, in cooperation with other European states, Germany planned to develop a weapon-carrying drone within the next ten years. Until its own weapons system is ready, Germany will rent drones. Until now, Germany has been renting “Heron” drones from Israel. These had only been used for reconnaissance, however. Now they are to be replaced by weapons-grade aircraft.

On the same day, Von der Leyen noted in an interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* that the possibility of buying weapons-grade drones has not been ruled out. The only problem the defence minister had was that most of these models did not have a licence for German air space. Rented drones do not require such a licence.

Unmanned armed aircraft are above all important for interventionist armies. They are deployed in areas where there are no air and ground support bases, or when a particularly rapid response is required. Drones can remain in the air far longer and are easier to transport than traditional military aircraft. Therefore they will be mainly used in asymmetric wars, such as the suppression of rebels who are not organised into a regular army. By contrast, drones are ill equipped for the defence of a country or other defensive manoeuvres.

In the parliamentary debate, the defence minister therefore justified the use of drones by referring to government plans to deploy the German army abroad. Not all serious conflicts can be solved diplomatically,

said Von der Leyen, but would require German military intervention. Only through the deployment of German soldiers could the federal republic secure its credibility. But this required the best possible military equipping of the army, which included drones, she avowed.

Von der Leyen spoke more concretely about the potential goals of this policy in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* interview. “The conflicts in Africa, through the arc of crisis in the Middle East, to ISIS in Iraq and the developments in Ukraine,” the minister said, “unfortunately demonstrate that a peaceful world cannot be taken for granted.” She did not exclude the possibility of another military intervention during the current legislative term.

In these war scenarios, Europe had to be able to act more independently, said Von der Leyen. “The NSA affair made clear to me once again the implications of failing to appreciate technological developments ten or fifteen years ago, and only now realising the bitter truth of how dependent on others we are.”

The Social Democrat (SPD) representative on the parliamentary defence committee, Rainer Arnold, also justified his party’s support for the rearming project on the basis of the need for German independence. “We need this crucial technology because we do not want to be dependent upon American technology,” he said in the parliamentary debate. Arnold explicitly backed the plans of the defence minister to equip the German army with drones as quickly as possible.

In May, the German-French aircraft concern Airbus, together with French firm Dassault Aviation and Italian company Alenia Aermacchi, proposed collaboration between the German, French and Italian governments in the development of new drones. The development of a European drone had already been agreed to in the coalition agreement between the CDU and SPD.

The US has been demanding stronger military engagement from Germany for some time. NATO

Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen stated during a visit to Berlin on Wednesday that NATO members had to catch up with the US precisely in the area of armed drones. Currently, the alliance was absolutely incapable of military action without the US.

Rasmussen views the expansion of the arsenal of drones as part of NATO's new positioning against Russia. "We have to make NATO fitter, quicker and more flexible," he said in Berlin.

"Russia has increased its defence spending by 50 percent in the last five years," the NATO Secretary General claimed. "During the same period, NATO had spent 20 percent less. This is not acceptable."

Rasmussen called upon Germany in particular to increase its military spending to at least 2 percent of GDP. This year, the German government will spend €32.4 billion on the military, around 1.3 percent of GDP. The increase called for would thus equate to some €17 billion.

The acquisition of drones will not only expand German military intervention, but also make such actions more brutal. Military drones are regularly used by the US for targeted killings of alleged enemies. Without charges, legal proceedings or convictions, US President Obama directly orders the assassination of people, including American citizens, at the touch of a button.

Von der Leyen and Arnold's attempts to distance themselves from this practice in the parliamentary debate are pure hypocrisy. It is well known that the US-German Ramstein air base plays a key role in the organisation of drone killings. In addition, there is considerable evidence that data passed to the NSA by the German domestic intelligence service and the foreign intelligence service has been used for targeted killings.



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