

Drones steal the spotlight at Paris Air Show

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The Aarok drone made by French firm Turgis and Gaillard could help the country's military reduce its reliance on US drones.

Drones of all shapes and sizes designed to carry more and more weapons or directly deliver explosives are everywhere at the Paris Air Show, matching the scale of their deployment on Ukrainian battlefields.

One French firm, Turgis and Gaillard, is showing off an [unmanned](#)

[aerial vehicle](#) (UAV) that it hopes will be snapped up by the country's army—until now reliant on American-made Reaper models.

Weighing in at 5.5 tons and able to stay aloft for up to 24 hours, the Aarok [drone](#) "fills a capacity gap in the French armed forces, we had the best of everything in France as far as radars, missiles, sensors go, everything except the plane itself," managing director Patrick Gaillard said.

With development costs so far "more than 10 million euros" (\$11 million), the production model should be "less expensive" than the Reaper (up to \$20 million per unit) and will have no American components, avoiding onerous export authorisations.

That characteristic could fit in with President Emmanuel Macron's controversial ambition for European "strategic autonomy" from other poles of world power including the United States.

Falling into the Medium Altitude, Long Endurance (MALE) class, the Aarok can carry out surveillance or hit a target to within two meters (yards) from 35 kilometers (22 miles) away.

Europe lags behind

The staff at General Atomics' stand aren't worried to see new competitors on the market.



The WanderB vertical takeoff and landing drone developed by the Israeli company BlueBird Aero Systems.

"All sizes of unpiloted aircraft are the future," said the firm's marketing chief Mark Brinkley, in Paris to show off the latest Reaper MQ-9B currently being delivered to Britain.

At the Airbus stand, the European manufacturer boasts a mock-up of its Eurodrone, for which it scored a 7.1-billion-euro contract in February.

The Berlin-led project launched in 2015 is supposed to provide German, French, Italian and Spanish armed forces with drones comparable to the Reaper.

But its first flight is scheduled only in 2026, with actual deliveries two years later—a full 25 years after the American aircraft hit the market.

There was better news at the airshow for French manufacturer Safran, which snagged a Greek order for four of its Patroller UAVs, while first deliveries to the French army will arrive this summer.

Self-detonating drones

France and other European nations are also "quite behind" in developing self-detonating drones, also known as loitering munitions, said French senator Cedric Perrin, who has written several reports on the weapons.

"This is a big deal, so industry is getting more and more interested in it," he added.



Sogitec's drone flight simulator to train UAV pilots.

Major defense manufacturer KNDS said Monday that it had been chosen alongside two other firms to develop a French loitering munitions device comparable to the US-made Switchblade, boasting a range of 80 kilometers.

First tests should come "within 18 months", the companies said.

Meanwhile Israeli company BlueBird Aero Systems on Wednesday trailed a self-detonating drone it said could land a 2.5-kilogram (5.5-pound) explosive within one meter of its target.

The ecosystem surrounding UAVs also offers business opportunities, with Sogitec—a branch of aerospace giant Dassault—soon to complete a simulator known as Genius to train pilots on different types of drones.

A demonstration allows users to zoom around a map and fly over an imaginary airport with three helicopters parked on the tarmac.

Other training scenarios covering infrastructure, desert or residential areas are also on offer.

"We can create hand-made environments for the customer," said product chief Stephane Morelli.

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