

German arms exports more than double

Sven Heymann
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Sixty-five years after the end of World War II, Germany is once again a leader in the world arms industry. The main responsibility for this development lies with the former Social Democratic Party (SPD)-Green Party government. During its term in office (1998-2005), it allowed the deployment of the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) outside the NATO area and practically deregulated arms exports.

Last Monday, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) published a report on the global interstate arms trade between 2005 and 2009. According to its findings, German arms exports more than doubled compared to the period between 2000 and 2004, reaching a new peak since the end of World War II.

At the beginning of the decade, German arms exports represented 6 percent of global exports in this field; they have now grown to 11 percent. Only the US (30 percent) and Russia (23 percent) have a higher share of exports of heavy weapons. At the same time, global arms sales have risen by 22 percent over this period. These figures make clear the enormous growth of the arms industry in Germany.

That Germany has developed relatively unnoticed as one of the largest hubs of the global arms trade is thanks in part to the fact that many companies produce not only armaments but other products as well. Extensive military hardware is produced, so to speak, in the “shadow” of well-known corporations. Thyssen-Krupp, for instance, produces a full range of military trucks and transport vehicles as part of its “vehicle technology” division. The army is the biggest customer of its “service and repair” operations.

The European aerospace company EADS, headquartered in Germany, likes to promote its work on civilian aircraft like the Airbus, but is also developing the Eurofighter combat aircraft as well as various types of combat helicopters. The fact that the arms industry is

booming despite the economic crisis can be seen by a glance at the press releases of the European market leader for armoured vehicles, Krauss-Maffei Wegmann. Among the company’s announcements in recent months is its status as market leader for military land vehicles in the Netherlands; the establishment of a “strategic centre” for the Asia-Pacific region in Singapore as well as the largest single contract in recent history worth more than €3 billion.

The global context shows that the rise of arms imports involves countries in crisis regions. Target areas are primarily the Middle East, North Africa, Southeast Asia and South America, regions that are currently characterised by increased social tensions. Arms imports to Latin America have grown by 150 percent. The statistics include heavy military equipment in particular; side arms and ammunition were not included.

SIPRI studies the development of the worldwide arms trade over regular five-year periods. This allows a more objective picture given that many military projects are carried out over several years.

The Swedish peace research institute relies on data provided by the various governments about their arms deals. Further calculations are then based on estimates, as many governments keep their figures under wraps. Moreover, many states do not include the export of used equipment in their statistics. SIPRI therefore assumes that the actual extent of the global arms trade may be much greater. The German government’s public pronouncements are also fairly opaque when it comes to defence policy. So far, the official defence report for 2008 has not even been published.

The Ministry of Economic Affairs, the competent authority, makes short shrift of the matter in its press release of March 15 regarding the SIPRI report, saying the figures quoted are wrong. It states that between 2001 and 2004, export permits were allocated valued at

€15.5 billion, and from 2005 to 2008, this volume had risen by only €2.2 billion to €17.7 billion.

But these figures do not disprove the SIPRI report; on the contrary, they confirm it and even support the projections for the coming years. The report is not based on the contracts agreed over the last five years but on the value of the actual goods delivered. The contracts for these exports, in turn, are already a few years older. It is common practice in defence deals that some years pass between the date the contract is signed and the date delivery is completed. If the Ministry of Economic Affairs now reports that the volume of export permits issued in the last five years has increased, then an even greater wave of exports can be expected for the next five years.

Given the clear responsibility of the former SPD-Green Party government for the growth of the armaments industry, the present horror expressed by Green party leader Claudia Roth is a sham. In a recent press interview, she blustered about it being “incredible how money can be made here on a large scale.”

In the same interview, Roth repeated her well-known demand for the Bundeswehr to be transformed into a completely professional army. In her words, this means a “smaller army without conscription” and is directly linked to upgrading the army’s capabilities. It is easy to see that such an army would have the character of a force that could be rapidly deployed globally—a precision instrument for the political and economic interests of the ruling elites to prevail throughout the world.

The security spokesman of the SPD parliamentary group, Rainer Arnold, did not even attempt to spin the figures quoted. In an interview with the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, he let it be known that he found “nothing objectionable” in the fact that German companies enjoyed an increasing share of weapons delivered to NATO.

With the bombing of Serbia in 1999 and the launching of the aggressive war against Afghanistan in 2001, the former SPD-Green Party government involved the Bundeswehr in two bloody NATO operations. The illegal war in Afghanistan has already cost tens of thousands of lives. If Arnold “cannot find anything objectionable” in this, then he is only expressing all the callousness and arrogance of the SPD leadership.

The defence of the increase in arms exports by the SPD also says a lot about the Left Party. Whenever their support in parliament is not needed, they vote against war and armaments deals, but otherwise they offer themselves as a reliable partner of the SPD.

Sixty-five years after the end of World War II and the crimes of Hitler’s army, the fact that the German armaments industry is now on a par with the world’s military superpowers must be taken very seriously. It is no accident that this coincides with the biggest economic crisis in 80 years—a crisis that is exacerbating tensions between the superpowers, and that will inevitably lead to armed conflicts.



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