

Weapon of choice in the 21st century

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Sir, Denis MacShane ([“How the Eurodrone can revive a pilotless Europe”](#), October 13) argues that European governments need to combine to build a “Eurodrone”. While claiming that civilian applications of these pilotless aircraft, or drones, far outweigh military use, he simultaneously acknowledges that they are transforming warfare.

He also calls for common production within the European defence sector and, without any apparent sense of irony, suggests that the model should be that of the Kalashnikov – “a robust, simple to make and easy to use design to which other specifications can be added as needs arise”. What he fails to mention is that the AK-47 is the world’s most prolific and effective combat weapon, with at least 50m copies spread around the world. It is the weapon of choice for many armies, militias, armed gangs, law enforcement officials, rebels and other private actors who abuse fundamental human rights and operate beyond international humanitarian law.

And just as the Kalashnikov became an icon of violence in the 20th century, the armed drone is becoming the weapon of choice in the 21st century. Conservative estimates suggest that US armed drone attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan kill one civilian for every two combatants, but no official figures are available. The drone strikes are almost certainly fuelling further extremism and anti-western sentiment, while the United Nations’ special rapporteur for extrajudicial executions has warned that the practice amounts to “a licence to kill without accountability”. Mr MacShane’s myopic lobbying for a Eurodrone might have more credibility if it were balanced by a call for European leadership in regulating and limiting the use of armed drones – something that is long overdue.

Mikhail Kalashnikov, who designed the AK-47 while wounded in hospital, later wished that he had invented the lawnmower instead. I suggest that Mr MacShane spend more time in his garden.

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