

Israel ecstatic over \$1.2 billion drone deal with Germany



Tel Aviv, June 26 (RHC)-- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has thanked German Chancellor Angela Merkel for her efforts in the approval of a more than one-billion-dollar deal to lease military drones from Israel.

Netanyahu said the approval of the accord – an estimated 1.2 billion dollars worth -- by Germany's parliament to lease Israeli-built surveillance drones for nine years would strengthen bilateral security relations between Berlin and Tel Aviv. "I want to personally thank Chancellor Merkel, with whom I spoke only ten days ago on the subject. She told me she'd pass it on to parliament and she did," the Israeli premier said.

"It's a huge deal. It has implications first of all on our defense industry and the Israeli economy, but also the continued strengthening security ties between Germany and Israel. Germany helps Israel and Israel also helps Germany," he added.

The leasing program is said to cover five Israeli-built Heron-TP reconnaissance drones capable of carrying missiles and will continue until European-built models are ready for operation around 2025.

The accord met with opposition last year from the center-left Social Democrats (SPD), who are partners in the ruling coalition, as the German military currently uses a different model of Heron drones that cannot

be armed with weapons.

The approved deal reportedly consists of two separate parts - one with Europe's Airbus, which will manage the drone program, and one with the Tel Aviv regime to cover training, infrastructure and logistics for the planes.

Parliamentary sources in Germany said the plan would cost the country's military around 250 million euros a year to operate the new drones, compared with around 70 million euros for the less capable drones currently used by Berlin.

The deal comes as the Israeli prime minister has been implicated in a grafting scandal over the purchase of three nuclear-capable submarines from Germany.

During the past two decades, Israel has ordered six submarines from Germany, with the final one set to be delivered in late 2018.

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