

German government plans purchase of 138 fighter jets and prepares for nuclear war

By Gregor Link and Johannes Stern
7 May 2020

Germany's government is preparing to purchase 93 Eurofighters and 45 US-made F-18 fighter jets for a total cost of almost €20 billion. The Eurofighter is produced by Airbus, while Boeing makes the F-18.

Among the latter type are 30 "Super Hornet" jets, whose purpose is to guarantee Germany's involvement in atomic warfare and make possible the deployment of US nuclear weapons located on German territory in the event of a nuclear war. Tornado strike bombers have been used for the purpose, but they need to be removed from service by 2030 and replaced.

Der Spiegel reported last month that German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (Christian Democrats, CDU) offered the deal to US Defence Secretary Mark Esper in an email. The extra-parliamentary move apparently took place with the approval of the CDU's coalition partners, the Social Democrats. In a statement, the Defence Ministry noted that the SPD had been involved in the process for weeks. *Der Spiegel* also reported that secret agreements were struck with Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and Finance Minister Olaf Scholz (both SPD).

On Monday, government officials reiterated Germany's commitment to the "nuclear participation" as part of NATO. It is "an important component of a credible deterrence strategy in the alliance," stressed government spokesman Stefan Seibert in Berlin.

Foreign Minister Maas distanced himself from other SPD members, including SPD co-leader Norbert Walter-Borjans, who over previous days criticised Germany's purchase of US-made planes and the close nuclear alliance with Washington. "One-sided steps that undermine the trust of our close partners and European neighbours weaken our alliances," Maas declared.

On Sunday, SPD parliamentary group leader Rolf Mützenich told German daily *Tagesspiegel*, "the nuclear weapons on German territory do not heighten our

security, on the contrary." It is "high time for Germany to rule out future stationing. Other states have done this without calling NATO into question." He then added, "As Germans, we should confidently demand to influence NATO's nuclear strategy, even when no nuclear weapons are stored on our territory."

The criticism of the government from sections of the SPD, who are being supported by the Left Party, has nothing to do with pacifism. Its goal is to develop a foreign and nuclear policy that is more independent of the United States and dominated by Germany and the EU. In the past, the SPD demanded that the Tornados be replaced exclusively with repurposed Eurofighters to "promote domestic production and prevent too great a reliance on the United States," as a report from the news channel N-TV noted.

Regardless of which fighter jet model the German government ends up choosing, what is taking place is the largest rearmament of the German air force since the end of the Second World War, and, in the final analysis, the nuclear arming of Germany. According to the Defence Ministry, the government's desire to purchase F-18 fighter jets is merely seen as a "temporary solution for nuclear participation and air-supported electronic combat." The development of "[Future Combat Air System (FCAS)] should not be endangered."

The FCAS is a European system composed of manned multi-purpose fighter jets, several unmanned aircraft (remote carriers), and new weapons and communications systems. The plan is for an integrated combat system incorporating drones, fighter jets, satellites, and command-and-control aircraft, potentially linked to an independent nuclear capability.

In a keynote foreign policy address in February, French President Emmanuel Macron appealed for a "strategic dialogue" on Europe's nuclear deterrence. In the face of a nuclear arms race, Macron declared that the Europeans

cannot restrict themselves “to the role of spectators.”

FCAS is part of the Franco-German led drive to transform the European Union into a military power capable of waging war independently of, and if necessary, in opposition to, the United States. Under conditions of mounting conflicts between the major powers, the development of the project is being pushed ahead aggressively. After Germany, France and Spain officially launched FCAS last June, there will “now be a shift to the technological development and demonstration over the next 18 months with a German investment of €78 million,” noted a report from the Defence Ministry on February 13.

In a press statement from April 22, Kramp-Karrenbauer also noted that the fighter jets were “a transition... to the future goal-oriented technology of FCAS.” The issue with the replacement of the Tornado fleet is to “equip the air force of the armed forces in the future in such a way that all of the capabilities of the Tornado, the capability of air combat, reconnaissance, electronic warfare, and also the capability for nuclear participation, can be covered in the future.” In this process, it is “important that we retain the industrial policy capabilities here in Germany and Europe. We need a solution that ensures that the major European air system of the future, namely FCAS, is not put at risk in the period after 2040.”

The sums of money set aside for the project are gigantic. With the cost for each F-18 standing at \$93 million (€85 million) and each Eurofighter costing \$170 million (€156 million), the total cost for 138 jets amounts to \$20 billion or €18.5 billion, although the cost for new rearmament programmes generally turn out to cost many multiples of the original figure.

The cost of the European air system is substantially higher. In total, costs will rise above €100 billion. *Handelsblatt* reported last year that by mid-century, the system will gobble up “up to €500 billion.”

In the midst of the raging COVID-19 pandemic, the financing of this project is a social and political crime. As the International Campaign for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons and the International Doctors for the Prevention of Nuclear War noted, the cost for the F-18 jets alone (€7.47 billion) would be sufficient to establish 100,000 intensive care beds, purchase 30,000 ventilators, and pay 60,000 nurses and 25,000 doctors for an entire year.

The purchase price for these weapons of mass destruction would suffice to finance the work of the World Health Organisation for four-and-a-half years.

The German government’s plans make clear that 75

years after the end of the Second World War, German imperialism and militarism is once again reviving its criminal traditions. The German ruling elite is responding to a nuclear arms buildup by the United States and the mounting tensions between the major powers by preparing their own plans for annihilation.

Influential think tanks, commentators, newspapers, and politicians have been demanding Germany’s own weapons of mass destruction for some time.

Recently, the president of the German Society for Foreign Policy (DGAP) and former head of Europe’s second large arms company EADS, Tom Enders, called, in a piece entitled, “We must talk about nuclear weapons” for collaboration with France or the creation of Germany’s own nuclear deterrent. “A responsible German security and foreign policy” must consider “the Federal Republic of Germany’s nuclear options soberly and with regard to reapolitik.” This discussion should “not exclude any option from the outset as taboo,” including “the seemingly unthinkable: does Germany need its own nuclear weapons?” The “building of a combat-ready European defence union is hard to imagine without nuclear backing.”

The only way to avert this arms race and the extermination of humanity in a third world war fought with nuclear weapons is by mobilising the working class against rearmament, war and its source—the capitalist profit system. Workers and young people must fight for the expropriation without compensation of the arms companies, the banks, and the super-rich oligarchy so that these vast resources can be deployed to combat the pandemic and meet the social needs of the vast majority. These demands are inseparable from the establishing of workers’ power and the socialist transformation of society.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>