

Germany to acquire hypersonic anti-ballistic missile system—another step towards nuclear war

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In mid-August, the Israeli Defence Ministry announced it had received permission from the US to sell the Arrow 3 missile defence system to Germany. The procurement of the system by the German Defence Ministry still has to be confirmed by the parliaments of both countries, but this is considered a formality, according to observers. The German parliament's budget and defence committees already approved the purchase in June. The move has far-reaching military and geo-strategic implications. According to the German air force, Arrow 3 could be operational as early as 2025.

Surrounding the new acquisition is discussion of preparations for nuclear war. The system consists of mobile missile units with a range of up to 2,400 kilometres and three radar systems. Deployed in Germany, Arrow 3 would cover all of Europe, including Moscow and Crimea, as well as half of Turkey and parts of Algeria and Libya. The projectile reaches more than ten times the speed of sound, can engage missiles at altitudes of up to 100 kilometres and can also be used against satellites. It is particularly suitable for combating weapons of mass destruction such as medium- and long-range missiles.

Costing almost four billion euros—paid for out of the 100 billion euro “special assets” fund for the German army—this is the largest arms deal in Israeli history. Ron Prosor, Israeli ambassador to Germany, welcomed the US approval, saying, “This is a historic day that marks a turning point in relations between Israel and Germany.” For the first time, he said, “an Israeli system will protect the skies over Germany and all of Europe.” Steffen Seibert, Germany's ambassador to Israel, said the move would “add a very significant element to our military relations”.

While the procurement of Arrow 3 shines a spotlight on the close diplomatic and military ties between Germany and Israel, the decision also marks a shift away from other “marketable” missile defence systems, such as the US Terminal High Altitude Area Defense or a version of the French-Italian SAMP/T (MAMBA), which was delivered to the Ukrainian military in May and June.

War against nuclear powers

The acquisition of anti-ballistic hypersonic missiles is directly aimed at further escalating NATO's proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. It is the military corollary to the insane statements of leading NATO politicians and military strategists that the west should not be

“deterred” by Russian nuclear weapons from realising its military aims in Ukraine. According to Israeli sources, the weapon system is also capable of fending off the nuclear-capable Kinschal hypersonic missile, which has been used by the Russian military against Ukrainian positions since March 2022.

The development of its own strategic and tactical missile defence by Germany is also intended to enable the air force to wage war against Russia and other nuclear powers independently of US military support. The Arrow programme stems from an Israeli-American project initiated in 1986 to integrate Israel into the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) of the United States. US President Ronald Reagan had declared three years earlier in an infamous televised speech that SDI would give the US military “the means to render nuclear weapons ineffective and obsolete” and “eliminate the threat of strategic nuclear missiles”.

At the same time, the Arrow 3 deal is part of Germany's biggest arms build-up since World War II and is integral to the comprehensive great power agenda of the ruling class. It is aimed at politically and militarily weakening the historical rivals of German imperialism—especially Poland and France, but also Italy and Britain—and thereby placing the smaller powers of Europe under German “protection”.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz had already elaborated these plans in a keynote speech at Prague's Charles University in August 2022, where he held out the prospect of a massive upgrade of the German air force and called for a “jointly built air defence system in Europe” to strengthen the “European pillar of NATO” and take action “against threats from the air and from space”. Germany will “design this future air defence system from the outset in such a way that our European neighbours, such as the Poles, Baltic countries, the Dutch, Czechs, Slovaks or our Scandinavian partners can also participate”.

To this end, Arrow 3 is to be integrated into a comprehensive air defence system as part of the European Sky Shield Initiative (ESSI), which aims to establish Germany as the leading military power on the continent. Defence Minister Boris Pistorius (SPD), Defence Committee Chair Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann (FDP) and Green Party Defence Spokesperson Sara Nanni all told the press that the system would “protect our neighbouring states”. The states in question “would only have to acquire ‘Arrow’ missile units for their defence,” according to a Tagesschau news report. The radar data would come from a central airspace surveillance system in Germany.

European Sky Shield Initiative

The ESSI was launched in October last year on the initiative of the German government on the sidelines of a NATO meeting in Brussels to create “a European air defence and missile defence system” following Scholz’s speech in Prague. The associated memorandum was signed by the defence ministers of the Czech Republic, Germany, Belgium, Hungary, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, the United Kingdom, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, and is “open to other interested states”.

This year, Sweden and Denmark, as well as Austria and Switzerland, joined the initiative. In a separate declaration, Switzerland absurdly stated that participation in the European military pact was in line with the neutrality clause enshrined in both the Austrian and Swiss constitutions. In direct contradiction to this, a Germany army (Bundeswehr) document states that it is “intended to integrate the expanded or newly created capabilities of the joint procurement initiative into the air defence of the NATO area led by the NATO Commander for Europe”.

Details are being kept secret from the public. The Bundeswehr merely states that, in addition to Arrow 3, it also plans to procure further German missile defence systems of the type IRIS-T SLM, as well as US Patriot models for the “near and immediate vicinity” in the course of ESSI.

In fact, ESSI is an informal “coalition of those willing to rearm” whose relationship to NATO and “Europe” is completely opaque. For example, the ESSI signatories Sweden, Austria and Switzerland are not members of NATO; Switzerland, Norway and Great Britain are not EU states. Key EU states such as France, Poland, Italy and Spain, which maintain close arms industrial relations with Germany within the framework of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), are also not part of the initiative.

The current Arrow 3 procurement plans actually compete with two other European missile defence projects that have been pursued behind the scenes for years. These are the French-coordinated PESCO project Timely Warning and Interception with Space-based Theatre surveillance (TWISTER), whose hypersonic missile is currently being developed by MBDA, and the Hypersonic Defence Interceptor (HYDEF), which was awarded by the European Commission to a Spanish-led missile consortium in July 2022. Although Germany is a major participant in both systems, government officials have claimed that they will not be operational in time to merit consideration.

Domination of Europe

The German ESSI initiative has been roundly rejected and publicly criticised by France. At a conference on European air defence on the sidelines of the Paris Air Show, French President Emmanuel Macron warned against the purchase of non-European weapons systems. These are “less manageable, tied to timetables, queues and priorities, sometimes subject to third-country approval” and are “too dependent on the outside world”. Scholz’s initiative was not agreed with Paris and “prepares problems for tomorrow”. Macron then announced the joint procurement of several hundred French-made Mistral short-range missiles together with Estonia, Hungary, Belgium and Cyprus.

Representatives of the German military then accused Macron of defending French interests and “putting Europe’s air defence at risk”. A recent paper by the government-affiliated German Institute for International and Security Affairs entitled “Germany’s Weak Leadership Role in European Air Defence” complains that “quite a few partners have major reservations about Germany’s idea” with regard to ESSI. Although “the participation of France and Italy is indispensable for the success of the initiative”, Berlin “has not (yet) succeeded in allaying the concerns of important partners about its leadership role”.

The paper concludes that Germany must rearm even more comprehensively and assert its claim to military leadership in Europe all the more vehemently. The goal must be to close the “capability gap” of strategic missile defence “as quickly as possible without weakening or endangering European development programmes”.

The paper goes on to say that Germany, as coordinator of the ESSI, must set a good example in financing Europe’s air defence. Around 5 billion euros from the special fund are only a first step. In addition, “regular funds from the defence budget” are needed for technical improvements and new acquisitions. Also, “high costs for operation, exercises and maintenance” had “not yet been taken into account in the Bundeswehr’s financial planning”.

Together with its European sister parties, the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) is contesting the European elections to be held next year in order to oppose the insane war policy of the ruling class. Instead of the war map of the imperialists, we follow the map of class struggle. The only way to ensure peace in Europe and worldwide is through the international mobilisation of the European working class on the basis of a socialist programme.

The imperialist military apparatuses must be dissolved and all social resources allocated to build a socialist society in which the warmongers are fought politically and expropriated and the vital interests of the vast majority of the population prioritised. The SGP opposes all of the attempts by German imperialism, responsible for historic crimes in two world wars, to once again bring Europe under its military domination.



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