

# The tripling of US arms sales

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The tripling of US arms sales abroad to a record \$66.3 billion is an accurate barometer of the accelerating drive to war in the Persian Gulf and on a world scale. This one violently surging sector of American exports reflects a diseased capitalist economy and society, whose financial-corporate elite resorts to militarism as a means of offsetting the overall economic decline of the United States.

The annual survey of global arms sales released this week by the Congressional Research Service (CRS), the policy research arm of the US Congress, places the United States number one in the provision of advanced weaponry to the world by an overwhelming margin.

“In 2011, the US led in arms transfer agreements worldwide, making agreements valued at \$66.3 billion (77.7 percent of all such agreements), an extraordinary increase from \$21.4 billion in 2010. The US worldwide agreements total in 2011 is the largest for a single year in the history of the US arms export program,” according to the report prepared for Congress.

In an earlier period, Washington justified such weapons deals as part of its Cold War strategy of countering the influence of the Soviet Union and propping up regimes aligned with the West against Moscow and its allies. This was under conditions where Soviet arms sales to the so-called Third World rivaled and even surpassed those of the United States.

Today, however, as the CRS report makes clear, the US accounts for more than three quarters of global arms deals, with the share of its closest competitor, Russia, amounting to just 5.6 percent.

The massive rise in US arms sales is driven by the accelerating turn toward aggressive war as a means of achieving the strategic global objectives of US imperialism, combined with the insatiable drive for profit and power by America’s bloated military-industrial complex.

The lion’s share of the rise in arms exports is directed

to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which together account for \$38.2 billion of the \$66.3 billion total. The other major sales were \$2 billion worth of antimissile batteries to Taiwan—a provocative move aimed against China—and \$6.9 billion in arms to India, ratcheting up tensions with its regional antagonist, Pakistan.

The Saudi monarchy’s purchase of 84 advanced F-15 fighter planes together with dozens of military helicopters and other weapons yielded super profits for Boeing and United Technologies. The regime in the UAE obtained a \$3.5 billion sophisticated missile defense system, providing rich returns for Lockheed Martin.

The CRS report includes the observation: “Whereas the principal motivation for arms sales by key foreign suppliers in earlier years might have been to support a foreign policy objective, today that motivation may be based as much, if not more, on economic considerations as those of foreign or national security policy.”

In reality, these foreign policy objectives and economic interests feed each other. The military-industrial complex that the former general Dwight D. Eisenhower warned against at the end of his presidency a half-century ago has grown to gargantuan proportions, dominating the US government and both major parties and playing a grossly disproportionate role in the American economy. It provides a powerful impetus to both militarism abroad and the assault on democratic rights at home.

The purchases by the monarchical regimes in the Arab world stem, on the one hand, from their reaction to the popular upheavals that were dubbed the “Arab Spring” and, on the other, from the buildup by the US and its allies for another war, this time against Iran.

The House of Saud, which runs Saudi Arabia as a family fiefdom, saw in the events in Tunisia, Egypt and

particularly Bahrain, where its troops were used to suppress mass protests, a mortal threat to its absolutist rule. An essential part of its response is the dramatic expansion of its military apparatus.

The buildup to war against Iran, just as the one that preceded the war of aggression against Iraq a decade ago, has been publicly justified as a response to the supposed threat posed by “weapons of mass destruction.” The US and its allies have claimed that Iran’s nuclear program is directed at producing nuclear weapons, a charge repeatedly denied by the government in Iran, which insists the program is for peaceful purposes.

The hypocrisy of these charges against Iran, which have provided the pretext for crippling sanctions, the deployment of a US air and sea armada in the Persian Gulf, and threats by Israel and the US of an unprovoked military assault, is evident in the figures provided by the US arms sales report. The amount of weaponry Washington sold to the Saudi and UAE regimes alone last year amounted to nearly six times Iran’s entire military budget.

The US geo-strategic objective in sponsoring these weapons sales is to create potentially armed regional proxies for a war for regime-change in Iran. This process is already playing out in Syria, where Washington’s major arms customers—Saudi Arabia and the UAE—are openly sponsoring the so-called rebels seeking the overthrow of Iran’s principal Arab ally, the government of Bashar al-Assad. This sponsorship has extended to the creation of a \$100 million fund to pay the salaries of the militias challenging the Syrian government, as well as the provision of weapons, which is being coordinated by the CIA in Turkey and undoubtedly on the ground in Syria itself.

The preparations for war against Iran are directed at tightening US hegemony over the energy-rich regions of the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea, which the landmass of Iran spans. In that sense, the aggression being prepared against Iran and its people under Obama is in pursuit of the same aims that underlay the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq launched under Bush.

The arms industry is massively subsidized by the American taxpayer. While the political establishment and media insist “there is no money” when it comes to jobs, decent wages, education and vital public services, endless billions are lavished on America’s merchants

of death.

American working people neither share in this industry’s state-subsidized profits nor have any say over its sale of powerful weapons systems to reactionary regimes. Just as mass opposition emerged to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, there is similar popular hostility to arming the Saudi and UAE monarchs to the teeth, not to mention being dragged into yet another war, this time against Iran.

The disappearance of any mass protest against war is a reflection not of popular sentiment, but rather of the reactionary politics of a privileged middle class layer of pseudo-lefts that deliberately worked to channel anti-war sentiment behind Obama and the Democratic Party.

A new mass movement against war can be built only through an irreconcilable break with the Democratic Party and the US two-party system. What is required is the independent political mobilization of the working class on the basis of a socialist program, including the conversion of the arms industry into publicly owned facilities dedicated to production for human needs rather than mass slaughter.

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