

German arms exports almost doubled in 2015

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Last year, German arms exports nearly doubled, and rose to their highest level so far in the 21st century, as was reviewed in the “Military Equipment Report 2015,” adopted by the federal cabinet last Wednesday.

The *Welt am Sonntag* quoted from the report at the weekend. According to the paper, in 2015 “individual licenses were granted for the export of arms totalling 7.86 billion euros.” By comparison, arms exports in 2014 totalled €3.97 billion, and in 2002 they were just €3.26 billion.

According to the report, in 2015 the German government approved a total of 12,687 applications—597 more than last year. Only 100 were rejected.

One of the largest items was the delivery of battle tanks and self-propelling howitzers worth €1.6 billion to the emirate of Qatar. The deal was so controversial that the *Die Welt* felt obliged to note: “Qatar is considered the financier of IS.”

In May, the human rights organisation Amnesty International condemned the decision by Germany to supply weapons to the counterrevolutionary military dictatorship of General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in Egypt.

In 2014 and 2015 the German government approved arms exports worth €22.7 million and €19 million to Cairo—including submarine technology—but also supplies for armoured vehicles used against demonstrators. The arms deal went ahead although the EU had officially imposed a stop on weapons and ammunition supplies to the country after Egyptian security forces killed more than 1,000 opponents of the regime during the forcible dissolution of protest camps in August, 2013.

In all probability, German arms exports will increase again this year. According to government sources, the government has already approved arms exports worth over €4 billion in 2016. In the first half of the record year 2015, they had amounted to nearly €3.5 billion.

As was the case last year, a majority of the arms will go to authoritarian “third countries,” which are neither members of NATO nor the EU. So far 1,732 orders are going to the countries of the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa). The largest single supply is a frigate, worth over €1 billion, to Algeria. In addition, licenses have been issued for military exports amounting to €37 million and €15 million to Israel and Kuwait respectively.

According to *Spiegel Online* the Economics Ministry informed the Bundestag on Tuesday evening that the federal security council (BSR) approved more weapons deals with Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Brunei and Mexico just 10 days ago.

The list is long. Saudi Arabia received “final approval for the export of the first of 48 military patrol boats ordered” and Egypt “for the supply of a German submarine plus torpedoes.” Brunei is to receive “900,000 bullets for imported machine guns,” Kuwait, Oman and the United Arab Emirates will get “armoured tanks as test models,” and Mexico can import “five German anti-tank weapons.”

In 2014, the German Economics Minister Sigmar Gabriel (SPD), whose department is responsible for arms exports, explained in an interview with *Stern* magazine: “It is shameful that Germany is one of the biggest arms exporters.” He went on to demand: “No arms to countries where civil war rages. And weapons should not be sold to regimes using illegal measures.”

Now the SPD chairman is seeking to deny any responsibility for soaring arms sales. On Monday he admitted to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, that arms sales had “significantly increased,” but then claimed the fault lay with the promises made by the previous conservative-liberal government, which “unfortunately could not be reversed.”

This is a brazen lie. In fact, all arms exports must be

approved by the federal security council, to which Gabriel belongs.

In addition to the Economics Minister, the council, which meets in private and is not subject to parliamentary control, includes the Chancellor (Angela Merkel), the head of the Chancellery (Peter Altmeier), the Foreign Minister (Frank-Walter Steinmeier), defence (Ursula von der Leyen), finance (Wolfgang Schäuble), the justice minister, and the minister for economic cooperation and development. The Inspector General of the Bundeswehr, Volker Wieker, also usually participates in the meetings of the BSR.

In reality, the massive increase in German arms exports is directly linked to the revival of German militarism and Germany's claim to "lead more often and more decisively in the future" (Steinmeier at the Munich Security Conference 2014). This not only requires more Bundeswehr missions abroad, but also the direct arming of warring parties. Significantly, a large proportion of the small arms trade in 2015 went to the Kurdish Peshmerga in Iraq—and the development of a German-European defence industry.

The arms export report declares that the strategic importance of the arms exports serves to "strengthen" a European defence strategy and "protect legitimate security interests."

The current military government report, which was published in April and lists about 20 defence projects with a total budget of over €60 billion—including the "Tiger" combat helicopter, the A400M transport aircraft, "Euro Fighter" combat aircraft, as well as various tanks and warships—defines the German armaments strategy as follows: "The aim and aspiration of the armaments is to provide the Bundeswehr with the necessary armoury to fulfil its constitutional mission in good time, and be ready for mobilisation within the predetermined financial framework, and thereby make an important contribution to the operational readiness of the Bundeswehr."

In other words, the prerequisite for a well-armed, "ready for mobilisation" and internationally competitive army is an export-oriented defence industry. In a note on the support helicopter "Tiger," the arms report states: "[The] Tiger is a joint European product of political importance for rearmament. Whether the European military helicopter industry can overcome US hegemony in the sphere of gunships will

be demonstrated by the Tiger in terms of its further development potential and export success."



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