

Germany, France and Italy to build military drone

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Germany, in collaboration with France and Italy, is developing a drone which can be equipped with missiles. The defence ministers of the three countries, Ursula Von der Leyen, Jean-Yve Le Drian and Roberta Pinotti signed an agreement to this end on 18 May. The pilotless military aircraft is to be ready for deployment by 2025.

Each member of the three-party coalition will immediately raise €25 million to review the technical requirements for a European drone. By 2017, a definition study is to lay out the technical basis. Among other things, it will ensure that the drone is permitted to fly in European airspace. A previous project, the “Euro Hawk,” was abandoned in 2013 because there were difficulties on this issue.

Other European states are keen to participate in the development of the new weapon. Europe’s second largest economy, Britain, has yet to make a statement on the matter. While the drone is being developed, the German defence ministry intends to continue using drones from Israel and the United States, which can carry small missiles.

The European powers, above all Germany, intend to use their own drone to increase their independence from Israeli and US production, which has made the technology available to the German army, but not their design plans.

“The goal of the Eurodrone is that we can decide ourselves what we want to uncover, where we deploy the Eurodrone and how we deploy the Eurodrone,” said Von der Leyen in justifying the project. In addition, it was important to have the necessary specialist knowledge and cutting-edge technology in Europe.

The drone is to be specifically designed to carry weapons. After the completion of the first study, “the contract for the development of a new generation of

MALE-class drones (will be) awarded” at the end of 2017, it stated in the German army’s official publication.

To date, drones have been associated with the illegal operations by the United States against alleged terrorists, which have killed thousands of innocent civilians. The drones launch Hellfire missiles, killing victims identified by the intelligence agencies as targets. There are no charges, due process or court decisions before they are executed.

Drones are viewed as the weapon of the future. Since they reduce the likelihood of casualties on the aggressor’s side, they also reduce inhibitions about military intervention. Drones also make it possible to eliminate the opponent’s military and political leadership with much more accuracy than previous weaponry.

The German government’s decision to build its own European drone shows the true face of German militarism, which likes to present itself as humanitarian. A combat-ready army, so the argument goes, must have access to the most modern technology.

The main barrier to the construction of armed drones is widespread popular opposition. Early last year, when Von der Leyen was newly installed as defence minister, she told *Bild am Sonntag* that she was only calling for reconnaissance drones for the German army.

At the time, she expressed her views on armed drones cautiously. “It would be false just to ignore the objections of the population to unmanned weapons systems,” she said. “Effective weapons are enormously important to protect our own soldiers, but the very passionate drone debate shows that we Germans are very sensitive on this issue of what means are used by our army.”

In fact, the majority of the working population

responded “very passionately” to the purchase of drones. This was shown in a representative survey from Infratest Dimap. The institution asked in mid 2014 if the German army should purchase armed drones. Almost two thirds of those questioned, 64 percent, answered no.

Recent revelations about the depth of Germany’s integration into the US drone programme have strengthened this attitude. The US pilots predator drones intervening in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen from the Ramstein airbase, Washington’s largest military base outside the US.

According to research by the London-based Bureau of Investigative Journalists, the US armed forces have killed between 2,400 and 3,900 people. US President Barrack Obama is personally involved in selecting victims for targeted killings, which include women, children and party guests.

As the *Bild* newspaper revealed last year, the German army and foreign intelligence agency (BND) are complicit in these operations. It emerged from secret documents that the commander of German troops in Afghanistan had also identified victims for targeted killings. The German intelligence agency assisted in the identification of a Taliban leader, well aware that he would be targeted by Britain and the US.

This shows that the German military and intelligence apparatus have already had practice to prepare them for the deployment of their own drones, seen by military strategists as a significant tool for the conducting of modern warfare.

The media is doing all it can to quell the widespread public opposition to armed drones. The Berlin-based political scientist Herfried Münkler justified them as “humane weapons,” and compared them with the use of poison gas in the First World War, which actually symbolised the brutality of trench warfare. In an interview with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Münkler claimed that during a drone attack “the attacker has much more reconnaissance time than the pilot of a bomber plane,” and the “collateral damage of drone attacks” was “much less than with bombers.”

The ruling class is rapidly turning into reality the demand raised by the German President Joachim Gauck openly in October 2013: that Germany abandon its military restraint, and play a role in Europe and the world corresponding to its actual size and influence.



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