

Advanced Anti-Drone Defense: Italian Air Force Focuses on BAE Systems Laser-Guided Systems for its Fighters

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The Italian Air Force is evaluating the purchase of U.S. technology to convert low-cost unguided missiles into precision weapons. The objective is to acquire an economically sustainable option for downing drones, avoiding the use of expensive traditional air-to-air missiles.

What is the BAE Systems APKWS II system?

The **APKWS II** (*Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System*) is a precision laser guidance kit developed by BAE Systems. Its operation is based on an engineering concept that is both simple and revolutionary: it is inserted as a modular component in the middle of the structure, precisely **between the warhead and the rocket motor** of a common inexpensive unguided missile (such as the widespread 70 mm rockets or *Hydra 70*).

The kit is equipped with four retractable fins that open after launch, each equipped with a semi-active laser sensor. This transforms a conventional ordnance into a laser-guided weapon

capable of striking with millimeter precision and minimal collateral damage.

- **Multi-domain and multi-mission solution:** The APKWS system enables air-to-surface, surface-to-surface, surface-to-air, and air-to-air attacks. It can be deployed from multiple platforms, including fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft, remotely piloted systems, fixed or mobile ground stations, and naval units.
- **Reliability and operational readiness:** As emphasized by **Neeta Jayaraman**, director of precision guidance solutions and sensors at BAE Systems:
  "*With over a decade of proven performance, reliability, and precision, APKWS guidance kits have supported precision strike missions worldwide. This milestone demonstrates our ability to deliver innovative technology rapidly and at scale. With our new production contract, we are ready to support evolving mission needs for years to come*".
- **Logistical simplicity:** The kit integrates easily with existing or new rocket motors, warheads, and fuzes, requiring minimal maintenance and training for personnel.



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Key points of the initiative and the FMS agreement

- **U.S. approval:** The U.S. State Department has approved a possible Foreign Military Sale (FMS) to Italy for **5,031 BAE Systems APKWS II guidance kits**.
- **Effectiveness in counter-drone operations (C-UAS):** The system represents a combat-proven response for the C-UAS mission, allowing engagement of asymmetric air threats at a fraction of the cost compared to advanced missiles such as AMRAAMs.

- **Overall value:** The potential authorized agreement includes launchers, warheads, rocket motors, and technical support, for an estimated value of **364 million dollars**.

Current status and operational prospects

Sources in Italy have clarified that **no contract has yet been signed** and that the technology is currently under review by competent authorities.

The main candidate to receive the integration of the APKWS system is the **Eurofighter** fighter of the Air Force, already engaged in protecting European skies and NATO patrols. The flexibility of the system directly addresses operational needs that have also emerged internationally: the British Royal Air Force, for example, has already successfully integrated and tested APKWS on its own Eurofighters for countering air threats.