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Germany, Sweden Making ‘Kill Decisions’ for US Drone Strikes in Afghanistan

By Jason Ditz

September 4, 2015

Drone strikes in Afghanistan are regularly carried out by the Pentagon, but officials today revealed that international partners are present and make “kill decisions” on whether or not to attack targets, with Sweden and Germany explicitly named as being involved in deciding when to launch strikes.

According to officials, there is a roundtable discussion during which drone surveillance footage is shown, and the various nations’ representatives are asked to raise their hands if they oppose the strike. This is meant to limit the risk of civilian deaths in the strikes.

It could set the stage for a huge constitutional crisis in Germany, as the nation is explicitly forbidden since WW2 from carrying out offensive military operations. Indeed, the German military was already facing lawsuits from human rights groups even on allegations of being

involved in an indirect support role for the drone strikes. Direct “kill decisions” would be a much bigger issue.

Officials described the roundtable as “giving thumbs up or down like gladiators in a stadium,” and confirmed it made several nations uncomfortable “particularly the Germans.” They also said of that targeting process that “a lot of NATO officials are pretty upset by it.”

Tellingly, German Foreign Ministry spokesman Konrad Lax issued a statement initially denying the claims, saying no German personnel were anywhere near the facility where the roundtable was held. He later withdrew his denial, however, saying he may have been “misinformed” and saying the Defense Ministry would be the one to ask. He followed this up with a third statement confirming that the German military did in fact have personnel at the site.

Germany’s involvement in the Afghan War has been extremely controversial, and the military had mostly tried to limit themselves to support and peacekeeping roles. The times when civilian casualties have resulted have sparked significant backlashes in the nation.