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Airbus – a company in decline

The Franco-German manufacturer of fighter jets, drones and electronic components for missiles ranks thirteenth among the world's fifteen largest defense groups in terms of sales in 2019. Germany, France, and Spain hold stakes in the group, which is headquartered in Toulouse, France and has a legal establishment in The Netherlands.¹

Airbus made a loss of more than €1 billion in the 2020 pandemic year, and its defense division, which is not affected by this at other groups, also posted a slight 4% drop in revenue despite a major taxpayer-funded order for Eurofighter fighter jets from Germany.^{2,3,4}

Even before the outbreak of the Corona pandemic, Airbus was in deep crisis. In January 2020, the Group had to pay unprecedented fines totaling 3.6 billion euros for corruption offenses.⁵ But that's not all, more

finances are looming: In May 2020, Sri Lanka Airlines announced it would sue Airbus for \$1 billion in damages and the government in Kuwait is also investigating whether corruption was involved in the ordering of military helicopters.^{6,7}

Due to the financially strained situation and an uncertain order situation, 2,300 jobs have been cut in the defense business at Airbus in Germany over the course of the last year.⁸ Further trend: uncertain.

In times of Corona, the Group should not rely on increasing armaments budgets and billions of euros invested in the development of a new European fighter jet - in view of the financial resources urgently needed elsewhere, it is certainly the wrong way to continue to pour large sums of money into this venture in the coming years.

Airbus on a fatal course

The enormous economic risks in pandemic times lead us to fear that Airbus will continue to vie for every order in the armaments sector. It will not matter in the future whether the fighter jets supplied are used in the wars of this world against innocent civilians, or whether increasingly sophisticated border security systems prevent fleeing people from reaching safety.

The following case studies show examples of where Airbus products are currently being used to massively violate human rights: in the Yemen war, in operations by security forces in Brazil, or in the militarization of borders worldwide. As long as Airbus sticks to this business model, the company will continue to be complicit in the deaths of countless innocent victims of armed violence worldwide.



Bad business in the Middle East: War in Yemen - also made by Airbus

By: Barbara Happe, Niels Dubrow, urgewald

The group puts the losses it faces as a result of the export ban to Saudi Arabia imposed by the German government at the end of 2018 at at least 220 million euros. Airbus is therefore unable to deliver a border security system ordered by the Saudis. Currently, Airbus is in negotiations with the Saudis to avert further financial damage.⁹

Due to the ongoing war in Yemen, the plan to sell Saudi Arabia another 48 Eurofighters - in addition to the 72 already delivered between 2009 and 2017 - is currently on hold. Thanks to the lobbying activities of Airbus and other defense groups, however, supplies from Airbus Germany for such a project would not be affected by the export freeze, as exports for European joint projects have been possible again since April 2019.¹⁰

Airbus itself is arguing for the export restrictions to be lifted again completely. This is despite the fact that these transactions even earned

it a criminal complaint before the International Criminal Court in The Hague at the end of 2019. Human rights lawyers accuse the company of aiding and abetting war crimes, or at least condoning them, by supplying arms to Saudi Arabia and its allies.¹¹

Specifically, the Saudi Air Force has also relied on Airbus aircraft in its air strikes in Yemen, which have been ongoing for six years in violation of international law. Despite a recently announced ceasefire, the Saudis continue their airstrikes on the devastated country.¹²

So far, this has repeatedly involved the use of Tornados and newer Eurofighter Typhoon fighter jets and A330 MRTTs for mid-air refueling, which are supplied with operating materials and spare parts by Airbus.^{13 14} In addition, Saudi Arabia uses air-launched Storm Shadow cruise missiles and Brimstone cruise missiles from MBDA, a consortium in which Airbus also holds a 37.5% stake

alongside BAE Systems (37.5%) and Leonardo (25%).¹⁵

Arms deals with the world's autocrats

Saudi Arabia is not the only Airbus customer. Other countries in the Middle East also rely on the Eurofighter. Oman received 12 of them in recent years, Kuwait ordered 28 in April 2016, and Qatar ordered 24 aircraft in September 2018.^{16 17} In summer 2020, Indonesia expressed interest in buying its 15 Eurofighters from Austria.¹⁸ Amnesty International has criticized the country for limited freedom of speech or assembly and repeated human rights violations by the police and military.¹⁹

Kuwait and Qatar were both initially part of the Saudi Arabia-led war coalition in Yemen, but Qatar was expelled from that coalition in June 2017. Kuwait was awarded the contract for the fighter jets at a time when the war crimes committed by the airstrikes in Yemen had long been known. Apart

from their involvement in the Yemen war, both countries have repeatedly attracted attention for their massive human rights violations.^{20 21}

The United Arab Emirates is also one of the important Airbus customers in the world's most conflict-ridden region. The launch of the FalconEye military spy satellite took place at the end of last year.²² A communications satellite is to follow in a few years.²³ Airbus also agreed a strategic partnership with Atlas Telecom at IDEX 2021. The goal is to market communications equipment for the military and police in the United Arab Emirates and the Middle East.²⁴

With such long-term collaborations, Airbus continues to drive armament

in a region where basic human rights are suppressed by security forces using brutal force.

Airbus in the wars of this world

The sale of the A400M transport aircraft to Turkey is also proving to be extremely problematic. Turkey is directly and indirectly involved in countless conflicts. Numerous indications suggest that these Airbus transport aircraft were used last year for illegal arms deliveries to Libya and Azerbaijan.²⁵ This is despite the fact that civil war-torn Libya has been under an arms embargo since 2011. There has also been an OSCE embargo on Azerbaijan since 1992.²⁶ However, this does not stop Airbus from continuing to support Turkey in the maintenance of its A400Ms.²⁷

Currently, the Turkish Air Force continues to use the aircraft for flights to Azerbaijan and Somalia.

With its exports to the world's crisis and war regions, Airbus continues to fuel the arms spiral, helping to fuel more and more new conflicts and abetting human rights abuses.

Through its strong presence at the largest arms fair in the Middle East, IDEX, Airbus made it clear once again earlier this year that it intends to continue on this wrong path.²⁸ Airbus continues to make profits from the world's conflicts and the militarization of borders, as the following article shows.²⁹

Airbus and border militarisation

By: Mark Akkerman, Stop Wapenhandel

'Great to see borders reopening', posted Airbus on Facebook in June 2020, when the easing of Covid-19 restrictions allowed for more international flights, bringing Airbus passenger planes back in the air.³⁰

However, Airbus also makes a lot of money from the closing of borders, with the use of its equipment for border security and control. The company is a prominent player in the global border industrial complex and its successful lobby for a militarized response to migration, with severe consequences for refugees.

Border security

Already in 2008 Airbus identified border security as "a huge area for R&D developments and a promising market".³¹ This was based then on the EU requiring new and candidate member states to boost their

capacities in this area, often with the EU funding equipment purchases to do so. Romania, for example, bought Airbus helicopters and a border security system with such funding.

Airbus' products in the field of border security range from aircraft to communication systems to radar. The company is the market leader for "border security" in Europe, where states have greatly increased their budgets in this field following the large movements of refugees in 2015. Apart from Romania, its helicopters are in use by border forces in Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Slovenia and Ukraine. It also sold border security systems to Bulgaria, France and Spain.

EU border guard agency Frontex, which has been repeatedly criticized

for its role in violence and pushbacks against refugees, is a new customer for Airbus. After Frontex hired drones from Airbus and its partner Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) for trial surveillance flights in the Mediterranean in 2018, the same partnership, along with Israeli arms company Elbit, in October 2020 was awarded a €50 million contract for drone surveillance services.³² This was the one of the first large contracts for Frontex after it got money to buy its own equipment under its €5.6 billion budget for 2021-2027.

Airbus has participated in many EU-funded border security R&D projects, including several aimed at the development and improvement of EU-wide border surveillance system Eurosur. The company is also involved in space-based EU border security measures. The European



Macedonian-Greek border near Idomeni. © Photo: ECCHR/Vera Wriedt

Space Agency contracted an Airbus-led consortium in December 2017 for the Copernicus Data and Information Access Service, to make its data available to users. This data is used for a wide range of objectives, including monitoring migration and border security, and by various agencies including Frontex.

Airbus plays a part in European border externalisation efforts, where the EU and its member states pressure third countries in Africa and the Middle East to act as outpost border guards, preventing refugees from reaching the European borders in the first place.³³ Airbus' C295 and CN235 helicopters are used by amongst others Mali, Egypt and Ghana for a broad range of missions, including (maritime) border control. Algeria purchased a border surveillance system. Germany donated loads of Airbus border security equipment to Tunisia, while France facilitated the sale of ten helicopters for border patrol to Libya.³⁴ The last deal is not only controversial because of the existing arms embargo against the country, but even more so because Libya has turned into a hell for refugees amidst the ongoing civil war. Both the internationally recognized government and rivaling militias are

responsible for murder, rape and torture against refugees, in- and outside the infamous detention centers. In spite of this the EU keeps cooperating with Libya to stop refugees from crossing the Mediterranean, training the notorious Libyan Coast Guard and donating money and equipment for border security.

Lucrative border business worldwide

Outside Europe and its neighbours, Airbus is one of the companies performing the through-life support for the P-3 Orion surveillance planes of the Australian Air Force, which are a part of the highly controversial Australian policy to prevent any arrival of migrants by boat and its connected offshore detention system.³⁵ Equally controversial is the militarisation of the US-Mexico border, for which Airbus has provided over a hundred helicopters to the US Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) agency.³⁶ Many migrants have died at this border, being forced to dangerous routes through the desert to get around the expanding border security infrastructure the US has been constructing.

Airbus' largest border security contract comes from Saudi Arabia. For the development of a complete bor-

der security system Airbus received around 2 billion euros. The German police worked together with Airbus employees in training Saudi border police in using the system. Dozens of German police officers were deployed in Saudi Arabia for this, with controversy caused by the fact they were paid from Germany's international development aid budget. Moreover, the deal has been dogged with allegations of corruption and bribery, as has been the case with the border security sales to Romania.³⁷

In 2017 Airbus sold parts of its border security and electronics business units to US financial investor KKR, with the German government maintaining a 25.1% stake "in order to continue to protect the security interests of the Federal Republic of Germany."³⁸

Lobby

Airbus profits from the field of border security and control are not a coincidence, Airbus is also at the forefront of the lobby of the military and security industry to militarise borders.³⁹ The company has had 213 meetings with representatives of the European Commission since December 2014.⁴⁰ While many of those were on civil aviation issues, the large number

signals its close relationship with EU authorities. In recent years Airbus has often met with (the cabinet of) EU commissioner for the internal market Thierry Breton, who is responsible for EU policy on defence industry. On 1 April 2020 Airbus was one of seven arms companies who held a teleconference with Breton on 'Covid-19 & its impact on the Aeronautic (civil and defence) industry'.

Airbus is a member of two influential European lobby organisations on defence and security: the European Organisation for Security (EOS) and the

AeroSpace and Defence Industries Association of Europe (ASD). Airbus CEO Guillaume Faury is Vice-Chairman of the Board of the latter. These organisations have positioned themselves as experts on the issue of migration, pushing policies towards a discourse of treating migration and refugees as a security threat and of militarisation of border security as the 'answer'.

Airbus' arms exports to problematic destinations, as described in the previous chapter, contribute to wars, internal conflicts, repression, human

rights violations and poverty. Or in other words: they fuel reasons forcing people to flee. Cynically, Airbus later profits again from the plight and misery of refugees, by providing the equipment for the heavily militarized border policies of the EU and other countries. Increasing and militarising border security means more violence and repression against refugees. It also forces them to look for other, often more dangerous routes, leading to more deaths, and drives them in the hands of criminal smuggling networks.

Airbus helicopters used in illegal deadly police operations in Rio de Janeiro

By: Andrea Zellhuber, terre des hommes

Airbus helicopter used as shooting platform

Rio de Janeiro's police force is one of the deadliest in Brazil. From January 2012 to May 2020, 8,205 people were killed by police in Rio de Janeiro. This equates to an average of 933 deaths per year.⁴¹

In recent years, there has been a staggering increase in cases of innocent people being injured or killed during police operations with helicopters in densely populated areas.⁴² In these engagements with drug gangs, security forces fire machine guns from helicopters into residential areas, placing the population at great risk of being caught in the crossfire. Airbus helicopters too are used in these operations. In the first half of 2019 alone, at least 34 anti-crime police operations with helicopters took place in Rio de Janeiro. In 11 of these operations, helicopters were used as shooting platforms.⁴³ Brazilian experts describe the numerous helicopter operations as "terrorizing

the population".

Briefly, between 1994 and 2001, the use of helicopters in armed clashes in densely populated areas was prohibited. Thereafter the corresponding regulations were again relaxed and, moreover, placed under secrecy by the current government.⁴⁴ This significantly limits the possibility for oversight by the public prosecutor's office, the press and civil society.

The Pereira case

The case of the chase and killing of drug trafficker Márcio José Sabino Pereira on 11 May 2012 is an impressive example of such highly problematic police operations using helicopters in densely populated areas.⁴⁵ In this police action, which has already been legally processed and well documented, an Airbus helicopter was used as a shooting platform. During the operation, more than 100 machine gun rounds were fired into a residential area.

The helicopter used in the operation by the Rio de Janeiro Civil Police (PCERJ) was the AS-350 (Esquilo -squirrel) model, designated "Águia II" (Eagle II). This model was originally designed and manufactured by the French company Aérospatiale and the Franco-German company Eurocopter, now Airbus Helicopter. The Rio de Janeiro Civil Police currently has two helicopters of this model in its fleet of aircraft.

This helicopter operation, involving an excessive use of force by the civil and military police, occurred in the Favela da Coréia in Rio de Janeiro and culminated in the killing of drug trafficker Márcio José Sabino Pereira. On 5 May 2013, about a year after the police operation, a [video](#) recorded by the Rio de Janeiro Civil Police themselves from the helicopter was broadcasted on the Globo TV programme "Fantástico".⁴⁶ The video recording shows not only the execution of the drug dealer, but also how another person in the car was

injured. In addition, several shots of large calibre and high penetrating power (7.62 mm and 5.56 mm projectiles) hit houses. It is not known whether inhabitants were harmed. At least one shot hit a local resident on a motorbike. He was seriously injured and taken to hospital.⁴⁷

The risks to the population were particularly extreme because the shots were fired from submachine guns set in automatic continuous fire mode, which allows less control and precision on the part of the shooter. To make matters worse, the operation was carried out at night (between 11 pm and midnight) and thus in low visibility. The video shows that many shots were fired in low visibility in a very densely populated neighbourhood. At that time, many residents were probably at home. From an excerpt of a document from the Office of the Attorney General, based on the conversations with the crew, it can be inferred that many of the shots were fired by police officers without

knowing where they were shooting. In the dialogues, one said, “Shoot, shoot” and another replied, “I don’t see anything”, to which the first says, “Shoot, damn it, shoot” (between minutes 15 and 18 of the video).

Legal experts assess the operation as disproportionate, in that a very high risk of collateral civilian injury and death was considered acceptable.⁴⁸ A court decision in September 2019 (7 years after the event) ordered the state to pay compensation to the injured passer-by.

Not an isolated case

This type of helicopter operation is unfortunately not an isolated case. Other helicopter operations have terrorized the population and caused diverse civilian casualties.⁴⁹

One example is a police operation on 7 May 2019 in the favela da Maré in the north of Rio de Janeiro. Three people, including a child, were injured.

Such operations also occurred during the Corona pandemic in 2020. During a joint civil and federal police operation to arrest a drug trafficking leader in the Complexo do Salgueiro in São Gonçalo, 14-year-old João Pedro was killed. Civil police officers first pursued the criminal from a helicopter, landed in the favela and, coming down from the helicopter in pursuit, stormed the house of João Pedro’s family where they entered his home and fired over 70 shots.⁵⁰

In 2017, fear and the recurring threat of helicopter gunfire in densely populated areas even prompted a social project for children and youth in the Maré favela to put up a sign on the roof telling the police: “School: Don’t shoot”.

No Airbus helicopters for police excesses in residential areas

The number of helicopter missions in Brazilian favelas to fight the drug gangs suspected to be there has been steadily increasing for years. Due to the great target uncertainty from helicopters, the number of civilian victims is also growing. Schools, kindergartens and health centres are frequently closed. Residents are often unable to go to work due to the gunfire.

Despite extensive documentation of such abuses and severe human rights violations, Airbus continues to sell their products to the Brazilian armed and security forces. In 2008, the government ordered 50 Airbus H225M helicopters, which are currently being delivered.⁵¹ In addition, Airbus has even has its own subsidiary in Brazil (Helibras) to build helicopters. The Brazilian security forces are also Helibras customers. Now there is an increased probability that, with the help of Airbus technology, residents will continue to be the regular “acceptable” collateral



A hail of bullets from a police helicopter hitting a car in a densely populated neighborhood in Rio, captured by a police infrared camera. The white dots are machine gun bullets. Source: screenshot of a video from the Rio de Janeiro Civil Police. The video can be viewed on TV Globo’s website: <http://g1.globo.com/fantastico/noticia/2013/05/imagens-mostram-perseguicao-e-cacada-ao-trafficante-matematico.html>



Sign on a school in Rio asking police officers in helicopters, “School. Do not shoot”, Photo: Favela da Maré Project / Source: Facebook

damage of more-than-questionable police operations with excessive use of force.

The lawsuit filed in June 2020 before the Supreme Federal Court (STF - Supremo Tribunal Federal) demanding a ban on helicopter gunfire has not been finally decided. At least it

brought about the interim suspension of such police operations in Rio municipalities during the Corona pandemic.⁵² But in practice, these court decisions are not implemented by the police authorities.

Therefore, Airbus should also push for such a ban to ensure that its

helicopters at least are not used in a manner which endangers, injures or kills innocent civilians and stop all deliveries until this is ensured. Airbus should not promote security policies that imply excessive use of force and human rights violations with its products.

Our demands on Airbus:

- No arms deliveries to warring states and states that violate human rights
- Comprehensive clarification of corruption cases in the company and credible approach to prevent corruption in the future.
- Ending the double dividend of first fueling wars and then building border walls (securing people, not borders!).
- Disclosure and regular reporting on all lobbying activities of the Group.
- Stop lobbying for militarization of the EU and European borders.
- Immediately stop the delivery of Airbus helicopters to the police and military in Brazil until it is ensured that they respect national law and human rights and no longer fire on residential areas.
- Active engagement with Brazilian officials and public advocacy for respect of human rights and halting of shelling of residential neighborhoods from Airbus helicopters already delivered.

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