

German military procure armed drones

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Barely in office, the grand coalition of Christian Democrats and Social Democrats is pushing ahead with its military upgrade plans. Eighteen major contracts, each exceeding the €25 million hurdle, and which must therefore be approved by the Parliamentary Budget Committee, should be awarded this year to the defence industry.

The project list, which was given to members of parliament in February, has been published by the *Bild* newspaper at the weekend, described as a “secret order list of the minister of defence.” This was preceded by a months-long propaganda campaign about the “ailing state of the Bundeswehr” (armed forces), which was to prepare the population for a drastic increase in military spending.

The massive rearmament programme is to enable the Bundeswehr to pursue the interests of German imperialism worldwide by military means. Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen told *Bild am Sonntag* it concerned “the future viability of our Bundeswehr and the reliability of Germany to our close partners.” The upgrade was “an urgent programme for future European projects with France, Norway, the Netherlands or the personal equipment of our soldiers.”

She boasted that the Bundeswehr was already in a position to have taken part in the recent Western air strikes on Syria: “Whatever Britain has done from the air, we can do too. We were not asked this time.” She continued, “A special responsibility” is expected from a country seeking a seat on the UN Security Council. A country with such high political and economic weight as Germany would have to face such expectations, she said.

The most significant item on the now-publicized shopping list is the contract for leasing Israeli Heron TP drones. For these alone, more than €1 billion are planned over a term of nine years.

In contrast to the Heron 1 drones previously used in

Afghanistan and Mali, whose lease is also being extended, the Heron TP is not only capable of reconnaissance but can also be armed. The Bundeswehr would then be able to fly unmanned attacks over long distances, as the US is currently doing, to assassinate real and supposed political opponents.

The leased Heron drones are to bridge the time that Germany needs to develop its own combat drone in cooperation with France and Italy.

Other acquisitions on the Ministry of Defence shopping list include: Seven light helicopters for search and rescue; six C-130J Hercules transport aircraft, which are to be stationed in France as part of the Franco-German cooperation; the development of a new radar system for the Eurofighter; container-based command posts for land operations; 18 Mars II medium-range rocket launchers; 258 training simulators for the Puma infantry fighting vehicle; 32 articulated trucks for transporting weapon systems; as well as combat clothing and protective vests for the soldiers.

In order to transport large military equipment, the contract for the use of Antonov wide-body aircraft, which are stationed at Leipzig/Halle Airport, is also to be extended. Previously, this contract was with a Russian and a Ukrainian company. Now, because of the Ukraine crisis, it is being extended only with the Ukrainian Antonov Airlines.

The list of projects that has now become known includes only a fraction of the military spending agreed upon by the grand coalition. For example, other plans include the development of a new fighter aircraft (along with France) to replace the Tornado, new tanks, heavy transport helicopters and a new assault rifle to replace the G36. In addition, the order for several new MKS180 multi-purpose combat ships, is out to tender, which will likely be won by a consortium of the Dutch manufacturer Damen and the German manufacturer Blohm & Voss.

The government has also agreed to a change in the award of defence contracts. In future, important armament contracts will no longer be tendered out, but will be awarded nationally. The experts of the Koblenz Bundeswehr Procurement Office are to negotiate the contracts directly with representatives of the defence companies. In this way, not only will procurement be accelerated, but also dependency on the US will be reduced and technological know-how protected.

The government regards key technologies to be submarines, battle tanks, encryption technologies, reconnaissance sensors, protective technologies and, more recently, warships such as the MKS180.

The grand coalition wants to double the military budget to over €70 billion a year. In addition, half of all additional revenue is to be channelled into the military budget and development aid, which is closely interlinked with military policy and used to fend off refugees. For example, Development Minister Gerd Müller plans to invest €1 billion this year to “fight the causes of flight in Africa.”

More details will be announced on Friday, when the finance ministry presents its financial planning up to 2022. By the end of April, Finance Minister Scholz will then draft the federal budget for 2018 and submit it to the Bundestag for decision in early July.



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