

# Collapse of Franco-German fighter jet project exposes sharp tensions

Peter Schwarz  
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The Future Combat Air System (FCAS), considered a lighthouse project of Franco-German plans to arm Europe into an independent imperialist great power capable of standing up to both the US and China, has failed spectacularly.

The agreement on FCAS was signed in July 2017 by President Emmanuel Macron and then-Chancellor Angela Merkel, a few hours before US President Donald Trump arrived in Paris for his first official visit. It was intended to demonstrate to Trump the European will for independence in military matters. Spain later also joined the project.

It envisaged developing a state-of-the-art air combat system for over €100 billion by 2040, networking drones, aircraft, helicopters and other combat systems with one another in a newly developed cloud. The core of the project was the construction of a new European fighter aircraft to replace the Eurofighter in Germany and Spain and the Rafale in France.

Macron spoke at the time of a “profound revolution.” EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who was German Defence Minister at the time, declared that it was “much smarter that we Europeans develop the next generation of equipment and technology together.”

Now Chancellor Friedrich Merz has scrapped the project. According to Berlin government circles, he informed Macron last Friday on the sidelines of the Western Balkans summit in Montenegro that he would not pursue the construction of the joint fighter jet any further. On Monday, the Chancellery then leaked the news to the press. It spread like wildfire and surprised Macron’s staff. Spain had not been informed beforehand at all.

It was finally agreed to blame the two leading companies for the failure—Airbus in Germany and Dassault in France. Officially, it is stated that Macron

and Merz reached the conclusion that the two companies could not work together on the construction of the fighter aircraft. Work on other parts of FCAS, particularly on the digital networking of different weapons systems, the so-called “Combat Cloud,” is to continue, however.

In fact, the failure of FCAS is the result of growing tensions and conflicts within the European Union. The massive increase in arms spending to 5 percent of GDP, to which all NATO members have committed themselves, and the militarisation of social life are not welding Europe together but rather causing old rivalries and conflicts to erupt once again. This applies in particular to the former “archenemies,” Germany and France, which waged three devastating wars against each other between 1871 and 1945.

This is directly linked to the goals of rearmament itself. Contrary to official propaganda claims, this does not serve as the “defence” of freedom and “Western values” in a world increasingly dominated by autocrats. Both Germany and France, the third and seventh largest economic powers in the world, pursue their own economic and geostrategic imperialist interests.

Germany is once again advancing eastwards and attempting—as in the First and Second World Wars—to dominate Ukraine and subjugate Russia. Since the US largely stopped its payments to Kiev, Berlin has become Ukraine’s largest financial backer. While Paris supports Kiev politically, it holds back financially. Whereas Germany has provided around €96.5 billion in bilateral support since the beginning of the war, in the case of France it was only €8 billion-€10 billion. Both countries also contribute to the EU’s multi-billion-euro aid and loans.

As a former colonial power, France pursues its own interests in the Middle East and Africa, while Berlin

cooperates more closely with the US and Israel. As the largest nuclear power in Europe, and the only one besides Britain, France also seeks to establish itself as Europe's leading military power. In this, it is increasingly being challenged by Germany.

FCAS is not the only Franco-German armaments project that has failed. Difficulties have already arisen with others, such as the Tiger helicopter and the MAWS maritime reconnaissance system. The joint Main Ground Combat System (MGCS) tank project is in danger of collapsing like FCAS. There is also concern in Paris that Germany's Bundeswehr (armed forces) wants to build its own military satellite constellation for communication and reconnaissance, in direct competition to the European IRIS Square project.

French military circles express fears that Germany is overtaking France militarily. With its "special fund" of €100 billion for military projects, the suspension of the debt brake for military spending and the €500 billion investment fund for largely military-related infrastructure, Germany has financial resources at its disposal that heavily indebted France lacks.

France's Chief of the Defence Staff, Fabien Mandon, recently warned at a hearing in the Senate: "If Germany continues at this pace, the argument that we [the French military] have operational experience and a certain culture will no longer hold water in five years." For the Americans, "Germany will gradually become the benchmark in Europe."

Conflicting national interests are also behind the dispute between Airbus and Dassault, which is being used to justify the failure of FCAS. Dassault was not prepared to share know-how and intellectual property with its competitor Airbus. For its part, Airbus refused to cooperate without gaining access to key technologies in return.

The German and French requirements for the aircraft also differed. France wanted a light aircraft that could land on an aircraft carrier and simultaneously carry nuclear bombs. According to an insider, Germany, which has neither aircraft carriers nor nuclear bombs, wanted "a bomb container that can fly as far as Moscow."

A lead article in *Der Spiegel* defends Merz's decision to pull out of the project and fiercely attacks Dassault boss Éric Trappier:

He claimed sole leadership in the construction of the fighter jet and sovereignty over the use of the intellectual property rights to the project. Had Merz bowed to the demands, Airbus would have been degraded to a mere supplier. Germany would finally lose the technological capability to build fighter aircraft. That would be irresponsible in terms of industrial and armaments policy.

According to *Der Spiegel*, new dependencies on France in armaments projects would be no less problematic than the existing ones vis a vis the US. No one could guarantee that Marine Le Pen's far-right Rassemblement National, which attaches less importance to Franco-German friendship than Macron, would not come to power soon. Germany must now rapidly develop a sixth-generation fighter aircraft, the news weekly writes.

The failure of FCAS is thus becoming a pretext to increasingly push ahead with rearmament unilaterally. The costs, and associated attacks on wages, pensions and social spending, will continue to rise. And the danger of escalating conflicts and wars—including within Europe—is growing.

Only an independent movement of the international working class, uniting the struggle against war and social inequality with the fight against capitalism, can stop this dangerous development. It must counter the European Union, the Europe of the banks, corporations and warmongers, with the United Socialist States of Europe.



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