

German Defence Ministry plans to wage international drone warfare

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Germany's ruling elite is responding to the mounting tensions between the major powers triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic by intensifying its drive to war. After the Defence Ministry announced two weeks ago the purchasing of 138 fighter jets, including 30 nuclear-capable bombers, drones armed with missiles are now to be obtained. This was confirmed last Monday in a choreographed panel discussion involving government representatives, military officials, opposition politicians, and theologians held on the premises of the Defence Ministry.

In Afghanistan and Mali, where the German army defends the pro-imperialist puppet regimes against resistance from the local populations, three reconnaissance drones have been operating since 2010 and 2016 respectively. In 2021, they will be replaced by the Israeli-built "Heron TP" model, which will be equipped with missiles.

The establishment of Germany's own armada of armed drones has been a goal of the grand coalition for years and was part of the months-long talks on forming the government in 2018.

In its coalition agreement, the Christian Democrats (CDU), Christian Social Union (CSU), and Social Democrats (SPD) stated that they want to "continue to develop the euro-drone within the framework of the European defence union." The Israeli Heron armed drone was seen as a "transitional solution," the "arming" of which would be decided "by parliament following a careful consideration of international law, constitutionality, and ethics." The panel held last Monday in the Defence Ministry was aimed at pushing forward with this goal.

State secretary for defence Peter Tauber (CDU), who opened the panel, stated that future drone attacks from the air would "provide our troops with additional protection." This is the Defence Ministry's well-known propaganda.

The reality is that there is hardly another weapon so strongly associated with the neocolonial wars of the 21st century and the anonymized murder of men, women, and children than drones.

In his appeal, General Inspector of the Armed Forces Eberhard Zorn left no doubt about the fact that Germany, like its imperialist rivals, would deploy armed drones to suppress entire populations of far-off regions and to carry out targeted killings of alleged opponents. Zorn explicitly referred to the army's interventions in Afghanistan and Mali. The German armed forces do not confront soldiers there, he said, adding, "These are interventions where we do not face a state actor... In Afghanistan, many ambushes were carried out from residential areas where women and children are also located."

Although "artillery" or "bombings by aircraft" are capable of killing opponents from a distance, these conditions require a "more precise method of combat."

"The small directed bombs we use on our aircraft weigh 125 kg. But the bombs are generally larger. Although they are precision-guided, their explosive power is so strong that not only the target is destroyed, but damage is also caused in a radius of up to several hundred metres. The same goes for artillery, which is a wide-ranging weapon per se," Zorn explained.

The precision-guided nature of these weapons is thus "one of the advantages from a military point of view." In contrast to aircraft and missile launchers, they can be used "almost without a sound."

Leading representatives from the government and opposition parties strongly advocated in the following panel discussion for the purchasing of the new weapon—including several members of the Parliamentary Defence Committee.

"We think it is an elementary matter of modern defence to have armed drones," stated Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann (Free Democrats, FDP). "We need this

drone, and I hope and am sure that it will come—even if we talk here for a while.” Sooner or later, all participants have to “get down to business.” She could say, “on behalf of the Free Democrats, we want this drone, armed, of course.”

SPD defence policy expert and chairman of the Berlin state association of the People’s Federation of Military Cemetery Providers Fritz Felgentreu stated, “We’re at a point where we need to be constructive. If it is true what the General Inspector explained...then one must conclude that the support from an armed drone is better than conventional aircraft.”

The SPD Parliamentary Armed Forces Commissioner, Hans-Peter Bartels, spoke out strongly in favour of armed drones ahead of the meeting. “An armed reconnaissance drone...for a German patrol in battle” is “worthwhile.” In an emergency, this would be better than waiting on the arrival of fighter helicopters or jets.

The representatives of the Left Party and Greens also made clear that they support the German army’s foreign military interventions. They opposed the government’s plans merely due to tactical considerations. The defence policy spokesperson for the Greens, Katja Keul, declared armed drones to be a “long-term security policy risk” for “the armed forces,” because they could fall into the hands of the enemy.

The Left Party parliamentary group’s spokesperson on defence policy, Tobias Pflüger, said that he “rejects the form of going into a mission with armed drones.” In other words, the Left Party agrees in principle with German imperialism’s military offensive. In his remarks, Pflüger boasted that he had recently visited the troops in Mali, which meant he knows “the needs of the soldiers” better than anyone else present.

Pflüger also showed no concern about sharing the podium with the representative of the far-right Alternative for Germany invited by the Defence Ministry, Rüdiger Lucassen. The right-wing extremist retired colonel spoke clearest of all about the war and rearmament goals bound up with purchasing armed drones. “The essential” point in “supporting our soldiers on deployment” is “the active moment.” The “entire spectrum of conventional and technical means for waging war” are necessary to “hold down the enemy.”

With its purchasing of armed drones, German imperialism is underscoring its determination to step up its neocolonial military interventions and brutally suppress any opposition to them. In so doing, Germany would join the ranks of military powers like the United

States, Britain, Israel, France, and Saudi Arabia that have unleashed global drone warfare over recent years. According to the Bureau of Investigative Journalists, between 9,000 and 17,000 people have been killed as a result of direct drone strikes.

So-called “targeted killings” are only the tip of the iceberg. In Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen, official data indicate that at least 454 children were murdered, mainly by the US military’s “hellfire” missiles. In 2013, at least 13 guests at a wedding were blown to pieces by a US drone strike. Earlier this year, US President Donald Trump ordered the assassination of Iranian Gen. Qassem Suleimani and Iraqi military commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

The planning and direction of these drone attacks take place at the American military’s airbase in Ramstein in the German state of Rhineland-Palatinate. With the headquarters of the “Allied Air Command Ramstein,” all of the technical capabilities to wage global drone warfare are already available there for the German army to use.

The Future Combat Air System (FCAS), which Germany is developing jointly with France and Spain, plans to integrate fighter jet missions with drones and satellites to “bring the next generation of the combat air force into heavy combat environments,” as it states on the website of Airbus Defence and Space, the arms company involved in construction for the project.

The German army’s murderous plans must be taken as an urgent warning by all workers and young people. Seventy-five years after the end of the Second World War, the German ruling class will stop at nothing to enforce the interests of German capitalism and imperialism at home and abroad. Nobody should have any illusions. The “heavy combat environments” could also include revolutionary mass demonstrations and strikes by workers in Germany itself.



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