

Drone Proliferation in Europe: Domestic Surveillance and Unmanned Warfare

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[Drone Wars UK](#)

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European countries are piling more pressure on the US to allow them to buy armed Predator and Reaper drones. As we have previously reported [Germany wants to buy armed Reaper drones](#) from the US and France too has reported this week that [it 'expects' the US to allow it to acquire unarmed Reapers](#) as a step towards its aim of acquiring armed drone capability.

Italy meanwhile is [getting frustrated with a lack of response from the US to its request to arm the unarmed Reaper that it currently operates](#). According to the Aviation News article, Italy says that it is "looking for alternatives" including supporting a European black (secret) armed drone project. There are already a number of known drone programmes under development within Europe including BAE System's [Taranis](#), Dassault's [Neuron](#) and EADS' [Talarion](#) (although the future of the latter is far from clear). However these are all at an early stage of development with possible in-service dates being many years off and hence the desire of European countries to purchase Reaper and Predator drones.



This week Germany also announced it was cancelling the Euro Hawk project. [Unveiled with such fanfare in 2011](#), Euro Hawk was a German version of the Northrop Grumman's surveillance drone, the Global Hawk. Various reasons were given this week to the press for its cancellation but German Defense Minister Thomas de Maizière simply called the project "a horror without end" in his [Bundestag statement](#). Cancellation of this project, even though it has [already cost Germany 500 million Euros](#), apparently 'saves' a further 500 million Euros which can now be spent on alternative drone developments.

Meanwhile the UK continues to operate its armed Reapers acquired from the US in 2007. The [UK is now testing the British-made Brimstone missile on its Reapers](#) as an alternative to the US-made Hellfire missile. This will no doubt make it easier for the UK to continue operating its Reaper drones after the Afghanistan 'drawdown'.



X47b takes off from US aircraft carrier

New figures from SIPRI show that [Israel has been the biggest proliferator of drone technology over the past decade](#) with just over 40% of drone exports originating from Israel. Many of these small to medium unarmed drones have gone to European countries but also to Latin America and Africa. YnetNews also reported that [sales of drones now nets Israel \\$400 million per year](#).

While other countries seek to catch up with the drone wars, the US this week undertook a [significant test of its new autonomous X-47B drone](#). For the first time an unmanned drone has taken off from an aircraft carrier, flown a pre-programmed mission and landed all by itself. As many commentators reported, this is a major step forward.

Ominously, in the same week [senior Pentagon officials told a Senate hearing on drone strikes that the war on terror is one without end or boundaries and that it is expected to continue for another ten to twenty years](#).

An [editorial in the LA Times](#) this week summarised what can be seen as mainstream US opposition to US drone strikes, calling for the Obama administration to “reconsider the scope and utility of the [drones] policy.” The key demand of this challenge is for the elimination of so-called signature strikes and for the CIA’s drones to be shifted back under military control.

Possibly in response to this call, [unnamed sources told Defense News](#) this week – incidentally giving some new interesting tit bits on CIA drone operations – that the latter is unlikely to take place as “the shift would be difficult to implement and would make little difference” as military officers actually operate the CIA’s drones. Those urging the shift to military control argue that there would at least be potentially more scrutiny and accountability over US military as opposed to CIA use of drones, but as Jeremy Scahill has pointed out in his excellent new book, [Dirty Wars: The World is a Battlefield](#) there is in fact very little scrutiny and public accountability over US military operations.

In an important legal ruling this week [a Peshawar High Court judge](#) stated that US drone strikes in Pakistan were criminal offences. Chief Justice Dost Muhammad Khan ordered Pakistan’s government to insist to the US that it must end drone strikes, using force if necessary. He also called on the UN Security Council to intervene.

A great panel of experts (Chris Woods of TBIJ, Jen Gibson of Reprieve and Dan Carey of Public Interest Lawyers) addressed the various legal aspects of the use of drones at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies in London this week. Thankfully [the session was recorded and is available here](#). It’s a really useful summary of the issues and highly recommended listen.

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