

Galileo satnav system called 'stupid idea': US cable

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A Russian Soyuz rocket carrying part of the Galileo system blasts off at the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan in 2005. The head of a German firm working on Europe's Galileo satellite navigation system called it a "stupid idea" being pushed by France for military reasons, a leaked US diplomatic cable showed Thursday.

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According to an October 2009 cable from the US embassy in Berlin obtained by [WikiLeaks](http://www.wikileaks.org) and released by Norwegian daily Aftenposten, the head of German satellite firm OHB Technology, Berry Smutny, made the comments to US diplomats in Berlin.

"I think Galileo is a stupid idea that primarily serves French interests," Smutny was quoted as saying in the cable.

Galileo aims to challenge the dominance of the US-built [Global Positioning System](#) (GPS) set up by the Pentagon in the 1980s, which is widely used in a huge variety of [navigation devices](#) like those in cars and boats.

Smutny, whose firm was jointly awarded a 566 million euro (\$742 million) contract to develop 14 satellites for the system, said the project was "a waste of EU taxpayers' money championed by French interests," according to the cable.

"He claimed the EU desire to develop a redundant but alternative to GPS was spearheaded by the French after an incident during the Kosovo conflict when the US military 'manipulated' GPS to support military operations," the cable said.

"Since this time, he said France has aggressively corralled EU support to invest in Galileo development -- something Smutny said France wants to ensure their missile guidance systems are free of any GPS reliance. Smutny added, the irony for German investment in Galileo is that some of France's nuclear missiles are aimed at Berlin," it said.

Asked about the cable by Aftenposten, Smutny denied making the comments.

"I made none of the statements attributed to me, though it is true that I had an informal dinner with them (the US diplomats)," he said.

Plagued by delays and cost over-runs, the Galileo project has an official price tag of 3.4 billion euros but reports have said the final cost of the system could exceed 20 billion euros. It is scheduled to be operational in

2014.

Aftenposten said last month it had obtained all the diplomatic documents leaked to WikiLeaks and that it would publish stories based on them independently of the whistleblowing website's own releases.

WikiLeaks has so far only made public around 2,000 of the some 250,000 cables in its possession, in cooperation with publications El Pais, The Guardian, The New York Times, Le Monde and Der Spiegel.

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