

US weapons dealers top the market in global arms sales

Nick Barrickman
29 December 2016

US-based arms exporters continued to dominate government-to-government weapon sales in 2015, according to a report from the Congressional Research Service (CRS) released last week. The study focused on sales from supplier nations to developing countries from 2008-2015, which accounted for 80.6 percent of all conventional weapons trade during that time.

The annual report is intended as “a means [to] assist Congress in ... assessing how the current nature of the international weapons trade might affect U.S. national interests.”

Between 2008 and 2015, over \$583 billion in weapons sales were conducted internationally. The US accounted for over \$208 billion of this, or 35 percent. Russia, the second highest seller, sold a little more than \$86 billion during the same period. Together, the two countries controlled over 52 percent of worldwide conventional arms trade from 2012 to 2015.

US arms dealers concluded \$40.2 billion in agreements, representing over half of global arms trade, in 2015. This amount was up from \$36 billion a year earlier. After the US, France (selling \$15 billion), Russia (\$11.1 billion) and other nations in Western Europe rounded out the list of top arms dealers for the year. China, a chiefly regional power in the arms industry, sold \$6 billion in weapons in 2015.

Additionally, the US ranked first in arms deliveries conducting nearly \$17 billion in weapons transfers in 2015. This was followed by Russia with \$7.2 billion and France with \$7 billion.

Significantly, the report excluded the cost of sales to “subnational groups,” such as those engaged in civil wars or insurgencies which the US may be funding.

The US’s most reliable clientele include some of the world’s most egregious human rights abusers. The top buyers of US weapons in 2015 include Qatar (\$17.5

billion), Egypt (\$12 billion) and Saudi Arabia (\$8 billion), which is conducting a brutal air war against the population of Yemen. Since 2009, the US has sold nearly \$100 billion in tanks, bombs and jets to the Saudi regime. The inclusion of such states in the US’s list of top buyers of weaponry exposes as a lie US claims to be concerned about “human rights” or “democratic values” in international dealings.

Taken year-over-year, the total value of weapons trade was slightly down in 2015; from \$89 billion in 2014 to \$79 billion. The report attributes this to “the weakened state of the global economy ... and the slow international recovery from the recession of 2008” which has forced certain developing countries to forego new purchases.

Despite the slight slowdown, it “appears likely [the US] will hold its position as the principal supplier to key developing world nations, especially with those able to afford major new weapons,” the report’s author remarks with satisfaction.

The report notes, “from the onset of the Cold War period, the United States developed an especially large and diverse base of ... clients globally with whom it is able to conclude a continuing series of arms agreements annually” to “help ensure that friendly states were not placed at risk ... by arms transfers by the Soviet Union or its allies.” Today, however, “the principal motivation for arms sales by key foreign suppliers [is] based as much, if not more, on economic considerations as those of foreign or national security policy.”

The significance of this statement is made clear later in the report, as the author notes, “As new arms sales have become more difficult to conclude in the face of economic factors, competition among sellers has increased.” It adds, “[A] number of weapons-exporting

nations are focusing ... on potential new clients in countries and regions where they have not been traditional arms suppliers.”

Similar to the processes fueling competition in other global industries, as tensions grow between countries in the arms trade, there are heightening risks of a military clash between well-armed international rivals.

According to the CRS, as the US has gained ground in arms sales to emerging nations, it has lost in total arms sales globally. In 2008, the US conducted 52 percent of international arms deals. By 2015, that percentage had dropped to 40 percent, with economic rivals Russia, China and the European Union increasing their portions of the global weapons trade.

The Obama administration has been integral in fueling the growth of the global arms trade. From 2001 to 2008, the US averaged \$11 billion in arms trade agreements with emerging countries. From 2009 to 2015, that average grew to more than \$23 billion annually.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact